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“YE CANNOT SERVE GOD AND MAMMON”

“No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”

—Matthew 6:24

RECENTLY THE *Wall Street Journal* had an article entitled, “More Spiritual Leaders Preach Virtue of Wealth.” To attract attention the writer said, “God has a co-pilot: Midas,” and then plunged into a reporting of the trends in church programs that involved the subject of money. The article said:

“In a convergence of the conspicuous consumption of the 1980’s and the more spiritual focus of the 1990’s, the relationship between wealth and religion is becoming a hot topic in books, church programs, financial seminars and spiritual retreats. Some religious leaders even preach that there’s a Biblical imperative to making money.

“At Seattle’s Christian Faith Center last month, a lecture by Paul Zane Pilzer, author of *‘God Wants You to Be Rich’*, drew 500 people who paid

\$50 each to attend. The church's pastor, Casey Treat, says his congregation was hungry for the message because of its 'positive perspective. If we're all poor, who's going to help the poor?' Mr. Treat says the church's liberal arts college uses Mr. Pilzer's book as a text. 'It's kind of a foundation for our economics classes', he adds.

"Mr. Pilzer says he receives about 100 letters a week from people all over the country who want to know more about his 'theology of economics'. Mr. Pilzer bases his beliefs on an Old Testament story in which the nomad, Abraham, creates abundance for himself and his people by owning and cultivating property."

The popularity of this type of teaching has increased immensely. Churches have taken a hand in guiding their flocks through the world of money and business. There has been an enthusiastic response to church-sponsored financial seminars. Quoting again from the article: "The mingling of money with the Bible isn't new. In America's early days, Calvinist ministers teamed up with businessmen to promote a capitalist agenda: many colonial church-goers heard a steady stream of sermons advancing the Protestant work ethic and God's blessing of material success."

The article then cited other best sellers such as, "The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success," "Dare to Prosper," and "Taking Stock," as well as popular lectures on "Socially Responsible Investing," "The Inner Life of a Leader," "Money and Meaning," and "The Empowered Lawyer." To the credit of the writer, a word of caution was cited on Biblical warnings about wealth, in particular our Lord's words in Matthew 6:19,20: "Lay not up for your-

selves treasures upon earth, . . . but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven."

How should we view these ideas from the pulpit? What part should money play in our lives? The Bible should be our guide in all matters, and this is especially true when it comes to earthly wealth. It is true, as Mr. Pilzer says, that Abraham was rich. From the earliest times precious metals—in particular gold and silver—have been used as money and as a measure of a man's wealth.

MONEY IN EARLY BIBLICAL TIMES

But in Biblical times the measure of wealth was not limited to gold and silver, but also included such possessions as flocks and herds. Thus, the first accounting in the Bible of a man's wealth was that of Abraham and is recorded in Genesis 13:2: "Now Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold." No wealth is mentioned prior to this, because the Bible's records to this point are devoted solely to genealogies and several principal events.

We know that Abraham used the silver—and most likely the gold—for monetary purposes, because later a transaction is recorded for the purchase of a cave for his wife, Sarah, when she died. (Gen. 23:9-16) This purchase involved 400 shekels of silver. The shekel in Abraham's time was a weight measure corresponding to a little less than 0.7 ounces AV, or 20 grams. Later the shekel became the name of a coin, when coins were first introduced in Israel around 141 B.C.

The word 'money' first appears in the Bible where God instructs Abraham concerning the keeping of his covenant and circumcision, and in

so doing includes as a part of Abraham's household those "bought with money," i.e., the slaves purchased by Abraham. (Gen. 17:12) It is interesting to note that the Hebrew word translated 'money' is *keseoph*, which means money, or silver. It is translated 'money' in the Old Testament 113 times, and as 'silver' 287 times. Since silver was used as money in Biblical times, the two were considered synonymous. Examples of this can be found in Genesis 37:28 when Joseph was sold into slavery; and in Genesis chapters 42 and 43, when Joseph's brethren went to Egypt to buy grain.

The first association of money in religious matters occurred when Moses was instructed in building the Tabernacle. The financing for this work is described in Exodus 30:11-16, where Moses was told by God to ask for 1/2 shekel from every male, 20 years old and older, which had been numbered. The money was to be used to provide means for carrying out the atonement rituals, and was called atonement money. This money was not in the form of coins, but rather, a specific weight of silver. Exodus 30:15 tells how God wanted full and equal participation of all the males in this matter, so that "the rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less." The reason for equal participation was so that contributions by the wealthy could not be used as a means of control. In today's society, wealth brings influence, and God clearly did not want the wealthy to control any religious matters.

USE OF COINS

Coins as money were deemed to have originated in Lydia in the seventh century B.C., when Israel as a nation was about to become captive in Baby-

lon, and the Babylonian Empire came upon the scene. Coinage became accepted and became national money as new empires arose. The Persian empire had its money, and was followed by the Grecian empire and its coins, called drachmas, which were the pieces of silver in our Lord's parable of the lost coin. (Luke 15:8-10) Little is known about Babylonian coins, though it is believed by some authorities that the dram mentioned in Ezra 2:69 is not the daric, a Persian coin, as generally supposed, but rather refers to dariku, a weight or measure of gold or silver in Babylon which became a coin. What is most interesting about coins and monetary systems is that their adoption coincided with the beginning of the Gentile Times, or the time of Nebuchadnezzar's reign.

During our Lord's First Advent, Rome was in power, and Roman coins were in circulation. The Jews had to pay tribute money to Rome, which they detested doing. This paying of tribute money was used by the Pharisees to test Jesus. We read: "Then went the Pharisees, and took counsel how they might entangle him in his talk. And they sent out unto him their disciples with the Herodians, saying, Master, we know that thou art true, and teachest the way of God in truth, neither carest thou for any man: for thou regardest not the person of men. Tell us therefore, what thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not? But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites? Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar

the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's. When they had heard these words, they marvelled, and left him, and went their way." (Matt. 22:15-22) The Pharisees were seeking a 'yes' or 'no' answer! A 'yes' would displease the Jews, and a 'no' would displease the Romans.

What is most important about this incident is that worldly wealth as symbolized by the Roman coin was not the type of wealth that belonged to God, or in which God was interested. It belonged to Caesar. It is true that money can buy cattle, sheep, land, and other possessions on earth which all belong to God, in the first place. As our wonderful Creator has reminded us, "Every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains: and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof." (Ps. 50:10-12) Money, therefore, is only a convenient means of exchange, whereas property and goods are the more significant measures of wealth.

HOW MUCH MONEY DID JESUS HAVE?

The Scriptures do not give a definite statement about the wealth Jesus possessed. For example, when Jesus and the disciples went to Capernaum, and Peter was approached by the tax collectors concerning paying tribute, although Jesus reasoned that they were not subject to the tax, yet, lest he offend the authorities, he instructed Peter to cast a line into the sea to catch a fish. In the fish's mouth he would find the tribute money, and this could be used to pay the tax for both of them.—Matt. 17:24-27

On another occasion, a particular amount of money is mentioned. (John 6:1-13) Judas was the treasurer for the disciples and carried the 'bag', but the others also knew what funds they possessed. Jesus had gone to a desert place to escape the crowds; however a great multitude sought him because of his miracles. When the time for a meal came, Jesus asked Philip, "Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?" Philip's answer was that two hundred denarii would not "buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." (vs. 7, *RSV*) Jesus knew what he planned to do even before he asked Philip, and Philip's answer involving 200 denarii probably represented what they had in their treasury at the time—a sum approximating 120 inflated U.S. dollars. As recorded, Jesus produced a miracle whereby five thousand men, plus women and children, were fed. (Matt. 14th chapter; John 6th chapter) It is reasonable to assume that Jesus and the apostles worked to supply their everyday needs, although once in a while, God's miracle-working power was used to supply their wants.

Jesus never advocated the amassing of wealth. On the contrary, his advice to the rich young ruler who came to him seeking to gain eternal life (Matt. 19:16-22) was, "Sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me." (vs. 21) The account says, "When the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions." (vs. 22) Note how Jesus suggested to this rich young ruler that he exchange his earthly wealth for "treasures in heaven," but he could not do it. And so it is with those who pursue earthly

wealth. They find it difficult to give these possessions up.

