

Our Refuge and Strength

*“God is our refuge
and strength, a
very present help
in trouble.”*

—Psalm 46:1

IN THIS SCRIPTURE THE

psalmist assures us that our loving Heavenly Father has promised to guide and care for his earthly children,

those who have been called for a special purpose. We have his promise that he is ready and willing to help us in our consecrated walk, as a ‘refuge’ and ‘strength’ and as a ‘very present help’ in every time of need. These words take on added meaning as we witness the violent and turbulent world that marks our day, and the closing features of this present Gospel Age. Concerning this, we read, “Will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.”—Ps. 46:2,3

HIS SUSTAINING POWER

Throughout the many long centuries of the present nighttime of sin and death, the children of God

have looked to him for his sustaining power to help, and his grace to forgive. This was true in connection with the lives and experiences of the prophets of old who were being guided by his Holy Spirit. It also touched others including Moses, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Noah, and all those who were being used in carrying out his plans and purposes concerning his earthly creation and their ultimate reconciliation and blessing. "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth."—Heb. 11:13

CALMING OUR FEARS

Later, our Lord Jesus was provided for us under the mighty hand of God as the way for our justification. This came through faith in his precious blood, and members of the fallen race were then given the means by which they could have a new standing with the Heavenly Father. These have been comforted with the assurance that, through their faith in Jesus, their sins, having been inherited through Adam's disobedience and weaknesses, are covered, and their imperfect works have been made acceptable to the Father.

During this period of time, Satan, as the great Adversary of man, has relentlessly continued to afflict those who have been called by God, those upon whom the wonderful favor and working power of our everlasting Father has been made manifest. Those who are privileged to walk in newness of life with our Lord have had to face the world and its temptations with increased fortitude and combativeness.

Having thus set upon a course to overcome the wiles of the Adversary, the weaknesses of the flesh, and temptations of the world, they have turned to the ever present help of the Father in their walk of faith.

SATAN'S WILL TO ATTACK

Satan's attacks were particularly directed toward our Lord Jesus—"the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." (John 1:29) The Adversary was determined to destroy him even at a very early age. He did this by using Herod as a tool to accomplish his evil design. By seeking Jesus' life, he attempted to thwart the eternal purpose of God and his plan to rescue the human family from the ravages of sin and death. His attempt failed, however, only because the Heavenly Father's promised blessing as a refuge and strength was working in connection with his beloved Son, as spoken by the psalmist in our featured scripture text.

JESUS AS A TARGET

Later, when our Lord was lifted out of the waters by John the Baptist (Matt. 3:13-17) and was ready to begin his earthly ministry, Satan was again on hand to try and turn him aside from carrying out the Father's plan and purpose. The scriptural record bears this out. The Gospel account reads, "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread

alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”—Matt. 4:1-4

FED BY GOD’S WORD

Here we see that, after a long period of time during which Jesus had not eaten and was in a weakened state, Satan quickly saw an opportunity to tempt him. The Master responded by pointing to the experiences of the Jewish people during their forty-year journey in the wilderness. This had been designed by the hand of God to serve as a means to humble and prove his people. (Deut. 8:2,3) In a greater sense, we see that these experiences served in a typical fashion to portray future events and circumstances as recognized by Jesus.

SATAN QUOTES SCRIPTURE

Turning again to the scriptural account, we read, “Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.”—Matt. 4:5-7

One of the noted points that marks this particular temptation is that Satan here turns to the Word of God as a means to justify his selfish and evil intentions. In his attempt to quote Psalm 91:11, he failed to quote the psalmist’s words correctly. When he said, ‘He shall give his angels charge concerning thee,’ he left out the important part of the scripture that pointed to the Heavenly Father as a refuge

and strength to our Lord Jesus, and also for his consecrated people, which said, “to keep thee in all thy ways.”

THE THIRD TEMPTATION

“Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.”—Matt. 4:8-10

Jesus knew that he had come into the world in fulfillment of the Father’s ultimate plan to rescue the human family from sin and death. He also knew that he must die as a ransom price to save mankind, and he quickly turned Satan away from diverting that Divine purpose. “Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.” (vs. 11) In Luke’s account, he wrote, “When the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season.” (Luke 4:13) Truly, the grace and power of the Heavenly Father was with Jesus as a refuge and strength, and a very present help in his time of need.

SEED OF THE SERPENT

Jesus said that those who were stirred to jealousy and hatred toward him were acting in accordance with the will of Satan. He told them, “Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh

of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.” (John 8:44) When speaking about Satan, the Apostle Paul referred to him as the “god of this world” (II Cor. 4:4), and admonished the child of God to renounce the “hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.” (vs. 2) The apostle wrote concerning those who continue to walk in the ways of darkness—“If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost [perishing].” (vs. 3) We are encouraged to remain faithful to the written Word of God, and we have the blessed assurance that he will be our refuge and strength and an ever present help when we need him.

MOCKING THE SPIRIT

On the Day of Pentecost, the waiting disciples of the early church were suddenly filled with the Holy Spirit. This mighty power of God was manifest to those who were gathered as “cloven tongues” of fire that sat upon each one of them, and the disciples began to speak with “tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” (Acts 2:1-4) We read that the group was confounded because every man heard the various tongues “in his own language.”—vss. 5,6

Some among the multitude who had also gathered began to doubt the wonderful working power of God. “They were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this? Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine.” (vss. 12,13) The apostle then rose to defend the glory of God and the special gift that had come to

them from him. “Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words: For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day.”—vss. 14,15

THE SPIRIT POURED OUT

Peter was directing his words toward Satan’s seed, those who were charging that they were all drunk. The apostle also identified the event as taking place at the third hour of the day, a time when it was unlikely that such behavior would occur. He then explained to them, “This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel [2:28-32]; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of 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.” (Acts 2:16,17) These words foretold the time when the future kingdom of Christ would be established over all the earth, and the power of the Holy Spirit of God would bless them richly with truth and the opportunity of life rights under the administration of justice and mercy toward all.

