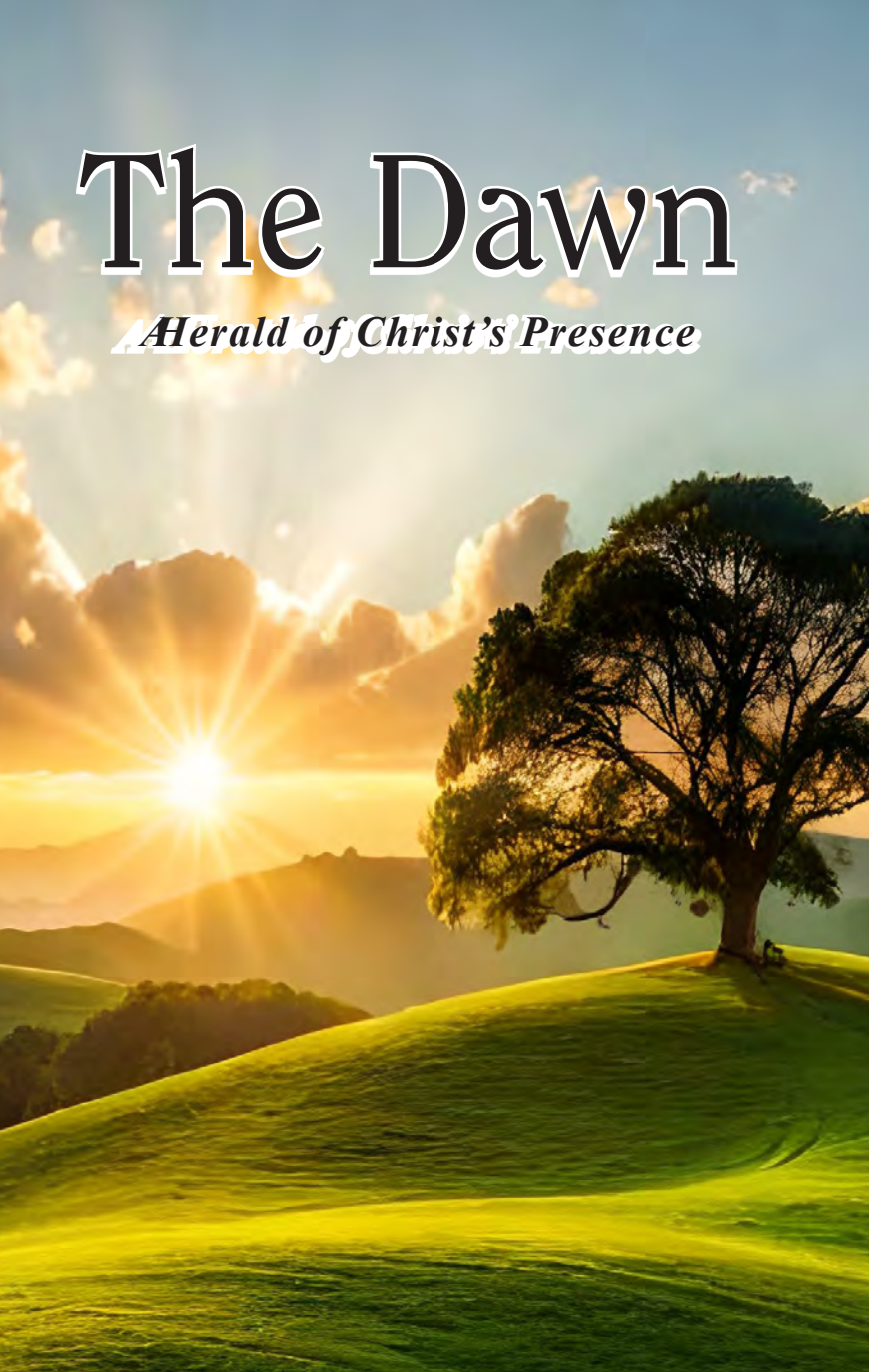


The Dawn

Herald of Christ's Presence



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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ARGENTINA: estudiantesdela
bibliargentina@gmail.com

AUSTRALIA: Berean Bible
Institute, P.O. Box 402, Rosanna,
Victoria 3084

BRAZIL: A Aurora, Caixa Postal
50088, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, CEP
20050-971

BRITISH ISLES: Associated Bible
Students, Brook House, Whitchurch
Road, Prees, Whitchurch Shropshire,
SY13 3JZ UK

CANADA: P.O. Box 1565, Vernon,
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FRANCE: L'Aurore, 39A rue des Bois,
68540 Feldkirch

GERMANY: Tagesanbruch Bibel-
studien-Vereinigung e. V., Postfach
3, 64396 Modautal

GREECE: He Haravgi (The Dawn),
PO Box 521167, Longwood, FL
32752-1167 USA

INDIA: P. Kumar/E. Rashmi Manu
Residency, #1-N-32-2717/8(2),
Near Vigneshwara wood Industries
Ashoknagar, Mangalore: 575006

SPAIN/ITALY: El Alba/Aurora,
Associazione Studenti Biblici, Via
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HIGHLIGHTS OF DAWN

Increase Our Faith 2

INTERNATIONAL BIBLE STUDIES

God's Word 14

Seek Ye First 16

Christ Died for Us 18

Led by God's Spirit 20

CHRISTIAN LIFE AND DOCTRINE

The Gifts of God 22

The Work of Elijah—Repentance,
Reformation & Restoration 34

The Spirit Poured upon All Flesh 47

Weekly Prayer Meeting Texts 46

TALKING THINGS OVER 61

OBITUARIES 46

SPEAKERS' APPOINTMENTS 63

CONVENTIONS 63

Increase Our Faith

*“The apostles said
unto the Lord,
Increase our faith.”
—Luke 17:5*

As the end of another year approaches, it is appropriate that we examine the important subject of faith. The word

faith appears 247 times in the *King James Version* of the Bible. Perhaps surprisingly, all but two of these occurrences are in the New Testament, and of all the New Testament usages, 216 are after the Day of Pentecost. Only 29 times does the word appear in the Gospel accounts, and in the Gospel of John the word faith does not appear at all. It is also interesting to note that nearly half of the New Testament uses of the word faith are in one of three books—Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews. Thus, to gain a greater appreciation of this subject, one may turn to these three epistles of Paul as primary sources of information and understanding concerning faith.

Before turning to the New Testament, however, we wish to first look at the Old Testament record. Though faith does not seem at first to be stressed in the Old Testament writings, yet the two references

recorded show the importance God placed upon it. The first usage were God's words directed to the nation of Israel, chiding them for their lack of faith. "I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be: for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith." (Deut. 32:20) The other Old Testament reference to faith is in the writings of the Prophet Habakkuk. "The just shall live by his faith." (Hab. 2:4) The Apostle Paul comments on both of these verses in the New Testament. Although not a direct reference to the Deuteronomy scripture, Paul says that Israel did not attain righteousness "because they sought it not by faith." (Rom. 9:32) The Habakkuk scripture Paul quotes directly three separate times in his writings—in Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, and Hebrews 10:38. We realize, then, that although the vast majority of the scriptural references to faith are in the New Testament, the basis of this important subject was established by God much earlier.

Keys to Understanding Faith

At the outset of our lesson, we wish to list four key points concerning faith. First, since man's creation, faith has been an absolute requirement for anyone to have a standing with God and to inherit his promises, whether earthly or heavenly. (Heb. 11:6) Second, the Mosaic Law did not stress faith, but works—the keeping of commandments and ceremonies. (Eph. 2:15) Third, those who were pleasing to God in Old Testament times—the Ancient Worthies—were acceptable to him not because they were able to keep the Law, but because of their faith. (Rom. 4:13; Heb. 11:1,2) Fourth, to

God's people living after Pentecost, there is an inseparable link between faith and spirit begetting at the beginning of the Christian walk, as well as in the daily operation of the Holy Spirit and the progression of faith until the end of that walk. (I Cor. 12:7-9; Gal. 3:14) This last point helps us to realize how remarkable was the faith of the Ancient Worthies. They were not begotten of the Holy Spirit, but yet they had great faith.

The key to the faith in the ancient heroes of the Old Testament was that it was a process, a development, not just a momentary belief. Faith to them became a way of life. It governed their whole outlook on the world they lived in and their place in it. Abraham, for example, looked for a city having a divine foundation, built by God, having faith that God had a plan for something in the future that would be a better arrangement for him and the rest of the world than the fallen conditions which existed in his day.—Heb. 11:10

Similarly, for the child of God now, the development of faith is also a process. Faith at the time of the begetting of the Holy Spirit is required in a measure, but it is only at a starting point, still undeveloped and untested. The development of faith begins at consecration and spirit begetting, but does not end until death and spirit birth. True faith is not saying we are "saved" or "born again," then mostly forgetting about it, and believing somehow that makes us a Christian. On the contrary, it is faith and its development and progression after spirit begetting that is the key to being a true Christian. As Paul states: "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to

every one that believeth. ... For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.” (Rom. 1:16,17) The *New International Version* translates a portion of verse 17 as “righteousness that is by faith from first to last.” In other words, living by faith and progressing “from faith to faith” is an ongoing process throughout the Christian life, not merely a momentary belief.

