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WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT

Even some Bible Students have a difficult time to explain how the witness of the Spirit works in their lives. Turning to the Scriptures, in Romans 8:16 we read, *'The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.'* When we look at the eighth chapter of the Book of Romans we find there a very interesting group of Scriptures that defines the Holy Spirit. The first verse of that particular chapter in Romans reads this way: *'There is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.'* That means those who have come into Christ have been released from Adamic condemnation. Do we realise what that really means? Now we have a new life and we walk not after the flesh any longer, but after the Spirit. In verse 14 of Romans 8 we read that *'as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.'* To be a son of God is an awesome thing. To be of the family of Almighty God! Have you ever wondered what it would be like to see the Father face to face, to see the Son face to face? Can we really imagine the magnificence, the glory that we would see.

When we talk about God's Spirit we can talk about it in many ways. It was His power, His magnificent power that created everything. But when we talk about the witness of the Spirit, we are talking about our Spirit begetting, our coming into Christ to become His (God's) sons, and if faithful, to be where He is. We will see Him face to face. The Apostle John tells us this, and we will become heirs with Jesus Christ of everything that the Heavenly Father has. On page 226 of Studies in the Scriptures, Volume V, we read: "Few doctrines are of more importance to God's people than this one (about the Spirit) because on it depends to a considerable extent the possession of *'the peace of God that passes all human understanding'* (Phil.4:7). How can the Christian have *'full assurance of faith'* if he lacks the Spirit, or the witness of the Spirit, testifying to his sonship, to his adoption into the family of God? Yet we find that few have the slightest conception of what is meant by this expression, 'witness of the Spirit' or what kind of experiences should be expected and looked for as constituting the Spirit's witness to our sonship." That was written many, many years ago. Note the emphasis that was placed upon *'full assurance of faith'* signifying sonship, adoption into this magnificent family of God. Consider the thought given that *few* have any conception of what is meant by the 'witness of the Spirit'. Anyone new to the Truth or anyone already in the Truth should be aware of the Spirit's witness. That's why it is worthwhile to examine the subject to find out just what is the Spirit, how it is God's agent to His people, and what the Spirit witnesses.

Born of the Spirit

When we look back to the word 'spirit' in the Scriptures, we find in Genesis 1:2, that *'the world was without form and was void, and darkness was on the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.'* We find that the Hebrew word there for Spirit is 'ruach' and is used in the sense of 'wind, breath or blast'. Keeping this in mind, when we go a little further in Genesis 2:7 we read about man, *'and the Lord God formed man out of the dust of the earth and breathed (the Hebrew word 'neshamah' - wind or vital breath) into his nostrils (the breath of life) and man became a living soul'*. This soul was a breathing creature and here we find that it was the combination of both body and breath that constitutes man 'a living soul' - his breath, his spirit, his thoughts - through God's almighty power which creates human life as well as every other form of life. Another illustration of the Spirit as a spirit of power is found in the New Testament in John, chapter 3. Here we find a man by the name of Nicodemus, a Ruler of the Jewish people, coming to Jesus and asking Him about His ability to perform miracles. In John 3:8 Jesus speaks about the wind and He says that one can see its power but does not know where it comes from or where it goes, and He went on to say, *'so is everyone that is born of the Spirit.'* In John 3:8, the Greek word for 'breath or blast of air' is 'pneuma', which is the Greek word for 'spirit' in most New Testament passages, and it has the thought of a current of air, blast or breath, a vital principle or disposition. In the case of Nicodemus it was the Lord's way of showing the capabilities of a spirit being.

Jesus received this breath, this power, this vital principle, when He arose from the water after His baptism by John at Jordan. At this time God showed to John that Jesus had received God's power, His disposition, His mind. A dove came and rested on Jesus' shoulder and a voice was heard saying, *'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'* (Matt.3:17) Then later, at Pentecost, the waiting disciples received the Spirit and cloven tongues of fire sat on each waiting in that upper room. Jesus had spoken of this day saying that the comforter, *'the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, it will teach you all things and bring all things to remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you'* (John 14:26). Then in John 16:13 we read again, *'When the Spirit of truth has come, it will guide you into all truth.'* We see then the importance of the Holy Spirit in the lives of God's people, *'bringing things to remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you'*, as we read, and then *'it will guide you into all truth.... it will show you things to come.'* At Pente-

cost various gifts were given for the edification of those of the early church such as speaking in tongues or speaking in different languages. The gift of prophecy came with the giving of the Holy Spirit and when the Apostles died certain of these special gifts ceased, and the knowledge of the Lord and the various graces of the Spirit took their place.

Now we are to do something. Now we are to *'walk by faith and not by sight'*, as we read in 2 Cor.5:7. Our faith today must be backed by the fruits and the graces of the Holy Spirit. Someone may ask the question, Is the receiving of the Holy Spirit necessary to the new creature? And the answer that we can give is from Scripture. In John 6:63 we read: *'It is the Spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing. The words that I speak, they are spirit and they are life.'* And then again, *'Now we have received the spirit which is from God'* (1 Cor.2:12). Then verse 14, *'The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit of God for they are foolishness to him, and neither can he know them because they are spiritually discerned.'* Now, when we consider this it doesn't mean we should put ourselves up on a platform somewhere and say how much better we are than anyone else, but what it does tell us is that with the aid of the Holy Spirit we can come to a knowledge of the plans and the purposes of Almighty God which He is pleased to give to us. His Holy Spirit is such as will guide us and lead us along the path of righteousness.

Going back to Romans 8: ¹⁴*'For as many who are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God'*; we find that ¹⁶*'the Spirit bears witness to us that we are the children of God'*. We are the sons of God, and if we are these children, these sons, ¹⁷*'then we are heirs - heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if so we suffer with Him, then together we will be glorified with Him.'* How important it is to have God's Holy Spirit! We want to see and to prove to ourselves that we have God's Spirit and that God is leading us as His children, for it is the Holy Spirit that inducts us into the body of Christ, this vital principle. In 2 Cor.5:5 we read: *'Now He who has wrought for us this self-same thing is God, who has given us the earnest of the Spirit.'* This earnest, or pledge of His power in this life, is the power in advance of that which we will receive in the future. Jesus' words in John 16:13 give us an insight as to what the Spirit's power would do for His people in His absence. It is very easy to follow someone, to hear their words, to sup with them and so forth as the disciples did when Jesus was upon the earth, but what about the guidance that they and we would receive when he left this earth? Yes, this earnest is the pledge of His power in this life and it is that in advance. Howbeit we read that, *'when the power of the Spirit of truth is come, it will guide you into all truth.'* This means, and will mean or should mean the development of the new creature. Yes, the Holy Spirit is a guiding,

an instructing, a converting force for those in Christ.

Evidence of Sonship

The word 'witness' means 'to testify jointly or to corroborate'. This evidence comes to us in seven different ways.

