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What Is Truth?

***“God is not man,
that he should lie,
or a son of man,
that he should
change his mind.
Has he said, and
will he not do it?
Or has he spoken,
and will he not
fulfill it?”***

**—Numbers 23:19,
English Standard
Version**

A RECENT DEVELOPMENT

which has swept over this country, as well as many other parts of the world, is identifiable to most by these simple words—“leaks” and “fake news.” *The Oxford Dictionary* defines a “leak” as “an intentional disclosure of secret information.” Although the term “fake news” is not yet found in all dictionaries, its addition has begun and will surely spread. *Collins English Dictionary* now includes it, with the definition: “false, often sensational, information disseminated under the guise of news reporting.” *The Australian Macquarie Dictionary* has also added it, and designated “fake news” as its 2016 “word of the year.”

“Leaks” as described above rarely include a disclosure as to how the “secret information” has been obtained, or its source. Therefore, it is virtually impossible for the general public to know whether such statements are true or false. Even the publisher of a leak may not know the veracity of what

he is disseminating, if it has not been disclosed to him in some documented fashion.

“Fake news” is even more blatant in its disregard for truth, as it is put forth as information for public consumption with full knowledge by its source of its falsehood. To add further confusion, fake news may often be generated from leaks. The leaks may be true, or they may be false, but the fake news into which they often evolve is, by definition, always untrue.

We might wonder why these phenomena are so recently rampant in the world. The answer lies in the fact that the vast majority of mankind, regardless of where they dwell on the face of the earth, are interconnected via modern forms of communication. Man has the ability to instantly communicate with his fellows. He can both disseminate and receive information “real-time” to and from anywhere on earth through a myriad of electronic communication networks.

With this explosion of instantaneous communication, it is to be expected that some people freely engage in propagating leaks and publishing fake news. Their intents may be varied, but in most cases, they are driven by self-centered desires, or the wish to promote certain political or social agendas while tearing down others. As such, leaks and fake news come from all corners of the political and social spectrum. In today’s world, all sides seem to be intent on participating in these activities.

The general public is not without responsibility. Many have become callous to the truthfulness of what they see and hear. With leaks and fake news, there is literally something for everyone to latch

onto and claim as true and real. Whether information is factual or not is almost of no consideration to many. One recent commentary suggests that people only want to hear what they agree with, regardless of truth or falsehood. If such has become man's way of thinking, then it should be no wonder that leaks and fake news abound.

A telling sign pertaining to the foregoing discussion is shown in the following statistic. A recent search on the Internet of the terms "leaks" and "fake news" returned over 105 million hits. A similar search of the term "truth" produced only 95 million hits. This surely sends a clear message about the ever-falling condition of mankind under the present sinful conditions of this world.

GOD'S VIEWPOINT

For those who desire to seek and do God's will in their life, their viewpoint on these matters will be different from the majority of the world. The leaking of secretive information without regard for its basis of truth is out of harmony with God's methods and ways. The psalmist writes, "The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant." (Ps. 25:14) Surely, all sacred "secrets" revealed by our all-wise and perfect Creator can only be of the most genuine kind. Our God can never be thought of as "leaking" information which may or may not be true.

On the other hand, God knows the secrets of fallen man, and will take the necessary steps accordingly. Various Scriptures point out this important truth. "God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be

good, or whether it be evil.” Jesus said, “Nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither any thing hid, that shall not be known.” Paul also speaks of a time when God will “judge the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.”—Eccles. 12:14; Luke 8:17; Rom. 2:16

Although the term “fake news” may seem on the surface to be somewhat innocent and harmless, its definition belies such thinking. It is false information and, at its core, consists of lies. There is no question about how God views lying. The Scriptures say that “a lying tongue . . . doth the LORD hate,” and “Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD.”—Prov. 6:16,17; 12:22

Jesus made it very clear who is the source of all lies—Satan, the devil. “He was a murderer from the beginning,” Jesus affirms, “and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.” (John 8:44) Indeed, in mankind’s earliest experience in the Garden of Eden, Satan was there to lie, saying to mother Eve, “Ye shall not surely die,” if you eat of the forbidden fruit.—Gen. 3:4

What a lie this was! Eve, as well as Adam, did indeed die, as has every generation of their offspring since. Satan, however, has continued to lie, one falsehood generating another down through the ages. Paul indicates that this great adversary of God has also used human instruments to convey many of his lies. He speaks of those whose words are “after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders.” (II Thess. 2:9) Thankfully, however, the Scriptures also speak of the time when God

will “sweep away the refuge of lies,” and waters of truth “shall overflow the hiding place.”—Isa. 28:17

WHAT IS TRUTH?

This is the heart-searching question which Pilate asked Jesus as he stood before him in the judgment hall. (John 18:38) Pilate knew that Jesus was unlike any other human being he had ever known. He was also no doubt aware of the many lies and fabricated stories the Jewish religious leaders had concocted in order to get Jesus condemned to death. It was quite natural, then, that Pilate propound such a question to the Master. This same inquiry—what is truth?—has been in the minds of many sincere people throughout the ages. As evident in the foregoing discussion, today the word “truth” is used rather loosely, and applied to ideas, viewpoints, and philosophies that, in reality, are often far from the truth. Even in the field of science, much is advanced as truth which is, in fact, philosophy or supposition. In the area of religion, the situation is even more confusing.

Jesus did not answer Pilate’s question, “What is truth?” However, the night before, he said in prayer to his Heavenly Father, “Thy word is truth.” (John 17:17) The written Word of God at that time consisted of the Old Testament. Subsequently, under God’s direction of the Apostles, the New Testament Scriptures were added to the Old and we now have the entire Bible, the inspired Word of God. This is the embodiment of the “truth” of which Pilate inquired.

There is much in the Bible upon which most of its claimed adherents would agree, such as its

historical, ethical, and devotional teachings. Many also rejoice in its assurances of God's love and care for his people. However, to most Bible readers, the precious Word seems to be thought of as nothing more than a book of ancient historical records, in which are found many good and wholesome precepts that, if followed, will make us better men and women. Indeed, it is an exceedingly valuable book by which to live. Yet, few realize that also contained in the blessed Bible is God's wonderful and harmonious plan for the recovery of the human race from sin and death.

Most professed Christians believe that the majority of mankind is lost forever because they have not accepted Jesus as their Redeemer in this life. What has been lost, however, is the great truth that those whom Jesus is now calling out from the world as his consecrated footstep followers are to live and reign with him for the purpose of extending the opportunity of salvation to the remainder of mankind, the living and the dead. (Eph. 1:18-23; Rev. 20:6) This understanding is an important element of the answer to the question, "What is truth?" It helps reveal the glorious harmony of the Bible, which tells of the fullness of God's love for the whole world of mankind, demonstrated when he sent his Son to be their Redeemer.—John 3:16

All mankind will be given the opportunity for full restoration to life on the earth. Thus, the promises of God pertaining to this wider aspect of his plan for mankind are descriptive of earthly blessings. Peter uses the expression, "times of restitution of all things," and adds, "which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world

began.” (Acts 3:21) This is a great truth of the Bible, which is testified in the writings of all the prophets, yet it is completely unnoticed by many. It is a key part of the answer to the question, “What is truth?”

THE KINGDOM HOPE

The coming kingdom of God is prominently taught in the Bible, in both the Old and the New Testaments. The prophecies in the Scriptures associate this kingdom with the promised Messiah, or Christ, with statements such as, “The government shall be upon his shoulder: . . . Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end.” (Isa. 9:6,7) Daniel wrote, “In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom.”—Dan. 2:44

When Jesus came, John the Baptist announced, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matt. 3:1,2) Nearly all of Jesus’ teachings were associated directly or indirectly with this “kingdom” feature of God’s plan. His parables related to the kingdom and to its preparation, with some of them pertaining to a counterfeit kingdom which Satan would set up to deceive the people. He encouraged his disciples with the hope of reigning with him in his kingdom, saying, “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”—Luke 12:32

In the last three chapters of the Bible, we are furnished with a symbolic description of the establishment and work of the kingdom. The followers of Jesus are shown coming forth in the “first resurrection” to “reign with him a thousand years.” A holy city then is seen coming down from heaven, and the dwelling place of God is with men, and

there is no more death. We see “the throne of God and of the Lamb,” and from that throne there flows “a pure river of water of life,” and the people are invited to come and “take the water of life freely.”— Rev. 20:6; 21:2-4; 22:1,17

This wonderful kingdom teaching has been misunderstood by most. The *King James* translation of Luke 17:21 references Jesus as saying, “The kingdom of God is within you.” However, a more accurate rendering of these words is, “God’s royal majesty is among you.” (*Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*) Many of the promises and prophecies of the Bible pertaining to the kingdom have been diluted to mean merely the righteous desires within man’s heart, which it is vainly hoped may one day control the lives of the majority of mankind.

To the extent that honorable men and women can enter into and control politics, it is hoped that the righteous desires of the people may become implemented by civil laws that will more effectively control and root out evil. To this arrangement has often been applied the name, “kingdom of God.” Thus, the hope of the real kingdom of promise has been lost, with the result that the only hope held out for a better world is based on the vain wish that fallen man can, in some way or other, raise himself up through his own efforts.

