

The DAWN

VOLUME NO. LXXXIII, Number 8
(USPS 149-380), August 2015

TABLE OF CONTENTS

First-class postage paid at Rutherford, NJ. Published monthly by The Dawn Bible Students Association, 199 Railroad Avenue, East Rutherford, NJ 07073. \$12.00 a year.

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SPAIN/ITALY: El Alba/Aurora, Associazione Studenti Biblici, Via Ferrara 42, 59100 Prato—Italia

HIGHLIGHTS OF DAWN

The Acts of the Apostles 2

INTERNATIONAL BIBLE STUDIES

Our Redeemer Comes 16

A Choice to Be Just 18

A Call for Repentance 20

God Demands Justice 22

Return to a Just God 24

CHRISTIAN LIFE AND DOCTRINE

Parables of Jesus—Part 8

The Parable of the Penny 26

John the Baptist

Forerunner of Jesus 37

Suffering and God's Comfort 49

Weekly Prayer Meeting Texts 15

OBITUARIES 36

SPEAKERS' APPOINTMENTS 62

CONVENTIONS 63

The Acts of the Apostles

“The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: . . . And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.”
—Acts 4:32,33

ALL WHO SINCERELY SEEK to understand God’s great plan for man’s salvation and ultimate blessing should also have a yearning to know more about the Holy Scriptures. It is in the inspired Word of God that we find the keys to our appreciation of the Creator’s loving purposes for his human family. With this in view, it is appropriate that we present

from time to time in the pages of *The Dawn* an overview of various books of the Bible, such as we will herein consider.

The full name of the fifth book in the New Testament is, “The Acts of the Apostles,” although it is usually referred to simply as “The Book of Acts,” or “Acts.” As its name implies, it is, for the most part, a chronicle of activities in which the apostles of Christ played an active part. Like the four gospels, Acts is largely historical in character, but interwoven

with its record of events in the Early Church are some of the most important doctrinal and devotional lessons to be found anywhere in the Bible.

This book was written by Luke, and opens with these words, “The former treatise [The Gospel of Luke] . . . of all that Jesus began both to do and teach, Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Spirit had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen.” (Acts 1:1,2) The first chapter of Acts is a transition from the life of Christ to the era of the apostles, for it records Jesus’ last appearance to them, and his commission for the service they were to render in his name after he left them.—vss. 4-11

Verse eight of the first chapter records a promise given by the resurrected Jesus. He stated that the Holy Spirit would soon come upon the apostles, and that in the power, and by the authority, of the Spirit they were to be his “witnesses . . . in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

The second chapter records the fulfillment of the promise Jesus made to send the Holy Spirit. In the *King James Version*, the expression “Holy Ghost” is often used. This is a mistranslation. It was designed by the translators to give the impression that the Holy Spirit is a person, but this is contrary to the teachings of the Bible. The Holy Spirit is simply the holy power, or influence, of God, sent forth to accomplish whatever his purposes may be.

It came upon the waiting disciples at Jerusalem in a miraculous manner, to establish their faith and confidence in Jesus as the Messiah. He had left them, and even though they had been convinced of

his resurrection from the dead, they would have been in a difficult position to represent him without this definite evidence of his return to the heavenly courts. Thus, in fulfillment of his promise, he sent the Holy Spirit to rest upon them.

This wonderful experience occurred “when the day of Pentecost was fully come.” (Acts 2:1) Pentecost was one of the special feast and assembly days of the Jews, and many thousands of them visited Jerusalem each year for the occasion. This meant that there were Israelites in the city at the time from many countries, speaking the language of the country in which they lived.

This afforded a wonderful opportunity for the Lord to demonstrate that his favor was upon the disciples, by miraculously empowering them to speak to their kinsmen from the various countries in their own native tongues. Thus one of the manifestations of the Holy Spirit at that time was the ability to “speak with tongues”—that is, other languages. (vss. 4-8) It was a very practical demonstration of divine power, and accomplished God’s design to give all the scattered natural descendants of Abraham who were gathered there a witness concerning the Messiahship of Jesus.

The enemies of Jesus were now opposed to his followers, and charged that they were intoxicated. The Apostle Peter quickly and energetically refuted this charge, and in one of the most eloquent sermons ever preached, he explained to his hearers the true significance of what was taking place. He established the fact of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, and showed it to be in fulfillment of Psalm 16:10, where Jesus is prophetically represented as saying to his

God, “Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.”—
Acts 2:27

The account states that the people were “pricked in their heart” by Peter’s sermon, especially by the forthright manner in which he charged the nation with the crucifixion of Jesus. They asked what they could do under the circumstances, and he called upon them to “Repent, and be baptized . . . in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” (vss. 36-38) Three thousand responded to Peter’s message that day, and were baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.—
vs. 41

“TIMES OF RESTITUTION”

The third chapter records another marvelous sermon by Peter, preached a short time after Pentecost. The setting was quite different from that in which he delivered his Pentecostal sermon. Together with John, Peter had gone to the Temple at the hour of prayer. At the gate of the Temple called “Beautiful,” he saw a man who was unable to walk from the time of his birth. In the name of Jesus, Peter healed the man, enabling him to walk, even to the point of “leaping.”—Acts 3:1-8

The crowd was curious, and Peter took advantage of the occasion to explain to them that this miracle had been performed in the name of, and by the power of, the resurrected Christ, the one whom they had crucified. Then he added, “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence [face] of the Lord; And he shall send

Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.”—Acts 3:19-21

The lesson is plain, based upon the miracle of healing the man who had been unable to walk. Peter is saying, in effect, that following the Second Coming of Christ, miracles of this sort will become universal, that there are to be times of “restitution,” or restoration, of all things. Then he adds that this glorious Gospel, or good news, had been spoken by the mouth of all God’s holy prophets.

Thus we have one of the key texts which helps to unlock the meaning of the entire Word of God. As we examine the various books of the Bible, in particular the prophecies of the Old Testament, this theme of redemption and restoration is repeated again and again. Now Peter confirms what has been said, for in this outstanding sermon he tells us that the “times of restitution” was the theme of all God’s holy prophets. Indeed, all the other writings of the New Testament also reaffirm and corroborate this fundamental teaching of God’s plan.

PERSECUTIONS AND TESTS

Jesus had said to his disciples before his death, “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33) The apostles and others in the Early Church experienced this persecution. Unbelieving Jews and Gentiles alike were unfriendly to them through intimidation, and by imprisonment endeavored to hinder and, if possible, to destroy their work. One

example of this is recorded in the fourth chapter of Acts, verses 1-31. Such persecution was to become commonplace among the followers of the Master.

Severe tests also began to come upon the Early Church. Most people have heard about Ananias and Sapphira, his wife, who “lied . . . unto God.” Acts 5:1-11 records the circumstances in which their falsehood was detected by the Apostle Peter, and they were instantly put to death. Much soberness of mind and self-examination came to bear upon all the followers of Christ as they heard of these things.

Chapters six and seven present the account of Stephen, the first Christian martyr. In particular, we note the powerful discourse which he delivered before the Jewish Sanhedrin when called upon to defend himself against the accusations of his Jewish enemies. Saul of Tarsus was then a member of the Sanhedrin, and consented to the death of Stephen. He even assisted in the slaying by guarding the clothing of those who stoned this young deacon to death.

CONVERSION OF SAUL

Saul of Tarsus was later converted to Christianity. In chapter nine, verses one and two, we are informed that Saul, “yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.”

Provided with this authority, Saul was on his way to Damascus when “suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the

earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Upon inquiry as to who it was that thus addressed him, Saul heard the explanation, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest."—Acts 9:3-5

Saul was quick to discern that by persecuting the disciples of Christ he was in reality opposing God, for this experience revealed to him the fact that Jesus was the promised Messiah. In answer to his question, "What wilt thou have me to do?" Saul was instructed to go to a certain home in Damascus and there he would receive his instructions.—vs. 6

From being a bitter enemy of the Early Church, Saul, who was known afterward as Paul, became an enthusiastic follower of the Master. He devoted his life to the service of the Lord and the Gospel of Christ. By divine appointment he became one of the leading apostles, his efforts being particularly toward the Gentiles. After his conversion, Jesus said of him, "he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake."—vss. 15,16

MISSIONARY JOURNEYS OF PAUL

From chapter thirteen through the end of the Book of Acts, with the sole exception of chapter fifteen, we have related the many interesting, and oftentimes trying, experiences of Paul as he traveled from place to place in the ministry of the Gospel. He was persecuted in many cruel ways. One of his journeys had Jerusalem as its destination, and he was informed by God, through the Holy Spirit, that

bonds and imprisonment awaited him there. Because of this, the brethren endeavored to dissuade him from exposing himself to this danger. Paul's wonderful spirit of devotion to his Lord is displayed in his reply, "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." (Acts 21:13) Later, he traveled to Rome where he again faced imprisonment, and eventually death, at the hands of the Roman Emperor Nero.