LAY UP TREASURES IN HEAVEN

When Jesus began his ministry, and delivered the well-known sermon on the mount, an important part of his message was: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through nor steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."—Matt. 6:19-21

What a profound message! Later he said, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." (vs. 24) What a difficult lesson this has been for the world of mankind to learn, and what a difficult lesson has this been for many of those who have been called to follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Much depends on our knowledge of the treasures in heaven, and so we ask, what are these special treasures in heaven? These are primarily the personal love and friendship of God and his Son, Jesus. They include the honor of the invitation to be part of the body of Christ. They involve the development of Christ-likeness by acquiring the fruits of the Spirit. Such treasures laid up in heaven have no comparison upon earth.

When Jesus said, 'Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also', he knew that treasure would suggest pleasure, comfort, joy, and delight.

The heart representing our inmost desires would reflect where our pleasure, joy, delight, and comfort would be. Would these be in heaven, and in the joy of his wonderful plan, or would they be on earthly matters? Wealth is deceiving. We can have it momentarily and then it can disappear as moth and rust corrupt, or thieves steal our possessions.

The pursuit of wealth can bring avarice. Such was the situation with the scribes and Pharisees who were lovers of money. After the Babylonian captivity, many Israelites lived in foreign lands, but would come to Jerusalem at the time of their solemn feasts. The money of their land was not acceptable as a free will offering until it was changed into Temple money, or money coined by Israel. Hence, there was a need for facilities to exchange all other money into Temple money. In Jerusalem, money changers had stalls in the city; as a particular feast approached they were admitted to the precincts of the Temple, and placed their tables in the Temple court. The premium paid for exchanging a half shekel was called by the Talmud a kollubos, equal to 12 grains of silver, and roughly 10% in value of the half shekel.

Jesus was not only aware of the high premium charged, but he also knew of the avarice and dishonesty of merchants who were selling animals for sacrifice. When he saw these traders in the Temple, he became so filled with righteous indignation that, as described in the three Gospel accounts, he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons and drove them out, saying, "It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves." (Matt. 21:12,13;

Mark 11:15-17; Luke 19:45,46) The Apostle John recalls a similar experience when Jesus went to Jerusalem at the time of Passover, and had done the same thing. (John 2:13-16) Monetary gain was never intended from the worship of God.

Quite often we hear it said: "Money is the root of all evil." This is a misquotation of I Timothy 6:10, which reads: "The *love* of money is the root of all evil." Money in itself is only a convenient means of exchange for goods and services. It does, however, represent wealth because of its potential for acquiring property and goods. Those who *love* money are covetous, and covetousness is evil. (Exod. 20:17) The Pharisees were lovers of money, and are described as 'covetous' in Luke 16:14. The Greek word translated "covetous" is *philargarous*, which literally means 'lover of silver', or 'lover of money'.

Jesus made it plain that wealth and riches—called mammon—could interfere with service to God. He emphasized this point in his sermon on the mount, and also brought it out at the conclusion of a parable recorded in Luke 16:1-8. The parable of the unjust steward has had many interpretations, and as a consequence the objective and force of the lesson can be missed. For a clear understanding of the parable we are dependent on the words of Jesus recorded in verses 9-13. Certainly the Pharisees did not miss his lesson, because they "derided" Jesus after he explained the lesson. (vs. 14) Luke tells us plainly why they scorned him—because they "were covetous," lovers of money.

In this parable, the steward is about to lose his job because he has not done well. He calls in debt-

ors to his lord, and reduces their bills. For doing so he is commended by his lord that he had done wisely. (Luke 16:8) This is considered contrary to good business. When someone is owed a debt, the goal is to receive full payment for that debt. But, if a debtor is unable to pay the debt, he may declare bankruptcy, and the creditor may lose all of that debt. There are many poor people in the world who cannot pay back what they owe to creditors. There are entire nations today who cannot pay back their indebtedness. At any moment, such nations may refuse to repay their debts, and financial crises would spring up everywhere.

Our Lord's lesson was intended for his people who recognize that all they possess belongs to the LORD, and is not their own. As stewards of these possessions we are to use them wisely and well in the LORD's service. How probing are Jesus' words when he asks: "If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon [the wealth in our possession], who will commit to your trust the true riches?" (Luke 16:11) Continuing he asks, "If ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's [what we have belongs to God], who shall give you that which is your own?" (vs. 12) Jesus then follows these questions on our performance as stewards over worldly wealth with the lesson given in the sermon on the mount. "No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."—vs 13

The parable's lesson involves the struggle that Christians can have in handling the wealth in their possession, and over which they are stew-

ards. Earlier in our Lord's comments on this parable, he stresses that earthly wealth is to be used to do good, and if so used it will be pleasing to God and his Son, Jesus. God's people are aware that there are permanent and temporary things in their lives. The Apostle Paul says, "We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal." (II Cor. 4:18) Mammon—earthly riches—are temporal; the treasures in heaven are eternal.

Since the Apostle Paul has clearly told us that the love of money is the root of all evil, we would expect that the Adversary would use this weakness in men to exploit them. A review of history reveals greed and selfishness everywhere, and evil running rampant. As mankind has multiplied on the earth, so, too, has acquisition of wealth given Satan the opportunity to use his devices.

FINANCIAL COLLAPSE

We should not wonder, therefore, that the end of this present evil world should be characterized by financial collapse. The introduction to one prophecy dealing with our day speaks of the "evil" that comes, and states that "the end is come." (Ezek. 7:5,6) Complete financial collapse is spoken of in Ezekiel 7:19: "They shall cast their silver in the streets, and their gold shall be removed: their silver and their gold shall not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of the LORD."

In the New Testament a more detailed prophecy is uttered by the Apostle James: "Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. [See: Matthew

6:19,20.] Your gold and silver is cankered [rusted]; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the LORD of Sabaoth."—James 5:1-4

Gold and silver are noble metals, and do not rust. Therefore, the allusion to gold and silver 'rusting' is symbolic that their use for monetary purposes fails. This is the collapse of the system using the mammon of unrighteousness.

We who have been waiting for God's kingdom see in this prophecy the fulfillment of one of many significant events of the last days of this old world order. Soon, however, the husbandman—our Lord—will bring in the precious fruit of earth, his church, and then it will be possible to usher in the blessings of that kingdom—the blessing of all nations of the earth.—James 5:7

Selfishness and greed, which have been characteristic of this present evil world, are not the only reasons for the imminent failure of our monetary system. It is noteworthy that James mentions fraud, as well, being involved in the acquisition of wealth. (vs. 4) The only way any system of monetary exchange can operate properly and justly is when fraud ceases. The potential for this will exist when God's law is obeyed in his kingdom. Among the many features of the Law given to Israel was a requirement forbidding fraud. It stated: "Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with

thee all night until the morning." (Lev. 19:13) We note that when Jesus asked the rich young ruler whether he was keeping the commandments, he included the statement, "Defraud not," as one of the examples. (Mark 10:19) How wonderful it will be in God's kingdom when men will not defraud one another!

NO MORE FRAUD

Then love and unselfishness will have replaced greed and selfishness! Leviticus 19:17,18 tells of this feature of God's law being fulfilled: "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him. Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD."

Keeping this law in God's kingdom will bring absolute honesty. Israel was admonished to be honest, but failed because of the fallen flesh. In God's kingdom it will be possible to do all that God commanded Israel to do, including the commandment in verses 35-37: "Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure. Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and just hin, shall ye have: I am the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt. Therefore shall ye observe all my statutes, and all my judgments, and do them: I am the LORD."

Then, and only then, will the world learn to serve God alone, and never to serve and love mammon again. ■

INTERNATIONAL BIBLE STUDIES

LESSON FOR NOVEMBER 3

Facing Defeat

KEY VERSE: *"Thou shalt set thy face toward the siege of Jerusalem, and thine arm shall be uncovered, and thou shalt prophesy against it."*—*Ezekiel 4:7*

SELECTED SCRIPTURE : Ezekiel 4:1-13

A GAIN AND AGAIN God sent his prophets to warn the people of Israel. These messengers told them that they must turn from their sinful ways or face God's judgment. Israel, although hearing the message, evidently did not believe that God would actually allow harm to befall the royal city of Jerusalem. "Surely God will protect us," must have been their thought. Although God did desire to protect them and continue to lead them as his people, their continuing resistance to correction and increasing hardness of heart left God with no choice but to take decisive action. It was in keeping with God's will that the Babylo-

nians were now poised to attack both Israel and Judah, and along with this to destroy their great city.