How meaningful are the Bible’s promises of the kingdom, however, when we take God at his word. After assuring us of the increase of Christ’s government and peace in God’s kingdom, the Prophet Isaiah added, “The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.” (Isa. 9:7) As followers of the Master, called to suffer and die with him that we might live and reign

with him, we have the privilege, through faithfulness and the Lord's assisting help, to make our "calling and election sure" in order that we may reign with Christ.—Rom. 8:17; II Tim. 2:11,12; II Pet. 1:10

Through the Scriptures, God's kingdom promises come to life, and we are given a glorious and comforting hope of coming peace, joy, health, and life for all the willing and obedient of mankind. The kingdom teachings of the Bible reveal that under that arrangement there will be both rulers and the ruled, the kings and their subjects. Jesus will be the King of kings, and his faithful followers of this age will be associated with him. The remainder of mankind will be the subjects of the kingdom, and those who obey its righteous laws will live in peace and joy forever.

THE WORLD'S CONVERSION

There is yet another important feature to consider in answering the question, "What is truth?" It is the fact that the present Gospel Age is not the time in the plan of God for the conversion of the world. Jesus commissioned his disciples to go into all the world to preach the Gospel "for a witness," but he did not encourage them to believe that this would result in the world's conversion through their efforts. (Matt. 24:14) The real purpose of this worldwide witness work is explained in Acts 15:14. Here James informs us that "Simeon [Peter] hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name."

This "people for his name" are the "little flock" who are to live and reign with Christ. (Luke 12:32) At the beginning of the Gospel Age, a few of these

were selected from among the Israelites, and to these were given the privilege “to become the sons of God.” (John 1:12) There were not enough of these to make up God’s foreordained number, so the message went to the Gentiles, and throughout the age its power has been drawing from among them a people for God’s name.

This special calling is only preparatory to the ultimate objective of God’s plan. “After this,” James continues, the Lord will “build again the tabernacle [house] of David, which is fallen down.” (Acts 15:16) God’s kingdom promises were first made to the natural descendants of Abraham. Later, they were narrowed down to the tribe of Judah. (Gen. 49:10) After this, they were still further restricted to the family, or house of David.—II Sam. 7:16

Jesus became the heir of this promise. It is for this reason that the Prophet Isaiah associated the government of the Prince of Peace with the “throne of David, . . . to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever.” (Isa. 9:6,7) It is at his Second Advent, or presence, that Jesus reestablishes the throne of David, when he and his glorified church will be the spiritual rulers in that new world government. It is this which is referred to by James as building again “the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down.”

James explains that following this the “residue of men” will seek after the Lord, and “all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.” (Acts 15:17) This will be the work of God’s kingdom. It is then that the world will be converted, “for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”

(Isa. 11:9) There has been no lag or failure in the plan of God. James concluded, “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.” (Acts. 15:18) What confidence this should give us in the promises of God, and what courage to continue on in our own efforts to know and to do his will.

The world surely needs the kingdom. Fear fills the hearts of the people. Those who attempt to say that man’s fears are unfounded, and offer the hope of immediate success, health, and happiness, are sure to get a following. However, a harmonious understanding of the Word of God offers no such temporal advantages under Satan’s present rule of sin and evil. The time will soon come when blind eyes will be opened, deaf ears unstopped, and when the lame shall leap like a deer. (Isa. 35:5,6) It is close at hand, but not yet here. Meantime, the consecrated followers of the Master today have the same privilege as did their brethren in the Early Church, which is to proclaim the Truth message, even though it will be mostly looked upon as out of step with the world.

We have the great joy of telling the world of the kingdom blessings soon to come, when a “way of holiness” will be opened upon which mankind may return to God, and to health and life everlasting. (vs. 8) These truths are not “fake news,” nor are they “leaks” which cannot be verified. They are, rather, the sure words of God found in the Bible, his Word, which comprise a harmonious and complete answer to the question, “What is truth?” “So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth,” God said. “It shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.”—Isa. 55:11 ■

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*“Let all who take refuge in you be glad,
let them ever sing for joy; and may you shelter
them, that those who love your name
may exult in you.”*

—Psalm 5:11, New American Standard Bible

God's Covenant with Abram

Key Verse: *“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.”*
—Genesis 15:18

Selected Scripture:
Genesis 15:1-7,18-21

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

Circumstances during Abram's lifetime, as well as conditions in the world today, demonstrate that the foregoing promise made by God must have a future fulfillment. Nevertheless, the Scriptures assure us that because of two unchangeable things, God's Word and his oath, all that he has promised will surely come to pass in his own due time.—Heb. 6:18,19

In today's study, being childless, Abram voices concern that since his wife was barren, his servant Eliezer of

ONE OF THE MOST COMPREHENSIVE statements concerning God's ultimate purpose for the human family is recorded in the following passage. “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

Damascus would have to become the intended heir. Not only did God reaffirm that Abram would father a son, but additionally he confirmed this with an illustration that the stars in the sky showed how numerous his descendants would be.—Gen. 15:2-5

Another aspect of God's declaration for which Abram sought assurance was how he could be certain that he would possess the land that was promised to him. God then told him to take various animals whose carcasses Abram split in two and waited for the Lord to pass through the divided parts. Eventually, a deep sleep fell upon Abram and, through a vision, God represented himself by means of a smoking oven and a burning torch which passed between the animal pieces, thus ratifying the covenant that God had originally made with Abram.—vss. 6-17

Our Key Verse indicates the boundaries of the land which was promised to Abram as a possession under the terms of the covenant which God had just ratified. A New Testament elaboration on the matter was provided by Stephen prior to his being stoned. Concerning the land God promised to Abram, Stephen said, "He gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child."—Acts 7:5

The scope of God's promises to Abram, who was later renamed Abraham, is far reaching indeed and will be fully accomplished as a result of God's soon to be established kingdom. There will be a spiritual seed composed of Christ and his church, through which "all the nations of the earth" will be blessed. (Gen. 22:18) These blessings of the kingdom will flow to Israel and all other members of the human family that prove obedient to the divine laws. At that time the whole world will become habitable, and mankind will experience everlasting peace and prosperity here on earth.—Isa. 35:5-10 ■

God's Covenant with Israel

Key Verse: “*Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine.*”
—*Exodus 19:5*

Selected Scripture:
Exodus 19:3-14

Our Key Verse asserts that if they would obey his commands, they would be a special treasure to him above all other people. The verses which follow add, “And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the LORD commanded him. And all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the LORD.”—Exod. 19:7,8

God dealt with the Israelites for several centuries in an exclusive manner despite their unfaithfulness in many ways. (Amos 3:2) They were given a priesthood which offered typical sacrifices as an important aspect of their relationship with Jehovah. With much patience and

MANY YEARS AFTER ABRAHAM'S death his descendants, the nation of Israel prepared to receive a covenant following their deliverance from Egyptian bondage, when they crossed the Red Sea to safety. As they camped at the foot of Mount Sinai, Moses ascended the mountain and received a message from God regarding his purpose and destiny for Israel, based upon what he had already done for his chosen people.

long-suffering, God honored his covenant made at Mount Sinai, until the due time came for their punishment on account of continued disobedience.

The Jews experienced captivity at the hands of Gentile governments because they walked contrary to the divine statutes. This chastisement was recorded in the Scriptures prior to its fulfillment in various prophecies—Lev. 26:27,28,31-35; II Chron. 36:11,12,17,20,21. After Judah lay desolate, in his mercy, God overruled so that the Jews could return to their homeland and await their Messiah, Jesus Christ, who was sent to be their deliverer.—Dan. 9:24-27

The rulers and religious leaders among the Jews did not accept that as a perfect human Jesus kept the Mosaic Law faithfully, thus fulfilling the prophecy of being their Messiah. Therefore, they conspired to have him crucified. Nevertheless, Christ was resurrected and exalted to the divine nature. He along with his body members, the church, will be the heavenly or spiritual seed that ultimately will bless all the families of the earth.—Gal. 3:16,29

God's desire is that Israel and all mankind worship him in spirit and in truth. During this Gospel Age, true Christians are being tested to determine if they will prove faithful in their path of self-sacrifice and obedience to God's will. At the end of the kingdom, after being bound for a thousand years, Satan will be allowed to test mankind for a "little season." All members of the human family who prove obedient and loyal to God will receive eternal life here on the earth. Evil doers, including Satan and his angels, shall be destroyed.—Rev. 20:7-9; I Cor. 15:24-28

How wonderful it will be when the New Jerusalem—the church in its heavenly glory under Christ's headship—will assist in eradicating all sorrow, evil and death. This grand fulfillment of the promise of both heavenly and earthly salvation will testify to the majestic grandeur of the Heavenly Father's wisdom, justice, love, and power throughout all eternity.—Rev. 21:1-5 ■

Obeying God's Law

Key Verse: *“An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee.”*
—Exodus 20:24

Selected Scripture:
Exodus 20:18-26

image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me.”—vss. 3-5

Both the foregoing requirements given to Israel by God through his servant, Moses, as well as the next two commandments relative to taking his name in vain and

ONE OF THE MOST WIDELY recognized passages of Scripture is considered in the context of today's lesson. It was addressed to the Hebrew people after their release from bondage in Egypt and gathered at the base of Mount Sinai. (Exod. 20:1,2) As God's covenanted people, the Jews were given a set of requirements they were expected to follow in order to maintain their relationship with the Heavenly Father. These are generally referred to as the Ten Commandments.

“Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me.”—vss. 3-5

observing the Sabbath, depict specific obligations mankind has towards the Creator. Although they were addressed to the Jews, it is well to note that these requirements should be adhered to by all mankind in order to attain and maintain God's favor.

There are also deeper lessons contained in these commands. During his earthly ministry, for example, Jesus had a dialogue with a woman of Samaria, who contrasted the place of her ancestors' worship on Mount Gerizim with Jerusalem, which the Jews viewed as the only proper location for approaching God. Our Lord responded to her that God was desirous of receiving worship "in spirit and in truth" for it to be acceptable, irrespective of location.—John 4:20-24

The last six commandments Moses received for the Israelites dealt with man's responsibilities to other humans. These included honoring parents, as well as prohibitions against murder, adultery, stealing, bearing false witness and covetousness. These matters also have both a literal and spiritual application.—Exod. 20:12-17; Matt. 5:21-48

The spectacular sights and sounds coming from Mount Sinai during the delivery of the Ten Commandments caused a sense of fear to come upon the Israelites. The people desired Moses to act as a mediator between themselves and God because of his relationship with the Heavenly Father.—Exod. 20:18-21

Our Key Verse gives instructions relative to the altar where God would receive sacrifices and offerings, as well as affirm his promise to bless the people. Since all of these matters were symbolic, we are thankful for the reality of Christ's sacrifice as being the fulfillment of God's plan to reconcile mankind back into his favor. "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. 2:5,6

■

God's Covenant with David

Key Verse: *“Thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever.”*
—II Samuel 7:16

Selected Scripture:
II Samuel 7:1-17

now, I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains. And Nathan said to the king, Go, do all that is in thine heart; for the LORD is with thee.”—II Sam. 7:1-3

Although Nathan approved of David's intention to build a temple for God, the word of the Lord came to the prophet informing him that David would not have the privilege of carrying out this task. Nevertheless, David arranged for the gathering of materials for the construction of the temple, which would be erected during the kingly reign of his son, Solomon.—II Sam. 7:4,5,12,13; I Chron. 28:1-6; 29:1-9

Additionally, God promised David that while he was king, Israel would dwell in safety, as opposed to

FOLLOWING HIS CORONA-

tion as king over all Israel, David was especially blessed by the Lord. He also had a great desire to build a permanent abode for the Ark of the Covenant. “And it came to pass, when the king sat in his house, and the LORD had given him rest round about from all his enemies; That the king said unto Nathan the prophet, See

her experiences during the time of the judges, when the nation was continually besieged by her enemies. God also declared that after David's death—"when thou shalt sleep with thy fathers"—his descendants would perpetually occupy his throne.—II Sam. 7:10,11,13

Our Key Verse reiterates the supremacy of David's posterity, and that a kingdom reign without an end would ensue. Although the family line of David did rule over Israel for several centuries, eventually it was removed because of repeated disobedience to God's laws. These practices of evil resulted in the removal of King Zedekiah from his throne. (Ezek. 21:25-27) Other Scriptures inform us, however, that the ultimate fulfillment of David's everlasting reign lies with Christ and his church. This is sometimes referred to as the "sure mercies of David."—Isa. 55:3; Acts 13:32-34

Another evidence that Jesus Christ's future reign of righteousness is pictured by David is found in the following New Testament account. "The angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end."—Luke 1:30-33

As members of the body of Christ, we are striving to complete our walk of obedience and sacrifice during this present Gospel Age. If faithful, even unto death, we will have the unspeakable prospect of sharing in the rulership and glory associated with the Master in God's soon to be established kingdom. If we overcome the world, the flesh, and the adversary, we will be with Christ and share his heavenly throne.—Rev. 2:10; 3:21

God's Covenant with the Returned Exiles

Key Verse: **THERE WERE MANY**
“Howbeit thou art just in all that is brought upon us; for thou hast done right, but we have done wickedly.”
—*Nehemiah 9:33*

Selected Scripture:
Nehemiah 9:32-38;
10:28,29

aspects concerning the restoration of Jerusalem following Israel's release from Babylonian captivity. One important consideration was the revitalization of their commitment to worship God and to obey his statutes.

“Now in the twenty and fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackclothes, and earth upon them. And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers. And they stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of the LORD their God one fourth part of the day; and another fourth part they confessed, and worshipped the LORD their God.”—Neh. 9:1-3

Then a number of the Levites led the people in a great prayer of confession, which emphasized God's faithfulness despite Israel's disobedience. Some of the remembrances brought to the people's attention included the call of Abraham and the covenant God made with him, the divine intervention that facilitated their ancestors' release from Egyptian bondage, the giving of the law at Mount Sinai, and the miraculous provision to sustain the nation

throughout their wilderness experience. They were also reminded of their conquest of Canaan, their experiences during the period of the judges, as well as their frequent acts of rebellion, many unheeded warnings and their subsequent captivity. Yet in mercy, God did not abandon the Jews.—vss. 4-31

Our Key Verse is an affirmation that God is just in all his ways. The people confessed their wrong doing and recognized that their chastisement was merited. God had acted justly, but they had done wickedly. This recognition would provide a basis for their reinstatement into his favor.

Having demonstrated an attitude of repentance, the returned exiles desired a covenant with God, even to the point of writing it down. (vs. 38) After listing the names of those who signed the covenant on behalf of the people, there was a statement that the entire congregation vowed to “do all the commandments of the LORD” as well as his ordinances and statutes. (Neh. 10:1-29) More specifically, they vowed not to intermarry, to observe the Sabbaths, make contributions for the temple services, supply wood for the altar and restore the payment of tithes.—vss. 30-39

Although this reaffirmation of various ceremonial features of the Mosaic Law helped to strengthen the religious life of the people, God was interested in their imbibing the spirit of his Law. When Christ was questioned as to which was the great commandment of the law, he replied that it was love for God and, secondly, love for one’s neighbor.—Matt. 22:36-40

Not only is the foregoing true, but for true Christians today, we should willingly lay down our lives in service for our brethren, so as to be participants with Christ in blessing all the human family during God’s kingdom of righteousness. This new commandment implies a sacrificial love towards fellow believers that goes beyond the demands of the Mosaic Law.—John 13:34,35 ■

Conclusion of Paul's Third Journey

*“I have not
shunned to declare
unto you all the
counsel of God.”*

—Acts 20:27

WHEN PAUL LEFT MACE- donia for the final time, he sailed to Troas, on the northwestern coast of Asia Minor, joining others in his party who had traveled there in advance. There he stayed for seven days. (Acts 20:5,6) On the last day of his visit, which was the “first day of the week,” the brethren in Troas came together in the evening, as was apparently their custom, to “break bread.” (vs. 7) This breaking of bread was not an ordinance of the church, but simply a custom some of the ecclesias in the Early Church followed in commemoration of the resurrection of Jesus on the first day of the week.—John 20:1,19

In the meantime, Paul's companions sailed on ahead to their next stop, Assos. After his meeting with the brethren at Troas, Paul journeyed by foot to Assos to meet up again with his fellow travelers.

(Acts 20:13,14) Just why this final meeting with the brethren at Troas seemed so important to Paul we can only conjecture. Although the subject of his message to the brethren there is not revealed, the apostle must have considered it vital, because he preached all night.—vss. 7,11

It was here also that a young man named Eutychus was sitting in a window and fell asleep while Paul was preaching. He fell three stories to the ground and was thought to be dead. Paul restored the young man, assuring the brethren that he would be all right, at which they were all greatly comforted. The apostle then continued with his sermon until daybreak.—vss. 9-12

As noted earlier, we are not told what the subject of Paul's sermon might have been. We do know that in Corinth, where he had recently traveled, there were some in the congregation who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. (I Cor. 15:12) It is possible that this blight of unbelief had reached some of the brethren in Troas, and that Paul used this opportunity, when they were assembled to commemorate Jesus' resurrection on the first day of the week, to help those who might be doubting. If this be the case, we need only to read the 15th chapter of 1st Corinthians to know some of the vital points of truth the great apostle may have presented that night to the ecclesia in Troas.

In any case, Paul considered it important enough to remain that night in Troas to serve the brethren to justify his walking more than twenty miles the next day over rocky, dusty roads in order to rejoin his companions at Assos. Such was the undaunted spirit of love and devotion which actuated this man

of God, this great apostle to the Gentiles. Since he preached all night, he would have had no sleep. We can imagine the apostle trudging along over those twenty long miles, weary of mind and body, yet rejoicing in heart as he recalled the blessings he enjoyed with those of like precious faith in Troas.