On one of his missionary journeys Paul visited Athens, and was taken by the learned men and philosophers to the Areopagus, the "Supreme Court" of Athens on Mars' Hill. He had been accused of introducing a new god. Taking a position on the side of the hill, a massive heathen temple towering over his head, Paul began his defense by commenting on the numerous idols, ascribed to various gods, which filled the valley below him. In this setting, he called his hearers' attention to one of their idols, which bore the inscription, "TO THE UNKNOWN GOD," and said, "Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you."—Acts 17:18-23

Continuing, Paul said, "God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands [a statement prompted by the imposing heathen temple on the hilltop above him]; Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That

they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us. For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device."—Acts 17:24-29

Then, referring to the Athenians' lack of knowledge of the true God, Paul commented that in past times "this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead."—vss. 30,31

It is noteworthy that Paul uses the word "assurance" in his reference to the coming day of judgment. This indicates that the "Judgment Day" of the Scriptures is to be a blessing to mankind. If it were to be doomsday, it would not have been a cause for rejoicing if Paul had given an assurance that such a terrible time would come. When we examine the great plan of God set forth in the Bible, we find that his Judgment Day is to be a thousand years in length, and will be a time in which all mankind will be given a true knowledge of God and of his laws, and have an opportunity to obey them and live.

JEWS AND GENTILES

In the Book of Acts we are also informed of the difficult situation that arose in the Early Church

when Gentiles began to accept Christ and join the Jewish believers. When Jesus first sent his disciples into the ministry, he instructed them not to go to the Gentiles. (Matt. 10:5) Just before his ascension, however, he rescinded this restriction by telling them that they were to go into all the world. (Acts 1:8) The apostles, especially Peter, found it difficult to become reconciled to this broader outlook.

Cornelius was the first Gentile convert. The Lord granted a special privilege of grace, manifested in a vision to Cornelius, and one also to Peter. The purpose of these visions was to bring the two together so that the apostle could present the Gospel message to this devout Gentile. This information is recorded in Acts, chapters ten and eleven, and is one of the most interesting accounts related in the Bible.

In Cornelius' vision, the Lord instructed him to send men to call for Peter, who was in Joppa at the home of "Simon a tanner." The next day, as Peter was praying on the rooftop of Simon's home, he "fell into a trance." His "trance" was in reality a vision from the Lord, in which he saw a "sheet," knitted in the form of a basket, let down from heaven, filled with all sorts of "fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air." He was bidden to "rise, kill, and eat."—Acts 10:1-13

Peter recognized these animals and the fowls as being, according to the Jewish Law, unclean, so he refused to eat. Then the Lord said to him, "What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common." (vss. 14,15) Later, led by a further providence of the Lord, Peter was brought into the house of the

Gentile, Cornelius, and he and his household accepted Christ. Then Peter realized that in his vision God had been saying to him that the time had come when Gentiles, formerly considered outside the scope of God's favor, were now to be accepted. Commenting on his impressions, Peter said, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him."—Acts 10:34,35

This wonderful experience did not entirely settle the issue for the Early Church. Later, a conference of brethren was held in Jerusalem at which the principal topic for discussion was the matter of Gentile believers, and how best to integrate them into local groups, which were at the time predominately Jewish. Peter was at that conference, and testified concerning his experience in connection with the conversion of Cornelius. Paul also was there and testified of the many Gentile conversions he had witnessed.—Acts 15:1-12

James, who apparently was the chairman of the conference, summed up the findings as follows: "Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon [that is, Peter] hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles [a reference to Peter's testimony concerning Cornelius], to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the

Lord, who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.”—vss. 13-18

This is a very enlightening presentation of the proper order of God’s plan. The “tabernacle of David” is the ruling house of David. It had been overthrown more than six centuries earlier. The disciples believed that it was to be restored by Christ, but up to this time they did not have a clear idea of when this would be accomplished. The last time Jesus was with them they asked him, “Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” Jesus replied, “It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.”—Acts 1:6,7

The outlook of the apostles was now broadening, however, and in this conference James discerned that the tabernacle of David would not be rebuilt until after “a people for his name” had been gathered out from among the Gentiles. The expression, “people for his name,” identifies these called ones as members of the God’s divine family. At first, this “high calling” was confined to the Jews, but now it was extended to the Gentiles.—Phil. 3:14; Rom. 9:23,24

When this work of selecting from the world those who are to be joint-heirs with Jesus is completed, then will come the rebuilding of the tabernacle, or house, of David in the hands of Christ and his “bride,” God’s heavenly family. Then, as James further declares, “the residue of men”—all Gentiles and Jews—will be given an opportunity to receive the blessings of the thousand-year Messianic kingdom, the same period as the aforementioned “Judgment Day.”

NO DENOMINATIONS

Since the Book of Acts records the establishment of the Early Church, beginning with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and under the guidance of the inspired apostles, it is interesting to note what did not take place. For example, there was no building of costly edifices in which to conduct religious services. There is nothing to indicate that a single meetinghouse was built under the direction of the apostles.

Several references are made to congregations of brethren which met in the home of one or another of the believers. Doubtless some of these groups, such as the one at Jerusalem, were too large to meet in homes, and no doubt assembly rooms of various types were used. So far as the records indicate, those early believers did not deem it necessary to build meetinghouses.

Another interesting fact is that there is no evidence of denominational names having been used. We are informed believers were first called “Christians” at Antioch. (Acts 11:26) This name is only used twice in the Book of Acts, and once later in a letter written by Peter. (Acts 26:28; I Pet. 4:16) The single word “church”—Greek, *ecclesia*—is almost the only name attached to the believers, who are referred to as the church of God, the church of Christ, the church at Jerusalem, at Ephesus, at Rome, in the home of Aquilla, and other similar references.

What strange departures from this simplicity have developed among Christian believers since those early days! Would it not be wise for all those who are seeking the “old paths” to return to those

simple ways and customs? (Jer. 6:16) We believe that rich spiritual blessings await those who are courageous enough to do this.

Much more could be written on these pages with regard to the Acts of the Apostles, and we have only touched briefly on a few highlights. We encourage our readers to look more fully into this vitally important account of the establishment of the Early Church. You will receive a rich blessing, as you consider this wonderful portion of God's Holy Word. May we all have the same sentiments as the psalmist, who said, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."—Ps. 119:105 ■

*Blessed Bible, precious Word!
Boon most sacred from the Lord;
Glory to his name be giv'n
For this choicest gift from heav'n.
'Tis a ray of purest light,
Beaming through the depths of night;
Brighter than ten thousand gems
Of the costliest diadems.*

—*Hymns of Dawn*

WEEKLY PRAYER MEETING TEXTS

AUGUST 6—"Resist the Devil, and he will flee from you."—James 4:7 (Z. '00-30 Hymn 149)

AUGUST 13—"We are ambassadors for Christ."—II Corinthians 5:20 (Z.'04-72 Hymn 118)

AUGUST 20—"Whom therefore, ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you."—Acts 17:23 (Z. '03-29 Hymn 116)

AUGUST 27—"Henceforth know we no man after the flesh."—II Corinthians 5:16 (Z. '03-170 Hymn 165)

Our Redeemer Comes

Key Verse: *“The Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the LORD.”*
—Isaiah 59:20

Selected Scripture:
Isaiah 59:15-21

DURING OLD TESTAMENT times, the Scriptures reveal that the nation of Israel was especially favored to receive God’s blessings based upon obedience to his laws. In view of her misconduct and failure to reverence the Heavenly Father, Israel was punished severely, being afflicted by her enemies several times until God raised up judges to deliver her from these adversaries. She later experienced subjection to Gentile dominion beginning with Babylon for several centuries.

Finally, the Jewish people were dispersed into foreign lands when Jerusalem was besieged and their Temple destroyed in the first century A.D. God, through the Prophet Amos, had said, “Hear this word that the LORD hath spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying, You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.”—Amos 3:1,2

The Book of Isaiah contains many prophecies detailing God’s judgments upon Israel, but additionally it foretells her repentance and restoration during the future kingdom under the dominion of Jesus Christ, her Messiah. During Isaiah’s ministry, he confessed Israel’s sins as though they were his own, acknowledging the

people's injustice, unrighteousness, blindness, rebellion, and persistent lying. (Isa. 59:9-15) It is well to note that because of sin, that which is true of Israel also applies to the entire human race.—Rom. 3:23

From the divine perspective, there was no sinner on earth who could intercede on Israel's behalf to ransom that nation. Nevertheless, our merciful Heavenly Father provided the means whereby Israel and all of fallen humanity could be recovered from depravity and death. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."—John 3:16

With reference to the mechanism whereby sin and injustice will be removed, the "arm" of God, in the person of Christ Jesus, is pictured as a warrior who will wear "righteousness as a breastplate," a "helmet of salvation," and "garments of vengeance" to eradicate evil prior to the kingdom of blessings and peace during Messiah's reign. Although Israel as a whole rejected Christ during his earthly ministry and has been persecuted by Gentile enemies since that time, the Scriptures give assurance that they will be delivered from peril as a result of repentance and acknowledgement of Christ Jesus as their Savior and Redeemer.—Isa. 59:16-19

Our Key Verse affirms Israel's restoration to God's favor when the New Covenant is in operation and God's Spirit is poured out upon all flesh. Associated with Christ in this work of blessing Israel and other willing and obedient members of the human family will be the church, who will reign with the Lord in establishing a government of righteousness.