(1) SUBMISSION: This new start is a figurative beheading. We give up any will of our own and take on only the will of our Heavenly Father. One must renounce his old will and ways and take on the will of the Father. Jesus said to His Father, *'I delight to do thy will, O My God; yea, thy law is written within my heart'* (Isaiah 40:8). This new life demands full submission to God in every way. Even our beloved Saviour followed His Father's will. Jesus said, *'I can of myself do nothing. I seek not mine own will but the will of my Father which has sent me'* (John 5:30) This will mean following after the Lord in every step of the way, even through the loss of strength or the giving up of some cherished hopes that we might have. What is God's will for His people? This is His will, even your sanctification. This sanctification demands that we walk daily not according to the flesh but to the Spirit, keeping ourselves as free from the cares of this world as possible. And so, are we willing to fully follow God's will in every respect? Have we fully placed ourselves into the doing of God's will whatever that will may be? If so, we have a witness of the Spirit.

(2) DISCIPLINE: As a father disciplines his children, we will go through a disciplined life, and this is the next witness of the Spirit – this discipline that we need. In Hebrews 12:6 we read: *'Whom the Lord loves, He chastens'*. Now that's hard for us sometimes to understand but it is a fact, and He scourges every son that He receives. God keeps His people in line with His will by cutting away every vestige of pride, self-will and earthlyward vein. Like trees, we need pruning to bring forth an abundance of the good things of this life – righteousness! Let's read another Scripture that is so important along this line. In our discipline, the Lord looks to see whether we fret, whether we complain, and I like the Weymouth translation of Hebrews 12:11: *'Now at the time discipline seems not a matter of joy but of grief, yet afterward yields to those who pass through its training a result of peace, namely righteousness.'*

We don't fret, we don't complain when God has to discipline us. If our children go wrong, they can expect to be disciplined by their parents. Prunings are for the Christian's ultimate good. We must build a good foundation of character as exemplified in 2 Peter 1:5-8, (add to your faith virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, love) Prayer is necessary for our growth in Christ. We are admonished to pray to our Heavenly Father (Matt.6:6). *'Pray with the spirit of understanding'* (1Cor.14:15), *'Always pray'* (Luke 18:1), *By prayer...; let our requests be made known'* (Phil.4:6), *'Pray one for another...The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much'* (James 5:16).

(3) ACTIVITY: Then we come to the third witness of the Holy Spirit, what the Spirit witnesses in our lives, and that is activity. Activity is an important witness of the Spirit if we desire to show forth *'the praises of Him who has called us out of darkness'* (1 Peter 2:9). We must have a desire to promote the truth to all the hearing ears and to build up one another in the most holy faith. In Matt.5:16 we are told to *'let*

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your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven. This must be the ultimate goal, to glorify our Heavenly Father. There must be a desire in our activity. We read, *'His word was in my heart as a burning fire that was shut up in my bones and I was weary with forbearing and I could not stay'* (Jer.20:9). The prophet realised that there is a cost to preaching God's message. Yes, there is a cost, yet that was his desire. He had this desire as a fire within him and he said, I couldn't keep it back, I couldn't forbear it.

Our question then must be, do we have the same desire to speak God's word as did the prophet Jeremiah? Are we daily doing all we can, every waking hour, to glorify God's name? In what ways can we witness the truth of God's plan? These are questions that all must answer for themselves. If we find that we have no zeal, let us pray to the Heavenly Father for zeal. If we find ways but fail to use them to the utmost, let us pray to the Father that the Father will help us to use each opportunity as soon as it arises.

(4) LOYALTY: Our fourth witness of the Holy Spirit is loyalty to the truth and the brethren. There is a comment on 2 Thess.2:9,10 in the Reprints (page 2793), which reads in part: *'There are peculiar trials today in our lives. This is the time of the hour of temptation which has come upon the whole world (and I think most of us can understand that) but yet the time has still not reached its intensity. Satan is the prime mover today in the evils of this present time and is especially active against the Lord's people. He is using lying wonders, signs and all deceivableness in unrighteousness. This is permitted to test the Lord's people especially to see if they love the truth.'* This is a very good article and worth reading in full. We hear much today about 'standing for the truth'. We believe there are fundamentals that are scripturally given to us in the Bible such as the fall of man, the ransom, restitution, the call of the church. Even the second presence of Christ is important because it is there in the Scriptures. Beyond those fundamentals no one stands at liberty to separate themselves from one another, however we find that we want to be careful how we use the truth. The Apostle Paul held faithfully to the word of truth, especially he found that salvation comes through sanctification of the Spirit. Jude even says *'to contend for, to strive for the faith which was once delivered to the saints'* (Jude 3).

Some more questions we need to ask ourselves are, Are we taking the word of God lightly? In our dealings with the world and with the brethren, are we using our commission to daily, hourly, preach the word of truth, God's word? Are we holding the truth in high esteem? Do we come short of practising reverence for God? We could. For policy sake, do we change our course of action in our studies? We should never do that. What about in our work or leisure time? Again, we shouldn't. We have a great responsibility in holding God's word. With our brethren we must be loving and kind for John 13:34 & 35 tells us of the commandment to love our brethren as Christ loves us, for it is by this that all that will see us will know that we are Christ's disciples - if we have love for one another. This is the highest type of love we find in the Bible, and it is called 'agapeo'. It is a disinterested love, the highest form.

(5) KNOWLEDGE: The fifth witness of God's Spirit is the knowledge of things to come. John 16:13 tells us that the

Spirit will witness to the things to come and it will be a guide to us into all truth. The mark or the seal, the understanding of where we are in the stream of time, a knowledge of the Lord's presence and the privilege we have of working in God's vineyard, giving the message of God's coming kingdom, the privilege of working out our own salvation. And this should not only be a comfort but also it will be a shield in this time of the harvest. *'Search the Scriptures'*, we are told, *'for in them are the ways of eternal life. These are they that testify of Me.'* (John 5:39).

(6) RIGHTEOUSNESS: Then the sixth way of the witness of the Spirit is found in John 5:18: *'We know whoever is begotten of God will not sin'* - that is, willingly sin, for we all know we make mistakes, and in fact we're told that if we say we have no sin we are lying to God because we do sin, but we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous. *'He that is begotten of God keepeth himself so that the wicked one touches us not.'* On that subject we need a little clarification for in 1 John 3 we see that whoever is begotten of God cannot sin, and the Greek word for 'commit sin' means 'to practise sin'. This is the proper application of this Scripture because to practise sin after we have been covered by the merit of Christ would be death. Hebrews 6:4 is very explicit: *"It is impossible for those who have been enlightened and have tasted the heavenly gift, the Holy Spirit,...if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance.* We need to examine ourselves along this line that we would not willingly practise sin.

(7) SEPARATENESS: The last witness is to be separate from the world. This was very important for the nation of Israel, to be separate from the world. *'Be ye separate'* (Ezra 10:11). We are in the world like a ship is in the sea. We can be safe if the ocean is not in the ship. 2 Cor.6:17&18 tells us to come away from all those who are unclean that God may receive us. Again in Matt.19:21 we are not to lay up treasures on this earth but in heaven. There are many things on this earth that could absorb our time and our attention. We should be minding the things of the Spirit. We read in James 4:4 that *'friendship with the world is enmity with God'* and in 1 John 2:15 we are told not to love the world.

