

The Dawn

A Herald of Christ's Presence



The DAWN

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ARGENTINA: *estudiantesdela bibliargentina@gmail.com*

AUSTRALIA: *Berean Bible Institute, P.O. Box 402, Rosanna, Victoria 3084*

BRAZIL: *A Aurora, Caixa Postal 50088, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, CEP 20050-971*

BRITISH ISLES: *Associated Bible Students, Brook House, Whitchurch Road, Prees, Whitchurch Shropshire, SY13 3JZ UK*

CANADA: *P.O. Box 1565, Vernon, British Columbia, V1T 8C2*

FRANCE: *L'Aurore, 39A rue des Bois, 68540 Feldkirch*

GERMANY: *Tagesanbruch Bibelstudien-Vereinigung e. V., Postfach 3, 64396 Modautal*

GREECE: *He Haravgi (The Dawn), PO Box 521167, Longwood, FL 32752-1167 USA*

INDIA: *P. Kumar/E. Rashmi Manu Residency, #1-N-32-2717/8(2), Near Vigneshwara wood Industries Ashoknagar, Mangalore: 575006*

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

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The Church

“You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it.”

**—Matthew 16:18,
Revised Standard
Version**

There are many self-identified Christian churches, bearing a great variety of names, and holding to different types of belief with respect to the teachings of Jesus and his apostles. When we consider these differences of viewpoint it is not out of

order, we think, to inquire as to what the Bible tells us the church really is, and what the divine purpose is concerning it. Is there any way of knowing which is the true church, or do all the denominational groups together make up the true church?

The word church does not appear in the Old Testament, and its first use in the New Testament was by Jesus when he told Peter, as noted in our opening verse, that the “powers of death” would not prevail against it. In this verse the word “church” is a translation of the Greek word *ekklesia*, which means “a calling out,” or a selection. Jesus said to his disciples, “I have chosen you out of the world.” (John 15:19) Essentially, the church is a company of people who, in accepting the invitation of Christ, have become separated from the world.

The church is not a building, although the word church is often used to denote the place where a congregation meets. If the expression “meeting house” were more universally used to describe the gathering place of a congregation, it might help to lessen some of the misunderstanding which prevails concerning the true significance of the word church itself.

In Jesus’ ministry he used the word church only three times. Once was in his remark to Peter; and twice on another occasion when instructing his disciples in the proper procedure for dealing with misunderstandings which might arise among them. (Matt. 18:17) The next time the word appears is in Acts 2:47, following the account of the three thousand who accepted Christ as a result of Peter’s sermon on the Day of Pentecost. It is a simple statement, saying merely that “the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”

In this simple statement of fact there is room for reflection. On the Day of Pentecost alone, three thousand became identified with the “church,” and thereafter there were “daily” additional converts, yet there is no record of any formal initiation services aside from water baptism. All of these converts were Jewish people. When, under the persuasive ministry of the apostle, they recognized that Jesus, whom their leaders had crucified, was indeed the Messiah of promise, they believed on him and were baptized.

It was as simple as that! Later, as the number of disciples increased, and they assembled in mutual edification, these groups of people were called churches. In Acts 11:22 we read of “the church which was in Jerusalem.” In Romans 16:5, Paul extends

greetings to “the church that is in their house”—that is, the house of Priscilla and Aquila.

From these texts we get the thought that in those early days of Christianity, each group of believers, regardless of its size and location, was considered a church. Indeed, it was a church, because each such assembly of believers was made up of those who, by the Gospel, had been called to separate themselves from the world and to follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

These individual groups bore no denominational names. They were identified by their location, being spoken of as the church at Jerusalem, the church at Philippi, the church at Rome, or, as in some instances, the church that held its meetings in the home of one or another of the believers.

In Revelation, chapters 2 and 3, seven churches are mentioned and identified by the cities in which they were located, and special messages were sent to them. There is reason to believe that these seven churches are, in a symbolic way, representative of all believers during various time periods, beginning at Pentecost and continuing to the present. This is another, broader use of the word church, as descriptive of all in every place whom the Lord looks upon as being called out from the world to serve him and his cause.

Jesus had in mind a broad, more general meaning of the word when he said to Peter that the “powers of death” would not prevail against the church. It is this application also that Paul makes when, in Ephesians 1:22,23, he speaks of Christ as being the “Head over all things to the church, which is his body.” It is in this sense that Paul again writes

about the “church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.”—I Tim. 3:15

In I Corinthians 12:12,13, Paul elaborates on the thought of the church being the “body” of Christ. He says, “As the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.”