What a blessed privilege it is for us as footstep followers of the Master to realize that faithfulness to God during our present Christian sojourn will enable us to participate in this wonderful program of eradicating the evil that has plagued mankind since Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden. ■

A Choice to Be Just

Key Verse: *“Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place.”*
—*Jeremiah 7:3*

Selected Scripture:
Jeremiah 7:1-15

(Jer. 7:1,2) In the words of our Key Verse, the prophet declared that God would not bring the promised judgment if Judah would repent in words and deeds.

“Trust ye not in lying words, saying, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, The temple of the LORD, are these. For if ye thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if ye thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbour,” continued Jeremiah, “Then will I cause you to dwell in this place . . . for ever and ever.”—vss. 4,5,7

The depth of Judah’s unrighteous conduct included mistreatment of the weak and defenseless members of society, acts of murder, idolatrous worship, and committing adultery. Even though these deplorable practices were rampant throughout the nation, God was willing to extend mercy because of his great love, if the people had demonstrated a spirit of genuine repentance.

ALTHOUGH GOD HAS MANY attributes, justice is a foundation principle upon which he deals with all intelligent beings. The Scriptures testify concerning the Heavenly Father that “justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne.”—Ps. 89:14

Prior to the fall of Judah to Babylon, Jeremiah was commissioned by the Lord to deliver a message to the people of Jerusalem at the gate of the Temple.

Unfortunately, the Jews ignored God's message to them through Jeremiah. They instead hearkened to false prophets, who encouraged them to believe that engaging in the various abominable rituals and obligations associated with worship at the Temple would give them immunity from the foretold punishment for their wickedness.—vss. 6-11

Prior to the erection of the Temple at Jerusalem during the reign of Solomon, the center of religious worship was at Shiloh, where the Tabernacle of Meeting and the altar of God remained for many years. Nevertheless, because of Israel's iniquity, Shiloh was destroyed even though the Ark of the Covenant had resided at that location. (Ps. 78:58-60) The lesson of Shiloh, therefore, was given by the Prophet Jeremiah as an example of how God would bring a similar judgment against the people of Judah in Jerusalem, because the people ignored the Word of God which exhorted them to repent of their evil ways.—Jer. 7:12-15

After Jeremiah concluded speaking the words of the Lord at the Temple gates, God informed him not to pray for the people who continued in their abominable, idolatrous worship and refusal to receive correction. Their obstinacy would result in a terrible slaughter, and ultimately the land would be left desolate.—vss. 16-34

Since the time that Israel was conquered by Babylon, well before Christ's First Advent when he offered himself to the Jews as their King, they have continuously been under the domination of foreign powers, until the middle of the twentieth century. Even today, after being reestablished in their own land as a sovereign people, the countries that surround them are generally hostile opponents, desirous of destroying them.

We are thankful, however, that under the provisions of the New Covenant, Israel will finally be at peace. With God's law inscribed in the hearts of the Jewish people, they shall fully return to divine favor, walk in God's ways and experience lasting blessings.—Jer. 31:31-34 ■

A Call for Repentance

Key Verse:
“Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, saith the Lord GOD. Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. Cast away from you all your transgressions, whereby ye have transgressed; and make you a new heart and a new spirit: for why will ye die, O house of Israel?”
—Ezekiel 18:30,31

Selected Scripture:
Ezekiel 18:1-13,30-32

their sins on the failure of their ancestors. The Heavenly Father refuted this logic. Through Ezekiel he

UNLIKE JEREMIAH, WHO prophesied in Judah and foretold its destruction before he was taken captive into Egypt, Ezekiel received his prophetic commission while in Babylon and warned the house of Israel concerning the consequences of their unfaithfulness to God.—Jer. 43:1-8; Ezek. 1:1-3

Ezekiel prophesied, “The word of the LORD came unto me again, saying, What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge? As I live, saith the Lord GOD, ye shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.”—Ezek. 18:1-4

The people of Judah blamed

indicated individuals are held responsible for their own sins.

In today's lesson, several examples are given concerning principles of divine judgment as they pertain to a man who does what is lawful and right, the wicked son of a righteous man, the righteous son of a wicked father, a wicked man who repents, and a righteous man who forsakes his righteousness and commits iniquity.—vss. 5-24

Our Key Verses affirm that God desires repentance from sinners, and has no pleasure in the death of any individual, although those who prove incorrigible will surely be destroyed. In viewing this study from the broadest standpoint, because of Adam's sin, there is none righteous. Were it not for the fact that Christ gave his perfect humanity to purchase mankind, no individual would be able to meet the Heavenly Father's requirements to attain everlasting life.

During this Gospel Age, those who have repented from sin and are diligently striving to walk in the footsteps of our Lord are counted by God as having been justified. If faithful in carrying out their vows of consecration, they will receive a heavenly reward and assist the Master during the coming kingdom in restoring mankind back to the state of perfection that Adam and Eve enjoyed before they were disobedient.

Additionally, a future application of the principle that "the soul that sinneth, it shall die," will occur when Satan is bound and humanity will have the opportunity to attain perfection and through obedience live forever. At that time, all will be accountable for their deeds because they will be fully enlightened as to the Heavenly Father's standards.

How thankful all humanity will be when they are raised from the tomb and will be given an opportunity to forever be in harmony with God and to receive his favor eternally.—John 5:28,29; Rev. 21:1-4 ■

God Demands Justice

Key Verse: *“Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and shew mercy and compassions every man to his brother: And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart.”*
—*Zechariah 7:9,10*

Selected Scripture:
Zechariah 7:8-14

me, saying, Speak unto all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, When ye fasted and mourned in the fifth and seventh month, even those seventy years, did ye at all fast unto me, even to me? And when ye did eat, and when ye did drink, did not ye eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves? Should ye not hear the words which the LORD hath cried by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity, and the cities thereof round about her, when men inhabited

THE LAW GIVEN TO MOSES

commanded a fast on Israel’s Day of Atonement. (Lev. 16:29-34) While in Babylonian captivity, however, the Jewish people instituted additional fasts in remembrance of various events associated with their tragic defeat at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar. (II Kings 25:2-10) In today’s lesson, once the exiles were back in their homeland, a delegation was sent to priests and prophets to inquire as to the propriety of continuing these fasts.—Zech. 7:1-3

The Heavenly Father through his servant Zechariah responded to this query. “Then came the word of the LORD of hosts unto

the south and the plain?”—vss. 4-7

The foregoing rebuke indicates that the mourning associated with their fasts was not for the Lord, but rather for themselves. Prior to the destruction of Jerusalem, their former righteous prophets had warned them that the Heavenly Father desires sincerity and obedience rather than rituals and lip service.

Our Key Verses emphasize God’s required standard of conduct from his people, including the manifestation of justice, mercy, and compassion towards others. Not only was this true of Judah in the past, but these same qualities would be expected to be manifested by all who love righteousness today and in the future.

Despite the clarity of God’s response, Israel refused to heed this counsel. They evidently did not recognize that God’s wrath upon them, including their dispersion and the desolation of the land, resulted from their obstinacy of heart. “It is come to pass, that as he cried, and they would not hear; so they cried, and I would not hear, saith the LORD of hosts.”—vss. 11-14

The future of Israel promises their restoration to God’s favor, as exiles would be regathered to their homeland. (chap. 8:1-17) Although these promises had a partial application in Zechariah’s time, their complete fulfilment awaits the glorious Kingdom of God, when all sin, sorrow, and unrighteousness will be a thing of the past throughout the earth. “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing.”—Isa. 35:5,6

There are still many present difficulties for Israel as well as others of the human family who desire the blessings of peace and righteousness. However, we are assured as to the conditions which will exist in the future, since Christ taught his disciples to pray, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth.” (Luke 11:2) What a time of blessing that will be for all mankind! ■

Return to a Just God

Key Verse:
“Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.”
—*Matthew 7:12*

Selected Scriptures:
Malachi 3:1-10;
Matthew 7:12

Jehovah’s mouthpiece, Malachi also foretold future aspects of God’s plan. “Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the LORD of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner’s fire, and like fullers’ soap: And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.”—Mal. 3:1-3

The foregoing words had an early and partial fulfillment

MUCH OF WHAT THE Prophet Malachi records is a delineation of Israel’s continued wickedness following a return from Babylonian captivity. The priests in particular failed to reverence God by making blemished offerings and were warned to repent. Additionally, they neglected divine ordinances, divorcing their wives as they aged, and then marrying younger heathen women.—chaps. 1,2

In addition to reproving Israel for her waywardness as

in the ministry of John the Baptist, who exhorted the Jews to repent and prepare to receive Christ as their Messiah at his First Advent. The broader application of this prophecy pertains to the work of the Gospel Age footstep followers of Jesus. Their commission has been to preach among all nations the good tidings relative to the presence of Christ, who will reign over the entire human family in power and glory. This will result in a period of righteous judgment being executed.—Acts 17:31

The Scriptures have much to say regarding justice and judgment. As believers who are rightly exercised by the Holy Spirit and the principles of righteousness, we are not to be undiscerning Christians concerning the conduct of others. Consecrated believers have the responsibility for judging serious sins and taking appropriate action. (I Cor. 5:9-13) On the other hand, Jesus cautioned against the tendency to see a small fault in others, while hypocritically ignoring our own deficiencies which may be of much greater magnitude.—Matt. 7:1-6

Our Key Verse sets forth a minimal standard of justice by treating others in the same manner that we would desire for ourselves. How sad it is that in this present evil world, even this basic measure of respect for one's fellow man has been lost sight of to a considerable extent.