Faith Still Necessary

The question might be asked, “Do we still need faith?” After all, we have more knowledge of God’s plan of salvation now than at any previous time. Many Bible prophecies have been fulfilled or are in process of fulfillment. We have today a seemingly endless supply of Bible helps and related study material. Perhaps faith is not as vital today as it once was. Jesus, pointing forward to our day, asked a related question, “When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8) Although he did not answer this question directly, Jesus implied by his words that faith would indeed still be needed in our day, and additionally that he would not find it in abundance. This fact, by itself, should help us realize the great importance of faith in our time, when there is so little of it left in the earth. Although we do see more clearly God’s great plan of salvation than at any other previous time, this should not in any way discount the need for faith. In fact, the more things we see and know, the more we should realize how much we still do not know, or understand fully, and that is where faith comes into the picture. Paul’s

words should still echo loudly within us: “We walk by faith, not by sight.”—II Cor. 5:7

For example, Abraham saw and knew certain things even in his day. He knew that God could perform miracles, such as the birth of a son when he and Sarah were beyond childbearing years. Abraham also knew that God could deliver from the dead, as evidenced by his intervention in the sacrifice of Isaac. (Rom. 4:16-21; Heb. 11:17-19) These things Abraham saw and appreciated with his literal eyes. Beyond this, though, he saw with the eye of faith a time in the future when, through a seed, all families of the earth would be blessed. (Gen. 12:3; 22:18) He did not know how or when it would come about but had faith it would come to pass. We today also see many things, but not all is fully known yet. We see a great time of trouble going on about us, but many of the details of events yet future we do not know. (Dan. 12:1) We see and appreciate the fact that the numbers of the body of Christ on this side of the veil are diminishing, but we do not know the day nor the hour that the last member will enter into glory. These, and other things, we see partially, but we have faith that they all will be brought to completion according to God’s arrangement.—I Cor. 13:12

It may be said that we will need more faith as we prepare to enter 2026 than Abraham needed in his day, more than the Early Church needed, more than the saints who lived at the beginning of the harvest needed, and more than we ourselves needed in the year past. We may be sure that an increasing measure and development of faith, according to the circumstances and experiences of

the Lord's people living at each point in time, is needed in order to be found fully pleasing to God.

Two Parts of Faith—Substance and Evidence

Some elements of the Christian's development are not specifically defined in the Scriptures, but faith is. Paul gives us its definition: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (Heb. 11:1) We notice here that faith is not the "things hoped for," nor is it the "things not seen." It is, rather, the "substance" and "evidence" of these things. That which we "hope for" is the fulfillment of God's plan, not only for his church, but also in due time for the entire world. Faith, Paul says, is the "substance" of what we hope for. The word substance here means "a setting under, or support." The support, or substance, of our hope is the Word of God, the Bible. It is this foundation of truth which provides us the substance of our hope. Paul speaks of it this way in another place: "Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil."—Heb. 6:19

The second aspect of faith, according to Paul, is "the evidence of things not seen." Those things which we do not see, generally speaking, are those which lie in the future, whether it be tomorrow, next week, next year, or many years hence. In all of these cases, we do not know the specific experiences in our life that will come to pass. The word evidence signifies "a proof or proving." The proof of what lies in the future, as it relates to faith, is shown by God's performance in the past. In other words, we can look back on our experiences and on

those of mankind in general and see that God has performed flawlessly up to this very moment and has executed every minute detail of his plan perfectly. Herein lies the proof that assures us concerning those things ahead of us—that which we do not see. Because of the evidence, or proof, of God's past performance, which we can see, we now have faith in the future execution of his plan, that which we cannot fully see.

These two aspects of faith—substance and evidence—can also be viewed in connection with God's performance. The substance part of faith we might refer to as “the faith”—the truth of God's plan and its fulfillment. (Jude 1:3) The evidence aspect of faith we could refer to as “our faith.” These are the experiences of life that have been, are now, and will be in the future, overruled in conjunction with God's arrangements for each one of his children. Viewing this, we know that he will perfectly execute in all things in the future, just as he has in the past.

Two types of experiences help us develop this two-part faith structure. First, we have learning experiences. These help us develop the substance aspect of faith. Such experiences might include things such as personal study, attending various meetings and gatherings of the Lord's people, personal meditation and prayer, and fellowship with fellow Christians. The evidence aspect of faith might be said to be developed by application experiences. These would include experiences such as dealing with the world, our job, going through various trials and tests, our responses to these experiences, how we respond to the world's experiences, and

how we deal with the uncertainties of life. Through both learning and application experiences our faith must grow, develop, and increase as we walk in the footsteps of Jesus.

Increasing Our Faith

In our scripture text at the beginning of this lesson, the disciples made a request that Jesus increase their faith. He did not respond definitively, but rather stated what increased faith could accomplish. “If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you.” (Luke 17:6) A similar statement is recorded in Matthew’s Gospel, “If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.” (Matt. 17:20) In both these statements we notice that increased faith has to do with accomplishments not possible to a human being—illustrated by such things as moving a tree or a mountain simply by speaking to it. To further emphasize these seemingly impossible feats, he likens such faith to a mustard seed, the smallest of all seeds. (Mark 4:31) Jesus, in fact, is stating that if we have faith represented by something even as small as a grain of mustard seed, humanly impossible things can be done.

Increasing our faith, then, has to do with knowing and having confidence that God can do things not possible by human power, whether directly related to us or to the fulfillment of his plan in general. Jesus did not grant to his disciples this request

because he knew that such increases in faith would come about through experience, and over a period of time, not by a miracle on his part or any immediate action he could take. Put simply, increased faith does not come about overnight, nor unknowingly. Increased faith came to the disciples—and comes to us also—by knowing more about God, his plan, his truth, the “substance” of our hopes, and by recognizing and appreciating more and more his leading in the past and present, which are the “evidence” we have to meet the future, unseen experiences of life.

Little Faith and Great Faith

If faith is to increase, it must mean that we sometimes do not possess it as fully as we should. This was also true of our Lord’s disciples during his earthly ministry. On four separate occasions Jesus told them they were “of little faith.” (Matt. 6:26-30; 8:25,26; 14:28-32; 16:5-10) Space does not permit elaboration in detail of these scriptures, except to summarize the problems that inhibited the disciples’ faith and, at times, ours.

In the foregoing accounts, faith was lacking due to: anxiety over current and future temporal needs, including those which may not even come to pass; fear during the storms of life which come upon God’s children from time to time; inability to maintain trust and confidence when passing through experiences that are completely beyond fleshly control; and fleshly reasoning, in particular the forgetting of how the Lord has guided past experiences.

The solutions to these examples of the need for increased faith are: replacing anxiety over temporal

things with the seeking of spiritual things; remembering that the Lord controls the storms of life which come upon us and will make them calm not a moment later than he sees it best for our spiritual development; developing continuance and constancy in our experiences, realizing that the Lord will never leave us nor forsake us; and calling to mind the evidence we have of God's perfect performance in all the past experiences of our life. All of these remedies will increase our faith, just as they did in the case of Jesus' disciples.—Matt. 6:33; Ps. 107:29; Heb. 13:5; Phil. 1:6

The Scriptures contain many wonderful examples of faith. Most notable is the account in Hebrews chapter 11, of the many faithful ones of old. These not only had faith, but their faith increased as their life progressed, even unto death. "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) We too, must die in faith, knowing that only then will we, if faithful, receive our promised inheritance. We are also pilgrims and strangers on the earth, and "our citizenship is in heaven." (Phil. 3:20, *Revised Version*) We have given up earthly claims and privileges and seek a "better country ... an heavenly."—Heb. 11:16; I Pet. 2:11

Goals for the New Year

As we close 2025 and enter into a New Year, it is imperative that we remember the great importance of increasing and maturing in our faith structure. To that end, let us make the following resolutions

for the coming year:

1. Be active for the Lord, the Truth, and the brethren. Work hard in all these areas, knowing that an active Christian life is one of the keys to increased faith.—I Tim. 6:18; Tit. 3:8

2. Keep the focus of our meditation on the Word of God and those many helps which we have available to us at the present time. The study of God's Word can never have any other impact than to increase the substance of our faith structure.—John 5:39; II Tim. 2:15

3. Do not get caught up in or be anxious about the world's myriad problems, nor their solution, which only Christ's kingdom will bring about. If conditions in the world seem to take us away from the Word of God, or the peace of God, then perhaps it is time to turn off the television or radio; get away from the constant bombardment of news and opinions via electronic and social media; and avoid those things written by man's human reasoning that propose unworkable solutions. Remember that God has all things under his control and we need not worry.—Phil. 4:6,7, *NIV*; I Pet. 5:7

4. Do continue to watch, remembering that there is a difference between watching and being caught up and anxious about things going on in the world. A watcher in the watchtower is "above the fray," not fighting in the battles of this world, but watching to see God's power as it is used to defeat his enemies. Watch to see the unfolding and fulfillment of prophecy. This will also increase our faith.—I Cor. 16:13; I Pet. 4:7

5. Be happy and rejoice. Be positive about your life in the Lord, be positive about your fellow brethren, be positive and firm in the Truth, and be positive

about the glorious outcome of God's plan. View all of life's experiences through the prism of God's great plan of salvation, and the result will be increased faith.—Phil. 4:4; I Thess. 5:16

Faith must guide us to our last breath. For any of us, this might be today, tomorrow, next month, next year, or many years from now. Regardless, however, of our life's remaining days, faith will always be necessary. With developed and increased faith, it does not matter how long or how short our life may be, nor what happens along the way, because we will be fully equipped, spiritually, to be victorious. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."—I John 5:4

