

The Great Deliverance

“When these things are beginning to occur, raise yourselves, and lift up your heads; for your deliverance is drawing near.”

—Luke 21:28, The Emphatic Diaglott

God’s people of all ages

have been “strangers and pilgrims” in the sinful world around them. (Heb. 11:13; I Pet. 2:11) However, the truly faithful have always been encouraged by God’s promise to care for them and to help them in their every time of

need. “God is our refuge,” wrote the psalmist, “a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth [present organizations of society] be removed, and though the mountains [present civil powers] be carried into the midst of the sea [ungovernable masses of people]; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.”—Ps. 46:1-3

God has not promised to deliver his people from their troubles in this life, although he often does, but he has promised to give them strength to endure their trials while they learn the important

lesson of putting their trust in him. We should cast all our care upon the Lord, knowing that he will permit only those difficulties to come into our lives as will best serve to test our faith and confidence in him. (I Pet. 5:7) Only those who learn this lesson of faith can be at peace and truly pleasing to the Lord. “Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”—Heb. 11:6

A Faith Class

Wonderful examples of faith are brought to our attention in both the Old and New Testaments. Sometimes in these examples, faith was openly and visibly rewarded by deliverance from trying situations, but at other times it was not. This was true of the ancient heroes of faith who lived during Old Testament times. It is also true of the “little flock” class since Pentecost. (Luke 12:32) As individual servants of the Lord we often see the hand of God in our affairs. We can sense his lifting of the burden of trials which, without his help, might well crush us. Yet at other times we do not have this rewarding experience and can hold onto the Lord only through faith in his promises. It is through these experiences that we need to be convinced that, while we may not be able to discern all of the providences of the Lord, he is still dealing with us. We must learn that his tender mercy is over all our affairs, even when all we can see are threatening and dark clouds of trouble. “All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose,” the Apostle Paul says.—Rom. 8:28

It is important to realize that our loving Heavenly Father is the guiding light of our lives, and he will not permit us to be tested above that which we are able to bear. (I Cor. 10:13) The Apostle Paul wrote, "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised)." (Heb. 10:23) We know and trust that all of God's promises will be fulfilled. He rewards those who diligently seek him even though, at times, his rewards are not immediately demonstrated. Thus Paul further reminded the Hebrew brethren, "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward."—vs. 35

Examples of Faith

Among the Israelites who had been taken captive to Babylon, there were many of God's faithful servants, such as Daniel; his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; Ezekiel; and others. To these, Jeremiah wrote, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. The Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord."—Lam. 3:22-26

For a long period of time, the people of Israel, especially their kings, had been for the most part unfaithful to God. They had worshipped false gods, and in many other ways they were disobedient to the Lord. According to the Mosaic Law they could have been justly put to death. As Jeremiah explains,

however, God showed his compassion and mercy toward them. Instead of consuming them in death, he permitted them to be taken captive into Babylon.

While the nation as a whole had been disobedient unto the Lord, there were noble exceptions among them—notably the aforementioned Daniel and his three companions. These remained loyal to God while in Babylon, even at the risk of their lives. Paul, when speaking of Daniel, said that he, by his faith, “stopped the mouths of lions.” (Heb. 11:33) Daniel was courageous in his loyalty to God, and from this comes the expression, “Dare to be a Daniel.”

Because of the wonderful manner in which the Lord enabled Daniel to interpret Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of the great image, he was highly exalted in the government by the king. (Dan. 2:31-48) He continued thus to be honored by the rulers of Babylon and was very highly placed in the subsequent kingdom of “Darius the Median.” (Dan. 5:31) The scriptural record further states, “It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom an hundred and twenty princes, which should be over the whole kingdom; And over these three presidents; of whom Daniel was first: that the princes might give accounts unto them, and the king should have no damage. Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm. Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him.” —Dan. 6:1-4

Delivered from Lions

Because of Daniel's faithfulness in his devotion to God, those who were plotting against him said, "We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God." (Dan. 6:5) Surely this is a wonderful testimony concerning Daniel's loyalty to the God of Israel. His enemies then prevailed upon King Darius to "establish a royal statute, and to make a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions."—vs. 7

The king was not aware that this was a plot against the life of Daniel whom he loved and trusted, so he made and signed the decree. (vss. 8,9) Since the laws of the Medes and the Persians could not be changed, when Darius discovered the intent of his advisers it was too late to do anything about it. He could only hope that Daniel's God would deliver him. The king knew that Daniel would continue to worship his God even though it might result in his death.

