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A Herald of Christ's Presence

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Deliverance Draws Near

***“When these things
are beginning to
occur, raise
yourselves, and lift
up your heads; for
your deliverance is
drawing near.”***

***—Luke 21:28,
Wilson’s Emphatic
Diaglott***

AT VERY FEW TIMES IN our country’s history has there been the combination of uncertainty, anxiety, and fear, that has accompanied the start of 2017. Indeed, there are the ongoing concerns of a tenuous economy, fear of more terrorism, unpredictability of rogue nations, insecurity in the Middle East, and other world and national problems that continue to be faced. However, the minds of most Americans have been transfixed during the last two months of 2016 with the selection of a new president, and with the results of the election that took place on November 8th.

So-called “experts” such as political analysts, pollsters, the media, and even many politicians were seemingly dumbfounded by the election of Donald Trump as the nation’s 45th president. The citizenry of the country was certainly no less taken aback by the results of their participation in the

electoral process. More than 129 million votes were cast in the presidential election, with Hillary Clinton winning the popular vote, albeit by a very small margin.

Other election statistics, however, were clearly in favor of Donald Trump. He won the popular vote in 60% of the individual states—30 out of 50. As a result, he claimed over 300 electoral votes, well above the 270 necessary to be elected, and 57% of the total. This was well ahead of Hillary Clinton's 43% of the Electoral College vote.

Most have wondered how Donald Trump could have been elected, since he has previously held no political office, and is considered a Washington outsider with minimal knowledge of the inner workings of government. Perhaps the most surprising aspect of his victorious presidential run, and to many the most disturbing, was found in the temperament he displayed throughout most of the campaign process.

During the Republican and Democratic primaries, as well as in the presidential campaign, nearly all the candidates, but especially Donald Trump, bitterly attacked their opponents, both politically and personally. No holds were barred as sarcasm, contempt, maliciousness, and cruelty abounded openly, whether in debates, political ads, the news media, speeches, and even social media. "Tweeting" at all hours of the day and night became a common method for communicating disdain and criticism of opponents.

Despite all these circumstances, Mr. Trump won the election. Many are asking, "Why and how did this happen?" In hindsight, it seems that because

he was a Washington outsider, and not afraid to speak his mind concerning all subjects, his message resonated with many people who have for a long time been very dissatisfied with the “establishment” politics of Washington—on both the Democratic and Republican sides of the aisle. Donald Trump’s often-times explosive demeanor seemed to be an outlet for many people to express their anger at the status quo in this country. Revelation 11:18, which speaks prophetically of our day, states, “The nations [peoples] were angry.” The recent election seems to provide, at least in part, a stark fulfillment of these words.

The passage of time, along with world and national events as they unfold, will ultimately determine what results from a Trump presidency. As sincere students of the Bible, we should continue to do as Jesus admonished, “Watch ye therefore, and pray always,” noting the prophetic words of the Scriptures which point to the nearness of God’s kingdom.—Luke 21:31-36

OUR OUTLOOK

The start of a new year reminds us that time marches on, and time is an important element of our outlook as Christians and students of the Bible. The servants of God in every age have been out of harmony with the world around them. They have been pained by the sinful and unjust practices of the ungodly. Because of their own imperfections they have also groaned within themselves, longing for the time to come when the downward course of sin would be stopped, and deliverance from its corrupting influences would come to all mankind.—Rom. 8:22,23

The questions, “How long?” and “When?” and their equivalents, appear frequently in the writings of the prophets and apostles. God’s reply is consistent that the present reign of sin and death will not continue forever. The Bible expressions “last days,” “time of the end,” and “latter days,” give assurance that in God’s plan a new dispensation is coming, in which righteousness will be enthroned and sin and death destroyed.—Isa. 2:2; Dan. 12:4; Ezek. 38:16; II Tim. 3:1

BIBLE ASSURES

God’s assurances of this final triumph of right over wrong are recorded throughout the Bible, beginning with Genesis 3:15. There the statement is made that the “seed” of “the woman” would “bruise,” or crush, the serpent’s head. This hope is amplified by God’s promises to Abraham that through his “seed” all the families of the earth would be blessed.—Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18

Through Moses, God promised to send a great “Prophet,” and Isaiah prophesied, “Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder.” (Deut. 18:18; Isa. 9:6) Daniel also foretold, “In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom.”—Dan. 2:44

JESUS COMES

When Jesus came, he was accepted by his disciples as the one spoken of by the prophets. To them it seemed that the long-awaited time for the divinely promised deliverance had come. John the Baptist announced the presence of Jesus with the statement, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matt. 3:2)

A better translation of the original Greek in his statement would be, "The royal majesty of the heavens has approached."—Matt. 3:2, *Diaglott*

It appeared certain to the disciples that there was to be no further delay. They believed that "the kingdom of God should immediately appear." (Luke 19:11) Jesus understood this situation, and to prevent them from being too greatly disappointed, he related the parable of the pounds, in which a "nobleman went into a far country" to receive a kingdom, and later to return.—vs. 12

Evidently the disciples recognized that Jesus, their Messiah, was the nobleman of this parable. He was telling them that he was going away, and that the kingdom which they believed "should immediately appear" would not be established until he returned. They did not understand, however, that his going away involved his death. Thus, they were quite unprepared for the sudden termination of his ministry.

Nevertheless, on the supposition that Jesus was leaving them and would return later to establish his kingdom, they went to him on the Mount of Olives, and asked, "Tell us, when these things will be? and what will be the sign of thy presence, and of the consummation of the age?" (Matt. 24:3, *Diaglott*) Here we have the questions, "When?" and "What will be the sign?" The disciples desired to know what evidences they should look for which would show that the time of waiting has ended, and that Christ has returned to set up the long-promised kingdom.

Chapters 24 and 25 of Matthew contain Jesus' reply to these questions. Luke's account of the Lord's prophecy of his return and the end of the age is

found in the 21st chapter of his Gospel, of which our opening text is a part. Luke reports Jesus as saying that when you see certain signs beginning to come to pass, “lift up your heads; for your deliverance is drawing near.” Here we have one of the most definite assertions found in the Bible concerning the preparation for Christ’s kingdom. It is very important, therefore, that we ascertain what “these things” are which identify this time for which the people of God in every age have so hopefully waited and longingly prayed.

“THESE THINGS”

Let us examine briefly some of “these things”—the signs referred to by Jesus. Luke 21:24 reads, “They shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.” The first part of this text is a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Israelites among the various Gentile nations.

While the literal city of Jerusalem was then destroyed, its destruction signified the overthrow of the whole Jewish polity, and the complete subjection of the people to Gentile domination. The nation had lost its independence six centuries before this, when their last king, Zedekiah, was overthrown, and the people were taken captive to Babylon.

When Jesus said, “Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled,” he was merely saying that the nation which had lost its independence in the days of Babylon would be further dispersed, and continue

to be persecuted until the “times of the Gentiles” were ended. This is one of the things which we should see begin to come to pass if we are to be assured that our deliverance is near.

We believe this prophecy of Jesus has been fulfilled. However, let us not read more into his words than he says. We know from other promises of God that wonderful blessings of health, peace, life and joy are in store for Israel. We believe that the time will come when he will “make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah.” (Jer. 31:31-34) We understand, too, that the Gentiles will share in these blessings in God’s due time.

Jesus, though, said nothing about these kingdom blessings in this prophecy recorded by Luke. He only said that Jerusalem, emblematic of the nation, would no longer be “trodden down” by the Gentiles. Since the treading down of the nation began with the loss of its sovereign independence, its restoration to this status would fulfill Jesus’ prophecy. Israel, since 1948, is now a free nation, having been given this status in the world by the United Nations.

The state of Israel today is not a large nation. Jesus did not say it would be. She does not possess all the land promised to her, nor is she free from many serious problems, but these conditions were not implied by Jesus. Like every other nation on earth today, Israel is perplexed and fearful. She has economic, social and political challenges which are similar to those of other nations, and as is abundantly evident, she has many enemies.

Jesus did not say that Israel would escape these problems when she first became free. He indicated only that Israel would no longer be trodden down—

that her status of bondage as a nation, which began six centuries earlier when King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon conquered Jerusalem, would be changed. She would again be free to conduct her own affairs and make her own laws. Indeed, we have seen this come to pass.

