

The Promised Seed

Key Verse: *“If ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”*
—Galatians 3:29

Selected Scripture:
Galatians 3:15-29

WHENEVER GOD CALLS someone to his service, he has a specific purpose or object in mind, as he did with Abraham. This faithful patriarch was directed to leave his native country for a life of separation from its heathen influence. He also had a great influence upon his children, and later upon

the nation of Israel, because of a promise he received indicating that by obediently responding to this calling, all the families of the earth would be blessed.—Gen. 12:3

As Abraham’s natural descendants, Israel was given the first opportunity to qualify as God’s means for blessing the human family. Obedience to the Law Covenant would have prepared the nation to accept Christ when he came, and through faith, be joined with him to become the seed of promise. God said to them, “If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.”—Exod. 19:5,6

Paul, under the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, provides us with much understanding concerning how this aforementioned blessing will come to fruition. He references the fact that as a result of Jesus’ perfect obedience throughout his earthly ministry, the Law

Covenant was fulfilled.—Rom. 10:4; Col. 2:14

Additionally, Paul reminds us that the Law provided at Mount Sinai through Moses was added over four hundred years after God's promise to Abraham. The Law was given to illustrate that sin was having a degrading effect upon the human family, as well as to demonstrate to the Israelites and everyone else the impossibility of any imperfect human being keeping the divine requirements for obtaining life on earth. Through all of this period, however, the original Abrahamic Covenant has continued to remain in force, and the blessings to be accrued will be realized during God's kingdom of righteousness, when Satan will be bound and unable to deceive mankind.—Gal. 3:16-19; Rev. 20:2,3

“Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”—Gal. 3:24-28

Our Key Verse affirms that all consecrated believers throughout this Gospel Age who comply with the conditions of discipleship, through baptism into Christ's death and faithfulness in keeping their covenant of sacrifice, will be a part of this spiritual seed that will bless all of mankind in the approaching kingdom of God.

What a privilege is ours to understand God's marvelous plan for the restoration of mankind from the devastating effects of sin in this present evil world. If faithful, we will also have the glorious privilege of being in the presence of Jesus, the “King of kings,” throughout eternity.—Rev. 17:14 ■

The Law Fulfilled

Key Verse: “*For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*”
—Galatians 5:14

Selected Scripture:
Galatians 5:1-15

IN TODAY’S LESSON, Paul is writing to the brethren in Galatia, a region which contained a number of ecclesias who were not of Jewish origin that were developed as a result of his missionary tours. One of the issues Paul sought to

counteract was the Judaizing influence upon these believers who formerly were heathen and were being subjected to efforts attempting to compel them to follow various aspects of the Mosaic Law. Although addressed to the saints in Galatia, in principle, this epistle has been preserved for the entire church throughout the Gospel Age. Bondage would include not only submission to the requirements of the Law Covenant in Paul’s day, but it would apply to any form of sectarianism or unscriptural traditions that would bring us under condemnation once we have been justified.

To the extent that, as Christians, we are becoming conformed more and more to the will of God, the sanctifying influence of his Word will enable us to progress spiritually. However, sometimes there can be pressures both from within our fellowship and from the world outside to have our behavior or beliefs conform to standards which do not necessarily represent scriptural teachings on a given matter.—Gal. 5:1-3

During his ministry, for example, Paul was very clear

that justification, or being counted righteous by God, was not dependent upon the keeping of various ceremonial features of the Mosaic Law, but rather upon the acceptance of Christ's ransom sacrifice as the basis for consecrated believers to become sons of God.—Rom. 3:20

“Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love. Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?”—Gal. 5:4-7

It is of great importance that believers study and apply scriptural principles in the exercise of liberty with regard to both doctrinal understanding and behavioral practices in order to be acceptable to our Heavenly Father. We are to “prove all things,” and never to use liberty as “an occasion to the flesh.”—I Thess. 5:21; Gal. 5:8-13

Our Key Verse indicates that God's law is fulfilled in the lives of the consecrated by serving one another in spirit and in truth. As such, we continually strive to have our hearts and minds regulated in accordance with the precepts set forth by our Lord during his earthly ministry and also elaborated upon in various New Testament epistles.