"You must never forget those past days when you had received the light and went through such a great and painful struggle. It was partly because everyone's eye was on you as you endured harsh words and hard experiences, partly because you threw in your lot with those who suffered much the same. You sympathised with those who were put in prison and you were cheerful when your own goods were confiscated, for you knew that you had a much more solid and lasting treasure in Heaven. Don't throw away your trust now—it carries with it a rich reward in the world to come. Patient endurance is what you need if, after doing God's will, you are to receive what he has promised. For yet a little while, and he who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, my soul has no pleasure in him. Surely we are not going to be men who cower back, ... but men who maintain [increase] their faith until the salvation of their souls is complete!"—Heb. 10:32-39, *J. B. Phillips New Testament* ■

God's Word

***Key Verses: "Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work."
—II Timothy 3:16,17, American Standard Version***

***Selected Scriptures:
II Timothy 3:14-17;
Psalm 119:105***

The Apostle Paul wrote his last letter to Timothy while bound with a chain as a prisoner in Rome. (II Tim. 1:16; 2:9) In the apostle's writings to the Early Church, he refers to Timothy as "my fellow-worker," and "beloved and faithful child in the Lord." (Rom. 16:21; I Cor. 4:17, ASV) In his letter the Apostle Paul first admonishes Timothy to "never be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me, his prisoner," but "instead, by God's power, join me in suffering for the sake of the gospel."—II Tim. 1:8, *International Standard Version*

Later in his epistle the apostle states, "Be strong by the grace that is in the Messiah Jesus. What you have heard from me

through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well." (II Tim. 2:1,2, ISV) Then the Apostle Paul warns Timothy that "in the last days [of this present age] difficult times will come," and he identifies the unholy attitudes and behaviors which would exist even among some who outwardly appear godly. (II Tim. 3:1-7, ISV) To counteract against such

conditions, the apostle urges Timothy, as well as all the followers of Christ, to remember his “teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, patience, persecutions, sufferings,” and states that “all that would live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”—vss. 10-12, ASV

We quote again our Key Verses, inserting the Greek definitions of certain words: “Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable [helpful, beneficial] for teaching, for reproof [to be convinced, persuaded], for correction [a straightening up, reformation], for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work.” Here the Apostle emphasizes the importance of “every scripture inspired of God,” and that we should earnestly and reverentially read, study, and deeply consider the entire Holy Word of Truth.

Prophecies recorded in the Bible demonstrate God’s wisdom, acquainting us with his plans and purposes, and enabling us to regard both the present and the future from the divine standpoint. The more we gain a clear understanding of God’s all-wise plans, the better enabled we will be to serve him in the correct manner and with the right spirit—not as “a servant,” but as “heirs” and “sons.”—Rom. 8:1-17; Gal. 4:1-7

The inspired Scriptures reveal to us what the conditions will be in God’s coming kingdom, helping us to counteract the present ungodly influences of “this present evil world.” (Gal. 1:4) Careful study of “every scripture inspired of God,” greatly strengthens our faith in the Creator and in all his “exceeding great and precious promises.”—II Pet. 1:4

The inspired Word of Truth has been provided, “so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” (II Tim. 3:17, ISV) “Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that through patience and through comfort of the scriptures we might have hope.”—Rom. 15:4, ASV ■

Seek Ye First

Key Verse: “*Be not therefore anxious for the morrow: for the morrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.*”

—**Matthew 6:34,**
*American Standard
Version*

Selected Scripture:
Matthew 6:24-34

because He Himself cares for you.” (I Pet. 5:7, *Weymouth New Testament*) The Apostle Paul writes, “Do not be over-anxious about anything, but by prayer, ... together with thanksgiving, let your request be unreservedly made known in the presence of God. And then the peace of God, which transcends all our powers of thought, will be a garrison to guard your hearts and minds.”—Phil. 4:6,7, *Weymouth*

There is a big difference between carelessness and anxiety. Had Jesus been careless respecting the morrow, he would not have told his disciples to gather up the fragments that remained after feeding an immense crowd. Instead, the Master illustrated on that occasion the wisdom of planning for the next meal. (John 6:1-13) It was not an “anxious” thought that our Lord commended.

As part of his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus instructed his followers to not be “anxious” for tomorrow. Anxiety and worry are serious foes for a Christian. If we permit these to invade our thinking, it can become injurious to both our physical and spiritual health. How can we fight against being anxious?

The Apostle Peter admonishes, “Throw the whole of your anxiety upon Him [God],

The disciples were instructed to use that which had been put into their hands, and not waste any of it.

Our Key Verse does not imply carelessness in our daily life concerning provisions for ourselves and those dependent upon us. What then do these words of Jesus mean? Earlier the Master admonished, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth, ... but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, ... for where thy treasure is, there will thy heart be also.” (Matt. 6:19-21, ASV) The “treasure” which we should value more than anything else in life, and upon which our hearts should be continually focused upon, are the heavenly treasures, the “exceeding great and precious promises” of God.—II Pet. 1:4

It is both proper and necessary to spend time and energy to provide for our needs and of those dependent upon us, such as food, clothing, and a place to live. After identifying such basic human needs, Jesus states, “Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.” (Matt. 6:25-32) Then he admonishes, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness.” (vs. 33) The word “seek” comes from a Greek word meaning “desire.” The word “first” has the meaning of “first in time, place, and importance.”

Jesus’ lesson is that the Christian’s desire and first priority should be “the kingdom of God” and the opportunity of joint heirship with Christ in that kingdom. Apostle Paul describes this as being “sharers with others in a heavenly invitation.” (Heb. 3:1, *Weymouth*) This glorious invitation is to become “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.”—Rom. 8:17

Let us, therefore, not be anxious concerning tomorrow’s needs. After having done our part, we should place everything in God’s hands, knowing that “to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to his purpose.”—vs. 28, ASV



Christ Died for Us

Key Verse: "If, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life."

***—Romans 5:10,
American Standard
Version***

***Selected Scripture:
Romans 5:6-11***

plans and purposes. It also serves as a constant reminder that there are no works we can or could do by ourselves in order to gain eternal life. The Apostle Paul states, "By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast."—Eph. 2:8,9

The apostle also identifies mankind's helpless condition, and that we were "without strength" to rescue ourselves from sin and death. (Rom. 5:6) He points out that "through one man [Adam] sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so death passed unto all men." (vs. 12, ASV) Paul further states that "the wages of sin is death," but not eternal torment.—Rom. 6:23

In our Selected Scripture

passage the Apostle Paul explains that God showed his great love toward us, "in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom. 5:8) God "gave his only begotten Son," Jesus, who willingly gave his perfect human life as a ransom, or redemption price, for all mankind.—John 3:16,17; John 10:17,18; I Tim. 2:5,6

A clear understanding of the ransom, from these and other scriptures, enables us to comprehend many aspects of God's

While all mankind was in this hopeless situation, “Christ died for the ungodly.” (Rom. 5:6) The apostle then emphasizes that “if by the trespass of the one [perfect man, Adam] the many died, much more did the grace of God, and the gift by the grace of the one man [the perfect man], Jesus Christ, abound unto the many.” (vs. 15, ASV) This unmerited “gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”—Rom. 6:23

Paul teaches us that reconciliation back to God is only through faith in the blood of Jesus’ sacrifice, the “ransom for all.” He writes, “While we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, ... through whom we have now received the reconciliation.”—Rom. 5:10,11, ASV

Having this standing, we are now in position to receive the additional blessing of understanding and appreciating that at the present time there is a “heavenly calling,” a “high calling of God.” (Heb. 3:1; Phil. 3:14) This is available to those who by faith accept Jesus as their ransom price and the basis for their reconciliation to God; and who additionally consecrate their all to do the will of God. Those who are “faithful unto death” will receive “the crown of life,” that is, immortality as spirit beings. They will be part of the “new Jerusalem,” and will constitute the “bride” for God’s dear Son. (Rev. 2:10; 21:2,9) Together with Christ their Head, they will serve as “priests” to reconcile mankind back into harmony with God in the kingdom.—Rev. 20:4,6

Let us give “more diligence” that we might make our “calling and election sure.” (II Pet. 1:10, ASV) The Apostle Paul admonishes the Lord’s followers, “If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified with him. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to us-ward.”—Rom. 8:17,18, ASV ■

Led by God's Spirit

Key Verse: *"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."*
—**Romans 8:14**

In our Key Verse the Apostle

Paul, for the first time in his writings, uses the expression "sons of God." He attaches to it a profound requirement: to be considered a son of God, we must be "led by the Spirit of God."

Selected Scripture:
Romans 8:12-17

What does it mean to be led by the Spirit of God? Is it a personal or emotional feeling we have? Our changeable feelings are not a reliable gauge of having God's Holy Spirit. Additionally, they are not trustworthy to lead us, because feelings are largely a result of our natural inclinations and may easily change based on outward conditions.

Feelings should never be mistaken for faith. Yet there is a connection between faith and a hallowed feeling, similar to the connection between the root of a plant and its flower. Faith is permanent, just as the root of a plant is permanently in the ground. Feelings have their "season," so to speak, like the flowers of a plant. Just as a plant's root does not in all seasons produce flowers, likewise faith does not always produce an ecstasy of happy feelings.

