

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

16 Fill their faces with shame; that they may seek thy name, O LORD.
17 Let them be confounded and troubled for ever; yea, let them be put to shame, and perish:
18 That men may know that thou, whose name alone is JEHOVAH, art the most high over all the earth.

PSALM 84.

To the chief Musician upon Gittith, A Psalm for the sons of Korah.

HOW amiable are thy tabernacles,
O LORD of hosts!

11 For the LORD God is a shield; the LORD will give glory; no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.
12 O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee.

PSALM 85.

To the chief Musician, A Psalm for the sons of Korah.

LORD, thou hast been favourable unto thy land; thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob.
2 Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people, thou hast covered all their sin. Selah.

3 Thou hast covered all thy wrath; thou hast turned away all the fierceness of thine anger.

4 Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause thine anger toward us to cease.

5 Wilt thou be angry with us for ever?

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CHAPTER 1

The Noble Bereans

“These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.”

—Acts 17:11,12

THE DAWN IS pleased to provide, in book form, this thirty-six part series of articles which appeared in *The Dawn* magazine during the years 2010-2012, under the caption “Searching the Scriptures.” The first of these articles addresses the importance of diligence when studying the Word of God. Jude has written, “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” (Jude 3) Future articles, in chapter form, will feature various aspects of our fundamental beliefs as students of God’s Holy Word, and a wide range of topics related to our consecrated walk and character development in the narrow way of sacrifice.

THE WORD OF GOD

The Bible is readily acknowledged as the greatest book of all time, the book of books. Its far-reaching antiquity extends back to the very beginning of earth’s marvelous creative work and its ultimate preparation as a home for God’s

earthly creation. Within its pages is found overwhelming evidence of its importance and meaning to the human family. For centuries, it has been accepted by countless numbers of people as the divinely inspired Word of our loving Heavenly Father, the great God of the universe.

The Bible's teachings and righteous principles have set it apart from all other books, and it remains the standard for truth even in our modern-day world. Its principal theme of redemption and the ultimate recovery of the human family from the ravages of sin and death, may be found in its various books that were written by many authors over long centuries of time. This serves to emphasize the Bible's divinely inspired harmony and purpose. Our attention is thus drawn to the various doctrines of truth in which each inspired writer harmonizes with that which others have written, yet in a different time and place.

The Holy Word of God has been referred to as the very torch of civilization. Its moral and ethical teachings have done more to influence the minds of men to live a nobler life than has any other book. It is a nearly inexhaustible source of inspiring and consoling messages. Many have found the Bible to be a source of comfort during times of sorrow. Others have found strength to face the uncertain scenes of life, while some turn to its many lessons to find reassurance.

The Bible is the textbook of Christianity, and it reveals the Heavenly Father's wonderful plan and purpose in the creation of his human family, and its salvation. This message is being carried out to a grand and ultimate conclusion that will culminate in the future administration of Christ's glorious kingdom of power and authority over all the earth.

In respect to the Bible's wonderful author and his eternal purpose, the Psalmist David wrote, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them hath he set a tabernacle for the sun, Which is as a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race. His going forth is from the end of the heaven, and

his circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof. The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.”—Ps. 19:1-10

CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH

As the Early Church was being established, the Apostle Paul and his companion Silas travelled extensively to minister the Truth to the newly consecrated brethren in Christ Jesus, and to help them organize new churches for study, service, and fellowship. By God’s great wisdom and providence, Luke, the historian, has recorded many of these important events.

The knowledge of truth which they and others were preaching, proclaimed the Heavenly Father’s plan and purpose for the ultimate salvation and reconciliation of his sin-sick and dying human family. The Holy Spirit of truth also opened the way for a little flock of Christ’s faithful followers to strive for the heavenly calling and to receive a position in the bride of Christ. We are thus assured, “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”—Luke 12:32

Those who are faithful will be privileged to share with their glorified Lord in his future heavenly kingdom, and to extend blessings to all the families of the earth. (Gen. 22:16-18) This glorious arrangement also provides for the resurrection of all who are in their graves—those who unknowingly wait for the establishment of that yet future kingdom under the rule of “The Christ.”

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

During the apostle’s extensive travels to spread the glad tidings of joy, many new Christian believers were brought into the fold, and to an appreciation of the Truth and fellowship with the Lord’s true people. However, prejudice and

conflict of interest often arose and followed Paul and his companions wherever they went. Friction existed between those who strongly held to the familiar teachings of Judaism, and with those who were teaching the new doctrines of Christ Jesus, which, in the majority of cases, many heard for the first time.

In our featured scripture, Paul and Silas had just escaped by night to make the trip from Thessalonica to Berea. When they arrived they were blessed by the reception they received at the local synagogue. They were greatly impressed by the brethren's keen interest and spiritual growth in their study of God's Word, and noted that this set them apart as being more "noble" than those who were of the ecclesia at Thessalonica.

AN ADMIRABLE TRAIT

The word "noble" as it is used in this instance, points to the admirable quality of mind and character that these brethren in Christ manifested when they searched the Scriptures, and their desire to make the doctrines and teachings of the Truth their own. An improved reading of this special scripture expands the thought of noble-mindedness, and has been so translated in other Bibles. For comparison we read, "Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things were so. Many of them therefore believed, along with a number of prominent Greek women and men." (Acts 17:11,12, *New American Standard Bible*) Thus is emphasized the desire that these brethren had, not only in searching the Scriptures daily, but striving to examine and prove them carefully and with "great eagerness."

PROVING ALL THINGS

Paul's admonition to the brethren in the church at Thessalonica was, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." (I Thess. 5:21) When writing to his beloved brother Timothy, the apostle encouraged him to, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (II Tim. 2:15)

Later he admonished, “Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.”—II Tim. 3:14-17

In his first epistle, the Apostle Peter also urged, “As each one has received a free gift, so minister it among yourselves, as good stewards of the manifold favor of God. If any one speak, let it be as the oracles of God; if any one serve, let it be as from the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ; whose is the glory and the power for the ages of the ages. Amen.”—I Pet. 4:10,11, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*

When accepted with a proper condition of heart, the admonition and encouragement of the apostles Paul, Peter and others will help develop a Christlike spirit in all of the Lord’s special people throughout this present Gospel Age. This would include their being proper stewards of the Truth, which is an important lesson for the consecrated class to emulate. This is especially true now for those who are living during the closing years of this age.

IN REMEMBRANCE OF THESE THINGS

The wonderful words of Peter written nearly two thousand years ago continue to be a blessing to us as followers of Christ who walk in the narrow way of sacrifice. He proclaimed, “I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance; Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me. Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance.”—II Pet. 1:12-15

The apostle spoke the words of truth that he had received from our dear Lord Jesus during his earthly ministry. “We

have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming 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

Peter emphasized that we receive the Truth by way of the Holy Spirit of God. “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”—vss. 19-21

In his first letter, he made clear the fact that the words he spoke were to those who had given their lives in consecration to God, “That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.”—I Pet. 1:7-9

HIDDEN FROM PROPHETS AND ANGELS

The words of truth were not revealed to anyone else, not the prophets of old and not even the angels. He explained, “Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven; which

things the angels desire to look into. Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”—vss. 10-13

WISDOM FROM ABOVE

The epistle of James is among the earliest of the New Testament writings, and represents the teachings that were first given to the Jews who had converted to Christianity soon after our Lord Jesus’ earthly ministry had ended. James stresses, “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

The Heavenly Father is the source of all truth and by way of his Holy Spirit he gives his people understanding. “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.”—vss. 18,19

Concerning the wonderful gifts of God, James also pointed to the significance of God’s wisdom always being pure. “The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.”—James 3:17,18

TRUTH IS FIRST PURE

Our attention is being drawn to the fact that heavenly wisdom works in harmony with the divine character of love. Although the spirit of wisdom that comes from above is peaceable, the apostle did not place its importance before purity. True wisdom is peaceable only when it is consistent with honesty and purity, and can only be at peace with that which is pure. Gentleness then follows purity and is peaceable when it is sanctified by the Truth. Heavenly wisdom then rejoices in true mercy; and fruitage of the Holy Spirit is developed in the hearts of those who have been illuminated by the wisdom from above.

THE LIGHT OF TRUTH

The Prophet Isaiah speaks of light and its relationship to life and truth. In presenting the divine purpose, he writes, “I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them.” (Isa. 42:16) “For Zion’s sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth.”—chap. 62:1

Many other scriptures also bring our attention to the special gift of light. “With thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light.” (Ps. 36:9) “Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O LORD, in the light of thy countenance.” (chap. 89:15) “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.” (chap. 119:105) “The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.”—Prov. 4:18

As a guide and spiritual perspective for the Lord’s consecrated people, we read, “No man, when he hath lighted a candle, putteth it in a secret place, neither under a bushel, but on a candlestick, that they which come in may see the light. The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, thy whole body also is full of light; but when thine eye is evil, thy body also is full of darkness. Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness. If thy whole body therefore be full of light, having no part dark, the whole shall be full of light, as when the bright shining of a candle doth give thee light.”—Luke 11:33-36

MEDITATING ON GOD’S WORD

Meditation is a mark of Christian character of those who seek to walk in the ways of our loving Heavenly Father and who abide in his Word. Centuries before Jesus was born, the psalmist wrote, “Your commandments are my delight. Your testimonies are righteous forever; Give me understanding that I may live. I cried with all my heart; answer me, O LORD! I will observe Your statutes. I cried to You; save me, And I shall keep Your testimonies. I rise before dawn and cry for

help; I wait for Your words. My eyes anticipate the night watches, That I may meditate on Your word.”—Ps. 119:143-148, *NASB*

The psalmist further said, “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.”—Ps. 1:1-3

In his letter to the Hebrew brethren, the Apostle Paul wrote, “The word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do. Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.”—Heb. 4:12-14

JESUS' TESTIMONY

Jesus made clear the fact that he was the one who had been sent forth to carry out the Heavenly Father's will and purpose, and not his own. His humbling words are recorded in John's Gospel, where we read, “I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me. If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true. There is another that beareth witness of me; and I know that the witness which he witnesseth of me is true.”—John 5:30-32

Our Lord Jesus was pointing to John the Baptist who was the forerunner of Christ and had prepared the way for him. “Ye sent unto John, and he bare witness unto the truth. But I receive not testimony from man: but these things I say, that ye might be saved. He was a burning and a shining light: and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light. But I have greater witness than that of John: for the works which

the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me. And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape. . . . Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.”—John 5:33-37,39

LEGACY OF THE BEREANS

The Apostle Paul’s observation that the church members in the city of Berea were noble-minded students of the Bible is a positive lesson for all of the Lord’s consecrated people to ever keep in mind. These brethren sincerely believed in the infallible Word of God, and emphasized that it is the only true source for understanding. They deeply appreciated its value and meaning as a “thus saith the Lord” for the final proof for what they believed.

The term *Sola Scriptura* (Latin, “By Scripture Alone”) was a slogan coined by Martin Luther when he was questioned in the Synod of Augsburg, Germany in October, 1518. It became a popular term during the Protestant Reformation. He was challenging the supreme authority of the established church. Their position maintained that church tradition and teachings, and the authority of the church must be recognized. Scripture by itself was insufficient, and there was to be no individual interpretation. In his appeal to the Council, Luther turned to the Bible as the only source of authority, and placed his own interpretation above that of the clergy.

“Now these [Jews] were better disposed and more noble than those in Thessalonica, for they were entirely ready and accepted and welcomed the message [concerning the attainment through Christ of eternal salvation in the kingdom of God] with inclination of mind and eagerness, searching and examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. Many of them therefore became believers, together with not a few prominent Greeks, women as well as men.”—Acts 17:11,12, *Amplified Bible* ■

CHAPTER 2

The Marvelous Works of God

*“I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made:
marvellous are thy works; and that my soul
knoweth right well.”
—Psalm 139:14*

IN THIS SCRIPTURE, the Psalmist David speaks of the wonderful creative works of our Heavenly Father, who is the source of all life. His power is marvelous and beyond the ability of our finite minds to fully comprehend. Reflecting on this, we realize that our loving God has created his human family with the ability to see, hear, touch, taste, and smell. Man is also able to think for himself and to know the difference between right and wrong, good and evil, and love and hate. Father Adam was also created perfect and with the ability to worship his Creator.

A SYMBOLIC BODY

The human body, which David said was “fearfully and wonderfully made,” is indeed a marvelous and intricate creation of divine wisdom, love, and power. The great God of the universe has thus very fittingly used it in the Scriptures to illustrate the body of “The Christ.” This symbolic body is composed of our Lord Jesus as the head, and his faithful followers as members of his body. It is also called a New Creation of God because the members of this body are being

called from among the human family and are being developed during this present Gospel Age.

In his letter to the church at Ephesus, the Apostle Paul directed the brethren's attention to this symbolic relationship. He told them, "Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit."—Eph. 2:19-22

A NEW CREATION

The work of preparing this New Creation for a place in Christ's future kingdom has been taking place throughout this present Gospel Age. Paul spoke of the specific work that some of the members of the body would be engaged in. "He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."—Eph. 4:11-13

Further to this, the apostle addressed the harmonious relationship that would prevail among the people of God. He wrote, "Speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."—vss. 15,16

PAINSTAKING NEEDLEWORK

In the psalm from which our featured scripture was taken, David used symbols to illustrate the various points he was making. He wrote, "I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from

thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.”—Ps. 139:14-16

The words translated “curiously wrought” in this scripture mean “to embroider.” The same Hebrew word has also been translated “needlework” when used to describe a weaving of beautiful and colorful threads. (Judg. 5:30) It is also the word used when speaking of the bride of Christ. “The king’s daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework: the virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee. With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought: they shall enter into the king’s palace.”—Ps. 45:13-15

Needlework requires careful, patient, and painstaking effort, and thus symbolizes the character development that takes place in the Lord’s people. It points to that which is being curiously wrought in the lives of the faithful members of the body of Christ. The majority do this while dwelling in the lower strata of earth’s society.

THE SON OF MAN

God’s Word teaches, “No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.” (John 3:13) “But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”—Phil. 2:7,8

Jesus could have come to earth as a perfect man and kept himself separate from the fallen human race. The sacrifice of his perfect human life could have provided the ransom price even if he had never mingled with mankind at all. Even though he did associate with the earthly creation, it was to a large extent with the lowly and humble.

From the scriptural account, we read, “It came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why

eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?" (Matt. 9:10,11) It was long before prophesied by Isaiah who wrote, "He made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth."—Isa. 53:9

GLORY FOR MANY SONS

Jesus' death as a perfect human being provided the ransom price for the whole sin-sick world. However, his association with the sinful world and the painful experiences he endured in connection with it, had much to do with his own development as a New Creature. It also served in the spiritual development of his body members. Paul explains, "We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren."—Heb. 2:9-11

Jesus and his body members are all developed as New Creatures. Even of Jesus we read, "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered." (Heb. 5:8) This does not imply that Jesus was not obedient to his Heavenly Father as the Logos before he left his heavenly home and came to earth. By his descending into the "lower parts of the earth" he learned what it meant to be obedient to God under adverse and very trying circumstances. By taking on the body of flesh it cost him much in the way of suffering, ignominy, and finally death on the cross.

Yet, these experiences perfected Jesus as the Captain of our salvation, and to be the Head over the members of his faithful body. This process prepared him for the great work ahead for the blessing of all mankind under the administration of his future kingdom. It is true, also, of each one of his body members who are being developed by the Holy Spirit of God in their walk in newness of life. "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into

his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”—Rom. 6:3,4

Our Lord Jesus was also prepared to assist his body members who are being called from the fallen human family. They have inherited the weaknesses of the fallen flesh and require his patient and loving help. We are thus assured, “We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.”—Heb. 4:15

OBTAINING MERCY

Because of our interaction with other members of the human family and with the world, we are subjected to the same tests of obedience as Jesus was. However, being imperfect we are not “without sin” as he was, and we need special provisions which the Heavenly Father has given us for our development as New Creatures in Christ. Prayer is one of these special gifts. “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” (vs. 16) By taking advantage of this blessing, it is possible for all the members of the body of Christ to be developed for a place in his future kingdom.

BAPTIZED UNTO DEATH

The sins of the whole world were on our Lord Jesus’ shoulders, as reflected in his statement, “I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!” (Luke 12:50) The Master was witnessing to the divine purpose, and he knew that it would not be fully realized until his baptism unto death had been fully consummated. He had committed himself to a course of self sacrifice, and he could not be worthy to be exalted to the right hand of his Heavenly Father until he had been faithful even unto death. To receive the position as Head over the members of his body, he would be required to endure the ignominious death of the cross. It was the Father’s will that he take the sinner’s place, and descend all the way into the lowest parts of the earth in death.

DRINKING THE CUP

Near the close of Jesus' earthly ministry, James and John asked him if he would grant them a special favor. "He said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you?" (Mark 10:36) "They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory." (vs. 37) The two disciples were no doubt disappointed with his answer. "Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" (vs. 38) James and John did not realize the life of sacrifice that was necessary to follow their Master. "They said unto him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized: But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared. And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John."—vss. 39-41

Jesus made it clear that his Heavenly Father would place the various members of the body of Christ as he desired. To follow our Lord means to sacrifice our lives and to accept the Father's will in all matters concerning our heavenly calling during this present Gospel Age. All of Jesus' faithful body members must die with him in order to qualify for a position in the Christ. The Apostle Paul proclaimed to the brethren at Rome, "If we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him." (Rom. 6:5-8) The full development of the Christ Head and body will not be complete until all have descended into death. The faithful must stand every test, learn every lesson, and be profited by every experience that is directed by the Holy Spirit of God.

GOD'S WORKMANSHIP

Paul spoke further of God's work toward the development of the New Creation and the body of Christ in his letter to

the church at Ephesus. He said, "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." (Eph. 2:10) It was the Heavenly Father who raised up Jesus as a New Creature and exalted him to the divine nature, and the apostle explains that we are all being created in Christ Jesus.

"You hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God."—Eph. 2:1-8

TESTING NECESSARY

The body of Christ as faithful New Creatures in Christ Jesus, are to be exalted to the very highest of all forms of life, the divine nature. Immortality is a condition that is indestructible. If they were raised to such a high position without being severely tested, they would continue to live forever if not faithful, and be a possible detriment to the other orders of creation. Upon the basis of these tests, God knows that the faithful ones in Christ will always be loyal to him, and to the principles of righteousness that are represented in his perfect laws.

This principle is emphasized by David in our featured psalm. "O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. You scrutinize my path and my lying down, And are intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, You know it all."—Ps. 139:1-4, *NASB*

GOD'S LOVING CARE

This tender supervision is expanded by the psalmist who continues, "You have enclosed me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is too high, I cannot attain to it. Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there."—Ps. 139:5-8, *NASB*

The psalmist points to our Lord who appears to be lost in wonder and praise with the Heavenly Father's love and care over his special people. This tender guidance and watchfulness is directed from an exalted position in the heaven of heavens, and reaches down to touch even those faithful ones in *Sheol* [Hebrew, the grave].

This passage is principally fitting to God's dealings with the Christ, and his presence is especially with them in death. His ultimate purpose is that upon the basis of their faithfulness unto death, he will give them a crown of life. Their resurrection to glory, honor, and immortality is evidence that he was well pleased with their devotion and loyalty to him. He supervised their consecrated walk in newness of life, and gave them strength to endure the trials and testing necessary for their faithfulness to him. The psalmist continues, "If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, Even there Your hand will lead me, And Your right hand will lay hold of me."—Ps. 139:9,10, *NASB*

SANCTIFICATION

Sanctification is a separating work, or setting apart to God and to the doing of his will. Speaking of his faithful followers, Jesus said, "I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth."—John 17:14-19, *NASB*

The sanctification of the body members of the Christ does not mean perfection of their flesh, but rather a full heart devotion and loyalty to God. By heeding the divine call to consecration, we become separate from the world. “If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.” (John 15:19) “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”—chap. 16:33

Jesus taught his disciples that although they would experience tribulation because of their separation from the world and its spirit, they too would be able to overcome. This would not be in their own strength, but in the strength of the Lord and the power of his Holy Spirit. Our Heavenly Father discerns between the world and his consecrated people in the world, and works with those who take a stand on his side. “Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”—Phil. 2:12,13

THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM

It is written, “The fear [reverence] of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever.” (Ps. 111:10) Paul taught, “Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it. For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world.”—Heb. 4:1-3

A proper reverence for the Lord is not only the beginning of wisdom, but those who are truly wise toward God will continue to reverence him by giving careful attention to all he has said, that their lives might be fully pleasing to him.

A BOOK OF REMEMBRANCE

Paul writes, “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.”—Rom. 8:28-30

The apostle was not speaking about the predestination of individuals, but of the characteristics each individual must possess in order to qualify as a member of the Christ. David wrote, “In thy book all my members were written.” (Ps. 139:16) It was the Heavenly Father’s will for those faithful ones to be written in his most blessed book.

The Prophet Malachi was moved by the Holy Spirit of God to write, “Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.”—Mal. 3:16,17 ■

CHAPTER 3

Tried in the Fire

*“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial
which is to try you, as though some strange thing
happened unto you.”
—I Peter 4:12*

THESE WORDS WERE written by the Apostle Peter more than thirty years after Jesus had finished his earthly ministry, and reflect the level of discipline that he had experienced in his faithful walk with our Lord. He had learned to recognize that trials were necessary in his own ministry, and as further evidence of his relationship as a son of our loving Heavenly Father. He rejoiced that he had been invited to partake of the heavenly calling in Christ Jesus.

TRIALS OF FAITH

The apostle’s admonition is addressed to all followers of our Lord Jesus who have accepted the invitation during this present Gospel Age. These have gladly left their former earthly hopes, ambitions, and pursuits, and have given their lives to God in full consecration to him. The apostle spoke of this special relationship of the heavenly calling, and put it in perspective, when he added, “Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.”—I Pet. 4:13

Earlier in his first epistle, Peter also wrote about the trial of faith that would come upon the Lord’s special people. He

thus addressed them, “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”—I Pet. 1:2-5

MORE PRECIOUS THAN GOLD

The apostle encouraged the people of God and said, “Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.”—vss. 6,7

The trials of which Peter wrote may come into our lives, but we must always keep in mind his words “think it not strange,” because these experiences are permitted by God to prove us, to strengthen our character, and to cause the principles of truth and righteousness to take deeper root in our consecrated hearts.

From Job, we read, “He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.” (Job 23:10) The Prophet Malachi wrote, “He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.”—Mal. 3:3

The revelator recorded our Lord’s words concerning the church at Laodicea. “I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the

fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.”—Rev. 3:15-19

THE ARMOR OF GOD

Fiery trials will come upon us as fiery darts from our great adversary, Satan, whose wrath against the children of light is permitted to manifest itself in various ways. But these darts cannot injure us if we have securely buckled on the divinely provided armor of truth and righteousness of which the Apostle Paul spoke. He admonishes us, “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”—Eph. 6:11-13

The Apostle Paul enumerates the various items that the child of God would need to fight the good fight of faith. He thus encourages, “Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.”—vss. 14-18

Each of these distinct items of the armor has a deeper meaning and spiritual significance. The breastplate of righteousness covers the heart of the consecrated follower of Jesus, and suggests the need to keep it pure. “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.” (Matt. 5:8) During this present Gospel Age the Lord’s people are walking in the narrow and difficult way of sacrifice, and their feet will need to be properly shod. “Make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.”

(Heb. 12:13) The shield of faith will be required to ward off the fiery darts that will be aimed at them. “Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”—I John 5:4

The helmet of salvation represents that part of the soldier’s armor that protects the head. This represents the individual’s knowledge, reasoning, and understanding concerning spiritual things. “The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.” (Eph. 1:18) The sword is used as a weapon, and represents the Christian warrior’s only weapon—the Word of God that he uses to defend the precious Truth. “Out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.”—Rev. 19:15

TESTINGS NECESSARY

The Apostle Paul, when writing to Timothy concerning the faithful members of the church during the present Gospel Age, reminded them, “Thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”—II Tim. 3:10-12

God allows his people to have difficult experiences and to suffer for right doing. During the present time, he is calling out a fully consecrated company who will be the royal priesthood of our Lord’s kingdom, and will have the power and authority to bless the sin-sick world of mankind during Christ’s future reign of truth and righteousness. We are assured that trial and testing is needed to prove and prepare the hearts and characters of each one of the Lord’s faithful followers.

Our loving Father watches to see how loyal we are to the principles of righteousness. Some who have been called may endure a certain amount of trial and testing and then

withdraw, while others will endure more. The Lord is seeking those who are willing to give up everything in their desire to prove faithful to their covenant of consecration with him. This higher level of faithfulness means a new life of entire loyalty to God and to his laws, which are the laws of righteousness.

FIERY TRIALS

Trials test the various members of the church and are designed to do a purifying work in their characters. It is an experience that must be endured by each one individually. Not only will the church as a whole have opposition against them, but each individual will be personally exposed to the fiery trials of which both the Apostles Peter and Paul wrote.

The trial and testing of the members of the Christ is different from that which comes to any other people. The explanation of this difference can be briefly quoted in the words of Peter in our opening passage of scripture, when he pointed to this and explained, "Inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings." (I Pet. 4:13) We know that each member of the body of Christ must be tried, and we can rejoice when some of these experiences touch us also. In our own heart we can say, I am glad to have a share in the sufferings of Christ and in God's wonderful providence. Without this divine arrangement we could never share as a body member of the Christ.

PATIENT CONTINUANCE

In his letter to the brethren at Rome, the Apostle Paul wrote, "To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life." (Rom. 2:7) He was pointing them to the wonderful blessings in connection with the High Calling in Christ Jesus.

We are all looking forward to the time when the body of Christ will be completed, and when we may share in the glory of abundant life with our glorified Lord Jesus. We rejoice in knowing that during the present time fiery trials are needed to perfect us as New Creatures in Christ Jesus, and have put ourselves into the Lord's powerful hands. He has promised to supervise all that concerns us during our

walk in newness of life, and whatever comes to us we may be sure that it is of his purpose or permission for our spiritual welfare. We know, too, that he has provided a wonderful provision whereby we may go frequently to the throne of grace for help in every time of need.

A LITTLE FIRE KINDLETH

A devilish disposition was manifested toward our Lord that resulted in great sufferings. Satan was permitted to instigate much of this, and also toward our Lord's faithful followers throughout the present Gospel Age. The Apostle James explains the nature of the human tongue in carrying out much of this persecution. He wrote, "Thus also the tongue is a small member, and boasts greatly. Behold! How large a mass of fuel a little fire kindles! (And the tongue is a fire,—the world of wickedness;) thus is that tongue rendered among our members, which defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the wheel of nature, and is set on fire by Gehenna." (James 3:5,6, *WED*) The tongue and pen are often used as weapons of evil.

OUR LIGHT AFFLICTION

The source of our trials may come not only from the Adversary, but also from the weaknesses and imperfections of others. Those that come from Christian people are often the most difficult to bear. However, we trust that nothing can happen to us unless the Heavenly Father permits it. If they do not come from one source they will be permitted to come from another. This testing is designed to strengthen the elements of our character which need development, and we are to take all these experiences patiently, knowing that they are working out for our spiritual welfare. "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."—II Cor. 4:17,18

We recognize the need for these trials and appreciate the grand purpose of God in our spiritual growth. We thus reflect the chiseling and polishing to make us ready for the grand temple of glory. We can look with fortitude and patience on

these fiery trials, fully recognizing that we shall receive rich blessings from them if they are received with humble and contrite hearts.

GLORY IN TRIBULATION

In respect to our High Calling we learn to rejoice in all things which our loving Father has done for us. We can have joy in putting our lives in the hands of the one who called us out of the darkness of this sin-sick world. Not that we enjoy the tribulations and persecutions, but we realize that these are working out for us in the development of a character that is pleasing to God. It is proper for us to recognize that in all of our present trials he makes them work together for our spiritual benefit. We can rejoice in any persecution, especially if we are in no way blameworthy. Peter said, "If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf."—I Pet. 4:16

FAITHFUL AMBASSADORS

The word of reconciliation has been committed to the Christ, and we are to "shine as lights in the world; Holding forth the word of life." (Phil. 2:15,16) The world is a very dark place, and sin and error abound. As we continually strive to be faithful ambassadors for Christ and are following closely in his footsteps, we have the privilege and honor of suffering with him.

Paul has explained, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And 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 together."—Rom. 8:16,17

Whoever will faithfully exercise their ambassadorship and not shun to declare the whole counsel of God, will come to realize something concerning the sufferings of Christ. They can truly say, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me."—Ps. 69:9

ENDURING CHASTENING

Satan introduces bitter aggression and painful injustice against the faithful followers of Jesus that is designed to

discourage them. Peter wrote, "This is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls."—I Pet. 2:19-25

If not resisted, adverse influences and the powers of darkness would lead to lukewarmness. "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not?"—Heb. 12:1-7

THE MIND OF THE SPIRIT

In his letter to the brethren at Rome, Paul proclaimed, "We know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also,

which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body. For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it. Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”—Rom. 8:22-28

PATIENTLY WAITING

The Psalmist David wrote, “Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday. Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass.”—Ps. 37:5-7

The present mission of the church is to develop in herself every grace, to be God’s witness to the world, and to prepare themselves to be the kings and priests in Christ’s future kingdom. Then, associated with the beloved sympathetic High Priest, the church shall establish God’s glorious kingdom in the earth. The fiery trials experienced this side of the veil will help fit us for a place in that heavenly kingdom.

TRUSTING IN HIM

The wonderful promises of our loving and wise Heavenly Father have never failed, and those who have put their trust in him will never fail. We feel unworthy that our efforts to be faithful to our covenant of sacrifice fall short. However, when we are weak and realize our own helplessness and incompetency, we may turn to our loving Heavenly Father. “He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather

glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”—II Cor. 12:9

It is when continued trust in the Lord and his responsive providence in our lives have ripened into precious personal acquaintance and intimacy that we learn to delight in him. It is when heart answers to heart, when pleading prayer brings recognized answers of peace, when the divine love and care have been clearly seen in the guidance of our way, that we can recognize the abiding presence with us of the Father and his Son.

However dark may be our way and severe the storm that rages about us, the thought of divine protection is ever with us, so that, as the children of the Lord, we are never in despair. Paul says, “We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.”—II Cor. 4:7-10

We must not allow our faith to falter when the test of patient endurance is applied, and while the outward peace and quietness which we crave may tarry long. Outward peace and calm are not always the conditions best suited to our needs as a New Creature in Christ Jesus. We would not desire conditions in which the precious fruits of the Holy Spirit would not grow and develop in us. Therefore, “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice.”—I Pet. 4:12,13 ■

CHAPTER 4

The Joyful Sound

*“Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O LORD, in the light of thy countenance.”
—Psalm 89:15*

THE PSALMIST IS addressing the people of God who have the Holy Spirit of truth, and are able to recognize and distinguish the wonderful message of God’s Word as it is taught in the Scriptures. “In thy name shall they rejoice all the day: and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted. For thou art the glory of their strength: and in thy favour our horn shall be exalted. For the LORD is our defence; and the Holy One of Israel is our king.”—Ps. 89:16-18

THE VOICE OF GOD

David has devoted an entire psalm that provides an important perspective concerning the power of sound, and as heard in the majestic voice of Almighty God. He wrote, “Give unto the LORD, O ye mighty, give unto the LORD glory and strength. Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness. The voice of the LORD is upon the waters: the God of glory thundereth: the LORD is upon many waters. The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty. The voice of the LORD breaketh the cedars; yea, the LORD breaketh the cedars of Lebanon. He maketh them also to skip like a calf; Lebanon and Sirion like a young unicorn. The voice of the LORD divideth the flames of fire. The voice of the LORD shaketh

the wilderness; the LORD shaketh the wilderness of Kadesh. The voice of the LORD maketh the hinds to calve, and discovereth the forests: and in his temple doth every one speak of his glory. The LORD sitteth upon the flood; yea, the LORD sitteth King for ever. The LORD will give strength unto his people; the LORD will bless his people with peace.”—Ps. 29:1-11

THE SHEPHERD’S VOICE

John recorded the precious words of Jesus who explained the manner in which the Lord’s people would recognize his voice, even as sheep know the voice of their master. “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers. This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them.”—John 10:1-6

THE FAMILIAR RING

We may apply the familiar expression “ring of truth” that is sometimes used to distinguish a certain scripture, or doctrine, that we recognize and hold dear. We note that it rings “true” because it harmonizes with the overall plan and ultimate purpose of God. Those who have learned to love and appreciate the true meaning of the “joyful sound” of which the psalmist spoke, are also strengthened in the narrow way of truth and understanding. Thus present truth takes on new and added meaning as it becomes more clear and melodious.

This appreciation of truth encourages the Lord’s people, and motivates them to pursue ever deeper levels of meaning and spiritual significance in the wonderful Word of God. Those who watch and wait with diligence are promised special blessings of unfolding truth at the end of the age,

which we believe points to our Lord's Second Presence that has taken place during the closing years of this present Gospel Age. The message to the seventh, and last, church at Laodicea is, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."—Rev. 3:20

Jesus said, "Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants." (Luke 12:37,38) "And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath."—vss. 42-44

The "meat in due season" has been a special and blessed portion of the joyful sound. It has been abundantly received from the Heavenly Father especially in connection with the High Calling in Christ Jesus. From the words of the revelator, we again read, "Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb."—Rev. 19:9

During his earthly ministry, our dear Lord Jesus often addressed various features of the Truth, and their significance in connection with the joyful sound. On one of those occasions, he had separated himself from the multitude of people who had come to see and hear him, and then went up into a mountain where he could commune with his Father in prayer. Later his disciples joined him, and he proceeded to teach them many valuable lessons concerning human frailties and their need to overcome them.

BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT

When Jesus began this series of lessons known as the Beatitudes, he told them, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 5:3) To be "poor in spirit" suggests being poor in the spirit of self, or to not think highly of oneself. It is the realization of one's own need of the

Heavenly Father and the rich blessings he alone can provide. This humble characteristic should cause the called ones to feel their own fleshly inadequacies. As a warning, however, it is also possible for one who may be poor in the sense of having material possessions and yet possess a proud, haughty or self-sufficient spirit and corresponding lack of proper spiritual growth.

BLESSED ARE THEY THAT MOURN

Jesus then spoke of another important feature of Christian character. “Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.” (Matt. 5:4) This does not refer to mourning in the everyday sense, because countless numbers of people continue to mourn who have not been comforted. The lesson concerns what we may learn from Jesus’ life and ministry, and then adapt those principles to our own consecrated lives.

Centuries before Jesus was born as a perfect man into the world, the Prophet Isaiah was moved by the Holy Spirit of God to emphasize this special mark of the Savior’s character. “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.”—Isa. 53:3,4

Jesus’ grief and sorrow was not related to his own trials, but his deep sense of love and sympathy for the poor, groaning human creation. He gave his life in sacrificial death for them, and had sympathy and compassion for the sinners of the world to be testified during the future administration of his kingdom. The Apostle Paul wrote, “We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.”—Heb. 4:15

As a foreshadow of that future kingdom of truth and righteousness, the Master brought sight to the blind, caused the lame to walk, and the lepers to be cleansed. He drove the evil spirits from those whom they had previously possessed, and even brought the dead to life again. However, these and other

miracles served as mere illustrations of the grander power and authority he would exercise in his future kingdom. The prospect and magnitude of that great blessing provided him with much comfort. All who are seeking joint heirship with him in his kingdom are also encouraged to develop similar hearts that are genuinely sympathetic toward others.

BLESSED ARE THE MEEK

The disciples no doubt listened intently as the Master said, “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.” (Matt. 5:5) Those who are being blessed by the joyful sound must also strive to be meek and teachable. Faithful followers of our Lord Jesus cannot fully appreciate the Truth unless they are willing to lay aside their own beliefs and theories, and allow themselves to be led and taught by our loving Heavenly Father through his Word of truth.

The blessing for those who diligently heed these important instructions, and who are meek and teachable, is the promise that they will “inherit the earth.” Those who respond to the heavenly calling during this present Gospel Age will share with Jesus in the future work of blessing all the families of the earth. This wonderful prospect will be part of the blessed inheritance.

BLESSED ARE THEY WHO HUNGER AND THIRST

When Jesus was teaching the disciples the true meaning of this wonderful parable, he emphasized, “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.” (Matt. 5:6) The Master was not pointing to human appetites to satisfy the flesh, but he was teaching his disciples an important lesson concerning those consecrated Christians who “hunger and thirst” to know and to do the Heavenly Father’s will. The child of God is thus encouraged to study and meditate on spiritual things that will enrich the New Creature, and to apply those truths in their own lives.

Further to this, Jesus said that those who search for truth and apply it to their consecrated walk in Christ Jesus, “shall be filled.” Nothing could satisfy the hunger and thirst for truth more than in studying the wonderful Word of God. The joyful sound of an increasing light of truth is more satisfying

and rewarding, and will become more precious with each passing day. Blessed, indeed, will be the divine grace in our hearts and lives.

BLESSED ARE THE MERCIFUL

Mercy is an essential principle of the truly consecrated child of God, and Jesus taught the basic meaning and significance of this characteristic. “Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.” (Matt. 5:7) Jesus included reference to exhibiting mercy in his model prayer, when he said, “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” (Matt. 6:12) This suggests an important element in connection with the relationship we enjoy with our loving Heavenly Father. “If ye forgive men their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”—vss. 14,15

BLESSED ARE THE PURE IN HEART

Possessing a heart of pure intentions may be contrasted with that which is merely an outward profession. Jesus thus promised, “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.” (Matt. 5:8) If we are faithful to the terms of our consecration vows, we will be exalted to the divine nature and see our Heavenly Father, as well as our dear Lord Jesus, face to face. John wrote, “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” (I John 3:2) This is one of the invisible aspects of the church’s future inheritance which may now be seen only with the eye of faith.

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS

Jesus said to his disciples, “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.” (Matt. 5:9) In connection with the Master’s words, the Apostle Paul also explained, “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”—Rom. 5:1,2

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, those who seek the peace of God in their lives are led by him to repentance and

consecration. They receive this special blessing through faith in our Lord Jesus, and proclaim the Truth to those who have an ear, even as foretold of the Master. "I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart. I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy loving kindness and thy truth from the great congregation."—Ps. 40:8-10

The joyful sound has brought rich blessings of truth into our lives, and has impelled us to lay down our lives as peace-makers. This is evidence that we are the children of God and walking in the narrow way of sacrifice. Let us continue to be faithful during the remaining years of this present Gospel Age.

BLESSED ARE THE PERSECUTED

In the last of Jesus' teachings known as the Beatitudes, he speaks of persecution that will be experienced in the lives of his faithful followers. He told them, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you." (Matt. 5:10-12) The Master sought to prepare his people that even as he had been persecuted for his faithfulness in proclaiming the joyful sound, so also would his followers.

When the Apostle Paul was travelling from one place to another to proclaim the joyful sound of the Truth, he encountered opposition, which he explained was necessary in his Christian ministry. Luke was his companion and recorded the events as they transpired. From the scriptural account, we read, "When they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch, Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."—Acts 14:21,22

The apostle thus confirmed the fact that difficult experiences would help prepare us for a place in our Lord's future heavenly kingdom. Those who faithfully let their light shine will receive the disfavor of the world. However, they are assured that they are walking in the light of God's countenance, and will share in the first resurrection. At that time, they will be exalted to live and reign with our dear Lord to bless all the obedient of mankind who will avail themselves of the blessings of everlasting life here on a perfected earth.

THE GRAND PROSPECT

In this wonderful series of teachings known as the Beatitudes, our Lord Jesus explained to his followers that certain qualifications were necessary for them to attain faithfulness and to ultimately receive a place among the blessed people of God in his future glorious kingdom.

When the heavenly calling is completed, the Christ will share in the administration of the kingdom. The revelator wrote, "I looked, and behold, the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder, and the voice which I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps. And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders; and no one could learn the song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had been purchased from the earth. These are the ones who have not been defiled with women, for they have kept themselves chaste. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb. And no lie was found in their mouth; they are blameless."—Rev. 14:1-5, *NASB*

In this wonderful scene, the faithful class who rejoiced in the joyful sound joined in singing together the song of Moses and the Lamb of God. "I saw, as it were, a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had come off victorious from the beast and from his image and from the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God. And they

sang the song of Moses the bond-servant of God and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvelous are Thy works, O Lord God, the Almighty; righteous and true are Thy ways, Thou King of the nations. Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? For Thou alone art holy; For all the nations will come and worship before Thee, For Thy righteous acts have been revealed.”—Rev. 15:2-4, *NASB*

THE FAITHFUL CLASS

To receive such a blessed reward for faithfulness, each one of the Lord’s people who will share in this spiritual kingdom must be poor in spirit, and be sympathetic mourners as they endure and witness the terrible results of sin and death placed upon Adam and the whole human family because of his disobedience to the divine law. All must be meek and teachable, and hungering and thirsting for truth and righteousness.

Jesus made clear that the wonderful quality of mercy will mark each one of his faithful people. They must all be peacemakers and pure in heart, for they are called to share in the work of reconciliation in Christ’s future kingdom. In his letter to the brethren at Corinth, the Apostle Paul pointed out that future and glorious work on behalf of the world of mankind, and said, “Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.”—II Cor. 3:6

All such are comforted as they seek to comfort others with a message of the joyful sound of the Truth. All will receive a place in Christ’s future kingdom for the blessing of all the families of the earth. In connection with the covenant which was inaugurated with Abraham, we read, “That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.”—Gen. 22:17,18

MARRIAGE OF THE LAMB

The revelator gives us a glimpse of the glorious marriage that will take place in heaven between our Lord Jesus and

the 144,000 members of his faithful bride. From the scriptural account, we read, “Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.”—Rev. 19:7-9

The joyful sound will ring loud and clear when this wonderful promise is fulfilled under the administration of Christ’s glorious and future kingdom of truth and righteousness. “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.”—Rev. 20:6 ■

CHAPTER 5

Voice of the Shepherd

*“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them,
and they follow me.”
—John 10:27*

THE APOSTLE JOHN was one of our Lord’s closest companions, and in his gospel he has recorded many of the important events and marvelous words which were spoken by the great Master Teacher during his earthly ministry. John has devoted the entire tenth chapter to the subject of the shepherd and his sheep, from which our featured scripture is taken. These scriptures reveal the closeness that marked Jesus and his people who have faithfully followed him throughout this present Gospel Age.

A TRUE BONDING

There is a particular intimacy that exists between a shepherd and his sheep, basically because they live together. Shepherds know the lay of the land, where the best grazing is, where the fewest predators are, and where they can best guard and care for their flock. At the time our Lord spoke these words, the average shepherd was responsible for caring for about one hundred sheep. Often, however, several shepherds would combine their flocks with those of other shepherds who may have been grazing their animals nearby. Despite the seeming confusion that might result from this practice, all of the shepherds knew their own sheep and all of the sheep knew their own shepherd.

The psalmist wrote, “O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. To day if ye will hear his voice. . . .” (Ps. 95:6,7) In another of the psalms, we read, “Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands. Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing. Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.”—Ps. 100:1-5

The Prophet Isaiah also draws our attention to the shepherd and his care over the sheep. “Behold, the Lord GOD will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.”—Isa. 40:10,11

THE SHEEPFOLD

Jesus had been preaching to the people who had come to hear his teachings when certain Jews encircled him with demands to reveal to them his identity and purpose. The words of our featured scripture were directed to those Jews whose hearts had not been open to accept his wonderful message, nor to appreciate the miraculous works which he accomplished during his earthly ministry.

The Master explained to them, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers. This parable

spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them.”—John 10:1-6

PLACE OF REST

The sheepfold represents the place of rest and protection which our loving Heavenly Father has prepared for his consecrated people during the long centuries of this present Gospel Age. “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”—Acts 4:12

Sheep are known for their gentleness, meekness, and obedience to the shepherd in whom they have put their trust. “Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”—John 10:7-10

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Jesus spoke of himself as being both the “door” and the “good shepherd.” There was only one door which no one else could open, and he opened that door of redemption by giving his life for the sheep. This wonderful feature of the Heavenly Father’s plan and purpose will be made known to all people under the administration of Christ’s future kingdom, and for the blessing of all the families of the earth. As the true sheep know their shepherd, so also does the shepherd know his sheep.

Thus the Master made clear, “I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.” (John 10:11-15)

The Heavenly Father knew Jesus intimately, had full confidence in him, and entrusted the care of the sheep to him.

OTHER SHEEP

Jesus also taught that there would be other sheep for him to look after. When “The Christ” will be set up in power and authority during Christ’s future kingdom, the whole human family will be given opportunity to learn the ways of truth and righteousness, and the obedient will receive the right to life here on a glorious and perfected earth. This will include the countless numbers of mankind who will be resurrected from the grave and given opportunity to walk up the highway of holiness. The Prophet Isaiah wrote concerning this future blessing, saying, “An highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there: And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”—Isa. 35:8-10

Our Lord was speaking of that blessed future time, and also explained, “Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.”—John 10:16-18

From the Gospel of John, we again read, “There was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings. And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him? Others said, These are not the words of him that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind? And it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, and it was winter. And Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon’s porch. Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him,

How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly.”—vss. 19-24

In response to the Jews’ angry inquiry, John recorded, “Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father’s name, they bear witness of me. But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand. I and my Father are one. Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him.”—vss. 25-31

FALSE SHEPHERDS

The Israelites were the covenant people of God, and he dealt exclusively with them through their mediator Moses. However, through pride, ambition and arrogance, the religious leaders of the Jewish people were not good shepherds to those who looked to them for guidance and instruction. The Prophet Ezekiel addressed this fact. “The word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks?” (Ezek. 34:1,2) They were not willing to lead their people to the green pastures of God’s wonderful word of truth, nor to the still waters of spiritual refreshment.

The prophet further wrote, “Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed: but ye feed not the flock. The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them. And they were scattered, because there is no shepherd: and they became meat to all the beasts of the field, when they were scattered.”—vss. 3-5

The false shepherds have permitted God’s character and his ultimate plan and purpose to be misrepresented. “My

sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them. Therefore, ye shepherds, hear the word of the LORD; As I live, saith the Lord GOD, surely because my flock became a prey, and my flock became meat to every beast of the field, because there was no shepherd, neither did my shepherds search for my flock, but the shepherds fed themselves, and fed not my flock; Therefore, O ye shepherds, hear the word of the LORD; Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against the shepherds; and I will require my flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves any more; for I will deliver my flock from their mouth, that they may not be meat for them.” (Ezek. 34:6-10) In an antitypical sense, some of the Lord’s true people have been led astray by false shepherds throughout the long centuries of this present Gospel Age.

JESUS CONFRONTS THE JEWS

The Master attempted to reason with those who were questioning him, but was unable to persuade them that he had ministered in his Heavenly Father’s name and done many wonderful things. “Jesus answered them, Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me? The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God. Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God? If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him.”—John 10:32-38

It was apparent that the Jews’ hearts were hardened against him. Therefore, he travelled elsewhere to deliver the wonderful message of truth to those who had ears to hear and accept his words. John records, “They sought again to

take him: but he escaped out of their hand, And went away again beyond Jordan into the place where John at first baptized; and there he abode. And many resorted unto him, and said, John did no miracle: but all things that John spake of this man were true. And many believed on him there.”—vss. 39-42

A PSALM OF DAVID

The psalmist wrote concerning the special relationship that exists between the shepherd and his sheep, and declared, “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.” (Ps. 23:1) The word “LORD” which David used in this scripture is in reference to Almighty God—the great over-shepherd of all things. The Apostle Paul said, “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” (Rom. 8:28) In turn, our Heavenly Father has appointed his only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus, to oversee the little flock of Jesus’ faithful followers. “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”—Luke 12:32

David speaks of his realization of the shepherd’s personal and loving care over him. “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”—Ps. 23:2-4

“To lie down in green pastures” illustrates the rest of faith that the Lord’s people are promised, and the spiritual refreshment that they are provided. We are being led to streams of truth and blessing, while being shielded from all foes and dangers. We can put our trust in the Lord even as the sheep trust in the wonderful care of the shepherd. To walk in the “valley of the shadow of death” suggests that the Lord’s people have been called from the sin-sick and dying human family, yet with the realization that our Lord is with us to the end of our walk in faith.

The psalmist was truly thankful for the shepherd’s care and said, “Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup

runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.” (Ps. 23:5,6) The truly consecrated child of God is feasting at the wonderful table of truth that has been provided, especially during the harvest years of this present Gospel Age. His “goodness and mercy” will follow us until the end of our consecrated walk, and then we will share in the blessings of the heavenly state in the Heavenly Father’s house.

THE SHEPHERD’S PRAYER

The great shepherd was constantly in an attitude of prayer, but he turned aside from the pressing issues that were before him to seek his Heavenly Father’s special counsel and guidance. His earthly ministry was rapidly drawing to a close and John recorded the wonderful words which he spoke. “These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee. As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”—John 17:1-3

Our Lord had left his heavenly home to provide a ransom for the whole human family. He would soon die to fulfill that most important work. During his earthly ministry, the invitation was given to certain men that would become his apostles, and others who were to be of the Early Church. In his prayer, he said, “I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.”—vss. 4,5

The Master then turned his attention to his beloved disciples. They were truly consecrated men, and had come to Jesus as their shepherd. “As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” (Rom. 8:14) “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”—Phil. 2:13

In his prayer Jesus said, “I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy

word. Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me.”—John 17:6-8

John recorded further Jesus’ wonderful words on behalf of his disciples. “I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them. And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled. And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.”—vss. 9-14

BRINGING MANY SONS TO GLORY

The words of this prayer were spoken by our Lord on the night of his betrayal. He was on his way from the upper room, where he instituted the memorial of his death with his disciples, to the Garden of Gethsemane. It was given on behalf of his disciples and those who would be his special followers during the present Gospel Age. Afterward, during the administration of his future kingdom of righteousness, the whole world would have the opportunity to believe on him. The very next day after offering this prayer he died as the ransom price for the sin-sick human creation. “We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.”—Heb. 2:9,10

THE FLOCK OF GOD

The Apostle Peter spoke of the good shepherd and the little flock of God, and put the wonderful relationship in perspective when he wrote his first epistle. He wrote, “The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.”—I Pet. 5:1-4

The Apostle Paul also spoke of the good shepherd who makes us lie down in green pastures, and leads and guides us in the way of quiet waters. He is always ready to care and assist us in the ways of righteousness and truth. If found faithful, we will share in the marriage ceremony as his faithful bride. “Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”—Heb. 13:20,21 ■

CHAPTER 6

God Speaks to His People

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spoke in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.”

—Hebrews 1:1,2

WHEN WRITING TO the Hebrew brethren, the Apostle Paul explained that it was through the inspired mouthpieces of God that he gave special instructions to his consecrated people. The Prophet Hosea confirms this fact, when he wrote, “I have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes, by the ministry of the prophets.”—Hos. 12:10

God speaks to those who are willing to share and cooperate in the outworking and ultimate purpose of his eternal will. This means that, when we hear the call and respond to it, we must devote ourselves unreservedly to the commitment we have made. During the present Gospel Age, this has meant the setting aside of our own wills and denying self so that God’s will may be done in us. “When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.”—Eccles. 5:4,5

DIVINELY INSPIRED

We can have confidence that God has spoken to us because what we have heard is in harmony with the entire Bible.