POWERS OF HEAVEN SHAKEN

Luke 21, verses 25 and 26, describe two signs which are closely related. Here, Jesus spoke of “signs in the sun and moon and stars.” On the earth, he said, there would be “anguish of nations in perplexity; roarings of the sea and waves.” Because of these things, Jesus said that men’s hearts would be exceedingly fearful, adding, “for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.”—*Diaglott*

It seems evident from these two verses that the signs in the sun and moon and stars are what Jesus refers to as the “powers of the heavens” being shaken. This is one of the contributing causes of men’s hearts becoming very fearful. It is not the literal heavens that are shaken, any more than it is the roaring of the literal sea and waves to which Jesus refers in this prophecy.

It is the symbolic heavens and earth that are involved here, the same as mentioned by the Apostle Peter when he wrote, “The day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.”—II Pet. 3:10

The figurative heavens and earth which pass away with “a great noise” in the “day of the Lord”

are the spiritual and material aspects of the present world order, which must give place to the kingdom of Christ. This kingdom, as Peter identifies it three verses later, is the “new heavens and . . . new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” (II Pet. 3:13) Just as the literal heavens exercise a powerful influence over all life on the earth, so the symbolic heavens through the centuries of this present evil world have exercised a large measure of control over the people.

This has been done through religion, which has been recognized as a spiritual influence. It is spiritual in the sense of claiming a higher authority than the dictates of human laws. The past church/state governments of Europe are a good example of this arrangement. However, even where these have not functioned, peoples of the earth, Christian and non-Christian alike, have been subject to the forces of religious viewpoints and influences.

However, one of the things which Jesus foretold would take place at the end of the age was, “The powers of the heavens will be shaken.” That is, established religious institutions and concepts would lose their control over the people. In many countries throughout the world, religion still exercises much influence in the affairs of mankind. Nevertheless, we have begun to see this “shaking” come to pass, as people and nations have resisted, even to the point of armed conflict, the “powers of the heavens” to which they have been in bondage for, in some cases, many centuries. Indeed, this development is contributing to the fear that fills the hearts of man today.

“WIDOWHOOD”

We are reminded of the judgments at the end of the age that come upon all false religions, illustrated by ecclesiastical Babylon as outlined in Revelation 18 and Isaiah 47. We note the attitude expressed in Revelation 18:7, “I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow,” and in Isaiah 47:8, “I am, and none else beside me; I shall not sit as a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children.” This is the attitude just prior to the severe judgments pronounced upon Babylon by God. Isaiah continues, “These two things shall come to thee in a moment in one day, the loss of children, and widowhood.”—vs. 9

This “widowhood” came at the time of the First World War, when the kings of Europe lost their crowns and the Divine Right of Kings church/state arrangement came to an end. The resulting fragmentation of the power of the former state church also caused a “loss of children,” as the peoples of European countries and others exercised their freedom from bondage to the “mother” church that had once existed.

Apart from these specific developments, in every part of the world, there has been an increasing breakdown of religious and moral standards. Evidences of this are increases in crime, hatred, violence, immorality, injustice, and discontent, as well as growing corruption and dishonesty in business and government.

SIGNS BEGINNING TO COME TO PASS

We have seen these and other signs which have begun to come to pass in our day. Only those who

are watching the “more sure word of prophecy” can see this beginning with an understanding of what it means. (II Pet. 1:19) How heartening is that understanding! It means that our “deliverance is drawing near.” That deliverance from the bondage of sin and death for which God’s people throughout the Gospel Age have waited and prayed is at hand. This means, also, that the deliverance of the whole world from the rulership of Satan is near. For this, too, we thank God.

However, unlike the watchers who “lift up” their heads, men’s hearts are filled with fear as they contemplate what they feel will be the inevitable result of the complete breaking down of present society. As we see these signs being fulfilled, we rejoice in the evidences they give that the world will soon recognize the significance of what is taking place. Jesus said, “Then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.”—Luke 21:27

With the symbolic sun, moon, and stars in the ecclesiastical heavens obscured so far as their power to control is concerned, the world will at first see only a “cloud” of trouble. It will be in that symbolic cloud—by means which divine providence will reveal to mankind—that the presence of earth’s new king will be recognized. Then, in God’s plan, the “new heavens” will take control, and through the assisting agencies of the new symbolic earth, his promised blessings of peace, joy and life will begin to flow to mankind as a vast “river of water of life.”—Rev. 22:1-3

Thus, as we enter the year 2017, it should be with hope, confidence and joy. Such should be our attitude, regardless of the uncertainties of having

a new president, the insecurity surrounding present economic conditions, or the pain of witnessing the spread of immorality, hatred, and strife in the world. We are promised that deliverance is near—just how near, God has not revealed. Let us continue to strive to be faithful to the precious Truths which have been revealed to us, and by them, be refreshed and sustained in these troubling times—until our deliverance, and the world's, comes to pass. ■

WEEKLY PRAYER MEETING TEXTS

JANUARY 5—“The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.”—Romans 15:3 (Z. '96-83 Hymn 299)

JANUARY 12—“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.”—Galatians 6:1 (Z. '01-150 Hymn 267)

JANUARY 19—“O how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day.”—Psalm 119:97 (Z. '99-156 Hymn 238)

JANUARY 26—“When ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance.”—Matthew 6:16 (Z. '98-45 Hymn 196)

2017 MEMORIAL SUPPER DATE

The proper time for the annual observance of the Memorial Supper will be after sunset on Sunday, April 9, 2017.

Praising God the Creator

Key Verse: *“By the word of the LORD were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth.”*
—*Psalm 33:6*

Selected Scripture:
Psalm 33:1-9

THE LESSON FOR TODAY

impresses upon our minds the truths concerning the creative power of God. We are thankful for knowing the force behind the creation of all things. These words of the psalmist remind us of the Genesis account of the creation and preparation of earth to be man's eternal home. Here we find this process described in very broad terms: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.” (Gen. 1:1-5) Other creative “days,” or time periods, accomplished additional aspects of earth's preparation for man.—vss. 7-31

Our Key Verse says the creation was accomplished “by the word of the LORD,” and “by the breath of his mouth.” These words infer that God did not personally create the heavens or the earth, but rather that he gave instructions which were perfectly executed. This

understanding harmonizes with similar statements of the Bible, such as, “Let them praise the name of the LORD: for he commanded, and they were created;” “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God;” and “By the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water.”—Ps. 148:5; Heb. 11:3; II Pet. 3:5

From these and other Scriptures, we learn that while God is the architect of all things, he has used other agencies in various ways to carry out his plans. God was personally responsible for only one creation—his only begotten Son. He is “Jesus Christ, . . . Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending” of God’s direct creation, and the central figure of his plan for man’s redemption. (Rev. 1:1,8; 22:13,16) By him, under the Heavenly Father’s direction, “were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth.” (Col. 1:16) When our first parents sinned, God’s Son willingly offered to come to earth to be man’s Redeemer. Paul tells us of this key feature of God’s plan, stating that he desires “all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.”—I Tim. 2:3-6

Comprehension of the Bible’s explanation that Jesus Christ is the first and last direct creation of God helps us understand the ransom. Knowing that God gave his only begotten Son to redeem Adam and his race allows us to greatly appreciate the full meaning of the statement that “God is love.” (I John 4:8) As we grasp these basic principles of truth, our love for the Heavenly Father deepens. We are also humbled, realizing that our understanding has only been made possible by the enlightenment of God’s Holy Spirit—a gift of his grace. We might appropriately define praise as the heart’s sincere expression of thanksgiving, love, reverence, and respect for God. How praiseworthy is our God—the Creator. ■

Praise God's Greatness

Key Verse: *"O sing unto the LORD a new song: sing unto the LORD, all the earth."
—Psalm 96:1*

Selected Scripture:
Psalm 96:1-6,10-13

Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac. (Gen. 22:16-18) This experience illustrated God's love in offering his son, Jesus, as a ransom sacrifice on behalf of the entire human family. (John 3:16,17) God's promise to Abraham was in the form of a sworn covenant. Paul states: "When God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself."—Heb. 6:13

The understanding of God's promise to bless all the families of the earth has largely been hidden throughout the ages. Initially, the Israelites believed the promise was for them alone. After their deliverance from Egyptian bondage, God spoke to Moses saying, "Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children

ONE OF THE WAYS IN

which we can praise God's greatness is to remember, and claim as our own, his loving promise to bless all the families of the earth. This promise was first expressed to Abraham. In its fullness, God gave it because of

of Israel.” (Exod. 19:3-6) The people’s response was “All that the LORD hath spoken we will do.”—vs. 8

Israel praised God for their favored position, thinking it was to be a perpetual blessing. However, their special standing before God was eventually removed due to disobedience. “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) When Israel rejected Jesus as their Messiah, he declared, “your house is left unto you desolate.”—Matt. 23:38

Having removed his special favor from Israel, God turned to the Gentiles. (Acts 13:46) However, without the Holy Spirit to shed light upon God’s plan to bless all the families of the earth, Christianity has largely restricted the blessings of that promise to just themselves. The false teaching that salvation is only available in this lifetime has forced them to fear that those who are not saved now will go into the eternal flames of hell rather than to heaven. This God-dishonoring doctrine has hidden the beauty of God’s promise to bless all who have ever lived.