Our feelings and emotions may sink down when we are in physical pain, going through the difficulty of poverty, or experiencing the death of a loved one. Yet, our faith in God and his promises may remain firm. As a consequence, we should not measure God's love and

power toward us solely by our feelings. If our faith is founded upon the scriptural promise that God is unchangeable, then our Christian life and love will flow steadily like a deep river. (Mal. 3:6; James 1:17) It will not be easily affected by a cold blast, nor obstructed by despondency.

Moses was not governed by his feelings or emotions when he stood at the edge of the Red Sea. Likewise, neither was Abraham when he offered up Isaac, nor the Israelite army when they circled Jericho seven days. The Apostle Paul was not guided by his feelings, nor persuaded by those of the brethren in Caesarea, after he had determined that the Lord's will was for him to go to Jerusalem, where it was certain that bonds awaited him.—Acts 21:8-14

God does not lead us by speaking audibly to us. He does, however, lead and teach us through his written Word, his "light" and "truth." (Ps. 25:4,5; 43:3; 119:105) The Apostle Paul outlines some of the indications that we are being led by the Spirit of God. Are we striving daily to "walk [Greek: live, deport oneself] not after the flesh, but after the Spirit?" (Rom. 8:4) Is our mind continually interested in "the things of the Spirit?" (vs. 5) Are we making every effort, assisted by God's Holy Spirit, to "mortify the deeds" of our body, including all our sinful tendencies? (vs. 13; Col. 3:8,9) If so, these are indications we are being led by the Spirit of God.

Elsewhere, the apostle identifies additional proofs that we are being led by God's Spirit. If our goal is to develop more of the fruits of the Spirit, "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control," then we are being led by the Spirit of God. (Gal. 5:22,23, *American Standard Version*) If we are willing to follow the steps of our Master at any cost or suffering, these are further indications that the Spirit of our all-loving Creator is leading us.—Rom. 8:17,18 ■

The Gifts of God

*“Every good gift
and every perfect
gift is from above,
and cometh down
from the Father of
lights, with whom
is no variableness,
neither shadow
of turning.”
—James 1:17*

For centuries the year's end has been a season for the giving of gifts. It is a beautiful custom, the practice of which temporarily lifts the world out of its otherwise self-seeking course. It gives millions a taste of the revolutionary changes which will result in human relationships

when, under the laws of Christ's kingdom, the unselfish spirit of giving takes the place of the selfish spirit of grasping.

The Spirit of Giving

The spirit of giving is the Spirit of God, and he is the greatest of all givers. Giving manifests the spirit of love, and “God is love.” (I John 4:16) The love of God which prompts him to give is described by the Greek word *agape*, which in our *King James Version* of the Bible is sometimes translated “charity.” (I Cor. 13:1-13; Col. 3:14; I Tim. 1:5) The original and true meaning of charity is the act of giving to those in need, where there is no hope of repayment. This is truly the case with respect to

the gifts of God, both to his people and to the world in general.

Nothing that any of God's creatures can give to him would add to his riches, and regardless of what they might withhold, he would not be made poor. He gives because he loves, and the rejoicing of those who receive his gifts is his joy. This, we believe, is true even in the case of his human creation, and despite the present fallen and dying condition of man. Solomon expressed this thought, saying, "Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this is the gift of God."—Eccles. 5:19

This text describes what should be the sheer joy of living here on the earth as a natural man. All the natural things which contribute to this joy are the gifts of God. We are reminded of this in the Genesis record of the creation of man, in which we are told of the garden which God prepared for his human creation "eastward in Eden." In that garden, we are told God placed "every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food." (Gen. 2:8,9) It was all designed for the joy and blessing of man. David wrote, "The heaven, even the heavens, are the LORD's: but the earth hath he given to the children of men."—Ps. 115:16

In bestowing the blessings which make for human happiness God has been impartial. Jesus assures us that his Heavenly Father causes the sun to shine and the rain to fall on the evil and the good, the just and the unjust. (Matt. 5:45) It is true, of course, that during the dark night of sin and death, when God has been permitting evil to

reign, there is no assurance to any individual or group of enjoying an adequate share of the natural earthly blessings. Today, it is estimated that ten percent of the human race exists on scanty provisions of food and other necessities of life.

This is largely because of human selfishness. The failure to provide adequate means of distribution prevents the bounties which the earth provides to be shared in measure by all. The Lord's own people, living in various parts of the world, are subject to the conditions with which they are surrounded, sharing the common experiences of the world, whether they be lean or full. These have learned, as did the great Apostle Paul, to be content with whatever God's providence may permit, whether they "abound" or at times "suffer need." (Phil. 4:11-13) They have learned that "godliness with contentment is great gain."—I Tim. 6:6

The Gift of Salvation

In order to be a member of God's family, and to sense the sweetness of the blest "tie that binds our hearts in Christian love," it was necessary to be a partaker of God's gift of salvation. Although we say the gift of salvation, we could have as well said the gift of God's dear Son, or the gift of eternal life through his Son. (John 3:16; Rom. 6:23) "By grace are ye saved through faith," wrote Paul, "and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God."—Eph. 2:8

This wonderful gift of salvation through Christ had to be preceded by another gift of God, the gift of discernment. When Peter said to Jesus, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," Jesus replied to him, "Flesh and blood hath not revealed

it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.” (Matt. 16:15-17) We cannot know and enjoy the true meaning of God’s gifts and their resulting blessings by reason of our own ability to interpret the Scriptures. Human reasoning—“flesh and blood”—is not able to discern the “mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.” This also is a gift of God.—Matt. 13:11

Psalms 119:144 reads, “The righteousness of thy testimonies is everlasting: give me understanding, and I shall live.” The “testimonies” of the Lord are his declarations, promises, and laws which reveal his divine plan and purpose. It is only those to whom he gives understanding that are able to grasp their meaning, and it is through their obedience to this God-given understanding that they receive everlasting life. To merely know something of God’s plans and purposes does not put one in the way of life. Indeed, it is through such understanding that we learn to know God, but it is when we know him, and yield ourselves in complete and hearty submission to his will, that his gift of life through Jesus becomes ours. In prayer to his Heavenly Father Jesus said, “This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”—John 17:3

“All Things”

Paul wrote, “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?” (Rom. 8:32) This is a wonderful promise! It does not mean, of course, that the Lord gives his people all that they might desire of temporal blessings and

advantages. The reference is to the spiritual needs of the consecrated people of God. These are all supplied, and abundantly so, in keeping with the riches of God's grace through Christ Jesus.—Eph. 1:7

In the context of the promise of "all things," Paul asks, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Rom. 8:35) The devil uses discouragement to do so. Paul continues, "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?" (vss. 33,34) Certainly it is not God who condemns his people, for he has made provision through Christ Jesus for the forgiveness of their unwilling imperfections. From him we have received the gift of forgiveness.—Col. 1:14

Failing to separate us from the love of Christ through discouragement based upon our sins, then other methods are tried. Shall we be separated by "tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" Paul, quoting from the Old Testament, then says, "For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter." In all these things, however, we can be "more than conquerors through him that loved us."—Rom. 8:35-37; Ps. 44:22

We can be conquerors in all these things, not in our own strength, but because God, through Christ, has freely given unto us all things needful in order to be overcomers. The difficult situations that the Lord's people face in various parts of the world would, from the natural standpoint, be cause for fear and defeat. However, as Paul wrote to Timothy, God has not given us the "spirit of fear," but the spirit of "power, and of love, and of a sound mind."—II Tim. 1:7

The spirit of power is the Holy Spirit. One of its many functions in our lives as Christians is to give us strength for our every time of need. At times our needs seem very great. One trial follows another in quick succession. At times the Lord may permit us to be severely tested along several lines at once. The enemy often will “come in like a flood” to overwhelm us. (Isa. 59:19) Nevertheless, as David wrote, “The LORD sitteth upon the flood; yea, the LORD sitteth King for ever.” In other words, he is in full control of every situation, and as David further promised, “The LORD will give strength unto his people; the LORD will bless his people with peace.” —Ps. 29:10,11

“The LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.” (Ps. 84:11) God will freely give us all things that are good for our spiritual growth in Christ Jesus. These are embodied in his gift of the Holy Spirit. Speaking to his disciples, and in anticipation of what his Heavenly Father would do for his consecrated people, beginning at Pentecost, Jesus said, “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” —Luke 11:13

God's Power

The Holy Spirit is the holy power and influence of God, by which he accomplishes all his works. The inspirational power of his promises, recorded in his Word under his direction, is one of the means by which he strengthens his people. The Scriptures,

inspired by the Holy Spirit, were given in order that the man of God might be “thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” (II Tim. 3:16,17) In all things God has made provision for us through his Word, and thus we are completely furnished to accomplish his will and works.

God’s promise to give strength unto his people is a source of great inspiration and encouragement. To know that God is for us, to really believe that he is helping us in every time of need, serves to help us over many difficult places in the narrow Christian way. (Matt. 7:14) We can press on because we know that greater is he who is for us than all they that are against us. (Rom. 8:31) The great battle may rage around us, but because the Lord has promised to strengthen and protect, we enjoy the “peace of God, which passeth” all human understanding.—Phil. 4:7

The promises of God are not empty words. He strengthens and protects his people, and information is given us in his Word as to how he does this. We read, “He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.” (Ps. 91:11) What a precious gift this is to the people of God. We read again, “The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.”—Ps. 34:7

We have never seen an angel, and our human minds cannot understand how these heavenly beings accomplish their work. We know, however, that they exist, that they are powerful, and that they are willing and ready always to do God’s bidding. In addition, they know the Heavenly Father’s will for his people. Jesus said, in this connection,

that the angels “always behold the face” of his Father in heaven. (Matt. 18:10) They are in intimate contact with our God. They know his will for us and are prompt to do his bidding. His mighty power is exercised through them to “keep” us in all our ways.