These witnesses of the Spirit are very important to each of us to know our position in the family of God. These should cause each of us to relate to the Heavenly Father in positive ways, to relate to our Lord Jesus in a positive manner. The witnesses are vital, and each of us should be aware of them in our life. We are living in the harvest time of the Gospel Age and soon the testings will be over and the little flock will be complete. We want to strive to be of the Christ company, so let us take this examination time to know whether we have the Spirit's witness in our lives. (CC 1/03)

***"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, even as He has chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world."* (Eph 1:2-4)**

“COMPASSION”

Today we are living in a world that is ever changing, unpredictable and increasingly insecure. In some nations there are wars and lawlessness; in other nations there is hypocrisy, greed, and moral and family degradation, and in many other nations there is poverty and despair. Here lies a world that needs a saviour. The comforts that we possess cannot make us rejoice in this present evil system. As we follow Jesus, we will see what He saw – the lonely, the sick, the poor, the innocent and every person who needs to be considered, helped and loved; a world in need of healing, a world that needs compassion, a people that need the support of one another, a people that need our mighty, awesome Jehovah God because *‘His compassions fail not’* and *‘great is His faithfulness.’* (Lam.3:22,23)

We ask, is it possible for us to have compassion for our fellow beings? In the Old Testament the word *‘compassion’* is from Strong’s 7355, and the meaning is *‘to have compassion, to have or show mercy’*. In the New Testament it is from Strong’s 4097, *‘to feel sympathy or pity, to have compassion, tender mercy’*. From the dictionary, *‘a deep feeling of pity for the suffering of another, and an inclination to give aid or support, or to show mercy’*. May God show us through His Word and Spirit the examples and lessons He has for us.

In Isaiah 57:15, we read, *‘Thus says the high and lofty One that inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.’* Jehovah is the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, before the mountains were brought forth or the hills, before the first-born was created, He is God. To Moses at the burning bush He said: *‘I am who I am’* (Exodus 3:14). Our God is very great, very wise, very high. Nevertheless, the Scriptures show us that He is also very sympathetic. He is a God of mercy and of love. Psalm 86:15 – *‘But you, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.’* Psalm 145:8,9 – *‘The Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love; the Lord is good to all, He has compassion on all He has made.’*

Old Testament Examples

Abraham had great faith but he also showed compassion. When he was told of the destruction of the Sodomites, Abraham did not rejoice at the calamities about to come upon his neighbours. On the contrary, we find him generous, praying for divine compassion, asking: *‘If there be fifty righteous, will you spare the city?’* Abraham must have known the unsavory reputation of the people of Sodom but he was unwilling to think of them as badly as they deserved. We rejoice in Abraham’s mercifulness as well as his faith. When even ten righteous were not found but only three, God’s righteous judgment came on Sodom. But God’s mercy, too, is shown in their promised deliverance for even the wicked Sodomites will hear the voice of the Son of Man and come forth in due time. *‘For this is good and acceptable before God, our Saviour, who desires all men to be saved and to come to an accurate knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one*

mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave Himself a ransom for all men.’ (1 Tim 2:3-6).

Another grand example of loving sympathy in the Old Testament is that of Joseph. We remember how Joseph was sold as a slave by his brothers and was taken to Egypt, where he was given a high position in the king’s realm, the highest authority next to Pharaoh. God used Pharaoh as His instrument to reveal to Pharaoh the meaning of his dream. There were to be seven years of plenty and seven years of famine. The result of the years of famine brought Joseph’s brethren to Egypt to buy food. When Joseph learned how changed his brethren were, he sympathised with them. When he saw that their hearts went back to their wrong course in his own case and were sorry, he pitied them. When he saw their interest in his aging father and their unwillingness to hasten his death by an unkind word or act, he was full of pity

After revealing to them his true identity, Joseph, full of true sympathy and pity, hastened to set them at ease. He did not cruelly threaten them with punishment for their wrongdoing. Instead, realising that sin had already brought punishment, Joseph consoled them, saying: *‘And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. God sent me ahead of you to preserve a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.’* Joseph exemplified the advice in the text in Romans 12:21: *‘Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil by good.’* He did not let the evil course of his brethren overcome him and make him bitter but he overcame their evil tendencies, characters and dispositions by his love, his mercy, his kindness and his generosity.

Then, in contrast, we have Jonah, whom God sent to preach to the people of Ninevah to tell them that in forty days He would destroy their city. But the people, impressed by Jonah’s message, repented of their sinful course and sought divine forgiveness. The king’s proclamation was: *‘Do not let any man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth; let everyone call urgently on God, let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows, God may yet relent and with compassion turn from His fierce anger so that we will not perish.’* (Jonah 3:7-9). The account goes on to say, When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, He had compassion and did not send them the destruction He had threatened. God was pleased to have the Ninevites turn from their sins and to repentance. He was pleased to grant them an extension of earthly life.

But Jonah was greatly displeased. He prayed: *‘O Lord, is not this what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamities.’* The Lord taught Jonah a lesson by providing a vine to grow and give shade to his discomfort, but then let it wither so that Jonah had no protection from the blazing sun. Jonah became angry about the vine and wanted to die, but our Heavenly Father said: *‘You have been concerned about the vine though you*

did not tend it or make it grow. But Ninevah has more than one hundred and twenty thousand people. Should I not be concerned about that great city?" How much greater is the compassion of the Almighty than that of His imperfect creatures of mankind!

We see a parallel of this in Christendom today, which has this Jonah syndrome, too. When we tell them that our Heavenly Father's gracious purpose for the world in general is to give **all** a resurrection and an opportunity during the Millennium to attain to human perfection, a world-wide Eden and an everlasting life, they, too, are displeased by the good news, calling it a "second chance". But it is the understanding of the ransom that truly manifests God's love to us in that through His only-begotten Son the world can be saved '*because He has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He has ordained; whereof He has given assurance to all men in that He has raised Him from the dead.*' (Acts 17:31)

"He Had Compassion on Them"

When we turn to the New Testament, what greater example of tender mercy towards the groaning creation is there than the ministry of our Redeemer! We read of Jesus' pity for the people in Matthew 9:35,36: '*Jesus went through all the towns and villages teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*' Matthew 14:13,14 reads: '*When Jesus heard about what had happened, He withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed Him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed He saw a large crowd; He had compassion on them and healed their sick.*' John 11:32-35 says: '*³²When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw Him, she fell at His feet and said: Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ³³When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit, and troubled. ³⁴Where have you laid him? He asked. Come and see, Lord, they replied. ³⁵Jesus wept.*'

Jesus' message was one of compassion and mercy, but how different was the attitude of the scribes and Pharisees. They held themselves aloof from the common people; the scribes because they claimed the masses were illiterate, the Pharisees because they claimed the people were sinners, cut off from relationship with God and not proper to be recognised by the 'holy' of humanity which they claimed to be. No wonder that, as it says in Mark 12:37 '*The common people heard Jesus gladly.*' In Luke, Chapter 15, the Pharisees and scribes accused Jesus of receiving sinners and eating with them, and Jesus gave them the parable of the lost sheep. '*⁴Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? ⁵And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. ⁶Then he calls his friends and neighbours together and says, Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep. ⁷I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one who repents than over ninety nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.*' The scribes and Pharisees were out of harmony with the divine spirit and not pleasing to God because they were proud and haughty. Jesus would

have all of His disciples show mercy.