How to Join

How does one become a prospective member of the church—that is, the church that was established by Jesus and the apostles? Acts 2:47, cited earlier, reads that “the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.” This indicates that becoming a member of the Lord’s church depends upon him. This, we believe, would be conceded by all Christian people. Just how, though, does the Lord add members to his church, and what qualifications must one meet in order to be recognized by the Lord as belonging to his church?

Briefly, the Scriptures indicate the steps of approach to the church as being, first, a repentant recognition of the fact that we are members of a sin-cursed and dying race, and could, therefore, have no standing before God in our own righteousness. (Isa. 64:6; Mark 2:17; Acts 26:20) Next is the acceptance of Jesus Christ as our personal Redeemer and Savior, realizing that only through the value of his shed blood can we be acceptable to God.—Acts 13:38,39; 16:31; Rom. 3:21-23; 5:1

Then, upon the basis of our confidence in the merit of the shed blood of the Redeemer, we are invited to present ourselves in unreserved devotion to do the will of God. We could speak of this as making a "consecration" of ourselves to God. Let us emphasize that this consecration is made to God, not to man, nor to any earthly organization.

The Bible is very explicit as to what this consecration will mean in our lives. Jesus said, "If any man will come after me [be my disciple], let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." (Luke 9:23) To deny self does not mean merely giving up of some petty pleasure or satisfaction for a short period of time, or even for all time. It is, rather, just as the expression implies, a complete denial of self. It is the same word that Jesus used when he foretold that Peter would three times completely deny knowing him. (Matt. 26:33,34) Thus to deny self is to completely disallow ourselves the right to recognize our own will, and accept instead the will of God as expressed through Christ and the Scriptures.

What is the divine will for those who, responding to Jesus' invitation, utterly deny self? It is expressed in his further invitation to take up their cross daily and follow him. Jesus used the symbolism of cross-bearing to denote going into death. When Jesus gave this invitation, he was himself laying down his life in sacrifice. His sacrifice was completed at Calvary when he cried, "It is finished."—John 19:30

Those who accept Christ's invitation to take up their cross and follow him, likewise lay down their lives in sacrificial service. They are not all literally crucified, although in the beginning of the Christian age some were. Many suffered martyrdom in other

ways. In the case of every follower of the Master, however, the willingness to serve and to suffer regardless of the consequences must and will be present.

This matter of following in the footsteps of Jesus is described by Paul as being “planted together in the likeness of his death.” (Rom. 6:5) Before we came to Christ, we were “dead in trespasses and sin.” (Eph. 2:1) However, through obedient faith in the merit of his shed blood we are released from Adamic condemnation. Yet we die; not as sinners, however, but as joint-sacrificers with Jesus. Paul expressed the thought when he wrote, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”—Rom. 12:1

Baptized into Christ

In Romans 6:3,4, Paul wrote, “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” The baptism here referred to is not in water, but into Christ, and into his death.

The word baptism in the New Testament is translated from a Greek word meaning “to bury” or “submerge.” Our baptism into Christ is the burial of our will into his will. It is a death baptism because it is God’s will that we die with him.

In Revelation 20:4 this thought is symbolized by the use of the word “beheaded.” Here we read of those who are “beheaded for the witness of Jesus,

and for the Word of God.” This does not refer to a literal beheading, but to the renouncing of our will, as represented by the head, and accepting Christ as our Head.—Eph. 5:23; Col. 1:18

Paul elaborates further on this point, saying, “By one Spirit are we all baptized into one body.” (I Cor. 12:13) It is by the influence of the Holy Spirit, through the Word of Truth, that we are drawn to the Lord and led by his love to present ourselves in full consecration to him. Since this consecration means the renouncing of our own wills and accepting the will of God in Christ, Jesus thus becomes our Head, and we become members of the church, which is his body, if we are faithful to our standing before God, even unto death.—Rev. 2:10

Thus, we see how it is that God, by the power of his Spirit, adds prospective members to the church of Christ. Our part in it as individuals is merely to yield to the influence of his Spirit, and to take the steps which the divine Word indicates; that is, the steps of repentance, acceptance of Christ, and the presenting of ourselves in full consecration to do God’s will.

Can we know, after taking these steps, whether or not God has accepted us, and actually recognizes us as probationary members of the church, the body of Christ? We believe so. Paul said, in a text already quoted, that having been “buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” (Rom. 6:4) Are we joyfully walking in “newness of life”?

Paul also wrote, “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold,

all things are become new.” (II Cor. 5:17) Have the old things belonging to the “times past” of our lives passed away, in the sense that they no longer hold any real attraction for us? (Eph. 2:3) Do we find our greatest joys in the new things of the Lord—our new vocation of divine service—our new hopes, new aims, new ambitions?