Another of the gifts of God to his people of the present time is the privilege of suffering for, and with, Christ. Paul wrote, “Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.” (Phil. 1:29) It requires great faith to appreciate this gift. The privilege of suffering with Christ is, however, a very precious gift; for, if we are faithful in thus suffering, even unto death, it will lead to association with him in glory: “If we suffer, we shall also reign with him.”—II Tim. 2:12

The Joy Set Before Him

In Hebrews 2:10 we read that it was God’s plan “in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.” The thought is that the “many sons” are also brought to glory through a pathway of suffering. Thus, just as the Heavenly Father did not shield Jesus from suffering, there is no reason to suppose that he will do so for us. However, God did provide a compensating portion for the Master: it was the “joy that was set before him,” which, as the apostle explains, enabled him to endure “the cross, despising the shame.”—Heb. 12:2

These same joys are set before us, the greatest of which is the prospect of seeing our Heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus face-to-face, and of spending

eternity with them as members of the divine family. (I John 3:2) David wrote, "In thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." (Ps. 16:11) Jesus entered into this joy after his resurrection. The apostle affirms that he "is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."—Heb. 12:2

This glorious inheritance was first given to Jesus by promise. To be at the right hand of the throne of God meant the glorious privilege of carrying out the Father's loving kingdom plan for the blessing of all the families of the earth. The promise was that the "pleasure" of Jehovah would prosper in the hands of Jesus. By faith Jesus laid hold of these precious promises, and they served as a bulwark of strength while he was making "his soul an offering for sin."—Isa. 53:10

In prayer to his Father, Jesus said of his disciples, and those who would believe on him through their word, "The glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one. ... Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou has given me [by promise]: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world." (John 17:22,24) What a gift!—"The glory which thou gavest me I have given them." It means that all the exceeding great and precious promises which inspired and encouraged Jesus belong also to us, and are among the means which God is using to fortify us against the attacks of the world, the flesh, and the Devil.

One of the promises to Jesus was, "I shall give thee the heathen [Hebrew: nations or people] for

thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.” (Ps. 2:8) We read further of God: “He hath shewed his people the power of his works, that he may give them the heritage of the heathen. The works of his hands are verity and judgment; all his commandments are sure.” (Ps. 111:6,7) God has shown us the power of his works. He has opened the eyes of our understanding to see and appreciate his great plan of salvation—the redemption through Christ Jesus, his covenants, his promised kingdom, the “great salvation” of the church, and the “restitution of all things” for the world.—Heb. 2:3; Acts 3:20,21

Through the outworking of this plan we see the mighty power of God in operation. That power gave strength to the Old Testament heroes of faith, enabling them to endure while they were being prepared to occupy, in the earthly phase of the kingdom, the position of “princes in all the earth.” (Ps. 45:16; Heb. 11:1-40) This same mighty power of God comforted and strengthened Jesus, and raised him from the dead. By faith we see God’s power in operation in the first resurrection of the church, and by faith we anticipate the manifestation of divine power in the resurrection of all the dead.—I Cor. 15:20-23; Rev. 20:6; John 5:28,29

God promised Jesus that he would be given the nations for an inheritance, and throughout the present age he has been helping the church to enter into this same inheritance. Not only has it been given us to see and know the mysteries of the kingdom—the many glorious features of God’s plan—but all of the Lord’s people have experienced the mighty power of God in their own lives as they are

being prepared to enter into their future inheritance with the glorified Jesus.—Col. 1:12,13

How inspiring are the promises of the Bible pertaining to the various aspects of our inheritance. Through the Prophet Isaiah God said, “I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages; That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves.”—Isa. 49:8,9

Other aspects of our inheritance are promised by Jesus’ statement: “To him that overcometh will I give” ... a crown of life; the hidden manna; power over the nations; the morning star; white raiment; make a pillar in the temple of my God; to sit with me in my throne. (Rev. 2:10,17,26,28; 3:5,12,21) All these promises pertain to our prospect of reigning with Jesus in his kingdom. He knew that it was his Father’s will that his followers should share these honors and blessings with him, for he had said while still with his disciples in the flesh, “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”—Luke 12:32

Our Gift to God

How many and manifold are the gifts of God to us! Truly they are more than can be numbered. In return he asks but one gift from us: “My son, give me thine heart.” (Prov. 23:26) To give our hearts to the Lord means to give him our all. It means that we will search his Word to determine his will for us at every step of the Christian way in which we walk. In this also there is great joy, great peace of mind, for we are assured of being guided aright,

and of hearing the voice of the Word of God saying, “This is the way, walk ye in it.”—Isa. 30:21

Without this infallible guide, the world strays aimlessly through life, burdened with its cares, and fearful of what each day’s experiences might bring. How wonderful it is, though, to have given our hearts to God, and to let him be our guide, as we endeavor to do his will and work. It is in thus giving our hearts to him that we receive one of the most precious of his present gifts. Jesus said, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”—Matt. 11:28-30

How precious is this rest which the Lord has given to his people. It is enjoyed by all true Christians, wherever they may be, and regardless of their circumstances of life. The measure of this rest is in proportion to our faith in the divine arrangements, faith in God’s dealings with us, faith in the provision he has made through the Redeemer, faith in his ability to fulfill his promises, and faith in all the means of grace which he has provided.—Rom. 1:16,17; Heb. 11:1,6; I Tim. 6:12

As we look ahead to the New Year before us, may it be with a “faith that will not shrink, though pressed by every foe; that will not tremble on the brink of any earthly woe.” We do not know what the future holds for us individually. Therefore, let us live today as though tomorrow we would hear those welcome words: “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: ... enter thou into the joy of thy lord.”—Matt. 25:21 ■

The Work of Elijah

Repentance, Reformation & Restoration

“Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to the fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.”
—***Malachi 4:5,6***

The expression, “great and dreadful day of the LORD,” is used in the Bible to describe a time when God will no longer permit the human race to continue in its selfish and sinful ways, unhindered by him. The prophets also speak of this period as the “day of the LORD’s vengeance,” and a “day of clouds and of thick darkness.” (Isa. 34:8; Joel 2:2) Jesus, quoting from Daniel 12:1, describes this as a time of “great tribulation.”—Matt.

24:21,22

A prototype of this “great and dreadful day of the LORD” came upon the nation of Israel in the destructive trouble which followed their national rejection by Jesus, their Messiah. For several hundred

years after Malachi, the last of the Old Testament prophets, delivered his message to the Jewish people, there was no special indication that God was taking any particular notice of the people's waywardness; not until the appearance of John the Baptist, and following him, Jesus.

Through the ministry of these two servants of God, Israel was called to repentance and reformation, but the call was not heeded except by a few. (John 1:6-12) John the Baptist foretold that as a result of the failure to respond to this call to repentance and to accept their Messiah, dire calamity would come upon the nation.

Speaking particularly to the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees, John said: "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham. And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit, and with fire."—Matt. 3:7-11

Thus is prophetically described a "great and dreadful day of the LORD," as it was experienced by Israel in the years A.D. 70-73. It came upon the nation as a manifestation of God's displeasure over the sin and idolatry of the people from which they did not repent, even when a full and final opportunity

was given. The vengeance of God thus displayed resulted in the destruction of the nation and a scattering of the Jewish people throughout the world, which was to last for nearly two thousand years.

However, the day of trouble upon Israel pales in comparison to the greater tribulation foretold for the end of the Gospel Age—a “time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation,” which comes upon the whole world. (Dan. 12:1) In a more general way, this larger manifestation of God’s vengeance is due to the unbridled selfishness of nations, leaders—both political and religious—and society in general. These have not lived up to the righteous principles set forth in the Bible, nor have they adhered to the teachings and example of Jesus, who preached and lived by the law of love.—Matt. 22:37-40; John 13:34,35

Rather, many people and their leaders have promoted and participated in wars, revolutions, and all types of armed conflict. Most have worshiped their many idols rather than God. Indeed, for many centuries it seemed as though God was paying no attention. However, finally the time has come for him to act, to intervene in human affairs, and the result is a “time of trouble”—the “great and dreadful day of the LORD.”

Our text declares that prior to the coming of the “day of the LORD,” Elijah the prophet would be sent to attempt a work of reformation. Every devout Israelite looked for the coming of the promised Messiah, and to the divine government which the prophets foretold he would establish in the earth. Yet here, seemingly, was another important personality, a “prophet” who must also come and

accomplish a vast work of reformation prior to the “great and dreadful day of the LORD.”

There was still another personality, as the Israelites understood it, who had been promised in the writings of Moses. In Deuteronomy 18:15-18, under divine inspiration, Moses speaks of a “Prophet, ... like unto me,” who would give the people that which they desired at Horeb, which was the ending of God’s “voice” against them in order that they might live. This great one the Israelites were accustomed to speak of as “that prophet.”