Paul explained to Timothy, saying, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.”—II Tim. 3:16,17

There is an old saying that the Bible is a fiddle upon which any tune may be played. Furthermore, by avoiding certain scriptures all sorts of tunes can be played, but they will not provide a true and harmonious sound. Even Satan, the Devil, quoted scripture when he tried to tempt Jesus at the beginning of his earthly ministry. The scriptural account provides the setting, where we read, “Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.” (Matt. 4:5,6) Jesus, however, was well acquainted with the Scriptures, could recall them perfectly, and was guided by the Holy Spirit of God. In his reply, he confronted Satan with another text of scripture that left the Devil speechless. “Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.”—vs. 7

UNCHANGING HARMONY

The words of our Heavenly Father are in harmony with his character. They reveal that he is absolutely just, unerring in wisdom, almighty in power and, above all, abounding in love. We may also be assured of his perfect and wonderful character, and can trust him on every occasion because the Scriptures further show that he is unchangeable. This fact is taught to us in both the Old and New Testament scriptures, where we read, “I am the LORD, I change not.” (Mal. 3:6) This marvelous trait is also brought to our attention by James who wrote, “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

The divine purpose, as revealed by God through his prophets of old, is still the same divine purpose many centuries later.

If God has spoken to us through his servants it means that we now hear and believe the same thoughts and teachings that were made known a long time ago. The working out of God's plan and purpose varies in detail from one age to another, but the plan itself does not change. God's ultimate purpose is to bless all the families of the earth in due time. How that purpose is eventually accomplished has been in preparation for centuries.

FUNDAMENTAL TRUTHS

One of the fundamental truths of the divine plan of the ages includes the world's recovery from the ravages of sin and death. God's purpose was declared in the message of restitution that was "spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." (Acts 3:21) It was to provide an opportunity for this wonderful recovery from sin and death that Jesus gave himself a ransom for all. Ransom and restitution are two prominent teachings of God's great love for his human creation. Isaiah was one of God's holy prophets who wrote concerning this wonderful promise. "The ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."—Isa. 35:10

Fallen men and women who are in their graves and yet awaiting the resurrection will not only return from death on the basis of Jesus' sacrifice, but will receive rich blessings of life under the administration of Christ's glorious, future kingdom. At that time, "they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" as written by the Prophet Isaiah. Those who are obedient to the laws of God will be restored to a state of perfection on a perfected earth, and will enjoy communion with their Creator forever.

There are various arrangements in the outworking of God's plan and purpose, but the great objective to which they lead is the promised blessing of all the families of the earth. God made that promise to faithful Abraham, and it permeates the whole message of the Bible. "In blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies;

And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.”—Gen. 22:17,18

Our all-wise and loving Heavenly Father declared his purpose to his servant Moses, when he revealed, “As truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD.” (Num. 14:21) If we have heard and appreciated these fundamental truths that were written many years ago, then we have heard the voice of God speaking to us.

DIVINE FAVOR

The blessedness of receiving divine favor is emphasized in the lives of those to whom God has directly spoken. This was especially true in the experiences of Noah. From God’s Holy Word, we are told that, “Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD” (Gen. 6:8), and God made a covenant with him. “God spoke unto Noah, and to his sons with him, saying, And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you.” (chap. 9:8,9) This was confirmed, “God said, This is the token of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth.”—vss. 12,13

Noah’s experiences are referred to in the New Testament and are used to illustrate certain features in God’s ultimate plan and purpose. Noah was building the ark over a long period of time, and he endured much scoffing while doing so. While working, he also preached to an unresponsive and indifferent public, but with no apparent results.

Noah had faith and fully appreciated the fact that God had spoken to him and given him a task to perform as a servant of God. He continued to preach and work irrespective of results. He was faithful despite the cost of weariness, scoffing and indifference. He responded wholeheartedly to fulfill the divine command faithfully. In his letter to the Hebrew brethren, the Apostle Paul wrote, “By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.”—Heb. 11:7

NOAH HEARD

When the plan of God is complete, the knowledge of his wondrous glory will fill the earth even “as the waters cover the sea.” (Isa. 11:9) It will then be seen that the destruction of the first world was justified by the lack of response to Noah’s preaching, and the level of evil among the people that was prevalent in those early times of human creation. That which Noah accomplished and preached will be appreciated during the future age of the world’s blessing. Perhaps it will help to fill the whole earth with God’s glory as spoken by the Prophet Isaiah.

The Apostle Peter said, “Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation. Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.”—I Pet. 2:12-15

ABRAHAM HEARD

We also read, “Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee: and I will make of thee a great nation, And I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.”—Gen. 12:1-3

In God’s message to Abraham, we have the first definite statement of his ultimate plan and purpose to bless all the families of the earth in due time. Paul also confirmed this wonderful fact to the brethren at Galatia, where he wrote, “The scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.”—Gal. 3:8

It was surely good news for Abraham to learn that it would be through his seed that all the families of earth were to be blessed by divine arrangement. We know this promise is true

because it was God himself who announced it to Abraham. However, his faith was also to be tested for he was asked to give up his home in Ur, and for the remainder of his life he had no permanent home.

Of him, Paul wrote, “By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”—Heb. 11:8-10

The Heavenly Father continued by testing Abraham very severely, even by asking him to offer up his dearly beloved son Isaac as a sacrifice. However, he showed his willingness to serve his Heavenly Father, and learned that God’s voice not only meant blessings, but also sacrifice. God spoke to Abraham to invite his cooperation in the outworking of his marvelous plan, and the message and the call were heard together.

Abraham discovered that in order for God’s promise to become a reality to him it would cost the uprooting of his whole way of life. All those, to whom the purpose of God to bless all nations has been revealed, have likewise been called to cooperate. This is God’s method of dealing with his people. He speaks to us by revealing his plan, and then invites cooperation therein.

MOSES HEARD

God also spoke to Moses at the burning bush. He instructed him, “Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. Moreover he said, I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. And Moses hid his face; for he was afraid to look upon God.” (Exod. 3:5,6) God told Moses to take off his shoes, for the place whereon he stood was “holy ground.” It was holy because God chose that place to speak to Moses.

One of Moses’ main characteristics was being meek. He felt incapable to carry out the great task that God had asked

him to perform. We read, “Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.” (Num. 12:3) However, meekness is an essential quality of Christian character which all members of the Christ must develop. Jesus, therefore, said, “Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart.”—Matt. 11:29

The world often mistakes meekness for weakness. However, true meekness is not weak. Moses was meek in the sense that he recognized and acknowledged his own limitations according to the flesh. When God assured him that all of his needs would be supplied, his faith made it possible for him to hold on to the promises of God. Thus was he made strong and courageous. We can only be used of God as we rely upon his wisdom and strength. The expression “When I think of self I tremble, and when I look to thee I’m strong” was the experience of Moses. In the strength which God supplied, he courageously took up the task which God assigned to him.

God spoke to Moses and, having responded, he was no longer his own. No longer was he free to think, to choose, to act, or to do as he preferred. Henceforth, the will of God was to be the guiding star of his life. God’s presence accompanied him, and he had peace of mind and heart. Yet, his way was difficult, and his burden was heavy.

Moses had to face and defy the austere and arrogant Pharaoh. He also had to patiently bear the murmurings of his own people. He had to put down rebellion against the divine arrangements concerning Israel. In many ways, Moses had to bear a load of care and responsibility that was his because of the high position of honor God had given him in the outworking of his plan. His was a blessed experience when he heard the voice of God and, like Noah and Abraham, he too found it very costly.

THE GREATER MOSES

The life of Moses illustrated the future work of a “greater than Moses.” “The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken.” (Deut. 18:15) These prophetic words speak of our Lord Jesus. “I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will

put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.”—Deut. 18:18,19

The Psalmist David also spoke of our Lord Jesus, saying, “Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart. I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I have not refrained my lips, O LORD, thou knowest. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation. Withhold not thou thy tender mercies from me, O LORD: let thy lovingkindness and thy truth continually preserve me.”—Ps. 40:7-11

Much of what the prophets had written concerned the manner in which God would speak to Jesus—directing him in performing his part in the divine plan. Not only was he blessed by the revealing testimony of the prophets, but he heard the voice of God speaking to him directly. “Lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”—Matt. 3:17

What a blessed assurance this must have been to Jesus. He was honored and blessed, but it proved to be very costly. It meant the laying down of his human life until it was consumed at Calvary. As Jesus said, “The Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.”—Matt. 20:28

Jesus came at the First Advent to lay the foundation for his future kingdom that would bless all the families of the earth. He did so by sacrificing his own life as man’s Redeemer. He dedicated himself to God and agreed to do all that was written of him. On one occasion during his ministry, he was speaking to some of his critics, and in doing so referred back to the life of Moses as an apt illustration. He said, “I am come in my Father’s name, and ye receive me not: if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive. How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only? Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you,

even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?"—John 5:43-47

In harmony with the spirit of Jesus' ministry, we have the words which he spoke to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus after his resurrection from the grave. "Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself."—Luke 24:27

FAVOR TO US

How blessed it was when we first heard God speaking to us, and telling us of the great plan of recovery for the sin-cursed and dying world that was based upon the ransom sacrifice of Jesus. It appealed to us and we rejoiced to learn that all mankind, who are the ransomed of the Lord, will be given opportunity to walk up the highway of holiness into Christ's future kingdom. Not only did we come to the light, but we also desired to walk in the light. We learned that together with God's love for all mankind there was also an invitation of the heavenly calling during this present Gospel Age.

Like the worthies of old, we, too, were asked to leave our own people and our father's house, which is the household of Adam. We responded to a call to give up the hope of earthly restitution for ourselves, and in its place to run for the prize of the High Calling of God in Christ Jesus. Henceforth, we were to touch lightly the things of this earth, esteeming them only of trifling worth. This is more than merely exchanging an earthly hope for a heavenly hope. It means following in the steps of Jesus, and walking in the way of sacrifice and suffering, even unto death. We are to do this until that which remains of our present earthly life is wholly and acceptably consumed in God's service.

As were God's servants of old, we rejoice to know that by means of the ransom and the promised restitution, all the willing and obedient of mankind are to be blessed with everlasting life and enjoy peace and quietness and assurance forever. The clear distinction made by the Truth between

the heavenly hope of the church and the earthly hope for the world emphasizes the importance of Jesus' earthly ministry in the ultimate plan and purpose of God for the reconciliation and uplifting of the human creation. How truly satisfying it is to know that God has a future blessing for all others, as well as for the footstep followers of this present Gospel Age. How it enhances our appreciation of the high and heavenly calling in Christ Jesus. The test upon all God's people is to hold fast to the Truth and in the spirit of truth. Let us praise God for speaking to us through his servants of old, and thank him for all the way he has led us. ■

CHAPTER 7

Parables and Dark Sayings

“Give ear, O my people, to my law: incline your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old.”

—Psalm 78:1,2

THE HEAVENLY FATHER’S divine program was designed to keep the Truth hidden from the worldly-wise and those whose hearts were not in tune to the principles of truth and righteousness. However, they would be revealed to the Lord’s people who accept the wonderful teachings, and respond by making a full consecration to God during the present Gospel Age. “Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done.”—Ps. 78:3,4

TAUGHT IN PARABLES

Our Lord Jesus used parables and dark sayings to teach valuable lessons to his followers and those who are seeking the heavenly calling. In Luke’s gospel, it is recorded, “He [Jesus] said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.” (Luke 8:10) All others of the sin-sick world will receive their opportunity toward reconciliation with God during the future kingdom of life and truth that will be made available

to them under the establishment of Christ's future kingdom, that we believe is soon to come.

PARABLE OF THE SOWER

One of the important and valuable lessons which Jesus taught was the parable of the sower, and Luke recounts the lesson in his gospel. The Lord said, "A sower went out to sow his seed: and as he sowed, some fell by the way side; and it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it. And some fell upon a rock; and as soon as it was sprung up, it withered away, because it lacked moisture. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprang up with it, and choked it. And other fell on good ground, and sprang up, and bare fruit an hundredfold. And when he had said these things, he cried, He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."—Luke 8:5-8

During Jesus' earthly ministry, some of his faithful followers evidently surmised that his mission was the conversion of the world, even at that early time of the church's history. They therefore asked him, "Why speakest thou unto them [the multitude] in parables?" (Matt. 13:10) The Lord answered them, saying, "Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand."—vss. 12,13

Continuing, the Lord explains the inability of the multitude to understand his words, saying, "This people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them."—vss. 15-17

THE PARABLE'S MEANING

The Lord plainly states to his disciples the important point of his parable. He told them, "Now the parable is this: The

seed is the word of God. Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection. But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.”—Luke 8:11-15

SEED SOWN BY THE WAYSIDE

In this parable, the “seed” that is sown is the Word of God. The sowing of the seed began with our Lord Jesus and was continued by the apostles after Pentecost and the remainder of the present Gospel Age church. We observe, in this parable, that some of the seed falls by the wayside where it is trodden down and the fowls of the air devour it. The Lord explains that those by the wayside are they who hear the message of truth, but have the Word taken out of their hearts by Satan, lest they should believe and be saved. The seed which falls by the wayside to some extent enters the hearts of those who demonstrate some interest and appreciation for the Truth. As we know, Satan is a deceiver. (Rev. 12:9) He employs an array of means by which he endeavors to take away the precious Word of God from those who may have received it with lukewarm zeal or a passing interest. One of his most potent means, and most often employed, is by false teachers who often instill error, fear, and confusion where there would otherwise be confidence, peace, and understanding.

SEED LANDING ON STONY GROUND

Some of the seed fell upon ground that had little of the necessary nutrients to sustain it, or the right amount of moisture to nurture the new life that springs forth from the seed of truth. The Lord explains that this part of the lesson portrays those Christian people who are joyful upon hearing the Word of God and believe it. However, having no substantial

root they fall away in an hour of temptation. He said, "He that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but [en]dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended." (Matt. 13:20,21) The trials may come because of the Truth, and those who uphold the Word of God will inevitably be tested by a world full of unbelief.

The Apostle Paul made clear, "Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."—II Cor. 4:1-4

As they begin their Christian walk, these Christians fall prey to one of Satan's most insidious lies. It is the lie that says that it is reasonable to expect that the disciple of Christ will be protected from trials. The mature believer never forgets that the path to glory is only through much tribulation. We are reminded of this reality in the account of Paul and Barnabas when they passed through Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch. They strengthened the brethren, "Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." (Acts 14:22) In his second epistle to Timothy, Paul states, "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us." (II Tim. 2:12) In his epistle to the Romans, the apostle explains, "Not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope."—Rom. 5:3,4

Only those who are willing to suffer and die with the Master may expect to attain a place in Christ's future kingdom. The consecrated child of God must continue to allow the sanctifying effect of the Word of God to take ever deeper root in his heart, or a falling away will surely follow. Those who would

patiently endure the test are those who have sufficient good ground for the seed of truth to have become deeply rooted.

SOWN AMONG THORNS

Jesus also pointed to other of the sown seed that fell among thorns, which sprang up and choked it. He explained that this portrays those who have heard the Word of God, and may go forth with zeal and commitment in an effort to fulfill the Christian life they desire to follow. However, these soon allow themselves to become entangled in the riches, pleasures, and cares of this world. In due course, the sense in which they began their new Christian journey gradually becomes choked and dies, having fallen prey to another of Satan's insidious devices. As recorded by Matthew, we read, "He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful."—Matt. 13:22

We are not to understand that those who hear and embrace the wonderful Word of God are to abandon their daily obligations to family, friends, and their fellow man. On the contrary, those who would faithfully follow our dear Lord are cautioned that it would be a mark of infidelity if they were to use our calling in Christ Jesus as an excuse to evade that responsibility. When Paul wrote to Timothy, he told him, "If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel."—I Tim. 5:8

It is manifest that one cannot avoid altogether the cares of this world of imperfection. In his wisdom, our dear Lord was not overlooking that reality, but was exhorting those who would follow him to avoid the pitfall of allowing earthly concerns and ambitions to overwhelm their budding spiritual vitality. When writing his epistle to the brethren at Rome, the Apostle Paul exhorted them, "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." (Rom. 12:2) All who heed these admonitions should be aware of the need to detect the evidence of thorns in their consecrated life, and to take the measures necessary to control and eventually eradicate them.

Those who have made a consecration to our loving Heavenly Father must continually resist the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the Devil. These enticements are characterized by the Apostle Paul, who admonishes us, “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.” (Eph. 6:11) In his letter to the brethren at Ephesus, he continued by then identifying seven various elements of the armor. He explained, “We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.”—vss. 12-18

Those who neglect to do all that is advised by the apostle in the foregoing passage of scripture are those who will be vulnerable to the Devil’s wiles. They are not “holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.” (Titus 1:9) Their attempt to please the world demonstrates their loss of the holy fear of displeasing their Heavenly Father. “Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body.”—Matt. 10:28

SEED UPON GOOD GROUND

The Lord concludes his wonderful parable of the sower by pointing to the seed that falls upon what he refers to as “good ground.” He thus teaches, “On the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.” (Luke 8:15) He states that these hear God’s Word, ponder its teachings, and

then bring forth fruit with patience. Patience is the significant thought, and is the vital difference between the believers who constitute the good ground of the parable, and those merely professing believers he spoke of in the other categories of the parable.

Thus, the “stony ground” believers did not have sufficient depth in which to cultivate patience. They could not endure the tribulation that inevitably comes to all who endeavor to hold fast the Word of God. Others who were enticed by the pleasures of this world could not endure the perceived thorny privations of a life of sacrifice. On the other hand, throughout the present Gospel Age the “good ground” believers have endured with patience the various trials of a fully consecrated life.

MANKIND TO LEARN RIGHTEOUSNESS

The “good ground” believers in the Christ realize that, in due time, the whole human family will be required to consider the wonderful providence of a loving Heavenly Father as recorded by the Prophet Isaiah, who wrote, “With my soul have I desired thee in the night; yea, with my spirit within me will I seek thee early: for when thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.” —Isa. 26:9

At the time of his First Advent, the Master’s message of the kingdom of heaven was not intended to convert the multitudes to whom he spoke. It was only for those who had a “hearing ear” for the High Calling in Christ Jesus during the present age of sacrifice. Thus did the Apostle Paul encourage the consecrated during this present Gospel Age by saying, “Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.”—Heb. 2:1

THE APPOINTED TIME

The Prophet Habakkuk was moved by the Holy Spirit of God to write, “The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.” (Hab. 2:3) Prophecy reveals that the present Gospel Age has been the appointed time of waiting for the “vision” of Christ’s kingdom.

Many centuries later, the Apostle Paul pointed back to Habakkuk's prophecy and proclaimed that Christ Jesus was the vision, and that it would be his Second Advent for which his faithful followers would be patiently waiting. "Ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry." (Heb. 10:36,37) The apostle reveals that waiting for the Lord's Second Advent would prove to be a test of patience. He warned that this period of waiting would constitute a severe test of faith for many who were walking in the narrow way of sacrifice.

HOLDING FAST THE TRUTH

Paul wrote to encourage the brethren at Rome, and emphasized that it was the Heavenly Father who is the supreme example of patience. He told them, "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope. Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus." (Rom. 15:4,5) In his epistle to Titus, the apostle mentions a special characteristic that should mark every child of God. "Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers."—Titus 1:9

Through divine revelation, the Apostle Paul understood that the due time for the return of Christ and the gathering of his disciples unto him would be many centuries into the future from his day. The apostle proclaims: "How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities. For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me. And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure."—II Cor. 12:4-7

THE PROMISED INHERITANCE

In his gospel, John recorded some of our dear Lord's final words as his earthly ministry was drawing to a close. In his prayer to the Heavenly Father, Jesus spoke of his faithful followers, those who were of the "good ground" class and, therefore, well-grounded in the fundamental doctrines and wonderful promises of the Truth. He said, "For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. 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 hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me." —John 17:19-25

As the present Gospel Age comes to a close, let us strive with greater diligence to make our calling and election sure and inherit the long-promised blessings of the Christ, of which the worldly-wise remain unaware. "Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."—I Cor. 2:6-9

"Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."—Ps. 16:11 ■

CHAPTER 8

Gold Tried in the Fire

*“I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire,
that thou mayest be rich.”*
—Revelation 3:18

THROUGHOUT THE PRESENT Gospel Age our Heavenly Father has extended an invitation to a special class of Christians who would share in blessing the sin-sick and dying human family under the future administration of Christ’s glorious kingdom. In this lesson’s scripture, our Lord speaks of this distinct class of his faithful followers in a very special way, even as “gold tried in the fire.”

Through the writings of the revelator, our Lord makes clear the fact that after these faithful followers of our Lord Jesus have been called from the world, they must also be cleansed, purified, and conformed to his own image. To assist them in this endeavor, he will provide them with some very important spiritual gifts they will need to be faithful. He promises that they will be given “white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.”—Rev. 3:18

HIGHLY VALUED

Gold is the most valuable of all metals and is usually found in small quantities, thus making it very rare. It is the first metal that is mentioned in the Bible, and is associated with the name Pison, one of the four divisions of the river which

went out from the garden of Eden. The river symbolizes the human family, out of which a special class would be selected. From the scriptural record, we read, “A river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads. The name of the first is Pison: that is it which compasseth the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; And the gold of that land is good: there is bdellium and the onyx stone.”—Gen. 2:10-12

Gold is highly valued not only for its rarity, but also because it has long lasting durability and beauty. It was recognized as a measure of wealth and prominence in ancient times, even before Abraham’s name had been changed. “Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold.” (Gen. 13:2) Throughout the ages it has been highly sought after. “The rich man’s wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit.” (Prov. 18:11) The Scriptures foretell a time when this hoarded wealth will become useless, and the present world and its evil institutions will fall away. James wrote, “Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.”—James 5:1-3

Because of its color and luster, and resistance to oxidation and tarnishing, gold is especially useful for making jewelry and ornamentation of many kinds. “Thy cheeks are comely with rows of jewels, thy neck with chains of gold.” (Song of Sol. 1:10) Another property of gold is that it is more stable and unchanging than other metals, and this has made it useful as a standard medium of exchange and commerce among nations and people.

THE DIVINE NATURE

Because of its scarcity and great value, gold is used in the Scriptures to illustrate the spiritual inheritance of the bride of Christ on the highest of all planes of life—the divine nature. Our featured scripture is taken from the Lord’s message to the last of the seven churches of Revelation. The inspiring promise was, “To him that overcometh will I grant

to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.” (Rev. 3:21) The faithful bride class, also known as the New Creation will share the divine nature as members of “the Christ” and is shown seated on the messianic throne in the future heavenly kingdom. Jesus promised, “I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me.”—Luke 22:29

THE BRIDE OF CHRIST

In the Hebrew Old Testament types and shadows, Rebekah symbolizes the Lord’s bride. To illustrate this, she was given gifts of gold that pictured the wonderful promises of the Heavenly Father who was seeking a bride for his beloved Son, our Lord Jesus. She willingly left her father’s house to set out on an arduous journey that marked her commitment to meet her future husband, Isaac, who in turn represented our Lord Jesus. “It came to pass, as the camels had done drinking, that the man took a golden earring of half a shekel weight, and two bracelets for her hands [Rebekah’s] of ten shekels weight of gold.”—Gen. 24:22

In the Book of Psalms, there is an illustration of the future marriage ceremony where the bride of Christ is dressed in gold. Gold serves to enhance her spiritual reward to the divine plane of life. Concerning this most wonderful inheritance, the psalmist wrote, “Kings’ daughters were among thy honourable women: upon thy right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir.” (Ps. 45:9) The queen stood distinct from her companions, the other honorable women, because of her loyalty to the Lord who she was about to marry, and because her character had been endowed with the principles of truth and righteousness. From the scriptural record, we read, “Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre. Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.”—vss. 6,7

The reference to Ophir identifies a place renowned as a source of much gold of the very highest quality. Thus, “The king’s daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought unto the king in raiment

of needlework: the virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee.”—vss. 13,14

THE HEAVENLY CITY

When speaking of the future bride of Christ, our Lord Jesus proclaimed, “Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.” (Matt. 5:14) In his last message to the faithful members of the Christ, we are given a glimpse of the heavenly city. The revelator recorded, “I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” (Rev. 21:2) In symbolic language, Jesus described the adorned Christ in glory. “He carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal.”—vss. 10,11

Even as gold was associated with the heavenly bride of Christ, so also was the heavenly city seen as a divine institution. “The building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass.” (vs. 18) Each one of the city’s twelve foundations were garnished with beautiful stones (vss. 19,20), and the twelve gates with twelve pearls. “The twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.” (vs. 21) Thus does the city of God represent the glorified Christ that has been in preparation to share in the rule over the nations. The heavenly city will be the center of blessing for all the families of the earth under the administration of Christ’s glorious future kingdom.

GOSPEL AGE CALLING

We are now living during the closing years of this present Gospel Age, and the appointed time of our Lord’s promised return. It was to be a special time of trial and testing for those who responded to the heavenly calling in Christ Jesus. From the prophetic words of Malachi, we read, “Who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner’s fire, and like fullers’ soap: And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he

shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.”—Mal. 3:2,3

We see that the world’s old social order which has been established on selfishness and pride is passing away in preparation for Christ’s future kingdom. “These be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.” (Luke 21:22) As evidence for this upheaval among the nations, Luke recorded Jesus’ words, “There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.”—vss. 25-27

All around us today we see the prophesied “distress of nations, with perplexity,” and with no apparent solution or way of escape. Selfishness, hatred, pride, and the spirit of aggression have led to the creation of cruel and powerful tyrannies. Sin, corruption, and injustice have surely brought their awful consequences. Man now has the weapons to even destroy himself. However, we are assured by the wonderful promises of God that the human family will not be permitted to do so. The Scriptures teach that human selfishness would ultimately lead to self destruction if not restrained by divine power and intervention. Jesus spoke of this awful time and the great distress toward which the world is now moving. He said, “Except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for elect’s sake those days shall be shortened.”—Matt. 24:22

THE GROANING CREATION

The poor groaning human creation will be rescued from its own selfish and proud madness. All national and international problems will be solved under the administration of Christ’s future kingdom. We are promised that all unrighteousness will then be removed from the earth, and “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall

there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.”—Rev. 21:4,5

The closing years of this present Gospel Age are the culmination of two thousand years during which time the faithful followers of our Lord have accepted the invitation of the heavenly calling. “Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.”—Rev. 19:7-9

A TEST OF FAITH

The ending of this age is a time of special testing for the Lord’s people, and the faith of each member of the Christ is being refined, purified, and proven. John recorded our Lord’s words, when he proclaimed, “The great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?” (chap. 6:17) We are now witnesses of the rapidly approaching collapse of all present social institutions in the earth.

Jesus said, “So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away. And take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.”—Luke 21:31-36

FAITH AND WORKS

It has always been true that those who have accepted the heavenly calling to joint heirship with Christ will be thoroughly

tested. Each must stand fast in the faith of God's Holy Word. "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong." (I Cor. 16:13) If the proper degree of faith is developed in us, it will surely manifest itself by bearing fruit. Those who may have only a measure of faith have not progressed in the Truth by making it a living faith. Thus does the Apostle James ask, "What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him?" (James 2:14) "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works."—vss. 17,18

Our faith, and our whole being as individuals, is especially on trial now, and we are thus exhorted by our Lord, "Be thou faithful unto death." (Rev. 2:10) Faithfulness of each member of the Christ unto death means an inheritance with him in glory, and the wonderful promise to share with him in blessing all families of the earth. This is the grandest gift we could ever expect to receive and is worth striving to attain and to prepare ourselves for. Our Lord asks for our faithfulness. He desires to purge out of us everything in the nature of dross, including self-will and all the works of the flesh.

Although works are essential, works without faith will not enable us to stand fast in the Truth. "Wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?" (James 2:20) He whose life is not in harmony with his faith dishonors that faith, and that kind of faith is dead. James then wrote, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."—vss. 21-26

If Abraham and other faith heroes had merely discussed their faith with one another they would never have been

faith heroes, or have obtained a good report through faith. The Scriptures reveal that they walked in faith, and their works were in harmony with their faith. Thus was their faith made complete by their works. Our faith must also be alive, active, and working in us by love.

THE MARK OF LOVE

Development of the attribute of love must also be stressed, although it does not take the place of other important factors in the life of those who have accepted the Heavenly Calling. For example, love cannot take the place of doctrine, but it does guide us in the proper use of doctrine. Love cannot take the place of faith or activity in the Lord's name, but it is the only motive for faith and for service that is acceptable to God.

While we stand fast in one spirit, with one mind and cooperate with others of like precious faith, we are to love each other from the heart. We are to encourage one another to love and to good works, and to avoid every word and every act that might incite to misunderstanding or strife. These traits are of the flesh and of the Devil. Faith and love must go hand in hand. If we stand fast in the faith and are made alive by love, we are kept by the power of God.

The love of many may wax cold, but our love toward others, as we stand fast in the faith, must remain fervent even though it may be spurned by others. If we are abused or reviled we must see that we revile not in return. When we are persecuted let us never join the ranks of the persecutors. We need a strong faith, and an increasing measure of the loving spirit of holiness. This should be our sincere desire and earnest prayer. God's precious Word is the firm foundation for our faith, and ours must be a faith which works by love.

ENDURING FAITH

We must bear up under the trials and stand fast while our beloved Lord continues to refine, purify, and cleanse us, that we may offer unto him our acceptable sacrifice. It will mean taking up our cross daily and following him. "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us,

that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” (Titus 2:13,14) The beloved refiner is graciously working upon us, and we are to submit willingly to his refining. We all need refining and cleansing because of the dross that is inherent in our earthen, fleshly vessel in which our spiritual treasure resides, even as gold tried in the fire.

The psalmist has expressed, “Lord, hear my voice: let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications. If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared. I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope.”—Ps. 130:2-5

Throughout our pilgrim journey, we could not possibly have any standing before our Heavenly Father without the covering robe of Christ’s righteousness. “I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.”—Isa. 61:10

In his letter to the brethren at Rome, the Apostle Paul wrote, “To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life.” (Rom. 2:7) To the church at Galatia, he said, “Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.” (Gal. 6:9) Our Lord will never leave us nor forsake us, and he lovingly desires that we be conformed to his likeness and that we reflect his image. It is for us to bear up courageously under his refining and cleansing.

We must not become “weary in well doing,” and we must remember that our test is not one simply of well doing, but “patient continuance in well doing.” Then keeping on the “whole armour of God” that we may be able to stand in this “evil day.”—Eph. 6:13

MORE PRECIOUS THAN GOLD

The Apostle Peter wrote, “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you.” (I Pet. 4:12) The apostle

also draws our attention to the elect class, symbolized by gold, that is being especially tried at the end of this present Gospel Age. Concerning the Christ, he further explained their special calling, "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied."—I Pet. 1:2

The apostle continues, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations."—vss. 3-6

Peter speaks of the Christ as gold tried in the fire, "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."—vs. 7

We are to remember, "He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold."—Job 23:10

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CHAPTER 9

Reviving the Contrite

“To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.”

—Isaiah 66:2

THE PROPHET ISAIAH records the ultimate purpose our Heavenly Father has in which he seeks a bride for his beloved Son, and the prospect of their sharing with him in his future kingdom. He makes clear the type of individual he is looking for during this present Gospel Age. They must first of all possess a disposition that is marked by having a “poor” and “contrite spirit.” God has been looking for those who could be molded and fashioned to his eternal will and purpose. They must also love and appreciate his Holy Word of truth.

THE BRUISED

The word “contrite” has been translated from the Old Testament Hebrew word which means “to bruise, crush or oppress.” It thus fittingly points to the individual whose heart is repentant in respect to his own shortcomings and acknowledges the lofty standards of the Most High God. Those who are contrite realize their own littleness, unworthiness and imperfection, and are emptied of self-confidence and self-esteem. These specially called ones of God are thus more readily submissive to the direction of the divine will in their lives instead of their own. A heart that is contrite also has a quiet and deep sense of sorrow for that which is not in harmony with the standards of truth and righteousness.

God's promise is that he will revive the poor and contrite in both their spirit and their hearts. To such he is ever near to assist them in their walk in newness of life.

THE HUMBLE MINDED

The word "poor" in this scripture relates to those who are humble-minded, lowly in spirit, and afflicted. Again, the prophet wrote, "Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."—Isa. 57:15

The great God of the universe inhabits eternity and is the one from whom all life has come and from whom all blessings flow. Yet, his ever watchful eye is directed toward those whom he has called from a sin-sick world and invited to share with our Lord Jesus in his future kingdom of truth and life for the benefit and blessing of his human creation. They are the poor and contrite ones of this world. They love our Heavenly Father and eagerly search his wonderful promises of life as they have been recorded in his precious Word—the Bible.

REFRESHING

The word "revived" indicates the giving of new breath and life to the Lord's people. The Holy Spirit of God is designed to restore, refresh, and satisfy the very life of the New Creature in Christ Jesus. It applies to those whose hearts are repentant, in total harmony and submissive to the divine will.

The prophet wrote, "Behold, the Lord GOD will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." (Isa. 40:10,11) Our Heavenly Father's beloved Son—our Lord Jesus—is the "arm" of God in carrying out his will and purpose. He is also the great "shepherd" who will feed his Father's little flock with spiritual food and sustenance and guide them in the narrow way. During this present Gospel Age, he is calling his sheep

together into one fold, and gently leading them in their Christian journey.

Isaiah also said that God would give strength to the faint of heart. “Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”—Isa. 40:28-31

The promise that God would revive his poor and contrite people was also addressed by the Psalmist David. He wrote, “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.” (Ps. 51:10-12) Exercising the right spirit is to realize the influence that the mind has over our bodies. The renewing of our minds is to refresh the thought process as New Creatures in Christ Jesus.

David then said, “O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise. For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build thou the walls of Jerusalem. Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar.” (vss. 15-19) The “sacrifices of righteousness” are a broken and contrite heart, and one that is rich in holiness and fragrant in grace.

GOD’S GRANDEST BLESSING

When our Lord Jesus humbly presented himself to his Heavenly Father in total consecration to the doing of his will, he was baptized in the River Jordan by John the Baptist, and Matthew has recorded the event. (Matt. 3:13-17) After he had been lowered into the water, we read, “Jesus, when he

was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”—vss. 16,17

Having received the Holy Spirit from on high, and hearing his Father’s wonderful words, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased,” he was thus assured of his acceptance and the Father’s loving care on his behalf. Afterward, he was in the wilderness where he fasted for forty days and nights and was tempted by Satan the devil. “Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.”—Matt. 4:11

A GREAT LIGHT

From the scriptural account, we read, “Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee; And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up. From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”—vss. 12-17

During our Lord’s earthly sojourn, he taught his faithful disciples by way of symbols and prophetic language. Early in his ministry, and after an exhaustive day of ministering to the multitudes, Jesus retired with his disciples to a place where he could be alone with them. In his first message to them, he spoke of the lowly and contrite ones who would respond to his teachings. Matthew recorded the event in his gospel, and it confirms the ultimate plan and purpose of the Heavenly Father to revive the humble and contrite.

WONDERFUL WORDS OF LIFE

We read, “Seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: And

he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt. 5:1-3) These wonderful words of life concerned the disciples’ everlasting welfare. They were thus prospective members of the future “kingdom of heaven,” and Jesus emphasized the disposition that would help them make their calling and election sure and how they could obtain the great prize of their High Calling. The “poor in spirit” will readily submit themselves to the divine will and discipline of an all-wise and loving Heavenly Father.

Jesus used the word “blessed” to point to the permanent comfort and joy that the consecrated Christian experiences when he has attained a character that is in harmony with our loving Heavenly Father. It is the “blessed hope” of our High Calling in Christ Jesus of which Paul spoke in his letter to Titus. “The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.”—Titus 2:11-13

HE COMFORTS THE MOURNERS

Jesus then told his disciples, “Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.” (Matt. 5:4) He was addressing those who are mourning and are especially grieved in spirit. To “comfort” suggests solace, and to be consoled or encouraged. It applies to those who possess a sympathetic nature and who are touched with pity for the sorrow and pain of others.

This distinguishing mark of character especially identifies our Lord Jesus. “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.”—Isa. 53:3-5

Jesus bore our grief and carried our sorrows. This endearing mark of character points to the attitude of heart and mind that he displayed at the tomb of Lazarus. He wept on that occasion because of his deep and sympathetic character. As we walk in newness of life in the narrow way let us also strive to be more like him. May we be comforted by the words of Paul, who wrote, “Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ. And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer: or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation.”—II Cor. 1:3-6

PROMISES TO THE MEEK

Jesus brought to his disciples’ attention the importance of possessing a meek spirit. He said, “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.” (Matt. 5:5) This characteristic points to a mildness of disposition and the spirit of Christian gentleness. It is not easily provoked or irritated, and forebears injury or annoyance. The Master is our best example and we do well to be encouraged by him, who said, “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.”—Matt. 11:29

A meek and gentle spirit is more easily taught, and will willingly submit to the will of God. “Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy? But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”—James 4:5-7

Jesus said that the meek would inherit the earth. This promise will take place after the present Gospel Age and the great Time of Trouble will have ended, and Christ’s kingdom is established. The psalmist wrote, “Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the

earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.”—Ps. 2:1-8

FILLED WITH THE SPIRIT

Another of our Lord Jesus’ lessons is, “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.” (Matt. 5:6) This suggests a humble disposition that longs for truth and righteousness, and to be taught of God. It is centered around a growing faith and desire to please our loving Heavenly Father. “As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?” (Ps. 42:1,2) They will surely “be filled” as promised by the Master. “Strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”—Heb. 5:14

OBTAINING MERCY

Another of the traits most desirable for the Lord’s people to attain is mercy. Being merciful is a Christlike principle, and Jesus said, “Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.” (Matt. 5:7) This applies to those who recognize their own need of God’s mercy in their lives. God will extend his mercy toward us in proportion to our willingness to be merciful and more generous to others. The heart that is more generous and loving is therefore living closer to God and his standards of righteousness.

HOPE FOR THE PURE

None of the Lord’s people can ever hope to obtain absolute perfection of conduct, thought or word, but our loving Father

looks on the intention of the heart. Those who have honest and pure hearts filled with the spirit of love and holiness are especially desirable to the Heavenly Father. Thus our Lord Jesus taught, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."—Matt. 5:8

The promise is that those who possess this mark of Christian character will see God. Thus do we read, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."—I John 3:1-3

CHILDREN OF GOD

Jesus was surely a man of peace, and at the beginning of his earthly ministry he taught his disciples, "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God." (Matt. 5:9) At the conclusion of his Father's work and as he was about to leave his followers, he said, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."—John 14:27

The peacemakers will be called the "children of God." They are called from a sin-sick world and led by the Holy Spirit of God for their perfecting in righteousness. "Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." (Rom. 8:12-14) "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord."—Heb. 12:14

TESTING NECESSARY

When Jesus was finishing his lesson he added, "Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when

men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”—Matt. 5:10-12

Jesus was reviled that he might demonstrate his loyalty to God and the principles of truth and righteousness. We should consider it a privilege to share in his sufferings. “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.”—I Pet. 4:12-14

STRONG IN THE LORD

When writing to the brethren at Ephesus, the Apostle Paul encouraged them to greater faithfulness. He said, “Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free. And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him. Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.—Eph. 6:5-10

NOT MANY WISE OR NOBLE

The ultimate plan of reconciliation for the sin-sick human family appears foolish to the minds of men. He said, “The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called.”—I Cor. 1:25,26

During this present Gospel Age, God is seeking those who are insignificant from the world's standpoint—the meek and humble who can learn from him and have their minds transformed to the pattern of his beloved Son. James said, “Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?”—James 2:5

THE WEAK CONFUND THE WISE

In his letter to the church at Corinth, Paul further proclaimed, “God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.”—I Cor. 1:27-31

The power of truth confounds the worldly-wise in the hands of God's weakest people. He thus hinders the pride and vainglory of men. “We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised.” (chap. 4:10) God's consecrated children who are striving to make their calling and election sure are counted as fools for Christ's sake.

Those who are contrite and of humble disposition, will share with our Lord Jesus in blessing all the families of the earth in Christ's future kingdom. “I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.”—Rom. 12:3 ■

CHAPTER 10

Our Heavenly Shepherd

*“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.”
—Psalm 23:1*

OUR ALL-WISE AND loving Heavenly Father is the author of salvation and is the great Heavenly Shepherd over his sheep. “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” (Luke 12:32) During this present Gospel Age, our Lord Jesus is the shepherd to the little flock of his faithful followers. The significance of the special relationship between the Father and his Son is addressed by the Prophet Micah. He wrote, “He shall stand and feed in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God; and they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth.”—Mic. 5:4

A SHEPHERD’S WORK

Shepherds were known to tend their flocks of both sheep and goats since the early days of human creation. For example, we learn from the scriptural account that Adam’s son, Abel, was a shepherd. (Gen. 4:2) Oftentimes, several shepherds would pen their animals together in one sheepfold to give them protection for the night, while a doorkeeper watched over them. When morning came, the shepherds would call to their flocks, and only their own sheep would respond to them. The shepherd would then lead his particular flock to pasture. He not only pointed the way for his sheep to follow him, but also to make sure that it was practicable and safe.

He thus taught them not to stray away. Occasionally, however, it was necessary to remind them of his presence with them.

DAVID IS ANOINTED

The name David means “beloved” and occurs hundreds of times in the Scriptures. In each case, the reference points to but one individual, the second king of Israel. We are first introduced to him while he was tending his father’s sheep in a field near Bethlehem. Samuel had been sent by God to the home of Jesse to anoint one of his sons to be the future king.

From the scriptural record, we read, “Jesse made seven of his sons to pass before Samuel. And Samuel said unto Jesse, The LORD hath not chosen these. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Are here all thy children? And he said, There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep. And Samuel said unto Jesse, Send and fetch him: for we will not sit down till he come hither. And he sent, and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to. And the LORD said, Arise, anoint him: for this is he. Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the midst of his brethren: and the spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward.”—I Sam. 16:10-13

THE ANTITYPICAL DAVID

Many centuries later our attention is again drawn to a field near Bethlehem and the events surrounding the birth of our Lord Jesus—the antitypical David. “There were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, 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. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”—Luke 2:8-14

David thus serves as a type, or illustration, of our Lord Jesus, the son of David. (Matt. 1:1) The shepherd boy was also a musician, poet, prophet, and king. As a soldier he was known for his great courage and endurance, and yet was humble enough to acknowledge his mistakes and repent of his sins. He was a man capable of tender compassion and mercy, and a lover of truth and righteousness. He had great trust, confidence, and love for the Heavenly Father.

DAVID'S PSALM

The psalmist spent his early years as a shepherd, and this had prepared him for the great tasks that lay ahead as he endeavored to know and serve God. He would be forced to deal with the terrible wrath of King Saul, and to bring an end to the reproaches of Goliath whom he slew with a pebble thrown by his slingshot.

As the author of this beautiful psalm, we are provided with much evidence that he was truly a devout man of God, and was assured of the Heavenly Father's loving care on his behalf, even as a shepherd. He used various symbols to illustrate his thoughts, and the words of this inspiring psalm have been a source of blessing to many of the Lord's faithful people throughout the ages. We will consider some of the highlights of the psalm.

He wrote, "He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever."—Ps. 23:2-6

I SHALL NOT WANT

In our featured text, Psalm 23:1, David said "I shall not want." In his own experience as a servant of God, and in his observation of the manner in which divine care had been

manifested toward others, he realized that God has never failed to carry out that which he had promised.

What was true in the life of David is equally true in our experience today. The symbols and lessons of this psalm aptly apply to the Heavenly Father's "little flock" during this present Gospel Age. God's goodness in providing all the needs of his people during this time is manifest more particularly along spiritual lines, and to those who are living by faith. They have set their affections on things above rather than on the things of the earth, and can verify God's care as a shepherd. Having thus affirmed God's goodness and mercy, David then begins to point out some of the many and various ways in which the Lord's care is manifest.

THE REST OF FAITH

In this psalm, verse 2, David says that God has invited him to "lie down in green pastures." This suggests a special rest of faith that the Lord's consecrated people during this present Gospel Age enjoy. Our attention is thus drawn to the spiritual food and refreshment which they receive from our Lord's abundant providence. We have been bountifully blessed with the "still waters [waters of quietness, *Marginal Translation*]." These "waters of quietness" flow in a deep and inexhaustible stream of refreshment, and provide water we can drink with ease and without measure. They are readily available for all who have ears to hear and recognize the shepherd's voice calling them to follow him.

This represents the deep truths that have been made available to us by our returned Lord and Savior during the closing decades of this age of sacrifice. These waters have been cleared of the muddy traditions and ignorance of the past. The pastures of truth are lush and green for all those who are faithful in following the shepherd whithersoever he leads.

One of the special blessings of the Truth that we share is the knowledge that the present Time of Trouble and distress of nations is under control of the mighty hand of our Heavenly Father. We can trust his wisdom and truly "lie down" in these green pastures with peace of heart and mind. We thus rest as we partake of the nourishing spiritual food which our heavenly shepherd has provided for us.

OUR SOUL IS RESTORED

The psalmist's expression—"he restoreth my soul" in verse 3—points to the saving provisions of God's marvelous grace on our behalf. The robe of righteousness now covers our sins, and we have been justified. We are led in the paths of righteousness because we are the Lord's people and we abide in the merit of Jesus' blood.

Because of our inherited imperfections of the flesh, we may fail at times to give proper attention to the shepherd's voice and therefore expose ourselves to danger. However, we are promised that divine mercy will restore us to safety if we listen for his voice and follow him. We need divine wisdom in order to walk in the right way. James explains, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord."—James 1:5-7

We must be willing to obtain divine wisdom through our Heavenly Father's appointed method which is his inspired Word. It is through the Word of truth that the great shepherd leads us, and it is through the Word that we hear his voice calling us to follow him.

PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

The heavenly shepherd leads his people "in the paths of righteousness." However, the path of the righteous is often rugged and very difficult. It is the narrow way of sacrifice. If we faithfully walk in this narrow way to the end of our consecrated life in Christ Jesus, we will receive the promised great reward. The revelator recorded our Lord's wonderful promise. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."—Rev. 2:10

The faithful will have the privilege of living and reigning as "The Christ" in his glorious future heavenly kingdom. We are strengthened by the Apostle Paul, who wrote, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And 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 together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”—Rom. 8:16-18

IN THE VALLEY OF DEATH

When David spoke of walking “through the valley of the shadow of death” in verse 4, we are reminded of the valley of sin and death and the reality of our journey through life as members of the fallen and sin-sick human family. The psalmist also said that he would fear no evil because our Heavenly Shepherd is always with us.

He cites an extreme condition of danger and hardship through which a shepherd sometimes finds it necessary to lead his sheep. This illustrates similar difficulties in the lives of the consecrated people of God. However, they need not fear evil because the Good Shepherd has promised to be with them.

THE ROD AND STAFF

In the psalmist’s day, a rod oftentimes represented a mark of prestige and authority. A rod, or staff, was used for many purposes including security, protection, support, or punishment. In the shepherd’s case, the “rod and staff” served an important function in his everyday life and role as a shepherd to the flock. They were very useful to him as he led and directed his sheep on their way to pasture. They could be used for protection, and if one of his little ones fell into a hole or crevice he could use the crook of his staff to pull it to safety. Later, when they were grazing, he no doubt found comfort when leaning on his staff to watch over them.

In this psalm, David said he feared no evil, and spoke specifically of the rod and staff. He said they were a special comfort to him as he walked through the valley of the shadow of death. The rod and staff are also significant of our Heavenly Father’s care and divine providence in caring for the little flock of his people during this present Gospel Age. The rod suggests his loving discipline and correction to keep us in the right path so that we do not stray. This is necessary for our development as New Creatures in Christ Jesus. The staff represents his providential care and consolation. He

promises to continually guide, protect, and comfort us during our walk in newness of life.

SPIRITUAL FOOD

The “table” to which the psalmist refers in verse 5, points to spiritual food. The bountiful meat in due season has especially blessed the Lord’s people who have lived during the closing years of this present Gospel Age. This special nourishment coincides with our Lord’s promised Second Presence. He said, “Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.” (Luke 12:37) The revelator also recorded the Master’s promise, in which he said, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”—Rev. 3:20

This table of spiritual food has been set before the Lord’s people “in the presence of his enemies”—Satan the devil, the great enemy of “The Christ.” Yet, we continue to receive the Holy Spirit of truth. The psalmist said, “Thou anointest my head with oil,” and “my cup runneth over.”

GOODNESS AND MERCY

David reminds us in verse 6 that God has promised his little flock that his “goodness and mercy” would follow them throughout their consecrated walk. These two principles of our loving Father’s grace are closely related although their operation may be carried out along different lines. In the use of these two expressions in the last verse of the psalm, he has successfully summed up all of the many ways that our Heavenly Shepherd has manifested his goodness and mercy to his little flock of sheep that are portrayed throughout this inspiring psalm.

Our greatest desire and hope is to be faithful to our heavenly calling. In doing so, we may dwell in the heavenly house of the Lord forever. He has promised to be our shepherd until the end of our consecrated walk. David also wrote, “The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down:

for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand. I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.”—Ps. 37:23-25

THE SHEPHERD COMES TO EARTH

When our Lord came to earth to save mankind he knew the sheep were scattered. “Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.”—Matt. 9:35,36

During his ministry, he taught special lessons in connection with the shepherd and his sheep. In one of his parables, he addressed this relationship, and said, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers.”—John 10:1-5

The Master then proceeded to explain the deeper meaning and significance of his lesson. From the scriptural record, we again read, “This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them. Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.”—vss. 6-11

ACCORDING TO HIS PURPOSE

In his letter to the brethren at Rome, the Apostle Paul also gives assurance of divine care in the lives of the consecrated people of God. He said, “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?”—Rom. 8:28-31

THE “ALL THINGS”

No one who has responded to the heavenly calling in Christ Jesus has been more faithful in following the heavenly shepherd than was the Apostle Paul. He acknowledges, “I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”—Phil. 4:12,13

This reference indicates that the apostle did not always have sufficient food and raiment, and in some cases he did not always have a proper place to lay his head. From this standpoint, Paul’s experiences were more like those of Jesus, but as a New Creature in Christ Jesus he could affirm that all of his spiritual needs were supplied. The apostle believed this was consistent with the terms of his consecration, and could say, “For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”—II Cor. 4:16-18

THE OUTWARD AND INNER MAN

The outward man of flesh is destined to perish and end in the grave. However, Paul was glad to share in the suffering

of the Christ. He understood that the inward man was a New Creature and was begotten in Christ Jesus by the Holy Spirit and through the Word of God. This inward man was being renewed, nourished, and built up by the spiritual food that was always abundantly supplied to him by the Heavenly Shepherd. “If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister; Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body’s sake, which is the church.”—Col. 1:23,24

THE SHEPHERD GATHERS THE SHEEP

During his earthly ministry, Jesus taught his faithful followers the mystery of the church’s heavenly calling and prepared them for the long centuries that would intervene before he would return to gather them together at the end of this present Gospel Age.

The Apostle Paul concludes by saying, “Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”—Heb. 13:20,21 ■

CHAPTER 11

The Significance of Baptism

*“I have a baptism to be baptized with;
and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!”
—Luke 12:50*

THESE WORDS WERE spoken by our Lord Jesus during his earthly ministry as recorded by Luke, the historian. They emphasize the total commitment, dedication, sacrifice, and zeal that would mark his baptism on behalf of the sin-sick and dying human family. His was the most important life that was ever lived, and through him we learn the true meaning and significance of baptism. It is a fundamental doctrine and one of the most important aspects of our walk of faith with him in newness of life.