Having taken this step of full consecration to the Lord, our former friends and relatives may fail to understand us. In some cases, they may even persecute us. In any event, they will not find in us the same degree of companionship, for they will not be in harmony with our new way of life. We will not love them any less, nor cease to do all we can for them, but we will learn that the ways of the world and the ways of the consecrated people of God are often far apart. Are we having this experience?

Paul again wrote, “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.” Then he adds, “God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.”—I Cor. 2:9,10

Is the Lord leading us day by day into a deeper appreciation of the marvelous truths contained in his Word? Are the “deep things” of his Word pertaining to our calling in Christ Jesus more clearly understood as we seek to know and to do his will? If so, we have additional evidence that he has accepted our consecration and is leading us in the path of righteousness.

Jesus himself gives us a very definite assurance of our standing before God. First, he declares, “him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.” (John

6:37) He follows this a few verses later, saying, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.” (John 6:44) If we have felt the drawing power of God through Christ, what further assurance do we need than this?

Indeed, our rejoicing in the spiritual things of the new way of life in which we are walking; our loss of interest in the former things of the flesh and of the world; a measure of misunderstanding, and perhaps even of persecution, from the world; our increasing appreciation of spiritual things, particularly as they pertain to our heavenly calling—all these are evidences that our consecration has been accepted by God, and that we have actually been “baptized” into Christ.

Water Baptism

The question of water baptism naturally arises, and properly so, for Jesus himself was baptized in water, and we are to follow in his steps. What is the purpose of water baptism? John the Baptist baptized for repentance. (Matt. 3:11) He could not understand why Jesus requested baptism, for he knew that Jesus was not a sinner, but rather, that he was the holy and just one.—Matt. 3:13-15; Heb. 7:26

John’s baptism applied only to members of the Jewish nation. It symbolized their return to the covenant with God under which he was dealing with the entire nation—the covenant made at Mount Sinai. John’s baptism was also to prepare the Jews to receive their Messiah, Christ Jesus, when his ministry would subsequently begin.—Mark 1:4,5; Luke 1:13-17; Acts 13:24,25

Jesus was not baptized for the repentance of sin. In asking John to baptize him he simply said, “Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness.” (Matt. 3:15, *RSV*) It is Jesus’ example that we follow in our water baptism. To him it was a symbol of his covenant to die sacrificially, and of his hope, if found faithful, to be raised from the dead.

How aptly water immersion pictures these two thoughts. When one is lowered into the water by the immerser he becomes helpless in his hands, and would remain buried, as in death, except as raised up out of the water. Thus, in our consecration we give ourselves up to die with Christ, inspired by the promises of God that we will be raised up in the resurrection, even as Jesus was, to be associated with him in the great future work of his kingdom.—Rom. 6:4,5; Phil. 3:10,11

Water baptism, then, is a beautiful symbol of our true baptism into Christ. It is not essential in the sense that it is a saving ordinance. However, since those who are properly eligible for water immersion have renounced their own wills, and have covenanted to do the Lord’s will, they will recognize that this is part of the Lord’s will for them, and they will gladly comply. Any other attitude would indicate something less than an all-consuming love for the will of God.

Church Organization

The Scriptures do not indicate that the various local groups of called out ones in those early years of Christianity had any elaborate organizational arrangements, nor does the Bible teach that this

was God's design for the church as a whole. However, the disciples at that time were not without some organization. Their meetings were not without order, and various privileges of service were assigned to different ones according to their several abilities.—Matt. 25:15; I Cor. 14:40; II Thess. 3:6,7; Titus 1:5

In the Early Church organization Jesus was universally recognized as the Head. This was in keeping with Jesus' own instructions to his disciples, when he said, "One is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren." (Matt. 23:8) Paul wrote, "Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body." (Eph. 5:23) In I Corinthians 11:3 he presents the same thought, saying that "the head of every man is Christ; ... and the head of Christ is God."

Jesus is not only the Head of his church, but he is also its foundation. "Other foundation can no man lay," wrote Paul, "than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." (I Cor. 3:11) The members of the church are also referred to as "the household of God," which is declared to be "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone."—Eph. 2:19,20

The Apostle Peter wrote, "Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded." (I Pet. 2:6) In Revelation 14:1-4, the Apostle John also affirms that Jesus is the "chief corner stone" in Sion—the church complete. This is especially noteworthy in view of the misunderstanding which has been attached to Jesus' statement, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church."—Matt. 16:18

This assertion has been misconstrued to mean that Peter was to be the “rock” upon which the church of Christ would be built. However, this interpretation is seen to be in error when we discover that Jesus used two different Greek words in making the statement. When he said, “Thou art Peter,” the Greek word translated Peter is *petros*, meaning a “piece of rock.” However, when he said, “Upon this rock I will build my church,” he used the Greek word *petra*, meaning a “mass of rock,” a boulder, as it were.