Daniel continued openly to pray to God and was discovered by his enemies, who were no doubt spying on him. Consequently, and much against the king's desire, Daniel was cast into a den of lions. From the scriptural account, we read, "Then the king went to his palace, and passed the night fasting: neither were instruments of musick brought before him: and his sleep went from him. Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions. And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel: and the king spake and said to Daniel, O

Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?"—vss. 10-20

Daniel's reply to the king was, "O king, live for ever. My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt." (vss. 21,22) Concerning God's angels the psalmist wrote, "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them." (Ps. 34:7) How wonderfully true this was with Daniel's deliverance from the lions' den. Surely he must have rejoiced because of God's protecting hand over him, and it was a wonderful and powerful witness concerning Daniel's God.

Delivered from a Fiery Furnace

Daniel's three young friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, likewise had their loyalty to their Heavenly Father severely tested. It was demanded of all the people in the Babylonian empire that they worship a great image which the king had ordered to be erected that he might impress his subjects with the greatness of his authority and power. The penalty for refusal to bow down to this image was death by being cast into a fiery furnace.—Dan. 3:1-6

Because of their loyalty to God, Daniel's three friends refused to obey the decree of the king. Thereupon the king summoned them before him and said, "Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of musick,

ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?"—Dan. 3:12-15

The reply of these three courageous servants of God was direct and to the point. They said to the king, "If it be so, our God whom we serve 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 which thou hast set up." (vss. 17,18) The record continues, "Then these men were bound in their coats, their hosen, and their hats, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace." The fire had been made so hot that even those who threw the Hebrews into it were themselves burned to death.—vss. 19-23

God sent an angel and delivered the three Hebrews. The king said, "Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God." (vs. 25) The king was impressed and gave commandment that the people of the realm should not say anything against the God of the Hebrews. (vss. 28,19) As for the three Hebrews themselves, their faith in the ability of their God to deliver them had been strengthened, although they would not have lost their faith in God's providence for them had it been that they should perish in the fiery furnace.

There is a vitally important lesson in this well-known experience of the three Hebrews. While God is always abundantly able to deliver his people

from physical harm, he does not always do so. His providential care over his people is not always manifest in the same manner in their individual experiences. He may permit some to suffer and die. Others he might deliver from suffering and permit them to continue in his service for a while longer, though perhaps under difficult circumstances.

Worthies of Old

This point is enlarged upon in chapter eleven of Paul's letter to the Hebrew brethren. Here he writes of the faithful lives of God's worthies of old. The apostle names many of them, such as Abraham, Moses, and David. He then tells of many others, "Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again."—Heb. 11:33-35

It will be noted that all of the ancient people of faith in this listing had their faith visibly rewarded by the protection and deliverance which their Heavenly Father afforded them. Through faith they knew, as did Daniel and the three Hebrews, that the God whom they served was able to deliver them, and in their case he did.

However, this was not true of all the Ancient Worthies. Paul writes that "others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; ... others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with

the sword [unlike those who “escaped the edge of the sword”]: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.”—Heb. 11:35-40

These “others” were just as much the objects of God’s care as were those who were delivered from prison and from threatened death. These were mocked and scourged, and God did not interfere. They suffered “bonds and imprisonment,” and God did not deliver them. They were “sawn asunder,” as Isaiah, by tradition, is reputed to have been. They were destitute and seemingly uncared for. It was by faith that they realized that the great God of heaven permitted their trying experiences for some good purpose although they could not always—perhaps seldom—understand what that purpose was.

They knew, although they may not have expressed it in these words, that their God was too wise to err and too loving to be unkind. They knew that their privilege and responsibility as his servants was to be loyal to him regardless of what the cost might be. They knew by faith that, in the end, God would give his best to those who left the choice with him. Paul also states that their faith included that of a future “better resurrection;” rather than an immediate, but only temporary, deliverance in the present life.—vs. 35

Spiritual Israelites

Christians at the present time should be greatly encouraged by the realization that our loving Heavenly Father is also dealing with us in much the same way as he did with his faithful people of old. His dealings we see exemplified in the life of Jesus and in the experiences of those in the Early Church. Jesus was delivered from an angry mob near the beginning of his ministry and at other times. (Luke 4:29,30; John 7:44; 8:59) However, the Heavenly Father withdrew his protection at the end and allowed him to be crucified. We can understand God's workings in the case of Jesus, for his role was to give his flesh for the life of the world. (John 6:51) We may not always understand, though, why God allows us, the followers of Jesus, to suffer.