BAPTISM

The word “baptism” is only found in the New Testament. It is derived from a Greek word which means “to whelm,” or “to completely cover,” with water. The Master taught us that being immersed in water symbolizes the giving of one’s life to the Heavenly Father in complete consecration. He promised that his true followers were also soon to be blessed with the spirit of enlightenment and understanding because of their commitment. He explained, “John baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”—Acts 1:5, *New American Standard Bible*

“STRAITENED”

In our featured scripture, Jesus used the word “straitened” which in other translations of the Bible has been rendered “pressed, pained or distressed.” It points to the very narrow and difficult way of his sacrificial life and ministry. Our Lord had come to earth to die for the sins of mankind, and he could not deviate from the Heavenly Father’s ultimate plan and purpose for his sin-sick and dying human creation. The Master was pressed on every side in his dedication to fulfill the will of his Father. He was thus restricted, limited, and confined to the fulfillment of that purpose.

The same word has been translated “pressed” when describing the Apostle Paul’s ministry. We read, “When Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ.” (Acts 18:5) The word “strait” was also used by Paul when writing to the church at Philippi. He told them, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.”—Phil. 1:21-24

On another occasion, Jesus used a similar word “strait” which means “narrow” and emphasizes the narrow way of the Christ. He said, “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”—Matt. 7:13,14

THE IMMERSER

The scriptural account of Jesus’ baptism was recorded in three of the gospels. These accounts were recorded in Matthew 3:13-17, Mark 1:9-11, and Luke 3:21,22. Matthew has included more detail of the event, and we thus turn to his gospel. We read, “Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness.

Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”—Matt. 3:13-17

The sacred record indicates that John objected to carrying out Jesus’ command to be baptized by him. John recognized our Lord’s true distinction and prominence as the foretold Messiah and he felt unworthy to baptize the Lord from heaven. Years later, when speaking of Jesus, the Apostle Paul pointed out this distinction. He said, “For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens.”—Heb. 7:26

SYMBOLIC

Water baptism was a symbol of Jesus’ consecration unto death. Paul explained, “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”—Rom. 6:3-11

A HIGHER PRIESTHOOD

Jesus fulfilled the requirements of the priesthood when he became thirty years of age, which was the legal age that a priest could offer sacrifice. “From thirty years old and upward even unto fifty years old, every one that came to do

the service of the ministry, and the service of the burden in the tabernacle of the congregation.” (Num. 4:47) The Psalmist David later wrote concerning our Lord Jesus who would be a high priest of a greater priesthood. Therefore, “Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.”—Ps. 40:6-8

A VOICE FROM HEAVEN

When Jesus was raised up from the water it symbolized his future resurrection from death. The heavens then being opened to him points to the higher spiritual truths that were opened to his understanding. As an emblem of holy peace and salvation, the dove was an outward representation of God’s marvelous power as it descended upon him. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” (I Cor. 2:14) The Heavenly Father responded to the Master by imparting his Holy Spirit upon his beloved Son.

From the account, we thus read, “Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”—Matt. 3:16,17

SACRIFICIAL DEATH

When Jesus was immersed by John the Baptist, it was merely a symbol of his sacrificial life and death. The reality of his new life was shown by a favor that was later asked of him. We read, “Then came to him the mother of Zebedee’s children with her sons, worshipping him, and desiring a certain thing of him. And he said unto her, What wilt thou? She saith unto him, Grant that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, and the other on the left, in thy kingdom.” (Matt. 20:20,21) Turning to Mark’s account, Jesus’ question concerning his baptism is more clearly stated.

“Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? And they said unto him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized: But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared.”—Mark 10:38-40

Thus did Jesus reveal the true nature of his baptism, which at that time had not yet been completed in death. His baptism was a symbol of his burial into sacrificial death, a burial so complete that it ended in the grave. His faithful followers are invited to participate with him in his sacrificial death, which, when faithful, will lead to life on the very highest of all spiritual planes.

Jesus expressed this matter further in a statement he made to Peter. “Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.”—Matt. 16:24-27

The Master explained this to Peter in response to his suggestion that Jesus was making a mistake in going to Jerusalem where he would expose himself to the danger of being arrested and put to death. His answer shows that, because he had entered into a covenant with God which called for the sacrifice of his life, any drawing back would mean the loss of eternal life because of unfaithfulness. He knew that being faithful to his covenant of sacrifice unto death would mean a raising up to newness of life, even to the divine nature in the first resurrection.

FORESHADOWS

There are many situations and experiences in the Bible that serve as types and illustrations of future events. One of

these is the story of Noah and his family. They were brought through the waters of the flood that symbolizes baptism.

The Apostle Peter wrote, “Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ: Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.”—I Pet. 3:18-22

Peter also spoke of the first world that was destroyed, “Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished.” (II Pet. 3:6) The whole human family was threatened with death by the coming flood waters. However, God warned Noah of the danger, and revealed to him that the way of escape was by means of an ark. Noah obeyed the voice of God, built the ark and entered into it before the waters descended. They were thus saved and brought through to life in the new world.

NOAH’S OBEDIENCE

The true spirit of consecration to do the will of God is thus shown in the readiness of Noah to build the ark and bring all of the animals into it. He also preached righteousness to the unrepentant people of his day. He and his family put their trust in God, and by obeying his instructions they placed their lives wholly in his hands.

The flood waters came as foretold and brought death and destruction to all human flesh, except to Noah and his family. They had passed through the deluge safely. It was a severe experience but, because of their obedience to God’s will, they were brought through the deluge alive and were then used by God to begin a new world.

The Apostle Peter said that the eight people who were safely in the ark had been “saved by water.” He then said

that this was a “like figure” of the manner in which baptism now saves us “by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” The baptism by which we are saved through the resurrection of Jesus Christ is not accomplished by our being merely immersed in water, but by our baptism into his sacrificial death.

The apostle put the matter in proper perspective, when he proclaimed, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.”—I Pet. 1:3-7

Jesus voluntarily gave his life in sacrifice, but God’s promises were made sure and he raised him from the dead. His resurrection inspires in us a hope of life because it gives evidence that if we lay down our lives in conformity to God’s will, he also will fulfill his promises to us. We can trust him that we, too, will be raised up to joint heirship with the Master. This is the real baptism into death, and the subsequent raising up to life in Christ is illustrated by the experience of Noah and his family in being brought safely through the waters of the flood.

THE CLOUD AND SEA

Another illustration of Christian baptism is symbolized by the typical baptism of Moses and the Israelites in the cloud and in the sea. When writing to the brethren at Corinth, the Apostle Paul spoke of this, and said, “Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the

same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.”—I Cor. 10:1-4

The scriptural account shows that the whole nation of Israel became dedicated to God through their leader Moses. They agreed to follow his leadership and join him on an unknown journey. This indicated their acceptance of the will of God as it was to be shown to them through his representative Moses and his leadership on their behalf. Their spirit of consecration was thus confirmed. The firstborn of Israel were in danger of death, but were delivered through the instructions given to them by God.

The entire nation risked their lives by putting themselves in the hands of Moses. The possibility of death became very real when they later stood facing the Red Sea, and with the Egyptian army bringing up the rear determined to capture them and return them to Egypt. However, God gave instructions to his representative. “Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace. And the LORD said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward.”—Exod. 14:13-15

The marvelous power of the Heavenly Father was truly manifest to the people. “The angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night.” (vss. 19,20) The sea was divided by the hand of God, the cloud descended upon them, and they passed safely through the waters.

The scriptural record reads, “The children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left. Thus the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore.

And Israel saw that great work which the LORD did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD, and his servant Moses.”—Exod. 14:29-31

CHRIST OVER HIS OWN HOUSE

The Apostle Paul makes clear the fact that Moses served as an illustration of our Lord Jesus who will deliver mankind from death under the administration of his future kingdom. Israel represents the whole world of mankind that will be delivered at that time. “Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus; Who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house. For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house. For every house is builded by some man; but he that built all things is God. And Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after; But Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.”—Heb. 3:1-6

Although all individual Israelites did not enter into a complete dedication of themselves to the Lord, it does not take away from the true significance of the illustration. God was dealing with his people as a nation, and they came under the terms of the original consecration and baptism established at that early time. When John introduced our Lord Jesus, he was also preaching the remission of sin to the Jews and to bring individuals back into harmony with their original dedication.

A NEW COVENANT

Through the Prophet Jeremiah, God directed his people to a New Covenant arrangement that he was preparing for them. “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they

brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; 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

DELIVERED FROM DEATH

Symbolically, the children of Israel had followed Moses into the waters of death, and in accordance with the instructions he had received from the Heavenly Father. However, because of their obedience to him they were delivered from death and restored to life and favor with God. Thus was the whole nation together with their leader baptized. First, there was the total surrender of Moses to God, and later of the Israelites as a nation, to do the will of God. After having demonstrated their readiness to follow the Lord, they were then symbolically immersed in the sea and in the cloud.

A SONG OF DELIVERANCE

A wonderful song of deliverance was sung by all the people following their harrowing experiences. “Then sang Moses and the children of Israel this song unto the LORD, and spake, saying, I will sing unto the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously: the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea. The LORD is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father’s God, and I will exalt him.”—Exod. 15:1,2

Throughout the present Gospel Age, our Heavenly Father has invited faithful followers of Jesus who have symbolized their consecration to him by water immersion. The inspiring words of the Master in our featured scripture will become ever more meaningful when the baptism of the Christ will also have been accomplished. “I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!”—Luke 12:50

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CHAPTER 12

The High and Holy Place

*“Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity,
whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place,
with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit,
to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive
the heart of the contrite ones.”*

—Isaiah 57:15

OUR FINITE HUMAN minds can barely grasp the fact that at one time our Heavenly Father existed all alone in the vast realm of space. This was long before there were any stars or the sun, and before there had been any spiritual or material creation. Neither can we fully comprehend the concept of eternity, and the fact that our loving Heavenly Father had no beginning and will never have an end.

IMMORTALITY

God possesses immortality—the very highest form of all life, and intelligence that exceeds all others. The basic meaning of the word immortality is deathlessness. It is perpetual and self-existent. In Paul’s letter to Timothy, he wrote, “Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.” (I Tim. 1:17) From God comes the source of all life. The psalmist said, “With thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light.”—Ps. 36:9

From God’s bountiful treasure-house of truth it is recorded, “Abraham planted a grove in Beer-sheba, and called there on

the name of the LORD, the everlasting God.” (Gen. 21:33) Further we read, “The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.”—Deut. 33:27

Our loving Heavenly Father is the eternal “I AM” as written in the second book of Moses. “God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.” (Exod. 3:14) We further read, “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.”—Ps. 90:2

THE GIFT OF IMMORTALITY

Our Lord Jesus did not possess immortality before his death and resurrection. He became the first created being to be given immortality, and it was received by him as a reward for his faithfulness even unto death. He had carried out the most important and central feature of his Father’s plan and purpose for the reconciliation of the human family.

This fact is explained in the words of the Apostle Paul, who said, “Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him.” (Rom. 6:9) The revelator also recorded the words of God, saying, “When I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell [the grave] and of death.”—Rev. 1:17,18

THE MYSTERY OF GOD’S WILL

The wonderful plan and purpose of God includes his desire to have a divine family. This invitation to a select few is a mystery to the worldly-wise. When speaking of this mystery that has been hidden for centuries, the Apostle Paul said, “Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.”—Eph. 1:8-10

In his letter to the church at Ephesus, the apostle spoke about the eternal purpose and hidden mystery of God. He said, "To make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord."—Eph. 3:9-11

GOD'S ETERNAL PURPOSE

Our Lord Jesus died for the sins of the entire human family to be testified to all in due time. He is the main character in the Heavenly Father's eternal purpose for the world's future reconciliation. "All that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." (Rev. 13:8) The Master also had to be tested as explained by the Apostle Paul. "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him." (Heb. 5:8,9) "But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."—Phil. 2:7-11

THE FAMILY OF GOD

The Heavenly Father desires to have a family on the same divine plane of life as he has. This new family will be immortal beings endowed with the highest of all mental resources, and with whom he can have spiritual fellowship in the most complete sense. Special emphasis is given concerning the mystery of God, and the fact that the faithful followers of Jesus will be brought together as body members in the divine

family. The bride of Christ will thus share in the special and intimate family of God's marvelous and eternal purpose.

The outworking of this ultimate plan will reveal the manifold wisdom of our loving Heavenly Father, and will demonstrate throughout all eternity the beauty and wisdom of his great love and tender care. All beings on all planes of life will come to appreciate the full meaning of his glorious name as once revealed to his servant Moses. It is again recorded, "The LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth."—Exod. 34:5,6

THE DIVINE SECRET

The calling to the heavenly nature has gone forth to a little flock of Jesus' faithful followers throughout the long centuries of this present Gospel Age. "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." (Luke 12:32) The world of mankind has not heard this call. The Apostle Paul wrote, "Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory."—I Cor. 2:6,7

The heavenly call continues to be a mystery to the world and to the worldly-wise. "Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written [Isa. 64:4], Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God."—I Cor. 2:8-11

SUBMISSION TO GOD'S WILL

To receive such a high reward, each called one must be thoroughly tested and motivated by supreme heart loyalty to

God. To be raised to the divine nature and to the same nature of life as our Heavenly Father, there must be a total submission to God's will in our lives, and a crystallization of our character in righteousness.

Each one must be willing to drink of the cup that our Lord drank and which the Father had given him. This is clearly shown in Jesus' discourse with two of his disciples. We read, "James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying, Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire. And he said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you? They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory. But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? And they said unto him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized: But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared."—Mark 10:35-40

OUR EARTHLY TABERNACLE

Throughout this present Gospel Age, those who have responded to the heavenly calling in Christ Jesus are known as a faith class. They have put their lives in the hands of our loving Heavenly Father and have learned to trust him in all the affairs of their lives and that which leads to a part of the heavenly bride, the church. Paul put this in perspective, when he said, "We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." (II Cor. 5:1) Our human bodies have become a dwelling place for the new mind, the New Creature in Christ begotten by the Holy Spirit of God. "Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage."—Ps. 119:54

The apostle explained, "In this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not

for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith, not by sight).”—II Cor. 5:2-7

A FAITH CLASS

The Scriptures speak of faith on many occasions, and Paul has provided us with an excellent definition. He said, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (Heb. 11:1) He also emphasized the importance of faith in the lives of the consecrated child of God. “Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” (vs. 6) When we study the subject of faith, we learn that it is not only indispensable to establish our relationship with the Heavenly Father, but that he also considers our spiritual growth and faith as being very precious to him.

The Jews had difficulty accepting the fact that no one could keep their old Law Covenant and that no one could expect to receive life under its terms. “Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” (Rom. 3:20) God’s purpose in giving Israel the law was to teach them that they were dead in sin. “The scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.”—Gal. 3:22-26

The apostle was teaching that we can be justified through faith in Christ Jesus, which is the only way to life. He said, “Now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness

of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.”—Rom 3:21-25

The only way to life is through Christ Jesus. Paul clearly stated, “To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also: Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith. Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.”—vss. 26-31

THE VICTORY OF FAITH

“Every one who believes that Jesus is the Anointed One, has been begotten by God; and every one who loves the begetter, loves the one begotten by him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and practise his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not burdensome; because all that has been begotten by God overcomes the world; and this is that victory which overcomes the world, our faith.”—I John 5:14, *Emphatic Diaglott*

TESTING REQUIRED

The great Apostle Paul stated that all of our experiences in the school of Christ are directed by our loving Heavenly Father. We must all learn, as did the two sons of Zebedee, James and John, that we must first drink of the cup of sorrow before we can receive the cup of joy. “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to

the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?"—Rom. 8:28-31

Paul's total faith led him to carry out his covenant of sacrifice in a most remarkable way. He knew that all of his cup-of-sorrow experiences were permitted for his growth and development as a New Creature in Christ Jesus. He speaks of some of his trials in his letter to the church at Corinth.

In the apostle's letter, we catch a glimpse of his abundant sacrificial life, "In labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches."—II Cor. 11:23-28

DELIVERED UNTO DEATH

Paul also said, "We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh." (II Cor. 4:8-11) "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."—vss. 17,18

JOINT-HEIRS WITH CHRIST

During this present Gospel Age, invitation has been made to those who will share in the marvelous privileges of dwelling with Christ in his future kingdom. This great truth opens to us our hope in becoming part of God's own intimate family. "Blessed is the man whom thou chooseth, and causeth to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple." (Ps. 65:4) The Apostle Paul put this in proper perspective in his letter to the church at Rome, when he said, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And 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 together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."—Rom. 8:16-18

The testimony of God's wonderful Word of truth will surely come to pass. "He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?"—vss. 27-31

THE LORD'S HOUSE

The Prophet Isaiah spoke about the majestic house of the Lord and when it would be established. "It shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his

paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.”—Isa. 2:2,3

IN THE SAME IMAGE

The church’s future heavenly inheritance will be the most wonderful blessing ever given to anyone at any time, and will never be offered again. Let us each say in our heart, as did Paul when writing to the brethren at Philippi, “I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 3:14) Our determination should be to make our calling and election sure, and especially as the days grow more evil. May we also be strengthened by the apostle’s words of encouragement, when he said, “We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”—II Cor. 3:18

In our featured scripture (Isa. 57:15), the Prophet Isaiah spoke about the “high and holy place.” This describes the divine habitation of our loving Heavenly Father, and he has extended an invitation to the church to share that glory, honor, and immortality when found faithful even unto death.

I SHALL BE SATISFIED

The Psalmist David serves to illustrate the faithful class of our Lord’s true followers during this present Gospel Age. Thus, his inspiring words capture the very spirit and desire of every truly consecrated heart who is diligently striving to be faithful to his covenant of consecration, and share in the spiritual kingdom.

In one of David’s beautiful psalms, we are given a glimpse of that wonderful scene. He said, “Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.” (Ps. 16:11) Again the psalmist wrote, “As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.”—chap. 17:15 ■

CHAPTER 13

In Season and Out of Season

“Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.”
—II Timothy 4:2

THE APOSTLE PAUL’S second letter to his beloved Timothy was written during his second imprisonment at Rome. He was to soon end his consecrated course in death, and these are among his last written words. His wise admonition and counsel represented many years of experience and hardship in the narrow way of sacrifice, and in preaching the Truth to those who had an ear to hear his message. His words thus take on added meaning and perspective, and are worthy of our deep consideration, study and meditation.

PAUL’S LOVE FOR TIMOTHY

The apostle loved his younger brother Timothy very much, even referring to him as a son. As he began this final letter, he opened his heart to him and wrote, “To Timothy, my dearly beloved son: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day; Greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy.”—II Tim. 1:2-4

It was not uncommon for Paul to address Timothy as a son. He had done so in his first letter on two occasions (I Tim. 1:2,18), and once again in his second letter, when he said, "Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." (II Tim. 2:1-3) He had also spoken of him as a son in a letter written to the church at Corinth. He explained to them, "For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church."—I Cor. 4:17

TENDER MEMORIES

Paul recalled many tender memories and his longtime association with Timothy and other members of his family. We read, "When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also. Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands. For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."—II Tim. 1:5-7

A PARTAKER OF AFFLICTIONS

The great apostle was in a Roman prison awaiting his inevitable fate. It was surely an "out-of-season" experience for him to continue being faithful even unto his death. Yet, as an encouragement to his younger brother walking in the narrow way he took the opportunity to write to him. He told him, "Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God. Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began, But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and

hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”—II Tim. 1:8-10

Timothy gladly received the wonderful message and further counsel from the apostle. “No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier. And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully.” (chap. 2:4,5) “It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us.” (vss. 11,12) “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”—vs. 15

OUR FEATURED TEXT

Our featured scripture is taken from chapter four of Paul’s letter, and he began this portion of his letter by saying, “I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.”—II Tim. 4:1-5

LONG-SUFFERING

Paul’s opening words “I charge thee” were assertive and add solemn emphasis to the testimony that he was about to give before our loving Heavenly Father and Christ Jesus. He knew he was about to die soon, and in this connection he spoke of both those who were in their graves and those who were yet living at that time. He confirmed that they were all to be judged at a future time at the appearing, or manifestation [*epiphania*, Greek], of Christ’s kingdom.

Sound advice was given to Timothy that he should be ready to preach the Truth at all times and places, even under

inconvenient and uncomfortable circumstances. However, he cautioned him to not intrude himself upon others if it was not a convenient time for them to receive his words. Perhaps an opportunity to proclaim the glad tidings of joy might be made available to him at another time. It would be more appropriate to use patience in such an instance.

REPROVE

Timothy was encouraged to reprove, rebuke, and exhort when preaching the wonderful doctrines of truth while exercising much long-suffering. To “reprove” suggests the delicate art of exposing a particular error of belief or personal behavior, and then carefully seeking to correct it.

In the apostle’s letter to Titus, he used the same word on three occasions that indicate the proper manner for reprovng. In the first instance, Paul wrote, “Holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute [reprove] those who contradict.” (Titus 1:9, *New American Standard Bible*) Again he pointed out, “This testimony is true. For this cause reprove them severely that they may be sound in the faith.” (vs. 13, *NASB*) The third time he chose this word, he wrote, “These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you.”—chap. 2:15, *NASB*

In connection with the importance of reprovng, Jesus said, “Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.” (Matt. 10:16) The Apostle Peter also admonished, “Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.” —I Pet. 3:15

REBUKE

Paul also included the word rebuke in his letter to Timothy. To “rebuke” means to censure, admonish or to forbid a certain thing. It is used in a wide variety of ways in the New Testament. For example, when Jesus began his earthly ministry he explained to his disciples that it was necessary that he encounter much hardship during his ministry and

that he would suffer many trials before being be put to death at the hands of Israel's religious leaders. However, he assured them that he would not remain in the grave, but that his loving Heavenly Father would resurrect him after three days.—Mark 8:31

The scriptural account of this particular instance includes two references where the word rebuke was used. We read, "He [Jesus] spake that saying openly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him. But when he [Jesus] had turned about and looked on his disciples, he rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men."—vss. 32,33

Peter loved Jesus very much, but he had to learn to not contradict, or correct, our Lord. Jesus rebuked his disciple to teach him a very important lesson. He made the distinction between our Heavenly Father's ultimate purpose, and that of human wisdom and the opposing spirit of evil and the Adversary.

The word rebuke was used another time when Peter's mother-in-law was sick with a severe fever. They called for the Master to come and help heal her sickness. "He stood over her, and rebuked the fever; and it left her: and immediately she arose and ministered unto them." (Luke 4:39) We are not told the details of how she ministered unto the others. However, this action showed the remarkable power that Jesus was given, which serves to illustrate the greater healing power that will be available to him for the whole sin-sick world during his future kingdom.

Another illustration of the word rebuke, and Jesus' miraculous power, occurred when he and his disciples were together in a ship. We read, "There arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full. And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish? And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm."—Mark 4:37-39

In a grander sense, the great storm represents the consecrated little flock of the Lord's people who have battled the storms of life and the tempest-tossed waves. This has been

their experience throughout this present Gospel Age. However, this has a more particular meaning at the end of this age, and the great time of trouble and restless waves that are now upon the nations.

It was the Master who then said, "Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm." The psalmist also wrote, "He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still."—Ps. 107:29

EXHORT

Paul's final admonition to his beloved Timothy was to "exhort." This word is usually used in a positive sense and, in his letter, he used it to encourage and urge his younger brother to pursue a course of action and conduct that would be pleasing to the Heavenly Father. He was to maintain this attitude of heart especially during his preaching activities.

When writing to the Thessalonian brethren, the apostle chose the same word exhort to encourage them to greater faithfulness in the Lord. He wrote, "Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more." (I Thess. 4:1) Later, he told them, "Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men."—chap. 5:14

In his letter to the Hebrew brethren, Paul also urged them by saying, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end."—Heb. 3:12-14

WORKERS TOGETHER WITH HIM

The Apostle Paul's untiring ministry for the Lord and his people is unparalleled in the history and development of the Early Church. The accounts of his pilgrimages and writings occupy a major portion of the New Testament scriptures. He willingly suffered affliction and severe trials on behalf of the true followers of our Lord Jesus. He was faithful to his

ministry whether it was in season or out of season. He also encouraged those to whom he preached to share in the present sufferings of Christ and the grand heavenly calling.

In his letter to the brethren at Corinth, he said, "Being also co-laborers, we exhort you not to receive the favor of God in vain; (for he says, "In a Season acceptable, I listened to thee, and in a Day of Salvation I assisted thee," Behold! now is a well-accepted Season; behold! now is a Day of Salvation;)"—II Cor. 6:1,2, *Emphatic Diaglott*

THE ACCEPTABLE TIME

We have been invited to become workers together with God, and in the carrying out of his ultimate plan and purpose for the reconciliation of the poor sin-sick human family. The apostle has thus admonished that we not receive the wonderful grace of God in vain, but to fulfill our covenant of sacrifice faithfully even unto death.

The present Gospel Age is the acceptable time to offer our lives in total consecration to our loving Heavenly Father. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."—Rom. 12:1,2

"FULL ASSURANCE OF FAITH"

Having given our lives in consecration to God, "let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."—Heb. 10:22-25

MINISTERS OF GOD

Having thus received of the marvelous grace of God, let us heed the further admonition of the apostle. "Giving no

offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed: But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings; By pureness, by knowledge, by long-suffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by love unfeigned, By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; As sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.”—II Cor. 6:3-10

“TO DIE IS GAIN”

Paul’s greatest desire was to be faithful to his heavenly calling and share with our Lord Jesus in his future kingdom beyond the veil of death. Nevertheless, he was willing to leave all matters pertaining to his earthly pilgrimage in God’s hands. This is clearly shown in the letter he wrote to the church at Philippi. He told them, “According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death.”—Phil. 1:20

“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.” (vss. 21-24) The apostle was hard pressed by the two aspects of God’s providence, to live and continue to serve the special people of God, or to die and rest from his labors of love. By the Heavenly Father’s wonderful grace, he permitted Paul to remain a little while longer in the flesh to serve the members of the Christ.

Out of the treasures of Paul’s heart he continued to speak the words of truth. With this spiritual hope imbedded deeply in his heart, he said, “Having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance

and joy of faith; That your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again. Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel.”—Phil. 1:25-27

KEEPING THE FAITH

He had faithfully kept the faith that was addressed by Jude. In his short epistle, he wrote, “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” (Jude 3) The true “faith” centers on the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus, and the merit of its application on our behalf. The apostle abided faithfully in the wonderful promises of God’s Holy Word. He could therefore write to the church at Rome with encouragement. “To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life.”—Rom. 2:7

PAUL’S FINAL TESTIMONY

Paul knew that he had come to the end of his consecrated walk in Christ Jesus, and that he was to soon give his life as a final sacrifice to the Heavenly Father. To Timothy, he thus acknowledged, “I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”—II Tim. 4:6-8

He did not complain about his confinement in a Roman prison, or of the many trials and tribulations he willingly endured along the narrow way he had walked for so long. There must have been many times when he endured great affliction and suffering, yet he went forward with the task that our loving Heavenly Father had given him to do. Neither did he take the opportunity to boast of his vast knowledge of

the Scriptures, or his many accomplishments as the greatest of the apostles. His last testimonial serves as an inspiration to all of the Lord's consecrated people who are yet striving to obtain the prize of the High Calling in Christ's future kingdom of truth and righteousness.

As Paul closed his letter to Timothy, he recalled some of the disappointing circumstances he had experienced with certain brethren that had caused him much pain and had forsaken him. He wrote, "At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me: I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge." (II Tim. 4:16) However, he acknowledged that our Heavenly Father had been with him throughout his Christian ministry. "Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion."—vs. 17

In Paul's letter to Timothy, he gave him wonderful counsel that was surely an encouragement to him at that time in the history of the Early Church. However, it has also been a source of rich blessing for the Lord's people throughout this present Gospel Age. "The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom: to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."—vs.18

We are encouraged to renew our determination to be faithful to our heavenly calling, and to take every opportunity to defend the Truth, especially as the days in which we now live become more violent. Let us endeavor to do this whether it be in season or out of season.

"IN DUE SEASON"

"Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."—Gal. 6:9,10 ■

CHAPTER 14

The Salt of the Earth

“Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.”

—*Matthew 5:13*

THIS SCRIPTURE IS taken from Jesus’ sermon on the mount. He had just finished teaching his followers many wonderful lessons called the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3-12), and was now directing his listeners to the important characteristics of “salt” and how its unique qualities relate to the Lord’s people and their consecrated walk in newness of life.

SALT A SYMBOL

In the Bible, salt is used as a meaningful symbol in many and widely varying applications. In some cases, the word is used to point to that which is incorruptible and free from decay. In other scriptures, salt symbolizes that which is corruptible, or desolate. In our featured scripture, Matthew has recorded Jesus’ statement wherein he used both illustrations of salt to emphasize important lessons concerning two very distinct characteristics of his followers.

Salt is known as a preserving and cleansing element, and keeps that which is good from decay or putrefaction. It also represents fidelity and other wholesome qualities. Our Lord was pointing out that those of his followers who manifest these Christlike qualities are being faithful to their High Calling, and he referred to them as the “salt of the earth.”

They have been salted with the Truth, and heed the instructions and commands of righteousness. The Apostle Paul said, “Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.”—Col. 4:6

SOME NOT WORTH THEIR SALT

In other applications, salt illustrates that which has become corrupt and barren. A worthy example concerns Lot and his wife as they were leaving Sodom and Gomorrah. From the scriptural account, we read, “His wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.” (Gen. 19:26) Our Lord later recalled this episode by saying, “Remember Lot’s wife.” (Luke 17:32) Jesus was pointing to those who have the wrong spirit and have become careless with their faith. They love the world, and remain in sympathy with it and its worthless allurements that should have been left behind. Their salt has lost its savor and thus they are not worth their salt.

SALT AND ITS SAVOR

The word “savor” indicates that which is pleasing to the senses of taste or smell. To be “unsavory” suggests not only the opposite effect on these senses, but also points to those who are morally offensive and disagreeable. Thus are they cast off from God’s favor. In his letter to Titus, Paul clarified this, and said, “This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith; Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth. Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled. They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.”—Titus 1:13-16

COMPARATIVE LESSONS

Valuable lessons concerning the significance of salt, and its applications concerning the Lord’s people, are also recorded in the gospels of Mark and Luke, which provide further perspective and insight. From Luke’s gospel, we read, “So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that

he hath, he cannot be my disciple. Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned? It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill; but men cast it out. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.”—Luke 14:33-35

FORSAKING ALL THINGS

Luke included Jesus’ statement that his disciples must forsake all things. This is vital among those who have given their lives in full consecration to the Heavenly Father and are striving to walk faithfully in the narrow way of sacrifice. They are admonished to deny themselves by giving up all earthly interests and pursuits, and to walk even as Jesus walked in newness of life.

As clarification of this important point, we note Jesus’ further reference to this. “Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”—Matt. 16:24-26

The Apostle Paul also explained, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” (Rom. 8:1) “That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.”—vss. 4-6

SALTED WITH FIRE

In Mark’s record of the significance of salt, Jesus said, “Every one shall be salted with fire, and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt. Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another.”—Mark 9:49,50

In this scripture, Jesus brings to our attention the fact that his followers will be salted with fiery trials. Their faithfulness

will be tested in proportion to the quality of the salt that was used in their sacrifices. Paul wrote, “Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is.” (I Cor. 3:13) The Apostle Peter also said, “That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.”—I Pet. 1:7

PROPERTIES OF SALT

The chemical and physical properties of salt, or sodium chloride, demonstrate its fitness as a spiritual symbol. It is abundant in nature and is found in all parts of the earth. Vast underground deposits of rock salt have been found, some of which are several thousand feet thick. Also, the oceans of the world contain about 2.7 percent sodium chloride in solution. A cubic mile of seawater holds approximately 124 million tons of salt.

The Dead Sea is up to six times more salty than ocean water, and has provided the Israelites with a readily available supply of salt through evaporation of the Dead Sea waters. There are also salt bearing hills in the southern region of the Dead Sea.

SALT AND THE HUMAN BODY

Every cell in the human body contains salt, and it is therefore an essential nutrient. Mankind, as well as all other animals, cannot live without it. It plays a crucial role in keeping our bodies functioning properly. When we do strenuous work or exercise, our bodies become very warm, and salt maintains the balance of fluids which carry oxygen and nutrients to all parts of our system. Our bodies adjust the amount of salt we consume by making us thirsty when it needs to dilute the salt. A healthy body processes the right amount of salt it needs, and the kidneys dispose of any excess.

SODIUM AND CHLORIDE

Two major elements of salt are sodium and chloride, and each plays a variety of crucial roles in maintaining a healthy

body. Sodium enables the transmission of nerve impulses. It regulates the electrical charges that move in and out of the cells, and that control taste, smell, and other processes. It helps our muscles, including the heart, to contract.

Chloride is essential for the digestion process. It preserves the acid balance in our body and absorbs potassium. It also helps blood carry carbon dioxide from respiring tissues to the lungs. If there is an insufficient amount of salt in our body, we may experience muscular weakness and cramps, and our body cannot perform all its vital functions.

PECULIARITIES OF SALT

Salt has the peculiar ability to lower the freezing point of water. Ice forms when the temperature of water reaches 32°F (0°C). If a 10 percent salt solution is added, the temperature drops to 20°F (-6°C), and with a 20 percent solution it freezes at 2°F (-16°C).

Highway maintenance personnel take advantage of this peculiarity by sprinkling salt on icy roadways during the winter months. Salt lowers the freezing point of the ice, and dissolves it into liquid water. The ice immediately around the grain of salt melts, and the melting spreads out from that point. If the temperature of the roadway is lower than 15°F, the salt will have little or no effect. In that case, sand is sprinkled over the ice to provide better traction.

This peculiarity of salt is also taken advantage of when making homemade ice cream. The temperature around the ice cream mixture must be lower than 32°F to make the mixture freeze. Thus, salt is mixed with ice to create a brine, and the temperature can be lowered to around 0°F. The brine becomes cold enough to easily freeze the ice cream mixture.

A FOOD ADDITIVE

In ancient times, man learned that salt could be used to keep food safe, and to preserve it by retarding the growth of micro-organisms that cause spoilage. It also became very effective as the world's oldest food additive. This is confirmed by Job, who said, "Can that which is unsavoury be eaten without salt?"—Job 6:6

Salt is still an important commodity in the modern food industry, and is used for the preservation of our foods, and to make them safe and palatable. Food technologists rely on salt to satisfy consumer preferences such as color, texture, appearance, and aroma. The majority of people use too much salt in their daily diets because it adds extra flavor and zest to their food. It has the remarkable ability to enhance certain flavors to make them taste better. It can also mask naturally bitter foods, such as chocolate, to make them more palatable. Evidence suggests that most people prefer the many and varied attributes that only salt can offer.

SALT MONEY

During the early period of the world's history, salt was used as a unit of exchange. In the early days of the Roman Empire, the price for salt was under strict control. Its cost could be increased to raise money for wars or other matters, or it could be lowered again to enable poor people to afford this important part of their diet.

At that time, Roman soldiers were given a ration of salt each day, but this practice was later replaced by an allowance of money. This was called their "salt money" (*salarium*, Latin) which is the basis for our English word "salary."

To supply the expanding city of Rome with increasing amounts of salt, roads were built for its transport. Thus the Via Salaria was built leading from Rome to the Adriatic Sea, from which supplies of salt were taken. The Tyrrhenian Sea was much closer to Rome than the Adriatic, but it did not have as good a supply, or quality, of salt. The Adriatic Sea had a higher salinity content because of its shallower water.

SALT AND FIDELITY

The wonderful Word of God provides interesting and important information relative to the use of salt. In the writings of Ezra, we read, "Now because we have maintenance from the king's palace [We are salted with the salt of the palace, *Marginal Translation*], and it was not meet for us to see the king's dishonor, therefore have we sent and certified the king."—Ezra 4:14

This scripture was recorded at a time when salt was under the control of the monarchy, or the ruling powers of the elite. Thus, the thought of “eating of the prince’s salt” was synonymous with receiving pay, accepting sustenance, or being in that person’s service. It was also a symbol of friendship and hospitality.

A CLEANSING AGENT

Salt was also used as a cleansing agent, and as a disinfectant on newborn babies. When writing about the abominations of Jerusalem, the Prophet Ezekiel used salt, or the lack thereof, as an illustration of God’s condemnation upon his people. “As for your birth, on the day you were born your navel cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water for cleansing; you were not rubbed with salt or even wrapped in cloths.”—Ezek. 16:4

DESOLATING EFFECTS

As a symbol of Moab’s and Ammon’s desolation, it is recorded, “Therefore as I live, saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Surely Moab shall be as Sodom, and the children of Ammon as Gomorrah, even the breeding of nettles, and saltpits, and a perpetual desolation: the residue of my people shall spoil them, and the remnant of my people shall possess them.”—Zeph. 2:9

In another illustration, we note that salt was also used as a desolating agent in military practice, by salting the earth of an enemy. This was an ancient custom whereby salt was strewn over a conquered city, or the land, to curse it and to make it barren. An example of this practice is recorded in Judges. “Abimelech, and the company that was with him, rushed forward and stood in the entering of the gate of the city [Shechem]: and the two other companies ran upon all the people that were in the fields, and slew them. And Abimelech fought against the city all that day; and he took the city, and slew the people that was therein, and beat down the city, and sowed it with salt.”—Judg. 9:44,45

The Prophet Ezekiel records God’s message concerning the waters of life that will be offered to the human creation under the administration of Christ’s future kingdom. Also

recorded are the judgments that will be placed upon those who disregard the blessings available to all. We read, “The miry places thereof and the marshes thereof shall not be healed; they shall be given to salt.”—Ezek. 47:11

THE TABERNACLE SERVICES

Salt was an important part in the making of the incense used in the Tabernacle services, which had to be made exactly as shown to Moses in the Mount. The directions for the composition of the sweet spices, and the ingredients, and their quantities are found in the scriptural records. “Then the LORD said to Moses, Take for yourself spices, stacte and onycha and galbanum, spices with pure frankincense; there shall be an equal part of each. And with it you shall make incense, a perfume, the work of a perfumer, salted, pure, and holy.”—Exod. 30:34,35, *New American Standard Bible*

It is noted that one of the ingredients of the sacrificial offerings was salt. This was significant because it pointed to the importance of fidelity, loyalty, and purity. More importantly, it foreshadowed the sweet-smelling savor of our prayers that ascend to our loving Heavenly Father. They are called sweet-smelling because they are well salted with fidelity. The scriptural record states, “When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.”—Rev. 5:8, *NASB*

In the eighth chapter of Revelation, we again read, “Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel’s hand.”—Rev. 8:3,4, *NASB*

Thus did the Apostle Paul admonish, “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour.”—Eph. 5:1,2

THE SALT OF GOD'S COVENANT

From the early days of human creation, salt was widely known because of its freedom from corruption and decay. In men's minds, therefore, it represented permanence, loyalty, and fidelity. These distinctive qualities made it a peculiar and fitting symbol, and the accepted medium used in the sealing of contracts and business arrangements. Salt was a chosen component of the ceremonial offerings and for the sealing of covenants. The preservative qualities of salt made it an excellent symbol of an enduring compact, and indicated a pledge of fidelity. God also used it to show that his covenants and promises would stand forever, and that his Word is sure. Thus, God's instructions to Moses were, "Every oblation of thy meat offering shalt thou season with salt; neither shalt thou suffer the salt of the covenant of thy God to be lacking from thy meat offering: with all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt."—Lev. 2:13

The requirement of adding salt to the meat offerings stressed the importance of the fidelity, loyalty, and purity of God's covenant. "All the heave offerings of the holy things, which the children of Israel offer unto the LORD, have I given thee, and thy sons and thy daughters with thee, by a statute for ever: it is a covenant of salt for ever before the LORD unto thee and to thy seed with thee."—Num. 18:19

THE WHOLE CREATION AT PEACE

When Christ's future kingdom is established over all the earth, the whole human family will rejoice in the salt of God's promises. The animal creation will eat "salted fodder," and be secure and living in peace and harmony with mankind in a restored earth. Speaking of God's everlasting promise, Isaiah wrote, "Then He will give you rain for the seed which you will sow in the ground, and bread from the yield of the ground, and it will be rich and plenteous; on that day your livestock will graze in a roomy pasture. Also the oxen and the donkeys which work the ground will eat salted fodder, which has been winnowed with shovel and fork."—Isa. 30:23,24, *NASB*

HEALED WATERS

There will be no more death, because the waters of life will be cleansed and made pure. “The men of the city said unto Elisha, Behold, I pray thee, the situation of this city is pleasant, as my lord seeth: but the water is naught, and the ground barren. And he said, Bring me a new cruse, and put salt therein. And they brought it to him. And he went forth unto the spring of the waters, and cast the salt in there, and said, Thus saith the LORD, I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence any more death or barren land. So the waters were healed unto this day, according to the saying of Elisha which he spake.”—II Kings 2:19-22

THE SALT OF THE EARTH

In our featured scripture, Jesus proclaimed, “Ye are the salt of the earth.” (Matt. 5:13) Our Lord is the principle figure in this reference, and the faithful members of the Christ will share in the salt’s preservative, cleansing, and healing qualities. Together, they will carry out the Heavenly Father’s ultimate plan and purpose to reconcile the sin-sick human family from the terrible results of sin and death.

When Christ’s future kingdom of righteousness is established, the salt of God’s covenant will be manifest to all as true, faithful, and forever. This was long ago typified by King David and his sons, who represent Jesus and his body members as they then share in blessing all the families of the earth. “Ought ye not to know that the LORD God of Israel gave the kingdom over Israel to David for ever, even to him and to his sons by a covenant of salt?”—II Chron. 13:5 ■

CHAPTER 15

In Remembrance of Me

“This do in remembrance of me. . . . For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord’s death.”

—I Corinthians 11:24,26

ON THAT PORTENTOUS evening nearly two thousand years ago, pious Jews all over the land were gathering with their families to celebrate once more the Feast of the Passover. For one small group, this evening held special interest and even premonition. He whom they so dearly loved, and to whom they had been looking for the realization of their long delayed expectations, had been making foreboding statements which both puzzled and troubled them. Only a short time earlier, he had told them, “He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.” (Matt. 16:21) On other occasions, he had said that he must “go away,” and that he must lay down his life.—John 14:28;16:7

These were strange words from one who had been talking of establishing a kingdom in which they had been led to believe they would share. When one of his followers remonstrated at his exposing himself to death, their Master used the occasion to invite them to also lay down their lives in death, saying, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.”—Matt. 16:24,25

Now, having followed his instructions to prepare the Passover, this little band of twelve had gathered with their Master in the upper room to celebrate the feast. At its conclusion, there came another of those strange statements. "He said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer: For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves: For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come. And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you."—Luke 22:15-20

BONDAGE IN EGYPT

The Jewish celebration, known as the Passover, and its deep significance was born of the agony and despair of the bondage of the nation of Israel in Egypt. They had gone there as a small number at the invitation of Pharaoh, on Joseph's request, in order to escape the famine in the land of Canaan. There they had prospered, and they and their flocks and herds increased mightily. In course of time, however, there arose a new Pharaoh "which knew not Joseph." (Exod. 1:8) As he observed the multiplication of the Jews in their midst, he began to fear for the safety of his own people. The burdens which Pharaoh then forced upon the Israelites to restrain their increase became intolerable. They cried unto the Lord for relief. In answer to their cries, the Lord sent Moses to deliver them from the hand of their oppressors. Under the direction of the Lord, Moses brought various plagues on the land.

LAMB WITHOUT BLEMISH

The last of these plagues, and the most grievous, was the slaying by the destroying angel of all of the firstborn of Egypt, both of man and of animals. The firstborn of the children of Israel were to be spared if they followed the Lord's specific instructions. The Lord had told the Israelites

that in the evening of the fourteenth day of the month, each household was to slay a lamb “without blemish.” The blood of this lamb was to be sprinkled on the two side posts and on the upper doorpost of the houses in which the lamb was to be eaten. It was to be eaten “in that night, roast with fire, and unleavened bread; and with bitter herbs . . . [and] his head with his legs.” Nothing was to be allowed to remain. Anything not consumed was to be burned by fire.—Exod. 12:6-10

The manner of its eating was also significant. “Thus shall ye eat it; with your loins girded, your shoes on your feet, and your staff in your hand; and ye shall eat it in haste: it is the LORD’S passover.” (vs. 11) The Lord then told them that he would pass through the land of Egypt that night and would smite all the firstborn in the land, both man and beast. However, the blood of the slain lamb on the doorposts and lintels of the homes of the Israelites would protect the firstborn within.—vss. 12,13

At midnight, all the firstborn of Egypt, including even the firstborn of Pharaoh himself, were smitten of the Lord, and also the firstborn of the cattle. There was not a house in all the land that escaped. So great was the consternation and dismay of the Egyptians that Pharaoh rose up in the night and, calling Moses and Aaron to him, ordered the Israelites with their flocks and herds to leave the land forthwith. Thus it was that with a mighty hand the Lord accomplished the release of the nation from their bondage in Egypt. (Exod. 12:29-31; 14:8) It was the terror and discomfiture occasioned by the plagues brought by the Lord, particularly that final dread affliction involving the slaying of all the firstborn of the Egyptians, that secured their release.

The Lord admonished the Israelites, saying, “This day shall be unto you for a memorial; and ye shall keep it a feast to the LORD throughout your generations; ye shall keep it a feast by an ordinance for ever.” (Exod. 12:14) When they should finally come into the promised land of Canaan, they were to keep the feast and explain to their children that it was the sacrifice of the Lord’s Passover. This was to remind them throughout their generations that the Lord had “passed over” the houses, wherein dwelt the firstborn of the children of Israel in Egypt, when he destroyed the firstborn of Egypt

and delivered the Israelites from their oppressors. It was “a night to be much observed unto the LORD for bringing them out from the land of Egypt: this is that night of the LORD to be observed of all the children of Israel in their generations.”—vs. 42

THE FIRSTBORN ARE MINE

At the time of the Passover experience in Egypt, the Lord gave Moses instructions on another significant point. He said to Moses, “Sanctify unto me all the firstborn, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast: it is mine.” (Exod. 13:1,2) On the eve of the deliverance of the Israelites, the lives of the firstborn alone were in danger. These were the Lord’s special concern, and for them the Lord had prepared a sure refuge—the covering blood of the lamb. All of the firstborn who availed themselves of this blessed provision were saved alive during that terrible night. Therefore, the Lord held these to be his. “All the firstborn of the children of Israel are mine, both man and beast: on the day that I smote every firstborn in the land of Egypt I sanctified them for myself.” (Num. 8:17) These were to be sanctified, or set apart, as his own special possession and to perform a special service.

Later, for convenience, these firstborn were exchanged en masse for the Levitical tribe of Aaron and his sons. The tribe of Levi thus became the Lord’s, and these were then appointed “to do the service of the children of Israel in the tabernacle of the congregation, and to make an atonement for the children of Israel.” (vs. 19) Aaron and his sons, themselves of the tribe of Levi, had already been consecrated into the priesthood. It was fitting, therefore, that the Levites should be chosen to be the priestly tribe. In the subsequent division of the land of Canaan, the tribe of Levi had no inheritance, but were supported by tithes supplied by the remaining tribes. The duties of the priests were many. Probably the most important was the sacrifice on the Day of Atonement of the bullock and the Lord’s goat as an offering for sin, “to make an atonement for the children of Israel for all their sins once a year.”—Lev. 16:34

REMEMBER THIS DAY

After the Lord had directed Moses relative to the setting apart to him of all the firstborn, Moses again reminded the people of the importance of the experience through which they had just passed under the Lord's guidance. "Remember this day, in which ye came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage; . . . And it shall be when the LORD shall bring thee into the land of the Canaanites, . . . that thou shalt keep this service in this month. . . . And thou shalt shew thy son in that day, saying, This is done because of that which the LORD did unto me when I came forth out of Egypt. . . . And it shall be for a token upon thine hand, and for frontlets between thine eyes: for by strength of hand the LORD brought us forth out of Egypt." (Exod. 13:3,5,8,16) "Thou shalt therefore keep this ordinance in his season from year to year."—vs. 10

The "frontlets" here mentioned were small leather cases containing strips of parchment on which were written words to remind them of their deliverance from bondage, God's promise to bring them to the land of Canaan, and various instructions, in order that they properly follow his commandments and pass these on to their children.—Exod. 13:2-10,11-17; Deut. 6:4-9,13-23

The Lord told them that the memory of all these things should be in their hearts. To assist them to be mindful of them, that they might always walk in his ways, they were instructed also to "write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates." (Deut. 6:9) This was even prior to the time when the Ten Commandments were engraved on tables of stone for all to see and to do. The frontlets, which were to be bound on their arms or worn on their foreheads, were to serve as additional reminders of these things. In the New Testament, these frontlets are called phylacteries, from a Greek word meaning a safeguard, or guardian. They were to love and serve the Lord with all their heart and all their soul and all their might. (vs. 5) By wearing these frontlets on their arms and on their foreheads, the Israelites would be reminded of God's goodness to them, and of his instructions and commandments. Thus they would be guarded from forsaking his paths.

“SHADOW OF GOOD THINGS TO COME”

That remarkable experience in the life of the nation of Israel is still most dear to the hearts of reverent Jews the world over. It is of special interest to the church of this present Gospel Age. The Apostle Paul tells us that those things which happened to Israel were “a shadow of good things to come.” (Heb. 10:1) Our Lord Jesus was a Jew, born under the Law, and subject to all its provisions and ordinances, including the observance year by year of the Feast of the Passover. He and his twelve disciples accordingly had come together in the upper room on that fateful evening for this purpose.

Jesus knew by his knowledge of prophecy that his time had come, for he was destined to be “cut off” in the “midst of the week.” (Dan. 9:26,27) He knew that the Passover lamb that was slain there in Egypt on the fourteenth day of Nisan in the evening, and whose blood provided protection for the firstborn of Israel, pictured himself. He was that perfect Lamb of God who would give his life as a ransom for the whole world. (John 1:29) He was about to meet the demands of justice by giving his life on behalf of all mankind.

At the end of the Passover supper, when they had finished observing the feast, Jesus said to them, “I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” Then, we read, “He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves: For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come. And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.” (Luke 22:15-20) Anticipating the terrible events of the morrow, when he would complete his sacrifice on the cross and so fulfill the requirements of the Law, we find our Lord initiating a new ordinance, or ceremony. This “Memorial” ceremony established by Jesus is the only one, beside baptism, that is enjoined upon his footstep followers of this Gospel Age.

On an earlier occasion, the Jews had asked Jesus for a sign that they might believe in him, although only the day before he had fed five thousand from a few loaves and fishes. They

reminded him that their fathers had eaten manna in the desert. (John 6:30,31) Jesus said, “He that believeth on me hath everlasting life. I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. . . . I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”(vss. 47-49,51) The account then tells us, “The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat? Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.”—vss. 52,53

In one sense, the Jews were right, for how could they eat his flesh? This was a “hard saying” to them, and we read, “From that time many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.” (vss. 60,66) We need not think, however, that they fell into the error of some who believe that they actually partake of the literal flesh and blood of the Master.