Thus when John the Baptist began his ministry the Jews sent priests and Levites to question him for the purpose of learning just who he claimed to be. John denied that he was “Christ,” the Messiah. Then these messengers inquired, “Art thou Elias?”—or Elijah—having in mind the prophecy of Malachi. John’s straightforward reply to this question was, “I am not.” Then the messengers asked, “Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No.”—John 1:19-21

However, as far as John the Baptist’s being the foretold Elijah was concerned, his negative answer to the priests and Levites did not entirely settle the matter. The angel who prophesied the birth of John said, “Many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. And he shall go before him [Jesus, the son of God] in the spirit and power of Elias [Greek for Elijah], to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.”—Luke 1:16,17

This prophecy comes short of definitely identifying John the Baptist as the foretold Elijah. It simply

states that he would conduct his ministry in the “spirit and power” of Elijah. The Prophet Elijah had been fearless and courageous in the conduct of his work of reformation in Israel, and it was in this same spirit and power that John called the nation to repentance. In many respects John’s work was similar to Elijah’s, and certainly the courageous manner in which he conducted it was identical.

Referring to John the Baptist, Jesus said to the multitudes, “If ye will receive it, this is Elias [Elijah], which was for to come.” (Matt. 11:14) Here again we have a qualified identification of John—“If ye will receive it.” What Jesus meant was, that to those who were reached and reformed by John’s ministry, he was the promised Elijah. This indicates that the work of reformation described in Malachi’s prophecy is the key to its understanding, rather than a certain individual or individuals who might perform, or undertake to perform, that work.

We use the phrase, “undertake to perform,” advisedly, for the prophecy itself implies the possibility of initial failure, and explains what the consequences of failure would be—“lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.” (Mal. 4:6) In other words, if the work of reformation described as turning the hearts of the children to the fathers, and the hearts of the fathers to the children, should fail, then a great curse would come upon the earth, ostensibly as a punishment to those who did not heed the message of the reformer.

We have an illustration of this in the case of John the Baptist and his ministry in Israel. Many gave heed to his call to repentance, and in doing so were blessed. However, the majority of the nation

did not. Not having heeded John's message, they were not prepared to accept Jesus as their Messiah, and were willing and ready to crucify him. In the outworking of God's plan this led to disaster for the nation. Within only forty years, and involving some of the very ones who rejected John and called for the crucifixion of Jesus, the foretold punishment fell. This was the destruction of their Temple and the city of Jerusalem, and later the Jews being scattered throughout the earth.—Luke 19:41-44; 23:20-23; Matt. 23:27,38; 24:1,2

Continued Call to Repentance

Since, as Jesus explained, John the Baptist was the foretold Elijah to those who could receive it, and not the Elijah to those who did not respond to his message, it is evident that we cannot properly look for the fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy in and through a single individual. Rather, the name "Elijah" is used in the prophecy merely as symbolic of a work similar to that accomplished by the original Elijah. This was a work of reformation beckoning repentance, in which the people of Israel were called upon to return to their God, and to acknowledge his sovereignty in the nation.

Thus the foretold Elijah work would be a calling upon the people to repent, reform, and recognize that the "kingdom of heaven" was at hand. (Matt. 3:1,2) John the Baptist began such a work, but it was by no means concluded with him. Matthew 4:17 reads, "From that time [following John's ministry] Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." This was the same message as had been previously delivered by John.

In Mark 6:12 we read that when the disciples of Jesus went out into the ministry they “preached that men should repent.” After the Holy Spirit came upon the church at Pentecost, the call to repentance was still preached. In his sermon on the Day of Pentecost, Peter said to his audience, “Repent, and be baptized.” (Acts 2:38) In a later discourse he said, “Repent, ... and be converted.” (Acts 3:19) In his sermon on Mars’ Hill, Paul said that now the Lord “commandeth all men every where to repent.” (Acts 17:30) Explaining his ministry to King Agrippa, Paul said that he “shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.”—Acts 26:20

It is evident from these scriptures that the call to repentance continued from John the Baptist, with Jesus, the twelve apostles, as well as his followers throughout the centuries since Pentecost, all participating in it. This was the foretold Elijah work. Following his resurrection, Jesus commissioned his disciples to go among all nations and preach the Gospel. (Matt. 28:19; Luke 24:46-48) This clearly implies that the message of repentance and reformation was to continue through the ministry of the Lord’s faithful followers, the “little flock.” (Luke 12:32) Thus the prophecy that Elijah would come before the “great and terrible day of the LORD” has continued to be fulfilled. This has been particularly evident at the time in which we are now living, because the footstep followers of Christ have given a wide witness that the “kingdom of heaven” is at hand, and that soon its blessings will

begin to flow to “all the nations of the earth.”—
Gen. 12:3; 22:18; Acts 3:25,26; Gal. 3:8

World Not Yet Converted

In spite of this, throughout the age, and now, the world in general has not heeded the Elijah message of repentance and reformation, even as Israel did not give heed to John the Baptist. Instead, the world has continued in its generally sinful, selfish ways, unmindful of the “curse” that unbridled human selfishness would inevitably bring upon all nations. Thus, just as a curse fell upon Israel, as a result of failure to repent at the time of Jesus’ First Advent, so the present unrepentant world during the time of Christ’s Second Advent is in the throes of distress and tribulation.

The world has not yet been converted by the Gospel. Darkness still covers the earth, and “gross darkness the people.” (Isa. 60:2) However, this does not mean that the world never will be converted and that the foretold Elijah work never will be successful. God’s wisdom determined in advance that it would be necessary for mankind to pass through the “curse” of the great time of trouble in order to recognize that nothing short of the righteous rule of the coming Messianic kingdom can succeed in establishing the divine will “in earth, as it is in heaven.” (Matt. 6:10) As we now see this principle being fulfilled, and view the foretold “curse” coming upon the world, we confidently look forward to the establishment of Messiah’s glorious kingdom. His kingdom will enlighten the world, and cause the people to say, “This is our God; we have waited for him, ... we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”—Isa. 25:9

A Vision of the Kingdom

In the Transfiguration vision shown to Peter, James, and John, we have a further clarification and confirmation of the Elijah symbolism in the prophecies. (Matt. 17:1-13) In the last verse of the preceding chapter Jesus said, "There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom." (Matt. 16:28) Then in the next verse, the first of chapter 17, we read, "After six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart." This was the Mount of Transfiguration.

When Jesus said that some standing among them would not taste death until they saw him in his kingdom, he evidently meant that they would be given a vision of the kingdom, which three of them were given just six days later. This was Peter's understanding, for in the first chapter of his second epistle he speaks of an abundant entrance into the "kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." (vs. 11) Then, concerning this glorious hope, he adds a few verses later, "We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming [Greek: presence] of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount."—II Pet. 1:16-18

It is clear that Peter, James, and John were given a vision of Christ's kingdom, and it is significant

that in this vision they should see Moses and Elijah with Jesus. (Matt. 17:3) It was the Lord's way of saying that the prophecies concerning Elijah, and "that prophet," who was to be "like unto Moses," would have their real and complete fulfillment in the Messianic kingdom. Other scriptures reveal that this is God's plan.

When Peter, who was inspired by this vision of the kingdom, preached his well-known sermon on the "times of restitution [Greek: restoration] of all things," adding that it had been spoken by the "mouth of all God's holy prophets since the world began," he cited as one of his proof texts the promise the Lord made to raise up a great prophet like Moses. (Acts 3:20-22) Thus Peter understood that the prophecy recorded in Deuteronomy 18:15-18 would be fulfilled during the "times of restitution of all things."

On the Mount of Transfiguration Jesus said that Elijah "indeed cometh, and shall restore all things." (Matt. 17:11, *Revised Version*) In this statement Jesus is referring to the ultimate accomplishment of the Elijah work during his kingdom reign and its resulting blessings to all the families of the earth.

Through John the Baptist, there was a beginning of this work, but he was rejected by the majority. Then Jesus was rejected and put to death. This work has continued throughout the present age since Pentecost, but those giving the message have likewise mostly been rejected and persecuted. Not until Christ's kingdom is established in power and glory, as so graphically portrayed in the Transfiguration vision, will the foretold Elijah work finally be accomplished. It is then that God's precepts will

be restored in the earth, and when all mankind, released from Adamic condemnation, will be awakened from the sleep of death and given an opportunity to be restored to human perfection and live forever upon the restored earth.—John 5:28,29; Rom. 5:18,19; I Cor. 15:21,22

Two Phases of the Kingdom

It was fitting from another standpoint that Moses and Elijah should be shown together with Jesus in that marvelous vision of the kingdom. Moses, as lawgiver and prophet, and Elijah, as a reformer in Israel, are fitting symbols of all the ancient faithful servants of God. All of these heroes of faith were God's representatives during the time preceding the First Advent of Christ. They upheld the principles of divine righteousness in a sinful world, suffering and dying for righteousness' sake. Yet the world was mostly not impressed by their presence and ministry.—Heb. 11:1-40

However, it will be different in the kingdom. This class of ancient and faithful servants of God will then be raised from the dead and become the human representatives of the divine Christ in the earthly phase of the kingdom. Then they will be rewarded by seeing that for which they stood become triumphant in the earth. Through the authority and power of "that prophet," Jesus, the greater than Moses, they will see the knowledge of the Lord fill the earth "as the waters cover the sea." (Isa. 11:9; Hab. 2:14) Then the righteous will not be persecuted. On the other hand, the "reproach of his [God's] people shall he take away,"—Isa. 25:8, *RV*

God used Elijah and his work of reformation to symbolize the call to repentance and to the acceptance of earth's new King—Christ. Thus we may properly think of Elijah as symbolizing the work of Christ, along with the faithful overcoming “little flock” throughout the Gospel Age, prior to their respective deaths. For the past two thousand years, the continuing message of repentance and reformation proclaimed to the world has not yet turned the “heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to the fathers.” The actual accomplishment of this work awaits the establishment of Christ's kingdom in power and great glory. How beautifully this is shown by Elijah's appearing with Jesus in that vision of the kingdom.