MEETING THE ELDERS OF EPHESUS

So far as this journey was concerned, Paul's ultimate destination was Jerusalem, and he wanted to arrive there by the day of Pentecost. (Acts 20:16) He knew that this would not be possible if he took time to visit all the ecclesias in Asia Minor, but he did want once more to see and fellowship with the elders of the Ephesus ecclesia. From Assos, where he rejoined his companions, the ship sailed on making a few incidental stops until it reached Miletus, which was about thirty miles south of Ephesus. From here Paul sent messengers to invite the elders of Ephesus to make the day's journey to Miletus to meet him, which they did.—vs. 17

The fact that the elders made this effort to see the apostle reveals the great confidence they had in him and their fervent love for him. One reason Paul was anxious to see these brethren is revealed in his statement to them, "Behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me."—vss. 22,23, *English Standard Version*

While Paul said that he did not know what awaited him, he seemed sure that, whatever it was, he would not be able to again visit the brethren in

Ephesus. Thus, he said to the elders that they would see his face no more. (vs. 25) It was in the shadow of this uncertainty, so far as his human life was concerned, that the apostle delivered his farewell message to the Ephesian elders. Under the circumstances, many would have been too unsettled to think of anything but their forthcoming troubles. Paul, however, testified, “None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.”—vs. 24

Paul had dedicated his life to the service of the Lord and the Truth. From the time the great vision of truth had come to him on the Damascus road, he had never tried to spare his strength nor save his life when the path of opportunity lay clearly before him. He knew that every time he witnessed to the Jews in their synagogues they would sooner or later rise up against him, but he did not hesitate to continue to witness. The fact that his ministry in the gospel would cost Paul suffering and perhaps death was never used by him as an excuse to cease serving his Heavenly Father.

It was no different now. A less ardent and self-sacrificing individual might well have reasoned that since it was the Holy Spirit that was bearing witness of the trouble he would encounter when reaching Jerusalem, the Lord was thereby giving warning not to go there. Paul, however, did not interpret the Holy Spirit’s warning in this way. For reasons which the Scriptures do not reveal, Paul was convinced that it was the Lord’s will for him to

go to Jerusalem. In the light of this conviction he interpreted the testimony of the Holy Spirit as a test of his faith and loyalty, and his willingness to die for the Lord Jesus.

In Paul's farewell message to the elders of Ephesus, he said that he had "kept back nothing that was profitable" for their spiritual growth, having taught them both publicly and in their homes. (Acts 20:20) Indeed, as stated in our opening text, he had not held back anything, but had declared to them "all the counsel of God." Paul was not satisfied simply to tell his hearers that through belief in Christ they could be saved. For example, we recall that it was at Ephesus, earlier in his third journey, that he found a group of disciples who had not heard about the Holy Spirit, and had not been taught true Christian baptism, so he instructed these brethren more perfectly in the ways of the Lord.—Acts 19:1-7

ADMONITION TO "TAKE HEED"

After reminding the elders of Ephesus of his own practice in declaring to them "all the counsel of God," Paul then admonished, "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." (Acts 20:28) This admonition was in two parts. First, the elders were to take heed—that is, give attention—to their own conduct and course of life. Second, they were to watch over and feed the brethren, through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Experience has proven that professed servants in the church who do not take heed unto themselves

first, are not qualified to watch properly and effectively over the spiritual welfare of others. For elders in the church to take heed unto themselves means, among other things, that they will not think of themselves more highly than they ought to think. Pride of mind and heart distorts spiritual vision, and makes ineffective what otherwise could be a blessed ministry of the gospel.

Taking heed to one's self also implies careful and prayerful study of the Word of God. One cannot minister to others what he does not understand himself. Paul had seen a vivid example of this in the ministry of Apollos. Seemingly, Apollos had great ability as a speaker, but regardless of this, until he was more fully instructed he was not able to impart knowledge to others which he did not himself possess. (Acts 18:24-26) To understand the Truth is important, as Paul later wrote to Timothy, saying, "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

"GRIEVOUS WOLVES"

Paul's discernment enabled him to foresee that when his own personal influence was no longer felt among the brethren, they would experience severe trouble. "Grievous wolves" would enter in among the brethren, he warned, "not sparing the flock." Then he added, "Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them."—Acts 20:29,30

The church at Ephesus is one of the seven mentioned in the 2nd and 3rd chapters of Revelation. While these seven churches may be viewed as

symbolic of the entire church in its various stages of development throughout the Gospel Age, it is reasonable to assume that they were selected for this purpose because of special circumstances associated with them as local congregations in Asia Minor. Paul's prophecy that false leaders—"wolves"—would enter the church at Ephesus, seems to be reflected in the Revelator's record, which reads, "I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars."—Rev. 2:2

Paul, continuing his words to the elders of Ephesus, said, "Watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears." (Acts 20:31) Paul had set a good example for these brethren over a long period of time, and now he wanted them to emulate that pattern—to follow him as he followed Christ.—I Cor. 11:1

While he desired that they follow his example, Paul never lost sight of the fact that the direct responsibility of every true Christian is to the Lord, and that all such should look to him, not to any human source, for guidance and help in time of need. "I commend you to God," he said to these elders, "and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified." (Acts 20:32) This sentiment is the same as he wrote to the brethren at Philippi, expressing confidence on their behalf, "that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."—Phil. 1:6

PARTING WORDS TO THE ELDERS

Paul was truly a sacrificing saint, and he set a notable example in the fact that he did not depend upon the brethren he served in spiritual things to care for his physical necessities. To the Ephesian elders, he said, “Ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me.” (Acts 20:34) This is remarkable, for Paul had not only provided for his own physical needs as a tentmaker, but cared also for those who were traveling with him.—Acts 18:3

Paul felt blessed by thus giving all his time and strength. He said, “I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Acts 20:35) Paul had proven by his own experience that Jesus was right, and so has every Christian who has followed faithfully in his steps, remembering the Master’s words, “Freely ye have received, freely give.”—Matt. 10:8

Having finished his words of exhortation, Paul kneeled with all the elders, and they prayed together. The elders then bade the apostle farewell, in a scene which was very touching for them all. We read that “they all wept sore, and fell on Paul’s neck, and kissed him, Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship.”—Acts 20:36-38

ON TO JERUSALEM

The ship on which Paul and his companions sailed from Miletus went by the way of Coos and

Rhodes, and then to Patara. There they changed ships, finding one that was sailing to Phenicia. This ship took them to Syria, and they “landed at Tyre: for there the ship was to unlade her burden.” They found disciples at Tyre, and “tarried there seven days.”—Acts 21:1-4

Little is said about the seven days with the disciples of Tyre except that they warned Paul not to go to Jerusalem. The warning was based on information received “through the Spirit.” Paul continued on his way, however, interpreting the message from the Lord as being intended merely as a test of his faithfulness. They had a farewell prayer with the brethren of Tyre, and then moved on.—vss. 4-6

There was a one-day stop at Ptolemais, where they greeted the brethren, and then “Paul’s company departed, and came unto Caesarea.” At Caesarea, Luke reports, “We entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven [deacons]; and abode with him.” Philip had four daughters, apparently all consecrated disciples of the Master.—vss. 7-9; Acts 6:3-6

THE PROPHECY OF AGABUS

While they were still at the house of Philip, there “came down from Judaea a certain prophet, name Agabus,” who bound his own hands and feet with Paul’s girdle, saying, “Thus saith the Holy Spirit, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.” Luke then reports, “And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem.”—Acts 21:10-12

This placed Paul in a very difficult position. In numerous places he had received similar information. Notwithstanding, he was still determined to go to Jerusalem. Philip and his household, Agabus, and even his traveling companions, all urged Paul to heed the information given by the Holy Spirit and thus avoid the difficulties which he would certainly experience if, as they saw it, he insisted upon going to Jerusalem. He must have known that the brethren would consider him quite obstinate if he did not heed their advice.

Paul refused to reconsider. His answer was, "What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." (vs. 13) We cannot think of Paul as being a brother who would recklessly expose himself to danger, and yet, he knew that there was danger. We must assume, therefore, that in some manner not revealed in the record, the Lord had made it plain to him that he should take the risk which, through various ones, the Holy Spirit had pointed out, and that nothing would befall him unless permitted by the Heavenly Father.

In taking this course Paul must have been very conscious of the fact that he was following in the footsteps of Jesus in quite a literal manner, for Jesus also was confronted with the same test. Jesus also knew that by going to Jerusalem when he did, it would mean his arrest and death, and so announced to his disciples. Peter endeavored to dissuade the Master from thus exposing himself to danger. Jesus replied, "Get thee behind me, Satan."—Mark 8:31-33

It was the Holy Spirit which testified to Jesus, through the prophets, that he was to suffer and to die. However, the Holy Spirit had also revealed that it was the Heavenly Father's will for his Son to sacrifice his life as man's Redeemer. To Paul, the Holy Spirit had revealed that it was his privilege—and the privilege of all Jesus' disciples—to suffer and die with him. (Rom. 8:17; II Tim. 2:11,12) The fact that now the Holy Spirit had revealed that his work of sacrifice might be consummated at Jerusalem was to Paul a further test of the genuineness of his consecration to do God's will.

TESTS OF FAITH

Every truly consecrated child of God has these "Jerusalem" tests. They are tests of whether or not we will actually go where the Lord wants us to go, do what he wants us to do, and be what he wants us to be. In order to test us, as he did Paul, the Lord may let us see what appears to be a less costly manner of serving him. If, however, we keep in mind the great fundamental truth that we have been invited to suffer with Jesus, and that we have agreed to do so, even unto death, we will be given strength to meet every test in a manner pleasing to the Lord and to his glory.