The bread and wine that he offered to his disciples there in the upper room were merely symbols. The bread symbolized his broken body and the fruit of the vine his shed blood. These together represented the sacrifice of his life on behalf of mankind. Our partaking of the bread and wine symbolizes our partaking of the merit of our Lord’s sacrifice, and manifests our faith in him as our Redeemer. The faith thus manifested is the basis of our justification, or righteousness, before God. “Being justified by faith, we have peace with God.” (Rom. 5:1) How glad we are for this loving provision of the Heavenly Father on behalf of the antitypical firstborn!

FIRSTFRUITS AND AFTERFRUITS

Only the “church of the firstborn” have so far received the merit of Christ’s sacrifice. (Heb. 12:23) These antitypical “firstborn” are also referred to in the Scriptures as “firstfruits.” (James 1:18; Rev. 14:4) This clearly suggests that there shall be “afterfruits.” Just as it was God’s purpose that not only should the firstborn of Israel be delivered, but that the entire nation should be released from bondage, so also will it be in due time with the whole world of mankind. For Jesus Christ died not for the few, but for all mankind. He “gave himself a

ransom for all, to be testified in due time.” (I Tim. 2:6) He said that the hour would come when all who are in their graves would hear his voice and come forth. (John 5:28,29) Herein is God’s great love for his fallen, human creation manifested. “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”—chap. 3:16

There is a “due time” for these blessings to be bestowed upon mankind. The Apostle Paul makes this clear in his wonderful sermon about the resurrection. He tells us, “As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order; Christ the firstfruits [Christ and the church]; afterward they [of the world of mankind] that are Christ’s at [during] his coming [presence].”—I Cor. 15:22,23

Our Lord Jesus died on the cross nearly two thousand years ago. Yet mankind is still going down into the grave. This is so because “Christ the firstfruits” is not yet complete. The Apostle Paul tells us that Christ is not one, but many—“As the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. . . . Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.” (I Cor. 12:12,27) During this Gospel Age, the Lord has been selecting and testing those who shall make up this body of Christ. He has been taking out of the world a little flock, “a people for his name.”—Acts 15:14

These have accepted Jesus’ invitation to deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow him. (Matt. 16:24) Having faith in his shed blood, they have presented themselves “a living sacrifice.” (Rom. 12:1) They have no inheritance in the land, for their treasure is in heaven. These “by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life.” (chap. 2:7) They are drawn by the wonderful hope that, if faithful, they will be joined with their head in glory, and will live and reign with Christ for a thousand years. The purpose of this reign will be the blessing of all the families of the earth.—Rev. 2:10; 20:6; Gen. 22:18; Gal. 3:27,29

The selection and proving of this firstfruits class is the glorious work of the Gospel Age. This explains the seeming

delay in the fruition of God's plan of salvation for mankind. When this firstfruits class is complete and the church joined to her head, then will the kingdom of God be set up in power and glory. Then will the merit of Christ's redeeming blood be applied on behalf of the whole world of mankind. Then will begin the work of restitution of mankind back to the glory and beauty and perfection that had been father Adam's in the lovely Garden of Eden. Then, indeed, will have come the due time for the afterfruits—when God's law will be written, not on tables of stone, but in the grateful, loving hearts of all men.

For now, though, the development of the Lord's special people continues. The antitypical firstborns, whose deliverance must precede that of the world, are still under the protection of the covering blood of the Lamb. Their sacrificial work is almost complete, and they look forward to soon receiving the consummation of their hope of being with their Lord, and of participating in the blessing of all the families of the earth. Until then, they are ever mindful of the sacrifice of their Lord and Master, and they reverently keep the Memorial of his death on Calvary's cross. With humility, they partake of the bread of life and the merit of his shed blood. Faithfully, they also lay down their own lives in sacrifice, filling up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ. This they do in grateful remembrance of him. ■

CHAPTER 16

Precious Promises

“Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”

—II Peter 1:4

IN THIS SCRIPTURE, the Apostle Peter has recorded God’s assurance that he will bestow abundant favor and grace through his precious promises to those who love and trust him. The apostle directed this second letter “to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ: Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue.”—II Pet. 1:1-3

EXCEEDING AND GREAT

Peter emphasizes that God’s promises are not only full of his wondrous grace, but they are also “exceeding great and precious.” These words add considerable depth of meaning and dimension to whatever blessings God may desire to give to his people during this present Gospel Age. They are directed especially toward those who have responded to the heavenly calling through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Thus, may grace and peace be multiplied unto all who continue

to abide in the promised blessing of sharing in his future kingdom of righteousness and truth.

As a help in attaining this wonderful spiritual inheritance, God gives his people valuable instructions for their spiritual growth and attainment. Peter further wrote, “Beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”—II Pet. 1:5-11

These are important lessons for the Lord’s people to learn. “If these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” The word “if” points to the attached conditions that God has set forth, and our need to fulfill them as the terms of our consecration. We are thus instructed to add virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and charity to the foundation of our faith. If we cultivate these graces of the Holy Spirit, which our Heavenly Father has outlined for our spiritual growth, we will attain the fruitage he desires in us and which will prepare us for an abundant entrance into Christ’s future kingdom. “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”—Rev. 2:10

Knowledge is to gain understanding and enlightenment of God’s Word. We learn to know his will and purpose, and especially as it may relate to our faith. It applies to those who receive the exceeding great and precious promises, and have accepted them as their own. “This I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; That ye may approve things that are excellent;

that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ.”—Phil. 1:9,10

Temperance, or self-control, is that virtue which keeps one moderate, gentle, and properly balanced. “Let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.” (I Pet. 3:4) “Let your moderation be known unto all men.” (Phil. 4:5) “Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.”—I Cor. 9:25

Patience is that grace of character which enables one to bear affliction and calamity with calmness and cheerful constancy of mind. “Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.” (James 5:10,11) “In your patience possess ye your souls.” (Luke 21:19) “We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience.”—Rom. 5:3

Godliness allows us to view and discern every experience from God’s standpoint. Those who possess this characteristic are dignified and just. They are more inclined toward peace and are opposed to strife. The Psalmist David waited to know what God’s will was for him. “David went thence to Mizpeh of Moab: and he said unto the king of Moab, Let my father and my mother, I pray thee, come forth, and be with you, till I know what God will do for me.” (I Sam. 22:3) We read that David’s heart smote him for his actions against Saul. “It came to pass afterward, that David’s heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul’s skirt. And he said unto his men, The LORD forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the LORD’S anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD. So David stayed his servants with these words, and suffered them not to rise against Saul. But Saul rose up out of the cave, and went on his way.” (chap. 24:5-7) “Know that the LORD hath set apart him that is godly for himself: the LORD will hear when I call unto him.”—Ps. 4:3

Brotherly kindness is a virtue that possesses an affinity for others of like mind. In spiritual matters, it is manifest in the desire for fellowship, care, and concern of others. Paul said, "Let brotherly love continue." (Heb. 13:1) "Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another." (Rom. 12:10) His concern for the spiritual welfare and growth of the Lord's people is also manifest. "Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches."—II Cor. 11:28

Love covers all of the other virtues of which the Apostle Peter spoke. "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God. And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." (I John 4:15,16) Our Lord Jesus is the perfect example and pattern of our Heavenly Father. "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich." (II Cor. 8:9) "Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end."—John 13:1

MEN OF FAITH

Abraham was an outstanding example of faith, and under very difficult circumstances he continued to trust God. "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." (Heb. 11:8-10) "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called."—vss. 17,18

Let us be diligent to intensify our faith with fortitude and singleness of purpose. The Apostle James has well said, "Let

him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.”—James 1:6-8

Daniel the prophet is another fine example of unwavering faith during times of adversity. He was determined to follow God’s law and took a stand for his convictions. “Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s meat, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.”—Dan. 1:8

He also knew that the king had signed a petition that could restrict his privilege of prayer and put him in great danger. The record states, “All the presidents of the kingdom, the governors, and the princes, the counsellors, and the captains, have consulted together to establish a royal statute, and to make a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions. Now, O king, establish the decree, and sign the writing, that it be not changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not.” (Dan. 6:7,8) However, Daniel continued to pray to God although knowing of the king’s pronouncement. “Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.”—vs. 10

This is a great lesson for the Lord’s people to also have the same spirit of faith and confidence as Daniel. Let us learn to put our trust in God and dare to be a Daniel. We must be ready to stand alone if necessary. “Take heed, and be quiet; fear not, and neither be fainthearted.”—Isa. 7:4

GRACE ABOUNDS

The Apostle Paul encouraged the church at Corinth by saying, “God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work: (As it is written, He hath dispersed

abroad; he hath given to the poor: his righteousness remaineth for ever. Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness;) Being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God. For the administration of this service not only supplieth the want of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God; Whiles by the experiment of this ministration they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal distribution unto them, and unto all men; And by their prayer for you, which long after you for the exceeding grace of God in you. Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.”—II Cor. 9:8-15

Paul was quoting from the previously written words of the psalmist, who said, “Praise ye the LORD. Blessed is the man that feareth the LORD, that delighteth greatly in his commandments. His seed shall be mighty upon earth: the generation of the upright shall be blessed. Wealth and riches shall be in his house: and his righteousness endureth for ever. Unto the upright there ariseth light in the darkness: he is gracious, and full of compassion, and righteous.”—Ps. 112:1-4

Those who possess Godly fear, or reverence, receive the light of truth by keeping the commandments of God. “A good man sheweth favour, and lendeth: he will guide his affairs with discretion. Surely he shall not be moved for ever: the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance. He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the LORD. His heart is established, he shall not be afraid, until he see his desire upon his enemies. He hath dispersed, he hath given to the poor; his righteousness endureth for ever; his horn shall be exalted with honour. The wicked shall see it, and be grieved; he shall gnash with his teeth, and melt away: the desire of the wicked shall perish.”—vss. 5-10

When writing his letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul also reminded them of the precious promises of God. He told them, “That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith;

that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.”—Eph. 3:16-21

NO LIMITS TO GRACE

The love of God has no limit, his grace has no measure, and his power has no boundary that is known to men. “Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.” (Ps. 55:22) “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. O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee.” (chap. 84:11,12) “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.”—Isa. 26:3

Jesus said, “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.” (John 15:7,8) Paul wrote, “Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.”—Heb. 13:5,6

The promises given to us from our loving Heavenly Father cover every feature and phase of our temporal experiences and spiritual growth. Growth in grace and mercy are distinct characteristics and mark the true child of God. Jesus said to the people, “Love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.”—Luke 6:35,36

THE HEIRS OF PROMISE

When the Apostle Paul wrote to the Hebrew brethren, he spoke of God's unchangeable promises that had been confirmed by his unconditional oath many centuries earlier. "When God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife."—Heb. 6:13-16

Our Heavenly Father could not swear by anyone greater, so he sealed the covenant with his oath. This is the anchor of our soul and the firm foundation of our faith. "Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec."—vss. 17-20

These wonderful promises assure us that ultimately all mankind will be blessed by the antitypical seed of Abraham—the heirs of promise under the administration of Christ's future kingdom. "If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."—Gal. 3:29

THE FATHER OF LIGHTS

We put our trust in God's unconditional oath and receive his exceeding great and precious promises. Accepting the heavenly calling through Christ Jesus, we become partakers of the call to the divine nature, and our hearts and minds are being changed from the human nature to that which is spiritual. We realize that God is the author of this great change, and that his Holy Spirit of truth is operating within us. "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. Of his own will

begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.”—James 1:17,18

Faithful men of old saw many of these exceeding great and precious promises that are now being revealed with greater light and understanding. “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) It was God’s ultimate plan that we might share as members of a new and spiritual creation.

WATERS OF LIFE

It is written, “Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.”—Ps. 1:1-3

The man that is like “a tree planted by the rivers of water” points to the meek and lowly of heart who is not in sympathy with the ways of the world or the worldly-wise. He draws his supplies of refreshing waters from the river of abundant life and blessing, and brings forth the fruitage of the Spirit. We also read, “All my springs are in thee.”—chap. 87:7

Using the symbol of water, Jesus taught a most remarkable lesson. “He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.” (John 7:38) This wondrous grace was also manifest when he spoke to the woman of Samaria who was drawing water from Jacob’s well. “Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”—John 4:13,14

When the mind and heart is filled with the exceeding great and precious promises of our loving Heavenly Father, we become more aware that the blessings of life will ultimately flow to all mankind. The promise of life in the truest sense

causes a swelling and springing up within, which finds expression through the tongue.

THE HOLY SPIRIT OF PROMISE

In his letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul wrote, “In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory. Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him.”—Eph. 1:11-17

THE FULNESS OF CHRIST

Paul encourages us to strive for the stature of a full grown man in Christ Jesus. “Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”—chap. 4:13

“Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”—II Pet. 1:4 ■

CHAPTER 17

Resting in Christ

*“He that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.”
—Hebrews 4:10*

GOD’S “REST” REFERRED to in our text is mentioned in Genesis 2:2, which reads, “On the seventh [sixth, *Rotherham Emphasized Bible*] day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.” We are not to suppose from this that God rested because he had become weary. The thought is that he desisted from his work. Notice the words of the Prophet Isaiah: “Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding.”—Isa. 40:28

The thought of resting from labor on the seventh day was continued when the Lord gave his Law to the Israelites following their exodus from Egypt. The Sabbath commandment was, “Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.”—Exod. 20:8-11

As time went on, religious services were instituted on the Sabbath Day, but this was not a part of God's original arrangement. The thought of rest was the sole design of the Creator pertaining to this day which he had hallowed. There was a divine purpose behind this which is clearly set forth in the New Testament by the Apostle Paul. Our text pinpoints this purpose, and it is amplified in the context.—Heb. 4:1-11

Paul wrote, "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached [to them] did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it." (vss. 1,2) Here, the admonition to spiritual Israelites of the present age is that they should be very watchful lest they do not live up fully to the conditions attached to the promises which God has made to them—promises which, when they reach their complete fulfillment in the kingdom, will assure us a position of complete "rest" beyond the veil.

While the Israelites were not of the "house of sons" in the divine arrangement, as servants they were given the opportunity also of resting in the promises of God. The reason most of them failed was their lack of faith both in God and in his promises. Paul explains that the "gospel" was preached to them, as well as to us. The special reference here seems to be to the assurance given them by God that they would be delivered from Egyptian bondage and led into the land of promise.

Paul continues his explanation of the Sabbath type: "We which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works." (Heb. 4:3,4) "The works were finished from the foundation of the world"—not only had the earth been brought to a suitable condition to be habitable by man, but in his foreknowledge the Creator knew that his human creation would disobey his law and come under sentence of death. Because of this, the plan, or works, for his recovery from death through Christ the Redeemer was also formed.

The Israelites were used by the Lord to picture this glorious future deliverance. First, they were delivered from Egyptian bondage under the leadership of Moses—a type of Christ. Their rest in the Lord in these circumstances was dependent upon their faith and trust in Moses. The majority of them failed to enter into this rest which had been provided, and died in the wilderness. Later, the remaining ones had the opportunity of entering into the rest and security of the promised land under Joshua. Here also, through lack of faith, the majority of them failed. Paul wrote, “Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief.” (vs. 6) Here the reference seems to relate particularly to those who, through unbelief, died in the wilderness.

ANOTHER DAY

Paul continues, “Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. For if Jesus [Joshua, *Marginal Translation*] had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.” (vss. 7-9) Thus does the apostle take us forward from the experiences of God’s typical people to the glorious “day” of rest which the spiritual Israelites of the Gospel Age are enjoying, conditional upon their faith.

This brings us to our text: “He that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.” As we have noted, God did not rest because he was weary. He completed his plan for human recovery from sin and death—a plan that was to be carried out by his beloved Son, the *Logos*, who later became Jesus Christ. God was so confident in the ability and faithfulness of his beloved Son that his position in the matter is described as a “rest.”

Since we have the opportunity of enjoying this rest of the Creator, the thought clearly is that we also should put our full confidence in Jesus and in his ability and willingness to fulfill all God’s good promises to us. What a blessed rest this should be, and what peace of mind and of heart it should afford us as we look unto Jesus, the “author and finisher of our faith.”—Heb. 12:2

OUR WORKS

Within the framework of this lesson, we might think of our own works as all those efforts which in the past we have put forth in order to gain the favor of God and thus to be assured of salvation. The Jewish people of Jesus' day, who were under bondage to the Law, were invited by Jesus to come to him and find rest. 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

Through the Law Covenant, God had offered the nation of Israel an opportunity, by obedience to its terms, to gain many rich blessings as his people. Doubtless, many of them sincerely tried, but they learned that that which was to give blessings was found instead to be a curse. This was not because the Law itself was imperfect, but because of the inherited imperfections of those who tried to keep it. Writing of his own experiences and the experiences of other Jews formerly under the Law who had since found rest in Christ, Paul said, "When we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were [made manifest] by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death."—Rom. 7:5

How greatly Paul rejoiced to be free from this burdensome yoke of the Law and to realize that through Christ he had found rest for his soul. He wrote, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." (Rom. 8:1) The Creator knew that all mankind would be lost under sin, but he also knew that he could trust the plan of redemption to the hands of his Son. Paul enjoyed this same rest in the finished work of Christ, as did all the believing Jews of that time who had been held in bondage by their futile efforts to gain blessings by keeping the Law.

NOT IDLE

Resting in the finished work of Christ does not by any means imply listlessness, or idleness, in the doing of the Heavenly Father's will. Paul admonished that we should work out our own salvation "with fear and trembling," and

adds that it is God who works in us to do his good pleasure. (Phil. 2:12,13) Yes, there is much “work” that we are to do. We are to study to show ourselves approved unto God, workmen that need not to be ashamed, “rightly dividing the word of truth.”—II Tim. 2:15

If we humbly search the “word of truth” in order to rightly apply its principles in our lives, we will be workmen pleasing to the Lord. This will be a lifetime effort. The pathway of the just is as a shining light which shines more and more until the perfect day. By diligence and humility in prayer and study, we will continue to experience an ever clearer understanding of the Father’s will for us, and our comprehension of his plan of the ages for the blessing of all mankind will become increasingly clear.

As we work out our own salvation through study, prayer, and application, it should not be with a sense of bondage, or frustration. If we have the right spirit we will endeavor to do all we can in obedience to the Father’s will. We will do it in the spirit of restfulness and assurance that our acceptableness to God is not based upon our own efforts but in the finished work of Christ. Our efforts are designed to demonstrate our heart condition of supreme loyalty to God under all circumstances.

The Master’s “burden is light” because he makes it possible for us to bear it. Paul quotes the Lord as having said to him, “My strength is made perfect in weakness.” (II Cor. 12:9) The assurance of this strength, received upon the basis of our faith, enables us to realize that nothing can hinder our complete victory in Christ. Thus we rest in him.

Consider the many assurances Paul gives us in the 8th chapter of Romans: “If the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.” (Rom. 8:11) Consider the great power that was required to raise Jesus from the dead. Here we have the assurance that this same power is available to work in and for us.

“As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” (vs. 14) If we are humbly following the will of God as outlined in his inspired Word, then we are being led by his

Spirit. Sometimes the Holy Spirit leads in difficult paths. The way may not be strewn with roses but, if it is God's way, outlined by his Word, we know that we are his children, and we know that he loves and cares for his children. How sweet is the rest this provides.

"The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And 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 together." (Rom. 8:16,17) Peter wrote that, through the prophets, the Spirit testified beforehand concerning the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow. (I Pet. 1:11) If we have the privilege of suffering with Christ, it means that we are indeed the sons of God and participating in that aspect of the plan of God foretold by the Spirit through the prophets. This means that we are walking in a narrow and difficult way, but always with the assurance from the great burden-bearer, Christ Jesus, that we will not be tried above our ability to bear. Thus we rest in him.

HOPE OF GLORY

"I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." (Rom. 8:18) Of Jesus it is written that, "for the joy that was set before him [he] endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Heb. 12:2) We have a joy set before us also. It is the hope of glory described by Paul in Romans 5:2 as "the glory of God." It is this hope that helps to lighten the burden of the narrow way and enables us to rest the more fully in Jesus.

"We are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?" (Rom. 8:24) Not until we have worked out our own salvation completely, and have been exalted to glory with Jesus, will hope give way to reality. For now, our faith enables us to see the otherwise unseen things, and this vision of faith is one of our greatest sources of strength as we continue to rest in the finished work of Christ.

"We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his

purpose.” (Rom. 8:28) What could give us a greater rest in Christ than to have faith to believe that all our experiences are working “together for good” to us as New Creatures in Christ Jesus? This indicates how fully we are in the love and care of the Lord. This blessed relationship is due to the fact that, as consecrated believers, we have entered into Christ’s rest, having ceased from our own ineffectual works of self-righteousness. Truly this is a blessed rest.

“What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? 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?” (vss. 31,32) What a blessed assurance this is that our needs as New Creatures, including the need for the robe of Christ’s righteousness, are all provided through Christ, to whom the Creator has assigned the great work of redemption and recovery from sin. We could perhaps condemn ourselves for the imperfections which we know that we have, and certainly others may indeed condemn us. However, no one, not even ourselves, can properly lay any damaging charge against us as long as we are resting in Christ and the precious blood of the atonement.

“Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.” (vss. 33,34) Here again, we are provided with a firm foundation for our faith in the finished work of Christ. We know that we must continue to struggle against the imperfections of the flesh, but we know also that we do this under the covering of the robe of Christ’s righteousness. Therefore, we have the continual assurance of divine approval because we have ceased from our own works as God did from his. We are putting our full trust in the provisions of atonement made available through Christ.

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.” (vss. 35-37) Satan and his cohorts will do

all in their power to separate us from the love of God, but we have the assurance that greater is he who is for us than all they who be against us. In this blessed assurance, we rest although we be “killed all the day long” and “are counted as sheep for the slaughter.”

We cannot be conquerors in our own wisdom, strength, and righteousness, but we can be conquerors through him that loved us. Knowing this, we can go forth without hesitation, regardless of how threatening the way before us might appear to be. To do this requires faith. The ancient Israelites failed to enter into rest because they lacked the necessary faith. Let it not be so with us, and it will not be so if we continue to look to the Lord for guidance and strength.

That guidance is already provided in his precious Word. Let us lay hold firmly upon it and be alert to its every indication of the Lord’s will, for “I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom. 8:38,39) What a blessed unity with God and with Christ is here assured. It is a unity indeed that is essential if we are to maintain our rest in Christ throughout all the storms of life. It is through our faith that we are persuaded of this blessed relationship with the Father and with his Son. May our faith ever remain steadfast as an anchor to the soul “which entereth into that within the veil.”—Heb. 6:19

THE FUTURE REST

Our rest in Christ while we are still in the flesh depends upon our faith in the promised glory to follow the present suffering of the narrow way. If faithful unto death, we will, beyond the veil, enter even more fully into the rest that has been provided through Christ. However, then, even as now, this will not mean idleness, but a complete and perfect cooperation with Christ in the glorious work of the kingdom, and with the full assurance that the divine plan through him cannot, and will not, fail. ■

CHAPTER 18

The Glory to Follow

*“Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us
a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;
While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the
things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are
temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”
—II Corinthians 4:17,18*

THE APOSTLE PAUL said that he rejoiced in the privilege of suffering with Christ. “If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister; Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body’s sake, which is the church.”—Col. 1:23,24

While every faithful follower of the Master experiences joys far deeper and more satisfying than anything known to the unbelieving world, it is also true that the Christian life is one of suffering and sacrifice. Jesus told his disciples that this would be their experience. He said, “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”—John 16:33

The Apostle Peter wrote concerning the afflictions of the Lord’s people, and said that the Spirit of God moved the prophets of old to testify concerning the sufferings of Christ. “Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand

the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.”—I Pet. 1:11

Jesus had this basic truth of the divine plan well in mind when, after his resurrection, he preached that wonderful sermon to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus. He began with Moses and from all the prophets pointed out to them that it was necessary for Christ to suffer before entering into his glory.—Luke 24:13-27

At the time Jesus was crucified, the disciples did not understand this aspect of the divine plan of salvation. They believed that Jesus was the Messiah, the Christ, and they expected him to shortly manifest the power and glory of that office as it had been foretold by the prophets. When he was crucified they were bewildered, but their hearts burned within them when they realized that the death of their Master was not a defeat of God’s plan by their enemies. It was something which had been foreknown and foretold as an integral part of the divine plan.

One of the prophecies of the suffering and death of Jesus is recorded in the 53rd chapter of Isaiah. “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. . . . Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. . . . He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.”—Isa. 53:3,4,7

In the last verse of Isaiah 53, the suffering and death of Jesus are foretold; however, Isaiah also foretold the glory to follow. We are informed that he would be given a portion with the “great,” and to this is added that he would divide the reward with the “strong.” “Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong.” (vs. 12) The “great” referred to here is evidently the great Creator of the universe—our Heavenly Father. Jesus was given a “portion” with his Heavenly Father. Those who are “strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might” are Jesus’ faithful followers. (Eph. 6:10) While being “sown in weakness” according to the flesh (I Cor. 15:43), they are indeed “strong in the Lord” through the power of the Holy Spirit. It

is this strength that helps them to endure and to struggle as they fight “the good fight of faith.” (I Tim. 6:12) In Revelation 3:21, we find the Lord saying, “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.”

COMPLETE TRUST

Jesus knew of his Father’s arrangement for him to suffer and die as the world’s Redeemer. The many promises of God, concerning the glory that would follow the suffering, helped to sustain him. Paul refers to the joy that was set before Jesus by these promises. It was this joy that enabled him to endure the cross and to despise the shame. Because he endured faithfully, he is now “set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”—Heb. 12:2

In a prophecy setting forth Jesus’ confidence in his Heavenly Father, recorded in the 16th Psalm, we read, “I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”—Ps. 16:8-11

Jesus knew that he was to die, but he also knew that he would not be left in death. He would be restored to life. He had confidence that God would show him the path of life. In his case, that path of life led through suffering to death. He knew this when he explained to his disciples that those who lose their lives in sacrifice—in the divine cause as he expected to do—would ultimately save their lives.

SUFFERING WITH CHRIST

It is clear that the prophetic testimony concerning the suffering of Christ and the glory that should follow applies also to the suffering and sacrificial death of his true followers. The Apostle Peter makes this plain. He wrote, “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings;

that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.”—I Pet. 4:12,13

Our theme text refers to Christian suffering as “light affliction” compared with the “eternal weight of glory.” The sufferings, or afflictions, of Christ are light in comparison with the weight of glory to follow, although from the human standpoint these afflictions are often severe and crushing. Think of what they involved in the case of Jesus. He was harassed by his enemies, most of whom were the religious leaders of his day, and, finally, put to death upon the cross. Think of the glory into which he entered as a result of his faithfulness. He received the divine nature and was given a position with the Heavenly Father.

The followers of Jesus from then until now have also suffered. In the days of the Early Church and throughout the Dark Ages particularly, they were almost continuously persecuted. Some were crucified, others thrown to the lions, while still others were burned at the stake or subjected to other cruelties. All of the Lord’s faithful people throughout this present Gospel Age have suffered trials and persecutions of one sort or another, either their own or as the “companions of them who were so used.”—Heb. 10:33,34

Regardless of the severity of the afflictions, they have been light and temporary compared with the eternal weight of glory to follow. With the followers of Jesus, even as with Jesus himself, this glory that follows the suffering consists of exaltation to the divine nature. They are also promised to share the throne with Jesus. (Rev. 3:21) Paul speaks of our “hope of the glory of God.” (Rom. 5:2) This goes beyond the ability of the human mind to comprehend. This glory to follow will not be “but for a moment,” but, instead, it will be eternal.

ILLUSTRATIONS

While we cannot comprehend the glory for which we are encouraged to hope, the Bible helps us to grasp some of its aspects, at least partially, by the various titles it ascribes to Jesus and to his body members. Jesus, for example, is a king, indeed the “KING OF KINGS.” (Rev. 19:16) A king is one who reigns over subjects, and the promise to the true church is that she “shall reign with him a thousand years.”—chap. 20:6

We might refer to this as the kingly glory to follow the afflictions. Paul set forth this thought clearly when he said that if we suffer with Christ we shall also reign with him. (II Tim. 2:11,12) This means that if we do not suffer with Christ we will not reign with him. It means that if, after entering into a covenant with the Lord to lay down our lives as Jesus did, we then hold back, sidestepping our privileges of service and sacrifice, we will not be found worthy to share the throne of his glory. These are sobering thoughts and should stimulate us to greater zeal and increasing diligence in devoting our lives to the service of the Lord by a daily laying down and giving up of our all in doing the divine will.

SERVANTS OF THE COVENANT

The Bible informs us that Jesus will be the Mediator of the New Covenant in his future kingdom. The Apostle Paul explains that we have also been made “able ministers” of that covenant. (II Cor. 3:6; Heb. 12:24) The New Covenant is foretold in Jeremiah 31:31-34. When that covenant is made with all the people, the law of God will be written in their hearts and they will be restored to perfection. This perfection is that which they lost through the sin of Adam in the Garden of Eden.

The Prophet Isaiah refers to this glorious work of restoration, and pictures the church as helping to bring it about, in a prophecy from which Paul quoted and applied to the disciples of Christ. “In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and 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 [of death], Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves.”—Isa. 49:8,9; II Cor. 6:2

PRIESTS OF GOD

Another title which the Bible ascribes both to Jesus and his church is that of priests. This title applies to Jesus and to his church in the flesh, for it pertains first to the work of sacrifice. In the Jewish Age, the offering of typical sacrifices was one of the chief functions of the priesthood. Peter wrote to the followers of Jesus, saying, “Ye also, as lively stones, are

built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up . . . sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.”—I Pet. 2:5

In verse 9 of this chapter, Peter speaks of the church as being a “royal priesthood.” It is to become royal priests that the present sacrificial work is leading for all those who are faithful unto death. The “royal priesthood” is a kingly priesthood, typified by Melchisedec, who was a priest upon his throne. (Gen. 14:18) Melchisedec was a type of Jesus exalted to kingship, and ruling to bless the people during the thousand years of his kingdom.

The faithful followers of Jesus will share this priestly glory with him. Revelation 20:6 reads, “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.” In this promise, we do not have priests offering sacrifice, but priests who are reigning upon the throne, even as was Melchisedec. What a prospect this is, and how it enhances our hope of glory, the glory to follow, and the light afflictions of the present time.

THE GLORY OF JUDGESHIP

In his sermon on Mars’ hill, the Apostle Paul said that God “hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.” (Acts 17:31) Jesus will be the great judge of the people during the thousand-year judgment day promised in the Bible. He will have associate judges working with him. Here again, these will be his faithful followers of the present age.

We read, “Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?” (I Cor. 6:2) This is a well-known text to many students of the Word of God, but it is by no means the only assurance the Bible gives us that the faithful saints of the Gospel Age will share the glory of judgeship with Jesus. The Master himself spoke of this time, saying, “When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: and before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats.”—Matt. 25:31,32

It will be recognized that this is Jesus' parable of the judgment day. He speaks of himself as then being seated upon the "throne of his glory" with all his "holy angels," or messengers, with him. These holy messengers are his faithful followers who, having been brought forth in the first resurrection, are represented as sharing with Jesus in the glory of judging the peoples of all nations.

This is in harmony with Jesus' promise to his disciples as recorded in Matthew 19:28. In the context, Jesus said to the rich young ruler that if he would give up all he had and take up his cross and follow him he would have treasures in heaven. The disciples did not understand this, so Peter reminded Jesus that they had given up all they had and had become his followers. He asked what they would receive in return. It was to this question that Jesus replied, "Ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

In this passage and in the parable in Matthew 25, the saints are shown to share the judgeship with Jesus. Here Jesus speaks of sitting on the "throne of his glory" and promises his disciples that they also shall sit upon "thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Thus Jesus indicates that all peoples are to be judged, including the twelve tribes of Israel. Here again is a part of the glory that follows our light afflictions.

THRONES

In his teachings, Jesus drew heavily upon the prophecies of the Old Testament. In his promise to his disciples concerning their sitting upon thrones (plural), he perhaps based his lesson on the prophecy of Daniel 7:9,10,18,22. Here we have foretold the kingdom and judgment work. In *Rotherham's Emphasized Bible*, Daniel 7:9 reads, "I continued looking until that thrones were placed, and the Ancient of days took his seat."

This is a picture of the setting in order of the kingdom arrangement. Verse 10, speaking of the "Ancient of days," says, "Thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened." This compares well with Revelation 20:11,12: "I saw a great white throne,

and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened.”

Verse 18 of Daniel 7 reads, “The saints of the most High shall take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever.” Then verse 22 adds, “And judgment was given to the saints of the most High; and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom.” Thus, in this prophecy of Daniel we have mention of “thrones” which are placed in the kingdom, and also that “judgment” is given to the saints of the most High—these possess the kingdom. What a firm foundation this gives for our hope of judgeship glory with Jesus.

REVELATION

Many of the important prophecies and promises of the Old Testament are reiterated in the New Testament, oftentimes in the Book of Revelation. This seems to be the case with Daniel’s prophecy concerning thrones, and the fact that judgment is given to the saints of the Most High at the time when the saints possess the kingdom.

“I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the Word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.” (Rev. 20:4) The *Rotherham* translation reads, “I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and ‘sentence of judgment was given unto them.’” It is clear from this translation that those John saw on thrones had been given a commission to judge. *Rotherham’s* statement “sentence of judgment” suggests that to those who sat on the thrones were given the authority to pass sentence on others, resulting from the judgment process. Thus we find a beautiful harmony between Daniel 7:9,18,22 and Revelation 20:4, substantiating further the promise that the saints of this Gospel Age, following their suffering and death—their light afflictions—will become co-judges with Jesus and thus share in the judgeship aspect of the glory to follow.

FAITHFULNESS REQUIRED

It is well to remind ourselves that, if we expect to share with Jesus in the glory that follows the light afflictions, we must be faithful to the terms of our covenant by sacrifice. Paul explains that while we are enduring the momentary light afflictions of the present we are looking for inspiration to “the things which are not seen.” He reminds us that “the things which are not seen are eternal.”—II Cor. 4:18

Are we able by the eye of faith to see the things which cannot be seen with the natural eye? If our vision of faith is keen, we will be able to see to some extent the glory that will follow the present time of trial. We are not able to see clearly all it will mean to be joint-rulers with Jesus in his kingdom. It is impossible to grasp the full thought of what is involved in being “able ministers of the new covenant,” members of the Melchisedec priesthood, or to be seated on thrones as judges. The assurances of the Bible that a participation with Jesus in all these official positions in his Millennial Kingdom help us to realize how great that glory will be.

There is also the great glory of the divine nature. Paul speaks of this in his lesson on the resurrection, as recorded in the 15th chapter of I Corinthians. Speaking of our sacrificial death and subsequent resurrection, Paul writes, “It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.”—vss. 43,44

How true it is that we are “sown in weakness.” Every faithful follower of the Master should realize his own weakness and his inability to do the Lord’s will as completely as he would like. There is frequently the tendency to become discouraged. This should cause us to turn to the Lord for strength and for guidance. How often do we experience the fulfillment of God’s promises to give us strength.

In no small way, the hope of glory is itself a source of strength and courage. May this hope remain ever bright as day by day we face the light afflictions which are but for a moment, knowing that shortly, if faithful, we will enter into the promised eternal weight of glory. ■

CHAPTER 19

The Great Deliverance

*“When these things are beginning to occur, raise yourselves, and lift up your heads; for your deliverance is drawing near.”
—Luke 21:28, Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*

GOD’S PEOPLE OF all ages have been aliens and strangers in the sinful world around them and have been persecuted by the devotees of false gods. However, the truly faithful have always been encouraged by God’s promise to care for them and to help them in their every time of need. “God is our refuge,” wrote the psalmist, “a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.”—Ps. 46:1-3

A FAITH CLASS

God has not promised to deliver his people from their troubles in this life, although he often does, but he has promised to give them strength to endure their trials while they learn the important lesson of putting their trust in him. We should cast all our care upon the Lord, knowing that he will permit only those difficulties to come into our lives as will best serve to test our faith and confidence in him. Only those who learn this lesson of faith can be at peace and truly pleasing to the Lord. “Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”—Heb. 11:6

Wonderful examples of faith are brought to our attention in both the Old and New Testaments. Sometimes in these examples, faith was openly and visibly rewarded by deliverance from trying situations, but at other times it was not. This was true of the Ancient Worthy class, and it is also true of the little flock class of the present Gospel Age. As individual servants of the Lord we can often see the hand of God in our affairs. We can sense his lifting of the burden of trial which, without his help, might well crush us. Yet at other times we do not have this rewarding experience and can hold onto the Lord only through faith in his promises. It is through these experiences that we need to be convinced that, while we may not be able to discern the providences of the Lord in our hands, he is still dealing with us. We must learn that his tender mercy is over all our affairs, even when all we can see are threatening and dark clouds of trouble.

It is important to realize that our loving Heavenly Father is the very light of our lives. In the final analysis, he will not permit us to be tested above that which we are able to bear. The Apostle Paul wrote, "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised)." (chap. 10:23) We know and trust that none of his promises will ever be unfulfilled. Paul also reminded the Hebrew brethren, "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward." (vs. 35) God rewards those who diligently seek him even though, at times, his rewards are not outwardly demonstrated.

EXAMPLES OF FAITH

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

For a long period of time, the people of Israel, especially their kings, had been for the most part unfaithful to God. They had worshipped false gods and in many other ways they were disobedient to him. According to the Law they could have been justly put to death. As Jeremiah explains, however, God showed his compassion and mercy toward them. Instead of consuming them in death, he permitted them to be taken captives into Babylon.

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

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

DELIVERED FROM LIONS

Because of Daniel’s faithfulness in his devotion to God, those who were plotting against him said, “We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God.” (vs. 5) Surely this is a wonderful testimony concerning Daniel’s loyalty to the God of Israel. His enemies then prevailed upon King Darius to

“establish a royal statute, and to make a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any god or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions.”—vs. 7

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

Daniel continued openly to pray to God and was “discovered” by his enemies. Consequently, and much against the king’s desire, he was cast into a den of lions. From the scriptural account, we read, “Then the king went to his palace, and passed the night fasting: neither were instruments of musick brought before him: and his sleep went from him. Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions. And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel: and the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?”—vss. 18-20

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

DELIVERED FROM A FIERY FURNACE

Daniel’s three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego likewise had their loyalty to their Heavenly Father severely tested. It was demanded of them that they worship a great image which the king had ordered to be erected that he might

impress his subjects with the greatness of his authority and power. The penalty for refusal to bow down to this image was death by being cast into a fiery furnace.

Because of their loyalty to God, Daniel's three friends refused to obey the decree of the king. Thereupon the king summoned them before him and said, "Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?"—Dan. 3:15

The reply of these three courageous servants of God was direct and to the point. They said to the king, "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." (Dan. 3:17,18) The record continues, "Then these men were bound in their coats, their hosen, and their hats, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace." (vs. 21) The fire had been made so hot that even those who threw the Hebrews into it were themselves burned to death.

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

There is a vitally important lesson in this well-known experience of the three Hebrews. While God is always abundantly able to deliver his people from physical harm, he does not always do so. His providential care over his people is not always manifest in the same manner in their individual experiences in the narrow way. He may permit some to suffer

and die. Others he might deliver from suffering and permit them to continue in his service for a while longer, though perhaps under difficult circumstances.

WORTHIES OF OLD

This point is enlarged upon in chapter eleven of Paul's letter to the Hebrew brethren. Here he writes of the faithful lives of God's worthies of old. The apostle names many of them, such as Abraham, Moses, and David. He then tells of many others, "Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection."—Heb. 11:33-35

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

However, this was not true of all the Ancient Worthies. Paul continues, "Others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword [unlike those who "escaped the edge of the sword"]: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect."—vss. 36-40

These "others" were just as much the objects of God's care as were those who were delivered from prison and from threatened death. These "others" were mocked and scourged, and God did not interfere. They suffered "bonds and imprisonments," and God did not deliver them. They were "sawn

asunder,” as Isaiah, by tradition, is reputed to have been. They were destitute and seemingly uncared for. It was by faith that they realized that the great God of heaven permitted their trying experiences for some good purpose although they could not always—perhaps seldom—understand what that purpose was.

They knew, although they may not have expressed it in these words, that their God was too wise to err and too loving to be unkind. They knew that their privilege and responsibility as his servants was to be loyal to him regardless of what the cost might be. They knew by faith that, in the end, God would give his very best to those who left the choice with him.

SPIRITUAL ISRAELITES

We who are now living in the closing years of this present Gospel Age are encouraged by our realization that our loving Heavenly Father is also dealing with us in much the same way as he did with his faithful people of old. His dealings we see exemplified in the life of Jesus and in the experiences of those in the Early Church. Jesus was delivered from a calamity near the beginning of his ministry, but the Heavenly Father withdrew his protection at the end and allowed him to be crucified. We can understand God’s workings in the case of Jesus, for his role was to give his flesh for the life of the world, but we may not always understand why God allows us, the followers of Jesus, to suffer.

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

JAMES KILLED

The Early Church was bitterly persecuted by the king. We read, “Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.” (Acts 12:1,2) Herod also placed Peter in prison until after the Passover thinking

that then he would also have him put to death, but the Lord in this case intervened by sending an angel to deliver him.—vss. 8-10

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

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

FAITH TESTED

The trials of the Lord's people are designed to test their faith in him, and be a witness for him. If, every time we suffered a bit of pain either of body or of mind, the Lord would at once deliver us from the distress, we would probably be very thankful, but our faith in his love, mercy, and compassion would not be completely tested. This would be walking by sight and not by faith. True faith is that which believes in God regardless of the circumstances with which we are surrounded, or the distresses which we suffer. Regardless of any and all circumstances, a true faith will continue to believe that God rewards those who diligently seek him.

True faith is that which will not permit us to shrink from the narrow path of sacrifice no matter how many, or how fierce, the foes we see ahead in that path. Through sickness or other difficult circumstances, we may realize that death may not be far away. However, such an experience of faith will firmly trust our loving Heavenly Father in the assurance that he knows what is best for us. We will not permit the pleasures of living, or the threat of dying, to separate us from him, and we will be able to say from our hearts, "Great is thy faithfulness."

We will know, by faith in the promises of God, that our ultimate and glorious deliverance from all enemies, and from all our distresses, will come through death, if indeed, we are faithful even unto death. It was this realization that enabled the ancient people of God to maintain their faith in him and loyalty to him. They endured their afflictions, refusing deliverance upon the terms of their enemies, "that they might obtain a better resurrection."—Heb. 11:35

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

The "just" as mentioned by Paul would surely include those who looked for the resurrection, the hope of which inspired the Ancient Worthy class to faithfulness. When Daniel was informed concerning the great Time of Trouble through which we are now passing, he was assured that then his people would be delivered. While Daniel's people here referred to would include all of the Lord's faithful servants in every age who have longed for deliverance, this promise must have been a great source of strength to Daniel himself.

It was made plain to him how this great deliverance would be wrought. It would be through a resurrection of the dead: “Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake.” (Dan. 12:2) Daniel was told, “Go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest [in the sleep of death], and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.”—vs.13

THE FIRST RESURRECTION

How real has been the hope of spiritual Israel in the resurrection, the “first resurrection” promised to those who are “beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God.” (Rev. 20:4) This hope should be especially real to the Lord’s people now at the close of this present Gospel Age. We are living in the time when we see the signs described by Jesus relative to the time of his presence and the end of the age being fulfilled. Just as Jesus stated in our featured text, “When these things are beginning to occur, raise yourselves, and lift up your heads; for your deliverance is drawing near.”—Luke 21:28, *WED*

LIFT UP OUR HEADS

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

We know that God is in the midst of his prospective bride class. “GOD is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof. Selah. There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, and that right early. The heathen

raged, the kingdoms were moved: he uttered his voice, the earth melted. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah. Come, behold the works of the LORD, what desolations he hath made in the earth. He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire. Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.”—Ps. 46:1-11

“When these things are beginning to occur, raise yourselves, and lift up your heads: for your deliverance is drawing near.”—Luke 21:28, *WED* ■

CHAPTER 20

The Joy Set Before Us

“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”
—Hebrews 12:2

IN THIS SCRIPTURE, the Apostle Paul points to Jesus, who walked in a very narrow and difficult way during his earthly ministry. This is also true of those who faithfully follow him during this present Gospel Age. There are trials and besetments on every hand, and we are cautioned, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”—I Pet. 5:8

GOD’S PROMISES

Although Satan is ever searching for ways to discourage us, the Heavenly Father in his great love has provided us with the encouragement that we need. By the ear of faith, his “little ones” hear the reassuring promises of God to protect and keep them in the narrow way and under the shadow of his wings.—Matt. 18:10

Jesus was constantly confronted with circumstances which could have discouraged him, but the promises of God lifted him above the trials that were part of his work of sacrifice. Shame and ignominy were heaped upon him, especially as it pertained to his trial and crucifixion. Through these trials,

Jesus experienced a compensating joy of anticipation—“the joy that was set before him.”

Jesus did not serve his Heavenly Father in order to obtain a reward, and neither should we. Yet, the promises of God assuring Jesus of a reward were a great source of strength to him, and enabled him to endure the cross and despise the shame. Paul says that Jesus is now “set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

This was foretold in the promise recorded by the Psalmist David. “Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell [Hebrew *sheol*, the grave]; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.” (Ps. 16:10,11) That joy is also set before us. Jesus said, “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.” (Rev. 3:21) Like Jesus, we realize the joy that awaits us when we have finished our consecrated course. This is a great encouragement when the trials are severe.

THE PROMISED SEED

In addition to the joy of spending eternity with his Heavenly Father, was Jesus’ great anticipation of the joy of restoring the dead world of mankind to life during his future kingdom. This was another incentive to faithfulness which enabled him to endure the cross and despise the shame and ignominy that he endured as he was laying down his life for the sins of the world. This joy is also set before us because we are promised to share in the promised “seed” of Abraham. The Apostle Paul explained, “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.” (Gal. 3:16) “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” (vss. 26-29) Paul admonishes, “Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.”—chap. 6:9

MOUNT ZION

Zion is one of the symbols of the spiritual phase of Christ's future kingdom in which we are promised a share. Our association with Jesus and Mount Zion is shown in Revelation, where we read, "I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth. These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb."—Rev 14:1-4

During the thousand years of Christ's future kingdom, the entire dead world of mankind will be awakened from the sleep of death. The Prophet Isaiah wrote concerning God's plan for their recovery. "The ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."—Isa. 35:10

THE HEAVENLY JERUSALEM

When writing to the Hebrew brethren, the Apostle Paul said, "Ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels." (Heb. 12:22) This wonderful symbol emphasizes the glory of the bride of Christ, the Lamb's wife.

Mount Zion was a hill in ancient Jerusalem, therefore both of these symbolisms blend into one. We are thus assured that if we are faithful we will participate with Jesus in that glorious kingdom, in the light of which all mankind will walk and be blessed. What an incentive this should be to continue following the Lamb and to endure the cross daily as we are crucified with Christ.

THE ANGELS

The “innumerable company of angels” is a reference to those marvelous spirit beings who serve the followers of Jesus as guardian angels. Paul mentions them again in his letter to the Hebrew brethren. “Of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire.” (Heb. 1:7) “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?”—vs.14

Speaking of the angels, Jesus said, “Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.” (Matt. 18:10) In this instance, Jesus used the expression, “their angels” which indicates the angels who minister to God’s little ones. The angels ministered to Jesus when he was in Gethsemane, and he said to Peter, “Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?”—chap. 26:53

It is evident that one or more of these holy, invisible ministers are constantly at work in shaping divine providences for the best spiritual interests of all those who are followers of the Lamb. How marvelous it will be, when exalted to the divine nature, to see and fellowship with those who have had so much to do in guiding and helping us as we walked in the narrow way of sacrifice.

There are many experiences in the life of every Christian, including times of great trial and moments of joy. At times, the trials may threaten to overwhelm us, and our loving Heavenly Father seems to hide his face. Through tears, we may look up to him in prayer. Then, in his due time when he sees we have learned the needed lesson, the darkness scatters and, once more, we realize his promised grace to help in every time of need. The angels who always behold the face of our Heavenly Father, and who know exactly what his will is for us at all times, are present to change our sorrow to joy and our darkness to light.

What great joy it will be to meet the angels who have been closest to us throughout our earthly pilgrimage, and to converse with them concerning their part in helping us in our weaknesses, and in guiding us when the way was dark

and lonely. There may be times when we wonder how circumstances could change so suddenly, or what it was that removed an obstacle that stood so threateningly in the way. Beyond the veil, we will have the joy of asking our guardian angel about the matter, and we will look back and praise the way our loving Heavenly Father, through the ministry of his guardian angels, led and helped us day by day. We look ahead to this great joy of meeting and being with this innumerable company of angels.

THE FIRSTBORN

By faith, we now see the “general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven.” (Heb. 12:23) Paul is emphasizing that this is a large, comprehensive company. It is the entire spiritual class in the wonderful plan of God. The expression “firstborn” refers back to the time when God was dealing with the nation of Israel. The tribe of Levi was later substituted for the firstborn of the nation.

From the scriptural record, we read, “The LORD said unto Moses, Number all the firstborn of the males of the children of Israel from a month old and upward, and take the number of their names. And thou shalt take the Levites for me (I am the LORD) instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel; and the cattle of the Levites instead of all the firstlings among the cattle of the children of Israel.” (Num. 3:40,41) “And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Take the Levites instead of all the firstborn among the children of Israel, and the cattle of the Levites instead of their cattle; and the Levites shall be mine: I am the LORD.”—vss. 44,45

The firstborn are those foreshadowed by the tribe of Levi. The whole tribe of Levi served the other tribes in matters pertaining to God and Israel’s worship of God. When Canaan was divided among the other tribes, the tribe of Levi received no inheritance. The priests of Israel were of the tribe of Levi and were special servants in the Tabernacle and in the offering of sacrifices.

In the tribe of Levi, which took the place of Israel’s firstborn, there is a general type of the two spiritual classes in the kingdom. There will be the antitypical priests who shall reign with Christ. “Thou didst make them to our God a

Royalty and a Priesthood, and they shall reign on the earth.” (Rev. 5:10, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*) These are the over-coming class who will share with Jesus in his future kingdom. “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.”—chap. 3:21

There will also be a great multitude who will not be part of the faithful bride of Christ. “Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.” (chap. 7:15-17) These will be servants in the kingdom. However, all are included in the “church of the firstborn” who gave up their inheritance in the land—their hope of restitution blessings here on earth.

If we continue to lay down our lives in sacrifice, and faithfully follow the Lamb, we can look forward to participating in that glorious general assembly beyond the veil. There we will meet all who have suffered and died for upholding the banner of truth as witnesses for Jesus and for the Word of God. What a joy it will be to participate in the congregation of the saints beyond the veil over which Jesus will preside. There are also many whom we have known personally in our own lifetime, during the closing years of this present Gospel Age, who may be part of that general assembly. Surely the anticipated joy of such a meeting should do much to help us endure the cross as we walk in newness of life.

JUST MEN MADE PERFECT

The Apostle Paul spoke of another class of devout men of God, and referred to them as, “the spirits of just men made perfect.” (Heb. 12:23) This is a reference to the ancient prophets and those who, in ancient times, faithfully looked to God for guidance. As a reward for their faith, they will constitute the representatives of the earthly phase of the kingdom of Christ—the earthly Jerusalem.

Following the completion of the first resurrection and the meeting of the general assembly of the church of the firstborn, the Worthies of Old will be resurrected to human perfection on the earth. The Apostle Paul devoted the entire 11th chapter of his letter to the Hebrew brethren to that wonderful company of sacrificing servants of God.