In Luke 6:35, 36 Jesus said: '*³⁵But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back; then your reward will be great and you will be sons of the Most High because He is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. ³⁶Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.*' God's mercy sent His Son to be our Redeemer and to help us back into favour. His mercy will pursue the lost sheep until every member of Adam's race shall have been brought to a knowledge of the truth and to a full opportunity of returning to the fold of God. Jesus said: '*Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.*' We who have received divine mercy through Jesus and have Him as our merciful and faithful High Priest as followers of Christ need to have this quality of compassion, to show love and sympathy, generosity and forgiveness to others and especially to our brothers and sisters in Christ. The Apostle Paul said in Ephesians 4:32: '*Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other just as in Christ God forgave you.*' The divine requirement of all who would have a standing with Jehovah is stated in Micah 6:8: '*What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*'

"Blessed Are the Merciful"

It is true that justice is the foundation of divine government, that God is just; but it is also true that God is loving and kind and that He accepts to Himself the very name of Love, for God is love. To be in the divine likeness, then, is to govern our own course by the rules of justice but to measure the course of others by the rule of love and sympathy, generosity and forgiveness. We show our appreciation of God's mercy to all of us by schooling ourselves in His character and becoming more and more merciful and generous towards all the household of faith. And if merciful towards the brethren, naturally we would be generous also towards all. As we remember and appreciate our own weaknesses and blemishes, it will make us sympathetic with the brethren and with all mankind, for mercy, generosity and sympathy are qualities God delights in. Those who cultivate these gracious qualities of the spirit will be pleasing in the Lord's sight, and they will thereby be fitted and prepared to have a share with Jesus in His throne of glory, for that Messianic Kingdom will be established with the very purpose of showing mercy to those of mankind who will return to divine favour and blessing.

In conclusion, let us read from 1 John 4, verses 7-12:

'Dear friends, love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been begotten of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love This is how God showed His love among us, He sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him. This is love; not that we love God but that He loved us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another God lives in us and His love is made complete in us.'

(BL)

SIGNS IN THE SUN, MOON AND STARS

This theme is from Joel's prophecy and was prepared because of a question about 'the Day of the Lord'. However, there are really three 'Days of the Lord' in the prophecy of Joel. We shall begin with some of Peter's words in Acts 2:19-21 – ¹⁹*I will show wonders in the heaven above, and light on the earth beneath, blood and fire and vapour of smoke;* ²⁰*The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the day of the Lord comes, the great and manifest day.* ²¹*And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.* 'Day' is sometimes specific and sometimes indefinite as a period of time but there was, as we know, a great and manifest day, the day of Pentecost. Joel wrote some centuries before *'And I will give portents in the heavens, and on the earth blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes.'*

Now here is the fuller context of Peter's words in Acts 2 – ¹⁴*'But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them, Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give ear to my words.'* ¹⁵*For these men are not drunk as you suppose since it is only the third hour of the day.* ¹⁶*But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:* ¹⁷*'And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.'* ¹⁸*Yea, and on My menservants and My maidservants in those days I will pour out My Spirit and they shall prophesy* ¹⁹*and I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth beneath, blood and fire and vapour of smoke.* ²⁰*The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the day of the Lord comes, the great and manifest day.* ²¹*And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'*

The Natural Heavens

Let us think about those words of Joel and Peter's application of them with the Holy Spirit guiding him. Let us think about the natural sun, moon and stars first. The natural sun, moon and stars have many functions and exert many influences over the earth and the activities of people on earth. They give light and heat, contribute to the cycles of day and night, the months, the seasons, the years, variation in ocean tides and provide guides to navigation. It is easy to understand really, isn't it, how people began to worship the sun, moon and stars and made idols to represent them and their functions as outlined by the Apostle in Romans One. The children of Israel were, as we know, commanded not to make idols or graven images as we read in Exodus 20 – ⁴*'You shall not make for yourself any graven image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or is in the water under the earth.'* ⁵*You shall not bow down to them or serve them: for I the Lord your God am a jealous God visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those that hate me* ⁶*but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.'*

The Lord, of course, has no cause to be angry or displeased with the physical heavens or the natural sun, moon and stars. We read in Genesis 8:22 – *'While the earth remains seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night shall not cease.'* The physical heavens are the work of God's hands, they function as designed by Him and so should provide reasons for praising Him, as the Psalmist wrote in Psalm 148:3-6 – *'Praise Him sun and moon, praise Him all you shining stars, praise Him you highest heavens and you waters above the heavens. Let them praise the name of the Lord for He commanded and they were created; and He established them forever and ever. He fixed their bounds which cannot be passed.'* The natural sun, moon and stars are also spoken of as so affecting the believer at times that he or she should not take liberties with them, and seek the Lord's protection. Psalm 121 – ⁵*'The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade on your right hand'* ⁶*The sun shall not smite you by day nor the moon by night.'* So if Joel's prophecy and Peter's application of it referred to the literal heavenly bodies, it would be reasonable to expect that the Lord Jesus would have called some attention to them while He was on earth.

Instead, Jesus directed His hearers to observe the events taking place around them. Matt.16 – ¹*'Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test Him they asked Him to show them a sign from heaven.'* ²*He answered them, "When it is evening you say, 'It will be fair weather for the sky is red';* ³*And in the morning it will be stormy today for the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.* ⁴*An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of Jonah."* *So He left them and departed.'* Similar words are found in Luke 12 – ⁵⁴*He also said to the multitudes, "When you see a cloud rising in the west you say at once, 'A shower is coming', and so it happens.* ⁵⁵*And when you see the south wind blowing you say, "There will be scorching heat", and it happens.* ⁵⁶*You hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the earth and sky, but why do you not know how to interpret the present time.* ⁵⁷*And why do you not judge for yourselves what is right.'*

The people of God have been prepared for the use of the sun, moon and stars as symbols. Joseph's dream is an instance. The sun, moon and eleven stars bowed down to him, as we are told in Genesis 37:9,10. In the dream, Joseph's father, mother and the eleven brothers were represented. The psalmist says also that the Lord is a sun in Psalm 84:11 – *'For the Lord God is the sun and shield. He bestows favour and honour. No good thing does the Lord withhold from those who walk uprightly.'*

Now, the prophecy of Joel. The children of Israel, as the Scriptures record, were frequently rebellious and idolatrous. God, however, was long-suffering and sent His prophets to them repeatedly. His prophets often warned them and told them of dangers to come if they did not repent and reform. Joel was such a prophet. He prophesied about 800 BC, some 800 years before the words we read were fulfilled. He must

have travelled up and down the land of Judah giving out the word of the Lord as recorded in his book. In the first chapter Joel gives warning after warning of desolation and famine to come upon the disobedient Jews. Further warnings are given in chapter 2, but there are also words of exhortation to repentance and turning again to the Lord. Prophecies of punishment on Judah are recorded in this chapter, punishments which came upon Judah at the hands of the Assyrians and subsequently the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar.