Consecrated followers of Christ are under the law of liberty. Our love for God is demonstrated by willingly sacrificing our human rights and privileges in serving him and his cause. The Law Covenant came to an end for those Jews who accepted Christ's death as the means by which they could be freed from this yoke of bondage. Through his ransom sacrifice and keeping all features of the Mosaic Law perfectly, our Lord met all the demands of divine justice and thus the price has been paid to release us from our former condemnation.—Rom. 10:4 ■

Walking in the Spirit

Key Verse: *“If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.”*
—Galatians 5:25

Selected Scripture:
Galatians 5:16-26

receive the empty honors of the earth, to have wealth, influence, or to be held in esteem, either by the world or even our brethren. These are characteristics which are part and parcel of our fallen nature, and must be striven against by hearkening unto God’s Word. “This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.”—Gal. 5:16

Additionally, as consecrated believers, if our spirit is such that we harbor feelings of animosity towards others, then we must wage an aggressive warfare against such a disposition lest it consume us. The Heavenly Father is very merciful, and even those who have opposed the followers of Christ prior to devoting themselves to godliness and consecrated living might subsequently repent of their wrongdoing and become acceptable to God. Saul of Tarsus, who became a sincere follower of Christ following his Damascus Road experience, was an example of such transformational conduct. What a marvelous provision God has made for all who truly desire to serve him in spirit and in truth.

ONE GREAT CHALLENGE

for God’s children is to consistently keep our fleshly appetites, ambitions or desires in subjection to the divine will. High-mindedness may be caused by a desire to be recognized by others among our fellow creatures, to be well thought of, to

—Acts 9:1-19; John 4:24

The Apostle Paul speaks to us concerning this battle of the flesh against the Spirit: “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.”—Gal. 5:17,18

The works of the flesh which Satan encourages are contrary to the path that those begotten of the Holy Spirit should follow. Paul enumerates in our lesson some specific vices which, although not an exhaustive listing, illustrate various sensual, religious, social and interpersonal sins as examples of conduct that are inconsistent with righteousness. If persisted in without repentance, such practices would debar us from sharing in the hope of being a member of the body of Christ. On the contrary, if the “fruit of the Spirit” is properly cultivated in its many manifestations of love in our character including joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, meekness, faith and self-control, that will give evidence that we are voluntarily crucifying the tendencies of the fallen human nature and are walking in newness of life.—vss. 19-24

Our Key Verse affirms that as New Creatures in Christ, if we abide in him, we will receive the strength to be more than conquerors and ultimately, be united in glory with our beloved Savior. We thus see that the object of our having received the Gospel message is not merely to give us an intellectual knowledge of God’s plan, but to assist us in the transformation process so that through the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit, we may develop a Christlike character. Let us indeed give diligence to these matters so that we can demonstrate our love for God, his righteous principles, and ultimately share in the work of reconciling mankind to the Heavenly Father and restoring them to the perfection that was lost in Eden. ■

A Habitation of God

*“In whom ye also
are builded
together for an
habitation of God
through the
Spirit.”
—Ephesians 2:22*

THE IDEA OF THE CREA-
tor’s interest in a house to
be provided by his human
creatures may have been first
suggested in the instructions
to Moses for the building of
the Tabernacle in the wilder-

ness. (Exod. 29:43-46) Still earlier, Jacob, fleeing from Esau and in a dream seeing Jehovah looking down from heaven and assuring him of the blessing for which he had risked so much, declared, “Surely the LORD is in this place; ... this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.”—Gen. 28:16,17

Later this idea of the house of God was embodied in the Temple built by Solomon in accord with divine instructions. Both of these buildings, the Tabernacle in the wilderness and the magnificent Temple in Jerusalem, were recognized as inadequate to furnish a real home, or habitation, for Jehovah. Of the Temple, Solomon declared, “Will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven

and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?" (I Kings 8:27) We see then that God did not dwell there as his literal home. Rather, it was, as he declares, a place where he would place his "name," a symbolic representation of himself, and which he designates a "house of sacrifice" wherein prayers might be offered and, if in accord with his instructions and in the proper spirit, forgiveness for sins and God's blessings would be obtained.—II Chron. 7:12-16

In the New Testament we have a clearer idea of God's thoughts with respect to his house. Certain statements of the Old Testament had given an intimation that the Tabernacle and Temple arrangements were merely pictorial, and their true significance quite unrelated to a material building. Such examples are found in Isaiah 57 and Psalm 132. We could know nothing of the physical requirements, if any, of a spirit or divine being's home. It is remarkable and inspiring to know where our Creator places the emphasis for his comfort, joy, happiness, and that which he will call his home. Thus, we can appreciate his specifications, and this would be quite natural with respect to human habitations. We can appraise and appreciate the utility, convenience, and beauty of a fellow man's home because we are of the same human make-up, needs, and grade of intelligence. If the wisdom and power represented in the universe were necessary for our understanding of the home God has designed for himself, it would be impossible for us to comprehend or even to reason about it.