Peter had just said to Jesus, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Matt. 16:16) Jesus was pleased with this confession. We might paraphrase his reply to Peter in order to get its meaning a little clearer: “Peter, your name means that you are a small piece of rock—a pebble, as it were. By comparison with the meaning of your name, the great fact of my Messiahship, and that I am the Son of God, is as a great mass of rock—a great boulder—and the church will be built upon me as its foundation.”

In next month’s issue of *The Dawn* magazine, we will give further consideration to the subject, “The Church.” Important topics to be discussed will include: The role of the twelve Apostles and other servants of the church; the mission of the church; and the heavenly and earthly phases of God’s plan for the salvation of all mankind through Christ. ■

The Believing Centurion

Key Verse: “*When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.*”
—*Matthew 8:10*

Selected Scripture:
Matthew 8:5-13

During Christ’s earthly ministry he performed many miracles in Capernaum, which was located in Galilee, including the healing of a centurion’s servant. In this account, although there is no written record that this servant was a good one, the inference is probable that the centurion was an orderly man. Such men would usually seek for and obtain obedient servants. Furthermore, in his dialogue with our Lord, he declared that

he was accustomed to having his servants to do what he instructed them. Though a Gentile, the centurion suggested that Jesus should merely speak the word. He believed that the Lord had powerful agencies at his command that would not require him to personally visit and touch the servant in order to heal him.—*Matt. 8:5-9*

Our Key Verse reveals that Jesus was amazed at the Roman centurion’s faith. On the other hand, the Jews as a whole were afflicted with unbelief as to the truth of his being their long-promised Messiah. “I say unto you, that many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom

shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. And Jesus said unto the centurion, Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour.”—vss. 11-13

There is a lesson for us in these words in that Jesus' ability was unlimited. Furthermore, his blessings to us are proportionate to our readiness to receive them by faith; for “without faith” it is impossible to please God. (Heb. 11:6) Thus those who are unable to exercise faith cannot share in the blessings offered under the heavenly calling, but must wait for the time of God's glorious kingdom to be set up upon the earth.—Matt. 6:10

The nucleus of the heavenly kingdom class was Jewish from the day of Pentecost for three and a half years, until the time when Cornelius was received as the first Gentile convert. Since then, “the middle wall of partition” between Jew and Gentile, which previously hindered the latter from a full share of God's favors, has been broken down. (Eph. 2:14) From that time until the present, the Lord has “called” and gathered disciples from all nations.

While the faithful of the Jews will have a share in the heavenly kingdom, the nation as a whole was rejected and cast into the “darkness” of the world in general. They have had “weeping and gnashing of teeth” for nearly twenty centuries. According to the Scriptures, however, the time will come when God graciously forgives their sin and saves them from their national blindness. (Jer. 31:31-34) They will be blessed, together with all the families of the earth, in the Messianic kingdom.—Gen. 12:3; 28:14

How much the consecrated saints of God should rejoice in this marvelous provision. All who will accept the offer of salvation and who yield in obedience to the Heavenly Father's grand design to establish peace and righteousness for eternity will attain to perfect and everlasting life upon the earth.—Rev. 21:1-5 ■

Peter Restored

Key Verse: “*So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my lambs.*”
—John 21:15

Selected Scriptures: John 18:15-18, 25-27; 21:15-17

the boat. They initially failed to recognize our Lord standing on the shore. Then, John—“that disciple whom Jesus loved”—realized that the stranger standing there was the risen Lord and proclaimed his conviction to Peter.—vss. 3-6

Peter, a man of action, and doubtless still suffering at heart from his earlier denial of Christ, plunged into the sea and swam ashore, but evidently was timid when he reached land. He did not go directly to Jesus but waited and helped to pull the net full of fish to the shore. When

Following his resurrection, and for a period of forty days, Christ was ever present, although only intermittently visible to his disciples. During that time, he gave assurances to his followers that he was risen, strengthened their faith, and provided them instructions concerning their roles after his ascension. One of these occasions took place at the “sea of Tiberias,” or sea of Galilee.—John 21:1

As part of today’s lesson, the disciples experienced a miraculous catch of fish after Jesus gave them instructions to cast their net on the right side of

the boat had landed and things were made fast and safe, it was noticed that the stranger had a fire of coals and fish thereon and invited the weary ones to “come and dine” with him.—vss. 7-12

In the first of three similar inquires, our Key Verse records that Jesus asked Peter whether he loved him more than the fishing business. Jesus then said to him a second time, “Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.”—vss. 16,17

In thinking about Peter, we are reminded he said that though all should forsake Jesus, he would not do such a thing. How it must have pierced his heart when he heard the cock crow as the Master predicted, for he denied his Lord three times, with cursing coming from his mouth. (Matt. 26:69-75) This is a powerful lesson concerning our own human frailties and the need to extend mercy to one another. In this appearance on the shores of the sea of Galilee it seems likely that during his discussion with Peter, Jesus was, in effect, reassuring him. In doing so, the Master showed that he had confidence that Peter would exercise care in the future and continue to lay his all on the altar of sacrifice to the end of his course after being reinstated as a worthy servant of his Lord.