The prophecies of restoration and prosperity are also recorded in this chapter, culminating in the great blessing of God's Holy Spirit to be poured out on all flesh. Chapter 3, the final chapter of Joel's prophecy, contains prophecies of punishments on surrounding heathen nations. The prophecy of the pouring out of God's Holy Spirit on all flesh is an example of a Messianic prophecy to be fulfilled in the Gospel Age, inserted among prophecies relating to the experiences, wars and punishments of Israel and the surrounding nations.

Three 'Days of the Lord'

Now, there are in Joel's prophecy three days mentioned. The first 'Day of the Lord' occurs in Joel 1:15 – *'Alas for the day! For the day of the Lord is near, and as a destruction from the Almighty it comes.'* And in Joel 2:1 – *'Blow the trumpet in Zion, sound the alarm on My holy mountain, let the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming; it is near.'* Then in verse 11 – *'The Lord utters his voice before His army, for His host is exceedingly great. He that executes His word is powerful: for the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; who can endure it?'* This day refers to special punishments for Judah and was a great and terrible day for the Jews at that time, some 800 BC.

The second 'Day of the Lord' refers to a time of the Lord's vengeance on the Gentile nations after Judah had been restored in Joel 3:1&14 – *"For behold, in those days and at that time when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem.....Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision."* This second day was a great and terrible day for the Gentiles.

But the third 'Day of the Lord' was to be a time of blessing not only to Judah and Israel but to all people. The prophecy was not fulfilled until some eight centuries had passed. Joel's prophecy is in Joel 2:28-32 – *'And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even upon the menservants and maidservants in those days I will pour out my spirit. And I will give portents (that is, something that is going to happen in the future) in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon into blood before that great and terrible day of the Lord comes. And it shall come to pass that all that call upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape, as the Lord has said, and among the survivors shall be those whom the Lord calls.'* No doubt this refers to the time of attack by the Roman armies. Many escaped, and those who were called preached the Gospel message and spread the word of the Gospel.

We know we understand correctly the meaning and signifi-

cance of the prophecy because Peter, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, applies this third 'Day of the Lord' in his address on the Day of Pentecost. Acts 2:14-21 – *'But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them, Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give ear to my words. For these men are not drunk as you suppose since it is only the third hour of the day.'* Remember, some had said, Oh, these men are full of new wine, but Peter deals with that for they would not have had time to become drunk. *'But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: "And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Yea, and on My menservants and My maidservants in those days I will pour out My Spirit and they shall prophesy and I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth beneath, blood and fire and vapour of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the day of the Lord comes, the great and manifest day. And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."* Marvellous really, that Peter the fisherman, uneducated, unlearned, standing up, was inspired by the Spirit to speak these very moving words to the multitude – and there must have been a multitude there on the Day of Pentecost. There was the sound of the rushing mighty wind, tongues of fire were seen on the heads of those to whom the Spirit was given, and then these eloquent words were spoken by the humble fisherman to the multitudes present, telling them that this prophecy of Joel was fulfilled before their very eyes.

A Great and Terrible Day

How, looking at some of the details of the prophesy: *'Wonders in the heaven and in the earth'*. The prophecy in Joel 2 is a prophecy of one of God's greatest blessings, but verses 30 and 31 speak of 'blood, fire and pillars of smoke; the sun turned into darkness and the moon into blood before that great and terrible Day of the Lord comes'. How do we understand these prophecies? The third Day of the Lord is a time of blessing. Why is it called terrible? Peter interprets the prophecy for us by using the word 'notable'. Peter is quoting from the Septuagint, that is, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures in which the word is so translated. The original Hebrew word is 'yareh' (Strong 3372 is the reference) and means 'fearful, in the sense of revered, held in reverence'. Peter uses the Greek word 'epiphanes' (Strong 2016) which means 'conspicuous or memorable'. The day referred to in Joel 2:30 and Acts 19:20 was indeed notable, conspicuous and memorable. In the first place God's Spirit was poured out on all flesh – something that had never happened before in the history of the world. So, in the second place, whoever would call on the name of the Lord would be saved, as Peter declared. Thirdly, the Day is still continuing – that 'Day' that began at Pentecost is still continuing and will continue until the close of the Kingdom Age.

The meaning of these symbols. What about the *'blood, fire and pillars of smoke. The sun turned into darkness and the moon into blood'*? Within the verses in Joel and Acts there occurs an important clue to interpretation. Both passages say *'before the great and notable day of the Lord comes'*, so the notable day comes after certain things have happened. The first Day of the Lord occurred in earlier times. 'The earth' symbolizes the social order which trembled before them, that

is, the invaders of Judah and Jerusalem – firstly the Assyrians and afterwards the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar. The heavens which would also tremble would be the governmental and ruling arrangements of Judah and Jerusalem. The sun and the moon are symbolic of the heathen gods which the idolatrous Jews were worshipping in disobedience to God, while the stars symbolized the Jewish priests and Levites who were no help and provided no Godly guidance to the people in their disobedience and sentence of punishment.

The second Day of the Lord had also to precede the great and notable third day in Joel 2 RSV ‘The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble; the sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining’ and in Joel 3 – ‘The sun and the moon are darkened and the stars withdraw their shining, And the Lord withdraws from Zion and utters His voice from Jerusalem, and the heavens and the earth shake: but the Lord is a refuge to His people, a stronghold to the people of Israel.’ This prophecy applies to the Gentile nations surrounding Judah and Jerusalem. The symbolism seems to be the same for the first Day of the Lord, the ruling powers and the people would be perplexed and troubled. Their rulers, priests and gods would be powerless when the God of heaven would roar against them out of Jerusalem. The word ‘roar’ means ‘to rumble, as of an earthquake or to moan, as of a strong wind or gale’ (Strong’s definition again). The whole picture is one of various kinds of trouble symbolized by blood, fire, smoke and darkness, first on the apostate and idolatrous Jews, then subsequently on the Gentiles. The blood would, of course, refer to the battles that would be fought and were fought.

The coming of the third Day of the Lord, announced in so powerful and moving a manner by the Apostle Peter as the ‘great and notable day’ was and continues to be a day of blessing, but the blessing, wonderful though it is, occurs in the midst of further trouble. The Apostles and disciples of Jesus were furiously persecuted, the severest Divine punishment fell upon the Jewish leaders and people in the siege of Jerusalem, and the early church had to endure severe persecution and tribulation brought upon its members by the Pagan Roman empire. But blessings will prevail. Above and through all the stress and persecution, there arose a new sun, the Sun of Righteousness and the Light of the World. The Lord Jesus Christ is the only true light of this present and continuing Day of the Lord.