The Apostle Paul declares that the knowledge of God’s promises has been hidden even from the Gentiles, as a whole, because he has not yet poured out his Holy Spirit of understanding upon them. (I Cor. 2:7; Eph. 1:9; 3:3,4,9) The beauty and full scope of God’s promise has only been recognized by those who are spirit begotten. “Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” (Col. 1:26,27) We are thankful that the day is fast approaching when songs of praise will be offered to the Lord by all mankind—Jews and Gentiles—for his greatness. ■

Praise God the Provider

Key Verse: “By terrible things in righteousness wilt thou answer us, O God of our salvation; who art the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of them that are afar off upon the sea.”
—Psalm 65:5

Selected Scripture:
Psalm 65:1,2,9-13

“By awesome deeds You answer us in righteousness, O God of our salvation, You who are the trust of all the ends of the earth and of the farthest sea.”

The preceding verses of our lesson describe the psalmist’s audience in prophetic language as spiritual Zion—Christ and his bride, “the lamb’s wife.” (Rev. 21:9) Together, they will be set up with divine glory and power, when all the members of the “bride” class shall have made their calling and election sure by being faithful unto death. (Rev. 2:10) The Christ class will bring joy to the whole earth, and serve as God’s channel of blessing to all mankind. The Prophet Micah wrote, “The law shall go forth

AN IMPORTANT ASPECT

of praise which we are to learn is that of thanksgiving and appreciation for the experiences which God provides us each day for our development. The *King James* translation of our Key Verse uses the phrase “terrible things,” as if God has prepared a painful path for us to follow. However, the meaning of the original Hebrew word has the thought of reverence, or to stand in awe. The *New American Standard Bible* translates the verse,

of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.” (Mic. 4:2) It will be the honor and privilege of this “Zion” class to be kings and priests in the long awaited earthly kingdom for which we all pray.—Rev. 20:6; Matt. 6:10

In verse 11 of our lesson, the psalmist praises God, saying, “Thou crownest the year with thy goodness.” It is fitting that the Lord’s people should keep an account of the mercies and blessings provided by God, lest we be overtaken in the cares of this life, or the earthly riches that might turn us from our spiritual growth as New Creatures. As we mature in Christ, we will perceive that these joys are of a holier and more lasting kind than we had ever known before. We will recognize them as having their source in the experiences provided by our Heavenly Father, which are always for our highest spiritual welfare.

We have other experiences that are not pleasant to the flesh, but we can joyfully accept these because they are developing in us a Christlike character. Of these experiences, the Apostle James writes, “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.”—James 1:2-4

The Scriptures assure us that our trials will never be more than we can bear. Again, Paul says, “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.” (I Cor. 10:13) These comforting words are in keeping with God’s promise —“I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.”—Heb. 13:5

Surely, we can praise God as the all-wise provider of our experiences. “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion . . . , who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.”—II Cor. 1:3,4, *New International Version* ■

Praising the Works of God

Key Verse: *“O LORD,
how manifold are
thy works! in
wisdom hast thou
made them all: the
earth is full of
thy riches.”*
—*Psalm 104:24*

Selected Scripture:
Psalm 104:1-4,24-30

us. These are indeed part of God’s “manifold” works, formed and created by his unerring wisdom.

The Genesis account of Creation tells us that after man was created, God instructed him, “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat.”—Gen. 1:28-30

In these verses, we see the relation between the lower forms of creation and man. By giving him dominion over

IN A PREVIOUS LESSON,

we examined how God used various agencies to create and prepare earth—man’s eternal home. Today we turn our attention to the extraordinary wisdom behind that creation and how it relates to man. It is easy to view with wonder the great variety within the animal and plant world which we see all about

all other living things on earth, God placed man in a superior position to plant and animal creation. Though we are mere specks in the universe, God declares his special love for the human race through the inspiring words of the psalmist: “When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea.”—Ps. 8:3-8, *English Standard Version*

The psalmist here shows that the works of God are manifold, and it is in man where his wisdom and love are the most evident. Adam was created perfect, and his life could have continued forever. However, the Bible explains that by his disobedience “sin entered into the world, and death by sin,” a penalty which has passed down to all generations since.—Rom. 5:12

God, however, did not leave us hopelessly in our sins. The Apostle John expresses the Heavenly Father’s love for his human creation and gives us hope, saying, “God is love. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation [atonement] for our sins.”—I John 4:8-10

God has given us the good news of his work of redemption, provided through the precious blood of his Son, Jesus Christ. This promise is not ours alone, but is for all mankind. (I John 2:1,2) Indeed, the shedding of the “precious blood of Christ . . . was foreordained before the foundation of the world,” that our “faith and hope might be in God.” (I Pet. 1:19-21) For all his mighty works, praise be to God!

■

All Creation Praises God

Key Verse: “*Let them praise the name of the LORD: for he commanded, and they were created.*”
—*Psalm 148:5*

Selected Scripture:
Psalm 148

month, which have focused on giving praise to God, have revealed important Biblical truths concerning his special love for mankind. The Scriptures make manifest that God’s first creation was his only begotten Son. His obedient Son then was used as the instrument for creating all other things, under the direction of his Heavenly Father. Preeminent among God’s creation were our first parents, Adam and Eve, who were specially blessed by receiving dominion over all other earthly creations.—Ps. 8:3-9

In these lessons, we have also seen that God designed a plan to bless all mankind through the gift of his only begotten Son. Through him, the price of redemption was provided for all mankind, so that they can be released from the curse of death brought about by Adam’s disobedience. (John 3:16,17; Rom. 5:12-19) Included in God’s plan was also a provision to choose a special class called the “bride of Christ” to help bestow these blessings in a coming kingdom upon the earth. (Rev. 21:2-4) God has given special provisions to help these called ones develop a Christlike character during this present Gospel Age.

OUR LESSONS THIS

Today's lesson, taken from Psalm 148, refers not only to man giving praise to God, but also to the appropriateness of all his creation to do so. In the first five verses, we find instructions to the angelic hosts to give praise. The angels knew God's Son in his prehuman existence and therefore sang praises at his birth as Jesus in Bethlehem. (Luke 2:13-14) As they see the full plan of God continuing to unfold to its ultimate completion, the holy angels will joyously sing praises before the throne of God throughout eternity.—Rev. 5:13; 7:11,12

Verse six of our lesson gives the assurance that God's creations are "stablished . . . for ever and ever." Some have denied this promise by the erroneous teaching that the earth will be destroyed. The Scriptures, however, consistently affirm God's promise as stated in this verse. One such example emphatically declares, "The earth abideth for ever."—Eccles. 1:4

Other components of creation are spoken of in Psalm 148 as rendering praise to God. "Praise the LORD from the earth, ye dragons, and all deeps: Fire, and hail; snow, and vapours; stormy wind fulfilling his word: Mountains, and all hills; fruitful trees, and all cedars: Beasts, and all cattle; creeping things, and flying fowl: Kings of the earth, and all people; princes, and all judges of the earth: Both young men, and maidens; old men, and children."—vss. 7-12

The psalmist summarizes the privilege of all creation to praise God in verses 13 and 14—"Let them [all those mentioned in previous verses] praise the name of the LORD: for his name alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth and heaven." Finally, specific mention is made of God's "saints," or holy ones, and Israel, as giving praise to God. The Psalm concludes: "He also exalteth the horn of his people, the praise of all his saints; even of the children of Israel, a people near unto him. Praise ye the LORD." We look forward to the time when all creation will praise God! ■

The Gospel Age Work Begins

“This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations.”