Those who are devoted to God and followers of Christ, however, will go beyond the "Golden Rule" and imitate our Lord's standard of discipleship as it pertains to love. This would mean that we should be in such harmony with the divine plan for man's salvation that we will desire to spend our time, talents, and energies in encouraging our brethren in their spiritual endeavors, while at the same time, as opportunity presents itself, proclaiming God's kingdom as the panacea for all evil and unrighteousness. May we all exhibit this spirit in sincerity and truth.—John 13:34,35; Gal.6:10 ■

The Parable of the Penny

“The kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.”

—*Matthew 20:1,2*

“standing idle,” and he said to them, “Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you.” They agreed, and went to labor in the vineyard.—vss. 3,4

At the sixth and ninth hours the householder similarly hired additional workers. At the eleventh hour he found still others who were idle, and said to them, “Go ye also into the vineyard.” (vss. 5-7)

IN THE PARABLE OF THE penny, recorded in Matthew 20:1-16, Jesus tells us of a householder who left his home early in the morning to hire laborers to work in his vineyard. As indicated in our opening scripture, he agreed with these to pay them a penny [Greek, *Denarius*] for a day’s work. Three hours later, while at the market-place, the householder saw other potential laborers

Here the *King James Version* adds, “And whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive,” as in the case of those hired at the third hour. However, this phrase is omitted in most other translations with respect to the eleventh-hour workers. At the close of the day, all the laborers received the same pay, which was the penny agreed upon by the householder when he hired the first workers in the morning.—vss. 8-10

In the parable, these “first” ones to be hired are said to complain because they did not receive more than those who worked fewer hours. (vss. 10-12) The householder’s reply to this complaint is in the form of a simple question: “Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?” (vs. 15) An important prerogative of our Heavenly Father is thus set forth, upon which the Apostle Paul enlarged.

Paul said, “It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy. . . . Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?” (Rom. 9:16-21) A more understandable rendering of verse 21 is found in the *Contemporary English Version*, which reads, “Doesn’t a potter have the right to make a fancy bowl and a plain bowl out of the same lump of clay?”

It would seem that one of the important lessons of the parable of the penny is that none of God’s

servants has the right to criticize him for the manner in which he bestows his benefactions. Certainly any “wages” he may pay are actually unearned, hence manifestations of divine grace. Paul wrote, “By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.”—Eph. 2:8

THE SETTING

The setting of the “penny” parable throws much light on its purpose and meaning. In the previous chapter of Matthew’s gospel, it is recorded that a young man had approached Jesus and asked him what he could do to inherit eternal life. Jesus’ ultimate answer to this man was, “Go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.”—Matt. 19:16-21; Luke 18:18-22

The account states that “when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.” (Matt. 19:22) Puzzled by this, the disciples asked, “Who then can be saved?” Jesus replied, “With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible.” (vss. 25,26) Then Peter, evidently having in mind the invitation to the young man to give up all his possessions and follow Jesus, brashly said, “Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?”—vs. 27

Jesus’ reply to Peter’s question was: “Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children,

or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life. But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first."—vss. 28-30

The Master's answer to Peter is his introduction to the parable of the penny. This fact is obscured somewhat by the chapter division made by the translators. However, this is overcome to some extent in some translations by the placement of a paragraph sign at the beginning of verse 27, in chapter 19, and indicating the continuance of the same subject through verse 16 in chapter 20.

This continuance of the lesson from chapter 19 to chapter 20 of Matthew is indicated by Jesus' opening words to the parable—"For the kingdom of heaven is like unto. . . ." Also, at the close of the parable, Jesus makes this statement: "So the last shall be first, and the first last." (Matt. 20:16) These words repeat what he had said at the end of chapter 19. In other words, Jesus, at the end of the parable, is simply noting that the parable is the explanation of how "the first shall be last" and "the last shall be first," as stated in verse 30 of the preceding chapter.

Prior to Pentecost, before the apostles received the Holy Spirit and were able to discern the true meaning of the promises pertaining to their heavenly inheritance, they displayed some anxiety over what their reward for following the Master would really turn out to be. In a vague sort of way they believed that they would share in the honors of his kingdom, but with this they were not entirely satisfied. Some wanted to be greatest in the kingdom. James and John wanted to sit, one on the right

hand and the other on the left hand of Jesus in the kingdom.

Now circumstances had again reminded them of what they might expect to receive, hence the question, "What shall we have therefore?" Jesus had explained to the young rich man that if he would give up all that he had and become his follower, he would have treasures in heaven. It is doubtful if the apostles at that time understood what this meant. They did not expect a heavenly reward. They expected to be co-rulers with Jesus in an earthly kingdom centered in Jerusalem, but now he had mentioned treasures in heaven. What did he mean?

This question was of vital concern to them because they had done exactly what Jesus suggested to the rich young ruler—they had given up all they had, and had become his followers. If this rich man could buy treasures in heaven with his riches, to what would they be entitled for the giving up of their all, which was doubtless much less?

In addition, the apostles had been following Jesus for some time—from nearly the beginning of his ministry. Would any consideration be given to this? There is no evidence that they were complaining, but they surely were concerned—indeed, overly concerned—as to what they would receive in return for giving up all that they had. This, of course, is understandable, because they were still natural men, and had not yet received the begetting of God's Holy Spirit.

THE BOUNTIFUL REWARD

Jesus had reassured his disciples in a marvelous manner that, if faithful in following him, they

would receive a far greater reward than anything to which they were entitled. In the time of the “regeneration”—the Messianic Age of restitution—when he would sit on the “throne of his glory,” they also would be enthroned, to share with him in the work of judging Israel and the whole world of mankind. In addition to this, they were to inherit eternal life—immortality—as was later revealed to them.

There is no real comparison between this “prize of the high calling” and the few earthly possessions that Jesus’ followers gave up to be his disciples. There is also no real comparison between the eternal years of joy with the Lord on the other side of the veil, and the few short years of imperfect service amid trial and suffering which the followers of Christ render now. The disciples, however, had not yet grasped this larger viewpoint of their relationship to the Master.

When the apostles were arguing over which one of them would be greatest in the kingdom, Jesus gave them a lesson in humility by calling attention to the humbleness of a child and stated that they should be as a little child. (Matt. 18:1-3; Mark 9:35,36) So now, seeing that they were too concerned over how much they would receive in return for following him, he related the parable of the penny to help them see that all his faithful followers would receive a just and bountiful reward, greater than anything of which they were worthy.

Of even greater importance then, and throughout the age, is the need to have full confidence in Jesus and in his Heavenly Father. With that should come the recognition that they have the right to reward their servants in any way they desire, and that

whatever rewards they mete out are unmerited. This has been an important lesson for all of the Lord's people. It is by grace that we attain unto the "great salvation," and not by any meritorious works of our own.—Heb. 2:3

That the amount of work done by the followers of the Master has no specific bearing on the reward received, is emphasized in the parable by the statement that the first became last and the last became first. This is simply an exchange of positions. The initial workers hired put in more hours, but then the "last" ones employed were paid the same as the "first." Similarly, the original "first" ones were paid the same as "last." All the laborers received the "penny," emphasizing that the number of hours worked did not enter into the amount of wages paid.

Jesus taught that "wonderful works" would not earn his favor. He stated, "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name have done wonderful works?" Jesus explained that he would say to these, "I never knew you."—Matt. 7:22,23

This does not mean that the Lord's people are not expected to sacrifice and serve. Those in the parable were hired to work. However, it is the matter of faithfulness in service that is important. This is indicated by the statement at the end of the parable, "Many be called, but few chosen." (Matt. 20:16) Those who ultimately will be enthroned with Jesus are described in Revelation 17:14 as those who not only are "called," but are also "chosen, and faithful." Faithfulness, however, is not determined by the length of time served, nor by the amount of

sacrifice, but whether or not the service is rendered in a way pleasing to the Lord.