When the brethren found that they could not dissuade Paul from carrying through with his plans to go to Jerusalem, they said, "The will of the Lord be done." (Acts 21:14) Their visit in the house of Philip completed, Paul and his companions continued on their way to Jerusalem. Some of the brethren of Caesarea, together with an "old disciple" of Cyprus named Mnason, joined them. (vss. 15,16) It must

have been quite a delegation who made the last lap of the journey with Paul to Jerusalem. It speaks well for the devotion of all these, for they must have realized that there was a certain element of danger in their being with Paul in Jerusalem.

Reaching the city, the brethren of Jerusalem, as Luke records, “received us gladly.” (vs. 17) Thus ended the Apostle Paul’s third missionary tour. Although changes would soon occur in his ministry, the search for God’s people continued. Paul’s part in this work would likewise continue, with new and different opportunities for spreading the message of the Gospel. ■

*I stand all astonished with wonder
And gaze on the ocean of love;
And over its waves to my spirit
Comes peace, like a heavenly dove.*

*The cross now covers my sins;
The past is under the blood;
I’m trusting in Jesus for all;
My will is the will of my God.*

—*Hymns of Dawn*

WEEKLY PRAYER MEETING TEXTS

OCTOBER 5—“Consider him who endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.”—Hebrews 12:3 (Z. ’04-38 Hymn 266)

OCTOBER 12—“Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow.”—Matthew 6:28 (Z. ’04-37,38 Hymn 358)

OCTOBER 19—“Freely ye have received, freely give.”—Matthew 10:8 (Z. ’04-78 Hymn 338)

OCTOBER 26—“Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.”—I Peter 5:7 (Z. ’04-237 Hymn 205)

Taste the Goodness of the Lord

*“O taste and see
that the LORD is
good: blessed is the
man that trusteth
in him.”*
—*Psalm 34:8*

THE PSALMIST DAVID, IN writing the words of our opening verse, realized that not all of his fellow Israelites had truly discovered and appreciated the goodness of

the Lord. Thus, he extends the invitation to “taste and see.” This is, of course, symbolic language, and although David desired that Israel would do this, there should be a much greater meaning in these words for spiritual Israelites of the present age. It is the lesson to consecrated believers, found in David’s words, which is the focus of our thoughts.

David indicates that to taste and see the Lord’s goodness should mean that we then place ourselves in a position of trusting implicitly in his care over us. In another Psalm, he identifies this as “the secret place of the most High.” (Ps. 91:1) Only those who have given all to God, and daily present

themselves to him as a living sacrifice, know of his goodness by experience, and can thus fully trust in him. When we responded to God's High Calling through full consecration of ourselves to do his will, we began to "taste and see that the LORD is good" in our experiences. The Apostle Peter uses this same symbolism, when he states, "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious."—I Pet. 2:2,3

The goodness of God includes both the loveliness of his being and character, as well as the all-encompassing scope of his bountiful providence and grace. We "taste" his wonderful benefactions, relishing them as precious gifts, savoring their sweetness. We also "see" his beautiful character, and delight in the contemplation of his infinite perfections. By such taste and sight, we daily discover new beauties in our Almighty Creator. As a result, we enjoy a rest and peace beyond the world's comprehension, and are comforted and encouraged even in the most difficult of our experiences.—John 14:27; II Cor. 1:3,4

TRUSTING IN HIM

"Blessed are all they that put their trust in him," the psalmist says in another place. (Ps. 2:12) Trust, as used in this verse and our opening scripture, has the meaning "to take refuge." Trust is closely related to faith and hope. Faith denotes firm conviction, and hope signifies confident expectation. It is our faith, or conviction, in God's arrangements, and our hope, or confident expectation, that his plan will be fully carried out in every particular, that allows us to trust him at all times, and take

refuge in the “secret place” of his presence. Thus, we can commit all things to our Heavenly Father and his son Christ Jesus, and find refuge from the Adversary and the spirit of this world.

An important part of our trust in God has to do with reliance on his covering protections over us. Those who take refuge in God are promised, “He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust.” (Ps. 91:4) Even our sinful Adamic nature is covered, as the Prophet Isaiah states, “He hath covered me with the robe of righteousness,” made available to us through Jesus’ ransom sacrifice. (Isa. 61:10; Rev. 1:5) The Scriptures also tell us that the Lord knows “them that trust in him,” and “knoweth them that are his.” (Nah. 1:7; II Tim. 2:19) How blessed to realize that our loving Heavenly Father bestows such intimate care upon his consecrated children—those who trust him in all things.

GOD’S WORD

As followers of Christ, we develop a spiritual taste for the food which God provides for our nourishment. This food is found in the Bible, and it is this Word of God which we feed upon, eating the instructions, principles, and promises that we might be strengthened spiritually. God’s Word of truth, as we eat of it, sanctifies us, making us holy and setting us apart from the world and our fallen fleshly tendencies. (John 17:17) Sanctification through the Word of truth begins at consecration, and continues throughout our earthly sojourn, as we daily strive to carry out the terms of our covenant with the Heavenly Father.

Now, during the harvest of the Gospel Age, the Lord's people have been served with an abundance of "meat in due season." (Matt. 24:45) What rich delicacies we are finding at the table of "present truth" which the Lord has spread before us. (II Pet. 1:12) How satisfying it is to our spiritual taste as we learn more of our Father's plans and purposes by partaking of the food which he has provided. The Lord, through John the Revelator, tells us that the Word of truth "shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey," but also adds, "it shall make thy belly bitter." (Rev. 10:8-10) These are the bitter persecutions and trials which will come to us because we have eaten and are appropriating this spiritual food. We are told that the world, which is in darkness, "hateth the light." (John 3:19,20) This fact, plus the weakness of our fallen flesh and the temptations of the Adversary, will yield some of the bitter experiences that come to us because we have partaken of the Lord's Word.

HIDDEN THINGS

Jesus thanked the Heavenly Father that he "hid" the Gospel truths "from the wise" of this world, and had "revealed them unto babes." (Matt. 11:25) As previously noted, babes in Christ are encouraged to grow by drinking the "milk of the word." Paul states that the food of the consecrated believer should progress to the point of being "strong meat." (Heb. 5:13,14) In one sense, milk refers to our knowledge of basic, foundation truths, and that strong meat denotes the understanding of more difficult portions of God's Word. In another sense, however, and perhaps most importantly, strong

meat refers to the application in our daily life and conduct of truths learned.

In the verses cited above from Hebrews 5, Paul notes that strong meat belongs to the “mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.” (vs. 14, *New American Standard Bible*) If an understanding of the truths contained in God’s Word results in our application of its principles for the discerning of “good and evil” in our lives, then it is strong meat to us and an evidence of a certain level of spiritual maturity. This does not diminish the importance of the “sincere milk of the word,” but rather points out that there must be exercise, growth, and proper application of the truths we have learned in order for them to have their full nutritional benefit to the spirit-begotten New Creature.

All the truths of God’s Word are “revealed unto us by his Spirit,” and thus constitute, as Paul states, the “deep things of God.” (I Cor. 2:10) Applying these deep things, that they may nourish us as strong meat, requires that we be “doers of the word, and not hearers only.” (James 1:22) This aspect of our lives, applying and doing, is perhaps the most difficult to carry out, yet it is the most important. The development of a Christlike character will be the ultimate test of our faithfulness to God, and will prove the extent to which we have appropriated the spiritual food of his Word which he has so abundantly provided.

DAILY BREAD

When the children of Israel were provided manna in the wilderness, Moses said, “This is the bread

which the LORD hath given you to eat.” (Exod. 16:15) We have been provided with the true bread from heaven, our daily supply of spiritual food centered in Christ. (John 6:48-57) As with those in the wilderness, our gathering of heavenly manna is to be day by day, and our feeding upon it is to be a continuous privilege. Without its nourishment, we would not have spiritual strength, but with it we can be “strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.”—Eph. 6:10

We daily partake of the “bread of life,” Christ Jesus, through examining and applying his teachings and example of conduct. Similarly, we “eat the flesh of the Son of man” by appropriating his spirit and disposition. There is no literal thought to this matter. Jesus makes it clear that eating his literal flesh “profiteth nothing,” but that “the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life.” (John 6:63) The life, words, spirit, and example of Jesus will be our portion of spiritual food until we reach the heavenly Canaan.

OUR SPIRITUAL SIGHT

Our sense of sight as New Creatures is the ability to discern the will of God as revealed in his Word. Jesus said to his disciples concerning their ability to understand the “mysteries of the kingdom of heaven,” “Blessed are your eyes, for they see.” (Matt. 13:11,16) Many in Jesus’ day had an opportunity to see, but they did not possess the spirit of discernment, and were hardened of heart. Of the religious leaders in particular, Jesus said they were “blind leaders of the blind,” and “blind guides.”—Matt. 13:14,15; 15:14; 23:16,24

When Jesus said to his disciples, “blessed are your eyes, for they see,” they were not yet begotten of the Holy Spirit. Their ability to discern the “mysteries” of God’s Word was limited until Pentecost, when the enlightening power of the Holy Spirit came upon them. Jesus said to them the night before his death, “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.” He promised, however, that the “Spirit of truth” would soon come, and guide them “into all truth: . . . and . . . shew you things to come.”—John 16:12,13

What the disciples possessed prior to Pentecost was the necessary humility of heart, and desire to learn. These qualities are essential, and prerequisite, to being able to “see” the mysteries of God through the power of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.” (Matt. 5:8) A pure heart is one which is clean from ill motives, sincere and genuine in its desires, and above all, humble and teachable. Only those who are thus pure will be able to see God. One striving to be pure in heart will not only seek to “do no evil,” but to even “abstain from all appearance of evil.” (II Cor. 13:7; I Thess. 5:22) This depth of heart purity is necessary in order to be of those who will “see God.”