The Apostle Peter addressed this very point, when he wrote, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy."—I Pet. 4:12,13

James Killed

The Early Church was bitterly persecuted by various leaders during the first century. We read, "Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword." (Acts 12:1,2) Herod also placed Peter in prison until after the Passover thinking that then he would also have him put to death. However, the Lord in

this case intervened by sending an angel to deliver Peter.—Acts 12:3-10, *Revised Version*

Under the circumstances, Peter was no doubt surprised at his miraculous release. He went immediately to the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where the brethren were holding a prayer meeting. They were so surprised by his arrival that at first they could not believe he was really there. (vss. 11-17) The question remains why God would deliver Peter from certain death at the hands of Herod while not delivering James. The brethren no doubt had prayed for James as well as for Peter. Although James had been killed, it is certain that the prayers for him gave him strength to bear up faithfully during his final hours of trial. Peter, by their prayers, was able to sleep during the night even though he was chained to prison guards awaiting death.

This emphasizes a precious reality which has been true for all of the Lord's faithful people. God sustains them in their trials, even though he does not always deliver them. The Lord has promised to provide a way of escape when trials are too severe to bear. (I Cor. 10:13) Sometimes that escape is through death. This was so for God's ancient people, and it has been true throughout the present Gospel Age. Perhaps Stephen could not have endured being pelted with rocks for a great length of time, but God permitted him to fall asleep in death, thus "delivering" him quickly from the cruel torture being inflicted upon him by his enemies.—Acts 7:59,60

Faith Tested

The trials of the Lord's people are designed to test their faith in him and to be a witness for him. If, every time we suffered a bit of pain either of

body or of mind, the Lord would at once deliver us from the distress, we would probably be very thankful, but our faith in his love, mercy, and compassion would not be completely tested. This would be walking by sight and not by faith. (II Cor. 5:7) True faith is that which believes in God regardless of the circumstances with which we are surrounded or the distresses that we suffer. Regardless of any and all circumstances, such faith will continue to believe that God rewards those who diligently seek him.

True faith is that which will not permit us to shrink from the narrow path of sacrifice no matter how many, nor how fierce, the foes we see ahead in that path. Through sickness or other difficult circumstances, we may realize that death is not far away. However, such an expression of faith will firmly trust our loving Heavenly Father's assurance that he knows what is best for us. We will not permit the pleasures of living, or the threat of dying, to separate us from him, and we will be able to say from our hearts, "great is thy faithfulness."—Lam. 3:23; Rom. 8:35-39

We will know, by faith in the promises of God, that our ultimate and glorious deliverance from all enemies and all our distresses, will come through death, if indeed, we are faithful even unto death. (Rev. 2:10) It was this kind of faith that enabled the ancient people of God to maintain their trust in and loyalty to him. They endured their afflictions, suffering, and even death, refusing deliverance upon the terms of their enemies.

As previously noted, it seems clear that those heroes of faith, the worthies of old, did have a hope of the resurrection. In a prayer to God, Moses said,

“Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men.” (Ps. 90:3) Job said, “All the days of my appointed time will I wait [in death], till my change come. Thou shalt call [in the resurrection], and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands.” (Job 14:14,15) Those ancient ones may not have known the details of God’s plan of salvation as we are privileged to know it today, but they testified to their faith. They had “hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.”—Acts 24:15

The “just” as mentioned by Paul would surely include those who looked for the resurrection, the hope of which inspired the Ancient Worthy class to faithfulness. When Daniel was informed concerning the great “time of trouble” through which we are now passing, he was assured that then his people would be delivered. (Dan. 12:1) While Daniel’s people here referred to would include all of the Lord’s faithful servants in every age who have longed for deliverance, this promise must have been a great source of strength to Daniel himself. It was made plain to him how this great deliverance would be wrought. It would be through a resurrection of the dead: “Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake.” Daniel was further told: “Go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest [in the sleep of death], and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.”—vss. 2,13

Lift Up Our Heads

Real and comforting has been the hope of spiritual Israel for “deliverance” in the resurrection, the “first resurrection” promised to those who are

symbolically “beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God.” (Rev. 20:6,4) This hope should be especially real to the Lord’s people at the present time. We are living in the time when we see the signs described by Jesus relative to the time of his presence and the end of the age being fulfilled. (Matt. 24:3, 27-39; Luke 21:25-27) Just as Jesus stated in our featured text, “When these things are beginning to occur, raise yourselves, and lift up your heads; for your deliverance is drawing near.”—Luke 21:28, *Diaglott*

Let us raise ourselves, for it is no time to be prostrate and idle. We are to be active in our witness for Jesus and for the Word of God. It is a time also to lift up our heads with hope, courage, and rejoicing. The clouds of trouble are hanging low over the peoples of the earth. Mankind and its leaders are distressed, and their hearts are filled with fear. We know that the troubles in the world may well bring additional hardships upon us, but this does not cause us to hang our heads in discouragement.

Let us meditate upon the words of the psalmist as we await the “great deliverance” of not only the church, but also of all humanity, from this present world of sin, suffering, and death. “There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: ... The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. ... He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire. Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.”—Ps. 46:4-10 ■