The Sun of Righteousness

We read in Malachi 4:2 – ‘But for you who fear My name, the Sun of Righteousness shall rise with healing in His wings. He shall go forth leaping like calves from the stall.’ And in John 8:12 – ‘Again Jesus spoke to them saying, “I am the light of the world. He who follows Me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life.”’ Because of Him, and only because of Him, blessings to all members of the human race will prevail and all troubles will eventually pass away and be no more. There have been throughout history, and there are today, many false lights both Pagan and professedly Christian and these false lights should be seen for what they are by reference to the Scriptures and avoided by the sincere Christian. These false lights will sooner or later be extinguished. In this present and enduring Day of the Lord the same symbols as used in Joel are used again – Matt.24:29 ‘Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun

be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light; and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken.’ These prophetic words spoken by the Lord Jesus follow His prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem and His reference in Matt.24:15 and Mark 13:14 to the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet. In the same context, Luke 21:20 speaks of Jerusalem encompassed by armies – a clear prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman armies in 70 AD.

The contexts of each of the three chapters, Matt. 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21, however are too extensive and far reaching to have their sole and complete fulfillment in the destruction of Jerusalem. The prophecies of Daniel and also Revelation and some passages in Paul’s Second Letter to the Thessalonians inform us that a great religious system would arise that would pervert and even deny the fundamental truth of Christ’s ransom and sacrificial blood, and stand between the believer and the Lord God where only Christ should stand, and thus be a desolating abomination to all the millions of its adherents. The symbolism of Matt.24:29 extends to our day and beyond. The tribulation of those days can be understood as referring to the prophesied period of Papal prominence in world affairs which lasted for 1260 years from 539AD to 1799AD, the sun being the Papacy itself, the moon being Protestantism which has continued to reflect the Papacy in many ways and continued to hold many erroneous Papal doctrines, while the stars fittingly symbolize religious leaders and teachers. The powers of the heavens represent world governmental powers and arrangements.

So, as the Gospel Age progresses toward its appointed end, we should be watching and praying as we see world leaders, political and ecclesiastical, declining in power and prestige. An instance at the moment is the Papacy, the Papal system under siege for abuses of children – a most disgraceful revelation that the organisation which should be preaching Jesus and salvation has been abusing and harming young people for many, many years, perhaps even for centuries. That is all now coming into the open and that great false religious system is being sued and pursued in the courts and judgments against it for millions and billions of dollars have been made. This we should watch as the beginning of the end of this great system prophesied in Daniel and in Revelation. We should be watching and praying.

The present heavens and earth, that is the present political, social, economic and ecclesiastical arrangements, are passing away. If we pin our hopes on them and become caught up or entangled in them, we will in the long term be greatly disappointed for we are children of the light and of the Day, as the Apostle Paul has told us in 1Thess.5 – ⁵*For you are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night or of darkness.* ⁶*So then let us not sleep as others do, let us keep awake and be sober.* ⁷*For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those that get drunk are drunk at night.* ⁸*But since we belong to the day, let us be sober and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation.* ⁹*For God has not destined us to wrath but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ* ¹⁰*who died for us, so that whether we wake or sleep we might live with Him.*

With those words of the Apostle, the exhortation for us is ever to be awake and sober, to watch and to pray as the Lord Jesus told us. Amen. (RC)

THE BALM OF GILEAD

The Natural Balm

The source of the genuine Balm of Gilead is a small ever-green tree of the incense-tree family, once called *Opobalsamum*. It stands 10 to 14 feet high with wand like spreading branches. The outer bark is of a rich brown colour, the inner bark is green and very aromatic, and leaves are small and white. The flowers are small and reddish in colour. The seeds are solitary, yellow and grooved down one side. The fruit is reddish grey and the size of a small pea with an agreeable and aromatic taste. The tree grows from seeds. It is both rare and difficult to rear. It is mentioned in the Bible six times.

Josephus states that the Queen of Sheba took trees from Arabia as a present to King Solomon. They were believed to have been planted by him in Judea and Jericho originally. (I Kings 10:10) There, being cultivated for its juice~ the tree acquired its popular name, i.e. Balm of Gilead. Other historians also inform us that the tree was first planted in Judea and that it grew only in the king's garden. This actually comprised two parts and the balsam tree grow in both.

The juice exudes during the heat of the summer, in resinous drops, the process being helped by incisions in the bark. The amount of liquid balm obtained from a tree is about three drops a day. The resin hardens into small nodules. The quantity of oil obtained is roughly one-tenth the amount of juice. The "Balm of Gilead" had long been famous in antiquity for its almost miraculous properties for healing wounds. It was used to cleanse sores, to heal deep wounds, as an eye salve, as an antidote for the bites of poisonous serpents and for breaking down of calcium deposits in the body.

In fact, it was commonly held by Israel to be beneficial in the healing of all manner of disease. The resin or gum of the balsam tree was also used as a scent for oils and perfumes. The product is named "balasan" in Arabic, in Hebrew "baal she-men", meaning "lord" or "chief of oils", and our word balsam. Recent excavation of an ancient city within the Gilead area has unearthed the remains of a fortress like building used for the manufacture of balsam oil. The balsam oil of Gilead was so famous that the conquering Roman emperor Titus 70 AD, after conquering the area of Gilead, displayed branches from it in his triumphal march through Rome.

Is There No Balm? (Jer 8:22)

Let us now concentrate on Jeremiah's reference to the balm of Gilead. We note that he asked three questions - (1) Is there no balm in Gilead? (2) Is there no physician there? (3) Why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?" Jeremiah was a prophet who cried out to God on behalf of the people of Israel. Their's was a proud history, and the people were quick to assume that God's blessings of the past were a guarantee of His future blessing, regardless of their own actions and devotions. Jeremiah's three questions, we know, did not refer to the physical condition of Israel. Nor did he refer to the natural balm that was contained in the balsam tree of Gilead. He was not referring to the physicians of that time but to the moral condition of Israel.

When the people turned away from God and when trouble came, they seemed all too surprised. When sickness and op-

pression came, they discovered they were looking in all the wrong places for relief. They were looking in all the wrong places for healing. They trusted in their own methods instead of God. The result was a coming destruction, sickness and oppression. In the face of this coming devastation, Jeremiah is overwhelmed with sorrow and depression. He sees the sickness to come, the terrible days ahead, and cries out to God.

"Is there a balm to heal this sickness?" Jeremiah asks. In his day, balms and balsams, along with ointments were medicines. Balms and balsams were aromatic. One can imagine the terrible odours from diseased parts of the flesh, sick bodies, as well as odours from work and perspiration. These balms and balsams were made to help in masking the odours, to cover them up. So sores and diseased parts of the flesh were treated with balms and a recovery was made. Many of these applications helped in the healing process. Many of them even soothed the pain - perhaps numbing the nerve endings somewhat. They had medicinal value and became a natural way of speeding the healing process. When one was sick or diseased, balms were applied to cover up the odours, to soothe the pain and to aid healing.

As it was, the balm of Gilead was still there - the balm was the word of God. There were still capable physicians of the Lord's word in Israel. There were still prophets of God in Israel who would have skilfully applied the healing balm. These prophets would have attended to the sickness of the nation. Then why was Israel not recovered? Israel was not recovered because it did not listen to those true physicians who had the necessary healing balm. The nation as a whole was spiritually diseased. Its moral health was deteriorating and God was most displeased with them.