The motive for serving the Lord is one of the vital considerations from this lesson. Paul wrote that even though he gave all that he had to feed the poor—as Jesus had suggested to the rich young ruler—and did not have love, it would profit him nothing. One might even give his body to be burned, but it would be to no profit so far as treasures in heaven are concerned, if it were done from any other motive than unselfish love.—I Cor. 13:3

There is only one sense in which the amount we give of “goods” or “time” enters into acceptable service to the Lord. That is, it must be our all. This “all” of the disciples of Christ in every part of the age includes time, talents, strength, and goods. In the parable these are all illustrated by the element of time. Those who were hired early in the morning had to spend the entire day working in the vineyard in order to obtain the “penny.” Those hired at the eleventh hour had to be faithful during the one hour remaining of the day, for this was their all.

In Jesus’ day, the “all” of the apostles who had been fishermen would be different from the “all” of Matthew, the tax collector. However, regardless of how little or how much our all may be, if we give it freely and with love, we will receive the “penny.” What a wonderful arrangement this is! It is encouraging to the widow with her “mite,” and it is a reminder to others who may have much. Each has a great responsibility with their “all” in connection with the work of the vineyard. The test of worthiness in all cases is the spirit with which the sacrifice is laid upon the altar, and kept there until it is consumed.

A PARABLE

What beautiful truths concerning the Christian life are illustrated by the parable of the penny when viewed in the light of the Master's own introduction to it. In any parable, the thing said is never the same as the thing meant. None of the details of this parable have ever had a literal fulfillment, and never will. For example, mention is made of five periods of the day in which servants are hired to work in a vineyard. There is nothing in the Bible, nor in the history of the Gospel Age, to indicate that at five different times throughout the centuries anything remotely resembling this has ever happened.

The parable illustrates the simple basis upon which the called ones, all during the Gospel Age, may prove worthy of living and reigning with Christ. They must give their all, regardless of how little or how much that may be, unto death. In relating the parable, Jesus anticipated that there might be some who, when learning of this arrangement, would not be satisfied with it. Thus, he takes these into account and shows how wrong such an attitude would be—that, in effect, it would be calling in question the justice and wisdom of God.

Another important point to remember is that the parable was not given to reveal what will happen when the saints pass beyond the veil. Rather, it is to teach the importance of a proper appreciation of God's abounding grace, and respect for his decisions, while we are still on this side of the veil. How impressively the parable teaches these vital lessons!

The Bible clearly reveals, through this parable and otherwise, that the disciple who faithfully

follows the Master for fifty or more years will receive the same reward in the kingdom—that of glory, honor, and immortality—as the one who has been faithful for a very short period of time. The brethren in the Early Church knew this, and we know it today. This is not a truth which will be discovered by some only after they pass beyond the veil.

Upon the basis of God's promises, we have already received assurance of our reward—if we prove faithful. In prayer, Jesus said of his disciples, "The glory which thou gavest me I have given them." (John 17:22) At that time, Jesus had received this glory only by promise, and he had given it to his disciples only by promise. However, the promises of our Heavenly Father, and of our Lord Jesus, are sure, and it remains only for us to be faithful to the conditions attached to them for the glories promised actually to become ours.

Jesus did, by promise, give his disciples the glory which his Father had given to him. When Peter asked what they would receive in return for the "all" which they had given up to follow him, he said, "When the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones." Over and over again the Lord, through his Word, gives this reward to us by promise. Jesus said, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne."—Rev. 3:21

Whether our reward be thought of as a promise now, or as a reality beyond the veil, it is entirely a gift of God's grace. No one can work long enough to earn it, nor has anyone sufficient "goods" to purchase it. This priceless "penny" is given to those who

demonstrate their faithfulness by giving their all, regardless of how much that might be. In the parable, Jesus emphasizes how wrong it would be for any of us, when we understand the matter properly, to question God's goodness and justice in making this gracious arrangement. Thanks be to the Heavenly Father for his unerring wisdom and boundless mercy! ■

*Behold, what wondrous grace
The Father hath bestowed
On members of a fallen race,
To make them sons of God.
By his dear Son redeemed,
By grace then purified;
What favor that we should be named
For Christ's joint heir and bride!
Nor doth it yet appear
How great we must be made;
But when we see our Saviour here,
We shall be like our Head.*

—*Hymns of Dawn*

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 Edna May Chastain, Hope, IN—June 24. Age, 86

Sister Lottie Buczek, Detroit, MI—July 20. Age, 98

Sister Oma Edney, Hendersonville, NC—July 29. Age, 93

Sister Ramamani, N.V., Bangalore, India—August 2. Age, 63

John the Baptist

Forerunner of Jesus

*“Behold, I will
send my messenger,
and he shall
prepare the way
before me.”
—Malachi 3:1*

THE WORDS OF OUR

opening text were spoken by God through his servant Malachi, the last of the Old Testament prophets. This prophecy is quoted in Mark 1:2, and applied to John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus. In Mark 1:3, John is identified as the one fulfilling another prophecy, found in Isaiah 40:3, which speaks of “the voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.” In John 1:23, the Apostle John also applies this latter prophecy to John the Baptist.

The Lord’s statement, “Behold, I will send my messenger,” is significant, for John the Baptist’s birth was a direct result of the overruling providences of God. The account of this is found in Luke 1:5-25. The circumstances parallel to some extent the experience of Abraham and Sarah in connection with the birth of Isaac, in that Zacharias and Elizabeth, who became the parents of John, “both

were now well stricken in years,” and “Elisabeth was barren.”—Luke 1:7

The miracles associated with the birth of John convinced Zacharias, his father and a priest in Israel, that momentous things in the plan of God were happening. This conclusion was confirmed when his wife’s cousin, Mary, visited them and they learned of the angel Gabriel’s announcement to her that she was to be the mother of Jesus, who would be the promised king to sit on “the throne of his father David.” (vs. 32) Following John’s birth, Zacharias prophesied concerning his son: “Thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins, Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”—vss. 76-79

The only information in the Bible furnished concerning John from the time he was a baby until he began his ministry is contained in Luke 1:80. This text reads, “The child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel.” It is safe to assume that during his maturing years in the desert he prepared himself for his coming ministry by self-discipline and communion with God. Desert life would naturally have called for courage and strength of character.

JOHN’S MINISTRY

Matthew 3:1 reads, “In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea.”

Verse 5 says, “Then went out to him Jerusalem, and all Judaea, and all the region round about Jordan.” This indicates that John did not go from place to place in the conduct of his ministry, but that the people came to him. When they did, they found a man with “raiment of camel’s hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins; and his meat was locusts and wild honey.”—vs. 4

Jesus made a revealing observation concerning John’s desert ministry, and his clothing. After John’s disciples departed from an interview with the Master, “Jesus spoke to the crowds about John: What sort of person did you go out into the desert to see? Was he like tall grass blown about by the wind? What kind of man did you go out to see? Was he someone dressed in fine clothes? People who dress like that live in the king’s palace. What did you really go out to see? Was he a prophet? He certainly was. I tell you that he was more than a prophet. In the Scriptures God says about him, ‘I am sending my messenger ahead of you to get things ready for you.’”—Matt. 11:7-10, *Contemporary English Version*

The miraculous circumstances associated with the birth of this “more than a prophet,” his manner of life, and the general expectation that some great one was about to appear, caused many to be attracted to him. He called upon his hearers to repent, and those who did he baptized “in Jordan, confessing their sins.”—Matt. 3:6

John the Baptist was outspoken in his ministry. Taking note of the Pharisees and Sadducees in his audience, he said to them, “O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to

come?” Then he told them the only way they could escape from this wrath, saying, “Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance.”—Matt. 3:7,8

The “wrath to come” mentioned by John was not eternal torture in a fiery hell, but the baptism of fire and destruction which was to come upon the nation of Israel because of their ultimate rejection of their Messiah. This wrath fell upon the nation in A.D. 70-73 when Jerusalem was destroyed and the people scattered. Continuing his symbolic prophecy concerning the destruction of the nation, John said, “The ax is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.”—vs. 10

WHO WAS JOHN THE BAPTIST?

“The Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem” to ask John, “Who art thou?” (John 1:19) He made it clear to these investigators that he was “not the Christ.” (vs. 20) Then they asked, “What then? Art thou Elias?” Again his answer was, “I am not.” Their final question was, “Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No.”—vs. 21

The question they asked John, “Art thou Elias?” was based on the prophecy of Malachi 4:5,6, which reads: “Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.” This prophecy describes a work of reformation such as John was conducting in Israel, and so it was natural that he should be asked whether or not he considered himself to be this foretold Elijah.

Those who believe the false teaching of reincarnation have seized upon this prophecy to indicate that the Bible supports their belief, claiming that it suggests the return of the Prophet Elijah as another personality. However, this is not the correct thought. The Prophet Elijah was a great reformer in Israel, and because of this, his name is used in the prophecy of Malachi to indicate the nature of the work to be attempted by the one which it foretells.

John denied that he was the foretold Elijah, yet Jesus said to his disciples, referring to John, that “Elias is indeed come.” (Mark 9:13) This does not contradict John’s statement concerning the matter. The more complete viewpoint is expressed in Matthew 11:14, where Jesus is quoted as saying to his disciples, “If ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come.” This means, that to those who had been prepared to accept Jesus by showing their repentance under the ministry of John, he was the promised “Elijah,” for he had accomplished the prophesied work of reformation in their hearts and lives.