The spirit of all these faithful servants was well illustrated by the three Hebrews who expressed their faith by telling King Nebuchadnezzar that their God, whom they served, was able to deliver them, but, even if he did not deliver them, they would still remain faithful to him. From the account, we read, “Nebuchadnezzar spake and said unto them, Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, do not ye serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands? Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.”—Dan. 3:14-18

Under the administration of Christ’s Millennial kingdom, all of these men of faith will be restored to life and will be the representatives upon the earth of “The Christ” in glory. In the spirit of their minds, they were always loyal to the Heavenly Father but, when they are made perfect, they will be able to render the kind of service they always longed to offer but were hindered by their imperfections.

INTERCESSION FOR US

We know that God is causing all things to work together for the benefit of our spiritual growth as New Creatures in Christ Jesus. Paul explained, “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? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."—Rom. 8:32-34

When we have completed our earthly pilgrimage, we will no longer need to have intercession made for us. Our loving Heavenly Father has cared for us throughout our consecrated walk in Christ Jesus, and by his power will ultimately exalt us to the very highest of all spiritual natures.

JESUS THE MEDIATOR

In his letter to the brethren at Corinth, the Apostle Paul encouraged them to greater faithfulness, and explained the wonderful privileges awaiting them in Christ's future kingdom. He wrote, "Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament [covenant]; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life." (II Cor. 3:6) The Prophet Isaiah had foretold God's purpose centuries before, when he said, "Thus saith the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages."—Isa. 49:8

We have the great joy of anticipation of the time when Christ's future kingdom will be established over the earth and "The Christ," as glorified ministers of a new and better covenant, will be privileged to share in the work of writing its laws in the hearts of all mankind. We may look forward to the superlative joy of being personally and intimately associated with Jesus as he mediates the New Covenant.

Jesus has been our Advocate, and in his name we have prayed to our Heavenly Father. He has been the Captain of our salvation, our Leader, and our Forerunner. Our Lord has been our Head, and his will has been our will. We have the unspeakable hope of seeing him face-to-face, and realize that soon we will be in the actual glorious presence of him who is so precious to us.

EXALTATION

Above and beyond all of the other joys that are set before us is the unsurpassed joy of meeting our loving Heavenly Father. “Who in the heaven can be compared unto the LORD? who among the sons of the mighty can be likened unto the LORD? God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him. O LORD God of hosts, who is a strong LORD like unto thee? or to thy faithfulness round about thee? Thou rulest the raging of the sea: when the waves thereof arise, thou stillest them.”—Ps. 89:6-9

The psalmist further wrote of our Heavenly Father, “Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face. Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O LORD, in the light of thy countenance. In thy name shall they rejoice all the day: and in thy righteousness shall they be exalted.”—vss. 14-16

Our finite minds are incapable of grasping fully what it will mean to be ushered into the actual presence of God and to see him face-to-face. With untold ecstasy, we shall then behold him whose abundant love has lifted us out of the miry pit of sin and death. At that time, we will come to know him even as we have been known by him.

The psalmist has recorded the wonderful scene when the bride meets her Lord. “The king’s daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework: the virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee. With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought: they shall enter into the king’s palace.”—chap. 45:13-15

A NEW COVENANT

The sacrificial blood of Christ will be used symbolically to seal the New Covenant through which the world of mankind will be blessed. Under the just terms of that covenant, the faithful members of the church will share with Jesus in the future work of blessing the whole world of mankind. This is one of the great joys to which we may look forward.

THE CURSE LIFTED

The blood of Christ will cry out to lift the condemnation which rests upon all mankind because of sin. The voice of Jesus' blood will make life available for all in their graves, and the curse of death which yet rests upon man and the earth will be lifted. What a blessing this will mean for the sin-cursed and dying human family!

Imperfect mankind will be restored to perfection. Those incarcerated in the great prison house of death will be released. Health, joy, and life will spring forth everywhere because the "blood of sprinkling" will have spoken with a voice which will proclaim the glorious provisions of divine love for the dying race, and announce that the time has come for the fulfillment of God's promises to bless all the families of the earth. It is for this great blessing that our loving Heavenly Father has called us out of the world during this present Gospel Age to share with our dear Redeemer in this wonderful future work.

"Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."—Heb. 12:2 ■

CHAPTER 21

The Prerequisites of Justification

*“Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect?
It is God that justifieth.”
—Romans 8:33*

JUSTIFICATION IS ONE of the most important doctrinal studies in the Bible. It helps us to understand the ransom sacrifice of Jesus Christ and how our relationship with God is attained. Our loving Heavenly Father, wishing to have some of his creatures share in blessing all the families of the earth under the administration of Christ’s future kingdom, has provided the important prerequisites necessary to justify those whom he has called from the world during this present Gospel Age.

DEFINING JUSTIFICATION

In our English Bible, the words “justification” and “righteousness” both come from the same Greek root which means “to be made right.” The Bible states in many places that it is God who justifies us. Therefore, the thought behind the word justification is to be made right with our Heavenly Father. Justification, as it pertains to the called in Christ Jesus during this present Gospel Age, is the arrangement by which God recognizes us as being made right even though we are not actually righteous. Thus, having been made acceptable, God begets us to a spiritual life that permits us to have fellowship and communion with him.

One of the qualifications of justification must be the removal of any estrangement and discord that may exist between God and the one justified. Someone may ask how this is possible since we were all born sinners, and how can righteousness be conferred upon anyone born imperfect? How does the Bible answer this question?

A FUNDAMENTAL DOCTRINE

Each of the following scriptures presents a prerequisite of our justification. These are taken from the Apostle Paul's letter to the brethren at Rome, and all apply to the justification of the church class during this present Gospel Age. We must keep in mind the statement of our theme text that, "It is God that justifieth."—Rom. 8:33

We are justified by God's grace.—Rom. 3:24

We are justified by the blood of Christ.—Rom. 5:9

Christ was raised again for our justification.—Rom. 4:25

We are justified by faith.—Rom. 5:1

BY GOD'S GRACE

With this brief introduction we will consider some of the prerequisites of our justification. In his letter to the church at Rome, Paul explained, "Now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."—Rom. 3:21-24

The last phrase is especially important, "being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." This introduces to us a righteousness that is set apart from the Law of Moses, and is not dependent upon the deeds of the Law. The Jewish people tried to attain righteousness through keeping the Law, but they failed. This scripture points us to a righteousness, or justification, that is obtained by faith in Jesus Christ. Both Jews and Gentiles need to be made right with God, as Paul proclaimed, "By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin."(vs. 20) Thus,

justification is made manifest, “even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ.” God accepts us only because we have faith in Christ Jesus.

We need this wonderful grace because, “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” Adam in his perfection was crowned with glory and honor, but none of his children have enjoyed the glory of human perfection. All have sinned and all are imperfect. Paul points out that we are “being justified freely by his grace.” God’s grace is his unmerited favor resulting from his love and loving-kindness. It is because of his great love for us that he arranged for our justification. Therefore, the first prerequisite of our standing before God in righteousness is our Heavenly Father’s love for us.

Had it not been for his loving grace and his great goodness and kindness toward us, there would be no opportunity for us to be other than sinners in the sight of God. This is true of every one of us with none excepted. This realization brings to our minds the words of a very familiar scripture, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16) He gave, and we are justified freely by his grace. The gift of his Son was not without cost to God. It cost him much in that it required the death of his beloved Son. It was also not without cost to our Lord Jesus. It cost him crucifixion and death, condemned unjustly as a blasphemer of God. This great love was freely given and without cost to us, and it opened up a new and living way for us to come back into fellowship and communion with God.

Let us pause and think for a moment of God’s love for us. The Heavenly Father was the one who was sinned against. It was his instructions that were dishonored in the Garden of Eden. It was Adam and Eve who owed so much to him and who sinned against him. Yet, it was our loving Father in heaven who made the first overture toward reconciliation, and at great cost. He arranged the first step so that those under condemnation could be brought back into fellowship with him. This was a wonderful expression of his grace and loving-kindness. This was the first requirement in providing the way for our justification. Through his great love he provided the “redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”

BY CHRIST'S BLOOD

Paul speaks of another prerequisite to our being justified. We read, "Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him." (Rom. 5:9) We are justified by the blood of Christ, "Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God."—Rom. 3:25

In his letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul wrote, "Now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ." (Eph. 2:13) These scriptures explain that the blood of Christ is a fundamental prerequisite to our standing of justification before God. The "sins that are past" refer to Adamic sins. The "wrath" of God speaks of the condemnation of Adam under which all mankind is born.

The "blood of Christ" has primary reference to his death. The "life of the flesh is in the blood." (Lev. 17:11) Shed blood results in the death of the life that existed in the body. Thus we understand the ransom sacrifice of Jesus Christ. This principle is, "Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."—I Cor. 15:21,22

It is written, "Take heed therefore . . . to feed the church of God, which he [Jesus] hath purchased with his own blood." (Acts 20:28) When we are purchased with Jesus' precious blood, then our relationship with God is dependent upon that purchase price. We cannot separate Christ's sacrifice from salvation. Our salvation depends upon it. The Apostle Peter wrote, "Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, . . . But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."—I Pet. 1:18,19

The sacrifice of the Passover lamb illustrated this point. The lamb died, its shed blood was applied, and the firstborn received life as a result. The offering of a life to God is the essential matter in sacrifice and therefore, blood becomes a symbol of sacrificial death. The blood of Christ is a gift to us because he sacrificed his life for us.

The expression "being justified by Jesus' blood" emphasizes the fact that the ransom is a prerequisite of our justification,

and it plays a very important part in our relationship with God. The philosophy of the ransom, and the part it plays in our deliverance from God's condemnation of our race to death because of sin, is an important and fundamental truth that clearly teaches that our redemption, which is from God, is made possible through Christ Jesus and his shed blood.

BY JESUS' RESURRECTION

Another prerequisite is found in Paul's letter to the brethren at Rome. When speaking of "The Christ," he said, "For us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification."—Rom. 4:24,25

Christ was "delivered" up in death for our "offences." Had he remained dead, none of the human race could ever be accounted righteous in the sight of God. Therefore, he was raised from death that we might be justified. Justification thus depends upon a change from our being at enmity with God to being reconciled to him, and from being under condemnation to being freed from that condemnation of death because of sin.

Paul referred to the Tabernacle and the typical applications of better sacrifices which they were designed to illustrate. "It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these." (Heb. 9:23) Then he explained, "Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us. (vs. 24) When Christ entered into the presence of God for us, he did not take the blood of a bull or the blood of a goat as was done in the typical application. He presented the merit, or value, of his own sacrificed life "for us" and, subsequently, for all mankind, to be manifest under the provisions of his future kingdom over the earth.

If Jesus had not been resurrected and had not appeared in God's presence for us, we would not be justified. John recorded Jesus' words, "Therefore doth my Father love me,

because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father.”—John 10:17,18

It was indispensable that Jesus take up that life again in order to accomplish the fruition of his death. He said, “No man taketh it from me,” which was not true of Adam whose life had been taken from him because of his disobedience to God’s law. Jesus was always obedient to his Father’s will and voluntarily laid down his life in sacrifice. Because he was perfect, his life was his own to either keep or to give. He chose to give it, but also proclaimed, “I have power to take it again.”

This is not to suggest that Jesus raised himself from death. He was raised from the dead by the mighty power of his Heavenly Father, as clearly taught in the Scriptures. “Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death: because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.” (Acts 2:24) Jesus was raised from the grave to the highest of all spirit planes, and appeared in the presence of God on behalf of his faithful consecrated followers who are being called in Christ Jesus during this present Gospel Age. In his letter to the Hebrew brethren, Paul told them, “Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.” This was a necessary step before anyone could be released from Adamic condemnation and be justified through the “redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”

BY FAITH

The next prerequisite is also found in Paul’s letter to the Romans, where he said, “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.” (Rom. 5:1,2) God’s love and grace in providing a way through the gift of his Son was the first step toward our justification. Christ’s faithfulness even unto death, his resurrection, and his appearing in the presence of God for us was a further step toward our justification.

We recognize the importance of God's part as well as the importance of our Lord Jesus' part in this providential arrangement of grace on our behalf. Our part is the full exercise of our faith, which is an active principle in the life of every child of God. Our faith must be active. "Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone."—James 2:17

Faith moves us to offer ourselves to God in full consecration, which is another step in our justification. We are justified by Jesus' blood which provides the merit of his ransom sacrifice. During this present Gospel Age, the merit of his blood is applied only for those who have truly consecrated themselves to God. If we have made a consecration to God, through the imputation of Christ's merit, we are covered with the robe of his righteousness and are thus made acceptable to God as a living sacrifice. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."—Rom. 12:1

The statement, "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God" does not refer to the peace of a tranquil life, but rather that we have peace with God and are no longer at enmity and in opposition to him. This peace of reconciliation is possible only because we have had imputed to us the merit of Christ's blood. The Heavenly Father sees us as being righteous and clean before him only because we are covered with the robe of Christ's righteousness. Thus, we are justified in God's sight. Only those consecrated to God may receive this redemption which is in Christ Jesus. Of them, Paul said, "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit."—chap. 8:1

One of the connotations of the word "peace" is reconciliation. It is the same word used by Luke when he recorded, "and on earth peace, good will toward men." (Luke 2:14) It brings us joy in the realization that the time is coming when there will be reconciliation and peace between God and man. Because of that reconciliation, there will be "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."—vss. 10,11

Being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. We are reconciled to God by the death of his Son. We are justified by Jesus' blood and by the imputation of its merit. We thus exercise faith in that precious blood, and offer ourselves in complete consecration to the Heavenly Father. This is another important step in partaking of the merit of Jesus' sacrifice, and is therefore a prerequisite of our justification.

One of the most beautiful texts that the Apostle Paul has written in explanation of justification is found in his letter to the church at Rome. "To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." (Rom. 3:26) Our Heavenly Father was just in sentencing man to death. However, if the sentence was just, how could he remove that sentence and still be just? He can do so only because of the ransom sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who died the just for the unjust, because the merit of the ransom is extended to those who have full faith in our Lord Jesus. This scripture emphasizes God's justice, even as his grace emphasizes his great love. It also affirms his eternal consistency. He provides the way whereby we may come to him and be justified, the way that enables him to be just and yet the justifier. He provides his Son that he can be just and yet be the justifier of the ones made acceptable through faith in the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

GOD IS FOR US

When emphasizing God's special care over his people who he justifies during this present Gospel Age, the inspired Apostle Paul wrote, "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? 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? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."—chap. 8:31-34

The subject of justification is a wonderful doctrine as it is presented to us in the Word of God. We rejoice in the knowledge that the elect, by virtue of the merit of Christ's precious blood

being imputed to them, are made righteous and acceptable to our loving Heavenly Father. Justification is not the process of being made right, but the righteous condition that is attained by the fully consecrated child of God.

The question may be asked whether God deals with anyone before they are consecrated, and there is no doubt that he does. The Scriptures are clear on this point, and the experiences of every child of God confirm that he does deal with those who are in the way of righteousness. Jesus exclaimed, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him." (John 6:44) The expression, "the drawings of the Lord," most beautifully expresses the experience of our own lives prior to consecration. Our providences and our experiences, as we sought after the Lord, made us realize that the drawings of God through the power of his Holy Spirit were directing us into the way of truth and righteousness. They were directing us, through his providences, toward the act of consecration and to our justification.

When writing to the Colossian brethren, Paul made the following statement that harmonizes these thoughts. He said, "Having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight."—Col. 1:20-22

This is a wonderful scripture with which to conclude this study. Justification is only the beginning of our heavenly calling in Christ Jesus, and leads us on to the subject and work of sanctification. Even as justification changes our status before God at the beginning of our walk in newness of life, sanctification changes us daily as we grow in grace and in knowledge.

Thus we develop as New Creatures in Christ Jesus. We go on towards the completion of the good work that has begun in us. Let us consider the great privilege that we enjoy of being justified in God's sight, and appreciate the privilege that we have of daily sanctification through the power of the Truth. "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth."

(John 17:17) If faithful unto death, at last our Christian walk will be finished and we will hear those longed-for words, “Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.”—Matt. 25:23

We also rejoice in the knowledge that the blood of the cross has a further dimension for the whole sin-sick world of mankind. The Scriptures testify that it will extend the redemption blessings to the entire world under the administration of Christ’s future kingdom of life and peace. At the close of the thousand-year reign of our Lord and the faithful members of the church class, all the obedient of the human family will have been reconciled to our loving Heavenly Father, and their enmity will be removed. Paul said, “That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him.”—Eph. 1:10

“Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth.”—Rom. 8:33 ■

CHAPTER 22

Journeying Toward Canaan

*“Because he loved thy fathers, therefore he chose their seed
after them, and brought thee out in his sight
with his mighty power out of Egypt;
To drive out nations from before thee greater and
mightier than thou art, to bring thee in, to give thee their
land for an inheritance, as it is this day.”
—Deuteronomy 4:37,38*

THE NATION OF Israel was a typical people, and various aspects of their culture, traditions, and religious observances served as illustrations. Many of these types had a deeper meaning and significant purpose in connection with God’s ultimate plan for the reconciliation of the sin-sick and dying world of mankind. This is especially true in connection with their Tabernacle arrangements, the Levitical priesthood, their sacrificial offerings, and its many other important details and services. These were designed by God to provide important instruction and guidance for the true followers of our Lord Jesus during this present Gospel Age.

THE CHRISTIAN’S JOURNEY

This lesson’s featured scripture points to another important aspect of the Israelites’ experiences pertaining to their journey in the wilderness and their hope to reach the promised land of Canaan. Their travels served to illustrate the very difficult

and arduous journey upon which our Lord's consecrated people have entered as they seek the promised antitypical haven of rest.

Our minds are thus drawn symbolically to the footstep followers of Jesus who have accepted the heavenly calling and are striving for an inheritance in Christ's future kingdom. The Apostle Paul explains that these consecrated believers "walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4), and aspire to new, higher spiritual goals and attainments.

OBSTACLES AND BESETMENTS

The faithful child of God will encounter obstacles and besetments in their journey to the spiritual Canaan. These will challenge, oppose, and attempt to discourage them in their new spiritual life and growth in Christ Jesus. There are three main obstacles that every child of God will need to overcome. Among these three are the weaknesses and failings of the fallen flesh. Therefore, we need to heed Jesus' instruction, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Matt. 26:41) The New Creature in Christ Jesus will also be required to overcome the temptations and allurements of the present evil world. (John 16:33) Finally, they will also struggle against the wiles of Satan, the great adversary of the Lord's people, "for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night."—Rev. 12:9,10

A NEW COMMITMENT

There are basic principles that the called in Christ must follow. The Apostle Paul wrote, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."—Rom. 12:1,2

The apostle has also given special instructions to the called in Christ Jesus to fight their individual Christian warfare. "Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty

through God to the pulling down of strong holds).”—II Cor. 10:3,4

We are also provided with our Heavenly Father’s precious Word of truth that contains the wonderful teachings of the Master. Therefore, we are strengthened to fight this battle, to know his will for us in this narrow way of sacrifice, and to faithfully carry out our lifetime commitment of total consecration. “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”—Rev. 2:10

SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONS

As a typical people, the Israelites were commanded to build the Tabernacle for their religious observances. God gave them very explicit instructions, “According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it.” (Exod. 25:9) This command was later confirmed in the Book of Joshua, where we read, “Therefore said we, that it shall be, when they should so say to us or to our generations in time to come, that we may say again, Behold the pattern of the altar of the LORD, which our fathers made, not for burnt offerings, nor for sacrifices; but it is a witness between us and you.”—Josh. 22:28

Any violation of God’s arrangements was punishable by death, as seen in the case of the very serious transgression committed by two of Aaron’s sons when it came time for them to carry out the particular religious services that they had been commanded to perform. The scriptural record states, “Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD.”—Lev. 10:1,2

Like the ancient nation of Israel which served as a type, the consecrated child of God is also engaged in a warfare that will continue to the end of his life’s journey in Christ Jesus. Having made a commitment to our Heavenly Father to be faithful to our covenant of sacrifice, there can be no looking back. Should we falter, we will not be prepared for a place in

the promised land of Canaan—Christ’s future kingdom. The seriousness of this commitment was addressed by the Master during his earthly ministry when a person who expressed his desire to follow him asked for time to attend to his earthly affairs first. “Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”—Luke 9:62

POWERFUL ENEMIES

It was commanded of the Israelites that they drive out the various powerful nations that were occupying the land of Canaan. They were to dispossess them so that they could enter the land and claim it in accordance with the will of God. The Canaanites had no rights to the land they occupied. They had simply staked off the most fertile areas that they wanted for themselves and then settled on them. The land did not belong to them because God had promised Abraham that the land of Canaan would be given to his seed. From the scriptural record, this is made clear. “In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates: The Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites, And the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims, And the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.”—Gen. 15:18-21

There heathen people had descended into a revolting depth of immorality, gross iniquity, and idolatry that could no longer be tolerated and needed to be destroyed. There are ten enemies referred to in this particular scripture. Ten has the significance of being a number representing completeness. As the enemies of the Israelites, it was essential that they all be totally dispossessed from the land because of their extreme violation of the most basic principles of righteousness and common decency.

The Canaanite people were engaged in the most corrupt forms of behavior, and this is brought to our attention by J. B. Rotherham in his *Emphasized Bible*. Immediately following his translation of the Book of Joshua, he includes a special “Note” on the “Destruction of the Canaanite Nations.” In his “Note” Rotherham describes the level of

sin, degradation, and depravity to which the people of Canaan had fallen. He points to their worship as being obscene, sensual, and of the utmost cruelty. Their sacred places had been turned into brothels, and, in honor of their unholy false deities, women surrendered their virtue. Further to this, the sons and daughters that were born from these unholy rites were consumed by fire as sacrificial offerings to their false gods.

ANTITYPICAL LESSONS

Since the Word of God indicates that the Israelite nation was a typical people, there are important lessons that remain applicable at this end of the age, especially in connection with the significance of the monstrous enemies typified by the inhabitants of Canaan—the antitypical enemies that must be overthrown in our own lives wherever applicable.

We note the following text of scripture, “On this side Jordan, in the land of Moab, began Moses to declare this law, saying, The LORD our God spake unto us in Horeb, saying, Ye have dwelt long enough in this mount: Turn you, and take your journey, and go to the mount of the Amorites, and unto all the places nigh thereunto, in the plain, in the hills, and in the vale, and in the south, and by the sea side, to the land of the Canaanites, and unto Lebanon, unto the great river, the river Euphrates. Behold, I have set the land before you: go in and possess the land which the LORD sware unto your fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give unto them and to their seed after them.”—Deut. 1:5-8

CHRISTIAN WARFARE

This scripture has a symbolic lesson in connection with the true followers of our Lord Jesus. Crossing the River Jordan pictures the Christian’s consecration, and the land of Moab represents the land of the Adversary. Horeb serves to illustrate the mount of sin that must be dealt with. Those who have willingly offered their lives to the Heavenly Father in consecration are weary of sin. In reference to the “spiritual seed of Abraham” we read, “The LORD your God hath multiplied you, and, behold, ye are this day as the stars of heaven for multitude.”—vs. 10

We may consider the experiences of natural Israel, as they also pertain to the consecrated lives of spiritual Israel—the stars of heaven—lessons by which we are edified and built up in Christ Jesus. We have all inherited sin in its many ugly forms, and as consecrated followers of our Lord Jesus, we must be engaged in fighting the Christian warfare to rid ourselves of them. We should strive diligently to make progress in overcoming the weaknesses of our flesh, and to walk in newness of life. As the spiritual seed of Abraham, and thus enrolled in the “school of Christ,” we must learn the necessary lessons that pertain to our life of faith. Each of us will be examined by our loving Heavenly Father to determine the degree of progress that we have made.

As the “stars of heaven,” we are counted as New Creatures in Christ Jesus. The Apostle John taught, “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.”—I John 3:1-3

In fighting the fight of faith, we must also subdue our mortal bodies and bring them into subjection to the pure mind of Christ. This means that we bring every thought into subjection, even as the Apostle Paul explained, “This is the will of God, even your sanctification.” (I Thess. 4:3) Sanctification is the process of setting apart our mortal bodies in total consecration to God with the intention of rendering our best possible service to him.

ENEMIES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

There are enemies of righteousness and truth harbored within our mortal fleshly bodies, and we are to remember that natural Israel serves as a type of the little flock of spiritual Israel. In the conquest of Canaan, there were powerful nations that Israel was to dispossess, destroy, and to make no covenant with.

“When the LORD thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many

nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; And when the LORD thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them; thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor shew mercy unto them.”—Deut. 7:1,2

There are seven nations in this reference, the number seven suggesting perfection. These names, and the land which they occupied, also correspond to the enemies of the New Creation, the antitype of Israel. All who are of the little flock have to battle these many enemies of righteousness. (Luke 12:32) Our Christian warfare, and our battles as New Creatures in Christ Jesus, will involve driving them out so that we may go in and possess the promised land, which represents Christ’s glorious future kingdom.

Further instructions were also given Israel concerning their enemies. “Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly. But thus shall ye deal with them; ye shall destroy their altars, and break down their images, and cut down their groves, and burn their graven images with fire. For thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth. The LORD did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people.”—Deut. 7:3-7

FALLEN FLESH TENDENCIES

It is suggested that the various Canaanites who needed to be dispossessed may represent different tendencies of our fallen flesh which have to be overcome and rooted out. For example, the name “Amorite” has the significance of being very strong and very tall. Therefore, those Amorites who dwelt in the mountains and high places may represent those of the Lord’s people who tend toward self assurance, and

those who are haughty, or lifted up with pride. “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall. Better it is to be of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud.” (Prov. 16:18,19) Spiritual pride is one of the greatest of all enemies to be destroyed by the consecrated child of God.

Those in Canaan who dwelt in the lower parts of the land may represent a jealous disposition, or one that is easily aroused to envy. “Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame.”—Song of Sol. 8:6

Dwellers of the best and most level landscape could represent selfishness, as in those who expect to have, and demand, the best of everything for themselves. Other weaknesses according to our fleshly nature that need to be dealt with include malice, strife, covetousness, and arrogance. Discouragement is another weakness of the flesh that needs to be continuously brought under control. Many of the Lord’s people have been driven from the Truth and a life of sacrifice because they were easily discouraged.

SPYING OUT THE LAND

From Israel’s encampment at Paran, Moses sent spies to search out the land of Canaan. This was permitted by God at the request of the Israelites. (Deut. 1:22,23) The spies travelled throughout the land as far north as Hamath and west toward the sea. On returning, although they all agreed that the land was indeed flowing with milk and honey, ten of the spies gave a faithless report that put fear into the hearts of the Israelites. Only Joshua and Caleb encouraged the people to go into the land, overcome their enemies, and possess it.

“Caleb stilled the people before Moses, and said, Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it. But the men that went up with him said, We be not able to go up against the people; for they are stronger than we. And they brought up an evil report of the land which they had searched unto the children of Israel, saying, The land, through which we have gone to search it, is a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof; and all the people that we saw in

it are men of a great stature. And there we saw the giants, the sons of Anak, which come of the giants: and we were in our own sight as grasshoppers, and so we were in their sight.”—Num. 13:30-33

Joshua and Caleb brought back an encouraging report, but the spies who had travelled with them lacked faith in the wonderful providence of God and were overcome with the spirit of fear. Caleb said, “Let us go up at once, and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it.” We also as spiritual Israelites may overcome the giants of fear and discouragement in our lives, and share with our blessed Master in his future kingdom when we reach the heavenly Canaan.

PILLAR OF A CLOUD

God provided for his people Israel in a most remarkable way. “The LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night: He took not away the pillar of the cloud by day, nor the pillar of fire by night, from before the people.”—Exod. 13:21,22

From the scriptural record, we learn that God’s providence was with Israel when they met Amalek for battle. Moses stood on a hill overlooking the site of battle. “It came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed.”—chap. 17:11

God then showed his powerful hand, as we read, “But Moses’ hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.”—vss. 12,13

EXAMPLES FOR US

The Apostle Paul enumerates some important examples of God’s overruling care over his typical people. “I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same

spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.”—I Cor. 10:1-6

We must fight our enemies until we reach the end of our course. However, it is only through our Lord’s strength that we can cast out the enemies that seek to destroy us. Our enemies are mightier than we are, and we rely upon the powerful hand of God to help us.

Throughout our battles with the flesh, the world, and the Adversary, we trust in our Lord who has promised to be with us, and we must manifest his strength and glory in all of our Christian warfare. Therefore, in any victory that may be gained, we must honor the Lord and recognize that it is through his strength, his Word, and his Holy Spirit that we may conquer and possess the long-promised land of Canaan.

“I am the LORD your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, and to be your God.”—Lev. 25:38 ■

CHAPTER 23

God's Everlasting Covenant

“He sent redemption unto his people: he hath commanded his covenant for ever: holy and reverend is his name.”
—*Psalm 111:9*

GOD HAS REVEALED his loving plan of salvation through covenants that he has made with his people. He has promised to do certain things for them and these promises constitute a “covenant” or an agreement. If we are to participate in this divine arrangement and receive the blessings promised to those who are faithful coworkers with the Lord, then we must abide by the conditions attached to God’s promises.

A covenant implies an agreement and harmony between those who enter into it. The Prophet Hosea wrote, “They like men [Adam, *Marginal Translation*] have transgressed the covenant: there have they dealt treacherously against me.” (Hos. 6:7) Adam was therefore in covenant relationship with the Creator before he transgressed the original divine law. God’s people, the Israelites, also transgressed the Law Covenant into which they had entered with God.

The terms of Adam’s covenant with God are partially set forth in Genesis 2:15-17. These terms were simple, but exacting. They called for Adam’s obedience which was based upon the simple test of not eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Thus Adam’s part in this

covenant was to obey. Clearly implied in the record is God's promise to bless Adam with a happy and continuous life. Had Adam remained obedient to God, the beautiful harmony which existed between him and his Creator would have continued, and his understanding of a loving Creator would have been an ever-expanding one.

However, Adam did not remain faithful to his part of that original covenant agreement. As the Prophet Hosea wrote, Adam "transgressed the covenant." This meant that instead of continuing in a friendly relationship with God, he was alienated from him. God's disfavor was manifest toward him in that he pronounced the sentence of death upon him. He was cast out of the Garden of Eden into the unfinished earth to die. Adam's transgression affected his entire progeny in that they all came under the same manifestation of disfavor. The Apostle Paul explains this, saying, "Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."—I Cor. 15:21,22

COVENANT WITH NOAH

Because of Adam's transgression, God was no longer in covenant relationship with his earthly creatures as a whole. From time to time, however, he made covenants with certain individuals from among mankind. These individuals, through their faith and obedience, were pleasing to him. The first one of these mentioned in the Bible is Noah. Noah had demonstrated his faith in God by his obedience in building the ark in preparation for the flood. Noah's family held the same faith as their father and later shared in the covenant which God made with him.

God's covenant was made with Noah after the flood. The covenant promised that all flesh would never again be destroyed by the waters of a flood. The covenant reads, "God spake unto Noah, and to his sons with him, saying, And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you; And with every living creature that is with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth with you; from all that go out of the ark, to every beast of the earth. And I will establish my covenant with you; neither

shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth.”—Gen. 9:8-11

This is a very important covenant in connection with God’s ultimate plan for the recovery of the human family from the sentence of sin and death. While the promise assured Noah and his family that the human race would not again be completely destroyed by water, it is a reasonable implication that God did not intend that it would be destroyed in any other way. God’s plan for man was that he was to multiply and fill the earth. The command to do this was given to Adam and repeated to Noah and his family. He created the earth to be man’s home, and we can be assured that neither the earth nor the human race will ever be destroyed.—Isa. 45:18

The fulfillment of God’s promises relative to the redemption and recovery of his earthly creatures from the divine penalty for sin and death, is based on the promise of the resurrection of the dead. This means that all the pure Adamic stock which died in the flood did not perish forever. God’s covenant with Noah and his family is a wonderful reminder that he created man to live, not to be destroyed. Through his other covenants, God’s great love for his human creatures is revealed, a love that has provided an opportunity of salvation from death for all mankind.—John 3:16; 5:28,29

COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM

A few hundred years after the flood, God made a covenant with Abram, whose name was later changed to Abraham. He told him, “I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.” (Gen. 12:2,3) Two points are mentioned in this promise. One is that the descendants of Abraham would become a great nation. The other is that in him “all families of the earth” would be blessed.

This promise was reiterated to Abraham later, the last reference to it being Genesis 22:1-18. God tested Abraham’s faith in connection with his son Isaac, whom he believed was

the first of the “seed” which God had promised. Isaac was born when Abraham and his wife Sarah were very old. They both doubtless recognized that God had performed a miracle to give them this child of promise. When Isaac was grown, however, God asked Abraham to offer this miracle child in sacrifice.

This was a severe test of Abraham’s faith, but he demonstrated his willingness to obey. In the New Testament, it is revealed that Abraham believed God would raise Isaac from the dead in the event he was sacrificed as a burnt offering. (Heb. 11:17-19) When Abraham demonstrated his faith by placing Isaac on an altar and preparing to slay him, his hand was stayed by an angel who instructed him to use a lamb which God had provided as a substitute. God was very pleased with Abraham because of this marvelous demonstration of faith. He said to him, “By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.”—Gen. 22:16-18

NEW SEED OF PROMISE

Turning to the New Testament, we read, “The scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.” (Gal. 3:8) Furthermore, the apostle explains, “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.” (vs. 16) Thus, from the scriptural record, it is made clear that when God promised Abraham that his “seed” would bless all the families of the earth, the one whom he would choose to carry out his will was his beloved Son Jesus. Thus Jesus was the Christ of the New Testament and the Messiah spoken of in the Old Testament.

The apostle also gives us further information concerning the “seed” of promise. “As many of you as have been baptized

into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."—Gal. 3:27-29

This means that the faithful followers of Jesus during this present Gospel Age are the children of the covenant which God made with Abraham. Paul further states, "Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of the promise." (chap. 4:28) The Apostle Paul again associates the followers of Jesus with God's oath-bound covenant with Abraham. He wrote, "When God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec." (Heb. 6:13-20) Paul closely associates the Gospel Age church with the Abrahamic Covenant.

THE LAW COVENANT

God entered into a covenant relationship with the natural descendants of Abraham. This is known as the Law Covenant because it was based upon God's law as shown in the Ten Commandments. Moses served as its mediator between God and the Israelites. During the time of the Early Church, there were some differences of opinion as to whether or not the followers of Jesus were bound by the terms of the Law Covenant.

In connection with this, the Apostle Paul explained that the Law was "added because of transgressions, till the seed

should come to whom the promise was made.” (Gal. 3:19) Further, he states, “The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.” (vs. 24) It is therefore true that Christians are not under the Law Covenant, although they are in harmony with all its righteous requirements.

For the natural descendants of Abraham, the Law Covenant served a good purpose. First, as Paul explains, “it was added because of transgressions till the [promised] seed should come.” God knew that it would be many centuries before his due time for bringing forth the true faith-seed of Abraham. It was in his plan that the head of this faith-seed should come from the nation of Israel. Because of the transgressions of the Jewish people, and the time until the Messiah would appear, the nation would wander completely away from God without something to hold it together. As a result, the Israelites would lose their identity as the typical people of God. The Law Covenant served as a deterrent to this trend. While the Israelites were not faithful in keeping the Law, it did hold them in check so that there was a small group of true Israelites among which Jesus was born. It was to these that he presented himself as their Messiah.

Paul further explains that the Law Covenant was a “schoolmaster” to bring us to Christ. It demonstrated the need of a Redeemer. As Paul explained, “Death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression.” (Rom. 5:14) Adam’s transgression was willful because he could have refrained from partaking of the forbidden fruit and the sentence of death upon himself.

Adam’s progeny came under condemnation to death through him, and not because of any willful sin of their own. As Paul states, these died although they had not “sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression.” This continued until Moses and the time of giving the Law. It was then that a change took place in the case of the one small nation of Israel.

This change was brought about through the Law Covenant in which God promised the Israelites that if they would keep his law they could live. “He that doeth these things shall live by them.” (Lev. 18:5; Rom. 10:5; Gal. 3:12) This meant that

any Jew who lived up perfectly to the terms of the Law Covenant would no longer need to die because of Adam's transgression. When the rich young ruler asked Jesus what he must do to receive eternal life, Jesus referred him to the law as summed up in the Ten Commandments.—Matt. 19:16-20; Luke 18:18-27

The young man realized that he was not gaining life by keeping the Law although he had been making a sincere effort to do so. The reason for his failure is the fact that no imperfect, fallen human can measure up to the perfect standard of the divine law. He realized that, like all others, his life would end in death. The failure to gain life by keeping the Law caused the young man to go to Jesus.

However, the rich young ruler was not ready to meet the terms of discipleship, and neither did he learn the manner in which he could receive life through Jesus. He did, however, learn that he could not gain life by keeping the Law. As explained by Paul, the Law served as a schoolmaster to emphasize the need of Christ and the provision which God has made through him. Before the plan of God shall have accomplished its full purpose, all will be fully enlightened, and only those who willfully turn against the provisions of grace will fail to gain everlasting life.

AN ALLEGORY

Paul presents a further aspect of the covenant that God made with Abraham, and the Law Covenant into which he entered with Israel. He said, "It is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a free-woman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all." (Gal. 4:22-26) The Jerusalem which is the "mother of us all" was represented by Sarah, the freewoman. Thus Paul refuted the argument of those who desired to be in bondage to the Law Covenant.

THE NEW COVENANT

Another of God's promises is brought to our attention in Jeremiah's prophecy. It is referred to as a New Covenant and that it will be made with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah. "Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; 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

At the time this promise was made, the Hebrew people were divided. One segment was known as the house of Israel, and the other as the house of Judah. God included both to emphasize that his promise applied to all the natural descendants of Abraham. The promise to Abraham was that all families, or nations, of the earth are to be blessed, and will also have an opportunity to receive the blessings of the promised New Covenant.

The Lord explains that the New Covenant will not be made according to the covenant which he made with ancient Israel. It will be different because the law of the New Covenant will not be written on tables of stone as was the original Law Covenant. It will be written in the inward parts of the people, in their hearts.

The Law written on stone and read to the people did not bring about a change in their inward selves. They remained imperfect and sinful, and little real effort was made by the people to keep the Law. There were noble exceptions to this by a small class who, upon the basis of their faith and sacrifice, looked for "a better resurrection."—Heb. 11:35

Adam was created in the image of God, and God's law was a part of his being. A test of obedience was given to him that he had the ability to pass had he not willfully yielded to other influences. So it will be with those with whom God enters into full covenant relationship under the promised New Covenant. That future law will be written in the inward parts and in the hearts, as man was originally created.

BLESSINGS FOR ALL

The restoration blessings that will be made available under the terms of the New Covenant will be worldwide. "They shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD." When the law of the New Covenant is fully written in the inward parts of men, there will be no more need for the services of teachers to instruct people in the ways of the Lord, nor to call upon any to obey and serve him. All those who will have passed those tests will obey and serve the Lord from their hearts.

The Heavenly Father's promises are enlightening as recorded by the Prophet Jeremiah. "It shall come to pass, that like as I have watched over them, to pluck up, and to break down, and to throw down, and to destroy, and to afflict; so will I watch over them, to build, and to plant, saith the LORD." (Jer. 31:28) This is one of the promises of the restoration of Israel and a sign of the nearness of the establishment of the New Covenant over the earth.

Then, we read, "In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge. But every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge." (vss. 29,30) Then will come to pass God's promise of the New Covenant and its blessings, emphasizing that when the time comes for its fulfillment there will be a complete change in the position of the human family so far as its relationship to sin and its consequences are concerned.

Figuratively speaking, it was Adam who ate the "sour grape" of disobedience to divine law many centuries ago. Not only were his own teeth set on edge, but the result of his disobedience was passed on to the entire human creation—his children's teeth have also been set on edge. In preparation

for the making and ultimate establishment of the New Covenant, Christ gave his life to redeem Adam and all mankind from death. That provision will grant all men an individual opportunity to obey the divine law. This opportunity will reach the Israelites and the people of all nations in connection with the making of the New Covenant.

Jesus spoke of his shed blood as a symbol of his sacrificed human life. "This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." (Matt. 26:28) It is his blood that ratifies God's promise of the New Covenant, and makes possible its fulfillment. The New Covenant will give life to all of those with whom it is made. All mankind are members of the condemned and dying race. It is only through Jesus and his sacrificial death on behalf of Adam and his children, that they will have an opportunity to gain everlasting life under the arrangements of God's everlasting covenant.

As followers of our dear Lord Jesus, we surely enjoy this wonderful hope. It is the hope of sharing with Jesus as the promised seed of Abraham in the future work of blessing all the families of the earth. It is the hope of sharing with him in the work of mediating the New Covenant over all of earth's people. The knowledge of the Lord will fill the earth and reach the people through "The Christ."

Let us rejoice in the hope of glory and in the future work of sharing in reconciling the sin-sick and dying human family to God. "He sent redemption unto his people: he hath commanded his covenant for ever: holy and reverend is his name."—Ps. 111:9 ■

CHAPTER 24

Our Invisible Enemy

*“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil,
as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:
Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same
afflictions are accomplished in your brethren
that are in the world.”*

—I Peter 5:8,9

THE QUESTION MAY be asked, is there a personal devil, an enemy of God and of man? If so, who created him, and why does an all-powerful God of righteousness and love permit such a being to exist? Throughout the ages, these questions have been pondered by sincere and thoughtful persons, and many answers have been given. On the one hand, there is the view that the devil is a hideous-looking creature with cloven hoofs and a spiked tail whose chief business is to preside over the alleged torture of the unsaved dead. On the other hand, the claim is made that the Devil of the Bible is merely an evil principle, widespread and powerful in its opposition to God and to righteousness, but not a personality.

The Scriptures teach that there is a personal Devil, that he is of a higher order of creation than man, and invisible to man. This powerful being was created perfect, and is referred to as “Lucifer, son of the morning.” (Isa. 14:12) He fell from his perfection and from his loyalty to the Creator when pride and ambition developed in his heart. The Prophet Isaiah wrote further concerning him, “Thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above

the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.”—Isa. 14:13,14

A variety of names and titles are given in the Bible that describe the Devil’s various traits and characteristics. He is referred to as “that old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan.” (Rev. 20:2) In John 12:31, he is described as “the prince of this world,” and he is also thus depicted in John 14:30 and 16:11. In Ephesians 2:2, Satan is described as “the prince of the power of the air” and, in II Corinthians 4:4, as “the god of this world.”

Through the various references given to us in the Bible concerning him, we are able to gain a fairly comprehensive understanding of his many methods of attack against the Lord’s people. The first activity of Satan described in the Bible is recorded in Genesis. This is the account of the manner in which he deceived mother Eve. He asked Eve if it were true that God had said she would die if she partook of the forbidden fruit. Affirming that this was true, Satan’s reply was: “Ye shall not surely die.”—Gen. 3:1-4

GOD’S WORD ATTACKED

These scriptures point to an attack on the integrity of God’s Holy Word. This has been one of Satan’s methods of attack against God and his people throughout the ages since that early time in the history of the world. In this first instance, Eve was deceived, although Adam was not. So it has been since, many have been deceived by Satan’s lies, while a few in every age have remained steadfastly loyal to the Word of God. The importance of this on the part of God’s people is emphasized by the Prophet Isaiah, who wrote, “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.”—Isa. 8:20

It was not until the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai that the Word of God began to be made available in written form. Prior to that, God spoke to his people largely through one or another of his holy angels. This continued until the First Advent of Jesus when an angel announced his birth and declared it to be glad tidings of great joy to all people. Meanwhile, the prophetic writings before Jesus’ First Advent

were added to the books of the Law. These inspired writings became a part of the written Word of God—that part which we now refer to as the Old Testament.

Throughout these books of the Old Testament rings the harmonious theme song of the Word of God. This theme centers around the great kingdom plan of God to redeem and restore mankind to life—the life which was lost when our first parents disobeyed the divine law in the Garden of Eden. In this melody of divine love, there is presented the hope of a coming Messiah—the Christ—and it was this Christ whose birth was announced by the angel. By his birth, the plan of God had taken a giant step forward in its development.

NEW TESTAMENT RECORDS

The teachings of Jesus were first recorded in the four Gospel accounts of his earthly ministry. In due time, there also came the Book of Acts and the epistles of Paul, James, Peter, Jude, and John. Later, the Book of Revelation was added. Thus the New Testament was included with the writings of the Old Testament to give us the complete Word of God. It is this vast storehouse of truth which our Heavenly Father has used throughout this present Gospel Age to nourish and strengthen his people as New Creatures in Christ Jesus. How wonderfully the precious truths of the divine plan refresh us as we feed upon them day by day.

Satan has always been on the alert to disparage the Word of God and to render it ineffective in the hearts and lives of those who receive it. A reference is made to one aspect of this effort in Luke's gospel where he recorded Jesus' teaching: "Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the way side are they that hear; then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved."—Luke 8:11,12

This scripture is a part of the parable of the sower in which we are told that the "seed" which is sown is the Word of God. This refers to the glorious Gospel message of the kingdom which is the main theme of the Bible. Concerning the seed sown by the wayside, Jesus said, "Then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved."

Jesus was pointing to the Devil's efforts to prevent the Word of God from taking root in the lives of the people. Perhaps many of us have wondered why it is that so often, when we see someone beginning to take a keen interest in the truth of God's Word, their interest may inexplicably wane. Jesus has given us the answer. In the case of Eve, Satan insisted that God's Word was not the truth, and in the parable we see him snatching the Word from the hearts of the newly interested.

THE CHANGING PICTURE

Satan was not satisfied with the harm he could do by snatching away the Word of God from the hearts of individuals who might be interested in receiving it. As time went on, a much more ambitious scheme unfolded. Paul cautioned the Lord's people and foretold that there would come a great falling away from the faith, and indeed, this has occurred. "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God."—II Thess. 2:1-4

The most holy faith of the Scriptures was maintained through the apostolic days by the apostles' authority and insistence on strict adherence to the Word of God. Paul complimented the Bereans because they searched the Scriptures daily to see if what he was telling them was true. (Acts 17:10,11) This insistence on a "thus saith the Lord" for every item of truth was one of the basic safeguards of the Early Church.

Following the death of the apostles, this situation began to change. At that time, the Bible was only available in manuscript form and copies were scarce. Many of the believers had to depend on the knowledge of a few favored ones who

possessed the Bible, and could impart it to them. The idea soon developed that loyalty to the Word of God really meant loyalty to someone else's understanding of the Word of God. This natural consequence of circumstances was taken advantage of by Satan. As time went on, the tradition developed that, while the Bible was the supreme authority of truth, it could be interpreted properly only by the church and its leaders. The result was that human traditions and superstitions slowly began to replace the beautiful and inspiring doctrines of the Bible. This viewpoint is widely held even to this day.

It is apparent that essentially every precious doctrine of the divine plan has become distorted by interpreters of the Bible. Yet, it was so subtly accomplished that the majority supposed they were in harmony with the Scriptures. Satan has removed from the hearts of professed Christians the glorious kingdom hope set forth in the inspired Word of God.

THE MESSIANIC KINGDOM

The clear and unmistakable teaching of the Bible is that the promised kingdom of the Messiah would not be established until after his return at his Second Advent. Satan has distorted this beautiful truth. Playing upon the ambitions of the human heart, he succeeded in getting many believers to accept the notion that the kingdom of Christ did not have to wait for Christ's return, but was set up and functioning through a great church-state system.

Satan had tried something similar to this in one of his temptations of Jesus. He told the Master that if he would fall down and worship him, he would give him all the kingdoms of this world. Jesus met this temptation in the proper manner, quoting a scripture: "It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."—Matt. 4:8-10

While Satan failed to mislead Jesus, he succeeded later with some of Jesus' professed followers. They saw the glamour of power and authority among men who had succumbed to the lure of high-sounding titles. They gave up waiting for Christ to return to establish his kingdom and undertook to do it themselves. This became known as Christendom, or Christ's kingdom.

The fact that in Christendom there was almost continuous war, persecution, and evil of every kind—all so contrary to the joyful conditions of Christ’s true kingdom as presented to us in the Word of God—seemed to count for little or nothing in their claims to kingdom authority. Many chose to ignore the facts, and while there were no real evidences of Christ’s true kingdom having been established, they continued to be guided by the false interpretations of the Bible through which they were being deceived by Satan.

There were some points of truth with which some individuals seemed to have difficulty. For example, in Revelation 20:4-6 the length of Christ’s kingdom is given. It was to be a thousand years long. The claim was made that the Christendom of their making was already enjoying this millennial kingdom. However, others realized that according to the promises of the Bible, the Millennium was a time during which the dead were to be restored to life, and that no dead were being restored. Here Satan prompted a tampering with the Word of God by inducing a translator to insert the interpolation, “The rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished.” (vs. 5) Therefore, no one would need to look for the resurrection amidst the wars and troubles of their so-called Millennium.

KINGDOM HOPE LOST

The substitution of Christendom for the real Messianic kingdom, in addition to reflecting a disregard for the teachings of the Word of God, also took away the hope of God’s professed people for the real kingdom of promise. Once the church-state systems were established, the preaching of the second coming of Christ and the establishment at that time of the kingdom of promise almost entirely ceased. Thus with this one master stroke, Satan snatched from the hearts of many honest-hearted believers the great kingdom theme of the Bible. He did it by substituting misinterpretations of the Bible for the Bible itself.

The Word of God teaches that the followers of the Master should look to each other for mutual help in their study of the Truth. It would be a mistake to suppose that anyone, by deliberately isolating himself from others of like precious

faith, could expect the Lord to specially guide them in the understanding of his Word. The Lord has placed various servants in his church such as pastors, teachers, and evangelists. He expects all of us to help one another as much as we can. However, in following this arrangement we should keep in mind that the Bible itself is the final word of authority. Even reasonable conclusions should be rejected unless they are in harmony with the plain statements of the inspired Word of God.

DISCOURAGEMENT

Another method used by Satan to oppose God's people is discouragement, and the Apostle Paul speaks of his own infirmities. We read, "Lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong."—II Cor. 12:7-10

There is some difference of opinion as to just what Paul's infirmity might have been, but the important thing was the apostle's recognition of the manner in which Satan was making use of it to discourage him. He asked the Lord three times to remove this thorn in the flesh, but the Lord replied, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness."

Satan did not succeed in discouraging Paul, who testified, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore, I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong."

Peter says that we should resist this roaring lion steadfast in the faith. The lesson here seems obvious. All of the Lord's

people have afflictions of one sort or another—illnesses, deaths in the family, economic reverses, misunderstandings, and many others. Satan often endeavors to have us believe that if we were truly the Lord's people he would take these burdens from us. Thus does our Adversary instill fear in our hearts that perhaps we have been unfaithful to the Lord, and because of this God has withdrawn his favor from us.

Our defense against this sort of attack is to return to the many scriptures which reveal that the followers of the Master are a sacrificing and suffering people, and that there is no assurance that the Lord will protect us from the trials and difficulties which are experienced by mankind in general. Our attitude in these situations should be to cast all our care upon the Lord knowing that he cares for us, not according to the flesh, but as New Creatures in Christ Jesus.