Peter, continuing to read from Joel’s prophecy, then quoted, “On my servants and on my hand-maidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.” (vs. 18) This second part of the prophecy points to the present Gospel Age when the Lord’s disciples, and others who would be his followers during this long period of time, are given the Holy Spirit of understanding. This blessing,

provided for the footstep followers of the Master, serves as a marked promise of the Heavenly Father's care for a very special class of believers during a special period of time. We are thus assured that he is our refuge and strength, and a very present help in every time of need.

PRESERVED BY GRACE

The early years of this Gospel Age are clearly marked by Satan's attacks against the Lord's people. When answering the accusations of his countrymen, Stephen said, "Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy [Spirit]: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it."—Acts 7:51-53

Stephen had been a loyal follower of the Master and was a wonderful witness to the power of God's Holy Spirit but, "When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth." (vs. 54) He suffered martyrdom for his faithfulness and there is no doubt that he willingly stood in defense of the Truth while abiding under the promised strength and ever present help of God. "They stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep."—vss. 59,60
(Continued on page 35)

We note in the scriptural account that the disciples of our Lord were called Christians first in Antioch. (Acts 11:26) "In these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar." (vss. 27,28) It had become very evident that trials and persecutions were to be a part of the Christian's consecrated walk. Those who had taken up their cross to follow the Master must learn to rely upon his strength and readiness to help them be faithful to their new calling in Christ Jesus. Otherwise they could be turned away from their High Calling.

"The disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul. 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 11:29-12:2) James was another of the Lord's disciples to suffer martyrdom at the hands of his enemies. However, we may be sure that the Father's loving presence was with him.

"Because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also." (vs. 3) Herod had thus responded to the wishes of the Jews who quickly pointed to the Apostle Peter too. In so doing, they again identified themselves as the seed and progeny of Satan. As we noted earlier, Jesus told them, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the

lusts of your father ye will do.” (John 8:44) However, Peter having been set free from Herod’s prison by the powerful hand of God, is an unquestionable evidence of the Father’s ever present help in the apostle’s consecrated walk. In this case, the apostle’s life was spared. Whatever may be the will of God, we are assured of his promised strength and overruling providence toward those who are walking in newness of life.

In the Apostle Paul’s second letter written to Timothy, he implied that his death was imminent. This was written during his second imprisonment at Rome. Reading from this epistle, he says, “I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”—II Tim. 4:6-8

The details of the great apostle’s death are not recorded here, but many believe that he very likely suffered martyrdom at the hands of Nero. The Apostle Paul was a tower of strength to the brethren of the early church who were privileged to personally know him. His untiring ministry and spiritual admonitions have been a great blessing to the footstep followers of Jesus throughout this present Gospel Age. There can be no doubt that he was uplifted by the mighty hand of God throughout his consecrated walk as a refuge and strength from the ever present Heavenly Father.

THE GOSPEL AGE

Throughout this present age, Satan has corrupted the truth of the Gospel message and has led the professed people of God into grievous errors of faith and practice. Although he failed to lure Jesus into an alliance with him, he did succeed with the followers of Christ. Contrary to the will of God they joined hands with the kingdoms of this world, and called it Christendom. Paul wrote concerning Satan, “. . . With all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.”—II Thess. 2:10-12, *New American Standard Bible*

The Lord's people have always had to suffer for righteousness sake, but in their trials they have felt our loving Heavenly Father's presence as their refuge and strength. He has never forsaken his own and, behind what may oftentimes seem to be a frowning providence, he surely hides a smiling face toward those who know and love him. His presence has been a compensating source of strength and joy.

As a further assurance of this blessed promise, we read, “Because thou hast made the LORD, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation; There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.”—Ps. 91:9-11

END OF THE AGE

Our featured text seems to reflect the foretold time of trouble that would mark the ending of this present age, and our special day in prophecy. Having been given the wonderful assurance of God's promised strength and refuge on our behalf, we also note the psalmist's words, "Therefore will not we fear." (Ps. 46:1-3) This indicates the events that would surround our Lord's Second Presence and, in this connection, we read, "As he was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, 'Tell us, when shall these things will be?' and 'What will be the sign of thy presence, and of the consummation of the age?'"—Matt. 24:3, *Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott*

In his answer to the disciples, Jesus informed them that it would be a time when men's hearts would fail them for fear, and that there would be great distress of nations with perplexity, and that the sea and the waves would roar and be troubled. (Luke 21:25,26) The end of the present Gospel Age would witness the disintegration of the entire social order, and with ominous threats it would become even more widespread as the end drew near.

We recognize the seriousness of the world's present situation and we can discern the dangers which are now threatening man-made institutions. The symbolic earth is being removed, and the mountains [kingdoms] are being carried into the midst of the sea as foretold long ago. We understand why these developments are causing the people to look ahead with fear to the destruction that is coming upon the world.

ASSURED OF HIS GRACE

The Apostle Peter also assures the Lord's people of the Father's wonderful care over his children. He wrote, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts."—II Pet. 1:19

We have been given knowledge and understanding concerning the wonderful plan and purpose of God. The glorious Truth of the Divine plan of the ages is the light that shines in a very dark world. Let us continue to praise our loving Father for his refuge and strength, and his ever present help in every time of trouble. ■