ANOTHER FULFILLMENT

Malachi’s prophecy of the coming Elijah suggests an additional fulfillment than only John the Baptist. The prophecy ends with the words, “Lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.” In other words, if the attempted work of reformation were to fail, the foretold “curse” would come upon the nation of Israel. This curse was in reality what John referred to as the aforementioned “wrath to come.” (Matt. 3:7) In verse 11 of the same chapter he also described it as a baptism “with fire” which, as we have noted,

came upon the Jewish nation in A.D. 70-73. While a few were converted and prepared to accept Jesus by the ministry of John, the nation as a whole was not, so the foretold "curse" fell upon them.

Since John himself denied that he was actually the foretold Elijah, we are warranted in looking for a larger fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy. We believe that the larger fulfillment began with Jesus' ministry, and has involved his true followers throughout the entire Gospel Age. Just as John preached repentance, so also did Jesus. Matthew 4:17 reads, "From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Similarly, when Jesus sent his disciples into the ministry, we read that they "went out, and preached that men should repent." (Mark 6:12) Speaking on Mars' Hill, Paul said that God "now commandeth all men every where to repent." (Acts 17:30) In proclaiming the message of repentance, Jesus and his true followers have continued this "Elijah" work throughout the entire age.

It seems that general failure has also accompanied the effort in this larger application of the prophecy. A few have repented, even as did a handful under the preaching of John the Baptist, but the world as a whole has continued on in its sinful, selfish ways. So, again, the alternative fulfillment of the prophecy—"Lest I come and smite the earth with a curse"—must come. However, in this larger fulfillment, it does not come upon only one nation, but upon all nations. This foretold "curse" is, in fact, already upon the world in the form of a "time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation."—Dan. 12:1

These apparent failures do not mean that the foretold Elijah work of repentance and reformation will never be accomplished. It will be accomplished completely during the time of Christ's kingdom. Under the typical Elijah, the people of Israel were led to repentance and to a return to the true and living God. (I Kings 18:36-39) So it will be under the administration of Christ's kingdom. A "pure language," or message, will be given to the people. The "knowledge of the LORD" will fill the earth, and as a result of that enlightenment, the people will "call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent."—Zeph. 3:8,9; Isa. 11:9

"THAT PROPHET"

As previously noted, the priests and the Levites who were sent to interview John the Baptist inquired of him if he were "that prophet," with the reply from John that he was not. (John 1:21) This question evidently related to a prophecy of Moses in which he said, "The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken."—Deut. 18:15

The Apostle Peter quoted this prophecy and applied it to the kingdom work of Christ to be accomplished during the "times of restitution of all things," when "every soul" will be given a full opportunity to "hear that prophet." (Acts 3:20-23) John the Baptist knew that he was not this great Prophet which Moses had promised, and so in response to the question, "What sayest thou of thyself?" he replied, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way

of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias.”—John 1:22,23

John had a humble opinion of himself and of his place in God’s plan. When asked why he was doing a baptizing work, since he was “not that Christ, nor Elias, neither that prophet,” he replied, “I baptize with water: but there standeth one among you, whom ye know not; He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe’s latchet I am not worthy to unloose.”—vss. 25-27

We read that “the next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” (vs. 29) John explained further that God, who had instructed him to baptize with water, told him, “Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Spirit.”—vs. 33

John did not understand the full implications of this, but he did take it to mean that the one upon whom he saw the Spirit descend would be the promised Messiah—“the Son of God.” (vs. 34) Later there arose a discussion between some of John’s disciples and the Jews, “And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him.”—John 3:26

This was a statement more than a question—implying that Jesus was attracting more followers than John. John was quick to catch the implication, and replied, “A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ,

but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease."—vss. 27-30

“HE MUST INCREASE . . . I MUST DECREASE”

If those questioning John thought that he would be disturbed or discouraged over the fact that Jesus was securing a larger following than he, they were wrong. John was willing, and “rejoiced greatly,” to have it this way. It was just what he expected, for, as he said, “He must increase, but I must decrease.” He knew that having announced the presence of the Messiah, his own mission was now practically fulfilled. Since the one for whom he had been commissioned to prepare the way had come, the work of preparation was coming to an end.

We are not to suppose that John the Baptist understood clearly all the details of God's plan. Doubtless much that he said was under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This might well be true with respect to his observation concerning the “bridegroom” and the “bride.” In Revelation 19:7, reference is made to the “marriage of the Lamb,” to whom John had referred as the “Lamb of God.” (John 1:29) Under this symbolism Jesus—the Lamb of God—would also be the Bridegroom, and his “wife” would be the bride. This bride class is composed of his faithful followers of the Gospel Age, beginning with the apostles who received from Jesus the “baptism” of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

John did not live until Pentecost, and so did not have an opportunity of becoming a part of the bride class. All he claimed was the great joy of being the “friend” of the Bridegroom—the one who had heard his voice. “This my joy . . . is fulfilled,” John said. He was content with this happy part in the divine arrangement. He did not complain because he could not be part of the bride.

Jesus also recognized that John would not be one of the “called out” ones of the Gospel Age who, if faithful, would live and reign with him in the heavenly phase of the kingdom. Jesus said, “Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” (Matt. 11:11) Jesus explained the reason for this. He said that “all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.” (vs. 13) John was the last of the prophets. Beginning with Jesus, a new age in the plan of God began—the age during which the kingdom of heaven class, the “bride” of the Lamb, has been called from the world through the Gospel, and made ready to live and reign with Christ a thousand years.

JOHN’S FAITH TESTED

John, in his righteousness, reproved Herod the tetrarch for marrying Herodias, his brother Philip’s wife, and because of this was cast into prison. (Matt. 14:3,4) This was a severe test of his faith, for, having announced Jesus as the promised Messiah, he doubtless believed, even as Jesus’ disciples later supposed, that the kingdom of Christ would “immediately appear.” (Luke 19:11) This being his

expectation, he naturally would wonder why he should find himself in prison when he was dedicated to be one of the faithful subjects of the new kingdom, a “friend,” indeed, of the king.

It would seem that John had perhaps begun to wonder if Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah. However, as he remained in prison, word reached him that the “works” of Christ were continuing. To get confirmation of this, he sent messengers to inquire of Jesus, “Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?” Jesus instructed these messengers to “Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.”—Matt. 11:2-6

The Scriptures do not inform us whether or not this reply gave John the reassurance which he sought. We presume that it did, for he would know that miraculous works were to be expected of the Messiah. He could not know, however, that the real age of worldwide miracles was two thousand years in the future. Jesus was then performing miracles, even raising the dead, and for all John knew, this work would continue and increase. Had he not said concerning Jesus, “He must increase”?

Although probably reassured, John was still without a clear explanation as to why the miracle-working Christ allowed him to remain in prison. Jesus had said in his reply, “Blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me.” This suggested the possibility of a test, and most likely John determined

that he would not be “offended” even if Jesus did not come to his aid.

Like all the other faithful prophets of God, John “died in faith, not having received the promises.” (Heb. 11:13,39) It was on Herod’s birthday, when the daughter of Herodias danced before him, that he was so pleased with her he promised to give her anything she asked. The depraved mother instructed her daughter to request that the head of John the Baptist be given to her. Herod expressed sorrow over this, “nevertheless for the oath’s sake, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her.”—Matt. 14:6-12

This may seem an inglorious end to a faithful career in service to the Lord, but such was not the case. John the Baptist was loyal to God and his divine principles. Being put to death gave him a further opportunity to prove his faithfulness. When, in that “better resurrection” promised for all the ancient prophets who “died in faith,” he is brought forth to be one of the “princes in all the earth,” he will rejoice. John will continue his faithful service, not as the forerunner of Christ, but as one of the human representatives of Christ’s kingdom.—Heb. 11:35; Ps. 45:16 ■

*“Who shall ascend into the hill of the
LORD? or who shall stand in his holy
place? He that hath clean hands,
and a pure heart. . . .
He shall receive the blessing
from the LORD, and righteousness from
the God of his salvation.
—Psalm 24:3-5*

Suffering and God's Comfort

*“Blessed be God,
even the Father of
our Lord Jesus
Christ, the Father
of mercies, and the
God of all comfort;
Who comforteth
us in all our
tribulation, that
we may be able to
comfort them
which are in any
trouble, by the
comfort wherewith
we ourselves are
comforted of
God. For as the
sufferings of Christ
abound in us, so
our consolation
also aboundeth
by Christ.”*
—II Corinthians
1:3-5

ALTHOUGH IT IS BEYOND our capacity as humans to comprehend the emotions of our Heavenly Father, we are assured from the Scriptures that he has the capacity for suffering and experiencing pain. “In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: in his love and in his pity he redeemed them; and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old.”—Isa. 63:9

The fact that Adam disobeyed God by partaking of the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden undoubtedly was a source of grief to the all-wise Creator. Thus, he made provision for mankind's eventual recovery from sin

through the Lamb that was “slain from the foundation of the world.” (Rev. 13:8) Indeed, God “so loved the world” that he sent his “only begotten Son” as a means of facilitating everlasting life for the condemned human race. (John 3:16) This act reflects his unfathomable compassion. Additionally, as he looked down upon the cross as his crucified Son cried out “it is finished,” surely God suffered greatly.