Our full appreciation of this matter should surely lead us to have a heart that is conformed to our Heavenly Father. Not only will we seek to be just, righteous, and pure in what we do, but also desire to be merciful towards others because, like ourselves, they also experience difficulties. —Ps. 136:1-26 ■

Jesus Meets Zacchaeus

Key Verse: *“And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for today I must abide at thy house.”*
—*Luke 19:5*

Selected Scripture:
Luke 19:1-10

of stature. And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way.”—*Luke 19:3,4*

Our Key Verse demonstrates that Jesus had the ability to read men’s hearts. The haughtiness of the Jewish onlookers was evident, as they were shocked to learn that the Master desired to dine in the home of this individual, who they considered to be a sinner. Zacchaeus, however, received Jesus joyfully.—vss. 6,7

Zacchaeus then made a declaration about restitution—half of his goods he would give to the poor, and a four-fold restitution would be made to anyone he had wronged. (vs. 8) The Law of Moses did not generally require people to restore things fourfold; usually, it was the value of the wrong plus one-fifth. (Lev. 5:14-16; Num. 5:5-7)

Zacchaeus had gone above and beyond. Jesus then declared that salvation had come to Zacchaeus' house. This seems to imply that from the divine standpoint, he had been restored to God's favor, having shown the type of character that could be used in God's service.— Luke 19:9

As consecrated followers of Christ, there are lessons we can utilize in our own walk from the foregoing narrative. These should sensitize us to the need to stay very close to the Lord in our thoughts, words, and deeds. As imperfect specimens of humanity, even the spirit begotten children of God realize it is possible to be overtaken by sin. Such acts may be unintentional, or they may be partially willful with the potential for severe consequences. When acts of sin occur, they need to be acknowledged and repented of if we are to be restored to God's full favor. Prayer and filling our minds with holy thoughts can be two effective tools towards preventing or reducing the incidence of sin in our lives.

A noted Christian writer made the following observation concerning this lesson as follows. "We might find parallels to this incident, which belonged to the end of the Jewish age and to fleshly Israel, in the end of this age and to spiritual Israel. We find today some backsliders from the Lord's Covenant of Grace, as Zacchaeus was a backslider from the Lord's Covenant of the Law. We may find them living in a measure of sin, in business which they admit is unjust and in violation of their consciences. We are not, therefore, to pass by them with the Gospel message, the good tidings of great joy; but if any such manifest an interest in the present truth, we are to seek to assist them as our Lord and Head assisted Zacchaeus."

In the experience of Jesus and Zacchaeus we see a marvelous example for us to emulate as we interact with others, especially with the household of faith, our brethren in Christ. ■

Mary—the Loyal Mother

Key Verse: “*But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.*”
—**Luke 2:19**

Selected Scriptures: **Luke 1:26-56; 2:15-19; John 2:1-5; 19:25-27**

Today’s lesson opens in Bethlehem, filled with travelers who had come to register for the census decreed by Caesar Augustus. Among the crowd was Joseph, a carpenter from Nazareth, and his betrothed wife, Mary, who was with child. They had journeyed a long distance to comply with the Roman decree, navigating the dusty roads and seeking shelter in the crowded town.—
Luke 2:1-3

Nearby, in the fields not far from Bethlehem, shepherds were visited by an angel of God who announced the birth of the Savior, Christ the Lord. “And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.” The angel’s message was accompanied by a heavenly host praising God.—vss. 8-14

The account continues: “And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they

came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.”—vss. 15-18

All that had happened was bewildering to Mary, and our Key Verse suggests she may have been wondering what would be the result of these events. Although an angel had months earlier announced to her that she would bear a son to whom would be given the “throne of David,” Mary likely did not realize the full scope of these divine arrangements involving her son.

Additionally, Mary could not have foreseen at that time that Jesus would be crucified approximately thirty-three years later, raised from the dead after three days, and then become the head of a group of followers who would be developed over a period of two thousand years—all this for the ultimate purpose of eradicating sin, suffering, and death from mankind.