God's time clock was steadily ticking off the countdown to destruction. At this point, further prophetic warnings would be to no avail, but God did have a role for the prophet to play. Ezekiel was commanded to illustrate the fate of Jerusalem in pictures and symbolic actions. In verses 1-3, God tells Ezekiel to etch, or sculpt, on a damp mud brick a picture of Jerusalem under siege. This picture was also to include the encampments and equipment of the attacking army. The prophet was further told to take an

iron pan—probably a cooking griddle—and to set it between himself and this portrayal of the city under attack. He was instructed to “set thy face against it” (vs. 3), showing God’s part in the coming destruction.

God then gave the prophet further instructions. He was told to lie first on his left side, then on his right, for three hundred ninety days, and again forty days, respectively, as an indication of the length of punishment first for Israel, the ten-tribe kingdom, and then Judah, the two-tribe kingdom. (vss. 4-8) God said he would bind the prophet with cords so that he could not turn from one side to the other until those days were accomplished. This showed that once Israel’s and Judah’s punishment would begin it would not end until God’s appointed time. Moreover, God called upon Ezekiel to “bear their iniquity.”—vs. 4

Ezekiel here is called to assume both his prophetic role and his priestly role, by prophesying against the city, and by bearing the guilt of the people before

God. How beautifully this foreshadowed the fact that Jesus would, as a faithful High Priest, bear the sins of the people—not only of the Jews, but of all mankind. The Prophet Isaiah speaks of this work that Jesus would accomplish: “The LORD hath laid on him [Jesus] the iniquity of us all.”—Isa. 53:6

God continued his instructions to Ezekiel in verses 9-13. He pointed out the fact that before their ultimate defeat the people would experience severe hardship in acquiring bread.

Bread is used in the Scriptures to picture truth. Truth was certainly in short supply in Ezekiel’s day. This but foreshadowed the time at the end of this present evil world when *the* truth, *the* faith, would be scarcely found in the earth. Jesus spoke of the time of his Second Advent and said, “When the Son of man cometh, shall he find [the] faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8) At this time, too, there will be a “time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation.”—Dan. 12:1 ■

EXPERIENCING THE UNBELIEVABLE

KEY VERSE: *"If ye will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret places for your pride; and mine eye shall weep sore, and run down with tears, because the LORD's flock is carried away captive."*—Jeremiah 13:17

SELECTED SCRIPTURE: II Kings 24:20-25:12

KING JEHOIAKIM HAD entered into a treaty with powerful Babylon a number of years earlier, thereby making Judah a vassal state. But when the Egyptians beat back Babylonian troops, Jehoiakim mounted a badly-timed rebellion that utterly failed. (II Kings 24:1-3) After his death, his son, Jehoiachin, ascended the throne and reigned only three months, rebelling against Babylon in the same way as his father. (vss. 8-16) After this short period, Jehoiachin was deported to Babylon along with thousands of other top government and military officers. King Nebuchadnezzar then made

Mattaniah, Jehoiachin's uncle, king of Judah and changed his name to Zedekiah. (vs. 17) Although Zedekiah reigned for eleven years, the Scriptural account concentrates on the final days of his reign. In those days, the words of the prophets—words that seemed so unbelievable when they were uttered—finally came true. Judah's downward fall toward destruction was almost complete.

Earlier in his reign, King Zedekiah wavered between maintaining Judah as a vassal state to Babylon, or turning to Egypt as an ally as his two predecessors had done. The latter

choice is the one that he finally made, rebelling against Babylon (vs. 20)—a decision that had devastating consequences for his people. In II Kings 25:1-3 we read that Babylon responded with a siege lasting eighteen months. As these verses describe the battle scene, we can see the fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophetic etching of the siege on a mud brick. (See lesson for November 3.) Ezekiel's loaf of bread, baked from a variety of ingredients because food was so scarce, comes immediately to mind as the verses note the lack of food in Jerusalem.

The Babylonian troops could not be repulsed. II Kings 25:4 states that "the city was broken up"—the great city of Jerusalem—once thought invincible by the nation of Israel, had now fallen to a heathen, Gentile nation. Zedekiah and his soldiers escaped from the city, but only briefly. Verses 5-7 describe his capture and the resulting punishment inflicted upon him. His captors took him, along with his sons, to Nebuchadnezzar. They

then killed Zedekiah's sons while he watched. Zedekiah's eyes were then put out, he was bound, and carried off to Babylon. Truly this seemed like an ignoble end to the kingly line of David.

The Babylonians, however, were not finished with Jerusalem. Nebuzaradan, the captain of Nebuchadnezzar's guard, led the army in a total destruction of Jerusalem. (vss. 8-11) His troops broke the remaining walls, set fire to all the residences, including the king's palace, and desecrated the Temple. He carried away captive most of the citizens to Babylon.

In the Key Verse, God laments for his people who have been taken captive. Yet, this all came about because the people did not heed the repeated warnings of God. When other prophecies are fulfilled, Jerusalem will again be safely inhabited during Christ's coming kingdom. We read: "Men shall dwell in it, and there shall be no more utter destruction; but Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited."—Zech. 14:11 ■

LONGING FOR RESTORATION

KEY VERSE: *"Turn thou us unto thee, O LORD, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old."*—*Lamentations 5:21*

SELECTED SCRIPTURE: *Lamentations 5:1-10, 19-22*

UNSPEAKABLE DISASTER HAD struck God's chosen people. Not only had the beloved city of Jerusalem been destroyed and burned, but the people had been carted off to Babylon. Where was God in all of this? Had he forgotten his covenant with the people? In their agony, the people cried out for God to remember them. What was the status of their inheritance, now that their land had passed into other hands? (Lam. 5:2) They reminded God of the problems that had befallen them. Could not God help them now, as he had when they were slaves in Egypt? At that time God remembered them and raised up Moses to deliver them.

(Exod. 2:24; 3:7) Again, they were praying through Jeremiah, the author of Lamentations, to be remembered and delivered. Lamentations 5:3-10 describes their pitiful condition. They compared themselves to the most vulnerable members of society—the orphans and widows—needing care and sustenance. The water they drank, and the wood they used, which were freely available in Jerusalem, now would have to be bought. Food was gathered at the risk of life itself. They were abused by their overseers, and forced to work long hours—without the Sabbath rest which was in conformance to the Jewish Law.

Even as they asked God to remember them, the exiles acknowledged their own sin. Like their forefathers, they too had sinned. In short, these captive people were living in chaotic, oppressive circumstances. Their surroundings were both unfamiliar and hostile. There was no Temple, so they could not worship or offer sacrifices to God. All they could do was lament their situation and call upon God to remember them.

In verse 19, the people acknowledge the God of their fathers as an everlasting God, perhaps recalling the words of their faithful king, David: "From everlasting to everlasting, thou art God," and, "Thy throne, O God is for ever and ever." (Ps. 90:2; 45:6) They reasoned that such an everlasting God would not forever forsake them, and therefore they asked this question, "Wherefore dost thou forget us for ever, and forsake us so long time?" (Lam. 5:20) To them it already seemed like too long a time of punishment. They could not understand that it

would be yet another twenty-five centuries before the yoke of Gentile dominion would be removed from them, and they would begin the process of being regathered as a nation.

Our Key Verse, "Turn unto us . . . and we shall be turned," for the first time, indicated a desire and willingness to change their former ways. This verse shows an attitude of repentance which God was looking for in his people—and not only repentance, but also a sincere desire to reform and change their ways.

The Apostle Paul speaks of the time when, at the end of this present age, Israel will indeed 'turn' back to God. He says, "All Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: for this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins." (Rom. 11:26, 27) This will be the time of Christ's kingdom, when all, not just Israelites, will be turned again to the LORD, and "all the nations of the earth [shall] be blessed."—Gen. 22:18 ■

FINDING HOPE BEYOND DESPAIR

KEY VERSE: “[I, the LORD] shall put my Spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the LORD.”—Ezekiel 37:14

SELECTED SCRIPTURE: *Ezekiel 37:1-12,14*

IN A VISION, God showed the Prophet Ezekiel a valley of dry, unburied bones that represent the “whole house of Israel.” (Ezek. 37:11) God’s people had been defeated and dismembered. We cannot imagine the reaction of the prophet as he viewed, in vision, this scene of dry, sun-bleached bones. They were separated one from another, scattered at random, and very many in number. Nothing in this scene would have suggested any hope for life. All seemed irretrievably lost.

The reason for this condition was not that they had been defeated by a superior nation, but because

they had turned away from God, and he had allowed this great punishment to come upon them as a result. Even before their defeat at the hands of the Babylonians, the people were, in a sense, spiritually dead—their bones dry and without the water of truth.