THE BURDEN OF LEADERSHIP

Numerous Old Testament servants of God suffered severely. As a class, the Scriptures provide a general description as to what some of them endured. “Others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented.”—Heb. 11:36,37

As one of the Heavenly Father’s servants, Moses was called of God to lead the children of Israel from Egyptian servitude into Canaan. In Egypt, as a people, they had suffered for an extensive period of time. Along with his brother Aaron, he explained to the Jews that God had looked upon their affliction and deliverance was promised. With the support of the elders of Israel, and God’s assurance that he would accomplish his purpose, Moses must have been rather surprised when Pharaoh not only would not allow the Israelites to go and celebrate a feast in the wilderness, but ultimately would cause the foremen of the Israelites to be beaten because they failed to have the people make their same daily quota of bricks after the king decided they would no longer be given

straw for this purpose. (Exod. 4:28-5:14) Confused and bewildered, Moses “returned unto the LORD, and said, Lord, wherefore hast thou so evil entreated this people? why is it that thou hast sent me? For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in thy name, he hath done evil to this people; neither hast thou delivered thy people at all.”—chap. 5:22,23

Eventually, after a series of plagues which came upon the Egyptians, Moses led the Israelites to safety through the Red Sea into the wilderness of Shur. When they came to Marah, there was water there but it was too bitter to drink, and the people murmured against Moses. God then gave instructions to Moses for sweetening the water by casting a tree into it so that it was palatable. (chap. 15:22-25) By this time it must have been clear to him he was going to have many, many difficulties in dealing with the Israelites. The Scriptures indicate some of the trials he endured during the forty year period of wilderness wanderings, although not every instance of the Israelites’ rebellious spirit is noted in the Bible.

In Numbers 13 and 14, as the Israelites came near to Canaan, twelve scouts were sent to spy out the land. Except for Joshua and Caleb, the other ten lacked faith and said that invading it would be too dangerous, and defeat on their part would be certain. They began to murmur against Moses and Aaron, entered into a conspiracy, and determined that they would select another captain to lead them back to Egypt. God was displeased, and he told Moses he was going to send a plague to destroy them. We see the nobility of Moses, however, who prayed for the Israelites to be spared. Ultimately, the Heavenly Father heeded Moses’ petition, but because the

people had disobeyed him so often, he indicated that for forty years they would wander in the desert, until all those adults who refused to go into the land were dead. He would take their children in, and Joshua and Caleb, who gave the good report, would also enter Canaan.

Numbers 20:7-13 records the sin of Moses when he failed to speak to the rock as God commanded, but on the contrary smote it a second time. This, while having antitypical significance, resulted in his being denied permission to enter the Promised Land. Disobedience to God's commands can never be justified. We wonder, however, whether the accumulated weight of the Israelites' murmuring against him for so many years may have been a contributing factor in this meek servant's gross error in presuming to bring forth the water on his own terms, instead of rendering faithful obedience to the Heavenly Father.

GOD'S SPECIAL CARE FOR HIS SAINTS

“Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him.” (Ps. 103:13) In considering this text, what a blessed perspective we can gain as we look upon how much our Heavenly Father cares for our every interest. The Lord's consecrated people live all over the globe. When floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes or other natural disasters strike, brethren generally make inquiries as to what is the situation among the friends who live in areas decimated by some of these circumstances. How thankful we are that, in most instances, the report comes back that the brethren were not affected adversely.

Although difficult experiences come upon the Lord's people, God never leaves nor forsakes us. (Heb. 13:5) If we abide in him, however, he will overrule in our lives whatever befalls us for our highest spiritual welfare, in accordance with his eternal purpose for us as New Creatures.

As believers, we have been accepted as sons of God through Christ Jesus. However, we must be aware of our fleshly defects and inability to do his will perfectly. Our failure in so many areas might be cause for discouragement, were it not for the Scriptural testimony that we have a unique standing with the Father. He does not cast us away simply because of our imperfections. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." (Rom. 8:1) How precious is this assurance!

PAUL'S SUFFERINGS

Following his dramatic conversion in becoming a follower of Christ, the Lord informed Ananias that the Apostle Paul would endure much suffering for his sake. (Acts 9:16) Paul later recounts some of the experiences he encountered throughout his ministry. "Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the

sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.”—II Cor. 11:23-28

As a result of his zeal for the Lord, Paul encountered much opposition from the Jews, who sought to take his life. However, because it was God’s will for him to witness in Rome, he survived a perilous journey, including a violent storm and shipwreck, as he traveled with other passengers towards his ultimate destination. Because of divine providence, there was no loss of life among any who sailed with him. (Acts 27:21-26,39-44) In view of his faithfulness to God throughout the severity of his many difficult experiences, Paul was able to declare near the end of his Christian sojourn that a “crown of righteousness” awaited him, as well as for others whose lives gave evidence of complete devotion to God.—II Tim. 4:7,8

CHRIST’S EXAMPLE

The sufferings of Christ commenced immediately after his baptism at the Jordan River, when he was led by the Spirit into the wilderness. Apparently, the Lord was so absorbed in meditation, study, and prayer that he fasted forty days and forty nights, during which the Scriptures were opened to him and he received instruction and guidance from the Heavenly Father. At the close of this period, when Jesus was physically weakened and hungry, the devil presented three temptations in an attempt to ensnare him. In each instance he resisted the Adversary and subsequently was ministered to by

the angels. (Matt. 4:1-11) The Master proved victorious in his initial series of trials and testings!

Throughout his ministry, Jesus experienced much reproach, opposition, and rejection. However, he always bore them willingly and patiently as part of God's will for his New Creature development. One attack upon his character which Jesus endured related to his casting out a demon from a victim who was mute. Despite this wonderful feat, some of Christ's opponents attributed his ability to cast out the evil spirit to the power of Beelzebub, the prince of demons. (Luke 11:14-18) It would be absurd to suppose that Satan was opposing his own underlings by using his power to cast them out. Additionally, other Jews had also cast out devils. (vs. 19) Whatever source of power Jesus utilized would also be employed by others engaged in this work. Since there was no condemnation of anyone else for performing the same act, this was another example of unjust treatment which the Master endured.

The doing of his Father's will caused Jesus to be totally consumed and physically spent. Day after day he walked upon dusty roads preaching, teaching, healing, and enduring the opposition and "contradiction of sinners." (Heb. 12:3) An aspect of his suffering to be considered was the weariness that was his portion because of such a demanding regimen.

The Master's final hours in the flesh contained many examples of personal anguish. Some of these included the inability of his disciples to remain awake while he prayed in Gethsemane; his betrayal by Judas; Peter's denial of him; the all-night buffetings and abuse endured during the civil and religious trials to which he was subjected; his need

for assistance in bearing the cross to Golgotha because of diminished physical stamina; and the jeers and taunting voiced towards him while hanging on the cross. He suffered much for all of us.

OUR SUFFERINGS

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” (Rom. 12:1,2) This passage of Scripture implies the doing of God’s will is going to cost us something if our consecration is sincere. When we do not follow the ways of our former friends and no longer engage in activities with them of an earthly nature, they may criticize us. This may initially hurt our feelings because we no longer receive their approval. On other occasions, we may have to push ourselves to go to the meetings when we are tired, but we go anyway in order to be a blessing and receive a blessing, “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is.”—Heb. 10:25

Some of the Lord’s dear ones also suffer from their family’s opposition to the Truth and are ostracized on this account by their relatives. Some are suffering from physical ailments, but still persevere in witnessing to the Truth despite limitations of vitality. If one were unable to get to meetings, but spent time reading Scriptures, listening to discourses, praying for other brethren, or doing something else related to the Truth, it undoubtedly would

take extra effort and perhaps aggravate one's physical condition. However, that clearly would be an example of suffering for righteousness.

Another form of suffering may be caused by a misunderstanding between brethren which is very difficult to resolve. As painful as that may be, we need to pray for each other fervently and ask for God's overruling in such matters, while looking for evidence of his leadings.

Some of the Lord's people suffer because of trials peculiar to child-raising. It is hard enough to give children in general, proper guidance during this evil time in which we live. For those who are Spirit begotten, however, the balance between letting young ones grow up normally, while at the same time setting before them the principles of righteousness, can be especially challenging. This is especially true when one's son or daughter is taunted by peers or classmates, being deemed as having a peculiar religion. As adults, we should expect to experience rejection or ridicule, but when our offspring is subjected to such treatment, it is a source of great pain for both parent and child.