As part of our continued effort to become part of the Christ class, we need to avoid being conformed to this world and to exercise care that we do not cater to fleshly gratifications deemed to be normal by others. It is for this reason that we read: “Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.” (Col. 3:2,3) Many activities that are not sinful are pleasing to the flesh. Unlike certain prohibitions which were given to the nation of Israel, we do not find many “thou shalt nots.” Rather, as Christians we desire to fulfill in our hearts the “spirit” of the law of love and the law of righteousness.—Rom. 7:6

We are surely blessed to experience the reality of this text: “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”—I John 3:2 ■

Sowing and Reaping

“Be not deceived; ... he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.”
—Galatians 6:7,8

The thought of sowing is that of planting, with a view to development and resulting good fruitage. The harvest of such sowing will come in due time. All of our thoughts, all of our actions, have an effect on future character. Little by little the character is made up. The sowing of

today will bring the reaping of tomorrow. If our thoughts and our attention are given to earthly things, the result will be an increase of development along earthly lines. By contrast, if our thoughts and attention are given to heavenly things, the development will be along spiritual lines.

Sowing to the flesh means gratification of the desires of the flesh, catering to the things that are craved by our fallen nature. If yielded to, these cravings will grow stronger and stronger. Beyond what is reasonably necessary to satisfy legitimate temporal responsibilities, it is a mistake to suppose

that other types of fleshly gratification are proper. Those who continue to yield to such propensities will, as our opening text states, “reap corruption [Greek: decay].” Those who mind spiritual things; who set their affections on things above, not on things of earth; those who seek to develop themselves along spiritual lines, will progress in spiritual attainment. (Col. 3:2) In due time, they will reap a character likeness to the Lord and become copies of God’s dear Son, sanctified more and more through the Truth. (John 17:17) To such is promised in our text the gift of “life everlasting.”

The words of Apostle Paul in our opening text are addressed to the church and relate, therefore, to those who have “made a covenant with [God] by sacrifice.” (Ps. 50:5) If these live after the flesh, they shall die, as the apostle says; for they have already surrendered their human life-rights. (Rom. 8:13) If, however, by earnest endeavors they seek to lay down their lives; to develop the new life by mortifying the flesh, by putting it to death; and strive to overcome the weaknesses which they inherit, they shall shortly be rid of their fleshly impediments and be clothed upon with a new heavenly body when they are resurrected. (II Cor. 5:1-4) Then they shall be like the Lord.—I John 3:2

The Extent of Personal Responsibility

Comparatively few realize to what extent we form our own characters. Our minds, our affections, are gardens in which we may plant either seeds of thorns and thistles of sin, or those seeds which produce the fragrant and beautiful flowers and fruits which more particularly represent the

heavenly and spiritual graces. (Gal. 5:22,23; II Pet. 1:5-8) "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap," whether he sow to the flesh or to the Spirit. (Gal. 6:7) Whoever, therefore, seeks for the heavenly things, and for joint heirship in the kingdom, must plant or set out in their mind and affections, those qualities and graces which the Lord marks out as essential to the development of characters such as will be acceptable for "the inheritance of the saints in light."—Col. 1:12

The Father places upon all those who accept the high, heavenly calling, and who make a covenant thereunder, the responsibility of sowing to the Spirit in order that they might attain the prize. (Heb. 3:1; Phil. 3:14) Through his Word God tells them of their own natural weaknesses and imperfections, and shows them how he has provided a full offset for these imperfections in the merit and sacrifice of the Redeemer. (Rom. 3:24,25) He shows them also what are the fruits and graces of the Spirit which they must possess, to the extent of their ability, if they would be joint-heirs with Christ. He points out to them, in the Redeemer's sacrificial life as well as in his teachings, the copy which all must follow who would reach the same glorious station and be his joint-heirs.—Matt. 16:24; Rom. 8:16,17

We might look at this matter merely from the standpoint of the responsibility which it puts upon us, and might well feel overwhelmed. Rather, however, we should view it from the standpoint of divine grace, and consider what a blessed privilege has been granted us of being "transformed by the renewing" of our minds, that we may come more and more to know and to strive for the "good, and

acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” (Eph. 2:4-8; Rom. 12:2) In addition to all this, God has set before us the grandest reward imaginable for the doing of that which is merely our “reasonable service”—that of being “partakers of the divine nature.”—Rom. 12:1; II Pet. 1:3,4

Plant Good Seeds and Weed Out the Evil

There is for all mankind a natural attraction toward earthly things. However, during this reign of evil, the earthly things are blemished and in many respects distasteful to those who have learned to love righteousness. There still, nevertheless, can be a strong attraction toward the marred and blemished things of earth. Like weeds, earthly affections and desires spring spontaneously from seeds which often germinate from sources we know not. Christians, therefore, who would keep their hearts in the love of God, must not only keep planting good seeds, keep setting their affections on heavenly things, but they must keep rooting out the weeds of earthly desire and attraction.—Jude 1:21; Gal. 5:24

Our new life is not manifest to all, nor upon all occasions to any. This the apostle intimates when he says, “Your life is hid with Christ in God.” (Col. 3:3) It is a life of new desires, new aims, new aspirations, which the world can neither see nor truly appreciate, though it sees some outward manifestations of the new life in our daily conduct. Even our fellow brethren in Christ may not be able to appreciate the extent of progress of the new life in us. We ourselves may at times be perplexed respecting the progress of our spiritual growth; we may need to look back over weeks, months, or perhaps years,

in order to determine unquestionably that our life “in Christ” is growing. (II Cor. 5:17) Our new life, represented by our endeavors to follow the will of God, is hidden thus in Christ and in the Father.