—Matthew 24:14

WE ARE PLEASED TO PRO-

vide our readers in 2017 a series of articles under the general heading, “The Search for God’s People.” These articles will cover the formation

and development of the Early Church, beginning with Jesus’ earthly ministry, and as it continued through the work of the apostles. It was the efforts of those faithful brethren of the first century which began the fulfillment of Jesus’ commission given in our opening text—to give witness to the Gospel message throughout the world. Indeed, without the ministry of these early servants of the Lord, we would not have an understanding of the beautiful truths of God’s plan of salvation.

The general concept taught in Christian churches throughout the world is that God’s purpose now in having the Gospel message proclaimed is to convert the world to Christ, and to save the souls of mankind. If one hears the Word and responds, he will go to heaven. If he ignores the message, he faces eternal

torment or, at the very least, eternal separation from God. A careful study of the Bible, however, reveals that this is not so. God's objective for this age in sending forth his Word is to find "a people for his name," an expression used by the Apostle James concerning the early Christian converts.—Acts 15:14

The search for those who will be of the Christ class has progressed from the time of our Lord's First Advent until our day—a period of nearly 2,000 years. We note that as this search continues, its objective has not changed, and is no different today than it was in the days of the apostles. It is only when this special work of selecting and preparing the footstep followers of the Master has been completed that God will turn to the remainder of the people, including all those in the grave, whom he will raise, for their conversion through the Christ—head and body.

ISRAEL FAVORED FIRST

As we look back at those beginning days of the search for God's people, we note first the Heavenly Father's faithfulness in keeping his word to Israel. For centuries God dealt exclusively with the nation of Israel, even as he said through the Prophet Amos, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."—Amos 3:2

As indicated by the words of the prophet, God's special favor to Israel brought penalties for unfaithfulness. Among those punishments was their captivity in Babylon. Daniel, one of those taken captive, went to God in prayer during this period of exile,

seeking the return of favor to his people. God answered that prayer through the angel, Gabriel, who revealed to Daniel how God would subsequently bless Israel with a period of favor.

In Daniel 9:24-27, Gabriel tells of the seventy weeks of favor to Israel. The key to understanding the time features of this prophecy is obtained from Daniel's contemporary, the Prophet Ezekiel, who was given this vital detail by God: "I have appointed thee each day for a year." (Ezek. 4:6) The seventy weeks, then, were not intended to be 490 days, but rather 490 years. Within the seventy weeks, however, a period of sixty-nine weeks—or 483 years—are mentioned, spanning the time when the decree would go forth to "restore and to build Jerusalem" unto "Messiah the Prince."—Dan. 9:25

True to Gabriel's prophetic announcement, after Babylon was conquered by Medo-Persia, Cyrus, the king of Persia, made a decree to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. (Ezra 1:1-4) This decree, however, was not to rebuild the city. It was not until Nehemiah asked King Artaxerxes for permission to rebuild Jerusalem, and that work was begun, that the prophecy given to Daniel began to be fulfilled. (Neh. 2:1-6) Four hundred and eighty-three years later, in AD 29, Jesus came to Jordan to be immersed by John the Baptist. Israel's Messiah had come and started his earthly ministry.

Additionally, the prophecy recorded in the ninth chapter of Daniel stated that Messiah would be "cut off, but not for himself," and that this would be "in the midst of the week." (Dan. 9:26,27) Three and one-half years after Jesus began his ministry, he was put to death in the middle of that "week" of seven years.

SENT ONLY TO THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL

This last week of favor, from AD 29 to AD 36, was a very important time indeed, and was particularly mentioned in Daniel's prophecy. There was no doubt that special opportunities were given to Israel during this time. Nevertheless, during Jesus' ministry there were times when Gentiles also sought the blessings he had to offer. One such incident involved a woman of Canaan, whose daughter was vexed with a devil. As she pleaded with Jesus, "he answered her not a word." Although ignored, this woman was so persistent that the disciples besought Jesus to send her away. Jesus then told her plainly, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." However, she still would not be denied, and continued to beseech him. Jesus again said to her, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs." "Truth, Lord," she responded, "yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table." This expression of faith touched Jesus' heart, and he healed her daughter.—Matt. 15:21-28

This woman was one of several Gentiles who received blessings from Jesus, but they were few in comparison to the great majority of natural Israel, who received the benefits of our Lord's teaching and healing liberally. This special favor to Israel was shown in other ways. The twelve apostles were all chosen from Israel, and became foundation members of the church.—Rev. 21:14

One of these, Judas Iscariot, failed in his calling and had to be replaced. The remaining eleven apostles thought to do this themselves, using a very proper and approved procedure—casting votes for

the selection. (Acts 1:15-26) However, they had overlooked the fact that it was not their task to select apostles. This appointment could only be made by the Heavenly Father and his Son, Jesus. They had forgotten our Lord's words to them, "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." (John 15:16) The principle here stated by our Lord applies to all selected as "people for his name." Later, Saul of Tarsus, also a Jew, was chosen by God to replace Judas.

We might expect that the work of finding members of the body of Christ would require a certain amount of organized effort, and we find that this was so. Certain individuals were motivated by the influence of the Holy Spirit to relocate to other geographic areas, so this work could gradually be extended. At first, all witness activity was centered in Jerusalem. The eleven apostles as well as other disciples continued to reside in that city, because Jesus had told them to tarry at Jerusalem until the helper, the Holy Spirit, would be sent to them.—Luke 24:49

PERSECUTION BEGINS

After the Holy Spirit came, many new converts continued with the apostles in Jerusalem. However, it was not long before hostility against the disciples grew until it became very severe. This compelled them to resort to a communal arrangement for survival, since the means of earning their livelihoods was not readily available. Persecution continually made matters more and more difficult, and so they lived by pooling their resources.—Acts 2:41-47; 4:34,35

Word of this increasingly perplexing problem was communicated to other disciples living in outlying areas as well as those who came to Jerusalem from

time to time to worship. It was probably in this way that the Lord touched the heart of a Levite named Joses, who lived on the island of Cyprus. He possessed property there, but sold it and came to Jerusalem, laying the money “at the apostles’ feet.” (Acts 4:32-37) This was the Lord’s way of bringing Joses, surnamed Barnabas, to Jerusalem where he was needed and could be used.

There were many Israelites in Jerusalem who had come to Judea from other lands at various times to celebrate the Jewish feasts. Some of these remained and became disciples of our Lord. Among these were the Hellenists, or Greek-speaking Jews. The widows of this group began to complain that they were neglected in their share of community supplies. Word of this situation soon reached the apostles, who corrected it by having deacons appointed to oversee this service.—Acts 6:1-6

One of these deacons was Stephen, who is believed by some Bible historians to have been a Hellenist. His preaching concerning Jesus as the Messiah caused confrontations with other Greek-speaking Jews who were not believers, which eventually led to a trial and conviction, followed by a sentence of death by stoning.—Acts 6:8-15; 7:1-60

Stephen’s death had a severe impact upon the disciples in Jerusalem. Because of this evidence of increasing persecution, many chose to leave the area and settle in distant places. Some left for former homelands, and others went to regions of Palestine where they perhaps hoped there would be less hostility. We read: “At that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout

the regions of Judaea and Samaria. . . . Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.”—Acts 8:1,4

SAUL OF TARSUS

There was a young man, Saul of Tarsus, who was present at the stoning of Stephen who consented to his death, and participated by guarding the cloaks of those casting stones. Afterward, Saul went about with great zeal, creating havoc in the Early Church at Jerusalem—having Christian men and women arrested and imprisoned. Not content to limit his activity to Jerusalem, Saul decided to pursue some who had escaped. He obtained letters from the high priest to bring these disciples back for trial, and set out for Damascus, in Syria.—Acts 8:3; 9:1,2

While traveling with his party, Saul was stopped, and struck blind by a brilliant light from heaven. He heard a voice saying to him, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” (Acts 9:4) When Saul realized that the one confronting him was the Lord Jesus, whom he was opposing, he was greatly frightened and confused. His self-confidence and assurance was suddenly gone. He was told to go to Damascus, where he would receive further instructions from the Lord. The other members of the group led him by the hand and brought him to the home of a man named Judas. There he sat in the darkness of blindness for three days, not eating or drinking, but devoting himself to prayer.—vss. 5-11

If we were to place ourselves in Saul’s situation, we too would be turning over in our minds all our former misdeeds and misguided zeal. Then, beginning

to realize that our actions had not been according to knowledge, we would beg the Lord for forgiveness. Through this very moving experience, Saul had a complete change of heart. Additionally, his former misguided zeal would now be turned in the proper direction.