God, however, did not gloat over their defeat, but rather now proclaims the hope for life. He asks the prophet, “Son of man, can these bones live?” (vs. 3) Ezekiel cannot answer for certain, that this is possible, but he trusts that such a possibility exists, and so responds, “Thou knowest.” God then speaks the words that the prophet

longs to hear, telling him that these bones shall live, and that this life, just as with Adam in the Garden of Eden, will be provided by the power of God himself. He says, "I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live."—vss. 3-5

Just as their fall from favor and subsequent destruction came over a period of time, so also their return to favor and eventually life itself occurs in a series of steps. At first the bones come together "bone to his bone," and then sinews come upon the bones to begin connecting them together. Finally, flesh (or skin) comes and covers the bones and sinews. (vss. 4-10) It would appear that a full restoration had now been accomplished. Yet verse 8 states, "But there was no breath in them." They were not yet alive from God's standpoint. It is from the symbolic "four winds" (vs. 9), that breath finally comes, and these formerly dry bones, now covered with sinews, flesh, and infused with the breath of life, live. "The breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon

their feet, an exceeding great army."—vs 10

In verses 12-14, God, through the prophet, declares how this restoration process will take place. He says that they will be brought up out of their graves, and back into the land of Israel. We would understand this in two ways. First, Israel would be brought back from their graveyard among Gentile nations, in which they were scattered for many centuries as dry bones. Second, those literally in their graves would be brought forth in the resurrection spoken of by Jesus: "The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth."—John 5:28,29

Our Key Verse (Ezek. 37:14) says at that time God will put his Spirit in them, and as a result, they will live. He will also place them back in their own land once again, not forgetting the inheritance promised to their father, Abraham. Finally, he says, "Then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken it and performed it." ■

OUR LORD AND NICODEMUS

*"There was a man of the Pharisees, named
Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews."*

John 3:1-13

THE ACCOUNT OF the interview of Nicodemus—a ruler of the Jews—with Jesus, is one of the most interesting of the many incidents in the Gospel story, illustrating as it does the attitude of at least some of the rulers of the Jews toward him whom the Father had sanctified and sent into the world. More important than this is the illustration it gives of the attitude of a learned natural man toward spiritual things, and his inability to receive and understand them.—I Cor. 2:14

The Pharisees were the 'holiness people' of their day, claiming special sanctity as a result of keeping the Law, manifesting scrupulous care for all its ceremonial features. Being spoken of as a 'ruler of the Jews', and a 'master of Israel', Nicodemus was very much like some of the powers in the churches of today. He was unable to grasp spiritual things on account of being a natural

man, and unable to receive the things of the Spirit of God, or to understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.—I Cor. 2:14

WHY BY NIGHT?

The account states that Nicodemus ‘came to Jesus by night’, and it has been suggested that he went at that time because he did not wish to be seen visiting such an unpopular person as Jesus was with the scribes and Pharisees, and he was ashamed to have it known that he was in any way influenced by his message. On the other hand, it may be said that night would be the most convenient time for a quiet conversation—especially in view of our Lord’s busy life of teaching, his performing of miracles, and frequently having great multitudes following him.

For instance, when the friends of the man “taken with a palsy” wished to take him to Jesus, there was such a throng of people surrounding the house that the only way to obtain access to the Master was by making an opening in the roof, and lowering the sick man to the feet of Jesus. (Luke 5:18,19) On another occasion we read that there were so many going and coming to see our Lord and his disciples, that they had not even time to eat. (Mark 6:31) Furthermore, we need not think of Nicodemus coming at the ‘dead of night’, but merely after dark—almost the only time available for a busy man to make a call.

His approach to our Lord was very respectful: “Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.” (John 3:2) From our Lord’s reply (vs. 3), it is quite evident that only part of the conversation is recorded;

also, it seems clear that the great subject of Messiah's kingdom, in which every Jew believed, must have been mentioned. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born [*begotten] from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus had evidently heard that Jesus was preaching that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. Possibly he heard that Jesus claimed to be the Messiah—the great king—in that kingdom.

But in view of our Lord's complete absence of political influence, and with only a handful of followers from among the common people, Nicodemus was, naturally, perplexed that such claims should be made. Hence Jesus emphasized the fact that a man must be begotten from above if he would 'see', in the sense of understanding, about the kingdom in its embryonic stage during the Gospel Age. For instance, the Apostle Paul later said, God "hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son" (Col. 1:13), suggesting that God's people, when begotten from above, enter into a spiritual world, with new hopes, aims, ambitions, interests—old things having passed away, and all things having become new.

The apostle says: "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit." (Rom. 14:17) Christians, prospective members of the kingdom, are not restricted in the use of food, as were the Jews under the Law Covenant; nor are Christians

*The Greek word *gennao* can be translated either "begotten" or "born," depending on whether the subject is the father or the mother. In this case, it should be translated "begotten," because God, the Father, is involved.

bound to keep one day in seven as a day of physical rest, although, when possible, it is wise and advisable to do so. It has often been proven that, over a period of time, a man can do more and better work in six days than in seven. However, as prospective members of the kingdom, our liberties, privileges, and blessings are much greater than freedom to eat what we like, or liberty to busy one's self with some work on the first or seventh day of the week. Some of the chief blessings we enjoy are 'righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit'.

In spite of centuries of effort, righteousness or justification was not enjoyed by any Jew as a result of keeping the Law. Peace with God was not the possession of any in natural Israel. The Law only condemned, and told God's typical people that they were short of the divine requirements, and therefore under judicial condemnation. Neither was joy resulting from the operation of the Holy Spirit the portion of any, until at Pentecost after our Lord's resurrection. We see how true it is that a man must be 'begotten from above' before he can understand or be acquainted with the kingdom of God and the blessings to be enjoyed by those called to the kingdom during the Gospel Age.

THE 'NATURAL' MAN AND 'SPIRITUAL' THINGS

In Nicodemus' questions, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?" we see the operation of the natural mind, with its ability to reason only on the level of earthly things. And in his reply, Jesus enunciates a further vital truth which can be fully appreciated only by those who have been Spirit-begotten. "Verily, verily, I say

unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." (John 3:5) To 'see' that kingdom, one needs to be 'begotten from above'; but to 'enter into' that heavenly phase of the kingdom to which the church is called, it is necessary not only to be 'begotten', but also to be 'born' of the Spirit. As Paul says, "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." (I Cor. 15:50) A new spiritual body must be received before we can be forever with the Lord.

This Spirit birth, our Lord tells us, is brought about by means of two things: 'water' and 'Spirit': (1) the cleansing, sanctifying power of the water of truth—living by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God; being built up by the word of his grace (Acts 20:32); (2) the operation of the Holy Spirit, quickening our mortal bodies in the work of sacrificing the flesh, renewing and transforming our minds that they may become more and more like the mind of Christ. (I Cor. 2:16) In this way we are prepared to be 'born' as spirit beings in the resurrection. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again."—vss. 6,7

Our Lord here tells us that there is more than one kind of begetting and birth. As the begetting and birth of the flesh is a real thing, so the begetting and birth of the spirit being is just as real and necessary, if one would enter the heavenly phase of Messiah's kingdom. However, as the record suggests, Nicodemus continued to marvel; he failed to grasp our Lord's meaning. How frequently has this been the experience of the Lord's people since that time, as they have come into contact with well-

meaning natural men! (I Cor. 2:14) It has been well said, "The most profound knowledge of mathematics, or oriental dialects, does not qualify a man to judge pearls and diamonds." Still less does it fit him to recognize spiritual truths.

In John 3:8, Jesus seems to say: 'Let me give you an illustration of the powers possessed by one born of the Spirit:' "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." From this we gather that to man, spirit beings are like the wind, invisible and powerful; and their means of locomotion is very rapid. (Dan. 9: 21) To use a common expression, they are able to go and come like the wind. Even with this explanation, Nicodemus, still handicapped by his natural mind, replied, "How can these things be?"—John 3:9

DID NICODEMUS BECOME A FOLLOWER?