An essential quality for an earthly dwelling to truly become a home is that in it there must exist

harmony, sympathy, understanding and companionship. This is also true of our Creator, “that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.” (Isa. 57:15) Those who aspire to be members of his spiritual family have similarly devoted their lives to acquiring, developing, and practicing all the elements of his own glorious character.

God, through the Prophet Jeremiah, says, “I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.” (Jer. 9:24) Therefore, it will be so with all who are being “builded together for an habitation of God.” In “these things” will be their delight also, not only to know about them as the character of God and to proclaim them to others as illustrated in the Scriptures, but also to delight in the application of them in all their relationships, thus gaining a counterpart of the divine character of their very own, for eternity.

This degree of development in God’s likeness is possible only under conditions of tribulation and trial, where tests of the utmost eternal benefit are permitted. Even of Jesus, we read that it was proper on God’s part, “in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings,” and that he was “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” (Heb. 2:10; Rev. 13:8) Likewise, Christ’s body members, chosen “in him before the foundation of the world,” must share his experience of suffering for righteousness’ sake—presenting their bodies, including their

human hopes, now and in the future, “a living sacrifice.” (Eph. 1:4; Rom. 12:1) Such thereafter are engaged in setting their minds and affections upon “those things which are above,” that which is appropriate to their new spirit-begotten condition.—Col. 3:1,2

Thus, through what are often difficult experiences, we have been learning the elements of God’s character. We are ascertaining right, often by experience with wrong; justice, by suffering injustice and inequity; humility, by experience with pride and vanity; pity and tenderness, by contact with hardness and cruelty. We are learning sympathy for others’ infirmities because we are conscious of our own; and we are developing self-sacrificing love, in contrast to the prevalent selfishness, ambition, and greed in the world which surrounds us.

THE TEMPLE OF GOD

In contrast to the literal places of natural Israel where our Creator placed his name, we find in the New Testament the detailed description of a symbolic home in which he can walk and dwell in spirit. We read, “Ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”—II Cor. 6:16

The full significance of this and similar statements of Jesus and the apostles would be impossible for us to comprehend without divine assistance. With this realization the Apostle Paul prayed for the brethren at Ephesus that “the eyes of your heart having been enlightened, that you may know what is the hope of his invitation, what the glorious

wealth of his inheritance among the saints.”—Eph. 1:18, *The Emphatic Diaglott*

We also, who entertain the same hope, view the wondrous beauty of our calling, and the inspiration it furnishes, “forgetting those things which are behind,” and concentrating thought and effort in “reaching forth unto those things which are before.” (Phil. 3:13) While setting our minds upon these things, as have all our brethren down through the age, we long for the time when all the members of this special class, God’s “inheritance among the saints,” will be gathered with our Lord and be introduced to the Father as members of his household for eternity.

To the woman who was a Samaritan, Jesus said that the hour “now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.” (John 4:23,24) The thought here is that God seeks intelligent worship, not based upon misconceptions of his character, but upon an accurate knowledge of it. Later, Jesus said to his disciples, “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, ... and we will come unto him, and make our abode [Greek: residence] with him.”—John 14:21,23

This figurative language implies that even here in our present trial state, if we meet the conditions, we can enjoy a genuine oneness with our Lord and the Heavenly Father. As their divine life is richer, fuller, and capable of higher emotions and joys, so will ours be also. Our spiritual joy in this intimate relationship will be “unspeakable and full of glory.”—I Pet. 1:8

LIVING STONES

God's habitation, centered in his glorious character, is one in which there is room for full fellowship, and in which he can manifest his principles, disposition and power. Grateful indeed should we be that he has arranged matters so that we can share this course of study and development, and that he seeks such earnest disciples. In I Peter 2:4-6, Jesus is compared to a "living stone." As such, he also has the ability and desire to shape and prepare other living stones, his disciples, to be the symbolic materials of which the temple of God is to be built. The Temple built by Solomon illustrated in its construction the development of the members of the spiritual temple during the Gospel Age, and their final assembly in glory. We recall that the stones of which Solomon's Temple was constructed were all shaped and prepared for their respective positions while in the quarry, and were all fully prepared and ready when placed in the Temple walls.—I Kings 6:7

Considering the preparation of the stones for that Temple, we can imagine that some taken from the quarry were found not of the right type, or consistency, and defects came to light that resulted in their being set aside. Some of these stones may have proved too hard and brittle to take the shaping required. We so find it in our consideration of the development of the living stones for the true temple.