There was at that time a disciple living in Damascus named Ananias, to whom the Lord appeared in a vision, instructing him to go to Saul. The Lord said to Ananias, “Go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.” (vss. 11,12) We note that the prayers of Saul did not go unanswered. Ananias at first questioned the Lord’s instructions, saying, “Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel.”—vss. 13-15

This experience occurred near the close of the last prophetic week of special favor to Israel spoken of in Daniel’s prophecy. (Dan. 9:24-27) In these words to Ananias, our Lord gave a direct indication that Gentiles would soon be invited into the body of Christ. In the end, Ananias did as he had been instructed, and went to the home of Judas where he greeted the blind man with the words, “Brother Saul.” Immediately Saul’s eyesight was restored, and he was baptized into

(Continued on page 36)

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(Continued from page 31) Christ. Having been without food for three days, he ate and was strengthened, and stayed with the disciples at Damascus for several days.—Acts 9:17-19

It would appear from the subsequent verses in Acts chapter 9 that Saul immediately went out and began to preach in the synagogues that Jesus was the Christ. However, the question arises as to how he could have immediately begun to witness effectively without first learning God's plan from the Scriptures. When Luke wrote the account in Acts, he did not tell how Saul obtained this understanding. However, this information is supplied by Saul himself—later known as Paul—when he wrote letters to the churches of Galatia and Corinth.

PAUL LEARNS THE SCRIPTURES

In the opening verse of the letter to the Galatians, we learn how Paul confirms his appointment as an apostle by Jesus and the Heavenly Father: "Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead)." (Gal. 1:1) However, this great honor never made him high-minded. He was always aware that first he had gone entirely in the wrong direction. He later wrote, "I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."—I Cor. 15:9

One might wonder why our Lord did not send Saul to Jerusalem immediately following his conversion, to be instructed by the other apostles. Perhaps one reason was because of their feelings about Saul. His persecution of the church initially caused a barrier between him and the apostles, so God taught

him the Truth in a different way. Later in Galatians the first chapter, Paul writes, “When it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus.”—vss. 15-17

Just prior to this, Paul told of his complete conversion from obeying and pleasing men, by his zeal for the “Jews’ religion,” to obeying and pleasing God. Paul’s experience should remind us that we can all too easily fall prey to the improper course of obeying and pleasing men, instead of striving to obey and to please God. He said, “Do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews’ religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: And profited in the Jews’ religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.”—vss. 10-14

The special call of Paul and the direct revelations Jesus and the Heavenly Father gave to him are confirmed again in his letter to the Corinthians. There he observed that anyone who had undergone experiences such as these might tend to boast about them. “Is it necessary to boast? It is not profitable

indeed, but I will come even to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man, in Christ, who above fourteen years since—(whether with a body, I know not; or without a body, I know not; God knows;)—such a one suddenly conveyed away to the third heaven. And I know this very man, (whether with a body, or without the body, I know not; God knows;) That he was suddenly conveyed away into paradise, and heard indescribable things spoken, which it is not possible for a man to relate. Respecting such a person I will boast; but respecting myself I will not boast, unless in my weaknesses. For if I should desire to boast, I shall not be unwise; for I will speak the truth; but I forbear, lest anyone should impute to me more than what he sees me to be, or what he hears from me. And in order that I might not be unduly elated by the transcendancy of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me—an Angel-adversary—that it might afflict me; so that I should not be too much exalted.”—II Cor. 12:1-7, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*

RETURN TO DAMASCUS AND JERUSALEM

We do not know how long Saul was in Arabia receiving these special revelations, but it might be safe to speculate that it was at least several months. After this he returned to Damascus, “And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.” (Acts 9:20) The reaction of the unbelieving Jews in Damascus was one of amazement, knowing that Saul had come there to take those believing in Christ as his prisoners. His logic was so compelling and clear that none could refute his powerful preaching of the resurrected Christ.

Therefore, his opposers decided it would be necessary to seal his lips by killing him. When the brethren learned of their plot, they helped Saul escape and make his way back to Jerusalem.—vss. 21-25

The apostles and disciples at Jerusalem were at first afraid of Saul, knowing of his previous persecution of Christians. Even though most of them found it difficult to accept him as a follower of Christ, one of them, Barnabas, realized that the matter had to be resolved, so he sought out Saul to talk with him. After he had learned of his peculiar experiences, obviously from God, and was convinced of his conversion, he took Saul to the apostles and insisted that they know the truth of the matter and of the complete change that had occurred in his life. The apostles and disciples then accepted Saul, and he became one of them, entering into their activities and speaking in the name of the Lord Jesus.—vss. 26-28

Saul's preaching at the beginning of his ministry brought him in contact with the Hellenists. We read of this in Acts 9:29: "He spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him." The word Grecians should be translated "Hellenists"—that is, Greek-speaking Jews. Here again, as before in Damascus, his logic and clear understanding of the Scriptures were so persuasive that none could disprove him. Similarly, these Hellenists decided the best way to silence the debate was to kill Saul, as those in Damascus had thought to do.

PERSECUTION EASED

When the brethren learned of the plot, they decided that for Paul's safety he should return

to his home in Tarsus—a city in Asia Minor in the province of Cilicia. They provided for his safe escort by way of Caesarea, a port city from which he could sail to Tarsus. After Saul's departure, a respite came to the brethren for a period. We read, "Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, were multiplied."—Acts 9:30,31

This was a meaningful change in conditions throughout the region. The Heavenly Father provided relief from the severe persecution that had existed since the time of Jesus' crucifixion. This was no doubt beneficial to the church, helping them in a temporal way, since they then became more acceptable in Israel's society, and employment was more readily obtainable. Thus, the communal arrangement became less and less important, and soon ended. It is noteworthy that there is no further mention of this type of shared, close-living social structure continuing, or being revived, among them.

The primary import of this period of rest is the spiritual growth of the church which resulted, as well as their growth in numbers. Three thousand were baptized on the Day of Pentecost, and another five thousand who "believed" are mentioned shortly thereafter. (Acts 2:41; 4:4) The increase of the brethren in the church from that fruitful beginning, nearly all we believe from the ranks of Israel, shows how God's blessing was still upon this nation, even as the last week, or seven-year period, of special favor drew to a close. ■

Seeing the Invisible

“We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”
—II Corinthians 4:18

OUR OPENING TEXT reveals to us the important truth that it is by the eye of faith that we can see what would otherwise be unseen things of God. If our faith is weak, we will find ourselves laying hold upon one object or another as visible supports to our belief—that is, things which can be seen by the

natural eye.

Everyone who is called of God must possess a certain degree of faith to respond to that call through a full consecration to do his will. Even the apostles realized that they did not possess sufficient faith when they requested, “Lord, Increase our faith.” (Luke 17:5) Likewise, we discover that our faith needs to grow if we are to be able to look beyond present temporal things, and receive the inspiration which comes from being able to see the invisible and eternal things of God.

ABRAHAM'S FAITH DEVELOPED

To begin with, Abraham's faith was sufficient to enable him to respond to God's call to leave his own country and journey to a land which would be shown to him. In conjunction with this, God promised him a child, or "seed." (Gen. 12:1-7) There was a long wait for this promised child, during which Abraham made two attempts to assist the Lord in fulfilling his promise. The first was in constituting Eliezer of Damascus his heir, and the second was the use of the bondmaid Hagar to be the mother of the seed. Neither of these arrangements, however, was accepted by God. It was his plan that Abraham and Sarah would be the parents of the promised seed.—Gen. 15:1-4; 16:1-4,15; 17:15-21

In God's due time Sarah did bear a son. (Gen. 21:1-3) Abraham's faith must have been strengthened by this. Later, when God asked him to offer up this miracle child as a sacrifice, Abraham's faith was so strong that he could envision the invisible power of God raising Isaac from the dead. Indeed, through faith he received Isaac "in a figure" from the dead.—Heb. 11:17-19

FAITH DURING THE JEWISH AGE

The history of God's typical people, Israel, reveals this development of faith on the part of those who believed the Heavenly Father, and the failure of those who had little or no ability to see the invisible. Two of the spies sent into Canaan reported their belief that, with the help of the God of Israel, they could enter and possess the land. Most of the spies, on the other hand, impressed with the visible strength

of the Canaanites, advised against a conquest of the land.—Num. 13:17-31; 14:6-8

Throughout Israel's wilderness journey, the people lost faith, charging that Moses had brought them out of Egypt to perish. An abundance of manna, quail, water brought miraculously from a rock, and other providences from God which produced visible evidences of his care, restored their faith temporarily. (Exod. 16:2-24; 17:3-6) Yet, it was not a faith sufficiently strong and constant to give them an assured standing in the favor of God.