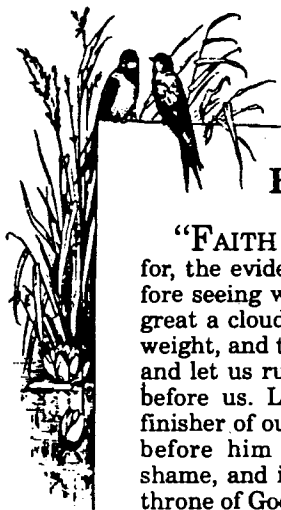
There is no record in the Bible that Nicodemus became a disciple of Jesus. However, we know he defended Jesus before the Sanhedrin. (John 7:50) The Pharisees and the chief priests had sent officers to take Jesus captive (vs. 32), but when they returned without Jesus they asked why they had not brought him, their reply was, "Never man spake like this man. Then answered them the Pharisees, Are ye also deceived? Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him? But this people who knoweth not the Law are cursed. Nicodemus saith unto them, (he that came to Jesus by night, being one of them,) Doth our Law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth? They answered and said unto him, Art thou also of Galilee? Search, and look: for out of

Galilee ariseth no prophet." (vss. 45-52) What the Pharisees did not know was that Jesus had been born in Bethlehem of Judea, not in Galilee.

When Jesus was crucified, Joseph of Arimathea—who was a disciple of Jesus, though secretly—asked to take the body of Jesus for burial. Pilate granted the request, and together with Nicodemus, who brought embalming spices, they buried Jesus in a sepulchre owned by Joseph. (John 19:38-42) These events suggest that Nicodemus had a great interest in Jesus and his teachings. *McClintock and Strong* report on traditional writings which say that after the resurrection of Jesus, Nicodemus became a professed disciple of Christ, and received baptism at the hands of Peter and John. All the rest that is reported of him is uncertain. It is said, however, that the Jews, in revenge for his conversion, deprived him of his office, beat him cruelly, and drove him from Jerusalem. Gamaliel, who was supposed to be his kinsman, sheltered him in a country house until his death, and, finally, gave him honorable burial near the body of Stephen.

OUR FAITH ENABLES US TO 'SEE'

As we review in our minds this interesting meeting between Jesus and Nicodemus, how thankful we should be that, as a result of our faith in the Redeemer and consecration to God through him, we have been enabled to lay aside the natural mind. By being *begotten* from above, we 'see' the kingdom of God, appreciate the things of the kingdom, understand the conditions for membership in the kingdom, and the work of the kingdom, now and in the future. But, actually to enter into that kingdom, we must be *born* of the Spirit.—John 3:5 ■



HEBREWS 11:1; 12:1,2

“FAITH IS THE substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. . . . Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us. Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

WEEKLY PRAYER MEETING TEXTS

NOVEMBER 7—“I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the Word of God.”—Revelation 20:4 (Z. '00-285 Hymn 191)

NOVEMBER 14—“Take heed unto yourselves, . . . for grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.”—Acts 20:28-30 (Z. '04-74 Hymn 200)

NOVEMBER 21—“My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations.”—James 1:2 (Z. '02-133 Hymn 120)

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CKFG 1340 9:00 a.m.
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10:30 p.m.

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*"O send out thy light
and thy truth: let them
lead me; let them bring
me unto thy holy hill,
and to thy tabernacles."
—Psalm 43:3*

“MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR THEE”

*“He said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee:
for my strength is made perfect in weakness.”*

II Corinthians 12:9

FOR TWO YEARS and three months, the Apostle Paul had actively engaged in the service of the truth at Ephesus, the ‘Gateway’ or ‘Eye’ of Asia Minor. (Acts 19:8-41) He was about ready to leave, and had already sent word to the churches en route, which he had established, informing them of his planned journey. He also purposed taking a present of money to the Christians at Jerusalem from their fellow believers in the Gospel and members in the body of Christ who resided in Gentile lands. However, the LORD permitted the Adversary to stir up persecution and cause a riot against the truth, and especially against Paul on the eve of his departure. As the apostle had written in another place: “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28), we may be sure that God saw some good which could be accomplished by

permitting this persecution. Otherwise, he would not have permitted it.

Ephesus was one of the greatest cities of that time. In Ephesus was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world—a huge temple honoring Diana, the deity of Ephesus, and, indeed, of Asia Minor. To her shrine thousands of people came, as opportunity offered, believing that they received a special blessing from her which affected favorably the prosperity of their homes. Her blessing was supposed to greatly increase the flocks and herds, and the birth of children. She was represented to be the goddess of fertility—the mother of all things living. Of course, the fame of this great idol attracted general attention, and those who could not go to Ephesus to worship in the temple were pleased to purchase from merchants certain charms or amulets which consisted of small copies of the temple wrought in silver. The business of making these talismans grew as the people of that region learned to desire her blessing and to offer her worship. In the apostle's day, the business of making these miniature silver temples of various sizes became immense—employing hundreds, perhaps thousands!

SILVERSMITHS CAUSE RIOTS

A man named Demetrius was the representative, or head, of a silversmith's guild, or union. He became incensed against Paul's Gospel message and the fervent zeal of the Early Church at Ephesus. He aroused his fellow craftsmen by a stirring speech in which he pointed out the great prosperity of their city through this temple, and how they themselves had prospered by the building of her shrine. He then painted a black picture of how the

prosperity would shortly die as a result of the preaching of this Paul. He called attention to the fact that it was not merely at Ephesus that this new religion—opposed to the worship of Diana—was spreading, but that it prevailed throughout Asia Minor among people who might be expected to place orders with them for shrines. With wonderful cunning, he upheld the combined duty of supporting their city religion with that of looking out for their pocketbooks. Who can think of stronger grounds of argument with people in general? That he was successful in encouraging the prejudices and creating a riot causes us no wonder. The whole city was in an uproar to preserve religion and worldly prosperity.

PAUL'S LIFE THREATENED

The Adversary, no doubt, helped in the matter, and shortly the people were in a frenzy of despair and fear that the collapse of their religion and prosperity was imminent. It was known where Paul stayed, so the mob rushed there, seeking the chief cause of the impending troubles. But, in the LORD's providence, Paul was absent. This was the home of Aquila and Priscilla who were there. Although threatened they were loyal to the Apostle Paul. Subsequently, Paul wrote regarding Aquila and Priscilla, where he remarked that they endangered their 'necks' for the sake of the truth.—Rom. 16:3,4

As working people and home-keepers they were not molested; but two companions and assistants of Paul were in the house and were taken by the mob who hurried them to the theater, or the place of public entertainment. The capacity of the amphitheater, we are told, was 56,000—indicating

that Ephesus must have been an immense city. Paul, learning of the commotion, would have courageously gone to the defense of his friends and, above all, in defense of his Master and his message. But wiser counsel prevailed, and Paul remained away. The brethren and other friends encouraged him not to go, believing that his presence would have accomplished nothing with people in such an unreasonable state of mind.

TOWN CLERK RESTORES ORDER

The LORD, however, did not neglect the two brethren who were arrested—Gaius and Aristarchus. The town clerk came to their assistance, and with words of wisdom dispersed the mob. This official was not interested in the Gospel of Christ, but he was interested in doing his duty as an officer of the city. He pointed out to the mob that they had become unduly excited; he reassured them that they, and everybody, knew the greatness of Diana—that one Jew or many Jews could not injure her great fame.

He went on to say: "Seeing then that these things cannot be contradicted, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rash. For you have brought these men here who are neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers of our goddess. If therefore Demetrius and the craftsmen with him have a complaint against anyone, the courts are open, and there are proconsuls; let them bring charges against one another. But if you seek anything further, it shall be settled in the regular assembly. For we are in danger of being charged with rioting today, there being no cause that we can give to justify this commotion." (Acts 19:36-40, *RSV*) With this he dismissed the assembly.

Notice the contrast between the people making up the crowd described in this account, compared with the people mentioned in the event just preceding this. (Acts 19:18-20) The first occasion concerned many who realized that they had been working in conjunction with the powers of evil. As a result of the influence of the Gospel message upon their hearts, they brought their books of 'magic' and 'curious arts', piled them in a heap, and burned them. They stopped the practice of the 'black art', refused to use the books of 'magic', and would no longer sell to others lest they should do injury to them. That group was willing to suffer financial loss, and to be thought foolish by their neighbors, rather than to do injury to others.

On the contrary, those of the later lesson were moved to a frenzy and to riotous conduct by their love of money, and their fear of suffering financial loss. Evidently it was not their respect for religion, but their love for filthy lucre which prompted their actions. Here we see the contrast. On the one hand, there were those who caused a riot in order to perpetuate idolatry and sensuality, and to bring money to their own purses. On the other hand, there were those who were ready to sacrifice their earthly interests rather than to do harm—and, in order that they may do the more good. Verily, there is a wonderful power in belief in Jesus, our Redeemer.