In harmony with this thought the apostle declares that neither the world nor even the brethren were capable of judging him—that only the Lord, who could read the heart and know all the conditions, testings and weaknesses to be striven against, could properly judge him. He even declares, “I judge not mine own self.” (I Cor. 4:3,4) It is an excellent plan neither to harshly judge others who claim to be walking conscientiously as children of the Lord, nor even to judge ourselves in such a manner, if we are sincerely striving to do the Lord’s will. We should simply press along, day by day, doing the best we can to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,” leaving all the results with the Lord. (II Pet. 3:18) He cares for us. So long as our hopes and aims and objects of life are centered in the heavenly things, and our lives are thus “hid with Christ in God,” we need fear no evil, present or future. The Lord will be with us, bless us spiritually, and keep us from falling. Ultimately, he will present us to the Heavenly Father both blameless and faultless.—Col. 1:21-23; Jude 1:24,25

Putting Off and Putting On

In detailing the changes which should take place in those who have consecrated themselves wholly to the Lord, the apostle enumerates certain alterations of disposition which should be striven for and, as far as possible, accomplished. This includes the putting away of the following: anger, wrath,

malice, evil-speaking, impurity of language, and falsehood in its every form. (Col. 3:8,9) The necessity for such correction of life might, at first thought, seem to be unnecessary to mention, such evil traits being too coarse and entirely opposed to every true Christian principle. Yet, as we scrutinize the matter more closely, we find that the apostle has taken into his list nearly all the weaknesses of the flesh which, to some degree, beset those who have become New Creatures “in Christ.”—II Cor. 5:17

How common is it, we ask, to become angry? How easy it is for those who have named the name of Christ to have malicious or, at least, unkind thoughts respecting others. How easy it is, too, when harboring these, to permit them at times to influence one’s conduct. Evil speaking, which is slander, is another trap that the Christian can easily fall into, and often results in deception, not only to the hearer, but also to the speaker of such things.

If all evil and impure language were avoided, what a wonderful world this would be! Christians should see to it that, henceforth, every word which proceeds from their mouths shall be such as will “minister grace to the hearers,” and which are “good to the use of edifying.” (Eph. 4:29) How much need there is also, not only of having good intentions in the heart, but also of expressing those good intentions truthfully one to another, “without partiality, and without hypocrisy.” (James 3:17) Such righteous behavior requires that a heart be very pure and full of love if it would be fully truthful; otherwise it would lead to trouble continually. If unloving, ungenerous, unkind hearts, full of evil surmising, malice, hatred, and strife, were to express themselves

frankly it would add immensely to the trouble of the world. The Scriptures therefore urge, first the purifying of the heart, and then the general outward conduct.—Matt. 5:8; I Tim. 1:5

With the thought before our minds of the oneness and equal standing of those who have been accepted into the body of Christ, the apostle then urges upon our attention the necessity not only of putting off the evil dispositions of our fallen flesh, but also of putting on, cultivating, the various graces of the Spirit exemplified in our Head, Christ Jesus.—Col. 3:12-14

He specifies these: 1) compassionate sentiments; a disposition of largeness and generosity of heart toward everybody and everything—toward the saints, toward our neighbors, friends, and relatives, even toward our enemies. Amplifying, he continues, showing that it would imply; 2) kindness toward all; 3) humbleness of mind, the reverse of boastfulness, headiness, arrogance; 4) meekness, or gentleness of disposition; 5) longsuffering, or patient endurance with the faults and weaknesses of others. This implies that we should bear with one another's peculiarities of temperament and disposition, freely forgiving one another, if there be found cause of offense in each other. Meanwhile, we are to learn to correct ourselves, as we see our own blemishes mirrored in others. The standard for all this course of conduct is found in the Lord's course toward us, for he surely has been generous, kind, forbearing, and forgiving.—Rom. 2:4; Eph. 1:7

Especially for the Church

The apostle brings to the attention of the "holy and beloved," the elect, the fact that he is not

attempting at this time a reformation of the world along these lines, but merely a transformation of those who have entered into a special covenant with the Lord. (Col. 3:12; Rom. 12:2) All who have thus covenanted with the Lord and who hope to make their “calling and election sure” to membership in the glorified church, will not only seek to cultivate these fruits of the Spirit in their own lives, but also to encourage the cultivation of the same fruits, as they may have opportunity, in their brethren in Christ. Additionally, they will seek to exercise so good an influence upon their own families that, as their children receive from them, as parents, the natural life and the necessary instructions to start therein, these may be equipped for a good start in life, with the necessary guidelines for a noble character.