Unique in the experiences of the original Elijah, was the fact that at the close of his ministry he was lifted up from the earth. Although he did not actually go to heaven, his experience readily suggests and symbolizes the fact that the greater Elijah class, after proving their faithfulness in witnessing for the Gospel regardless of the cost, are exalted to heavenly glory in the resurrection, to participate with Jesus in the spiritual phase of his glorious kingdom.—Rom 8:16,17; II Tim. 2:11,12; Rev. 20:6

In the Transfiguration vision we have a marvelous portrayal of the earthly and spiritual phases of the Messianic kingdom, in which Jesus himself will be the supreme Head and Ruler, the “King of kings, and Lord of lords.” (Rev. 19:16) It will be through the kingdom that the Elijah work of reconciling the world to God will finally be fully and forever accomplished. With this work completed, following

the thousand year reign of the Christ, the kingdom will be turned over to the Heavenly Father, that he may be “all in all.”—Rev. 20:6-15, *RV*; I Cor. 15:25-28 ■

OBITUARIES

The following brethren have recently finished their Christian course. We wish to express our sincere sympathy to their family and friends in the loss of these dear ones.

Brother Richard Peddemors, Piqua, OH—October 24. Age, 87

Sister Wiesława Gutowska, Chrzanów, Poland—October 28. Age, 79

Sister Krystyna Taczała, Świdnik, Poland—November 3

Brother Wilbur Johnson, Jacksonville, FL—November 10. Age, 72

WEEKLY PRAYER MEETING TEXTS

DECEMBER 4—“If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?”—Luke 11:13 (Z. '01-271 Hymn 205)

DECEMBER 11—“My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways.”—Proverbs 23:26 (Z. '01-324 Hymn 208)

DECEMBER 18—“The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.”—Hebrews 13:6 (Z. '02-45 Hymn 307)

DECEMBER 25—“Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”—Luke 2:10,11 (Z. '03-457 Hymn 345)

The Spirit Poured upon All Flesh

***“It shall come to
pass afterward,
that I will pour out
my spirit upon
all flesh.”
—Joel 2:28***

Our text reveals that God’s Holy Spirit, his righteous power and holy influence, will be exercised for the blessing of all mankind—“all flesh.” This prophecy is located in a

context of predictions pertaining to the end of this “present evil world” and the establishment of Christ’s millennial kingdom. (Gal. 1:4; Rev. 20:6) The general testimony of the prophecies related to this time is that there would be a great “time of trouble” upon all nations, in which both Jews and Gentiles would be perplexed and distressed. (Dan. 12:1; Matt. 24:21) The prophecies also reveal that in the midst of this period of trouble the dispersed people of Israel would be returned to their own land.—Matt. 24:32-34; Jer. 24:1-7

The word “afterward” in our text is a most revealing one. On the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the waiting disciples, the Apostle Peter quoted this prophecy. Instead of using the word “afterward” he said the “last days”

—in the “last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh.” Peter then continued quoting from Joel’s prophecy, “Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams: And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.”—Acts 2:17,18

Peter also cited another part of Joel’s prophecy which, in highly symbolic language, describes certain aspects of world conditions leading up to and associated with the time of trouble with which this present evil world comes to an end: “I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood.” (vss. 19,20; Joel 2:30,31) Taking all these statements into consideration, when the apostle said, as quoted in verse sixteen, “This is that which was spoken by the Prophet Joel,” we are not to understand that the entire prophecy that he quoted was fulfilled at Pentecost. Peter wanted his hearers to be sure to recognize the prophecy from which he was quoting, though only a portion of it was being fulfilled at that time.

What actually happened at Pentecost was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Lord’s “servants and handmaidens.” Afterward, as Joel states it, or in the last days, as Peter interprets Joel, the Holy Spirit is to be poured out on all flesh. Thus Joel’s prophecy pertaining to the giving of the Holy Spirit in the outworking of God’s plan covers in brief this entire feature. The giving of God’s Holy Spirit began to be fulfilled at Pentecost, but the

outpouring upon all flesh is yet future, and will take place during Christ's kingdom.

To the Jew First

In pouring out the Holy Spirit upon his servants and handmaidens on the Day of Pentecost, the Lord's providences directed that it first be upon the Jewish believers assembled in the "upper room" in Jerusalem. (Acts 1:13) A short time later there was another outpouring upon the Gentiles, demonstrated by the divine acceptance of Cornelius and his household into the body of Christ. (Acts 10:44,45) The Scriptures indicate that there will be a similar sequence in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh.

In Ezekiel 37:1-14, there is an enlightening prophecy depicting the restoration of Israel. In this chapter the "whole house of Israel" is likened to a valley of "dry bones." (vss. 2,4,11) In the vision of restoration given to Ezekiel, he saw the bones come together, "and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath [spirit or life] in them."—vs. 8

Then Ezekiel was instructed to prophesy: "Thus saith the Lord GOD, Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army." (vss. 9,10) This does not portray the resurrection of the dead, but the gradual return of the nation of Israel to God's favor during the "last days." The next verse reads, "Son of man [Ezekiel], these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our

bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts.”—Ezek. 37:11

Then Ezekiel was commanded to prophesy further and say to them, “Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel.” (vs. 12) The “graves” here are symbolic, even as are the “dry bones” in the graves. The graves evidently depict the various countries in which the Israelites throughout the many centuries of their dispersion were domiciled. They surely were “cut off”—that is, separated from other segments of their people. Thus all of them symbolically said, “Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost.”

Now that we are living in the last days, this situation has already undergone a marked change. A goodly percentage of all Israel has been brought up out of their graves, symbolically speaking, and have been regathered to their land of promise. As a people they do not feel so cut off, and considerable “flesh” and “skin” have appeared on the dry bones. As yet, however, they do not “live” from the divine standpoint. Indeed, a few of them associate their changed position with the divine promises, but the majority have looked to human leaders and institutions rather than to God. There is one more event in their foretold experiences which is yet to occur, and must occur, before this prophecy is completely fulfilled.

God did not say that his people would know him when he merely brought them out of their symbolic graves. It is when he has not only uprooted them from the countries where as dry bones they were living, but when he will have put his Spirit in them, that they shall know him and live. “And ye shall

know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, ... Then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the LORD.” (vss. 13,14) Our particular interest at the moment is in the fact that here God indicates that he will put his Spirit in the regathered Israelites, and that as a result of this they will “know” that he is the Lord, and will then live.

The following two chapters, Ezekiel 38 and 39, prophetically outline the major developments in a sequence of events associated with Israel’s regathering in the Holy Land. Enemies from various quarters are shown to attack them, and when the attackers are defeated by divine intervention, their eyes will be opened. The Israelites will recognize the providence of their God in the mighty deliverance that is wrought for them. Then, in the last eight verses of chapter thirty-nine, we are presented with an explanation as to the significance of the events foretold in these three wonderful chapters—37, 38, and 39. The principal point in this explanation is that “the house of Israel shall know that I am the LORD their God from that day and forward.”—Ezek. 39:22

In the last verse of this chapter, God says, “Neither will I hide my face any more from them: for I have poured out my spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord GOD.” (vs. 29) That is, as a result of God’s deliverance from a situation which would otherwise have meant utter ruin for the regathered Israelites, they learn to know their God. God’s explanation is, “I have poured out my spirit” upon them, and I will not “hide my face any more from them.”

First upon His Servants

The Holy Spirit, given at Pentecost for the blessing of all the footstep followers of Christ, led to certain gifts of apostles, pastors, and teachers. (Eph. 4:11) These, together with their Head, Christ Jesus, have served as means through which the Holy Spirit of Truth has flowed out to all the consecrated believers. The entire Christ class, in turn, through the ministry of that Spirit, will be the source of the outpoured Spirit upon all flesh—that is, to Israel and then to the entire world.

The pattern designed for the enlightenment and blessing of the church by the Holy Spirit at the present time will have its counterpart during the coming Messianic kingdom. Then, also, there will be “servants and handmaidens” through whom God’s Holy Spirit and instructions in the ways of Truth and righteousness will come to the people. These “servants” will be the ones described in Psalm 45:16 as “princes in all the earth.” In Isaiah 1:26, these are referred to as “judges” and “counsellors,” and the promise is given to Israel: “I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning.”

Israel was served during the period of the judges by individuals who were raised up by God in special times of need, and through these judges the people were delivered from their enemies. A case in point is Othniel, son of Caleb’s younger brother. Through this judge the Israelites were delivered from King Chushanrishathaim, whom they had served eight years. The secret of Othniel’s ability to deliver the Israelites was that the “Spirit of the LORD came upon him.”—Judg. 3:8-10

If judges will be raised up to serve the Israelites “as at the first,” it follows that the Spirit of the Lord will be upon these also, even as, in a special manner, it came upon Jesus at Jordan and upon the apostles at Pentecost. This enabled them to perform miracles of various sorts, which served as signs that contributed greatly to the establishment of the Early Church.