It is to be noted that the apostle and his co-laborers were not guilty of the charge of which they were accused—blaspheming the goddess of Ephesus. Here we have a point of importance, and a valuable lesson. The Apostle Peter said, "Let none of you suffer . . . as an evildoer, or as a

busybody in other men's matters." (I Pet. 4:15) It was not necessary for the Apostle Paul to say one unkind word in reference to the goddess Diana. His commission was to preach the good tidings of great joy—not to quarrel with false gods, or their worship. His persecution was, therefore, for doing what was right. There is a lesson here for us, also. It is not necessary for us to do an unkind act, or to say an unkind word to our friends who do not believe as we do. It is not necessary for us to send a tirade against others' systems or doctrines. Our commission is to preach the good news and proclaim the Gospel message. Of course, Paul did not fail to call attention to the fact that Diana was merely the work of men's hands, and not, as claimed, a deity.

GOD'S GRACE ALWAYS AVAILABLE

'My grace is sufficient for thee'. Our Lord's words applied not only to Paul, but to all who are part of the one body, and energized by its one Spirit. Doubtless, Paul's experiences in connection with his 'thorn in the flesh' (II Cor. 12:7) were given to him and recounted in the Scriptures largely for the benefit of all who—from his day until now—have been suffering under peculiar experiences and trials, whose necessity and value are not clearly discerned.

When Paul, blinded by the great light which accompanied his conversion, finally received the LORD's forgiveness and the restoration of his sight in considerable measure, he doubtless bore patiently with the continued weakness of his eyes. He considered it a proper chastisement for his wrong course in persecuting the body of Christ, which is the church. He also thought his service

would be enhanced, if he could have had better sight.

There have been blessed lessons for all the LORD's people throughout the Gospel Age in these experiences of Paul. We, too, have various 'thorns in the flesh', various trials—some of them mental; some physical; others often unknown except to ourselves. What a comfort it has been to many to have the LORD's assurance that, because those trials and difficulties are not removed, they are permitted for wise and loving purposes. These, he assures us, will all work together for our good. Of these he declares, 'My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness'.

Let us take all of our experiences in good faith, realizing the truth of those words—that our weakness, our imperfection, our frailty, so far from working injury to us, under the LORD's supervising care, enables him to supplement our willing endeavors with strength; and this is by his grace. ■

THANKSGIVING DAY

*THANKSGIVING DAY comes once a year
God's blessings every day.
How much of truth and joy to cheer
Us on our Christian way.*

*Here God's goodnews manifold
We cannot rightly count
Much less if faithful, his untold
Illimitable amount!*

—MCM

LET US GIVE THANKS

*"I will offer to Thee the sacrifice of
thanksgiving, and will call upon
the name of the LORD."*

Psalm 116:17

THROUGHOUT THE UNITED STATES on the fourth Thursday of this month, millions of people will—for a few hours—turn away from the regular pursuits of life and, in a nominal way at least, give thanks to God for the blessings of the year. Among these will be many sincere worshipers of God, those who at heart are desirous of doing his will in all that they think, and say, and do. With many, Thanksgiving Day will be one of feasting and merrymaking, and happy indeed will be those who remember that all the blessings of life which they enjoy from day to day come to them from the Giver of "every good and perfect gift" (James 1:17), even the LORD, the Creator of heaven and earth.

It is appropriate at all times to give thanks unto the LORD, and the consecrated followers of the Master do not wait for special occasions to express their appreciation to their Heavenly Father for the spiritual and material blessings which are

daily their portion. The Apostle Paul wrote that we should give thanks in everything, and if we follow this admonition, to us every day will be one of thanksgiving—yes, in every hour of the day there will be much for which our hearts will turn to the LORD in grateful appreciation.

It is also appropriate that we observe special occasions of thanksgiving. At such times we can recall in a more particular sense the many ways in which the LORD has blessed us throughout the year, and recalling these, renew our determination to show our appreciation to the LORD by more zealously paying our vows of consecration to him, rendering unto him, not only with our lips but with our lives as well, the praise that is due his great and holy name, and, again we are glad for any occasion to “give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth forever.”—Ps. 106:1

CAUSES FOR THANKFULNESS

There is never a time in the Christian life when the blessings received from the LORD are not more abundant than we could reasonably ask or expect. If we are not in the habit of noting from day to day the many ways in which our Father manifests his blessings toward us, we will be surprised, when noting them, to realize what God has really done for us. We cannot, of course, count all of our blessings. Should we attempt to do so, we would find, even as did the psalmist, that “they are more than can be numbered.”—Ps. 40:5

Many of the LORD’s blessings are common to all of his people, differing only in the manner in which they apply to their individual experiences in life. Along physical lines there are the blessings of

the sunshine and the rain, and of food, shelter, and raiment. To all of his people the LORD gives spiritual strength and guidance. He fills them with his Spirit in proportion as they are emptied of self, and devote themselves to the doing of his will. How thankful indeed we should all be for the assurance that he is more willing to give his Holy Spirit to those who ask him than is an earthly parent to give good gifts to his children!—Luke 11:13

We can all be thankful for the LORD's grace that through another year has kept us from falling—that we are still rejoicing in the truth and in the privilege we have of laying down our lives in his service. This is a great cause for thankfulness. True, we expected that the LORD would continue to hold us in the hollow of his hand, for we relied upon his grace to help in every time of need. But we recall the Apostle Peter's admonition in which he informs us that it is only if we "do these things" that we can have the assurance that we shall "never fall." (II Pet. 1:10) If, therefore, we have been kept from falling by the wayside, it means that God has been pleased with our efforts to do his will and that it is because of this that he has blessed us with his sustaining grace.

Some of us have been 'in the truth' for many, many years, and how thankful we can be that throughout these years the LORD has become ever more precious to us, and that his truth—the glorious truth of the divine plan—has continued to increase in brilliance as we have learned to understand it better. That we have maintained a clear vision of the great fundamentals of the divine plan is evidence of the LORD's keeping power

in the lives of those who have no will of their own, but are determined that his will only shall rule supreme in their lives, regardless of what that might mean in the way of sacrificing the flesh and its interests.

Others of us have been blessed with a knowledge of the truth within more recent years—some, indeed, within 1996. How we rejoice in this ! It is impossible to give thanks adequately to the LORD for opening the eyes of our understanding in order that we might, through the vision of present truth, behold his glory. This we know, however, that whereas once we were spiritually blind, now we can see. And oh, how glorious the vision that enables us to comprehend the divine plan for the blessing of both the church and the world! May our ‘first love’ for the LORD, and for his truth never grow cold! May our appreciation daily increase, and our thankfulness overflow more and more!

During the year, many of us have been richly blessed through the privilege of fellowship with one another in our local ecclesias and at our convention gatherings. How spiritually stimulating this has been! And if our fellowship has been truly that of the Spirit, it has meant much more than merely rejoicing together in the LORD. Of those who speak “often” together concerning the divine plan, the prophet tells us that the LORD hearkens, that he hears, and that a “book of remembrance was written.” (Mal. 3:16,17) Yes, even where ‘two or three’ join in fellowship, the LORD is in their midst. How we should praise him for the blessing he bestows upon those who gather in his name.

Our Heavenly Father has continued to give his children opportunities to serve him by serving one another, and by bearing witness to the truth. Surely we should always be thankful for our privileges of ambassadorship. Many of these opportunities have been ours as individuals. Individually, we have been able to speak a word for the Master and for the truth, perhaps to a neighbor, or a friend, or to some we have met in our association with co-workers at the office, or others in one way or another. It has been possible to give a tract or a kingdom card here or there. Some have enjoyed the privilege of distributing literature at fair booths, conveying the kingdom message to hundreds and even thousands.

In many places, both in the Old and New Testaments, God's people are exhorted to rejoice and give thanks—or, in other words, experience and express joy, gladness, happiness, serenity of soul. Indeed, joy and gladness derived from the present blessings which the Father provides for his children—blessings for which we should continually give thanks—are part of the present inheritance of the New Creation.

On four occasions we are definitely told that Jesus gave thanks: (1) At the feeding of the multitude (Matt. 15:36); (2) When his testimony was rejected (Matt. 11:25); (3) At the grave of Lazarus (John 11:41); (4) In the face of his own death (Luke 22:17-22). John says, "As he is, so are we in this world." (I John 4:17) We are in a similar position as our LORD, called to have some similar experiences. So may we not draw four parallels here of things in which, if we are living up to our privileges, we may specially give thanks?