HOW WE SEE GOD

For the faithful followers of Jesus, there will be the unspeakable privilege in the “first resurrection” of being presented before the Father, and of seeing him face to face. (John 14:2-4,12; I John 3:2) This, indeed, is a glorious hope which should lift our affections to things above. (Col. 3:1,2) However,

there is a way in which we see God now, and that is by the eye of faith. Faith in his plan, his working in our lives, and his promises for all the families of the earth all reveal the attributes of God's character—his wisdom, justice, love, and power. Each day, we should discern more clearly and appreciate more fully the Father's character, and his loving arrangements for man's ultimate blessing.

Our spiritual sight cannot be thought of as merely a momentary vision of knowledge. Rather, it must be developed into a daily observation of God's plans and purposes which governs our thoughts, words and actions. Our spiritual vision will be tested, Peter says, "That the trial of your faith, . . . might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: Whom having not seen [by literal vision], ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing [seeing by the eye of faith], ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."—I Pet. 1:7,8

No words can describe the delight that fills our hearts as we thus see God. We see his love, and realize that such a love is all-comprehensive in providing our every need. We see his wisdom, and know that he is too wise to err, even as he is too loving to be unkind. We see that no matter what he may permit our experiences to be, it is because he loves us and knows what we most need, in order to be prepared to share his glory beyond the veil. We see his justice, that all his ways are true and righteous in his dealings with us. We see his power also, and realize that nothing can possibly interfere with what he proposes to do as our Heavenly Father.

What a basis this is for peace and joy. The character qualities that we see in God give us confidence that no mistakes will be made on his part concerning our spiritual well-being, nor that any experience will be permitted to come upon us that is not necessary for our discipline and training in his eternal service. Though these will be difficult at times, we know that not one of his precious promises will fail us, if we continue to trust him implicitly.

In the natural realm, as a human being, if we discovered that every possible need of life was to be provided; that there could be no possible contingency that would rob us of our security of both mind and body; that all our surroundings were to be only of the sort that would contribute to our good, would we not be exceedingly happy? This can be our experience spiritually if we see the Lord, his attributes, and his promises fully. Seeing him by such a keen vision of faith, he becomes more precious to us than any earthly object we have ever known.

Our joy in seeing the Lord is not merely confined to what he is doing for us. We rejoice also, and see the infinite beauty of his character, in the fact that he is so abundant in mercy and love, that he has made a plan by which all may be blessed in his coming kingdom. Though mankind suffers much now, and most do not see or taste the goodness of the Lord, he is, nevertheless, supervising all the affairs of this world, and will soon say to the groaning creation, "Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth."—Ps. 46:10

SOURCE OF OUR STRENGTH

We have a never-failing source of strength, and it abides continually for our benefit if we reach out by faith and lay hold upon it. The psalmist writes, “The LORD is the strength of my life.” “God is our refuge and strength.” “The LORD God is a sun and shield: . . . no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.” (Ps. 27:1; 46:1; 84:11) As the sun, God shines upon our pathway and into our hearts, enlightening us and guiding us in the way. As a shield, he protects us from all the fiery darts of the wicked. “No good thing” will God withhold from those who walk in the sunlight of his guiding providences, and who humbly walk behind his shield of protection.

We can reach out to see and taste the Lord’s goodness through prayer and by claiming his promises. In all experiences, large and small, the mundane or the direst emergency, God is willing and able to meet our needs, and provide the best things possible for our spiritual good. (Rom. 8:28) Knowing this, we can join with Paul and say that we have been “strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness; Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.”—Col. 1:11,12

APPRECIATING GOD’S LOVE

To taste and see the Lord’s goodness, it is especially needful that we understand his love. In turn, we are to exercise this highest of all character qualities toward all with whom we come in contact, especially our brethren. The Apostle John tells us,

“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us.” Several verses later, John adds the important thought that unless we love our brethren, whom we have seen, we cannot truly love God, whom we have not seen. (I John 4:10,19,20) Even to see God by the eye of faith, we must exercise love toward our brethren, and a sympathetic love toward the world. The development of unselfish, Godlike love is one of the great tests of faithfulness to our consecration vows.

Daily we are the recipients of God’s love and goodness. Through his overruling providences in our experiences, we hear his voice telling us of his love, and instructing us in the way that we should go. Our ears hear his words, “This is the way, walk ye in it.” (Isa. 30:21) If, by obedience, we follow his instructions, we will not stumble as we “press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”—Phil. 3:14

A full appreciation of God’s love requires action on our part. Paul says, “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” He then reminds us who is directing this work. “It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” (Phil. 2:12,13) The apostle further describes this work in us with these words: “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.”—Heb. 13:20,21

Let us, then, continue to daily “taste and see that the LORD is good.” To do so will give evidence

of our reverence and honor to the Heavenly Father. In the next verse, the psalmist states, “No one who honors the LORD will ever be in need.” (Ps. 34:9, *Contemporary English Version*) Our eternal, spiritual interests will always be uppermost in our minds if we feast continually upon the glorious hope of living and reigning with Christ, of seeing him as he is, and of inheriting the promises of the heavenly kingdom.—I Pet. 1:3,4

“Therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.” (Heb. 13:15) Our Heavenly Father has spread before us a bountiful table of spiritual provisions to see and taste. Even in the midst of the trials and difficulties of our present sojourn, the manifold goodness of the Lord is thus displayed to his consecrated people. “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 ■

OBITUARIES

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

Sister Sandra Parker, Hampton, NH—August 30.
Age, 63

Brother Albert Stocki, Prince Albert, SK—September 12.

A Great Cloud of Witnesses

*“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.”*

—*Hebrews 12:1*

IN THE ELEVENTH CHAP-ter of Hebrews, the Apostle Paul put together for us a marvelous array of the lives and faith of many Old Testament people of God. The men and women whom he referred to, and in some cases named, each had an incredible life which exhibited trust in the true and living Lord. They lived in different lands, and comprised many cultures. Their lives

spanned a period of four thousand years. Nowhere in the annals of literature are there more fascinating stories than the histories of God’s people recorded in his Word. In our opening verse, which immediately follows his listing of faithful ones of old in the eleventh chapter, Paul calls them a “cloud of witnesses.” (vs. 1) They make up a group which has been set before our minds to contemplate. The faith and actions of their lives surround us even to this very day.

Something made those people unique. Certainly, it was not their wealth or status that made them unusual, since we learn that many of them were poor. Paul says that they wandered in desert places—many were shepherds and herdsmen. A number of them, however, were powerful, wealthy people who held high positions. They included kings, counselors, priests, judges, prophets, and governors. Both men and women were mentioned by Paul as part of this group. Although the majority were Israelites, some lived before the nation of Israel came into existence. A few were called from among the Gentiles—some Moabites and Canaanites. A large variety was included in that cloud of witnesses.

However, they all shared certain qualities and characteristics that made them who they were, causing them to stand out from those around them. They could have lived anywhere, in any age, or in other circumstances, and they would have conducted their lives in the same manner. It would not matter if they had lived during the period of the Judges, or the Babylonian captivity, or before the Flood. It would not matter if they were in the courts of Pharaoh, working in the administrative offices of Nebuchadnezzar, or plowing in the fields. It did not matter where they were, or what they were doing, they were unique among mankind. Through thousands of years, they exhibited the rare, Godlike qualities which set them apart from the average person. In short, they were heroes of faith.

ONE TRUE AND LIVING GOD

There is one prerequisite that these witnesses shared in common. This necessary characteristic we

find illustrated in a very touching and dramatic manner by the Apostle Paul in Hebrews 11:31, where he refers to Rahab, a woman who was unusual in many respects. The fact that she was a woman outstanding enough to be mentioned is unique, especially when women in her time were often considered merely as possessions of men. Secondly, her faith was unusual because she was not an Israelite. She was born into a culture steeped in heathenism, and that practiced the sacrifice of human beings to its gods. Likewise, from a Christian perspective, she was an unusual example to choose to depict faith because she was a prostitute.

In the account of this unique woman, we read the words of Rahab to the spies who had come to do reconnaissance in Jericho before Joshua attempted to conquer that city. She said, "I know that the LORD has given Israel this land. . . . We heard how the LORD dried up the Red Sea so you could leave Egypt." (Josh. 2:9,10, *Contemporary English Version*) This was an amazing remark, since it had been forty years since that event had occurred, in a land far away from Jericho. Yet, Rahab had heard about the crossing of the Red Sea by Israel, and recalled how God had miraculously brought his people safely across, destroying the pursuing Egyptians. Then, in faith she claimed, "The Lord your God rules heaven and earth."—vs. 11, *CEV*

That is what made her unique. She, and all the cloud of witnesses, believed in the one, true, living, all-powerful God. That kind of faith was a rarity at that time. Nearly all other cultures during that period of time had a multiplicity of gods. They had sun gods, moon gods, tree gods, river gods, and

many other designations. They had gods made of stone, wood, gold, and silver. They had gods in the form of large monuments, portable gods, and even those that could be carried in one's hand. Some cultures had gods for every season, occasion or probability. Out of that incredible mass of humanity living under such beliefs, we suppose that there were very few who believed in just the one, single, true, and almighty God.