The God of Israel was invisible to his people. Few, without some visible aid to their faith, could lay hold of his promises. When it came time to build the Tabernacle, Moses experienced no difficulty securing the needed material for it. The people realized there was to be some evidence of God in their midst which they could see, and so they gladly gave of their possessions to be used. In fact, Moses had to instruct them to cease their donations.—Exod. 35:29; 36:3-7

However, the Tabernacle did not satisfy Israel's desire for the visible very long. Throughout the Jewish Age the lure of idol worship, as practiced by surrounding nations, appealed greatly to Israel's lack of faith. They could not see God, but their heathen neighbors worshipped gods they could see—that is, they could see the various idols which represented their gods. At times these idols were even brought into the sacred Temple of the Lord.

JESUS' TEACHINGS

During the Jewish Age, God used physical objects to teach lessons pertaining to the present age of

the invisible—the age of faith. The Jewish people of Jesus' day, not understanding this, continued to lay great stress upon the visible. Whenever opportunity offered, Jesus presented the higher concept of those typical truths, but there were only a few who understood. To the scribes and Pharisees, he said, "Ye . . . have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done."—Matt. 23:23

The exercise of judgment, mercy, and faith, was an invisible form of worship and obedience which the scribes and Pharisees did not comprehend, so they could not appreciate the true spirit of Jesus' teachings. Note the points along this line made by Jesus in his sermon on the mount: "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness." "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth: . . . But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven: . . . For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."—Matt. 5:6; 6:19-21

"IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH"

This change of emphasis from the visible to the invisible is highlighted by Jesus in his conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well. The Samaritans had their origin long before Jesus' First Advent. They began as a group of people sent into the land of Israel during the time of desolation and captivity of the ten-tribe kingdom by Assyria. They were dispatched there by an Assyrian king as recorded in II Kings 17:24, being Assyrians either by birth or by subjugation. They were idol worshipers at the time, and later one of the captive priests of the ten-tribe kingdom was sent to teach them "how they should

fear the Lord.” (vss. 25-29) However, they “did not hearken, but they did after their former manner, . . . and served their graven images, both their children and their children’s children: as did their fathers, so do they unto this day.”—vss. 40,41

Jesus met the woman of Samaria at Jacob’s well. Her understanding being limited to the visible, she was surprised when Jesus said, “Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” This was a tremendous thought to her, and with her limited faith she replied, “Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw.”—John 4:14,15

Not understanding the “invisible” nature of Jesus’ statement, she thought he was speaking of some sort of literal water which would render one who drank thereof forever free from thirst. To get a drink of such water, she thought, would save her further trips to Jacob’s well. Only those enlightened by the Holy Spirit can discern that Jesus was here using water as a symbol of the life that consecrated believers would receive from him. Such life, when perpetuated through the resurrection, will continue forever.

Through the centuries, even fewer have seen the further meaning in Jesus’ words concerning the fact that those who, in this age, receive life from him will become channels for life to flow out to others. Indeed, each consecrated recipient of life from Jesus will, if faithful, have the privilege of bestowing this water of life to others. The prophet refers to these faithful ones of the present age as “wells of salvation.”—Isa. 12:3

After the woman of Samaria realized that Jesus was a prophet of God, she engaged him in further conversation, saying, "Our fathers worshipped in this mountain; and ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." (John 4:20) This was Jesus' opportunity to set forth the great truth concerning the worship of God, not from the standpoint of things visible and tangible, but invisible. He replied, "The hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what."—vss. 21,22

As expressed in II Kings 17:41, the Samaritans "feared the Lord, and served their graven images." It is no wonder that they were confused and did not truly know what they believed. Such is the inevitable result of endeavoring to serve God on the one hand, while compromising with error on the other hand. How different it was with Jesus. "We know what we worship," he continued. (John 4:22) What assurance is thus expressed! Jesus knew what he believed because he accepted and had full confidence in his Father's Word which had been provided through the holy prophets of the Old Testament. However, the Samaritan woman did not, nor could not, understand how Jesus could be so certain of his position.

She could grasp only those things which the natural eye could see, and must have wondered when Jesus said that the time was coming when the people would worship God neither in a mountain nor at Jerusalem. With her limited understanding, she must have speculated as to how a person could worship God, apart from some visible center or monument of worship.

“God is a Spirit,” Jesus said, “and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” (vss. 23,24) Indeed, God is an invisible, all-wise and powerful, spirit being. (Col. 1:15; I Tim. 1:17; Heb. 11:27) Our faith must grasp this, that we might look to him in worship and praise at anytime, anywhere, and under all circumstances, without the help of visible assistance. Such is the faith that enables us to look at the things which are unseen by the natural eye.

GOSPEL AGE WALK OF FAITH

Beginning on the Day of Pentecost, when the enlightening influence of the Holy Spirit came to the church, God has expected his people to walk entirely by faith. A great change took place at the close of the Jewish Age and the beginning of the Gospel Age. In that former typical age God’s people had the Tabernacle, and then the Temple. They had visible sin offerings and burnt offerings. They had priests with robes of glory and beauty. In addition, they had the promises of the Law Covenant that God would bless them “in basket and in store,” and when they were faithful, he did bless them in this and many other ways.—Deut. 28:1-5

However, our “Tabernacle,” “Temple,” and “High Priest” are all invisible. Instead of offering up a visible animal in sacrifice, we deny self and give God our hearts. From then on, we sacrifice time and strength. We also offer our substance—whether of means or otherwise—to the Lord, but these sacrifices are made through the urgings of the heart. It is not a matter of one animal, or two, or some other number which we must offer, but all that the

desires of our hearts lead us voluntarily to give. The reward for faithfulness is also largely in the realm of the invisible.

God has not promised to bless us in “basket and in store” along temporal lines. He has assured us, however, the spiritual strength to endure the trials which his loving providences permit to come upon us, making a way of escape when they are more than we can bear. (I Cor. 10:13) It is only a faith that is strong enough to see the unseen things of God that, under these circumstances, enables us to think of our trials as light afflictions, which are “but for a moment,” and to be assured that they are working out for us a “far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”—II Cor. 4:17

NO “ARM OF FLESH”

During the present and past ages, mankind has sought to govern himself by the “arm of flesh.” (II Chron. 32:7,8) Human leadership has time and again been established. Those weak in faith have placed their confidence in the teachings and directions of their favorite leaders. Many have attained a measure of temporary security, but what rich blessings they have forfeited by not training their eyes of faith more resolutely upon the promises of God. They have looked too much at the things which are seen, and not sufficiently at the things which are not seen.

The one thing most nearly visible which the Lord has given us to lean upon is his inspired Word. However, it is not the ink and paper that constitutes his Word. It is the thoughts expressed by the words which are important. These thoughts—in the

form of instructions, warnings, corrections, assurances and promises—are invisible. They can be seen and appreciated only by a strong faith that enables us to see these unseen things.

How wonderfully God has prepared his Word for us. The prophets of the Old Testament contributed their part, and Jesus and the apostles theirs. We properly look up to the invisible, glorified Jesus, as our Head, Master, Advocate, Good Shepherd, and prospective Bridegroom. Indeed, we honor him even as we honor the Father. No individual prophet or apostle occupies such a prominent position in our hearts and minds. We do not depend upon any one of them alone for our spiritual guidance and strength. Even Jesus humbly testified, “The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father . . . , he doeth the works.”—John 14:10

It is the sum total of these invisible thoughts of God that faith’s vision beholds and in which we find our security, and rejoice. When the apostles were visibly present in the Early Church, some of the brethren, in their weakness, chose favorites. Some in the church at Corinth wanted to be “of Paul,” and some “of Cephas [or Peter].” (I Cor. 1:12,13; 3:4-7) Paul exposed the error of this viewpoint, and in other ways discouraged the brethren from leaning upon him instead of the Lord.