Some potential living stones may be disallowed because, if unresponsive to the Lord's instructions and discipline, the rough parts of their character cannot be refined sufficiently. Pride, the great hardener, is warned against as a dangerous snare in many portions of Scripture: "Despise not thou

the chastening of the Lord;” “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall;” “If a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.”—Heb. 12:5; I Cor. 10:12; Gal. 6:3

In contrast, Jesus gave us a perfect example both in his words and his life, and could say, “Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart.” (Matt. 11:29) The Apostle Peter, having learned wisdom from personal contact involving reproof as well as instruction from the Master, exhorts, “All of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.”—I Pet. 5:5

In this and other expressions of the Apostle Peter, we have the blessed assurance that he was of the proper texture as a living stone and had taken to heart the humbling experiences that God had sent into his life. May it likewise be so with us. Let us not fail to throttle pride in ourselves, and if we have taken a wrong course, confess and correct it. If we have been too hard, too stern or too opinionated in our relations with members of our family, with the brethren, or with any others, let us hasten to repent, reform and undo any damage our human mind and conduct may have caused. Paul, also deeply impressed with the importance of meekness and gentleness, followed the example of the Master in his humble course among the brethren at Corinth, and besought them to recall and consider attentively the “meekness and gentleness of Christ.” (II Cor. 10:1) Such qualities are unnatural to the fallen human nature, and hence need the most careful and persistent cultivation.

FURTHER EXHORTATIONS

Moreover, stones for a permanent structure may be too soft. Living stones may also be excessively soft, and not useable in such a condition. Softness of will or character may be manifested in the fear of loss or suffering, restraining us from faithful obedience to the Lord's instructions. Softness may result in being "conformed to this world" instead of the reverse. (Rom. 12:2) It may be revealed in judging ourselves too tenderly or carelessly; or in not taking a firm stand in opposition to wrong conduct in the daily affairs of life.

Many exhortations are given us along this line. "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." "Be no more children," but "grow up into him in all things." "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life." (Gal. 5:1; Eph. 4:14,15; 6:10; I Tim. 6:12) Paul gives us an inspiring illustration of determination to be faithful to God at all costs, when he said concerning the "bonds and afflictions" that awaited him at Jerusalem, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy."—Acts 20:22-24

In the construction of a building, still other defects may be encountered. We may use as an illustration destructive carpenter ants or termites which attack wooden timbers, eat out the center, and weaken them so that the structure becomes unstable or even collapses. Such destructive forces, secretly working unobserved, *(Continued on page 36)*

(Continued from page 31) well illustrate the damage to character resulting from secret faults permitted that are not dealt with honestly and quickly, and which over time may render much injury to our consecrated relationship with God. Let us, rather, echo the sentiments of the psalmist, who prayed, “Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me.”—Ps. 19:12,13

These deflections, though perhaps appearing minor at the outset, would seem to indicate a corresponding neglect of the Word of God, the effect of which would be to leave us unprepared for tests as well as for opportunities to serve the Lord. It would make us the reverse of what was said prophetically of Jesus in Isaiah 11:1-3, that he would be “of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD.”

How we admire one such as Jesus, who was prepared for every test and opportunity, whether it called for him to be gentle, tender, and meek; or bold, strong, and uncompromising. So may it be with us, his followers and disciples. It is indeed possible for us to reach that degree of development, “conformed to the image of his [God’s] Son,” but only if we are saturated with the Word of God—the “word of Christ” dwelling in us richly and “teaching and admonishing” us.—Rom. 8:29; Col. 3:16

TESTS OF SPIRITUAL STRENGTH

The living stones of which the “holy temple in the Lord” is to be constructed have still further tests. (Eph. 2:21) Even as some materials for earthly structures, these must be tested as to their tensile and their load-bearing strength. Tensile strength

well corresponds to longsuffering and patience. In that wonderful description of the divine character, we are told by the Apostle Paul that love “suffereth long, and is kind,” and in writing to the church at Rome, he assures them that “tribulation worketh patience.” (I Cor. 13:4; Rom. 5:3) With the same thought, James exhorts us to “let patience have her perfect [Greek: complete] work.” (James 1:4) How reasonable that God allows for time and experience in the development and ripening of the fruit of the spirit in each of his children! Thus the apostle again urges, “Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.”—Gal. 6:9