Not only was the faith of the cloud of witnesses unique, but the God whom they worshiped was also unique in that he was all-loving, all-powerful, all-wise and perfectly just. Yet, at the same time, he was kindly and lovingly interested in each of their lives, and considered them his friends. (Exod. 33:11; James 2:23) These faithful men and women could see this difference between the one true God and the many false and powerless heathen gods. They could see and appreciate the righteousness displayed in his judgments, in his laws, and in his actions of kindness on their behalf.

He was not a god who vengefully required human sacrifices to appease his anger. He was not a god who created the earth or humanity in vain. He was not a god who toyed with his creatures, giving them a taste of the joys of life, but in the end having a plan which provided for the saving of just a few of them, and unmercifully punishing the majority forever.

These men and women of faith became aware of all this information concerning God, and they communicated their knowledge to those around them. That is why they were called God's "witnesses." Even today, they continue to witness to us through

their recorded lives. As they followed God's laws, trying to please him, the gap between them and their fellowmen widened. They were so moved by what they saw in their wonderful God that their lives were changed. His ways became their ways, and their motivation gradually evolved into the desire to be pleasing to such a wonderful, righteous Creator. Their belief in the one God made them who they were.

LIVES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

Another distinguishing quality which this great cloud of witnesses possessed was what the Scriptures term as righteousness. The Prophet Ezekiel, historically, lived in the middle of this period of God's cloud of witnesses. From his standpoint, however, he could look still farther back at earlier witnesses making up that group, and he saw three righteous men—Noah, Daniel and Job. (Ezek. 14:20) When we recall their life's experiences, we indeed see the quality of righteousness in each of them.

Looking briefly at Daniel's life, we find that he so distinguished himself among the administrators of the kingdom of Babylon—which had, as an empire, ruled many nations—that the new king, Darius the Median, planned to place him in the highest office over the entire kingdom. (Dan. 6:1-3) This was despite the fact that Daniel had been a slave, captured by Nebuchadnezzar during the overthrow of Israel.

Daniel's competitors for this high position were jealous of him. They tried to find grounds for charges against Daniel in his conduct of governmental affairs, but they were unable to do so. They could find no corruption, lack of judgment, or incompetence in him.

Finally they said, “We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God.” (vs. 5) Daniel was a righteous man in whom they could not find any faults.

Although we know the ones who made up this cloud of witnesses were not actually perfect, as was our Lord Jesus, yet we find that they did have a deep appreciation of what righteousness was. They saw the leadings of their God, and they followed them despite the cost. Often it cost them very dearly—their reputations and sometimes even their lives. This was true of men such as Joseph, Noah, Job, David, and women like Hannah, Naomi, Esther, and Elizabeth. Righteousness was the fabric of their lives. They tried to the best of their abilities, as much as their imperfect bodies would allow them to do, to adopt the righteous characteristics of their God.

We see a parallel to these faithful men and women throughout the Gospel Age. There is a counterpart in the lives of the true children of God now to those faithful ones of old. Jesus is our forerunner and our pattern. He was truly righteous—perfect in every respect. There will be righteousness exhibited in our lives if we follow faithfully in his footsteps. The standard of righteousness must be of the highest type in our lives. There is not even to be an appearance of evil. There is to be no evil surmising, and no evil speaking. We must speak only the truth, and that in love.—I Thess. 5:22; I Tim. 6:4; Eph. 4:15,31

SUFFERED AFFLICTIONS

The righteousness of these faithful people of old led directly to their third unique characteristic. They

were “an example of suffering affliction.” (James 5:10) More often than not, righteousness leads directly to affliction. Satan will not tolerate the attempts of any to follow in the paths of righteousness without mounting a strong counterattack.

In Hebrews 11, Paul emphasized this quality of suffering for righteousness’ sake. The cloud of witnesses endured terrible afflictions, “cruel mockings and scourgings, . . . bonds and imprisonments.” They were tortured, stoned, “slain with the sword,” and even “sawn asunder.” (vss. 36,37) However, this group was unique because they suffered these persecutions joyfully, and continued to give honor and glory to God, whom they worshiped and adored.

It was not just that these suffered afflictions. Many persons on the face of this imperfect earth have suffered great affliction, either due to their own wrong actions, through injustice, because of ill health or by accidents. Untold numbers have been stoned into unconsciousness, and death, and many more have died by the sword. Yet, this group of God’s witnesses suffered in a special way—“for righteousness’ sake.”—Matt. 5:10

WILLINGNESS TO SUFFER

There is another great example to be found in the Book of Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, on a particular occasion, set aside a certain time for the worship of a huge image—which in fact represented himself, and his universal kingdom. Three young Hebrews refused to worship that image, even at the threat of being put to death in a fiery furnace. The reason they gave for their refusal was this: “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 [if we die in the fiery furnace], 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

We see the beauty of their willingness to suffer for doing what was right. Not even the threat of death by the excruciating pain of burning in a furnace of fire could change their decision. They did not worship their God because he would save them, nor because he would make them rich, or keep them healthy. They worshiped and served God because he was the very embodiment of righteousness.

The worldly mind down through the centuries, to our very day, does not understand the principles exemplified by this cloud of witnesses. Neither do they understand Jesus’ followers’ willingness to suffer reproach, disrepute, lack of respect, or their willingness to forego “making their mark,” so to speak, in this world. This is considered irrational behavior in the minds of most. They cannot harmonize suffering and the forfeiting of wealth or position as a result of faithful service to the Heavenly Father, with the concept of a God of goodness and benevolence.

The Apostle Peter comforts and exhorts us with these words: “If ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye.” “If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.” (I Pet. 3:14; 4:16) Let us see that we are careful not to suffer for our own lack of Christian graces, but because of putting into practice these Christlike qualities.

Suffering often makes people impatient, irritable, or bitter. However, suffering had a different effect on the Ancient Worthies, and also on true Christians—an ennobling effect. It crystallizes the righteous character in all the fruits and graces of the Holy Spirit of God. When we consider that we are suffering for a particular purpose, to learn specific lessons, then we realize that we are filling up “that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ.” (Col. 1:24) Our afflictions are permitted so that we can serve God more wisely now, but also in the future, as we will have the opportunity to help the rest of the world learn righteousness in Christ’s kingdom.

LONGSUFFERING

James 5:10, partially quoted earlier, also speaks of this cloud of witnesses as “an example . . . of patience.” In the Scriptures, patience often denotes “cheerful endurance,” another important Christlike quality. However, in this instance its meaning is “longsuffering.” Those who made up the cloud of witnesses suffered long and patiently. The model of their longsuffering was God. In describing the essence of his very being to Moses, God said, “The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.”—Exod. 34:6,7

In the New Testament the word longsuffering is made up of a combination of two Greek words. The first, *makro*, means “large.” The second is *thumos*, which means “passion.” When we think of the word passion, we think of undying love for a person or a pursuit which one has. This was true concerning

the cloud of witnesses. They had such a “large passion” for God, and for his ways, and for his service, that these things consumed their lives. Whatever they experienced, of happiness or of trial and affliction, made no difference to them. They would not have it any other way.

OTHER QUALITIES

There are other features which round out the description of this company. They believed in God’s promises of a future kingdom of righteousness here on earth, when all will honor and glorify God. Of Abraham it is written that he “looked for a city [government] which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” (Heb. 11:10) Joseph requested of his children to make certain that his bones would be taken back to the land of promise. (Gen. 50:25; Josh. 24:32) Jacob also believed in God’s promises to bless all the families of the earth.—Gen. 28:13-22

Think of what an extraordinary ambassador John the Baptist was, as he laid down his life bearing witness to the presence of the Messiah. He was one among the cloud of witnesses. (Matt. 11:11) It would be a great honor to be associated with him, or with any of the others. We think of one such as Ruth, the Moabitess, who left her homeland to return to Israel with her mother-in-law, Naomi, seeking a blessing from the Lord. What a blessing she received, as the great-grandmother of King David, through whose line the Messiah eventually came.

These faithful ones of old also worked diligently, as they strived to follow God’s direction for their lives. We recall how Noah worked for decades, building the ark according to the plan given to him by

God. This group of witnesses served as excellent role models for us to follow even today. We need good examples after which to pattern our lives. Early in life our parents are our role models. Later our teachers, our friends, and those with whom we meet in our Christian fellowship become patterns to us. As we mature, we look farther afield to those, past and present, whose lives inspire us to higher goals. Apostles, such as Paul, Peter, John, and others are some of our best examples. Our Lord Jesus, however, is by far the most elevated role model we could take for ourselves, in every respect.