By way of contrast, Paul congratulated the Jews of Berea for being “more noble” than those of Thessalonica because they “searched the scriptures daily” to ascertain whether he was presenting the Truth to them. (Acts 17:10,11) When one of the inspired apostles takes this position with respect to the ultimate authority of the Word of God, we

should surely hesitate to insist that the brethren accept our interpretations of the Bible simply because they are ours.

HELPERS

As we have seen, God's inspired Word has been made available through Jesus, the prophets, and apostles. As Paul points out in Ephesians 4:11, he also has provided helpers—"evangelists; . . . pastors and teachers." These are not inspired servants, but since they are provided by God, they are certainly needed by all his consecrated children. These uninspired servants have been furnished for the church throughout the age. A special "faithful and wise servant" was raised up in this end of the age, and we rejoice in the way the Lord used him to bring forth "meat in due season" from the great storehouse of truth, God's inspired Word. (Matt. 24:45; Luke 12:42) How this spiritual feast has strengthened and built us up in our "most holy faith."—Jude 20

To suppose that we do not need the help which the Lord has provided is to assume that we are self-sufficient—smart enough to study the Bible independently and obtain from it the glorious truths which it contains. In taking this position, we might reason that we do not wish to accept a man's interpretation. By so doing, we do not realize, perhaps, that we are looking to our own thoughts as being the only ones we can trust. We may make an idol of ourselves, which gets in the way of faith's vision of the unseen, and prevents us from worshiping God "in spirit and in truth."

On the other hand, all the Lord's people should continue to discern the difference between the

inspired Word of God and the uninspired teachings of other servants of the church. The “servant” Jesus spoke of in Matthew 24:45 was commissioned to give “meat” already provided in God’s storehouse—the Bible. How marvelously this has been done. The great fundamental teachings of God’s plan have been brought forth with unsurpassed clarity. This was accomplished by providing a “thus saith the Lord” for every precious doctrine of the Truth.

Our responsibility is to acquaint ourselves with the Scriptural proof of the various items of the Truth, so that by the eye of faith we will be able to “see” and know what we believe and why. The “why” should not be because a prominent brother or class elder said so, but because God has declared it in his inspired Word. Failing in this, we may well be in the position of leaning upon an “arm of flesh” which we have created by our own weak faith. In such a case, we are failing to see clearly the invisible riches of truth which we need as an encouragement to continued faithfulness.

THIS “MOUNTAIN”

We will be able to worship God “in spirit and in truth” only through faith’s vision of things unseen. To have such a vision, however, requires a stronger faith than that possessed by the Samaritan woman at the well. She was concerned over a mountain or a city in which God could be worshipped. She needed something visible. The history of the church during the age is cluttered with “mountains” and “cities.” Many visible edifices and man-made systems have been created in the professed cause of Christ, based on the mistaken

idea that such is the method by which God is to be worshipped.

Let us remember that the true worshiper and servant of God is not made holy by the place where he worships and serves. Rather, the place is made holy by the fact that it is used by those who therein worship God “in spirit and in truth.” This is equally true of the humblest home in which there are a few uncomfortable chairs, or of a larger and more comfortable meeting place. The same principle would apply if we think of a “place” from the standpoint of a service opportunity, by which we can cooperate for the furtherance of the Truth.

INVISIBLE RESULTS

As we have seen, during the Jewish Age the rewards for faithfulness were visible and tangible. It is not so during this age of faith. We may strain every nerve to please God, and yet severe trials may come upon us. We may zealously labor to promulgate the truth, and see no results for our efforts. Do we wonder why the Lord permits us to have such disappointing experiences? If we do, it is because our faith is not sufficiently strong to see the eternal, invisible things of God.

By seeing the invisible things of God, we will know that our suffering is preparing us to share in the glory of the kingdom, and that our apparently unrewarded service is laying up for us “treasure in heaven.” (Matt. 19:21) Therefore, no matter what the circumstances of our Christian lives may be, let us continue to look at the eternal and unseen things of God which are visible only by the eye of faith. Only thus will we be worshiping God “in spirit and in truth.” ■

Statistical Report

For the year ended September 30, 2016

THE DAWN IS pleased to provide this annual report to our readers. It has been a privilege to continue the work of spreading the Gospel message throughout the world during the past year, and we greatly appreciate the cooperation of many brethren in these efforts. As you read this report, we believe you will rejoice, as we do, that it is evidently the Lord's will for the Truth to continue to be spread during this present Harvest period. Accordingly, we are happy to report that our efforts in this work have expanded once again during the past year.

During 2016 the Dawn was able, by the Lord's grace, to increase its witnessing expenditures by 5% compared to the previous year. These increases comprised both domestic and foreign activities, including the categories of radio, Internet advertising, other media, printing, and shipping of literature. Total operating expenses, excluding contingencies, were 11% below budget. We had a net operating loss, excluding bequests and investment income, of (\$498,838) in 2016, compared to a 2015 loss of (\$499,457). The table on the next page provides details of revenue and expenses for the 2016 fiscal year:

We have budgeted to increase witnessing expenditures in 2017 by an aggregate of 11%, excluding contingencies, but to limit to no more than

Income	Receipts	Expenditures
Revenue (excluding bequests and investment income)	<u>\$106,106</u>	
Expenses		
Radio (domestic)		\$ 79,585
TV (domestic, includes spots and recordings)		29,399
Radio and TV (foreign)		28,381
Internet and Other Media		89,406
Pilgrim Service (domestic and foreign)		18,074
Other Foreign Support		21,733
Shipping/Mailing (domestic and foreign)		83,297
Outside Printing		18,828
Shop Operating Expense		54,876
Plant Operating Expense		138,696
House Operating Expense		<u>42,669</u>
Total Expenses		\$604,944
Less Income	<u>106,106</u>	
Net Operating Loss	\$(498,838)	

\$400,000 any reduction in total cash and reserves during the year, including contingency spending. Further increases in witnessing expenditures, beyond the planned increase noted above, will be considered if additional opportunities arise, and for which necessary resources are available.

We rejoice that the Gospel message, first preached by our Lord and the apostles, is still being declared today, and that we continue to have the privilege of sharing in that work. Indeed, the “most holy faith . . . once delivered unto the saints” is still proclaimed by faithful “workers in the vineyard” who are willing to sacrifice time and energy witnessing it far and wide.

The Dawn utilizes many types of media to proclaim the Gospel message—television, radio, commercial spots, audio and video recordings, the Internet, digital

electronic media, YouTube, and a variety of magazine, almanac, and other media advertising, as well as our large inventory of many printed booklets and books. The Dawn recorded lecture service and Dawn video service continue their work, and the Dawn website brings in many appreciative replies from around the world. The importance of these combined efforts is attested to by the fact that many responses continue to be received. The Dawn processed over 4,000 individual orders for literature during the past year from these responses. Individually, these ranged from orders of just one booklet in some cases, to orders for hundreds of pieces of literature in others. These orders do not include those from various ecclesias around the country.

We increased our overseas and foreign language witness work during the past year. *The Dawn* magazine is available in nine foreign languages, either printed or online. The English *Dawn* continues to be printed in India for our brethren there. Counting all languages, *The Dawn* magazine currently has nearly 7,000 subscribers worldwide. Literature offerings of all kinds—*Dawn* magazine, booklets, and books—are now available in twenty languages, either in printed form or on the Dawn's website. We would like to express heartfelt thanks to all those who provide assistance with the translation work into these various languages.

Hope and Life After Death booklets continue to be reprinted and sent by repeat requests to funeral homes throughout the United States, and to many ecclesias as well. Brethren in Italy, in cooperation with the Dawn, are in the process of translating the funeral home order packets for distribution in their

local areas. They are excited to be updating the Italian translation of these and other booklets from an older Italian dialect to the modern Italian. The updated Italian translation of the booklet *God and Reason* has just been completed and is ready to go to print.

In 2016 the Dawn continued its Internet keyword advertising on Google and Microsoft for 39 booklets in English, 12 booklets in Spanish, 8 booklets in French, and 3 booklets in German. During the past year, the number of “clicks” to these keywords, which brings the user to the Dawn’s ad page for viewing, was over 370,000 for all languages combined. The viewing of these ads generated over 6,400 mail responses for booklets during the past year. In addition, booklets either downloaded or read online as a result of the same ads are estimated to have numbered close to 50,000, although exact totals in these categories are not presently available from our Internet Service Provider. Ads and booklets in additional languages are planned for implementation during 2017.