LESSONS FROM SUFFERINGS

As New Creatures who have been baptized into Christ's death, we should expect to have suffering and distress. (Rom. 6:3-6) A scriptural basis for our understanding of the benefits we derive therefrom is found in these words: "Not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope." (Rom. 5:3,4) It is necessary for us to develop the fruits and graces of the Spirit. These qualities

are not developed overnight, or without adversity. Those who prove more than overcomers will take only their character with them beyond the veil. We will be in that condition for eternity, possessed of the divine nature. Therefore, our Heavenly Father will not grant immortality to any being that is deficient in any aspect of the Lord's Spirit.

"It became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings." (Heb. 2:10) Our Heavenly Father ordained there should be a sympathetic high priest class who would serve as ministers of reconciliation during Christ's glorious reign. The collective experiences of the footstep followers of the Master in this present life will give them the wisdom to deal effectively with mankind in God's kingdom. There will be no trials or difficulties which have fallen upon mankind that will be foreign to the experience of the body of Christ.

"I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin." (Isa. 1:25) This text is written concerning natural Israel, but could be applied prophetically also to the Gospel Age spiritual Israelites. The thought of purging is found elsewhere in the Bible. For example, Malachi 3:3 speaks of purging the sons of Levi "as gold and silver" during the day of the Lord. As we are inspected by the Great Refiner, he permits experiences to come upon us that will solidify righteousness in our being and eradicate any vestiges of iniquity.

"If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world." (I Cor. 11:31,32) Self-examination and

self-discipline are essential aspects related to keeping our sacrifice on the altar. We need to use initiative in self-correction, so that through the exercise of our free will, we can demonstrate to the Lord our serious endeavors to be faithful. Prayers for spiritual guidance are always in order also, and to the degree that we set a proper example in our conduct, we can be a help to our brethren in their walk.

Paul admonished, "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." (Eph. 5:19) Our sufferings should evoke a sense of praise in our hearts that we might be permitted to endure hardship and distress for the cause of Christ. Our mind reflects upon the fact that Paul and Silas, having been beaten with stripes and put into stocks at a jail in Philippi, were able to sing praises so loudly at midnight that the prisoners heard them. (Acts 16:19-25) What an inspiring example for us and a reminder that our ability to praise our Creator under all circumstances must certainly merit his approval.

If we are grieved with the sinful conditions in this world which surround us, and if we are touched by the plight of the untold millions who are suffering, have no sense of hope, and know not God, we above all should desire the kingdom and its blessings to come soon. The Bride class will not be complete until 144,000 individuals have finished their course of sacrifice and suffering. For those of us who have been called and chosen, let us rejoice in the privilege of suffering with our Lord willingly, even unto death, for that is the only way to complete the body of Christ and end earth's weary night of sin, suffering, and death.

HOW GOD PROVIDES COMFORT

Whatever may be our sufferings, the Bible assures us that our Heavenly Father cares and is solicitous of our needs. "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." (I Cor. 10:13, *New International Version*) The means whereby we may be comforted in the midst of suffering include providential overruling, hymns, Scriptures which contain precious promises, guardian angels that may intervene if we are in harm's way, as well as the Holy Spirit which enables us to comprehend and appreciate God's tender mercies towards us.

A merciful provision available to Spirit-begotten believers is access to the Heavenly Father through prayer. God is keenly aware of the difficulties associated with the Christian sojourn. As a means of providing us with the needed strength to ease our burdens and to receive grace to help in time of need, we are encouraged to approach God in personal communion to obtain guidance and comfort. "When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee."—Matt. 6:6

Another aspect of God's comfort to consecrated believers is the ecclesia arrangement, whereby we can receive support and encouragement from fellow members of the body of Christ, thus enhancing our spiritual growth and development. Throughout the Christian age, brethren around the globe have

profited from their studies of the Scriptures with others of like precious faith for mutual edification. “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments.” (Ps. 133:1,2, *New King James Version*) Although Internet and telephone meetings were not in the mind of the psalmist when this verse was penned, those who might be otherwise isolated today have the benefit of this provision. What a blessing is the availability of technology for a godly purpose when we note how it is misused by so many others for reasons that do not glorify God.

Summarizing our lesson, let us ever bear in mind that God is not indifferent to the sufferings of his people, or the world of mankind at large who have not yet come into a covenant relationship with him. The Scriptures indicate the Ancient Worthies suffered for righteousness and served as wonderful examples of faithfulness for us to emulate during our Christian sojourn. God’s providence allows adversity upon his prospective divine family while in the flesh as a means of demonstrating our obedience and crystallizing our characters.

The Heavenly Father also provides needed grace and various forms of comfort to sustain us through what otherwise might seem to be unbearable trials. May we appreciate his wisdom in permitting us to endure necessary lessons that will equip us for future service as part of that sympathetic priesthood that will help restore mankind to perfection during that glorious kingdom reign. ■

SPEAKERS' APPOINTMENTS

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

M. Balko

Jacksonville, FL August 16

T. Ruggirello

Denver, CO August 21-23

R. Goodman

Columbus, OH August 8,9

S. Jeuck

Louisville, AL August 9
Jacksonville, FL 16

*Come ye that know and love the Lord,
and raise your thoughts above;
Let every heart and voice accord
to sing that "God is love."
This precious truth his Word declares,
and all his mercies prove;
Jesus, the gift of gifts, appears,
to show that "God is love."
—Hymns of Dawn*

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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.

OKPUALA NGWA CONVENTION, August 8—Okpuala Ngwa Class Meeting Hall, Isiala Ngwa North, Abia State, Nigeria. Contact G. C. Adiele. Phone: 234-811-611-1533 or Email: godwin.adielle@yahoo.com

COLORADO CONVENTION, August 21-23—DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel Denver - Stapleton North, 4040 Quebec Street, Denver, CO. Contact L. Turner. Phone: (303) 809-1957 or Email: twink94@comcast.net

NIGERIA GENERAL CONVENTION, August 21-23—Emmanuel College, Owerri Imo State, Nigeria. Contact C. O. Egbu, #24 Fayemi Street, Coca Cola Mokola Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. Phone: 234-803-333-9949 or Email: egbucaje@gmail.com

HUNTSVILLE CONVENTION, September 5,6—Wyndham Garden Huntsville Airport, 8721 Madison Blvd., Madison, AL 35758. Contact R. Armstrong. Phone: (256) 281-9556 or Email: robin@exzaktec.com

JACKSON LABOR DAY CONVENTION, September 5,6—Holiday Inn Jackson NW, 2696 Bob McClain Drive, Jackson, MI 49202. Contact V. Lumley, 2531 Ashton Road, Jackson, MI 49203. Phone: (517) 782-7252 or Email: raylumley2531@comcast.net

NEW YORK LABOR DAY CONVENTION, September 5,6—DoubleTree Hotel Mahwah, 180 Route 17 South, Mahwah, NJ. Contact G. Passios. Phone: (201) 939-3196 or Email: gpassios11@verizon.net

SEATTLE LABOR DAY CONVENTION, September 5-7—Seabeck Conference Center, 13395 Lagoon Drive NW, Seabeck, WA 98380. Contact L. Flinn. Phone: (253) 838-3822, (206) 518-2678 or Email: laurie@flinn.us

COLUMBUS HARVEST CONVENTION, September 19,20—Ledwinka Farm, 10004 E. 550 N., Columbus, IN 47203. Contact D. Ledwinda. Phone: (812) 546-5276

MILWAUKEE CONVENTION, September 26,27—Lake Lodge, 1235 East Howard Avenue, Milwaukee, WI 53207. Contact S. Kuenzli. Phone: (414) 690-8281 or Email: song_of_hope@sbcglobal.net

GRAND RAPIDS CONVENTION, October 3,4—Kenowa Hills Middle School, 3950 Hendershot Avenue NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49544. Contact J. Houlmont. Phone: (231) 972-4259 or Email: ljhoulmont@gmail.com

PITTSBURGH AREA CONVENTION, October 3,4—Sewickly Grange Hall, Route 136, West Newton, PA 15089. Contact G. Balko. Phone: (724) 771-0139

SAN LUIS OBISPO CONVENTION, October 17,18—Masonic Hall, 859 Marsh Street, San Luis Obispo, CA 93401. Contact M. Allard. Phone: (805) 773-2963 or Email: medlallard@juno.com

ORLANDO CONVENTION, October 24,25—South Seminole Masonic Lodge, 122 Triplett Lake Drive, Casselberry, FL 32707. Contact J. Kuenzli. Phone: (407) 831-2098 or Email: jkuenzli@cfl.rr.com

RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL CONVENTION, October 24,25—Carioca Hotel, Rio de Janeiro - RJ. Contact: estudantesdabiblia_aurorabrasil@hotmail.com

NEW HAVEN CONVENTION, November 1—Westwoods Italian-American Club, 85 Chase Lane, West Haven, CT. Contact A. Suraci, 171 Johnson Road, Hamden, CT 06518. Phone: (203) 248-3793 or E-mail: annasuraci@comcast.net

PHOENIX CONVENTION, November 15—Boys and Girls Club of Scottsdale, 10515 E. Lakeview Drive, Scottsdale, AZ 85258. Contact C. Humphreys. Phone: (480) 226-9076 or E-mail: christyscastles@gmail.com