First: the message of truth, as a sharp sickle is not only gathering the LORD's people together, but the good news of the coming kingdom is being preached in all the world for a witness. Among the multitudes, many truth-hungry ones are being fed with some of the simple truths of the Word of God, and are rejoicing in the knowledge of the love of God, and the blessings of restitution soon to come to the poor groaning creation. Surely all who have the Master's Spirit can rejoice and give thanks also in this fact—rejoicing with those that do rejoice.—Rom. 12:15

Second: Jesus rejoiced and gave thanks when his testimony was rejected by the wise and learned, but was received by a few humble and sincere ones who were willing to become his disciples. Is not the same thing happening today, and can we not rejoice and give thanks for the infinitely wise and effective method used by the LORD for gathering the church, as well as in the lessons to be taught in the Millennial Judgment Day to the wise and learned, whose self-sufficiency, self-complacency, and self-importance, now prevent them from seeing and accepting the glad tidings?

Third: Jesus rejoiced and gave thanks at the grave of Lazarus in view of the resurrection power he was about to exercise. This surely has its parallel today as we contemplate the power of the Christ soon to be exercised for the awakening from death, and the blessing of all the families of the earth! "They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." (Isa. 35:10) Let us be glad in anticipation of this day of universal rejoicing and giving of thanks.

Fourth: Finally, Jesus could give thanks despite the imminence of his own death. Can we not give thanks, too, in view of the solemn thought that we are called to die with him—that we have been justified through our faith in his ransom sacrifice, in order that we might go into death with him—being planted in the likeness of his death, and drinking of his cup of suffering? What higher privilege could be given to any of God's creatures!

“Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.”
—I Pet. 4:13

When the LORD spoke to Moses at the burning bush, he was bidden to take off his shoes, with the explanation that the place where he was standing was holy ground. Should we not feel the same way concerning the ‘ground’ on which we are standing today—that ‘higher ground’ of opportunity and honor to which the LORD has now led his people? Realizing the sacredness of the position which is now ours of being the LORD's ambassadors, let us give attentive ears to his voice, and respond joyfully as he makes clear the various ways he wants us to lay down our lives for him. Surely we can do no less at this Thanksgiving time of the year, than to echo the sentiments of the psalmist when he wrote: “I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the LORD. I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people.”—Ps. 116:17,18 ■

IVE THANKS unto the LORD, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the people.—I Chronicles 16:8

THAT YE SIN NOT

"My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."

I John 2:1

SIN IS THE transgression of divine law—the thinking, speaking, or doing of things that are contrary to God's will. The daily chief concern of every Christian should be that his thoughts, words, and actions be wholly pleasing to the LORD. There is no middle ground, no stopping halfway on the road to this goal of perfection, feeling that we have done the best we can. The standard is perfection, to which we should ever strive to attain.

When the apostle wrote the words of our theme text, his object was to help every reader of his epistle live without sin. Every Christian has an individual responsibility in controlling himself, and a wonderful privilege also to help others. We are not to be judges of each other, but to "consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works." (Heb. 10:24) John's epistle is a good example of exhortation—"that ye sin not". That is to

say: "My object in writing is to encourage you to greater diligence in the doing of God's will."

We cannot write inspired messages to the church, but we can all keep in mind the privilege we have of encouraging others to greater faithfulness. Our example, both in word and deed, should help fellow Christians, rather than hinder them. We should always be encouraging rather than discouraging. If we are living up to our privileges, every Christian who crosses our pathway will feel like trying just a little harder as a result of the encouragement received from us.

But there is a possibility of discouraging fellow travelers in the narrow way when we mean to encourage them. We cannot make the standard too high, nor can we make the narrow way too narrow, for the LORD has already set the standard of perfection, and determined the narrowness of the way. It would be presumption for any Christian to change what has been divinely decreed. What we can do, and should do, however, is to follow the method of the apostle, by reminding those whom we seek to help that 'if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father'.

This is a good illustration of true spiritual balance! No member of the fallen race can live without sin, although as Christians we should strive to do so. We should strive just as earnestly and untiringly as though we believed we could finally reach that standard of actual perfection in the flesh. We should not only do this ourselves, but should exhort others to do the same. At the same time we are Scripturally warranted in taking comfort from the fact that when we fail we are not cut off from divine favor, but have an advocate with the Father.

The fact that an advocate has been provided, through whom we can approach the throne of heavenly grace, assures us that we will obtain forgiveness. This should not be used as an excuse for not 'keeping the body under' control. It is a wondrous provision of divine grace to encourage us—not to excuse us for lack of diligence. We are not to "continue in sin, that grace may abound." (Rom. 6:1) We are to continue striving against sin, assured that when we unavoidably fail, it will not mean defeat, but that the LORD is judging us upon the basis of our heart intentions, and covering the blemishes of our flesh under the precious blood of Christ. God's grace should encourage us to great efforts to sin not.

KEEPING THE HEART

"Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." (Prov. 4:23) The 'heart' here stands for our real and innermost desires, our affections. Our striving against sin must be from the heart. It is not sufficient that we acknowledge sin by our words, and profess to be struggling against it; that would be merely 'lip service', while secretly we would be in sympathy with that which we profess to condemn.

The LORD is never deceived by a hypocritical attitude of this kind. Those who can judge only from the outward appearance might be deceived; they might consider us to be 'noble characters', but He who looketh upon the heart would know that our righteousness is only an outward sham, a pretense. In our striving against sin, let us make sure that our hearts are pure, that we are really out of sympathy with everything that is contrary to the LORD's will. A good test of our heart condi-

tion is to note our feelings when we come short of the perfect standard. Are we sorry only because we have failed, or is the sin really distasteful to us, because, at heart, we are out of harmony with it?

A child might be sorry for stealing candy because of the punishment involved, but still love the candy. Is the sin against which we strive a sweet morsel which we regretfully give up because we feel we must, or are we at heart so in tune with the divine will that we have come to despise that which the LORD condemns?

For example, God's will is that we love our enemies. Not to love our enemies, therefore, would be sin. If we love our enemies only in the sense that we refrain, with a protest, from doing them injury, while inwardly wishing we could get even with them, it means that our heart condition is wrong. If this be the case, we should seek to purify our hearts, to cleanse therefrom every root of bitterness, that we may be able to love our enemies as God would have us love them.

But heart purification is not possible without the LORD's help. The psalmist realized this, and so he prayed, "Cleanse thou me from secret faults." (Ps. 19:12) However, when we ask the LORD to cleanse us, we are not to sit back, doing nothing about it ourselves, waiting for him to miraculously remove our sins. God has provided the means for heart-cleansing, and we need to use the provisions he has made, if our prayers are to be answered.

God's Word is one of the divine provisions for heart-cleansing. David says, "The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart:

the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.”—Ps. 19:7-9

From this we see the need of diligently studying the Word, not with the motive of learning a lot of things, but to discern the LORD's will, and to be inspired to do it. “Study to shew thyself approved unto God,” Paul exhorted. (II Tim. 2:15) Bible study with any other motive is a waste of time; but to study with this right motive, determined that we will conform to the divine will as it is discerned, is certain to have a cleansing effect in our hearts and lives. Our prayers for heart-cleansing and our study of the Word will work together toward the end desired.

WHOM THE LORD LOVETH

David speaks of the ‘judgments of the LORD’. These judgments seem to be akin to what the apostle speaks of as the “chastening” of the LORD. (Heb. 12:7) These are manifested largely, we believe, in the divine providences which surround the Christian life. We are not to think of these judgments, or chastenings, too much from the standpoint of punishments for doing wrong. They are intended as corrective punishments, disciplinary measures, to help us in our struggle to bring every thought, word, and deed into conformity with the divine will.

The apostle emphasizes that it is “whom the LORD loveth he chasteneth,” and that if we are without ‘chastisements’, we are not true sons. (Heb. 12:6,8) If chastenings were merely for wayward sons, then the apostle would hardly empha-

size the LORD's special love for those whom he chastises. As long as we are in the flesh, and the LORD is dealing with us, we will need all the disciplinary experiences his wisdom sees best to permit. In addition to the power of his Word in the lives of the humble, the LORD surrounds us with his providences. Some of them are sweet, others are bitter, but they are all for our good. If we view them prayerfully, in the light of his Word; they will teach us valuable lessons to help us that we sin not. ■

***"He shall drink of the brook in the way: therefore shall he lift up the head."*—Psalm 110:7**

Let us, as we 'drink of the brook', take a lesson from the little birds, which, when drinking, repeatedly lift the head as though giving thanks to God. Let us continually give thanks to our LORD for every taste of life's experience, for every lesson, for every trial—appropriating them all to our spiritual development. —Z. '02-71

OBITUARIES

The following brethren have recently finished their Christian course. We wish to express our sincere sympathy to the families and friends in the loss of these dear ones. We appreciate information concerning any brethren to be included in this list.