In 2016, a new book, *Searching the Scriptures*, was printed and bound. Another book we are working toward producing is, *The Mind of Christ*, which will be printed and bound in a similar fashion as *Searching the Scriptures*. *The Book of Books* is being reformatted for a new printing. The previous version was only available for reprinting by using scanned copies of the pages, which was not resulting in sufficient quality for reading. Reprinting of other existing booklets and new literature will be done as the need arises and manpower resources are available.

The Dawn's YouTube channel, "The Dawn Magazine—Monthly Video," is now in its third year of operation, and has grown significantly in popularity as a method of presenting the message of Truth. Currently there are 51 videos posted on the channel, with more to be added in 2017. During the past year, the videos were viewed over 4,700 times, for a total of nearly 25,000 minutes. Viewership came from 91 different countries during the year, with the largest numbers coming from the United States, Canada, India, United Kingdom, and France.

During the past year, the activity of the Dawn Pilgrim service expanded once again. A total of 12 pilgrim trips of varying lengths were taken during the year by 9 different brethren. Two of these were trips to Australia and Germany, which included visits with hundreds of brethren. The Pilgrim department hopes to continue its expansion of this important service in the coming year.

We have recently implemented several changes to bring down our postage and mailing costs for *The Dawn* magazine, without sacrificing quality. We are using new cover and paper stock, as well as Tyvek envelopes. The new envelope also protects the magazines better than the old standard paper type. These recent paper and envelope modifications bring the total mailing weight of *The Dawn* magazine down from 2.1 oz. to 2.0 oz., which saves upward of 30% in postage costs compared to previously used paper and envelopes.

In the spring of 2016 we revamped the Dawn's printing process, which included the purchase of a new printer and booklet maker. We are now able to print and make into booklet form *The Dawn*

magazine and other printed material quicker and more efficiently, with fewer problems and machine breakdowns than previously.

At the Dawn Home, we recently upgraded plumbing in the basement, as well as completed several repairs and some interior renovations. These were accomplished with the help of brethren who traveled from other parts of the country to volunteer their time and talent in these efforts. Further renovations are planned in the spring of 2017.

We could not carry on the work of spreading the Gospel message without the tireless help of many brethren, whether they be located on site at the Dawn Plant, or work remotely. Currently there are approximately 25 brethren in the U.S. involved in the work. There are also many brethren in foreign countries who assist with the work abroad. Some of these are in Australia, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Brazil, and Croatia, to name a few. Other brethren have traveled to countries such as the Philippines, Poland, Ukraine, Romania, and Moldova to further help the witness work in these areas.

In summary, we are thankful for the many willing hands and hearts of brethren throughout the world which have assisted directly and indirectly with the work of the Dawn during the past year. Without this help, the work could not continue. We are excited about the prospects for 2017, and rejoice in the continued privilege of bearing witness to the Truth given to us by our Heavenly Father. We ask for your prayers on behalf of the work of the Dawn, as daily we seek to proclaim the Gospel message throughout the earth, and strive to be good stewards over the opportunities which God's providence has made available to us. ■

General Convention Bulletin

July 15-20, 2017

THE 2017 GENERAL CONVENTION returns again to the facilities of the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown. Air conditioned hotel-like rooms with private bathrooms in the Living-Learning Center (LLC), family-style air conditioned apartments with private bathrooms (APTS), and housing with two rooms sharing one bathroom (not air conditioned) in other facilities will be available on campus. A child may sleep on a bedroom floor at no charge if both beds are occupied.

All room and meal costs for children 12 years old or younger will be paid by the convention. In addition, 100% of the room and meal cost of those from ages 13 through 17 will be refunded if the young person attends at least 75% of the studies for his or her age group. This subsidy does not cover meals paid at the door.

The convention theme text is taken from Ephesians 2:10, “We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works.” Two dialogue sessions will be held based on Isaiah 65:17—the titles are “New Heavens” and “New Earth.” A special discourse will consider lessons from I Peter 5:10—“The God of all grace” A discussion will be held on the topic, “Paul’s Thorn in the Flesh,” based on II Corinthians 12:7-10. Other special program features are planned,

General Convention Registration

330 Jasmine Road—Casselberry, FL 32707

E-mail: ekuenzli@cfl.rr.com (407) 670-4189

	Brkfst	Lunch	Dinner	Bed
Friday, July 14, 2017				
Saturday, 15th				
Sunday, 16th				
Monday, 17th				
Tuesday, 18th				
Wednesday, 19th				
Thursday, 20th				
Check for package: 7 nights, all 18 meals <input type="checkbox"/> or 7 nights, 12 meals (no breakfasts) <input type="checkbox"/>				
Check: <input type="checkbox"/> private bath or <input type="checkbox"/> shared bath <input type="checkbox"/> double occupancy <input type="checkbox"/> single occupancy <input type="checkbox"/> interested in APTS				
Names and ecclesia name (age if under 18)				
Address:				

SPEAKERS' APPOINTMENTS

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

D. Christiansen

Chicago, IL
December 31-January 2
Phoenix, AZ 14,15

O. B. Elbert

Phoenix, AZ January 14,15

B. Montague

Phoenix, AZ January 14,15

P. Mora

Phoenix, AZ January 14,15

D. Rice

Los Angeles, CA January 29

T. Ruggirello

Los Angeles, CA January 29

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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.

CHICAGO CONVENTION, December 31-January 2—Prisco Community Center, Aurora, IL. Contact L. Larson. Phone: (708) 341-2067 or Email: lambgram@comcast.net. Accommodations, contact A. Pop. Email: accommodations@chicagobible.org

PHOENIX CONVENTION, January 14,15—Drury Inn, Happy Valley, 2335 W Pinnacle Peak Road, Phoenix, AZ 85027. For reservations, phone: (800) 325-0720, confirmation #2268162. Mention “Christian Group-Phoenix Associated Bible Students.” Contact A. Mengos. Phone: (480) 390-3767 or Email: samengos@yahoo.com

LOS ANGELES CONVENTION, January 29—Burbank Auditorium, 406 Irving Drive, Burbank, CA 91605. Contact T. Parkinson. Phone: (818) 288-2765 or Email: tipark77@gmail.com

SACRAMENTO CONVENTION, February 17-19—Holiday Inn Express, 2224 Auburn Boulevard, Sacramento, CA 95821. Contact K. Freer, 8012 Vintage Way, Fair Oaks, CA 95628. Phone: (916) 879-4657 or Email: winnerwear@aol.com

FLORIDA CONVENTION, March 4-6—Holiday Inn Orlando International, 5750 T. G. Lee Boulevard, Orlando, FL 32822. For room reservations, call the hotel. Phone: (407) 851-6400. Specify “Florida Bible Students” to guarantee special convention rate. Deadline for special rate is February 25, 2017. For other information, contact M. Balko. Phone: (407) 339-7580 or Email: mbalko@cfl.rr.com

DETROIT CONVENTION, April 1,2—Quality Inn of Troy, 2537 Rochester Court, Troy, MI 48083. Contact P.

Nemesh. Phone: (248) 649-6588 or Email: nemeshfp@aol.com

ALBUQUERQUE CONVENTION, April 14-16—Sheraton Albuquerque Airport Hotel, 2910 Yale Boulevard SE, Albuquerque, NM 87106. Contact S. Thomassen. Phone: (505) 268-8170 or Email: srbt@juno.com

LOS ANGELES CONVENTION, May 27,28—Burbank Auditorium. For room reservations (subsidized rate of \$55/night ending April 23), contact N. Nekora. Phone: (310) 454-5248 or Email: npnekora@aol.com. Other information, contact T. Parkinson. Phone: (818) 288-2765 or Email: tipark77@gmail.com. Please place LABible in subject line of the email.

DELAWARE VALLEY CONVENTION, June 4—Sheraton Bucks County Hotel, 400 Oxford Valley Road, Langhorne, PA. Contact R. Griehs. Phone: (267) 456-8889 or Email: rgriehs@gmail.com

*A better day is coming, a morning promised long,
When truth and right, with holy might, shall overthrow
the wrong;*

*When Christ the Lord will listen to every plaintive sigh,
And stretch His hand o'er sea and land, with justice by
and by.*

*O! for that glorious dawning we watch and wait and
pray,*

*Till o'er the height the morning light shall drive the gloom
away;*

*And when the heavenly glory shall flood the earth and sky,
We'll bless the Lord for all His works and praise Him by
and by.*

—*Poems of Dawn*