Jeremiah was earnestly asking the nation to turn back to God. The nation of Israel would have no difficulty in understanding the question. They knew the prophet was using a figurative language. They knew he was referring to the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the nation's personal Physician.

The Balsam Tree

But let us go back and examine the balsam tree in a little more detail. The balsam tree of Gilead had great medicinal value and in the seed of the tree, the sap of the tree, in the wood, or the tree itself, we have a most beautiful picture of the Word of God. The balsam tree was a saving or healing tree. Its many medicines and creams at that time would miraculously heal wounds. The Word of God as expressed by Jesus and as presented in the Scriptures offers the only means of salvation, for the church and for the world of mankind. There is no other way.

The balsam tree produces a seed and a new tree grows from this. This could picture the seed of our new nature, a seed that through the operation of the Holy Spirit is generated within us. This is similar to the seed of the balsam tree, which when planted in the ground, germinates and brings forth a new plant. What a beautiful picture it presents of our begetting by the Holy Spirit as new creatures. The seed re-

quires a life- giving fluid, water. Watching the tree grow, it will be found putting forth leaves until a certain age, then it will begin to blossom - a further stage of growth.

With the breaking out in blossom it is pleasing to the eye, gives off a pleasant smell, and we see that a future result will be to bring forth some fruit. So with the Christian, when he or she begins to blossom out, we note the progress. It is pleasing to behold and it is a sweet smelling savour to the householder who anticipates some fruitage. If the tree is well watered it will show healthy looking growth, as well as rapid growth~ it will become sturdy and able to produce more. The lack of the life giving fluid will result in sickly, shrivelling foliage and the tree will gradually wither away or put on a stunted growth. It is similar with the Christian. The Christian needs to be irrigated with the water of life- the truth.

The tree may lose much of its irrigation if the roots do not come in proper contact and absorb it. If the truth is not absorbed by the Christian all the irrigation may be lost. However, where it is taken in we notice the refreshing results. The prophet says Jer 17:7,8 "Blessed is the man that trusteth in Jehovah and whose trust Jehovah is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, that spreadeth out its roots by the river, and shall not fear when heat cometh, but its leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit."

It is necessary that Christians plant themselves near the stream of life, where the food is so satisfying - near to that river where the fruits of the spirit grow. They must grow from the leaf stage, develop to the blossom condition and produce fruit. They are to progress in the development of the image and likeness of the great Creator. Time and processes of growth are most important factors in the production of a Christian character.

The sap of the balsam tree could picture the Holy Spirit circulating through God' s Word. As the sap of the Balsam tree circulates through that tree to impart life and vitality to it, similarly the Holy Spirit circulates through the Word of God. It imparts life and vitality and is an energising power to the Christian. As the sap of the balsam tree generates or causes the seed of that tree to form, so does the Holy Spirit operating within our minds and hearts, generating the seeds of the new nature by fertilising, assisting, nourishing and promoting its welfare.

We are told that the leaves of the balsam tree of Gilead were white and were very thickly distributed over its branches, literally covering the tree and giving it a very white appearance. This might possibly picture the covering robe of Christ' s righteousness and the purity and spotlessness of the Word of God. In Psalm 12:6 we read that ' the words of Jehovah are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace on the earth, purified seven times'; and in Prov 30:5 "Every word of God is tried: He is a shield unto them that take refuge in Him' ~.

The Scriptures give us to understand that at the very beginning of our Christian experience, we figuratively are clothed in white raiment. This white raiment represents justification - we are justified freely from all things. It is a robe without a spot. It is sometimes spoken of as Christ' s robe of righteousness because it comes to us through Christ. Isaiah 61:10 men-

tions it ".... He has clothed me with garments of salvation, He has wrapped me with a robe of righteousness...". This is only to be had through Jesus. He is able to impute His righteousness to us, to grant to us this temporary robe.

The Balm of Gilead had a rather sharp, biting taste, but was most beneficial to the digestion. Similarly the Word of God is indeed sharp and not agreeable to the normal appetite. The Word of God was folly to the Jews and a stumbling block to the Gentiles. But to the chosen ones of both Jew and Gentiles, it was the power of God unto salvation. Often the truth is sour to the taste initially, but afterwards it becomes ever so sweet like the sweetest honey.

The balsam tree of Gilead exudes or weeps a kind of gum very much in the form of tears. It could possibly picture the tears of grief and sympathy shed by Jesus. We see Him as He grieved and wept over Jerusalem, and we hear those sweet words, recorded in Matt 23:37 ~O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto her, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"

The balsam tree of Gilead was first granted to only one land, the land of Judea. From there it was introduced to others, but the merchants of Judea took it to Israel first. And so it was with the balm of the Word of God; it was first given to Israel. We read in Psalm 147:19, 20 ' He sheweth His word unto Jacob, His statutes and his ordinances unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation; and as for His ordinances, they have not known them, Praise ye Jehovah This distinguishes them above all other nations of the earth and gives them special occasion for gratitude.

The Spiritual Balm

Our Lord Jesus expressly commanded his disciples not to go to the Gentiles nor into any city of the Samaritans, but only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. The first opportunity for membership in the kingdom, the first chance for the high and holy calling, was granted to the Jewish people. Romans 2:10 illustrates this well ' Buglory and honour and peace to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.' However as a nation they neglected to take this once in a lifetime so special opportunity and when the time came for the spiritual balm of Gilead to go to other nations and to other peoples, it was the Jewish "spiritual merchants" - the Apostles - who spread the goods news. Acts 13:46 reads as follows: "And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: Seeing ye thrust it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles. "

Historians inform us that when first the balsam tree grew in Judea, it was permitted to grow in the King's garden only. Subjects of the king had full access to the balm for their needs and sicknesses~ but they were not permitted to control the output of the balsam tree. The same can be said of the spiritual balm~ the Word of God. It did not originate from man but it came from heaven itself. It was first given to man by God through the prophets~ then through our Lord Jesus and later by the apostles.

As already noted the balsam tree was permitted to grow only

in The King' s garden consisted of two parts or two orchards. One of these orchards was much larger and grander than the other. What a beautiful picture this presents of that day to come shortly when there will be two phases of God' s Kingdom in operation.

The resurrection day is the time when the long planned for completion of the Church; the Body of Christ will take place. The resurrection has a spiritual component for the Church as well as a natural component for the rest of mankind. These are referred to by John as - (1) a resurrection of life for Gospel Age overcomers (a spiritual reward) and (2) a resurrection of judgement for the remainder of mankind. The final judgement for life for mankind in general will await the end of their next age trial time, but for those blessed in the resurrection of life, described as "the first resurrection", the assurance is (Rev 20:6) - "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection over these the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years." Theirs is the reward of immortality, on the spiritual plane.

The heavenly phase of the kingdom will be grand and most spectacular, beyond the dimensions of our minds. It will be the larger or greater phase of the kingdom. The lesser or earthly phase of that kingdom will also be glorious. From both phases the healing balm of the even-balanced, even-tempered Word of God shall flow. Speaking of that time, Isaiah in Ch 29:24 says " They also that err in spirit shall come to understanding, and they that murmur shall receive instruction." Here we see a day is coming when the spirit of love and the truths of the Bible will go hand in hand, it will be a rightly tempered, perfectly balanced Gospel, not "untempered mortar".