PRIDE

Concerning pride, James wrote, "Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy? But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." (James 4:5-7) James indicates that one of Satan's methods of attack is to engender pride and ambition in the hearts of the Lord's people. We are to resist this urge by humbling ourselves under the mighty hand of God, knowing that our promised exaltation will come in due time. Genuine promotion that is in harmony with the divine will comes from God and is not self-planned.

Satan is directly or indirectly associated with all influences which tend to divert the Lord's people from their course of true faithfulness in serving him. We often speak of our enemies as being the world, the flesh, and the devil, but it seems evident that Satan stands at the head of this list. It is he who works to our disadvantage as New Creatures in Christ Jesus through the world and its temptations, and through our fallen flesh. How important it is, therefore, that we keep alert in order to detect his every approach. We should be prepared to resist him through a sincere knowledge of the Word of God and through prayer.

ENMITY

Shortly after mankind's first parents—Adam and Eve—fell into sin and death in the garden of Eden, God said to Satan, “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” (Gen. 3:15) Jesus later said to the scribes and Pharisees of his day, “Ye are of your father the devil.” (John 8:44) Here, our Lord was speaking of the serpent's “seed.” The seed of the woman refers to Christ and his footstep followers. The foretold enmity of the “seed of the serpent” against the “seed of the woman” was manifested in the bitter persecution inflicted upon Jesus by the religious rulers of his day. This enmity has also continued against his followers with varying degrees of intensity ever since.

However, we know that through it all the “seed” of promise will ultimately be victorious. We are not ignorant of Satan's devices. (II Cor. 2:11) We know that if we follow the Lord's instructions in our good fight of faith and rely always on him to guide and strengthen us, we will neither be overcome nor foiled by the wiles of the Devil. We have the promise of ultimate victory, for Paul wrote, “The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.”—Rom. 16:20

This will be the promised bruising of the head of the serpent. The word “shortly,” used here by Paul, is an interesting one, reflecting God's perspective of time. Paul used it nearly two thousand years ago and the serpent's head has not yet been bruised. He is not yet even bound, and is still going about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. He still appears as an angel of light to deceive and mislead. To resist him, we still need to have on the whole armor of God, which consists of all the great fundamental doctrines of the divine plan of the ages.

FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH

We have the plain and understandable teachings of the gospel of Christ, which is the only hope for the sin-cursed and dying human family. Let us study these precious truths and bind them upon our hearts. Let us make sure that our understanding of these truths is in harmony with the facts with which we are surrounded. The Scriptures are clear that

if we want to have a share in that kingdom, living and reigning with Christ, we must continue to suffer with him faithfully even unto death. This is one of the great fundamentals of the plan of God. Let us be encouraged by it to remain in the narrow way of sacrifice until the end of our Christian journey is reached in death. “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”—Rev. 2:10

Let us ever keep in mind the admonition of the Apostle Peter in the words of our featured scripture, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.”—I Pet. 5:8,9 ■

CHAPTER 25

The Church's Commission

“Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.”
—Galatians 6:9,10

WHEN THE RESURRECTED Jesus appeared to his disciples the last time before his ascension, he outlined for them what their work as his disciples was to be. He said, “Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.” (Acts 1:8) Years later, when the Apostle John received that marvelous vision on the Isle of Patmos, he wrote, “I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, . . . and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.”—Rev. 20:4

This work of bearing witness to the Truth was to be done under the power and through the authority of the Holy Spirit. Jesus himself received this power and authority at the time of his baptism when the Holy Spirit came upon him. Later, in a synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus quoted from Isaiah 61:1-3 to show that his authority and work had been fore-known and foretold by his Heavenly Father. We quote verse one: “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to

proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.”

Throughout the three and one-half years of his ministry, Jesus was faithful in carrying out this commission of the Holy Spirit. Luke 8:1 reads, concerning Jesus, that “he went throughout every city and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God: and the twelve were with him.” Jesus not only preached the Gospel by word of mouth, but also illustrated the blessings which would reach the people through the agencies of his kingdom by the many miracles he performed.

Jesus sent his apostles out to do a work similar to his own. After that, he sent out seventy others. This made a total of eighty-two who, under the leadership of Jesus and following his example, went from place to place throughout Palestine to bear witness to the Gospel of the kingdom. (Matt. 10:5-8; Luke 10:1) The apostles and the other seventy were empowered to perform miracles in order to substantiate the message they proclaimed.

NOT SOCIAL WORKERS

While in the course of their ministry, these first witnesses bestowed many temporal blessings of healing upon those to whom they proclaimed the message of the kingdom. This was merely a by-product of their campaign. The miracles were designed simply to make more effective their witness to the fact that the kingdom of heaven was at hand.

We should appreciate and commend those who seek to do good to their fellowmen along material lines. Probably at no time has there been a greater recognized need for assistance throughout the world. However, as followers of the Master, our obligations are set forth in his commands and in his example. Those who are acquainted with present truth have the advantage of knowing that, in the Lord’s due time, abundant provisions will be made for all the poor and needy of the world, as well as for the sick and dying, about which we can do very little now in any case.

Jesus said to those he called from their fishing business, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.” (Matt. 4:19) He did not say to them that in following him they would be

social workers to feed and clothe the needy. When he sent them out into the ministry, he said, "As ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, Nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat."—chap. 10:7-10

From these detailed instructions, it is clear that the apostles were sent out to preach, and in conjunction with their preaching, to heal the sick and perform other miracles. They were not provided with means to assist the poor. Indeed, they had to depend upon the generosity of those whom they served for their own material needs.

Later, when opposition toward Jesus and his coworkers had grown to the point that the religious rulers were ready to crucify him, he instructed his apostles that they should now take whatever material means they had with them, because from then on they could not expect much help from their fellow Israelites. "He said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing. Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one. For I say unto you, that this that is written must yet be accomplished in me, And he was reckoned among the transgressors: for the things concerning me have an end. And they said, Lord, behold, here are two swords. And he said unto them, It is enough."—Luke 22:35-38

Jesus conducted his ministry along lines similar to the manner he outlined for his representatives, except that his miracles were more outstanding, for on several occasions he awakened the dead from the sleep of death. After Pentecost, Peter also did this. (Acts 9:36-42) Another of Jesus' outstanding miracles was the feeding of the multitude. (Mark 6:38-44) There is no evidence to show that these five thousand people were particularly poor. It was simply that they had been listening so long to Jesus' preaching in a "desert place," far removed from their homes, that he considered it an act of courtesy and hospitality to provide something for them to

eat. His disciples advised that they be sent into the villages to buy their own food, indicating that they had the necessary funds to do this had Jesus permitted it.

This miracle, even as all the others performed by Jesus and his representatives, was designed to impress the message of the kingdom they were preaching. Jesus later admonished his hearers, "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed." (John 6:27) When the people asked Jesus for a sign, he referred them to the manna which God provided for the Israelites in the wilderness, and reminded them that all those Israelites died. Then he explained that he was the true bread which, when accepted through belief, would give everlasting life.—vss. 30-35

TO FEED THE POOR

A young man went to Jesus and asked him what he could do to acquire eternal life. This man was a Jew, and Jesus reminded him of the Law which promised life to anyone who could and would keep it. When the man told him that he had kept the commandments, Jesus said to him that he should sell all that he had and give the proceeds to the poor, then take up his cross and follow him. (Matt. 19:16-21; Mark 10:17-21) Jesus did not ask this young man to give his wealth to him so that he might feed the poor. What he did ask was that the man divest himself of his riches, dispensing them to the poor, and then become his follower. The simple act of giving his wealth to feed the poor would not have been following Christ, but a demonstration of his commitment in becoming a disciple. The point is that Jesus' ministry was not one of feeding the poor with material food.

We do not condemn the professed Christian world for devoting so much effort to social and uplift work among the poor and needy. We are merely emphasizing that this is not the sort of work Jesus conducted, nor are his followers commissioned to conduct such efforts. There is nothing in the life and instructions of Jesus to indicate that he concentrated his efforts along this line. He was commissioned by the Holy Spirit to proclaim the glad tidings. As his followers,

our great commission also is to preach the Gospel of the kingdom. The apostles understood the matter in this way, and for this reason we find nothing in their writings and sermons to indicate otherwise.

AFTER PENTECOST

After Pentecost, by the authority of Jesus and through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, the apostles and other disciples continued the ministry of the Truth, the glorious Gospel message of the kingdom. The apostles were able to perform miracles, as Jesus did, although this aspect of their ministry does not seem to be as prominent as it was in the case of Jesus. When the apostles died, miracles ceased altogether. The simple proclamation of the Truth was then depended upon to give the witness.

In the beginning, this effort was limited almost entirely to what could be accomplished by individual oral presentations of the message to varying sizes of audiences. Copies of the Scriptures themselves were very scarce and expensive. Many centuries later, following the advent of printing, the Lord's witnesses had this additional means of dispensing the message. Coming down to our day, we rejoice in the availability of radio, television, and many forms of electronic media as further means of transmitting the Gospel. There is no change, however, in the commission.

From time to time, there are those of the Lord's people who reach the conclusion that all the efforts to proclaim the Gospel of the kingdom are wasted because, they imagine, there are such meager results. Nowhere in the Bible are we instructed to give up proclaiming the Gospel on the ground that there are no results. The Lord's will in this matter is not determined by the results of the efforts. Quite to the contrary, we are instructed to continue laying down our lives in this service whether the people to whom we witness hear or whether they forbear to hear.

Solomon wrote, "He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap. As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all. In the morning

sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.”—Eccles. 11:4-6

SEED SOWING

In Jesus’ parable of the sower, he taught us what to expect from our efforts to proclaim the Word of God to the people. (Matt. 13:18-23) According to this parable, as the seeds of truth are sown, some fall upon what is illustrated by the “wayside,” some fall on “stony places,” and still other grains of wheat fall among “thorns.” Only a small portion, it seems, falls upon the “good ground” of sincere and honest hearts. It is this class, we believe, that eventually prove worthy of joint heirship with Jesus in his kingdom.

Jesus said, “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” (Luke 12:32) It is indeed a little flock—in all, we believe, a mere hundred and forty-four thousand. Essentially two thousand years have elapsed in reaching this small number, which is an average of less than seventy-five for each year, the world over. Of course, there is the great multitude class which is also reached through the witness of the Gospel message. Even so, it must have seemed many times to the Lord’s people that they were obtaining very small results from their self-sacrificing efforts.

The results, though, are not our responsibility. We are to sow the seeds of truth and water them, but it is the Lord who gives the increase. Indeed, the Lord does give an increase. Many times newly interested individuals are reached by the message. There is also a growth of grace in the hearts of those who continue faithfully to tell out the glad tidings of the kingdom.

SERVING THE CONSECRATED

Bearing witness to the Truth does not end with a public proclamation of the message, important though this is as the bulwark of consecrated efforts. Our love for the Lord should reach out especially to our brethren in Christ. Jesus commanded us that we should love one another as he

loved us. (John 13:34) The Apostle John wrote that we should lay down our lives for the brethren. (I John 3:16) The great need of all our brethren is spiritual help and encouragement. We should be on the alert at all times to render this needed assistance.

As a class, the Lord's consecrated people are the prospective "bride" of Christ and should be energetic in making herself ready for union with her Lord. (Rev. 19:7; 21:2,9) First, the members of this class are reached through the witness work and the examples of the consecrated. Second, together they then assist one another in the development of Christian character, in putting on the fruits and graces of the Spirit, and in being built up more and more in our most holy faith. This all comes within our commission.

Nor can we turn our backs upon the material needs of our brethren in Christ. When there was a famine in the Jerusalem area and the brethren there were in desperate need, Paul raised funds from among the brethren of many ecclesias to help supply their needs. We believe that the Lord's people in every part of the age have similarly been awake to their privileges along this line. Those in need may not be in some far off country. They might be right in our own ecclesia. It might be only a single individual of whose needs we are aware. What a privilege it is to render what assistance we can to all such. It is one of the Lord's ways of giving us an opportunity of demonstrating our love for him.

In this connection, we think back several decades to the opportunities which presented themselves at the close of the second World War. Brethren in a number of European countries were in dire need of food and clothing, and it was a heart-cheering experience to observe the extent to which the brethren in America and elsewhere came to their assistance. This is the privilege which, as the Lord's consecrated people, we all have of helping to take care of our own. If our love does not include this type of service for our brethren it is a shallow love indeed.

UNSELFISHNESS

The motive in all that we do as followers of the Master should be love. We should have no selfish desire to please self

or to be honored of men in anything we do. The course of selfishness is described by the Apostle Paul as sowing to the flesh and the course of love as sowing to the Spirit. Our text is the climax to Paul's lesson on these points: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."—Gal. 6:7-10

God has called us and is preparing us to be members of the Christ and to bless all the families of the earth under Christ's future kingdom. He wants us to keep our hearts sympathetic toward these "families" and to rejoice in the prospect of soon having the privilege of assisting in their blessing. How great, indeed, are the needs of the poor groaning creation! They are sick and dying. Millions are crippled and filled with pain. Millions are without homes and hungry. Millions live in fear of terrorism by neighboring nations and even nations that are afar off. Millions also live in constant fear of revolution and internal warfare within their own borders.

The Lord knows all about these conditions and could remedy them very quickly if it were his will to do so. However, he has a due time in his plan for this work. He is now preparing the personnel for this great project. He wants us who hope to be a part of that group in the heavenly phase of the kingdom, to love those whom we expect to bless, even as he loved the whole world in giving his Son to be the Redeemer and Savior.

One of the greatest blights upon the suffering world is ignorance of the true and loving God. Indeed, for the most part the people are without God, and therefore, have no hope. We know the plan of God and are in a position to speak a word of comfort to those we can reach. Thus, in a small way we can bind up the brokenhearted with the good tidings of the kingdom. What a privilege this is! How better could we do good than to do for as many as possible what only we can do, namely, impart to them the comforting message of God's plan.

This does not mean that if we are aware of specially needy cases along other lines among those with whom we come in contact, we should turn a deaf ear to them. We are to be helpful in all ways that we can, but our primary commission is to proclaim glad tidings to all who will hear. The Lord is still calling out a people for his name from the world and preparing them to live and reign with Christ. We do not now know when the Lord may give the increase to our feeble efforts.

However, as Paul declares, in our work of sowing to the Spirit, we are to do good especially to other members of the household of faith. This household are those who are already in the family of God, his children. These are to be our special care, both along spiritual, as well as material lines, when needed. Paul says that we should not be “weary in well doing.” There would not be much danger of becoming weary if we could see outstanding results from our efforts. It is because we frequently do not see results that we become weary. When we do, sometimes there is a tendency to question whether or not we are doing the proper thing.

Paul reminds us that we shall “reap, if we faint not.” Here he is not speaking of present visible results from our efforts, but to reaping life everlasting in the kingdom. The Lord does not want us to depend upon present results for courage and strength to continue in the narrow way of sacrifice and service, although we are all greatly encouraged when he permits us to see some small results from our labors. He wants us to walk by faith and to rejoice in the hope set before us of reaping “glory and honor and immortality” beyond the veil, and of sharing with Jesus in causing the knowledge of the Lord to fill the earth as the waters cover the sea.—Rom. 2:7; Isa. 11:9; Hab. 2:14

What a glorious prospect! May it give us strength to continue faithful to our commission to bear the glad tidings to all as we have, and can make, opportunities, remembering that those who will live and reign with Christ are those who are “beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God.”—Rev. 20:4 ■

The Marriage of the Lamb

*“Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him:
for the marriage of the Lamb is come,
and his wife hath made herself ready.”
—Revelation 19:7*

THE “LAMB” SYMBOLISM is very prominent in the Bible. It is introduced in Genesis 3:4 where we are told of a lamb sacrifice which Abel offered to the Lord. His acceptance of Abel’s sacrifice prefigured the sacrifice of “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29) Later, Abraham was provided with a lamb to offer in sacrifice to the Lord as a substitute on the altar for Isaac.—Gen. 22:11-13

In Exodus chapter 12 is recorded the account of the Passover lamb which was offered in connection with the deliverance of Israel from bondage in Egypt. This pointed forward to the deliverance of all mankind from bondage to sin and death. In this picture, the firstborn of Israel were the first to benefit from the shed blood of the lamb.

In Isaiah 53:7, we read prophetically of Jesus, the antitypical Lamb, “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.”

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul refers to “Christ our passover [lamb]” who is “sacrificed for us,” and the Apostle Peter explains that we are redeemed “with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.”—I Cor. 5:7; I Pet. 1:19

This wonderful Lamb of God is also mentioned in the Book of Revelation in the fifth chapter. Verse 6 reads, "I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth." Notice that here we are informed that the Lamb "had been" slain—past tense. The personal sacrificial aspect of Jesus' ministry was now over and he was the highly exalted Lamb.

The ultimate objective of Jesus' sacrifice as the Lamb of God was that all mankind might be reconciled to God through the agencies of the Messianic kingdom which he would establish. This, in part, is the foretold glory which was to follow the suffering of Jesus. A prophetic description of this glory is given in Revelation 5:11-13: "I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands: Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, . . . and such as are in the sea, . . . heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever."

WASHED IN THE BLOOD

Revelation 7:14, speaking of a "great multitude," says, "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." While here the reference is specifically to the "great multitude" class, the purpose of the blood on behalf of all who benefit from it is to cleanse from sin and to make the beneficiary acceptable to God.

In Revelation 13:8, Jesus is again referred to as a Lamb—"the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." In Revelation 14:1, we find the Lamb standing on mount Sion, "and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads." In verse 4, we are informed that "these are they which were not defiled with

women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.”

We read, “I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? For thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest.”—Rev. 15:2-4

THE LAMB OVERCOMES

The Book of Revelation refers repeatedly to evil forces opposed to the Lamb and the work that God is accomplishing. These opponents are referred to as “beasts,” “dragons,” and other symbolic names. Revelation 17:14 says these evil forces “make war with the Lamb,” and the Lamb overcomes them. This denotes progress in the plan of God, progress to the point where evil is no longer triumphant. By the time this becomes true, according to this verse, the “called, and chosen, and faithful” are with the Lamb, participating in his glorious victory.

The last reference to the Lamb in the Bible is in Revelation 22:1, which reads, “He shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.” Here the Lamb is enthroned and the promised blessings of the kingdom are flowing out to the people. However, as previously noted, this cannot become a reality until the marriage of the Lamb takes place and he is united in glory with the “called, and chosen, and faithful.”

WORK OF AN AGE

The work of the “bride” in making herself ready to become the Lamb’s “wife” requires an entire age in the divine plan. It began at Pentecost, with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and still continues. It is the work of the Holy Spirit within the hearts and lives of the consecrated followers of the Master,

who in their present relationship with him are spoken of as espoused virgins.

While it is the power of the Holy Spirit which accomplishes the making ready of the “bride,” it is not without the earnest cooperation of each individual who will make up that honored company which will share the glory and the riches of the heavenly “Bridegroom.” First, there is required the full submission of the mind to be governed by the mind of Christ. This mind of Christ is in reality the mind or will of the Heavenly Father. The Holy Spirit cannot work in a heart that is rebellious to the will of God.

The prospective members of the Lamb’s wife must be thoroughly loyal to him and fully set apart to the task of being developed into his character image. This means a complete separation from the world, a resolute warring against the flesh and its interests, and a complete opposition to Satan and all his godless influences. These things can be accomplished in our lives only through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Scriptures warn us, though, that we can negate that power by showing sympathy for our fleshly, fallen tendencies. The great objective of being made ready for marriage with the Lamb is absolute loyalty to him and to all for which he stands. Thus we realize that those who participate in that marriage will not do so on a trial basis, but must first be proven fully faithful.

THE BRIDE’S CLOTHING

The bride of the Lamb is described in Psalm 45:13 as “the King’s daughter,” the “King” being the Heavenly Father. We are told in the *King James Version* that the King’s daughter is “all glorious within,” and that “her clothing is of wrought gold.” *Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible* reads, “All glorious—the daughter of a king sitteth within, Brocades, wrought with gold, are her clothing!” Verse 14, *Rotherham* translation, reads, “In embroidered raiment, shall she be brought unto the king.”

How glorious indeed will the bride appear within the palace of the king. Her clothing will be “brocades wrought with gold,” symbolic of the divine nature. She shall also be brought into the king’s palace “in raiment of needlework.” This suggests the adornment of character, the “fruit of the Spirit”

which is “love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance.” (Gal. 5:22,23) How wonderful indeed will be the characters of those who fully develop this fruitage of the Holy Spirit. All of the bride class must be thus adorned before the marriage of the Lamb can take place.

God’s work through the Holy Spirit, and our work in connection therewith, are beautifully set forth by the Apostle Paul. Writing to the church at Philippi, he said, “Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”—Phil. 2:12,13

IMPORTANT STEP

What an important juncture in the divine plan it will be when finally the “marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.” There have been many important developments in God’s great plan for the deliverance of the human race from sin and death. His promise to Abraham that through his seed he would bless all the families of the earth was one of these. The coming of Jesus at his First Advent was a vital and wonderful step forward in the divine plan. For centuries, God had promised the coming of Jesus to be the Redeemer, Messiah, and King, and now he had come: “Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”—Luke 2:11

The coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was another step forward in the outworking of the divine plan of salvation. However, this marked only the beginning of the work of making ready the “bride, the Lamb’s wife.” Long centuries were to elapse while this preparatory work was to continue. During this time, Satan was permitted to try the individual members in all sorts of ways. The Book of Revelation portrays his beastly organization, the false kingdom arrangement made up of the union of an unholy “woman” with the kings of the earth, through which he has persecuted the saints.

This apostate system is eventually destroyed when the time comes in the plan of God for the marriage of the Lamb to take place. When these things occur, and the bride and the

Bridegroom are made one before the great white throne, Satan will be bound that he should deceive the nations no more. (Rev. 20:1-3) With the marriage of the Lamb, the “first resurrection” will have been accomplished. Those who have been thus exalted will “live and reign with Christ a thousand years.”—vss. 4,6

These events having then all taken place, the judgment day for all individuals of the human family will then begin. Then “the dead, small and great” will “stand before God” and the “books” will be opened, “which is the book of life,” and the dead will be “judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.” (Rev. 20:12) All truly enlightened Christians have longingly waited for the time to come when mankind would be educated with the Truth, and tried upon the basis of their progress as written in these symbolic books. This will not become a reality until after “the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.”

GOD’S CITY

In Hebrews 11:10, we read that Abraham “looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” A city, in the Bible, symbolizes a government or kingdom. The people of God in all ages have looked for this “city,” his promised kingdom to come. In a vision, the Apostle John saw the coming of this city. “I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” (Rev. 21:2) In verses 9 and 10, John further writes, “There came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb’s wife. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God.”

This “holy city,” these verses say, is the “bride, the Lamb’s wife,” and comes into being when the marriage of the Lamb takes place. This symbolic city, which will be God’s agent in blessing all families of the earth, cannot come until the bride has made herself ready. We believe that even at this present

hour there are some of the bride class still engaged in the blessed work of preparing themselves.

When the espoused virgins become the bride of Christ and the “city” comes down from God, then will be poured out to mankind all the wonderful blessings which are described by John. Then “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.”—Rev. 21:4,5

We know that the words of him who sitteth on the “throne” are always true and faithful, although the time may seem long while we wait for their fulfillment. God has a complete and precise timetable for every detail and major event in his plan. Just as it was in his due time that he sent his Son to be the Savior of the world, so it will be in his due time that “the marriage of the Lamb” will come. God knows how much time is required for the bride to make herself ready. At that due time, the great marriage event will take place. Then the Holy City will be complete and ready to come from God to rule and bless the people. We may at times ask, “How long, O Lord?” (Rev. 6:10) We can be confident that God’s Word is sure. The due time for the marriage of the Lamb and the resulting promised blessings to all the families of the earth will come exactly at God’s appointed hour.

THE THRONE AND THE LAMB

The final chapter of the Bible tells us further of events to follow the marriage of the Lamb. Revelation 22:1 reads, “He shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.” The throne of God here symbolizes divine authority operating throughout the earth. The Lamb symbolism reminds us that the blessings of that wonderful government have been provided by the shed blood of Jesus Christ, “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”—John 1:29

We read in Revelation 22:2, *Revised Standard Version*, “Through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit,

yielding its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.” Here is another reference to the “city” with the added information that a river of life runs through the midst of it and that on either side of this river there are the trees of life.

This “river” of life is clear as crystal. No more will men’s minds be polluted with all sorts of traditions and theories as to how to obtain salvation, for he who deceived all nations will then be bound. The water of life then flowing from “the throne of God and of the Lamb” will be wholesome and will provide life eternal for all who will humbly and obediently partake of it.

The opportunity to partake of the water of life will be extended to all. In Rev. 22:17, we read, “The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” What a prospect this is for the sin-sick and suffering world of mankind. It is a prospect which will begin its fulfillment once the bride has made herself ready and the marriage of the Lamb takes place, for it is “the Spirit and the bride” who initiate the invitation to “Come” and partake of the water of life.

Thus we see that this and other wonderful prophecies of the kingdom await fulfillment until the last members of the bride of Christ complete the embroidery on their garments. These garments will appear glorious and beautiful when at long last the bride is ushered into the palace of the king. Through diligence and faith we should endeavor continually to make ourselves ready for the marriage to the Lamb.

In Revelation 7:1-3, we are reminded of God’s great interest in the last members of the bride class. The closing period of the great “time of trouble” which brings this present evil world fully to an end is here symbolically described as “four winds.” Four angels standing on the four “corners” of the earth are instructed to hold back these winds “till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.” So may this sealing work go on in our foreheads and in our hearts also until the work is complete and the last member of the bride has passed beyond the veil. Then the “marriage of the Lamb” will come. Then there will be a Holy City, and the bride will then say “Come” and partake of the water of life. ■

CHAPTER 27

The World's Judgment Day

“He [God] hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.”

—Acts 17:31

IN THE MINDS of many, the coming day of judgment is to be a period of twenty-four hours. It is thought that in this day the righteous and the unrighteous will be summoned before a judgment seat occupied by Jesus to hear their eternal fate declared. According to this belief, the righteous will be sent to heaven and the unrighteous to a place of torment. Since history indicates the vast majority of the human race have been unbelievers for whom it is thought that the judgment day will be one of terror, it is frequently spoken of as “doomsday.”

Let us note well that this concept of the world's coming judgment day is merely a tradition, another of those misconceptions handed down to us from the Dark Ages. The judgment day which the Bible describes is a period of one thousand years, during which mankind in general will be on probation for the purpose of proving their worthiness, or unworthiness, of everlasting life here on the earth.

A PAST JUDGMENT DAY

The need for the world's future judgment day arose at the time when our first parents were tested in the Garden of

Eden. They failed under that test and came under condemnation to death. This condemnation was passed on to their children, and thus Adam and his descendants became a dying race. Paul wrote, "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."—Rom. 5:12

When Jesus came, he explained that he had not come to condemn the world, but that the world through him might have life. (John 3:17) On this point, Paul wrote, "As by the offence of one [Adam] judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one [Jesus] the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous."—Rom. 5:18,19

The life provided by the ransom sacrifice of Christ is not thrust upon anyone. It is obtainable only upon the basis of acceptance and obedience. At the present time, this is upon the basis of faith, and those who receive it are called upon to lay down their lives in sacrifice, even as Jesus did. Few, indeed, have been willing to meet these rigid conditions of discipleship. In the first place, the vast majority have never had an opportunity really to know about Christ in an understandable manner. Those who died prior to the First Advent had no opportunity to believe on him. Even since Jesus' earthly ministry, millions have lived and died never hearing of Jesus. They likewise had no chance to know him and accept the provisions of divine love available through him and his work of redemption.

GOD'S WRATH MANIFESTED

Jesus said that "the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all . . . unrighteousness." (chap. 1:18) This does not mean that God is vindictive. It is a reference, rather, to the death condemnation which came upon our first parents because of their failure to obey God's law, and to the manner in which it is manifested in their children, the human race.

This death condemnation is indeed visible on every hand. We see evidences of it in every graveyard, in every funeral home, in every doctor's office, in every hospital. We each

experience it in every ache and every pain. The Bible speaks of this death condemnation as an evidence of God's anger against sin, but it also tells us that this anger endures but for a moment, adding, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."—Ps. 30:5

This foretold morning of joy is in reality the morning of the world's coming thousand-year judgment day. This coming new "day" is to be one of enlightenment, during which all will have a full opportunity to know the Lord. The people will then be on probation to determine whether or not they will, under those favorable conditions, turn to the Lord in belief and obedience. Those doing so will receive the provision of life made for them through Jesus, their Redeemer.

TO LEARN RIGHTEOUSNESS

Isaiah 26:9 declares that when God's judgments are abroad in the earth, the inhabitants will learn righteousness. This educational program is essential if the world of mankind is to have a full opportunity to know the Lord and to know his will concerning them. In this future judgment day, the people will not be judged in their ignorance, but upon the basis of an understanding of the provisions of divine grace made for them through Christ.

There is no salvation outside of Christ, but one must know Christ in order to believe on him. Paul wrote, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" (Rom. 10:13,14) The purpose of the judgment day is to enlighten the world so that they may know and believe and obey.

In a glowing description of the people's rejoicing during the judgment day, the psalmist informs us that the Lord "shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth." (Ps. 96:10-13) This is another way of saying that the people will be judged upon the basis of the Truth which will then be revealed to them. This will be the truth concerning the provision of life made for them through the death of Jesus and the Lord's requirements of belief and obedience.

Through another of his prophets, the Lord declares, “Then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent.” (Zeph. 3:9) This text shows that the enlightenment of the people will lead to their united worship and service to the Lord. No longer will contradictory creeds and the influence of false gods hinder the people from knowing the true God and intelligently serving him.

JESUS’ TESTIMONY

Jesus said, “I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness. And if any man hear my words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.” (John 12:46-48) The expressions “last day” and “latter days” are used a number of times in the Bible to describe the period of Christ’s thousand-year earthly kingdom. At that time, the dead will be awakened from the sleep of death and the world in general will be enlightened and given an opportunity to believe, obey, and live forever. “[God] will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.”—I Tim. 2:4

The above scriptures inform us that the “knowledge of the truth” provided in this prophetic “last day” will be Jesus’ word and teachings. This knowledge, together with man’s response to what he then learns, will be the basis upon which the people will be judged. This agrees with the other testimony of the Scriptures which we have examined indicating that the future judgment day of the world will be a time of enlightenment. It will be a time when the people will learn the real truth concerning the Creator’s grand design for their eternal blessing.

BOOKS OPENED

This fact is further confirmed in Revelation 20:12, where the Apostle John says, “I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were

judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.” This is, of course, symbolic language. It does not mean that all the millions of the dead will literally stand before God. The word “stand” is here used in much the same way as it is today when we say that one has a “standing” in court.

When our first parents transgressed God’s law, they lost their standing before God. Without his favor, they could not continue to live. They died, and so did their progeny. God, in his love, provided redemption through Christ Jesus and, during the future judgment day, all will be awakened from the sleep of death for the purpose of being judged. In this position, the original condemnation upon man will have been lifted. Through Christ, all the willing and obedient will gain a standing before God, or as John explains, will “stand” before him.

In this position, mankind will be judged—judged by the things contained in the books which will then be opened. Many suppose that those books contain a record of the past lives of the people. This is not the thought at all. The Lord knows that upon the basis of their past lives these “dead, small and great” would not be found worthy of everlasting life. The “books” contain the Truth by which the people are judged.

This is the truth concerning Jesus and his work of redemption. It is also the truth concerning God’s standards of righteousness to which all worthy of life must adhere. It is the “pure language” which will be turned to the people at that time. It is the words or teachings of Jesus which he said would judge the people in the “last day.” It will be man’s response during that time to the teachings of God’s “book,” both in heart as well as by action, that is to be judged.

No longer will the world be shrouded in heathen and other forms of darkness. The greatest cause of darkness and superstition in the world today is the deceptive influence of Satan. We are assured that Satan, who has deceived all nations, will be bound during that judgment day, that he may deceive the nations no more. (Rev. 20:1,2) With the light of God’s truth flooding the earth, every individual will know that only by accepting Christ as his Redeemer and then

obeying the righteous laws of the Messianic kingdom can he gain eternal life.

THE BOOK OF LIFE

The thought of attaining life in the judgment day is symbolized in Revelation 20:12 by a “book of life” in which the names of the worthy ones are written. Like the “books” of knowledge, the “book of life” is also said to be opened at that time. Clearly the thought of the entire text is that the people will be enlightened, and upon the basis of their response to this enlightenment they will be judged. If their response, their “works,” are favorable, their names will be placed in the book of life and they will attain everlasting life.

This is a “book” of human life, and during that future period of probation, those who prove worthy of having their names entered and remain therein will live on the earth as humans forever. They will no longer be imperfect or afflicted with disease and pain. Rather, they will be restored to the perfection which Adam lost when he transgressed God’s law in the Garden of Eden. Revelation 21:4 declares the culmination of that future day of blessing, “There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”

ASSOCIATE JUDGES

The future judgment day of the world will not be for the purpose of determining who are Christians and who are not. The faithful followers of Jesus will already have passed through their trial, or judgment period, having proved worthy of “glory and honour and immortality.” (Rom. 2:7) These will be associated with Jesus in the work of judging the world of mankind in general. Paul wrote, “Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?” (I Cor. 6:2) These will be the “angels” (Greek, messengers) who will be with Jesus in his judgment throne of glory when all nations are being judged by him, as stated in the parable of the sheep and the goats.— Matt. 25:31-46

In this parable, those during the future judgment day who qualify for everlasting life are symbolized by sheep, while those who do not thus qualify are referred to symbolically as

goats. The “sheep” are shown to be those who are motivated by a loving interest in their fellows and thus enter into the spirit of that new day. The “goats” are those who continue, even under those favorable conditions, to pursue their selfish ways. The parable indicates that there will be such a class of willful sinners. These are the ones who Peter said would be “destroyed from among the people.”—Acts 3:23

Those who, through obedience to the spirit of the open “books,” manifest the spirit of love will, as Jesus said, “go away . . . into life eternal.” The wicked will go into “everlasting punishment,” symbolized in the parable by the destructive element of fire. Many have misinterpreted the statement “everlasting punishment” to mean eternal torture, but this is not the correct thought. The punishment, or “wages,” of sin is death. (Rom. 6:23) If the death is eternal, which it will be in the case of willful sinners, then it will be everlasting punishment or, as the Greek text puts it, an everlasting cutting off.

In this parable, Jesus says to the “sheep” class, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” (Matt. 25:34) This is the kingdom, or dominion, that was given to our first parents when they were created. It was the dominion over the earth and over the lower forms of creation on the earth. The Genesis record reads, “God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.” (Gen. 1:26) This is the kingdom that was given to mankind in the beginning, and this is the kingdom that will be restored to the willing and obedient at the close of the world’s thousand-year judgment day.

A FUTURE TIME

David wrote concerning man, “Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands.” Paul quotes this, and adds, “We see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.”

(Ps. 8:6; Heb. 2:8,9) Thus, Paul explains that the death of Jesus provided for the eventual restoration of man's life and dominion.

It is Jesus who, in his parable of the sheep and the goats, explains when man's lost dominion will be restored. It will be at the close of the world's judgment day, when he will say to those proven righteous at that time, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." When this great event in the plan of God is accomplished, none will need to say as Paul did, that "we see not yet all things put under" man. All will then know that the grand design of the Creator through Christ has been fulfilled and that all things have been put under man. His lost dominion shall have been restored.

GOOD AND EVIL

The sin of our first parents consisted in their eating of "the tree of knowledge of good and evil." (Gen. 2:9) The fact that God planted this tree together with the others in the Garden of Eden suggests that he desired his perfect human creatures to have an understanding of both good and evil. That he made eating of the fruit of this tree a test of obedience indicates his foreknowledge of the fact that this knowledge could be acquired only by experience.

God informed Adam that disobedience would lead to death. (vs. 17) He knew that his human creation would experience much evil as a result of disobedience. Since Adam's disobedience, the world has been filled with sickness, sorrow, and death. Truly all have received a knowledge of evil and its terrible consequences. This has come about as a result of that original act of disobedience in Eden—the partaking of "the tree of knowledge of good and evil."

During all this time, mankind has had little opportunity to learn about good and its results. True, probably most people in every generation have experienced moments, perhaps days or even a few years, of relative happiness. However, for the most part, the dying human race has continued to groan under the weight of sin and death. Man has increased this suffering by his inhumanity to man, and selfishness in all its ugly forms has continued to plague the human race from Eden until now.

This situation will change with the establishment of Christ's kingdom. Under the laws of that kingdom, evil will be restrained, Adamic death will be destroyed, and the dead will be restored to life. Then, for the first time in a universal way, the human race will experience good. Only then will they be in a position to judge upon the basis of actual experience whether to choose evil and die, or to choose good and live.

This is the divine purpose in the permission of evil. God did not wish his human creatures to be like robots, obeying him because they had no choice to do otherwise. He wanted them to obey and serve him because they delight to do so. He desired them to do righteously because they realized upon the basis of a full knowledge of the issues involved that this was the only proper thing to do.

It is this willing desire to serve the Creator that will be manifested by the restored human race at the close of the thousand-year day of judgment. The people will then know the Lord and appreciate the advantages of being in harmony with him. They will have learned fully of his love in providing redemption and salvation through Christ. As those ransomed by the gift of God's dear Son and his sacrificial death, mankind "shall return . . . with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." (Isa. 35:10) Let us then not fear, but look forward to this time, soon to come, spoken of in our opening scripture—the day "in the which he will judge the world in righteousness." ■

CHAPTER 28

Sinching Against the Holy Spirit

“Therefore I say to you, any sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven men, but blasphemy against the Spirit shall not be forgiven. And whoever shall speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age, or in the age to come.”
—*Matthew 12:31-33, New American Standard Bible*

THOSE WHO CLAIM that the Holy Spirit is the third person in a trinity of gods, of which the Father and the Son are the other two, and all co-equal in power and authority, would have difficulty in explaining this statement by Jesus. He says that while sin against himself would be forgiven, sin against the Holy Spirit would not be forgiven. Certainly this disproves the absolute equality of the Holy Spirit and the Son of God. There is no need here, however, to be concerned with an erroneous doctrine which has come down to us from the Dark Ages. When we understand what the Holy Spirit is and the circumstances under which these words of the Master were spoken, all is clear, harmonious, logical, and satisfying.

In the context of our featured scripture, we are told of one of Jesus’ miracles when a man was brought to him “possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw.” (Matt. 12:22) The people who witnessed this miracle were properly

“amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David?” (Matt. 12:23) To these Israelites, the “son of David” was the promised Messiah. When they saw, through Jesus, the exercise of what they knew must have been divine power, they were convinced that he was indeed the great one whom the God of Israel had promised to send. In their simplicity of mind and humbleness of heart, they were glad to acknowledge the truth when it was so conclusively demonstrated to them.

It was not thus with the Pharisees. When they “heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.” (vs. 24) These Pharisees, in their hardness of heart, refused to accept the logical explanation of what they had witnessed. They had seen the power of God—the Holy Spirit of God—manifested in the casting out of a devil from this afflicted man. However, they were ready and willing to deny the facts, closing their minds to the reality of what had happened.

This was the background of Jesus’ statement in our text. By it, the Master implied that the Pharisees, in denying the truth of what they had clearly witnessed, had set themselves in opposition to the Holy Spirit of God. Indeed, as he said, they had blasphemed against the Holy Spirit in that they had charged that its good work was in reality the work of the devil. Such a sin, Jesus said, could not be forgiven, neither in this world or age, nor in the age to come.

This account highlights the fact that the Holy Spirit is simply the holy power of God by which he accomplishes all his good purposes. In this instance, it was exercised through the Master in ridding this afflicted man of the “devil” which was causing him to be blind and dumb, and restoring him to health. It was a miraculous demonstration of divine power. The exercise of divine power is always miraculous in the sense that our finite minds are unable to understand it. However, to deny its accomplishments is a sin which God does not overlook.

Why is it that sin against the Holy Spirit cannot be forgiven? In a broad sense it is sin against light, against knowledge. In the case of the Pharisees, there was the chance that they could misunderstand Jesus’ teachings. After all, while he spoke as never man spoke, their conception of him had to be

based upon his words. No fault could be found with Jesus' "gracious words." In the imperfection and prejudice of the Pharisees, they could nonetheless have misunderstood the meaning of what he said. This, the Master indicated, could be forgiven, but to distort the meaning of the miracle-working power of the Holy Spirit was not ignorantly done. It was a willful sin, so could not be forgiven. They had sinned against what they knew to be right.

The application of this principle is seen in God's dealings with Saul of Tarsus, who afterward became the great Apostle Paul. Saul was a bitter opponent of the Christian cause. With what he supposed was a righteous hatred, he persecuted the early believers. On the way to Damascus on a mission of further persecution, he was struck down to earth by a blinding light shining above the brightness of the sun at noonday. He heard a voice speak to him, saying, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" (Acts 9:4) The voice explained, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest."—vs. 5

It was in all good conscience that Saul had been opposing Christ and the Christian cause. Now, though, given a demonstration of the power of God informing him that Jesus truly was the Christ of promise, it dramatically changed his whole outlook. Had he been like the Pharisees, he might have insisted that the devil was trying to interfere with his work. He might have even more zealously tried to stamp out the heresy of the Nazarene, Jesus, and continued on to Damascus to complete his mission of persecution. However, Saul's heart was right. He accepted the logic of events that had occurred, was convinced, and gladly entered into the service of the Messiah whom previously he had been persecuting.

The experience was a severe lesson to Saul which even as the great Apostle Paul, he did not forget. It served to keep him humble and ever to realize how easy it is to be in error. Writing about it later, he said, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus."—I Tim. 1:12-14

Paul had been a “blasphemer” and a “persecutor.” He had done great injury to the brethren of Christ, but he had not blasphemed against the Holy Spirit. His sin was against Christ, whom he did not know. He had sinned “ignorantly” and in “unbelief” so mercy was extended to him. This was great mercy, indeed, for he was forgiven and exalted to the high position of a special apostle in the church. The situation would have been different if, when that great demonstration of power which he later characterized as a “vision” was given to him, he had been “disobedient” to it. This would have been an unforgivable sin.—Acts 26:19

LYING TO THE HOLY SPIRIT

A very illuminating episode is related in Acts 4:29-5:11. The religious rulers of Israel were much disturbed over the successful ministry of the apostles at Pentecost and afterward. “They called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.” (chap. 4:18) The Apostles did not obey these instructions. Instead, they reported to their brethren and held a prayer meeting. Their prayer concluded thus: “And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.”—vss. 29,30

Immediately there was a miracle, for we read, “When they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spake the word of God with boldness; And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.”—vss. 31-33

These were the miraculous circumstances which caused the believers to sell their houses and lands and turn over the proceeds to the apostles. Little wonder, in view of the Holy Spirit’s demonstration among them, that they were induced to take this drastic action. Then we are told that a “certain man

named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, and kept back part of the price,” his wife agreeing to it. (chap. 5:1,2) As Peter told Ananias, he had a right to do what he wanted, for he had not been commanded by the Lord to sell his land or to give any part of the proceeds to the apostles to be used for the common support of the church. (vs. 4) His sin was in the fact that he claimed he had turned in all the money when he had not.

Peter asked Ananias why Satan had filled his heart to lie to the Holy Spirit. The meaning of this is apparent when we take into consideration the circumstances. The Holy Spirit had been working mightily in and through the apostles. The place where they held their special prayer meeting shook with its power. The sick were healed and other signs were brought by the Spirit’s power. Filled with the Spirit, the apostles’ preaching was powerful. The entire company was convinced that God was in their midst, including Ananias and Sapphira. However, these later were not sincere in the matter. They were willing that their relationship to God, through Jesus, should cost them something, but not all. Yet they wanted their brethren to think they had given all.

The brethren could have been misled in this, but one of the special powers of the Holy Spirit which had been given to Peter was the ability to read the mind and heart. Through the power of God he discerned the deception. Peter said to Ananias, “Thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.” (vs. 4) What a lesson this is for all the Lord’s people! Let us remember that we stand or fall before the Lord, not before one another.

Peter then exercised the authority given him by the Holy Spirit and Ananias and Sapphira both perished. They had sinned against the Holy Spirit and it could not be forgiven them. It was not a sin of ignorance.

THOSE ONCE ENLIGHTENED

It is not necessary that the miraculous power of God, his Holy Spirit, be outwardly demonstrated in order to sin willfully against it. In Hebrews 6:4-8, another and different situation is brought to our attention in which it is possible for one to commit sin which cannot be forgiven. We quote,

“It is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame. For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.”

Here the apostle is discussing those in whose hearts and lives the Holy Spirit has operated through the written Word. He makes it plain that in this situation also it is possible to sin against the Holy Spirit. They have been “enlightened,” so they do not have ignorance as an excuse. They have “tasted of the heavenly gift.” This evidently is a reference to Jesus whom God gave to be the Redeemer and Savior of the world. They have “tasted” of the wonderful gift of Jesus, which implies more than merely having heard of him.

They were made “partakers of the Holy Spirit.” The work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, through the Word of truth, has been too evident to put aside lightly. While not spectacular, as the power of the Spirit was demonstrated to the Pharisees, yet its power in the life of a believer is even more convincing. Who could come under the baptism of the Spirit and the power of its anointing, the life-giving energy of its begetting, and not understand the great privilege of such a relationship with God? Who could receive of the Holy Spirit’s witness and seal and be filled with its power for holiness, its peace and its joy, without realizing that he has been enjoying the rich favor of God?

It is through the miracle-working power of the Spirit that the Word of God has reached us with all its enlightenment and inspiration. Those who have “tasted the good word of God” have, as it were, been face to face with God. Indeed, the Word reveals him in his glory and outlines his wisdom, justice, love, and power. Millions read the Bible just because they believe it is a good book, others for its historical value. Some read it simply out of curiosity. Those who have devoted

themselves to do God's will and read the Bible that they might know his will and receive encouragement to perform it, find that it is a power in their lives. This is the power and influence of the Holy Spirit.

Paul indicates that some of these believers have tasted of the "powers" of the world to come. The Greek word here translated "powers" means force, and may be used either in a literal or figurative sense. Much miracle-working power will be operative in the age to come and the Hebrew Christians had already tasted some of it. We read, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will."—Heb. 2:3,4, *New American Standard Bible*

From this, it is clear that the Hebrew brethren, in addition to being enlightened and given the Holy Spirit of truth through the written Word, had witnessed some of the miracle-working power of the Spirit in the signs which were given to those early believers. Perhaps some of them had bestowed upon them one or more of the miraculous "gifts of the Spirit" mentioned in I Corinthians, chapter 12. In this respect, they were in the same position as the Pharisees, and Ananias and Sapphira, who had witnessed the miracles performed by the Holy Spirit. These were "the powers of the world to come." In the age to come, all the sick will be restored to health and all the dead will be awakened, the powers of regeneration then being in effect. How that will fill the earth with God's glory!

Thus the apostle informs us that those who fall away from their loyalty to God after having enjoyed all these marvelous favors from him, favors which we might say are summed up in the one word "enlightenment," that it is impossible to renew them again to repentance. The falling away of such would be a matter of willfulness so gross that they would have no desire to repent. By having accepted Christ and enjoying the merit of his shed blood on their behalf, and then rejecting him, they put him "to open shame." The "enlightenment" of these comes through God's only source of

enlightenment, which is the Holy Spirit of truth, so in falling away they sin against the Holy Spirit and cannot be forgiven. Because they cannot be forgiven, and there being no hope of their repenting, these die the second death. In his letter to the Hebrew brethren, the Apostle Paul wrote, "That which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned."—Heb. 6:8

A similar presentation of this general thought is found in Hebrews 10:26-29. "If we sin wilfully after that we have received a knowledge of the truth (have been 'enlightened'), there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?" The Law given by Moses was typical. Those who died under its judgments will be awakened from death. Those who sin willfully in this age, after having been enlightened by the Holy Spirit of truth, will go into oblivion forever.

DEGREES OF WILLFULNESS

We see no reason from the Scriptures to suppose that a single act of sin against the Holy Spirit results in eternal destruction. True, when Jesus said to the Pharisees that sin against the Holy Spirit could not be forgiven either in this age or in the age to come, he implied that their sin in denying that his miracles were wrought by the power of God would not go unpunished. However, this does not necessarily mean that the punishment would be what the Scriptures describe as the "second death."

In Luke 12:47,48, Jesus lays down a rule governing the punishment of those who sin which is understandable, practical, and just. We read, "That servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given,

of him shall be much required.” In other words, the degree of enlightenment determines the extent of responsibility. Those mentioned by Paul in Hebrews 6:4-8 and 10:26-29 are indicated to be sufficiently enlightened, and their sin against light so persistent and continuous that there is no repentance, no turning around. That is why their punishment is shown to be eternal death.

Notice also the principle set forth by Jesus is specifically said to apply to the Lord’s servants. The unbelieving world, in its almost total ignorance of God, is not on probation now at all, but only the servants of God and those who profess to be his servants. This includes the Pharisees who in Jesus’ day claimed that they were the representatives of God. This made them responsible, especially when they denied the power of him whom they claimed to serve. They will be punished and doubtless with many “stripes,” but the Bible does not indicate that they necessarily died the “second death.”

THE “GREAT TRANSGRESSION”

It is apparent from the Scriptures that it is possible for those enlightened by the Holy Spirit of truth, through the written Word, to “fall away.” It is equally clear, however, that such a calamity does not occur suddenly. There is a gradual encroachment of sin, beginning perhaps with but a slight degree of laxity, but finally ending in what the psalmist describes as the “great transgression.” This is a complete denial of the Lord, the Truth, and the power of the Holy Spirit in one’s life.

In Psalm 19:12 and 13, David traces this gradual development of sin, and in verse 14 utters a touching prayer expressive of every true Christian’s desire to please the Lord. He asks, “Who can understand his errors?” (vs. 12) In the preceding verses, the psalmist speaks of the power of God’s law, his testimony, and his statutes, his commandments being “pure” to make his people “wise” and to “enlighten” them. “By them,” David says, are the Lord’s servants warned, “and in keeping of them there is great reward.”—vss. 7-11

In asking the question, “Who can understand his errors?” it would seem that David is implying that no one apart from

the Word of God can enlighten or reveal them. Then he utters his prayer, “Cleanse thou me from secret faults”—faults that I do not realize I possess. (Ps. 19:12) Help me to turn on myself the searchlight of thy Word that the beginnings of sin may be detected. May the cleansing power of thy Truth make me clean and pure in thy sight.

David continues his prayer, “Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me.” Presumptuous sins are willful sins, sins against light, against the Holy Spirit. Perhaps nearly all the Lord’s people at one time or another in their Christian life are guilty of one or more presumptuous sins. These are not “secret faults,” although they might be the outgrowth of a wrong condition of mind and heart of which one is not aware. Notice David’s prayer, “Let them not have dominion over me.” In a moment of impetuosity one might commit a presumptuous sin, a sin which cannot be forgiven and a sin therefore that calls for some measure of punishment or “stripes.” Still, it does not follow that such sins must necessarily have dominion over us.

For presumptuous sins to have dominion over one means that he has given up all effort to control his life in keeping with the directives of the Word. It would mean, as David continues, that such an one was guilty of the “great transgression.” (vs. 13) Such transgression is so great, so willful, and so continuous, that the only suitable punishment would be the “second death.” Such is the growth of sin if not checked.