We can envision a similar situation in connection with the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh during the earthly kingdom. There will be miraculous demonstrations of God’s power. The divine intervention to save Israel from her enemies in the final phase of the great Armageddon struggle will never be forgotten. This will lead into the manifestation of kingdom authority in the earth, and since the Ancient Worthies, “princes in all the earth,” are to be the human representatives of that kingdom, their awakening from the sleep of death will evidently take place at about this time.

This, in itself, will be a most convincing sign that God’s power is operating on behalf of Israel and the whole world. Through the use of divine power, these heroes of faith who lived prior to Jesus’ First Advent will quickly become the recognized earthly leaders in the kingdom.

What Will Be Accomplished?

The outpouring of God’s Holy Spirit upon all flesh will not accomplish all the things for the world of mankind that it has for the church since Pentecost. It will not be, properly speaking, a “baptism” of the Spirit, because in the church the only way to come under this baptism of the Spirit is individually to

be baptized into the death of Christ. (Acts 1:5; Rom. 6:3-5) The pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon mankind will, however, lead to full surrender to do God's will.

Mankind's endowment of the Holy Spirit in the kingdom will not be an "anointing" of the Spirit, for an anointing signifies appointment to a special office. For the Christian, their anointing now during the present age is that of ambassadorship, and later to reign as kings and priests in the kingdom. (II Cor. 5:20; Rev. 20:6) The world of mankind will not be thus commissioned to serve in the kingdom. The Holy Spirit will not beget believers of the next age to a new, spirit life, for the willing and obedient then are to be restored to human perfection, not exalted to the spirit nature. The "witness" and "seal" are also functions of the Holy Spirit, through the Word of Truth, which apply specifically to its working in and for the footstep followers of Christ of the present age.—Rom. 8:16; Eph. 1:13

Spirit-begotten believers of the present age find themselves surrounded by an unfriendly, and often antagonistic, world. Satan is the "god of this world," and the "prince of this world." (II Cor. 4:4; John 12:31) Satan's spirit, or influence, among the people is far from holy. Instead, it induces sin. It is the spirit of deception, ignorance, superstition, anger, malice, hatred, and strife. Today the spirit-begotten children of God have to resist these influences of Satan with which they are surrounded. (I Pet. 5:8,9) In order that the various manifestations of the Holy Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, meekness—may manifest themselves, the spirit of Satan has to be overcome.—Gal. 5:19-25

It is Satan who, in his attacks against the seed of promise, stirs up enmity and persecution against those who are now blessed by the Holy Spirit. During Christ's kingdom, however, Satan will be bound, "that he should deceive the nations no more." (Rev. 20:1-3) No longer will it be necessary to suffer for righteousness' sake. No longer will all the Satan-inspired, unholy influences that war against the people of God now, be permitted to hinder progress in righteousness by those upon whom God pours his Spirit during the kingdom. Isaiah wrote of that time when the Lord will take away the "rebuke of his people ... from off all the earth."—Isa. 25:8

While there will continue to be a measure of imperfection manifested in the world until the work of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh is completed, righteousness and Truth will predominate. That is why Peter foretold that it would be a world—a "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." (II Pet. 3:13) How different, then, will be the position of the people in that age from what it is today!

Then, even as now, believers in Israel and throughout the world, if faithful to the privileges granted to them at that time, will become filled with God's Holy Spirit. This will not mean the same for them, however, as it does for the spirit-begotten ones of this age. Now, to be filled with the Holy Spirit implies, among other things, zeal in sacrificing the flesh and its interests, and the setting of affections on things above, on heavenly things, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. (Rom. 12:1; Col. 3:1,2) It will not be so during the Messianic kingdom. Then the righteous will not be called upon to sacrifice

earthly blessings and joys, but will be encouraged to “plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them,” to “build houses, and inhabit them,” and to “long enjoy the work of their hands.”—Isa. 65:21,22

At the present time, the calling of God, through the Holy Spirit, leads those who accept that call to enter into a covenant “by sacrifice.” (Ps. 50:5) In the next age, beginning with Israel and then encompassing the entire world, those who come under the influence of the Holy Spirit as poured out on all flesh, will enter into what is called a “New Covenant.” This covenant arrangement will not call for sacrifice. The promise is, “After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”—Jer. 31:31-34

This beneficent work of righteousness in the hearts of the people will be accomplished by the Spirit of God. Just as God’s Spirit since Pentecost has ministered to the church through the written Word of Truth, we may know that in the next age there will be a definite program of instruction for the people. That instruction will reveal to them the holy precepts of God, and will inspire mankind to obedience. This is clearly implied in the prophecy which states of that time when “the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.” Then, the desires of the people will be met, and they will say, “Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain

[kingdom] of the LORD, ... and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths.” (Micah 4:2) Isaiah, in a very similar prophecy informs us that “all nations shall flow unto it.”—Isa. 2:2

It has long been recognized by students of the Bible that the “Zion” of this prophecy symbolizes the heavenly phase of Christ’s kingdom. (Rev. 14:1) “Jerusalem” represents the earthly phase. (Luke 21:24; Zech. 14:2-17) The ancient heroes of faith—Ancient Worthies—will be the princes and judges in the earthly phase of the kingdom. Through these, the “word of the LORD” will go out to all people, and we can be certain that this “Word” will be inspired by the Holy Spirit, even as it reaches true Christians now.

The humble and sincere attitude of the people who then will say, “he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths,” is also revealing. Just as the Holy Spirit at the present time has no power over those who do not submit to its directions, even so it will be in the next age. Only those who yield themselves in obedience, declaring their determination to walk in his ways, will have the law of God written in their hearts. “The law shall go forth of Zion,” the prophet declares. This will be the law of the New Covenant. The Word of the Lord which goes forth from Jerusalem—the earthly phase of the kingdom—will be the interpretation of that law in the sense of its proper application in the lives of the people.

Then, even as now, in order to enter into covenant relationship with God it will be necessary to repent of sin, and accept Jesus as the Redeemer and Savior from sin and death. Jesus, together with his body

members, the Christ class, will be the mediator of that New Covenant, and will have to be recognized as such by all those who wish to obtain life under its terms.—Acts 3:23

A Pure Language

Zephaniah 3:8,9 is another prophecy pertaining to the time of trouble which immediately precedes the establishment of Christ's kingdom. It shows that in that kingdom the Word of the Lord will be diffused among the people in order that all may have an opportunity to serve him. In this prophecy, all the nations of the earth are mentioned, and the indignation of the Lord is shown to come upon them, with the whole symbolic earth—present earthly institutions—being “devoured with the fire” of God's “jealousy,” or zeal.

All the prophecies pertaining to the time of trouble with which the “present evil world” ends, reveal in one way or another the later outpouring of God's blessings upon the people. Thus, in this prophecy of Zephaniah, we are assured that after the present earthly institutions come to an end, the Lord will “turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent.” This “pure language” is God's message of Truth, the Word of the Lord, which will go forth from Jerusalem—that is, from the earthly phase of the kingdom.

The pouring out of God's Spirit upon all flesh will be reflected in the knowledge of the “pure language,” which will then fill the earth. It will be this true understanding of God and his laws that will enable the people of all nations to call upon and to

serve him “with one consent”—that is, shoulder to shoulder. When all serve the Lord in unity of purpose, and are in covenant relationship with him, there will be peace and joy everywhere. Isaiah wrote, “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain [kingdom]: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.”—Isa. 11:9

In Revelation 20:12, the diffusion of the knowledge of the Lord, which will result from the Holy Spirit being poured out upon all flesh, is symbolized by the opening of “books.” The truths contained in these “books” will be the basis of judgment among the people—all the people, including those who have died and will then be awakened from death. (John 5:28,29) Those who yield themselves in obedience to the truths in the opened books will have their names enrolled in the “book of life.” This also is symbolic language. The thought is that obedience to the law of God, the law revealed in the books which are then opened by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, will lead to life—not spiritual life, but restored, earthly life.

It is this full obedience to the pure language, the knowledge of the Lord, and the truths revealed by the opened books, which is described in the promise of the New Covenant as the law of God being written in the hearts of the people. This means a return to human perfection. It is this work of restoration that is described by Peter as the “restoration of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.” (Acts 3:20,21) Then the human race will be in the same covenant relationship with God as

Adam was before he sinned.—Hos. 6:7, *Rotherham Emphasized Bible*

In Christ's kingdom, through agencies beyond our ability to comprehend, the Holy Spirit of God will provide all the assistance needed in order that the glorious objective of the divine purpose for the recovery of mankind from sin and death might be accomplished. It will reach down into the tomb and restore the dead to life. This will be done by the same mighty power that accomplished the original creation. The psalmist said concerning God and his human creation, "Thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth. The glory of the LORD shall endure for ever: the LORD shall rejoice in his works." —Ps. 104:29-31

It is because sin and death will be destroyed, and the earth filled with a perfect and happy people in keeping with God's original design in Creation, that he will "rejoice in his works." Then, too, his name will be honored and glorified by all. Isaiah wrote, "The glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh"—all flesh upon whom the Spirit of the Lord will then be poured out—"shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it."—Isa. 40:5

What a glorious prospect! May we continue to rejoice in it, and pray for it, "until the spirit be poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness be a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest. Then judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field. And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness quietness and assurance for ever."—Isa. 32:15-17 ■

TALKING THINGS OVER

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