It has been written of the balm of Gilead that it was recommended for the breaking up or dissolving of stones or calcium formations in the body. This could picture the spiritual balm of Gods word and its power to break up and dissolve the hardest formation of all, a stony heart. Jeremiah in Ch 23: 29 says; "Is not my word like fire? saith Jehovah; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?" Again we read in Ezek 36:21-30 addressed to the nation of Israel ~ God will sanctify his name among the heathen. How comforting are the words to the nation of Israel in Ezek 36:26 - ~' a new heart will I give you, and a new spirit that will cause you to walk in my statutes. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave your fathers, my people indeed and I will be your God". What a beautiful promise is given to the nation of Israel!

Today a distressed world is searching about for healing balm. One by one, her concoctions fail to bring peace to this world, they also fail to bring healing to the sickness of the people on earth. So many of the earth' s leaders seek for balm, but refuse to seek it in Gilead. They seek for a physician, but refuse to seek him in Gilead. The leaders of the nations refuse the only Physician who can heal all their problems and diseases.

Over the years the world has had fascism, communism and other isms. The United Nations and NATO are being tried by a despairing, dying world, but are failing to bring about healing. Their solutions are only temporary and they end up creating more problems to this world by their so-called attempts at making peace. Mankind cannot and will not bring peace

into this world of ours. With all our modern medicines, with all our modern medical equipment, some reach 100 years, but eventually all must die.

Soon, however, the Great Physician will be seen pointing the way to the healing balm, to those who shall have been delivered from the "besieged city". To those who shall have been delivered from the power of Satan, He will be seen pointing towards literal Gilead, the Gilead of old, for from the nation of Israel shall the word of the Lord go forth, the healing balm for every ill, as foretold by the prophets:

"For I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the LORD; because they called thee an Out-cast, saying, This is Zion, whom no man seeketh after." Jer 30:17

"Come, and let us return unto the LORD: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up". Hosea 6:1

"And 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. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion (the Heavenly phase of the Kingdom) shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem (The earthly phase of the Kingdom). Isa 2:2-3. The spiritual seed will instruct and support the earthly seed. What a strong and irresistible government will be established!

The Balm for Today

From another standpoint, we may sometimes wonder if there are those who, coming among the Lords people, ever have occasion to ask the question, which Jeremiah did, "Is there no balm in Gilead?" Possibly this question may come from some lonely heart, it may come from some seeker after truth and righteousness. Has someone ever come to us in search of the true balm of Gilead and gone away without receiving it? This is a question to which each one of us should give serious thought.

Further, in those moments of self-examination, does that question come to each one of us? Let us examine our hearts and minds. Is the balm of Gilead to be found there? Is the true and great Physician reigning within our hearts? Let us hold fast those spiritual blessings that have been given to us, ever remembering that we wrestle not with flesh and blood, for our great Adversary is watching spiritual Israel at this time as never before, and if we let down our guard, he will be sure to reach some vulnerable spot.

Let us shine then as lights in a dark place. Let us fight the good fight of faith, so that we may lay hold on eternal life, and be caught up to that heavenly phase of the Kings garden, from where we shall be used in assisting the world, helping mankind from sickness to health, from death to life, and from destruction to restitution. May we hear those most beautiful words at the end of our earthly journey "Well done thou good and faithful servant enter thou into the joy of thy Lord. " Amen..

THE FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT-JOY

In Galatians 5:22 the Apostle Paul lists nine fruits of the Spirit. The second fruit listed is joy.

In John 15 Jesus explains the relationship between love, the first fruit of the Spirit listed by Paul in Galatians 5, and joy. Jesus' joy stemmed from keeping His father's commandments – *"If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love, even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in His love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full"* (John 15:10-11). For us to have fullness of joy we must keep His commandments, and John 13:34 tells us that His commandment is that we love one another.

Love for our brethren is a great source of joy for us, just as the Apostle Paul derived great joy and consolation from the love of Philemon (Philemon 7, 20), and the love which the Philippians had for each other. (Phil. 2:2)

The joy which we derive from the love of our brethren arises from our common understanding and belief that the Word of God is truth and is not from men: *"For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God ... For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? For ye are our glory and joy."* (1 Thess. 2:13 – 20).

One truth we share that brings joy is that Jesus was with the Father, and was manifested to His disciples in the flesh, as 1 John 1:1-4 states: *"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; ... That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy be full."* We who remain in the flesh in this 21st century have this same *"fellowship of the Spirit"* (Phil. 2:1-2), and therefore may have this same fullness of joy.

Romans 15:13 tells us that our joy requires belief, and not just understanding: *"Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing."* The Apostle Peter confirms the need for belief: *"whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory"* (1 Peter 1:8).

A second common understanding that provides us with great joy is our knowledge of God's plan of the ages. It was His knowledge of that Plan that gave Jesus His joy during His earthly ministry: *"for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."* (Heb. 12:2). It was His knowledge of God's plan for the redemption of all mankind that enabled Him to despise the shame, to *"resist unto blood"* (verse 4) and to joyfully give His flesh for the life of the world (John 6:51). An understanding of, and belief in, God's Plan that *"the good news of great joy shall be to all people"* (Luke 2:10) is necessary for us to have joy in the present time while *"the whole creation groaneth and tra-*

vailleth in pain together". (Romans 8:23). Faith that Jesus' sacrifice has paid the price for the redemption of all mankind, that God will bring about the resurrection of all who are in the graves (John 5:28) and restore them to life and happiness in *"the times of restitution of all things"* (Acts 3:21) is necessary for us to experience joy.

In spite of this hope, we *"groan within ourselves"*. One antidote for our grief is the realisation that God *"hath given this sore travail"* for man's ultimate benefit, and while *"weeping may endure for a night, joy cometh in the morning."* (Eccl. 1:13; Psa. 30:5)

In order to experience joy in the face of the personal reprimands we receive in the world, we need to appreciate that *"the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ"*; and that *"the Spirit itself bears witness with our Spirit that we are the children of God."* (Ephesians 1:3, Romans 8:16) It was this understanding and belief that enabled Paul and Silas to sing praises to God when they were in prison (Acts 16:19-25) and, on another occasion to *"rejoice that they were worthy to suffer shame for His name."* (Acts 5:41).

The challenge for us is to also *"count it all joy when we fall into divers temptations, knowing that the trying of your faith worketh patience."* *"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: For so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."* (James 1:2-3; Matthew 5:10-12). We may assuredly *"rejoice in hope of the glory of God"*, realising that we are *"partakers of Christ's sufferings; that when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy."* (Romans 5:2; 1 Peter 4:13)

An understanding of these things does not come instantly, but as the prophet has said *"Whom shall he teach knowledge? And whom shall he make to understand doctrine? Them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, there a little."* (Isaiah 28:9-10). In this sense joy is a fruit of the Spirit – a fruit because it is developed over a period of time and *"of the Spirit"* because *"God has revealed them unto us by his Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, yea the deep things of God."* (1 Corinthians 2:10).

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