The only safe course for any of the Lord’s people lies in the attitude expressed by David when in further prayer to God he pleaded, “Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.” (vs. 14) We can cooperate with the Lord in the answering of this prayer through continued and earnest searching of his Word. In so doing, we will know the things which are acceptable to him and pleasing in his sight. Thus we will be safeguarded from sinning against the Holy Spirit. ■

CHAPTER 29

Adversity: The Lord's Diamond Dust

*“They shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts,
in that day when I make up my jewels.”
—Malachi 3:17*

SOME MACHINE SHOPS have what is called a diamond wheel. This wheel is similar to an emery wheel used to sharpen ordinary tools. However, there are certain types of tools which are too hard for an ordinary emery wheel, so a special one is used, a diamond wheel. This wheel is made of diamond dust, the remains from the grinding of other diamonds. This refuse dust is worthless except to be compressed into a wheel form and used to shape, sharpen, and polish cutting tools which are too hard for the usual emery wheel.

Adversity, too, while seemingly worthless, in the divine economy is utilized to sharpen and polish Christian character. One might at first think that the child of God should be exempt from adversity. However, the facts are to the contrary. The Apostle Paul recognized this, and wrote, “Even unto this present hour we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace.”—I Cor. 4:11

As noted in our theme text, the Christian is a special jewel in the sight of the Lord—a jewel in the rough as yet, a rare gem in the making. To such, adversity is as diamond dust by

which they are being polished. Jesus said, “Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven.”—Matt. 5:11,12

PURPOSE OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

The Master reveals the real purpose of the Christian life, saying in verses 13-16 of this same chapter, “Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”

The Christian is the salt of the earth. In order for the divine purpose to be fulfilled in our lives as individuals, the salt must not lose its savor. The savor is the taste that gives salt value and purpose. By nature, we are all fallen and imperfect. We thus have no savor of our own, being part of a dying race. However, it is as New Creatures in Christ Jesus that we have the Truth and its spirit, and thus we have savor. In these verses, Jesus implied that it is possible to lose this savor if we are not constantly on guard. The spirit of selfishness is ever present to draw us away from and lose the savor of truth. Thus, we would find ourselves without its spirit and power in our lives.

One of the virtues of salt is its power to season and preserve from decay. The number of true Christians throughout this Gospel Age has been small indeed. Nevertheless, these have exercised a preserving influence upon mankind within their limited sphere, and the world has been blessed by their presence. The next age will be even a greater period of fulfillment of this picture. Then, associated with Christ, the church will preserve and give everlasting life to all those who obey the laws of the kingdom.

Jesus also said, “Ye are the light of the world.” This “light” of the Gospel message of truth is of value only when it is

permitted to shine. Jesus admonishes us not to hide this light under a bushel. It is the only true light in the world today, and we are to make it shine as widely and as brightly as we possibly can. This light has not attracted very many because the “god of this world,” Satan, has blinded the vast majority so as not to be able to recognize the light.—II Cor. 4:4

The light has, however, attracted a peculiar class that God desires. These are his “jewels.” Through special experiences and polishing, they are being fitted for a place in the heavenly phase of Christ’s kingdom. With Jesus, the church will shine as the sun, and the world shall ultimately be enlightened. “For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.”—Hab. 2:14

FROM WHENCE COMES ADVERSITY?

From whom, or by whom, do such adverse experiences come? In order properly to appraise our trials, and in them maintain the true Christian spirit, it is essential that we adopt the Master’s attitude respecting such experiences. He said, “The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?”—John 18:11

The Heavenly Father permitted Jesus’ suffering. This is corroborated by his experience before Pilate, as recorded in John 19:10,11: “Then saith Pilate unto him, Speakest thou not unto me? knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above: therefore he that delivered me unto thee hath the greater sin.”

We must also recognize it to be so with the “cup” the Father is giving to us to drink. This does not mean that God is the author of evil. Indeed, he is not a participator in evil things. However, there are all manner of evil forces and evil influences surrounding us. These can all be traced to one of three sources. One of these sources is Satan and the fallen angels. Our “adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” (I Pet. 5:8) Thus we see that Satan, together with his fallen angels, are ready and waiting to assault the children of God.

The world is also a source of evil, particularly the so-called religious world, from which much opposition comes to those who live godly in Christ Jesus. Satan again enters into the picture, for he has blinded the minds of the world by putting error for truth and darkness for light. He does this so that the way of righteousness and obedience to God might seem foolish and extreme.

The third source of evil is our own flesh. It is a constant, ever-present adversary, and is inclined to be in harmony with the spirit of the world and the sinful influence of Satan. Paul said, "I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing."—Rom. 7:18

PERMITTED FOR GOOD

Let us always remember that if we live close to our Heavenly Father, he will not permit any evil influence to touch us, or do injury to us, as New Creatures in Christ. The true thought is not that God creates evil or adversity, rather that he permits it, knowing that by his overruling it will work for our good. In this, however, he will prevent any experience to come to us that would injure or harm us as New Creatures.—I Cor. 10:13

Satan knows that certain ones have the Truth, and he is determined to do anything within his power to take it from them, if it were possible. This prince of darkness will stop at nothing to accomplish his purpose. "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip." (Heb. 2:1) He will try to instill dissatisfaction and restlessness in our minds by ever hinting that we should look at something new and put aside the things we have learned.

Such a course would eventually prove a delusion and a snare. To be able to hold our ground against all opposition means that we must possess the proper qualities of mind and heart. We need to "endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ." (II Tim. 2:3) Our adversities, in fact, should be crystallizing our determination to overcome.

The world and its spirit often become our adversary. "Do not take such an extreme view of things, and you will get along better," the world suggests. "Do not spend so much time studying

your Bible, or people will call you an extremist.” The ideal of many in the world is to do good, to work for social and civil reforms. In this, the world tries to influence us sympathetically.

A certain amount of opposition also comes from those who seemingly have our best interests at heart. For example, when our Lord announced that he was going to Jerusalem to be crucified, Peter said, “Be it far from thee.” Our master turned to Peter saying, “Get thee behind me, Satan [adversary].” (Matt. 16:22,23) For the time being, Peter was our Lord’s adversary, because his suggested course was in opposition to the one God had set for Jesus.

Then there is our own flesh and its natural tendencies, which often severely try us. Our flesh is prone to follow the path of least resistance. Our fallen habits seem so difficult to change, and it is easier to say, “What is the use? I can’t change now.” The flesh will say of our consecration vows, “Do not carry these things too far.” It is at these times that we need to say with Paul, “I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest, . . . when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.”—I Cor. 9:27

WHY PERMITTED

Why are evils permitted to come upon God’s people? It is by these that we are being polished as the Lord’s “jewels.” (Mal. 3:17) James wrote, “Blessed is the man that endureth temptation [trial]: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.”—James 1:12

We must keep in mind that every trial, every test, every persecution, every difficulty which is permitted to come upon those who have made a covenant “by sacrifice” (Ps. 50:5), is designed to develop, prove, and test our love. They are allowed in order to demonstrate that our character is fixed and rooted in righteousness. When viewed in this way, all our painful experiences are seen in a new light, and they will greatly assist us in fighting the good fight of faith. It is by these trials and tribulations that we prove our love and devotion to the Lord. “The LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.”—Deut. 13:3

The Word of God aptly describes the human family in their present condition as a groaning creation: "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now." (Rom. 8:22) The Lord's consecrated people are no exception to this. "We ourselves [also] groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption [deliverance] of our body." (vs. 23) However, while we are waiting for deliverance, the experiences of life have an important mission to accomplish in us. Therefore, the manner in which they are received should be of deepest concern. According to their use, each day's prosperity or adversity brings a blessing or a curse.

RESULTS

The results of our trials can be illustrated by the storms of winter and summer. How different is one from the other. In the winter, they rush over the earth with violence, and any remnants of foliage or flowers are swept away, leaving nothing but desolation in their wake. Long after the storms have ceased, the wind-driven cold remains as a token of what has been.

However, in the summer, when the clouds have poured forth their torrents and the winds have spent their fury, the sun comes forth in all its glory. Vegetation seems to rise with renewed loveliness, as after a refreshing bath. The flowers smell sweeter than before. The grass takes on a brighter shade of green. The young plants, which were barely in sight before, now take their place among their fellows, so quickly do they spring up after a summer shower. The air, too, which previously may have been oppressive, is now clear and fresh.

Likewise it is with the storms of adversity. To the unregenerate, the storms of life are apt to bring dreariness and a desolation which was not apparent before. Their gloom is not relieved by the prospect of a cheering ray to follow. There are no flowers or fruit to show its beneficence. To these, adversities, like the storms, winds, snow, sleet, and rain of the winter time, still leave the heart barren and cold.

These same adversities which come upon the Christian should be like the storms, winds, and rain of the summer time. They should beautify our character and brighten our

outlook on life, and strengthen the faith and hope which God has planted within us. The Apostle Paul wrote, “No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are [rightly] exercised thereby.”—Heb. 12:11

As we look at the benefits which we derive from our experiences with the assurance that they are supervised by God, let us “count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.” (James 1:2-4) Peter wrote, “The trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.”—I Pet. 1:7-9

How encouraging is Paul’s description of the Christian life, as recorded in these verses: “We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.” “As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.” “For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”—II Cor. 4:8,9; 6:9,10; 4:16,17

EXAMPLE OF JOB

Let us remember the example of Job. Very few, if any, have suffered the troubles that this man endured. He lost all of his property, and all of his children, whom he loved dearly. They perished in the home of his eldest son, which was struck by a great wind. Then Job lost, at least for a time, the love and loyalty of his wife. Finally, Job was smitten by a loathsome disease which caused his skin to erupt from head to foot with boils. To further cause him suffering, along came

three of his best friends. Instead of comforting him, they added to his grief by insisting that these disasters were a result of his sins, and that he was being punished by the Lord because of his unfaithfulness to him.

The beautiful part of Job's life story is that, like the rains and winds of summer, these experiences had a most beneficial effect upon his character and life. Through all of them Job did not lose faith in God. His testimony was, "The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." (Job 1:21) In the end, we see that all of Job's troubles passed away, and he was blessed more abundantly than before, with children, servants, and cattle. "So the LORD blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning." (Job 42:12) We believe God used Job as an illustration of the human family. First was their prosperous, but short-lived, condition as experienced by Adam in his perfection. Then came mankind's many troubles and groanings as a result of Adam's fall. Finally, however, will come the restitution blessings which they will receive as a result of Christ's coming kingdom. Added to this will be the blessing of their valuable previous experience with evil which will make them wise. The Christian marks Job as an example of trust, faith, patience, and love for his Creator, as expressed in Job's immortalized testimony, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him."—chap. 13:15

GOD'S FAVOR

There are still other benefits which the Christian realizes because of adversity. Strange as it might at first seem, adversity is an evidence of God's favor. In Hebrews 12:6-8, we read, "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye [illegitimate children, *New International Version*], and not sons."

Each of God's children needs chastening from time to time. If we stray from the path of righteousness, chastisements are designed to bring us back. However, we still need chastening even if we do not wander, for by it we learn

obedience and discipline. The word chastisement ordinarily signifies correction for wrongdoing, but in the Bible it is also used to signify discipline, or instruction in righteousness. Of our Lord, we read in Hebrews 5:8, "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered."

Let us appreciate more the privilege of being trained in the school of Christ. In this school, we learn some very valuable lessons through our experiences. We receive chastisements, and encounter all kinds of adversity which comes to us under the Heavenly Father's supervision. Surely we should desire to learn all of our lessons well. Paul wrote, "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds." (chap. 12:2,3) Whoever does not appreciate the spiritual joys of things "set before him" can hardly be expected to endure with patience, and with cheerful endurance, the present period of training. One must see the glory that is to follow in order to appreciate the necessity and value of adversity.

How long will these adversities continue? When will they end? To the individual Christian it will be only as long as his life lasts on the earth. In short, the answer is given in Revelation 2:10: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." The adversity of the rest of mankind will not last forever either. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." (Ps. 30:5) Soon the permission of evil will be over. While we are here, it is good to know that all things in God's plan of salvation are working together not only for our good, but ultimately and most assuredly for the good of all. ■

CHAPTER 30

Judgment of the House of God

*“The time is come that judgment must begin at the house of
God: and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be
of them that obey not the gospel of God?
And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the
ungodly and the sinner appear? Wherefore let them that suffer
according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls
to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.”
—I Peter 4:17-19*

OUR FIRST PARENTS were subjected to a test of obedience to God’s law. When they failed to obey, they were sentenced to death. Judgment came upon father Adam—in Paul’s words, a judgment to condemnation. (Rom. 5:16,18) That period in Eden from the creation of man until his fall and condemnation we might speak of as Adam’s judgment day. It ended in his loss of the right to live. From that time until the First Advent of Jesus, a group, or class, of God’s servants had the privilege of proving their obedience to God. They were judged upon the basis of their faith, a faith which was demonstrated by works. Paul informs us that they received the testimony that they pleased God. (Heb. 11:2) Then there will be the coming thousand-year judgment day for the whole world of mankind. Paul spoke of this period of judgment in his sermon on Mars’ hill.—Acts 17:31

In our text, Peter speaks of still another day, or period of judgment. It is, he explains, the judgment of the house of God. The house of God is his family of sons. Jesus is the head of this house of sons (Heb. 3:6), and associated with him are his dedicated followers. Beginning with Jesus, this group become sons, or children, of God through the begetting of the Holy Spirit. Those begotten of the Spirit who prove faithful are ultimately born of the Spirit and become divine sons of God. Jesus was the first of these. When the last member of this house of sons has, through Spirit birth, been exalted to the divine nature and associated with Jesus, this "house of the Lord" will be established. Then the peoples of the earth will, through this channel, receive the long-promised blessings of the Messianic kingdom, their judgment period.—Mic. 4:1-4

The entire period of the Gospel Age, during which this house of God is being selected from the world, is one of testing and trial. A final decision, a judgment, is rendered by God with respect to each one composing this group. If the decision is favorable, they will hear, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord."—Matt. 25:21,23

Although Jesus was perfect—"holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners" (Heb. 7:26)—nevertheless, it was necessary that he also be tried as to his worthiness of the highly exalted position which had been promised to him in the arrangements of God. He was tempted, or tested, in all things just as we are, "yet without sin." (chap. 4:15) On the Mount of Transfiguration, near the close of his ministry, God said of Jesus, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."—Matt. 17:5

There is no doubt that God was well pleased with Jesus right to the full end of his earthly course. The important question for us is whether or not he is, and will be, well pleased with us. We are now in the testing time to determine whether or not we will prove faithful to the Lord. These tests are severe. Peter states that even the righteous are scarcely saved. The meaning of the word "scarcely" as used in our text is "with difficulty." This suggests that proving our

worthiness is not an easy matter. Those who are aspiring to live and reign with Christ understand how true this is.

THE TEST OF SUFFERING

No one wants to suffer; we all shrink from it. There are many who are unacquainted with the plan of God who feel that as God's people they should be protected from suffering. When they are not, they become discouraged, and many lose their faith. This should not be so with us. If we do wrong and recognize the discipline of the Lord, we should have no difficulty in accepting it. Peter, however, shows us a higher form of suffering: "It is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing." (I Pet. 3:17) Jesus himself suffered and eventually was put to death.

Jesus went about doing good, yet he suffered for it. Indeed, his entire sacrifice, including its consummation on the cross, was in the nature of doing good unto all. Thus it was that, in harmony with the Father's plan, he provided redemption for the entire sin-cursed and dying world of mankind. So far as his earthly life was concerned, the reward was suffering. It is our privilege to follow in his steps, not expecting the praise of men. This is indeed a severe test. It is one of the tests we must victoriously pass in this our judgment day if we are to live and reign with Christ.

When Paul was in prison in Rome, expecting to be executed, he wrote to Timothy, "It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us." (II Tim. 2:11,12) In the preceding chapter of this epistle, Paul mentions many who had turned against him, perhaps because they did not wish to expose themselves to danger from the Roman authorities. On the other hand, he mentions Onesiphorus. Paul explains, "He oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain: But, when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me."—chap. 1:15-17

Paul was one of the Lord's little ones, and a failure to stand with him in his hour of trial was like denying the Lord himself. This was a test that came upon many in those days of the Early Church, and some of them failed. Others passed the test, such as Onesiphorus and Timothy. A similar test is

upon us today. True, today none of our number is incarcerated, awaiting execution for the promulgation of the Truth. However, the Gospel of Christ, and those who proclaim it, are still unpopular. Are we gladly taking our position with those who, because they are letting their light shine, are incurring the ill will and ridicule of the world, or do we prefer the friendship of the world, which is enmity toward God?

NOT STRANGE

Again Peter wrote, “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.” (I Pet. 4:12,13) Note Peter’s reference to “the fiery trial which is to try you.” The purpose of the trial is to “try” or test us in this our judgment day.

Peter indicates that a successful passing of this trial should be manifested in our rejoicing. We do not rejoice in the trial itself, but our rejoicing is in the fact that we see in this experience evidence that we are associated with Christ in his suffering. To those who understand the plan of God this means that if they continue faithful under trial, faithful even unto death, they will have the privilege of living and reigning with Christ. Truly, this is something in which to rejoice.

If we think it “strange” that a loving God should permit us to suffer, it would reveal a lack of appreciation for his loving providence in our lives, providence which has drawn us to him and given us the desire to devote our lives to him. The remedy for this is study and prayer, to become better acquainted with the divine purpose for the present age. When we do this, we will realize afresh that we have been called to suffer and to die with the Master. Grasping this point clearly, we will no longer think it strange that we are not shielded from trials.

FAITH ON TRIAL

From I Peter 1:7, we learn that our faith is on trial, and we know that without a steadfast faith we cannot please God. Peter uses a vivid illustration, likening the trial of our faith

to the testing of gold in a fire. If our faith passes this fiery test, Peter indicates that we will “be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” In other words, we will receive the approval of our Lord and be found worthy to be exalted to “glory and honour and immortality.”—Rom. 2:7

The trial of our faith is a test, not only of our intellectual knowledge of divine truth, but also of our heart reliance upon God. In both respects, the true child of God will find himself severely tested. Let us see to it that every item of our faith is supported by a “Thus saith the Lord.” Tradition and speculation do not constitute a firm foundation for our faith. Let us study the precious doctrines of the Truth and obtain a clear understanding of every element of the divine plan. Only thus will we become rooted and grounded in the faith.

We should also continue to develop a heart reliance on the “great and precious promises” of the divine Word. A faith that has stood the tests of fiery ordeal and has come off victorious is very precious in the sight of the Heavenly Father. When we pass through a fiery trial and still retain not only our faith in the doctrines, but also our confidence in God and reliance upon his promises, then our characters have grown more Christlike. Hence, we are more pleasing to God.

This is one of the objectives of our testing. God has foreordained that everyone who lives and reigns with Christ must be conformed to the image of his Son. Like Jesus, they must be willing and glad to lay down their lives in divine service. Like him, they must be filled with the spirit of love and manifest that love in patiently doing good to others, daily adding to their characters the fruits and graces of the Spirit.

We are not necessarily continuously exposed to fiery trials. There are days of calmness in which we can also grow strong in the Lord. A variety of experiences is needed to fit and prepare us for joint heirship in the kingdom. The test is to recognize and to rejoice in all the experiences which the Lord permits to come into our consecrated lives as those which are the best for us as New Creatures, and to be thankful for them. Let us then rejoice in the calmer, more peaceful days, and during these periods endeavor to fortify ourselves for

the trial times which sooner or later we will experience if the Lord is truly dealing with us.

When the trials come, when we find ourselves again in the furnace being tried as gold is tried in the fire, we will need to be courageous and patient. It will be then that we will need especially to call to mind the promises, and to lay hold upon them with full faith that they belong to us. We will then be able to maintain our heart reliance on the Lord and in his ability to care for us, not casting away our confidence, knowing that it “hath great recompence of reward.”—Heb. 10:35

FAITH PRIMARILY TESTED, NOT WORKS

What God is seeking in us is the development and perfection of our faith. He knows, even as we do, that according to the flesh we are frail and imperfect. The flesh will often cry out against the heat of the fiery trials. An unfaltering faith and full heart reliance upon the Lord and his wisdom, justice, love, and power are the important qualities that our Heavenly Father is seeking. Do we trust him fully, and will we continue to so trust him, regardless of the experiences through which he permits us to pass? Job said of God, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.” (Job 13:15) That should be our attitude, and must continue to be our attitude.

God primarily tests our faith rather than our works because, as members of the fallen race, it would be impossible for us to consistently perform works pleasing to him. He knows, of course, that if our faith in him and in his ways is strong, we will endeavor the best we can to bring our works into line with his standards of righteousness. For those who are sincere in their effort to do this, he has provided the robe of Christ’s righteousness to cover their fleshly imperfections.

We can, however, exercise a triumphant faith. This does not mean necessarily a perfect faith, but rather a faith that will continue to trust God even though we may not always understand the meaning of his providences. Our faith may well be stronger at one time than another, but the victorious follower of the Master, who passes the test of this trial time, will never turn his back on the Lord. He will always trust the God of his salvation and continue to believe that his ways are best.

Our faith will be in proportion to our knowledge of the divine character. The one who knows God best will trust him most. We learn to know God through his loving plan which is set forth in his Word. If we did not know why God has permitted the long reign of sin and death to blight the happiness of his human creatures we would find it difficult to have faith in him. The Prophet Jeremiah speaks of God as one who delights in exercising loving-kindness in the earth. If we did not know the great divine plan of the ages, we would be unable to see much evidence of God's loving-kindness.—Jer. 9:24

SATAN'S DEVICES

Just as the Lord permitted Satan to test the faith and obedience of our first parents, so he allows Satan to test his "house" during the present Gospel Age. Satan has succeeded in deceiving the whole world of mankind, with the result that now, in the end of the age, when the kingdom of Christ is soon to be established, there is little faith left in the earth. (Luke 18:8) Almost the entire world has turned away from God, especially the true God of love who is revealed to us in the Bible.

Satan is ever on the alert to turn us away from God by deception, discouragement, and by whatever other means his cunning mind can devise. Those who maintain their faith in God and in the great realities of the divine plan are subjected to tests along other lines. He makes non-fundamental viewpoints seem important, and, when the Lord's people cannot agree upon these matters, Satan seeks to drive a wedge between them. He suggests to some that they are standing for principles, when as a matter of fact they may be standing merely for a preferred interpretation of non-fundamental details, or perhaps for traditions.

Satan also endeavors to weaken the faith of the Lord's people by causing slanderous attacks to be made against some of the brethren. Sadly, he may even use fellow members of the prospective body of Christ to spread false rumors against others. This is a disrupting influence in the house of God and is a test upon all who may be involved in it. Under these circumstances, let us remember that it is God who has

called his people and provided for their justification through Christ. As long as he is dealing with them, we should love and cherish them as our people. Let us never join hands with Satan as accusers of our brethren whom God has chosen.

PRIDE BEFORE DESTRUCTION

Paul wrote, “I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.” (Rom. 12:3) It was Lucifer’s pride and ambition that caused him to fall and become Satan, the great adversary of God. There are few of the Lord’s people who are not in one way or another subjected to this test. Paul presents this danger as thinking of oneself more highly than one ought to think.

The remedy for this is to “think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.” Our faith in God and in his plan will cause us to realize that he has not called us unto this holy calling because we were better or more brilliant than others. Therefore, we have no real cause for pride, or for a high estimation of ourselves or our abilities.

Pride is not an easy thing to detect in ourselves. We discover it by noting carefully our attitudes and viewpoints, particularly as they relate to our fellow members in the body of Christ. If we find ourselves habitually criticizing others—if we feel that we could do most things better than other brethren can do them—then we are very likely afflicted with the disease of pride. Likewise, if we surmise that our viewpoints on certain non-fundamental subjects of the Truth are more correct than the viewpoints of others, and if we become irritated when others disagree with us, this also may be a symptom of pride.

A “Thus saith the Lord” should be the end of all controversy, and the source for all our viewpoints of divine truth. If we are proud of heart we may well insist upon those things that the Scriptures either do not support or, in some cases, do not address plainly. When Lucifer became proud he lost his respect for the Lord’s viewpoint, and persisted in following his own desires and inclinations. If we are watchful of our

own hearts we will not permit pride to gain such a firm hold as this upon us. Rather, we will purge our hearts from this evil, right from its small beginnings.

One of the tests upon us in this, our day of judgment, is that we be on the alert for the slightest manifestation in our hearts of this great enemy, pride. Let us remember that “pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.” (Prov. 16:18) Surely we do not want to fall away from the Lord’s favor.

OVERCOMING THE WORLD

Another test upon us is that we overcome the world and its spirit. Jesus said, “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33) The Lord surely wants us to overcome the world. Selfishness is one of the characteristics of the world, and selfishness manifests itself in many unsightly forms. Let us endeavor diligently to rid our minds and hearts of every selfish ambition, and to be filled instead with the spirit of love, which is the spirit of the Lord. Thus we will be better prepared to pass the test in this time when judgment is upon the house of God.

From whatever standpoint we view this aspect of the present work of the Lord with his people, we realize that we will need to muster all the determination we can. Paul wrote, “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. Let all your things be done with charity [love].” (I Cor. 16:13,14) If we do this faithfully unto the end of the way, we will pass the test. Thus, by the Lord’s grace, we will qualify for that “great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him.”—Heb. 2:3

THE UNGODLY

The judgment which begins with the house of God is his judgment of the church. As we have noted, Peter indicates the severity of this judgment, that the righteous “scarcely” are saved. Then he asks the question, “Where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?” Peter does not answer this question. However, other texts of scripture do answer it (see

earlier reference to Acts 17:31), and the answer is that the whole unconverted world of mankind will appear for trial and judgment in the world's future judgment day of a thousand years.

At that time, those of the house of God who successfully passed the testings of the present judgment period will be associated with Jesus in the work of judging the world of mankind. This great work will be part of their association with him as kings to rule over and bless the people. This is one of the blessed rewards which will come to all the faithful of the present age.

May this, and the other joys which are set before us, enable us to be judged faithful as we are now passing through the fiery trials which the Lord in his wisdom sees to be needful for us. When we have fully proven our faith, we will hear his blessed "Well done: . . . enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." ■

Our Sufficiency

“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God.”

—II Corinthians 3:5

IN II CORINTHIANS 3:3-6, the Apostle Paul explains that “the epistle of Christ,” is being written by the Spirit of God on “the fleshy tables” of our hearts. He contrasts this with the writing of the Ten Commandments on tables of stone. The writing of God’s law in our hearts constitutes us “able ministers of the new testament [covenant],” just as the tables of stone served, under the direction of Moses, as teachers of the Law of that covenant to the people. This places the followers of Jesus in a very high position in the outworking of the plan of God—so much so that Paul deemed it advisable to add the important words of our theme text.

This is a timely reminder for all the Lord’s consecrated people. However, probably very few of these feel that they are really worthy of the high position to which they are called—the High Calling of God which is in Christ Jesus. They realize that in their own merit they are not worthy to be heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ. They know that they are not “sufficient” of themselves to be made “kings and priests unto God” (Rev. 1:6), to reign with Christ a thousand years. Paul’s reminder would seem also to have an important application to the attitude of heart and mind which we maintain toward our present privileges and responsibilities, and especially in our association with the brethren.

One of the illustrations which might help us to grasp this thought is the case of Moses. Concerning him, the Scriptures state, "Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth." (Num. 12:3) Prof. Strong indicates that the Hebrew word here translated "meek" suggests the idea of being depressed or needy. In other texts it is translated "poor." It seems to carry essentially the same thought as that which Jesus expressed, when he said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 5:3) To be "poor in spirit" implies that one senses his inadequacies and the need for help beyond his own ability.

AT THE BURNING BUSH

Moses' feeling of insufficiency particularly comes to our attention in connection with the Lord's commission to him at the burning bush. Here he expressed his sense of inadequacy to carry out the assignment the Lord gave to him. Moses had not always felt this way. Forty years before this he had felt very sufficient to do something for his brethren, the Hebrew people, who were being oppressed as slaves in Egypt. He became very belligerent about it, and slew an Egyptian whom he found smiting one of his fellow Israelites.

The Lord, through his providence, knows how to humble the hearts of those whom he calls into his service—how to make them "poor in spirit." Because of his slaying the Egyptian, Moses was obliged to flee from Egypt, and he went into the land of Midian. There he married a daughter of Jethro, a priest of Midian, who was also a sheep rancher. Moses became a shepherd and helped to care for Jethro's flocks, a position he occupied for essentially forty years.

Forty years is a long time in human experience, and here, as a tender of flocks, the once self-sufficient Moses had the opportunity to reflect upon his failure in Egypt. Perhaps his humble occupation as a shepherd gradually brought about in his heart a keen sense of insufficiency. Seemingly he reached the point where he felt both unworthy and unable to do anything very important, especially as a servant of God to deliver his people from Egyptian bondage.—Exod. 2:11-25

When the Lord informed Moses that he had chosen him to deliver his people from their slavery in Egypt, Moses replied, "Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?" (Exod. 3:11) It is doubtful that forty years before this Moses would have raised such a question. Seemingly he was then willing to take the side of his people and do anything he could for them, although there is no record that the Lord had then specially commissioned him to do so.

THE LORD'S ASSURANCE

When Moses expressed his feeling of inadequacy for the task assigned to him, the Lord replied with the assurance that he would supply his needs. The Lord said, "Certainly I will be with thee." (vs. 12) Moses was impressed by this and began to ask questions concerning the various problems which he foresaw would arise in this great undertaking. Patiently, the Lord assured Moses regarding these details, and we find the one who was to be the great lawgiver and leader of Israel ready and willing to embark upon the task assigned to him.

Moses had learned the great truth expressed by Paul, namely, that he was not sufficient of himself, but now, by faith, he knew that through his God he could be sufficient. How clear the record is that the Lord did go with Moses, and that he did give him wisdom and strength in his every time of need. One of the outstanding aspects of Moses' forty years of service is that in every crisis, with one recorded exception, he turned to the Lord for help. That help was always ready and was graciously provided.

All those who are "poor in spirit" likewise realize their need of divine guidance and help. It is not enough that we be in this attitude of heart only at the time we make a consecration to serve the Lord. Later in his life, Moses had an experience in which he felt that he could accomplish things in his own strength and in his own way. This was at the time when he smote the rock twice, instead of speaking to it as the Lord had instructed him. He said to the Israelites, "Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this rock?"—Num. 20:10

In this instance, Moses failed to depend on the Lord. “Must we fetch you water?” he asked the people, as though by his own sufficiency he could duplicate the miracle which the Lord’s power performed on a previous occasion. An interesting particular about this incident is that water did gush forth from the rock, and “abundantly.” (vs. 11) However, the Lord was displeased with Moses’ attitude—so much so that he did not permit him to enter the promised land.—vs. 12

In this experience, the fact is revealed that at times the Lord overrules the waywardness of his people so that it might seem to them that he is blessing their efforts. This should be a warning to all of us to be exceedingly cautious, lest, in our zeal to do something in the Lord’s service, we take matters into our own hands, forgetful of our initial poorness of spirit. The Lord might not interfere with what we propose to do in his service, and we could easily assume that we are successful because of our own ability. This would be a form of pride, and the Lord hates a proud spirit.

PROPERLY DETERMINING GOD’S WILL

Sometimes the Lord allows us to do things which may not be his will. People become successful in the world, perhaps, through clever planning and perseverance. We could easily surmise that this is the way we should determine the Lord’s will in our affairs. On this basis, if we try hard to accomplish something we want to do, and do accomplish it, we might conclude that it was the Lord’s will. Actually, what this could mean is that we have determined the Lord’s will simply upon the basis of what he has not hindered us from doing.

Paul gives us the proper method of determining the Lord’s will. As we study it, we find that it precludes human reasoning and worldly methods. He writes, “Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.”—Rom. 12:2,3

We are not to follow the ways of the world in seeking to determine the Lord's will. We are not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. Moses asked, "Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh?" When a great opportunity of service was presented to Moses his first thought was one of humble insufficiency. He did not determine the Lord's will upon the basis of what he considered himself capable of accomplishing. This should be true of us also.

If we make a rational appraisal of our own abilities, we will realize that there is nothing we can do in the Lord's service in an acceptable manner, except as he guides and otherwise blesses us, and through Christ, extends his mercy in connection with our imperfect efforts. In the beginning, it was essential to be "poor in spirit" in order to realize our need of the Lord, and of his grace to help. It is just as essential to maintain this sense of need throughout our entire course in the narrow way, if the Lord is to continue to use us.

FORGETTING THE LORD

The Lord does great things for his people for which they should ever be thankful. He has given us his truth, and through the anointing of the Spirit he has made us ambassadors of Christ. In the exercise of our ambassadorship, the Lord provides daily help and guidance. As we watch the overruling of his providence, we marvel at the things he accomplishes through us, and this despite our insufficiency. Ironically, this showering upon us of the Lord's abundant blessings may result either in good or in harm.

The result will be good if these blessings of the Lord daily increase our appreciation of him, and produce an ever deepening conviction that, under all circumstances, our sufficiency is of him. However, it would be unfortunate should we lose sight of the Lord and begin to attribute what he is accomplishing in and by us entirely to our own ability. This was Moses' failure toward the end of his illustrious forty years of service. His viewpoint changed, at least temporarily, from the feeling expressed by his question, "Who am I?" to the self-sufficient attitude revealed in his statement, "Must we bring water from this rock?"

GOD'S ALL-SUFFICIENT GRACE

Saul of Tarsus was another ardent servant of the Lord, but until he recognized and accepted Christ, his zeal and service was not according to knowledge and was contrary to the Lord's will. When Paul did accept Christ and enter into the service of the Lord, he maintained his poorness of spirit. He knew that he had been appointed to be one of the twelve Apostles, but said that he was "the least of the apostles." (I Cor. 15:9) Remembering his sin in persecuting the church, he freely acknowledged that "I am chief" among sinners. (I Tim. 1:15) How heavily his previous course in persecuting the brethren must have weighed down upon him. No doubt at times he anguished at the very thought of it and must have marveled at the grace of God in continuing to use him.

Paul also had "a thorn in the flesh." (II Cor. 12:7) This was probably his poor eyesight, which could have been brought about at the time of his conversion by the light which shone down upon him brighter than the sun at noonday. This light actually did blind him for a time. While he received his sight back, it was perhaps not the clear vision which he enjoyed before. Whether it was this or something else which he later referred to as "a thorn in the flesh," he felt that if it could be removed he could serve much more efficiently, so he asked the Lord to remove the "thorn."

Paul recognized that this "thorn" had been given to him, as he said, "lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations" with which he had been blessed. Perhaps, however, he reasoned that he had now passed this test and it would be best if the "thorn" were removed. He petitioned the Lord to this end. He explained, "For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me."—vs. 8

The Lord had a different view, and answered Paul, "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness." This satisfied Paul, as he explained, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, than am I strong."—vss. 9,10

OUR WEAKNESS, THE LORD'S STRENGTH

From Paul's testimony it is evident that he had Moses' viewpoint of himself. This was the viewpoint expressed in the question, "Who am I?" In this response, Moses did not take the position that he was wholly incapable of doing anything for the Lord. Rather, he rightfully questioned whether he had the qualifications needed to persuade Pharaoh to release the Israelites from slavery. Moses did not refuse the assignment, but simply inquired of the Lord as to how he would meet various situations which he knew would arise. Moses felt that he was not effective as a speaker, so the Lord gave him Aaron as a mouthpiece. He showed Moses how he could make good use of the rod in his hand.

By the Lord's answers to his inquiries, Moses perceived that while he could not be the deliverer of Israel by his own wisdom and ability, the Lord could use him and would make every necessary provision for his insufficiencies. This was also true with Paul, and it is true of all the faithful followers of the Master. God uses his mighty power to supplement our weaknesses. In this way, we can go on from victory to victory, performing those tasks in his service which he chooses for us. If, however, we choose our own way on the basis of what appeals to us the most, and with the thought that these things we can do, ignoring what the Lord's will might be, there is the possibility that the Lord's help and guidance would not be forthcoming.

SERVING IN THE BODY

The question arises as to just how we can determine the Lord's will, especially in the matter of serving him in the harvest work. There are no hard and fast rules laid down for us in the Scriptures along this line. However, general principles are set forth, which, when we reason upon them with a pure, honest, and humble heart, will help to guide us. For example, when Paul admonished us not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, and not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, he continued by reminding us that we are a part of a "body" of Christians. He said that in this "body" there are various qualifications and offices. He wrote, "As we have many

members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.”— Rom. 12:4,5

One of the principles here set forth is that we are not alone, but part of a group, and that this must be taken into consideration in determining the will of the Lord. Not all in this body are qualified to do the same thing. Not all are called by the Lord to render the same service. All should watch the providences of the Lord, and be ready and willing to serve in any way he might indicate to be his will in this “body” arrangement. Peter wrote, “Ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.”—I Pet. 5:5-7

To be subject one to another requires waiting on the Lord. If we lose sight of our poorness of spirit, our insufficiency, if we begin to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, then we may decide that in our particular case the Lord does not expect us to be subject one to another, but wants us to pursue our own course. We might begin to reason that, after all, the Lord does not want to see our talents wasted, and if the brethren do not recognize our talents, why should we be subject to them?

This is the viewpoint and way of the world. If one is employed by a certain company, and his services and talents are not properly appreciated, he looks for another place of employment where he can more easily “get ahead.” In the world, generally, no one condemns this practice. This, however, is not the way for the servants of the Lord to determine his will for them. The Lord knew the sort of experience that would best prepare Moses for the service which he would later entrust to him. Moses thought he was ready before he was forced to flee to Midian. The Lord allowed him to wait forty years, serving as a shepherd, until he was brought to a sense of his great need for the Lord’s assistance if he was ever to accomplish anything worthwhile in his service.

If we think others do not appreciate us as they should, let us endeavor to realize that it is really the Lord who is testing our humility and our willingness to wait upon him. This is an essential lesson for all the Lord's people. Within the "body" there are various services to perform. Are we happy to serve in an inconspicuous manner? Do we realize that we are not really qualified to do anything in the Lord's service except as he gives us wisdom and strength?

Another important consideration is our motive for serving. This is a matter which concerns our innermost heart relationship with the Lord, for he does not always prevent those with wrong motives from making an outward display of service. Paul wrote, "Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife." (Phil. 1:15) Paul did not compliment these. Neither did he condone what they were doing, although he was glad that the Gospel was being preached, even if in a wrong spirit. The point being stressed here is that the Lord did not prevent these brethren from serving, even though their motive was wrong. For us, individually, our motive in serving is of utmost importance, without regard to the "success" of our service.

FOLLOW THE PRINCIPLES

In order to make sure that the Lord is really blessing us in our service in his vineyard, it is essential to follow all the principles of righteousness given to us in his Word in deciding upon our course of action. A pure motive is one of the most important considerations. We need always, even as at the time of our consecration, to recognize our poorness of spirit and that we cannot really do anything except by the Lord's grace and help. Let us never undertake anything for the Lord in our own strength.

If we are privileged to be associated with a group of the Lord's consecrated people, it is important to be subject one to another. Let us not be overly concerned even if the brethren fail to recognize what we believe to be our real worth and talents. Let us realize, rather, that whatever abilities we have are known to the Lord. He permitted Moses to wait for forty years, and it will do us good to wait on the Lord until he sees that we are prepared to serve him with our heart as

well as with our head and our hands. If we begin to be concerned about our talents, it would be an indication that we still have a degree of self-sufficiency. The Lord might just be waiting until we feel as Moses did when he asked that question, “Who am I?”

The matter of having a proper assessment of our sufficiency concerns all of us. It is not limited to those who serve in the more prominent positions in the church. No matter how small our sphere of service might be, it is important that we should ever keep in mind that we are not sufficient in ourselves to do anything. This is the lesson the Lord is teaching us. He wants us to realize that we will only be qualified for that future glorious position in the kingdom if we now realize our own insufficiency, and continually look to him for wisdom, for strength, and for grace through Christ. Let this be a daily goal in our service to the Lord, the Truth, and the brethren. ■

CHAPTER 32

If Ye Do These Things

“Brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.”

—II Peter 1:10

PETER’S WORDS, CONTAINED in our theme text, are just one of many reminders given to us in the Scriptures that the promises of God to his people have conditions attached to them, and that if we are to experience their fulfillment we must, as individuals, comply faithfully with those conditions. Jesus’ promise in Revelation 2:10 is another good example of this: “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.” Indeed, to receive the fulfillment of this ultimate promise—that being the crown of life—requires the meeting of the condition of faithfulness “unto death.”

In God’s dealings with his typical people, Israel, he promised them rich blessings if they obeyed his commandments. These promises, therefore, were not unconditional. If the people did not obey, then God would hold back the good things he promised and the people would not receive them. While various experiences were permitted to come upon natural Israel which demonstrated the importance of the conditions attached to their blessing, the same holds true in principle concerning spiritual Israel. “Exceeding great and precious” are the promises which the Lord has made to us—promises which, if we are faithful to the conditions attached to them, will lead to the divine nature, and to “glory and honour and immortality.”—II Pet. 1:4; Rom. 2:7

In Peter's reference to the precious promises of God, he emphasizes the necessity of adding to our faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge self-control, and to self-control patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. He explains that "if these things" be in us and abound, then we will not be unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. However, if we lack these, Peter continues, we will be spiritually blind, and eventually forget that we were once purged from our sins. Rather than this, Peter exhorts, we should "give diligence" to make our calling and election sure. He assures that "if ye do these things," then an abundant entrance shall be ministered unto us into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.—II Pet. 1:4-11

THE HEBREW BRETHREN

There are certain statements in Paul's letter to the Hebrews which indicate that as a group they were not living up to their privileges as well as they might. Hence, to some extent they were "coming short" of the promises of God as they applied to them, and to all the followers of the Master. He speaks of them as being "dull of hearing," explaining, "When for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."—Heb. 5:11-14

Many are the promises of God which assure his people of an abundant supply of spiritual food for their nourishment as New Creatures, food which will enable them to grow and become mature in Christ Jesus. This food must be faithfully used and assimilated if we are to develop from the immature, childhood stage of Christian experience into the mature, adult stage—"by reason of use," Paul states. This is one of the conditions attached to the promises of God which builds us up in the most holy faith.

When we do not properly assimilate the promises of God, and through faith obey the conditions attached to them, our “first love”—enthusiasm for the Lord, the Truth, and the brethren—will be lost. This seems to be what had happened with the Hebrews to whom Paul addressed his epistle. He said to them, “Call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; Partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used.”—Heb. 10:32,33

Seemingly these Hebrew brethren had been very faithful and zealous in the beginning of their walk in the narrow way. They then took joyfully the spoiling of their goods. Apparently, however, their attitude had somewhat changed, else Paul would not have invited them to call to remembrance those former days. It is not a temporary faithfulness that will gain the crown of life. One of the conditions attached to the promises is continued faithfulness, not for a week, or a month, or a year, but until the end of the narrow way is reached in death.

It is this that Paul encouraged in the Hebrew brethren. He wrote, “God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end: That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” (chap. 6:10-12) The promises of God hold before us a very rich future inheritance, but if we are to “inherit” what those called of God are promised, we must exercise faith and patience unto the end. Thus, the apostle wrote, “Ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.”—chap. 10:36

“Ye have need of patience.” Here is another of the conditions attached to the promises of God. Jesus illustrated this point in his parable of the sower, in which, as he explained, the “seed” is the Word of God. (Luke 8:5-15) In his Word are contained the promises of God and the conditions which are attached to these promises. In the parable, some of the seed falls by the wayside. This does not take root at all. Some of the seed falls upon stony ground, where there is not enough soil

to keep the new plants alive. Some falls among the thorns, which choke out the growing plants. Some falls on good ground where the new plants flourish and bring forth fruit.

The stony-ground believers, Jesus explained, are those which wither under the heat of trials and persecution. If these could enjoy the promises of God and inherit their fulfillment, but also at the same time enjoy the plaudits of men and be assured freedom from trials and opposition as they walk in the narrow way, they would rejoice. This is not the pathway which the Lord has designed for his faithful people. In order to demonstrate their faithfulness to him and their worthiness of the place in the kingdom which he has promised, they must endure opposition and persecution—and they must endure patiently.

The seed that fell among thorns, Jesus explained, “are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.” When we first accept the invitation and make a consecration to do the Heavenly Father’s will, it may not seem so difficult to give up the good things of life, and devote all our strength, time, and means to serving the Lord. If, however, we do not patiently endure the difficulties and hardships resulting from this prescribed way of life, but allow the deceitfulness of riches and the cares of this life to interfere with our walk in the narrow way, then we will not be pleasing to the Lord. Are we permitting these things to choke out the important interests of the New Creature, hindering its growth in grace, and in the knowledge of the Lord?

Our aim should be to qualify as the “good ground” hearers of the Word, concerning whom Jesus said, these are “they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the Word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.” How important it is that we “keep” the Word, that we treasure up in our hearts the precious promises of God, patiently enduring all the tests which the Lord, in his love and wisdom, permits to come upon us. Only thus may we expect, after having done the will of God in making a consecration to do his will, to inherit the fulfillment of the promises.

Bringing forth the fruits of righteousness is the great objective of our receiving the Word. After speaking of those

who become so unfaithful that it is impossible to renew them unto repentance, Paul continues, “For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by [for, *Marginal Translation*] whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God: But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.” (Heb. 6:4-8) This grave warning follows Paul’s admonition to the Hebrew brethren to lay hold more firmly upon the Truth, to learn its great first principles, and adhere to them without wavering.

ABRAHAM AN EXAMPLE

Paul cites Abraham as an example of patient endurance in connection with the promises of God. We quote: “When God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.”—vss. 13-20

Usually we think of Abraham as an example of faith, and correctly so. In this passage, Paul reminds us additionally of his great patience in waiting for the fulfillment of God’s promise. It was, in fact, his faith which enabled him to patiently endure during all those years of waiting, from the time God first spoke to him in Ur of the Chaldees, until, when he had demonstrated his faithfulness by his willingness to offer up his son Isaac in sacrifice, God confirmed the promise by his oath. Yet, this was not the fulfillment of the promise which Abraham received after patiently enduring, but its confirmation by God’s oath. It was not then the due

time for Abraham's seed to bless all the families of the earth, but God did assure Abraham that the promise would be fulfilled—he confirmed it by his oath.

Our glorious hope has its roots in the Abrahamic Covenant, not as part of the human race which is to be blessed, but as the promised seed which will, together with Jesus, do the blessing. Because of this, God's confirmation of the promise is a "strong consolation" for us. It is a blessed assurance that if, like Abraham, we patiently endure, we will inherit the fulfillment of the promises. To us, the promises of reward are spiritual. The hope engendered by them entereth into that which is beyond the veil, where our forerunner, even Christ, has already entered.

We still "have need of patience," having need of it in all the trying experiences of life. When Paul used this expression he was applying it particularly to the fact that our long wait for the fulfillment of God's promises of glory, honor, and immortality is a severe test of our patience. It was this test of time which Abraham patiently endured. The waiting test has been upon all the Lord's people, from Pentecost even to the present. In this end of the age particularly, the Lord's people have been sorely tested by their long wait for the kingdom, and their exaltation to joint heirship with Christ in his kingdom. That test is still upon us. Shall we patiently endure, or shall we become weary of waiting and fall by the wayside?

When Paul wrote, "Ye have need of patience," he added, "For yet a little while, and he that shall come, will come, and will not tarry." (chap. 10:36,37) The brethren in the Early Church knew that they would not inherit joint heirship with Christ in his kingdom until he returned at his Second Advent. Paul encourages them in the thought that it would be only a "little while" until he did return, and admonished them to patiently endure throughout that short time of waiting. We understand that "little while" turned out to be nearly nineteen hundred years, but so far as the Hebrew brethren were concerned, it lasted only until they finished their course in death. Similarly, in this harvest period of the age, the test of time is no longer than the lifetime of any of the Lord's consecrated people. If we are faithful unto death, we will

receive the crown of life, regardless of God's timetable in the outworking of his plans and purposes as a whole.

We believe the fulfillment of many scriptural signs indicate that we are now living in the days of our Lord's Second Presence. The "little while" of waiting for him to return is in the past. Still, we have need of patience. For each of us, there is still a "little while, now he has come," which is testing our patience. Are we enduring that test, or are we inclined to become lax in our zeal, and just drift along in a half-hearted way? How are we meeting the test of patience in waiting for the kingdom? It is important that we patiently endure if we are to receive the promised reward. This is one of the conditions attached to the exceeding great and precious promises whereby we are made partakers of the divine nature.

GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

Many times promises are made by those who are not reliable, or who lack the ability to fulfill them. This is not true with respect to the promises of God's Word. God, our beloved Heavenly Father, is the source of all the promises contained in his Word. In the two opening verses of the Book of Hebrews, we read, "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds."—Heb. 1:1,2

When God speaks through his prophets, through his Son, or through the apostles of the New Testament, it is his voice which we hear in all the exceeding great and precious promises of his Word. He is the Author of the promises, and we can depend upon God to fulfill them. Paul wrote, "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised.)" God is faithful. He is both willing and able to fulfill all his good promises.

God will be faithful—of this there is no question. The important consideration is our own faithfulness. Paul attaches another test of our faithfulness to the promises in the statement, "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering." The promises are sure. It remains only for us to hold fast to them, and without wavering. If we waver in

uncertainty, we could well lose our grip on the promises, and find ourselves tossed about by every wind of doctrine.

Obedience is another test. Through the promises of God we hear the voice of God speaking to us, but if we are to be blessed in full by that voice, it is necessary to be obedient to all the conditions attached to the promises. Thus the apostle wrote, "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall we not escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven: Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace [hold fast, *Marginal Translation*], whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire."—chap. 12:25-29

Here we are warned against turning away from the voice of God. Are we ever tempted to do this? When we hear God speaking to us through his Word, outlining the conditions which make the narrow way so narrow, do we wish that we could turn away and not hear some of those conditions, the ones which seem particularly difficult for us? We may not consciously do this, but it is so easy to close our ears to the things which we do not wish to hear, and be tempted along this line. Let us be watchful of this. Let us listen attentively to everything which the Lord says, and by his grace and strength obey his voice, while we continue to serve him "acceptably with reverence and godly fear."

MORE EARNEST HEED

Continuing to emphasize the need of faithfulness to the conditions attached to the promises, Paul wrote, "Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which

at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him.”—Heb. 2:1-3

Giving “earnest heed” to, and not neglecting the promises, are the conditions laid down in this admonition as prerequisite to obtaining the “great salvation” which “began to be spoken by the Lord.” It is easy to allow the vitality of the promises of God in our lives to “slip” away from us. The weaknesses of the flesh, the allurements of the world, and the attacks of the Adversary, all contribute to steal away from our hearts and minds that freshness of zeal and obedience which we manifested when first the Lord spoke to us. The revelator speaks of this as the loss of our “first love.” (Rev. 2:4) This is why the apostle urges that we give “more earnest heed to the things which we have heard.” A similar thought is contained in Peter’s admonition that we give “all diligence” to make our “calling and election sure.”—II Pet. 1:10

“We are made partakers of Christ,” Paul wrote, “if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end.” (Heb. 3:14) Notice the condition—“if” we hold steadfast unto the end. Are we holding steadfast? This is the condition upon which we are made partakers of Christ, and if faithful, become part of the great Messianic company for the blessing of all the families of the earth. To hold fast implies willingness to suffer and to die with him, to be planted together in the likeness of his death. It is only if we suffer with him that we will be with him in the kingdom. It is only if we are planted together with him in death, that we may hope to live with him in the resurrection.