Sister Agnes Rozmus, Highland Glen, Manitoba, Canada—September 16. Age, 91.

Brother James F. Summers, Scotia, NY--September 22. Age, 71.

Sister Iola Griffeth. Los Angeles, CA--July 17. Age, 78.

EUROPEAN PILGRIM TRIP

Sid Jones

OUR ONE-MONTH PILGRIM trip to Germany, France, and England began with a flight to Frankfurt, arriving on May 22. Brethren from Bobenheim-Roxheim met us and put us on a train to Nurnberg. We had meetings nearby in Neunkirchen, where Brother and Sister Burner—the German Dawn representatives—reside, and in Lauf, with 9 brethren present.

The three-day German convention in Korbach began on May 25. Ninety joyful brethren from various parts of Germany were in attendance. About 35 brethren remained after the convention for a question meeting, with many actively participating in the discussion.

Other visits in Germany were in Dortmund and Bobenheim-Roxheim. At Dortmund, several Greek brethren were visiting, and we all traveled to a gathering nearby where 23 friends met together. A diversity of visiting speakers required translations in 5 languages. We enjoyed many blessings in our warm fellowship and earnest discussions on Biblical topics while in Germany.

We made 8 stops in France, visiting about 200 brethren in all, starting in Flaxinden, where 27 were assembled. The next day we went to Bollwiller, with 70 in the meeting. We were able to visit Sister Schoenberg, who translated the English *Dawn* magazine into French for many years, and is now in a nursing home in Mulhouse. We also called on several elderly sisters in Lausanne, then traveled to Yverdon for a meeting with a class of 7 brethren. Near Paris, at Lamorlaye, we met with 20 brethren, before proceeding to Lens where we enjoyed a profitable one-day convention with about 80 in attendance. We also visited in Lievin before leaving France for England. As in all our travels, we had blessed seasons of fellowship, and many interesting discussions with the French brethren.

We left France on the train that runs under the English Channel, and were met by friends of the West Wickham Ecclesia for an evening gathering of 10 brethren. In England we were also able to visit friends in Gainsborough House, Chesham, Hitchin, and Gidea Park—a total of 39 in all—before making a two-day trip to Scotland for a pleasant meeting with a mature, elderly brother. Then we went on to northern England, where we called upon an elderly, isolated sister. Making our way back to the London area, we said our goodbyes to Brother and Sister Binns—the *Dawn* representatives in Great Britain, who had accompanied us for five days on our trip north.

We returned homeward from Heathrow Airport, with fond memories of many faithful brethren and our profitable discussions together on the LORD's Word. ■

"I WISH I KNEW WHAT TO DO!"

HOW OFTEN WE hear this statement made by those who are zealous for making known the glad tidings of the kingdom. May we suggest one thing practically all can do is to send one or more "Dawn" gift subscriptions to their friends. Just think, one gift subscription means that *The Dawn* magazine enters the home twelve times during the year as your messenger of truth. Isn't this something worthwhile doing? Each subscription is only \$3.00, and you can have four names entered for just \$10.00! It is simple to do when you use the coupon(s) below and on the reverse:

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ENCOURAGING LETTERS

REQUEST AFTER FOUR YEARS TIME!

Sirs: May I still get a free booklet, "*Armageddon, then World Peace*"? I found the ad in a 1992 Almanac. Would you believe I had this almanac for four years, and this is the first time I really looked at, or read it. If I had discovered that ad in 1992 I would have ordered the booklet sooner! I hope I can still get it! Yours truly—*MO*

WONDERFUL OUTREACH

"Frank and Ernest": I listen to your program each and every Sunday night on WSM, Nashville, TN. Always enjoy them so very much. It is a wonderful outreach—and is made so easy to understand. You have been such a great source of help to me. God bless you with continued suc-

cess. We all have such a great need for God's Word. May I please have a copy of "*Hope beyond the Grave*"? I have just recently lost a wonderful friend, and I'm sure the book will help me to further accept his going. Your sister in Christ.—*TN*

HOME-SCHOOLERS ENJOYED VIDEO

We home-schoolers used several of your videos for our classes. The children are 11-14 years old. We very much enjoyed, "*The Dream Is Certain*." Thank you again.—*OR*

FOUND LITERATURE IN EMPLOYER'S HOME

My dear Friends: Peace and blessings to you at the beginning of this New Year. During my working hours in a

home of one of your subscribers who is now shut-in I found some 1991, 1992 and 1993 *Dawns*. I have never seen nor heard about *The Dawn*, as I am a foreigner here, but when I read one copy I got so excited over the lessons, especially its 'Golden Thread' series. I read as many as she has, and found real spiritual food, which fed my spirit and improved my knowledge. Congratulations to your entire staff for such a magazine with clarity on the Bible. I just love *The Dawn*. I would like to subscribe to this magazine. Those five-and ten-cent books, are they available? Thank you. I love you! Yours in Christ.—NY

SEARCHED FOR LOST BOOKLET

Dear Sir: Many years ago I sent for one of your publications titled,

"*Why God Permits Evil.*" After reading it, I put it away, like many other booklets I've read. On May 4, my dad passed away and I felt such a great need to re-read that booklet. After searching for days, I finally gave up, thinking it had been thrown out somehow. Today I found it, and had the chance to read it again! It has helped me a great deal. I would like to purchase several of the other booklets offered if they are still available. Please send "*God and Reason*," "*Hope beyond the Grave*," "*Our Lord's Return*," "*When a Man Dies*," "*Armageddon, then World Peace*," and "*How God answers Prayer*." Please let me know if I have sent enough money. Since my dad has passed away, I have many questions about death. I appreciate these booklets very much. Thanks!—PA ■

SPEAKERS' APPOINTMENTS

These speakers 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:

W. Harp	Vinton, OH	6
Wilmington, OH (a.m.) Nov. 5	West Newton, PA	7
Greenfield, OH (p.m.) 5	Buffalo, NY	11

The listings in this schedule have been arranged by local ecclesiastical cooperating with the Dawn:

W. Blicharz	E.F. Lankford
San Diego, CA Nov. 28-Dec. 1	New York, NY November 10
J.B. Brown	F. Nemesh
New York, NY November 10	Grand Rapids, MI November 3
R. Gorecki	L. Wesol
New Haven November 3	St. Petersburg, FL November 10
E. Kuenzli	
Louisville, AL November 10	

CONVENTIONS

These conventions are listed by request of sponsoring classes. So your convention can be listed in time, make your request in writing 3 months before the convention to: Dawn Magazine, 199 Railroad Ave., East Rutherford, NJ 07073.

NEW HAVEN, CT, November 3—Italian-American Club, 85 Chase Lane, West Haven, CT. Contact: Mrs. Richard Suraci, Secretary, 171 Johnson Road, Hamden, CT 06518
Phone: (203) 248-3793

DETROIT, MI, November 17—Redford YWCA, 25940 Grand River, Redford Township, MI. Contact: George Tivador, Secretary, 11202 Lorman, Sterling Heights,

MI 48077
Phone: (810) 978-7444

JERSEY CITY PRE-THANKSGIVING CONVENTION, November 23,24—Masonic Temple, 1912 Morris Ave., Union, NJ. For information or reservations, contact: Mrs. Charlotte Teklinski, 84 Arthur St. Ridgefield Park, NJ 07660
Phone: (201) 440-0925

SAN DIEGO, CA (Thanksgiving Weekend), Novem-

ber 28-December 1—
Radisson Hotel, 1433
Camino del Rio South, San
Diego 92108. For reserva-
tions contact the hotel at
(800) 333-3333 or (619) 260-
0111, or by mail. Mention
Bible Students to receive
special rates *until November*
12th. Meal count needed by
Sandra Bierman, 624 Alta
Mira Ct., Vista, CA 92083 by

October 31st.

Phone: (619) 230-1717

**PHOENIX, AZ, NEW
YEAR'S CONVENTION,
December 27-30—**Wynd-
ham Garden Hotel, 427 N.
44th St. For information,
contact: Mrs. Esther
Bachorski, 13223 Palmwood
Dr., Sun City West, AZ
85375
Phone: (602) 546-0430

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10—Not of This World
17—God So Loved the World
24—Gospel of the Kingdom

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