Our observation of the cloud of witnesses shows us what high levels of attainment are possible, with the help and guidance of our Heavenly Father. When we look to our Lord Jesus we realize that he was a perfect man and we, as children of Adam, are fallen human beings. We can never hope to attain the perfection of righteousness which Jesus exemplified. Yet, it is still requisite that we strive to reach toward the goal of perfection. As encouragement, God has provided us with many examples of those who were also fallen human beings, but who showed us what heights of faith and character development can be reached even by sinful man.

BY FAITH

The Apostle Paul begins the eleventh chapter of Hebrews by saying, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen," and by the exercise of faith the ancients "obtained a good report." (vss. 1,2) Continuing, he says, "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice, . . . by which he obtained witness that he was

righteous.” “By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, . . . prepared an ark to the saving of his house.” “By faith Abraham, when he was called . . . went out, not knowing whither he went.” “By faith Moses . . . refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.” “And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel.” “These all, . . . obtained a good report through faith.”—vss. 4,7,8,24,25,32,39

Many similarities exist between the lives of the Ancient Worthies and the faithful followers of Christ during the Gospel Age. Although each group’s experience is a little different, the sacrifices are just as great, the faith exhibited is just as strong, and the afflictions are just as deep. The names are changed, but the results are the same.

Even as Paul was writing his account of those Old Testament heroes, his own history was being enacted—one of unending faithfulness to God and the truth, and service to God’s people. His life was consecrated until death, and the promise of restoration to perfect human life was given up, in exchange for the hope of a glorious spiritual reward. His daily experiences were those of the spirit-begotten.

In a living sense, the names of Paul and many others were being added to the list of faithful witnesses. Paul could have added words such as this: “By faith the brethren of the Early Church obtained a good report. By faith Barnabas offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Ananias and Sapphira. By faith Philip went out to preach, not

knowing whither he was going. By faith Lydia, the seller of purple, received strength to begin an ecclesia in a heathen land. By faith Peter was used to first bring the Gospel to the Gentiles. These all died in the faith. They saw the promises. They were persuaded of them and they confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.”

Because the reward for following in Christ’s footsteps is so much greater than the prize offered to the Ancient Worthies, we cannot expect the trials and sufferings to be less than they endured. The experiences of the Little Flock of faithful Christians must be as severe, or even surpass in severity, the experiences of the faithful ones of old. Barnabas gave everything to help the poor in the church. (Acts 4:36,37) Peter, Andrew, James and John left their businesses, their homes and families to follow Jesus. (Matt. 4:18-22; Luke 18:28) They suffered worthily for Christ, as they were sent forth to spread the Gospel message. What an increasing cloud of witnesses we can draw from the Early Church.

WORTHY EXAMPLES

We must follow these examples from both the Old and New Testaments, and strive to be worthy of having the same expressions of faithfulness used concerning us, the saints at the end of the Gospel Age. If we have to live, literally or symbolically, in sheepskins and goatskins, or in the mountains and the caves and the deserts, as some of them did, then so be it.—Heb. 11:37,38

As these witnesses were unique, so must we be unique. We believe in the righteous standards of God, and despite our feeble flesh, we are to strive every

day to do his will in our lives. Let nothing shorten our long-lived passion for righteousness, or for serving God. We have committed our lives into his hands until death. Thus, if the eleventh chapter of Hebrews were to be rewritten today, it would contain still more names and stories of faithfulness.

Those who made up the cloud of witnesses described by Paul in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews are worthy examples of faithfulness as they strove to win an earthly inheritance. However, the members of the church class being chosen now are called to a higher, heavenly calling. (Heb. 3:1; I Pet. 1:3,4) They will die in the faith. They will claim the promise of being called the sons of God. (I John 3:1,2) They will work. They will be generous. They will sacrifice. Finally, it will be said of them, as of their Master, that they endured the cross, despised the shame, and are “set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Heb. 12:2) Our prayer is that this will be said of all who are now faithfully striving to walk in Jesus’ footsteps, encouraged by the great cloud of witnesses God has given us to urge us onward. ■

“The Lord knoweth them that are his.”

—II Tim. 2:19

He is looking for those who humble themselves, and who are glad to have his truth at any cost, and whose hearts, long famished, hunger and thirst for the truth, and who know the Shepherd’s voice, and who find in his message that which ‘satisfies their longings as nothing else could do.’

—Exceeding Great and Precious Promises

SPEAKERS' APPOINTMENTS

The speakers listed below are routed through the Pilgrim Department of The Dawn. Their visits are furnished free upon request. Write to: The Dawn Pilgrim Department, East Rutherford, NJ 07073. A visit will be arranged whenever possible.

O. B. Elbert	Reynoldsburg, OH	16-18
Toronto, ON	October 1	Carthage, IN 19
J. Freer	Waynesboro, MS	24
Kansas City, MO	October 1,2	Gulfport, MS 25
St. Louis, MO	3-5	Belleair, FL 26,27
Indianapolis, IN	6,7	Louisville, AL 30
Grand Rapids, MI	13-15	

The speakers listed below are invited by individual classes, or their services have been arranged by their home classes:

T. N. Alexander	Golden, CO	October 6-8	J. Parkinson	San Luis Obispo, CA	
O. B. Elbert	Grand Rapids, MI	October 14,15			October 21,22
R. Gorecki	Pittsburgh, PA	October 1	D. Rice	San Luis Obispo, CA	October 21,22
Orlando, FL	28,29		R. Shahan	Pittsburgh, PA	October 1
L. Griehs	Pittsburgh, PA	October 1	J. Trzeciak	Pittsburgh, PA	October 1
B. Montague	Agawam, MA	October 1		Orlando, FL	28,29
H. Montague	San Luis Obispo, CA	October 21,22	A. Williams	San Luis Obispo, CA	October 21,22

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CONVENTIONS

These conventions are listed by request of classes who sponsor them. So your convention can be placed in these columns in time, make your request in writing three months before the date of the convention to Dawn Magazine, 199 Railroad Avenue, East Rutherford, NJ 07073.

PITTSBURGH AREA CONVENTION, September 30-October 1—Sewickley Grange Hall, Route 136, West Newton, PA 15089. Contact G. Balko. Phone: (724) 771-0139 or Email: gbalko57@gmail.com

COLORADO CONVENTION, October 6-8—Holiday Inn Express & Suites, 17140 W Colfax Avenue, Golden, CO 80401. Contact D. Moss. Phone: (303) 238-4936 or Email: deb.moss@comcast.net

GRAND RAPIDS CONVENTION, October 14,15—Kenowa Hills Middle School, 3950 Hendershot Avenue NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49544. Contact T. Malinowski, 5609 Buttrick Avenue SE, Alto, MI 49302. Phone: (616) 868-0313 or Email: malinowski.tjm@gmail.com

SAN LUIS OBISPO CONVENTION, October 21,22—Masonic Hall, 859 Marsh Street, San Luis Obispo, CA. Contact M. Allard. Phone: (805) 773-2962 or Email: medlallard@juno.com

ORLANDO CONVENTION, October 28,29—South Seminole Lodge, 122 Triplet Lake Drive, Casselberry, FL 32707. Contact J. Kuenzli. Phone: (407) 831-2098 or Email: jkuenzli@cfl.rr.com

DETROIT/METRO DETROIT JOINT CONVENTION, October 29—Pleasant Ridge Community Center, 4 Ridge Road, Pleasant Ridge, MI. Contact G. Zandler. Phone: (248) 399-8843 or Email: ngzandler@wowway.com

NEW HAVEN CONVENTION, November 5—Westwoods Italian-American Club, 85 Chase Lane, West Haven, CT. Contact A. Suraci. Phone: (203) 248-3793 or Email: annasuraci@comcast.net

IBADAN NIGERIA CONVENTION, December 2—Ibadan Ecclesia Place of Fellowship. Contact C. O. Egbu, #24 Bola Fayemi Street Coca Cola Mokola Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. Phone: +2348033339949 or Email: egbucaje@gmail.com

CHICAGO NEW YEAR'S CONVENTION, December 30,31—Addison Park District, 120 E Oak Street, Addison, IL 60101. For programs, contact J. Farrell. Phone: (630) 469-9511 or Email: Jean9farrell@gmail.com. For accommodations, contact A. Pop. Email: accommodations@chicagobible.org

PHOENIX CONVENTION, January 13,14—Drury Inn & Suites, Happy Valley, 2335 W Pinnacle Peak Road, Phoenix, AZ 85027. Contact A. Mengos. Email: samengos@yahoo.com

FLORIDA CONVENTION, March 3-5—Holiday Inn Orlando International, 5750 T. G. Lee Blvd., Orlando, FL 32822. For room reservations, contact Holiday Inn: Phone: (407) 851-6400. Deadline for special rate of \$109 per room, per night is February 23. Other information, contact: R. Goodman. Phone: (407) 695-6815 or Email: goodmanrw@gmail.com

*O Saviour, precious Saviour, whom yet unseen we love;
O name of might and favor, all other names above!
We worship thee! We bless thee! To thee alone we sing!
We praise thee and confess thee
our Saviour and our King.*

*In thee all fulness dwelleth, all grace and pow'r divine:
The glory that excelleth, O Son of God is thine.
We worship thee! We bless thee! To thee alone we sing!
We praise thee and confess thee
our Saviour and our King.*