Load-bearing strength is also a requisite in these living stones. This does not mean that any of us individually could bear all the extreme tests which might be applied, for we are assured by the apostle, “God is faithful, who will not permit you to be tried beyond your ability; but with the trial, will also direct the issue, that you may be able to bear it.” (I Cor. 10:13, *Diaglott*) This was Paul’s own experience, when he testified that while in Asia he was “pressed out of measure, above strength,” but that God delivered him though he had “despaired even of life.” He further said that he and his companions “had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead.” (II Cor. 1:8,9) What an inspiring testimony to the unbreakable determination of Paul and his associates to trust fully in God and his providences for them, inasmuch as they had made a consecration even unto death. Hence, we, too, are to look beyond this human life and trust in him that “raiseth the dead.”

In another place, Paul writes that God's purpose concerning the establishment of his promised kingdom is to shake all things in order that the things which can be shaken may be removed. (Heb. 12:26-28) The clear intimation from this passage is that not only is the kingdom we seek one which cannot be shaken, but also that its spiritual ruling class is to be composed of those living stones which likewise cannot be shaken, because they have sought and received the strength sufficient for their every need, and tests which, in his wisdom, the Lord has subjected them to in order to bring their development to completion.

FELLOW BRETHREN IN THE HOUSE OF GOD

“That thou mayest know how to conduct thyself in God's house, which is a congregation of the living God,” wrote Paul to Timothy. (I Tim. 3:15, *Diaglott*) Individual Christians are God's habitation through the Spirit, but he also has at the present time a more comprehensive representation and means of expression in and through the ecclesia or “congregation” arrangement. How important, therefore, is our association with the brethren in “God's house.” Each member is a stone in God's symbolic temple, yet how much profit we may gain from our association with fellow members of this building! Through our fellowship with these other living stones, we will see a demonstration of God's Spirit, and at times, perhaps, greater development in some respects than our own. Let us note their examples of courage, meekness, patience, zeal, humility and love. Recalling another illustration given by Paul—that of the body—let us remember that it is by

“that which every joint supplieth” that the body is being built up in our Master’s likeness. (Eph. 4:15,16) Let us take a builder’s interest in the brethren, as God does, considering one another and provoking each other to love and good works.—Heb. 10:24

In every gathering of the Lord’s people, we find occasion for the exercise of godly character, sharing in the joint endeavors of the brethren to maintain “the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free,” and at the same time, “with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (Gal. 5:1; Eph. 4:2,3) Without doubt, in obeying the exhortation, “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together,” we shall find many of our greatest helps and blessings in the narrow way. At the same time in that blessed fellowship with others of “like precious faith,” we shall experience some of our most searching tests as to our knowledge of, and obedience to, the instructions of the Lord’s Word.—Heb. 10:25; II Pet. 1:1

HABITATION SOON TO BE COMPLETE

Soon, we believe, God’s spiritual habitation will be complete. We could well exhaust language in our efforts to describe the grandeur and glory of that dwelling place of the Almighty. In the 45th Psalm, the head of the divine family of sons is pictured, and with him his bride, the church. The bride is said to be “all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold;” and she is “brought unto the king in raiment of needlework.” (vss. 13,14) The Apostle Paul describes the church as both the “bride” and

also the “body” of Christ—the “fulness” or completion of the Christ class—that “little flock” who are to be God’s heavenly family and enjoy the most intimate communion with him.—Eph. 1:23; 4:13; 5:25-27,29,30; Luke 12:32

We are told in the Book of Revelation that the activity of the completed Christ class for the first thousand years will be as kings, priests, and judges over the world. (Rev. 20:6,12; 5:10) The result will be the reuniting in loyal obedience to God of all his intelligent creation alienated through sin, except those who, with full light, reject the opportunity. One thousand years are only the beginning, however, of the church’s eternal association in the plans of the Creator, who in his perfect wisdom, love, and power will have formulated a program which will be sublime in every respect for the ages of eternity.

The opportunity to become of the immediate family of God is far beyond our ability to fully appreciate or understand. As the apostle says, however, we hope for it, remembering that “the Spirit also helpeth our infirmity. ... And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because it maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. ... For whom he foreknew, he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.”—Rom. 8:25-29, *Revised Version Improved and Corrected* ■