Here are further “ifs”: “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:31,32) “If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.”—chap. 14:23

How wonderful to know, as Paul wrote, that “the Lord is faithful, who shall establish you, and keep you from evil.” (II Thess. 3:3) Because the Lord is faithful, not one of his good promises will ever fail on behalf of those who strive as earnestly as possible to meet the conditions attached to his promises. “Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.”—Heb. 4:1 ■

CHAPTER 33

“I Will Make a New Covenant”

“Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers: . . . But this shall be the covenant that I will make; . . . I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts: . . . for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD.”

—*Jeremiah 31:31-34*

APOSTLE PAUL WROTE, “Death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam’s transgression.” (Rom. 5:14) Adam’s transgression was individual and willful, and it brought upon him the penalty of death. Because Adam fell from perfection prior to the birth of his children, they were born imperfect and, therefore, inherited the death penalty. Paul reminds us that this situation continued from Adam to Moses. Adam’s descendants were not necessarily as individuals willful sinners, but in any case they were under condemnation to death because of their inherited imperfection.

When Moses became the leader of the Hebrew people and delivered them from Egyptian bondage, he mediated a covenant between them and God. Because this covenant was a representation of God’s perfect law of obedience, anyone

who could keep it perfectly would, by doing so, have the right to continued human life as long as such perfect obedience was maintained. This arrangement is often referred to as the Law Covenant. The epitome of that covenant, so far as God's law was concerned, was the Ten Commandments. The Apostle Paul wrote that these commandments were "ordained to life."—Rom. 7:10

When the rich young ruler asked Jesus what he could do to have eternal life, Jesus referred the young man to the Law, for he knew that anyone who could keep those commandments would be worthy of life. The young man indicated that he had kept the Law—and probably he had kept it as well as he could—but he realized that just like everyone else, he was dying. The fact is, as discovered by the most earnest of the Israelites, by the rich young ruler, and by Paul, that the standards of righteousness set forth in the Law were beyond the ability of any imperfect human to meet, so no one gained life under that arrangement. However, the Israelites were given an opportunity, and it was this Law Covenant arrangement that made the change in status of the Israelites who died after Moses.

Paul wrote that the Law was a "schoolmaster" to bring Israel to Christ. (Gal. 3:24) In other words, the Law demonstrated the need of a Redeemer in order for members of the Adamic race to obtain life, and that the Redeemer was, and is, Jesus. Paul wrote, "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." (I Cor. 15:22) Through the Prophet Jeremiah, God reminds us of the principle involved in the matter of all mankind's dying because of Adam's transgression. He speaks of it as the fathers eating the "sour grape" and the children's teeth being "set on edge." In this scripture, God promises that it will not always be this way. He speaks of a new arrangement, saying, "In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge. But every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge."—Jer. 31:29,30

This wonderful passage of scripture immediately precedes our theme text concerning the New Covenant which the Lord promised to make "with the house of Israel, and with

the house of Judah.” The complete lesson is that through the instrumentality of the promised New Covenant, people will no longer die because of Adam’s transgression, but if they die at all it will be because of their own individual transgression of divine law, having thus eaten the “sour grape” of sin.

INTERESTING DIFFERENCES

In his promise of the New Covenant, God said that it would be “not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers.” In connection with the giving of the Law Covenant, the one made with Israel’s fathers, there was the sacrifice of animals to provide blood for sprinkling the people. Moses went up into the mount, and there received from God the tables of stone on which were written the Ten Commandments. After returning, the Law was read to the assembled people, and they shouted, “All the words which the LORD hath said will we do.” Then Moses sprinkled the people with the blood of the covenant.—Exod. 24:3-8

In its entirety, this was an impressive and glorious inauguration of a most solemn covenant, or agreement, between God and his people Israel, and it has many valuable lessons for us today. The blood of that covenant pointed forward to the blood of Christ, which is the blood that makes possible the establishing of a New Covenant. The Law Covenant had a mediator, who was Moses, and the New Covenant will have a Mediator—Jesus. (Heb. 12:24) Associated with him in the mediatorial work relative to the New Covenant will be his bride, the church. Additionally, any who could have kept the Law Covenant would have been worthy of continued human life, and those who fully come under the terms of the New Covenant are promised eternal life upon the earth.

There are other aspects of the New Covenant, however, which will be “not according” to the old Law Covenant, and it is in the examination of these features that we obtain our clearest understanding of what the New Covenant will really mean to those who come under it. One of the principal “not according” features of the New Covenant lies in the fact that its law will not be written on tables of stone, but in the hearts of the people. According to our theme text, “I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts.”

Moses was in the mount with God for forty days while the Law was being etched on tables of stone. There will be no such literal procedure as this in connection with the making of the New Covenant. The Apostle Paul gives us the antitype of this phase of making the New Covenant. "Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart. And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: Not that we are sufficient of ourselves; . . . but our sufficiency is of God; Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament [covenant]; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: How shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious? For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory. For even that which was made glorious, had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth, For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious. Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech."—II Cor. 3:3-12

There should be no misunderstanding of the meaning of this beautiful and straightforward presentation by the Apostle Paul. He speaks here concerning the relationship of Jesus' followers to the New Covenant, as "ministers," likening it to the relationship of the tables of stone to Moses in connection with the ministry of the Law Covenant. However, the "not according" aspect of this comparison is striking. Moses was in the mount forty days receiving those typical tables of stone, but it requires the entire Gospel Age in the plan of God to prepare the antitypical tables of stone, embodied in the "ministers of the new covenant."

When this "ministers of the new covenant" class is complete, they will appear with Christ in glory, which will be the antitype of Moses appearing with glory on his countenance, bearing the tables of stone. This is the "hope of glory" which so inspires us as we are being prepared for the future ministry

of the New Covenant. It is the fulfillment of the promise referred to by Paul: “When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.”—Col. 3:4

TO TEACH THE PEOPLE

In Exodus 24:12, we are informed that the typical tables of stone were given to Moses that he might teach the people. The teaching of the people in connection with the making of the New Covenant will be the work of the entire next age in the plan of God. It will involve the enlightenment of the whole world of mankind concerning the truth of God’s provision of life through Christ. Paul touches on this, saying, “This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.”—I Tim. 2:3-6

The church, as the antitypical tables of stone, will be associated with Jesus in the work of testifying to all mankind God’s law. They will teach man the truth concerning the ransom through Jesus, and offer the opportunity of life to all. The church, as the “bride” of Christ, will be associated with him in saying to the people, “Come . . . [and] take the water of life freely.—Rev. 22:17

What a wonderful provision God has made for writing the law of the New Covenant in the hearts of the people. This is another of the “not according” features of the New Covenant—its law will not be written on tables of stone, but in the inward parts of the people themselves—in their hearts. Of necessity, this will begin with their being made acquainted with the great truth of the ransom and the high standards of righteousness which will then be enforced through the agencies of the Messianic kingdom. Then also God’s Spirit will be poured out upon all flesh, and under its influence, through the teachings of the “able ministers of the new covenant,” mankind will, with different degrees of progress, gradually be restored to perfection of heart and mind and action. Upon the basis of this restoration under the terms of the New Covenant, mankind will come back into full harmony and communion with God as his human children.

THE DEAD AWAKENED

In the study of this aspect of the plan of God, it is important to keep in mind that the great majority of those who will be reconciled to God through the New Covenant arrangements and receive everlasting life will, at the beginning of that age of restoration, be asleep in death. This means that these will need to be raised from the dead in order to enter into the blessings of the New Covenant. While it might not require the entire age to reconcile a single generation under the New Covenant, when we take into consideration the many generations who at the start will be in their graves, we can readily see that the restoration work of the New Covenant with all the people will indeed require the entire Messianic Age.

How wonderful it will be when that covenant is made and its restoration work is completed. Note again these words of our theme text: “For they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD.” Here is another difference between the New Covenant and the old Law Covenant. While the people back there said, “All these things will we do,” the precepts of the Law had not reached their “inward parts.” It is only when this is accomplished that the people will be truly in full relationship with God. When this is accomplished in the lives of all the willing and obedient, and the willful opposers are “cut off from among the people,” all will know him. The work of teaching the people concerning God will have been finished, for all will then know him from the least unto the greatest.

There will be still another “not according” in connection with the New Covenant. Concerning those who are reconciled to God through its agencies, the Prophet Jeremiah says, “I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” (Jer. 31:34) There was a typical forgiveness of sins in connection with the Law Covenant, based upon the year-by-year atonement day sacrifices of bulls and goats. This pointed forward to the “better sacrifices” of the Gospel Age, whereby, through the blood of Jesus, permanent forgiveness is provided for those who accept and whose lives become transformed through obedience. Then it will be true that God will remember their sins no more.

AS INDIVIDUALS

As we have already noted, the period spanned by the making of the New Covenant will be one in which every man will suffer for his own iniquity, and not for the sins of another. Each individual will then need to accept the provisions of God's love through Christ in order to be fully cleansed in heart and mind from the effects of Adamic sin. Each one, as individuals, will need to obey the Messianic kingdom laws in order to make progress toward perfection, and toward having the law of God written in his "inward parts."

In the promise of the New Covenant, it is said to be made "with the house of Israel and the house of Judah." This emphasizes the fact that the natural descendants of Abraham who have been regathered to their "Land of Promise" will be among the first who will be given the opportunity to come, through faith in Jesus, their Messiah, under the blood of the New Covenant, and to begin walking upon the "way of holiness" which will lead to perfection.—Isa. 35:8

However, the blood of the New Covenant is the blood of Jesus, which was shed for all mankind, not just for Israelites. "He [Jesus] is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world." (I John 2:2) This reminds us of another sense in which the making of the New Covenant will be different, and on a much grander scale than the making of the typical Law Covenant. Then, as we have noted, the blood of animals was sprinkled literally upon the people of Israel. However, in the case of the New Covenant it will be a symbolic sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ upon the people of all nations. (Isa. 52:15) The Apostle Paul admonished the church, "Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water."—Heb. 10:22

How different is this from the sprinkling of literal blood upon the heads of the people. While Paul is here speaking of consecrated believers in this age, the principle will be the same in the next age. Then also the antitypical sprinkling will be associated with the heart cleansing of the people. Paul again speaks of this in his preview of the wonderful prospect which is set before us as followers of the Master,

when he talks of “the blood of sprinkling,” which speaks better things than the blood of Abel.—Heb. 12:24

The Apostle Peter also mentions this blood of sprinkling. He says, “Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.” (I Pet. 1:2) Peter does not say that we are sanctified by obedience, or by the blood of sprinkling, but “unto” these, thus signifying a process. Sanctification is our setting apart to the holy service of God, and that setting apart is to be so complete that we will be wholly obedient to the divine will. This is the great objective of our Christian lives so far as the present is concerned. We are also set apart “unto” the great future work of sprinkling the blood of Jesus Christ in connection with our service of the New Covenant.

It will be through reconciliation to God, and a restoration to human perfection of body, mind, and heart, that the houses of Israel, Judah, and all people will become worthy to “inherit the desolate heritages.” This, in reality, is descriptive of complete restitution. It is that which Jesus said of the sheep class in the parable, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”—Matt. 25:34

It will be then that the “knowledge of the LORD” will fill the whole earth “as the waters cover the sea,” and when nothing will “hurt nor destroy” in all God’s holy kingdom. (Isa. 11:9) What a blessed prospect it is to contemplate the human race restored, and reconciled to God, delighting to do his will! It is for this glorious consummation of the divine plan that we continue earnestly to pray, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.”—Matt. 6:10 ■

CHAPTER 34

God's Word Versus Men's Traditions

*“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain
deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments
of the world, and not after Christ.”*

—*Colossians 2:8*

JESUS WAS VERY outspoken in condemning the “tradition of the elders” as set forth by the scribes and the Pharisees of his day. He was asked by them why his disciples transgressed these traditions, and his reply was, in part, “Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?” (Matt. 15:2,3) Thus Jesus indicates that the traditions of men are often contrary to the commandment, or Word of God.

Webster's Dictionary gives as one definition of tradition: “The delivery of opinions, doctrines, practices, rites, and customs from ancestors to posterity; the transmission of any opinions or practice from forefathers to descendants by oral communication.” This thought is in sharp contrast to the Scriptures, in which it is made clear that religious doctrines, practices, and rites come only by the direct instruction of God, or through his specially chosen instruments. In the New Testament, the word translated “tradition”—the practice Jesus condemned—is the Greek word *paradosis*. According to Prof. Strong, this word specifically has reference to “the Jewish traditionary law.”

The “Jewish traditionary law” was that mass of interpretations and adjustments which began to be formulated by the elders of Israel at an early date, and which was transmitted orally and added to from generation to generation. So far as we know there were no written versions of these traditions in Jesus’ day. It was in the second century that these oral traditions began to be put into written form. Out of these written versions of tradition there finally developed the Jewish Talmud. However, not all Israelites shared the views of the scribes and Pharisees with respect to tradition. The Jewish historian Josephus wrote:

“What I would now explain is this, that the Pharisees have delivered to the people a great many observances by succession from their fathers, which are not written in the laws of Moses; and for that reason it is that the Sadducees reject them, and say that we are to esteem those observances to be obligatory which are in the written word, but are not to observe what are derived from the tradition of our forefathers.”

CONTROVERSY CONTINUES

The controversy as to the relative value of the written Word of God and the tradition of men, which began in ancient times and was highlighted by Jesus’ firm stand against tradition, has continued to our day. One of the crucial issues today confronting many of the large denominations of Christendom is whether or not their traditions should be given equal authority with the written Word of God in their teachings. As church leaders deal with this, the necessity arises of perhaps even setting aside the Word of God in some cases, where it conflicts with their long-held traditions.

As shown by our theme scripture, the Apostle Paul, in the days of the Early Church, found it necessary to counsel the brethren to resist the influence of tradition. The traditions Paul spoke of that were “not after Christ” and which wrought the greatest harm during that time were likely those related to false notions concerning the place the Jewish Law should occupy in the beliefs and practices of Christians.

The Apostle Peter wrote, “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from

your fathers.” (I Pet. 1:18) Here, Peter emphasizes that neither the world’s wealth nor the foolish conduct enjoined upon them by the traditions received from their fathers had purchased their redemption, but they were redeemed “with the precious blood of Christ.”—vs. 19

In Galatians 1:14, Paul speaks of his former zeal for the traditions of his fathers. We quote: “[I] profited in the Jews’ religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.” Now, however, Paul was zealous only for the Gospel of Christ, and this zeal was even greater than it had previously been for tradition.

As we have noted, the word “tradition” simply implies the passing along of ideas to others by word of mouth. Thus, the word itself does not suggest anything necessarily evil. Paul, in fact, uses it in reference to his own teachings of the Gospel. He says, “Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.” (II Thess. 2:15) Here Paul uses the Greek word translated “traditions” as applying to his own inspired teachings which he had passed on to the brethren by word of mouth and by letter. However, since Paul spoke and wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, his teachings were a part of God’s message to his people, and not the opinions of men.

Paul also used the word “tradition” in a good sense in II Thessalonians 3:6, which reads, “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.” Here again the “tradition” Paul refers to is his own teachings, and therefore inspired by God’s Holy Spirit.

HUMAN TRADITIONS

The traditions condemned by Jesus and the apostles are those of purely human origin. The specific traditions with which they dealt at that time pertained to the Law. Today there are many philosophies pertaining to the Gospel of Christ which have developed throughout the centuries, and which eventually have become accepted by many as of equal

importance to the Word of God. As the definition of the word implies, these traditions started as opinions which were passed along to others orally, sometimes over many generations. Finally they achieved dignity and a semblance of authority by being published in written form.

However, human tradition, unsupported by the teachings of the Bible, no matter how old, how venerable, or how seemingly reasonable, should be given no authority by the dedicated child of God and sincere student of the Bible. The Lord's true people will only give heed to the instructions of his Word, which states, "To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them."—Isa. 8:20

THOROUGHLY FURNISHED

The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, saying, "All Scripture, divinely inspired, is indeed profitable for Teaching, for Conviction, for Correction, for that Discipline which is in Righteousness; so that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly fitted for Every good Work." (II Tim. 3:16,17, *Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott*) Here the Apostle Paul clearly emphasizes that the Lord's people need not look outside the Word of God for authoritative instructions in order to be acceptable servants to the Lord.

Paul again wrote to Timothy, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." (chap. 2:15) To be workmen pleasing to God, it is essential only that we rightly divide the Word of truth and apply its precepts in our lives as we daily walk in the narrow way of sacrifice. It is not necessary to harmonize the Word of God with traditions. Some traditions may be quite in harmony with the Word of God, but most traditions are not, and these should give us no concern in our "rightly dividing the word of truth."

SMALL BEGINNINGS

Traditions usually have small beginnings. The doctrine of the trinity is a humanly conceived tradition. There is no authority for this teaching in the Word of God. To the one who first gave thought to this erroneous doctrine it probably

seemed to be a reasonable conclusion. Certainly the Bible speaks of God the Father, and it also speaks of Jesus, his beloved Son. The Bible also speaks much about the Holy Spirit of God.

Could it be, someone may have inquired, that these three are in some way the same? This seed of philosophy was possibly passed on to others, and then to still others. Finally, it was debated in church councils and accepted by the majority as fact. Many of those who fought against it, insisting that the Bible taught that there is but one God, were pacified by the suggestion that “these three are one.” This tradition has become so deeply rooted in the minds of millions that to question it makes one disobedient, in their minds, to the Word of God. Yet, it is not taught in the Bible at all. Rather, this tradition makes void the teaching of the Word of God that “there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, . . . and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things.” (I Cor. 8:6) It also makes the Holy Spirit a “ghost” instead of the holy power or influence of God, as the Bible teaches.—Acts 1:8, *Rotherham Translation*

Many other traditions developed during the Dark Ages. Among them is the teaching that the end of the world means the destruction of the earth by literal fire. On the contrary, the Bible teaches that the end of the world is the end of an age—the end of Satan’s kingdom, the present evil social order—and is brought about to prepare the way for the establishment of Messiah’s kingdom. Recognizing this enables us to have a much clearer understanding of the end-of-the-world prophecies than otherwise would be possible. God assures us in his Word, “Thus saith the LORD that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited.” “The earth abideth for ever.”—Isa. 45:18; Eccles. 1:4

Then there is the “immortal soul” tradition. This false idea began very early in man’s experience, when Satan said to mother Eve, “Ye shall not surely die.” (Gen. 3:4) As this tradition developed it took the form that “there is no death.” Then the “reasonable conclusion” was reached that since actual death is not the punishment for sin, some form of conscious punishment must await those who only “seem” to die. This

idea, thought by many to be so reasonable, soon developed into the God-dishonoring doctrine of eternal torture in a fiery hell. How this tradition has indeed made void the Word of God with respect to its simple statements that “the soul that sinneth, it shall die,” that “the wages of sin is death,” but that God has a loving provision for everlasting life through Jesus Christ our Lord!—Ezek. 18:4; Rom. 6:23; John 3:16

INFALLIBILITY

As the great falling away from the faith foretold by the Apostle Paul developed, the tendency grew to impart authority to certain outstanding leaders in the church. The bishop of Rome received the largest share of this authority. In due course, it seemed reasonable to his supporters to confer infallibility upon him and to regard him as the vicegerent of Christ, that is, in place of Christ. This tradition soon became a church-approved doctrine, but it has no support whatever in the Word of God.

The only truly infallible teachings, so far as the humble Christian is concerned, are those contained in the written Word of God. God has so overruled the matter that, as Paul declared, the Scriptures given by inspiration are sufficient to make one wise unto salvation. We know that it is in the providence of God that he has seen to it that his Word of truth has come down to us in written form. It does not depend upon oral transmission, as is true with the beginning of all traditions. Oral testimony can be forgotten, distorted, or wrested, but not the written Word of God.

True, we do not have the original manuscripts of the Bible, as written by those who were inspired by God. We have to depend upon translations, which at times are less than perfect. Today, however, in the Lord’s providence, we have Greek and Hebrew concordances and lexicons which enable us to check the accuracy of translations. These helps are available in printed form as well as in computer software versions. This has proved to be a great blessing to the Lord’s people, and has resulted in a clearer and more blessed understanding of God’s great plan of salvation.

Revelation 22:18,19 contains a warning against adding to or taking away from the Word of God. While this warning

applies particularly to the Book of Revelation, without doubt God is equally concerned with respect to his entire written Word. He wants his people to be meek and humble in their approach to his Word. When he speaks, he rejoices to have his people take heed to what he says and to order their lives accordingly. This is one of the vital tests the Lord imposes upon all his consecrated people. They have dedicated themselves to do his will, and his will is expressed through his written Word. Are we truly following that Word, or are we in part giving heed to the precepts and traditions of men?

THE NOBLE BEREANS

The Apostle Paul was one of the inspired servants of God who was used greatly in helping to provide his written Word to those in the Early Church. Paul rejoiced when he met those who insisted that even his teachings be tested as to their harmony with the inspired Scriptures already written. He indicates this in telling of his experiences with a group in a synagogue in Berea to whom he presented the Gospel. He said of these that they “were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.”—Acts 17:11

In addition to searching the Scriptures for proof of what Paul preached to them, these Bereans were noble also in the fact that they received the Word of God “with all readiness of mind.” This is an important quality for all those who would be pleasing to the Heavenly Father. The disposition to turn a deaf ear to clear statements of the Word of God, and to be guided instead by human philosophy and tradition, cannot be pleasing to the Lord. Let us endeavor to be among those who “tremble” reverently at his Word.—Isa. 66:5

HELPERS

The Lord, in his providence, has provided that his people should assist each other in the understanding of the sacred and infallible Word of truth. We all have opportunities and responsibilities along this line. The Apostle Paul speaks that some of the brethren may serve as teachers, some as evangelists, and some as pastors. (Eph. 4:11) In this regard, the

Lord in his love provided a special servant for his people in this Harvest period of the Gospel Age, for which we are duly grateful.

Throughout the Gospel Age, the oral and written assistance to the church provided by these helpers occupies a different position than do the writings contained directly in the inspired Word of God. These helpers are not, nor have they ever claimed to be, the sources of truth with respect to the divine plan. Rather, they have served to call attention to the glorious doctrines of present truth as they are set forth in the inspired Word. If Paul, although an inspired apostle, considered the Bereans to be noble because they made sure that what he taught them was supported by the infallible Scriptures, how much more important it is for us to make sure that what we are taught by those not inspired, as was Paul, is indeed supported by a “thus saith the Lord.”

SCRIPTURAL INTERPRETATIONS

Speaking of the experiences of natural Israel, the Apostle Paul wrote, “Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world [ages, *WED*] are come.” (I Cor. 10:11) Some have taken this statement by Paul to mean that everything which happened to Israel is supposed to have a very deep significance which does not appear on the surface. Then they proceed to interpret these supposedly deep types according to whatever their opinions may indicate to be the meaning.

This is an unwarranted use of the Word of God. Paul clearly indicated what he meant by saying that the things which happened to Israel were examples. He explains that God dealt with all his ancient people in the same manner. Some responded to his providences in terms of faithful obedience, but others did not. They were “ensamples,” either good or bad, by how they responded. He wrote, “With many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Neither let us commit

fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer.”—vss. 5-10

Then follows the explanation already quoted that “all these things happened unto them for ensamples.” God permitted those things to happen to natural Israel in order to provide “ensamples,” or lessons, to his people of later times not to be disobedient as some of his people of old were disobedient. These lessons apply to the Lord’s people of today, those living at the “end of the age,” just as Paul expresses in this verse.

Many numbers and figures are mentioned in various parts of the Bible. Some have assumed that these are all intended in some way to be prophecies or to have special, deep, significance. As a result, many have disappointed themselves and others by their interpretations of these so-called prophetic “deep things,” which have not come to pass as they were once supposed. Although most often rightly intended, this is an unwise use of the Word of God. There are indeed wonderful and beautiful prophecies in the Bible, but the Bible itself identifies these as such, and gives us the proper keys for unlocking them. We must also remember that no prophecy can be fully understood in every detail until it is fulfilled. Paul wisely and humbly said, “Now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.”—chap. 13:12

THE FUNDAMENTALS

All the great fundamentals of the divine plan are clearly established in the Word of God by direct statements of Scripture. If we rightly divide the Word of truth we will discover the firm foundation upon which present truth is established. If, however, we try to harmonize these truths with opinions and traditions which are based merely on human philosophy, we will sooner or later experience disappointment, no matter how appealing the philosophy may be.

The Apostle Paul wrote, “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised.)” (Heb. 10:23) God is always faithful to his promises, but he

takes no responsibility for the theories we may attach to his promises. We will never be disappointed when putting our faith in the promises of God, but could well be disappointed if we fail to see the difference between the promises of God and those theories and traditions which we may unwittingly associate with his promises. May the Word of God, and all the blessed features of the divine plan which are clearly revealed therein, become more and more precious to us as the days and years go by! ■

CHAPTER 35

Confession

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

—I John 1:9

THE SCRIPTURES TELL us, “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” (Rom. 3:23) One might then ask, “What should I do about my sin?” To address this question, we begin by reading the Apostle John’s statement in I John 4:9,10 about the greatest gift ever given: “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” God sent his son so we might have life through him—“The man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all.”—I Tim. 2:5,6

This Gospel message had been delivered many times already. Most likely John felt compelled to repeat it not only to fortify what had been preached earlier, but also to warn the disciples against false prophets and doctrines which threatened the very necessity and meaning of Jesus’ sacrifice.

In the same context as the verses quoted above, John gives a warning. His words, given to those in Christ living near the end of the first century, parallel Jesus’ prophetic warning to those living at the end of the Gospel Age. Let us compare their statements. John’s warning is recorded in I John 4:1-3. “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out

into the world. Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.” John’s warning to the brethren of his day to “believe not every spirit” and to “try the spirits” meant that they were not to believe the teachings of everyone who claimed to have the “spirit” of God, but to test those things they were taught by comparing them to God’s Word. For example, John said that God’s Word clearly testified that his son Jesus had come in the flesh, and if any teaching denied that truth, it should be considered as being of the spirit of antichrist—that is, in opposition to Christ.

Jesus’ warning is recorded in Matthew 24:3-5, 23-25. “As he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming [presence], and of the end of the world [age]? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. . . . Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before.”

Note the similarities between these two warnings of Jesus and John—terms mentioned such as “false prophets,” “false Christs,” “try the spirits,” “take heed,” and “spirit of antichrist.” Man’s fallen, sinful spirit has more often than not gotten in the way of his faith in Christ. In John’s day, the Greek philosophers took the teaching of “liberty” in Christ (Gal. 2:4), and tried to expand it into a concept of salvation based more on man’s abilities than on his faith in God. The worst of these philosophies was Gnosticism, which taught that salvation was based on man’s knowledge, and credited Jesus to be no more than a good teacher who failed to go far enough in releasing the Jews from the bondage of the Law. It was this type of spirit also which John was warning against during his lifetime.

Jesus' prophetic warning is particularly applicable to our day. While today's false teachings are varied, they share the same general idea of man's ability to obtain his own salvation, of which John warned the brethren in his day. For example, beginning in the 1960s, the New Age movement began teaching that "God is within us"—each one possesses a little of God sufficient to develop ourselves as fully as we desire, and capable of carrying out our own salvation. Additionally, many churches today are increasingly proclaiming "great signs and wonders" in missionary work, feeding of the poor, helping many overcome alcohol and drug dependency, mending broken homes, providing financial security, and other great works. We do not criticize these noble efforts and the limited good they have accomplished. However, we note that one of the effects has been the same as in John's day—an elevation of man's importance and a decrease of God's importance in providing man's salvation and recovery from the terrible effects of sin.

A recent *Time* magazine article on this topic spoke of baby boomers returning to the churches, but on their own terms and with many of their own ideas of what Christianity should be. The author pointed out that, as a result, many churches have become almost indistinguishable from many "self-help" groups, and concluded with the statement that all these efforts would fail spiritually as long as church-goers replace "the glorification of God with the gratification of man." This is the same spirit of opposition to Christ which John warned against.

How can we protect ourselves from these and other threats which teach in opposition to Christ? How do we resist the temptation to replace "the glorification of God with the gratification of man?" The Apostle John has given us a very practical and essential tool to ward off these false doctrines that would in any way minimize the ransom price paid by our dear Master on the cross, with the words of our theme text: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."—I John 1:9

From the statements of John quoted thus far, we conclude that confession is an important tool to help us resist the spirit of opposition to Christ—antichrist. Let us consider

John's words on this subject more closely, and examine the importance of confession in our consecrated walk.

WHO SHOULD CONFESS?

As we consider "who should confess?" we must understand to whom John is speaking in our theme text. While it is true that all have sinned, and that confession is always a proper response to one's sinful condition, it is quite evident from the context of John's words that he is not speaking to sinners in general, but directly to the footstep followers of Christ. Note these words from earlier in the same chapter: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full."—I John 1:1-4

Whose joy can be full in this present evil world in which we live except those who have been begotten by the Holy Spirit, those who understand God's plans and purposes? Clearly, the world in general does not enjoy this fullness of joy today. The world is consumed in a spirit of fear, distress, and greed. Likewise, most of today's churches do not enjoy this fullness of joy because they are so consumed in earthly affairs. If these words of John were applicable to sinners in general, it would give the impression that there is no difference between those in Christ and the world. It would nullify the need to deny ourselves and follow Jesus according to the terms of the divine call—"Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice."—Ps. 50:5

Additionally, if applicable to sinners in general, some might mistakenly conclude from John's words that it is impossible to commit further sins after past sins have been forgiven by our gracious God. However, such is not the case, and our reliance on God continues in every step of our life, as Paul

reminds us, saying, “We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.” (II Cor. 4:7) It is evident, then, that John is speaking, not to the world in general, but to those who would become the sons of God.

It is important that we understand why confession is needed in our life as a child of God, and the purpose of confessing our sins. We turn to the testimony of David and Solomon on this point. David wrote these words, saying, “How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered! How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit! When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away Through my groaning all day long. For day and night Your hand was heavy upon me; My vitality was drained away as with the fever heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I did not hide; I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD’; And You forgave the guilt of my sin.”—Ps. 32:1-5, *New American Standard Bible*

David was eager to serve God and quick to seek forgiveness when he erred. We find three important points regarding confession in this beautiful account: 1. Without confession David suffered and there was no fullness of joy (vss. 3,4); 2. Confession preceded forgiveness, meaning it is a prerequisite. (vs. 5); 3. God’s forgiveness was a blessing that led to fullness of joy (vs. 1). We see that confession was an important element in David’s relationship with God and his service to him.

Solomon also had experiences with regard to confession, and provides similar words, as recorded in Proverbs, “He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion.” (Prov. 28:13, *NASB*) Here we see the same three thoughts as David had expressed—hidden sins are detrimental to our well-being; confession leads to forgiveness; and forgiveness is a blessing from God, here expressed as “compassion.”

If confession leads to forgiveness, we should want to know more about it. Let us consider Paul’s words concerning forgiveness as he recalled the details of his conversion before Agrippa. “I said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But rise, and stand upon thy feet:

for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.”—Acts 26:15-18

There are two points worth noting here. First, Paul was sent to the Gentiles to turn them from darkness to light. Second, the purpose of his mission to provide the light of truth to these was that they might be granted forgiveness of their sins and be given the opportunity of receiving an inheritance.

We now return to John’s discourse and consider our need of cleansing, and its relationship to confession and forgiveness. “This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”—I John 1:5-10

John makes it very clear that we are all sinners in need of cleansing, stating that if we claim to have not sinned we are liars! If we are to be considered as walking in the light, and cleansed from all unrighteousness by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, then, according to the apostle’s words, confession is required. We will be partakers of these blessings “if we confess our sins.”

WHAT SINS TO CONFESS?

John states in I John 5:16 that there two kinds of sin which, in particular, can apply to the Lord’s people at the present time. He says, “If any man see his brother sin a sin

which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it." The second of these sins, the "sin unto death," is willful sin against light provided by the Holy Spirit. Jesus speaks of this type of sin in this way, "Whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come."—Matt. 12:32

Paul confirms this principle in Hebrews 10:26, which reads, "If we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins." Because we are free moral agents and not banned from making such a treacherous and terrible choice, John says we are not to pray for those who commit this sin. They have made their own choice, with full knowledge against the light of the Holy Spirit.

The other sin John mentions is a "sin not unto death." These are unintentional sins, faults, and shortcomings of our flesh that we all are guilty of and battle constantly throughout our walk in the narrow way. John says we should pray for one another concerning these types of sin, that we might be encouraged and grow spiritually from our mistakes. This also clarifies for us which sins we should confess—not the sin unto death (which one would likely not think of confessing anyway), but sins "not" unto death. We should confess the faults and shortcomings of the flesh, in which we all share, and which the Apostle Paul once described in himself with these words: "The good that I would [do] I do not: but the evil which I would not [do], that I do."—Rom. 7:19

Notwithstanding the scriptural testimony previously cited, some may reason that the body members of Christ cannot sin, as John seems to state in I John 3:6-9. "Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him. Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. Whosoever is born [begotten] of God doth not

commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born [begotten] of God.”

We should note two points in these verses. First, the sins spoken of in these verses are of the willful kind, not unintentional. This is shown by John’s statement that they are “of the devil,” that is, they are willful even as Satan’s sin was willful “from the beginning.” The second point we note is that the true child of God cannot commit such willful sin as long as he continues to abide under the begetting power of God’s Holy Spirit. Being begotten of God, he is opposed to all such sin.

Part of our battle to develop as spirit-begotten New Creatures comes from this dual aspect of our being, as we currently have “this treasure in earthen vessels.” (II Cor. 4:7) This begotten New Creature—the new heavenly will and mind—currently resides in an earthly, imperfect body. The spirit-begotten will does not sin because it is from God, but as long as we are in these earthen vessels, we continue to commit the unintentional sins of the flesh. These are the sins John tells us we are to confess. These are the sins we speak of when we pray, “Forgive us our sins and shortcomings.”

This duality of sin, willful versus unintentional, and the fact that the child of God has a spirit-begotten mind or will, residing in a fallen earthly body, raises an interesting question. Can an unintentional sin become willful? If an unintentional sin is later recognized, but not repented of, and not rectified, is it then willful? Are we then sinning against the Holy Spirit by omitting proper repentance and rectification? It would appear from John’s words that this is indeed the case. Sincere, heartfelt confessions would be of even greater necessity to correct such a course.

Especially important along this line is our dealings with the brethren. Because “we walk in the light [with our brethren], . . . [and] have fellowship one with another” (I John 1:7), we must first know who our brethren are. Jesus said, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.” (Matt. 7:21) In other words, actions speak louder than words when determining who are to be considered as brethren. Jesus further says, “Who are my

brethren? . . . Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother.”—chap. 12:48,50

In dealing with the real or, at times, perceived sins of our brethren, we should consider Jesus’ advice on the matter, as recorded by Matthew, “You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT MURDER’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to his brother, ‘You good-for-nothing,’ shall be guilty before the supreme court; and whoever says, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell [*gehenna*—Greek, destruction]. Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.”—chap. 5:21-24, *NASB*

These are very serious words. Jesus is here saying that God will not accept our offering if our brother has something against us. He is further saying that the offender has the responsibility to reconcile the transgression, and that this is required before we can once again present an acceptable offering to our Heavenly Father. We should, therefore, frequently ask ourselves if we have fully reconciled with those we have transgressed against. Here again, confessions are required. Let us then be very careful in all of our thoughts, words, and deeds directed toward our brethren.

TO WHOM IS CONFESSION MADE?

According to some scholars, the practice of confession and absolution in the traditional church systems is based on John 20:22,23. From the *New English Translation*, we read, “Then he breathed on them, saying, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit!’ If you forgive any man’s sins, they stand forgiven; If you pronounce them unforgiven, unforgiven they remain.” The church systems took these words to authorize setting up the practice whereby confessions would be made to a priest, as if they had acquired this gift long ago given to the Apostles. This practice became yet another fear and control tactic of Satan to keep the church congregation in line with the

doctrines of the clergy. The verses quoted above authorized only the Apostles to forgive sins, as one of the special gifts which was conferred on them at Pentecost. Aside from this authority, granted exclusively to the twelve Apostles, the Scriptures do not authorize any such form of confession as traditionally practiced in the churches.

On the contrary, we should always direct our confessions to our Heavenly Father, not through a priest or any human agent. God has provided us with a much better avenue through which to approach him. The Apostle John says, “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.” (I John 2:1) These words tell us that our Advocate, Jesus, represents us to the Father because our sins are against God. That is a very sobering thought, but thanks be to him that God has provided his Son to act as our advocate before him! Jesus is the “propitiation [satisfaction] for our sins.” (vs. 2) If we ask, he will impute his merit with such sufficiency to cover all of our defects—but we have to ask. If we do we can have complete confidence that our confessions will result in our total cleansing.

We are to remember that sin is sin. We should take them all to the Lord in prayer, even the ones that slip our minds, or those that we may not recognize. Such apparently happened in David’s life on occasion, as he confesses in Psalm 19:12, saying, “Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults.” As his children, we received spotless robes of righteousness when we consecrated to do God’s will. If we stain this robe in any way we need to seek cleansing as quickly as possible. We must not let the stain set in.

In summary, we should consider confession as a valuable tool provided to help keep us humble, remembering our need of the ransom price provided by Jesus’ death on the cross. Confession is a key to a healthy spiritual life based on four basic principles: 1) Concealed sins are detrimental to our spiritual well-being; 2) God is pleased when we come to him for forgiveness; 3) Confession leads to forgiveness; and 4) Forgiveness is a blessing from God. May the Lord help us to use confession along with all of the other tools he has given us to make our calling and election sure. ■

The Power of the Scriptures

*“For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because,
when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us,
ye received it not as the word of men,
but as it is in truth, the word of God,
which effectually worketh also in you that believe.”
—I Thessalonians 2:13*

IN THIS FINAL chapter of the series of lessons entitled “Searching the Scriptures,” we will examine the all-encompassing power of the Scriptures as they profess God’s wonderful plan of the ages in simplicity and in truth. It is this “word of God,” as stated in our opening text, that we daily thank him for, and which we desire to have “effectually” work in all those who have implicit faith and trust in its testimony.

The written Word of God in Paul’s day consisted largely of the Old Testament scriptures. Then came the Gospels of the New Testament, the Book of Acts, the various letters written by the apostles, and the Book of Revelation. The apostles leaned heavily on the Old Testament scriptures in their teachings, but since they were inspired servants of God, their teachings could also be considered the Word of God. The only exceptions were in those rare instances where they explained that they were not speaking by divine inspiration, as in the case of Paul and his advice on the subject of marriage.

Jesus said to his Heavenly Father, concerning his immediate disciples, “I have given them thy word,” and he prayed, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” (John 17:14,17) Thereafter, these statements by the Master applied to all his faithful followers—those who would believe on him through his own words and the words of the apostles. All these true followers of the Master have come under the sanctifying power of the Truth, or, to again use Paul’s language, it has worked “effectually” in all who have believed.

THE PSALMIST’S TESTIMONY

The psalmist wrote, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.” “I have rejoiced in the way of thy testimonies, as much as in all riches. I will meditate in thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways. I will delight myself in thy statutes: I will not forget thy word.” “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”—Ps. 119:11,14-16,105

Notice that in these various quotations the Word, or testimony, of God is shown to be active in the hearts and lives of those who sincerely believe it and love it. It is a cleansing and a strengthening influence. It is a light to guide us in our walk in the narrow way. As our theme text indicates, it works in the hearts of all true believers.

David also wrote, “The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear [reverence] of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward.”—chap. 19:7-11

“Who can understand his errors?” David asks. The obvious answer is, no one, except as he is guided by the Word of God, enlightened to know his will, and strengthened to do it. “Cleanse thou me from secret faults,” he continues. This cleansing is accomplished by the power of the Word of God.

We can only know of our secret faults as they are revealed to us by the Word.—vs. 12

Having our secret faults revealed will help keep us from “presumptuous sins,” and we will pray, “Let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression. Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer.” (vss. 13,14) If our hearts are pure and sincere before God, the truth of his Word as found in the Scriptures will indeed be a power in our lives to cleanse us and to set us apart to the doing of his holy will.

NOT THE TRADITIONS OF MEN

The religious ruling class in Israel was not wholly satisfied with the truth of God’s Word, so as time went on many traditions of men were added. At first, these traditions were passed on from one to another by word of mouth, but later put into written form and called the Talmud. Likewise, down through the ages, there has always been a tendency for many of the Lord’s people to substitute the teachings of men for the simplicity of the Word of God—the Scriptures.

Blessed are those true servants of God who rejoice in the privilege of helping their brethren understand the Word of God more clearly as they progress in the pathway of the just, which is as a shining light, shining more and more unto the perfect day. (Prov. 4:18) This is a blessed service, but may we never attempt to set forth our own teachings unsupported by the Word of God. This is what has happened many times, and has largely accounted for the promulgation of many false doctrines and other teachings not supported by the Scriptures.

Paul admonished Timothy, “Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou has learned them; And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” (II Tim. 3:14,15) Timothy had been greatly favored by God, since from childhood he had known the Scriptures, and Paul admonishes him to continue in the things he had learned

from God's Word. Paul had pointed out to Timothy from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah of promise, and the Redeemer and Savior of the world, and he wanted his "son" to continue in this knowledge because he had proven it to be supported by the Word of God.

While in prison in Rome, and expecting to be executed soon, Paul continued his letter to Timothy, saying, "All Scripture, divinely inspired, is indeed profitable for Teaching, for Conviction, for Correction, for that Discipline which is in Righteousness; so that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly fitted for Every good Work." (II Tim. 3:16,17, *Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott*) The emphasis here is on the divinely inspired Scriptures. It is these which are to be understood and appreciated by those who are seeking to know and to do God's will. To such, the enduring power of the Scriptures is evident by the many "profitable" benefits Paul says result from our consideration of them.

PROFITABLE FOR "TEACHING"

The inspired Scriptures are profitable for "Teaching." We are not to teach the traditions of men which are unsupported by the Word of God. We are not to teach our own opinions unless they are thoughts which have become ours because we found them supported by the Word of God. Paul was very definite on this point—so definite that in others of his epistles he wrote that even if "an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel" than the "gospel of Christ," which is "the power of God unto salvation," it was not to be believed, and the one who did this was not to be considered a servant of the Lord.—Gal. 1:8; Rom. 1:16

Paul again wrote to Timothy instructing him to "charge some that they teach no other doctrine, Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith." (I Tim. 1:3,4) It is not clear just what Paul refers to as "endless genealogies," but it was a subject of discussion which undoubtedly had little bearing on the Gospel of Christ. It raised questions more than answering them, and was unprofitable for the furthering of true Christian fellowship, which would build them up in the most holy faith.

Indeed, how easy it is to indulge in speculations concerning matters which do not concern our relationship to God, or to each other as brethren in Christ. The fundamental teachings of God's plan, however, are not based on speculation, or mere philosophy, but upon the teachings of the Scriptures. Even the manner of Christ's Second Presence, and the signs which establish the fact of his return, are clearly and definitely set forth in the inspired Word of God.

It is very important to note the main topics of the Truth which were set forth by Jesus and the Apostles. They are our guides in the narrow way, as we follow in the footsteps of Jesus. They are the inspired interpreters of the Old Testament scriptures. Thus they are our guides with respect to God's plan as set forth in the entire Bible. In our fellowship and in our ministry, we can do no better than to follow these inspired guides. Should there be a difference of opinion, or we are uncertain in our own minds as to what the proper understanding might be on any given subject, let us consult Jesus and the apostles. If they have not spoken on the matter at all, we might well ask ourselves how important it is to our spiritual growth as New Creatures in Christ Jesus.

In presenting this viewpoint, it is with the realization that in reality the whole plan of God was presented in the Old Testament, but remained hidden until the meaning was revealed by Jesus and the apostles. The purpose of the creation of Adam and his fall into sin and death are given their proper setting in the New Testament, where Paul showed us how "as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."—I Cor. 15:22

God's oath-bound promise to Abraham is also explained in the New Testament, where we are informed that Christ is the seed of Abraham, which will bless all the families of the earth, and that as many as have been baptized into Christ are included in that seed, and therefore are "heirs according to the promise." (Gal. 3:8,16,27-29) Likewise, the purpose of the Law Covenant, and the typical meaning of the Tabernacle and its services, are set forth in the New Testament.

The Prophet Micah, in foretelling the birth of Jesus, wrote of him, "Whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting." (Mic. 5:2) No one could understand the real

meaning of this prophecy until the New Testament revealed the truth concerning the prehuman existence of Jesus as the “Logos,” the Word of God.

The death of Jesus as man’s Redeemer was foretold in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah, and elsewhere in the Old Testament, but these wonderful prophecies and promises were not understood until the ransom feature of God’s plan was brought to light by Jesus and the apostles. The prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the “day of the Lord”—the day of his wrath—were shrouded in mystery until light was thrown upon them by Jesus and the apostles. Now we can understand that these prophecies were descriptive of events in the world at this end of the age, during the period of Christ’s Second Presence.

Think of all the wonderful promises of the restoration of health and life on earth, and the resurrection of the dead which are recorded in the Old Testament. Peter gave the key to the meaning of these promises by his reference to “the times of restitution of all things,” and said that this future time of blessing, following the current period of trouble, had been foretold by the mouth of all God’s holy prophets since the world began.—Acts 3:20,21

In the last verse of the prophecy of Obadiah, he speaks of “saviours” (plural) who will come up on Mount Zion, when “the kingdom shall be the LORD’S.” (Obad. 21) This is one of the veiled references in the Old Testament to the fact that the Messiah would have associates in the work of the kingdom. Paul explained this, saying, “The body [or Christ] is not one member, but many.” (I Cor. 12:14) In the New Testament, this glorious truth opens to our minds that grand and glorious heavenly calling of the footstep followers of Christ. It is referred to as the “mystery,” hidden from ages and generations, but now “made manifest to his saints.”—Col. 1:26,27

We could continue to go from point to point and note the manner in which the New Testament interprets the Old Testament, and actually makes it for us the living Word of God. The understanding of God’s plan of salvation, the Gospel of Christ, which has come to us through Jesus and the apostles, enables us to turn back to the Old Testament and read much of it almost as though we had always understood

it. Think how meaningless most of it would be, however, without a knowledge of God's plan.

True, there are many precious devotional truths set forth in the Old Testament which have been an inspiration and blessing to the people of God in all ages. The Book of Psalms contains many of these precious gems of comforting truths, assuring us of God's help in times of need—of his guidance, of his tender care, and of his willingness to forgive. Jesus and the apostles drew heavily upon these precious promises, and so should we. How wonderful it is to realize that God will "give strength unto his people," that he will "bless his people with peace."—Ps. 29:11

FOR "CONVICTION" AND "CORRECTION"

The *Diaglott* translation says that the inspired Scriptures are also profitable for "Conviction" and "Correction." Our convictions are those things of which we have been assured, or convinced. Our conviction concerning the things of God is that his plan of salvation is the Truth, and therefore the sure foundation of our faith. Such an important conviction cannot stand secure upon the teachings of men, except as those teachings are supported by the inspired Word of God. Paul was pleased that the Thessalonian brethren understood the matter this way, as stated in our theme text, and had accepted the Gospel as being from God, not from men.

"Correction" is another profitable result of considering the Scriptures. This has to do, for one thing, with developing the character of Christ. By nature, we are all sinners, and imperfect, and from time to time need to be corrected in our conduct. We cannot depend upon our conscience for this correction, except as our conscience is enlightened by the inspired Scriptures. Likewise, we cannot depend upon the advice of our friends—not even the brethren—unless the advice is supported by the Word of God. Not only must our conscience be enlightened by the Bible, but it should be tender, and receptive to every instruction of the Scriptures, if our lives are to be regulated by God through his Word. The Bible speaks of those who "tremble at his word." (Isa. 66:5) Do we, in reverence and obedience, humbly tremble at the instructions contained in the holy Scriptures?

Not only do the Scriptures correct us in matters of conduct, but also in doctrine. It is easy to get temporarily turned aside from the path of pure truth. We may develop viewpoints of our own, and because we suppose that we have discovered something new and important we hesitate to give it up or put it aside. However, if we are quick to hear the Word of God when its truths are pointed out to us, and are humble before him, we will gladly turn to the truth contained in the Scriptures and continue to rejoice in it.

This does not mean that we should not make progress in our understanding of the Truth. Indeed, we are admonished to grow in grace and in knowledge. As the hymn suggests, the Bible is like a mine, deeper than mortal can ever go; and even though we search for many years, we continue to find additional rich gems of truth. This should be the experience of every dedicated follower of the Master. If we develop the idea that we now know everything and understand every detail of the Truth, and there is nothing more to be learned, this also means we are in need of "Correction."

"DISCIPLINE"

The *Diaglott* translation says that the inspired Scriptures are profitable for "that Discipline which is in Righteousness." The thought of discipline is a little stronger than that of "correction," although it does not necessarily imply punishment. The Word of God does not itself discipline us, for this comes through his overruling providences in our lives. The part God's Word plays in these experiences is to explain their meaning to us.

Hebrews 12:5-8 reads, "Have you forgotten the exhortation which reasons with you as with Sons? 'My Son, slight not the Discipline of the Lord, neither be discouraged when reproved by him; for whom the Lord loves, he disciplines, and he scourges Every Son whom he receives.' If you endure Discipline, God deals with you as with Sons; for is there any Son whom a Father does not discipline? But if you are without Discipline, of which all have become Partakers, then truly you are Spurious, and not Sons."—*WED*

Paul speaks of "that Discipline which is in Righteousness." Such discipline is in keeping with the righteous character of

God, and designed to develop and establish the principles of divine righteousness in the lives of his people. We are all more or less subjected to these disciplines of the Lord. May we, through the Scriptures, recognize their purpose and conform our lives to that purpose.

“COMPLETE”

The *Diaglott* again gives us a clear thought when it says that the inspired Scriptures are given “so that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly fitted for Every good Work.” So far as inspired teachings for the man of God are concerned, the Bible is indeed complete. Nothing needs to be added to it. It contains the entire glorious design of the Creator for his earthly creation, including the two salvations—the earthly for the world, and the heavenly for the followers of Jesus. We do not need to look elsewhere for inspired guidance.

God, in his love and overruling providence on our behalf, has provided pastors, teachers, and evangelists for the building up of his people in this most holy faith. Their ministry, too, is limited to the teachings of the inspired Scriptures. It is, in fact, the privilege of every consecrated child of God to encourage one another by gathering together to study his precious Word of truth.

Think of the blessings which have come to us through those special servants whom God has raised up during this Gospel Age. Their ministries have been a blessing to us because they honored the Scriptures as the only source of divine inspiration for the people of God. They urged all to prove everything they said and wrote by the inspired Word. May we show our appreciation of these faithful servants of the Lord by ourselves honoring the Bible as they did.

Jesus was and is God’s greatest gift to his people. We believe it would be proper to say that the inspired Scriptures by which we are sanctified are also a tremendous gift that has come to us from God. Through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, which is also a gift of God, may we continue to show our appreciation for his Word by our faithfulness to it. May we also continue searching the Scriptures, and more fully realize the power contained in them—the “power of God unto salvation.”—Rom. 1:16 ■

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