The apostle, as the mouthpiece of God, is a thorough instructor. He does not just tell us what fleshly propensities to put off and what graces to put on. Further, viewing us as arrayed in these qualities of heart-compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patient endurance, forbearance, and forgiveness, he adds, “And above all these put on charity [love], which is the bond of perfectness,” or completeness. (Col. 3:14) Love is thus pictured as that which binds and holds in place the folds of Christ’s “robe of righteousness” with its various jeweled adornments of character. (Isa. 61:10) In other words, the apostle would have us see that forbearance, meekness, patience, and other qualities we are to “put on,” must not be matters merely of courtesy or policy. The wearers of Christ’s robe will not be perfected in heart, nor be fit for the

kingdom, until they have reached the place where these various graces of their wills and intentions are bound to them by the cords of love—love for the Lord, love for righteousness, love for the brethren, and sympathetic love for the whole groaning creation. Love is, indeed, “the bond of perfectness,” the very Spirit of the Lord.

Let Us Not Be Deceived

In our text the apostle says, “Be not deceived.” The question naturally suggests: Is there danger that we may not know whether we are sowing to the Spirit or sowing to the flesh? We answer that there is indeed a danger of being deceived along this line. The Scriptures represent that the flesh is very crafty; that the natural mind is “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” (Jer. 17:9) The new mind needs to guard continually lest it fall into a trap of the old nature. If we are living according to the flesh, we may expect to reap accordingly, even deceiving ourselves. Others, too, may be deceived. God, however, cannot be mocked by our outward service of him and his truth while we inwardly live according to the flesh. (Gal. 6:7) If we plant corn, we harvest corn; if we sow wheat, we reap wheat. In all the affairs of our lives we are either building up the old nature that we agreed should be destroyed, or faithfully seeing to it that the deeds of the flesh are mortified and killed, that we may prosper spiritually.

We sow to the flesh every time we allow the fleshly, selfish, unjust, unrighteous desires of the flesh to have sway in our hearts and lives. On the contrary, each sowing to the Spirit, each resistance

of the desires of the flesh toward its fallen tendencies, and each exercise of the new mind, of the new will, toward the things that are pure, the things that are noble, the things that are good, the things that are true, the things that are spiritual, is a sowing to the Spirit. (Phil. 4:8) If persevered in, such a course will ultimately bring the attainment of the Lord's gracious promises and arrangements—everlasting life and a share in the heavenly kingdom.—Rom. 6:22; Rev. 2:10 ■

Search and See

*There's a wideness in God's mercy,
Like the wideness of the sea;
There's a kindness in his justice,
Though severe his judgments be.
For the love of God is broader
Than the measure of man's mind;
And the heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind.
—Hymns of Dawn*

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The Great Deliverance

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

*—Luke 21:28, The
Emphatic Diaglott*

God’s people of all ages

have been “strangers and pilgrims” in the sinful world around them. (Heb. 11:13; I Pet. 2:11) However, the truly faithful have always been encouraged by God’s promise to care for them and to help them in their every time of

need. “God is our refuge,” wrote the psalmist, “a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth [present organizations of society] be removed, and though the mountains [present civil powers] be carried into the midst of the sea [ungovernable masses of people]; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.”—Ps. 46:1-3

God has not promised to deliver his people from their troubles in this life, although he often does, but he has promised to give them strength to endure their trials while they learn the important

lesson of putting their trust in him. We should cast all our care upon the Lord, knowing that he will permit only those difficulties to come into our lives as will best serve to test our faith and confidence in him. (I Pet. 5:7) Only those who learn this lesson of faith can be at peace and truly pleasing to the Lord. “Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”—Heb. 11:6

A Faith Class

Wonderful examples of faith are brought to our attention in both the Old and New Testaments. Sometimes in these examples, faith was openly and visibly rewarded by deliverance from trying situations, but at other times it was not. This was true of the ancient heroes of faith who lived during Old Testament times. It is also true of the “little flock” class since Pentecost. (Luke 12:32) As individual servants of the Lord we often see the hand of God in our affairs. We can sense his lifting of the burden of trials which, without his help, might well crush us. Yet at other times we do not have this rewarding experience and can hold onto the Lord only through faith in his promises. It is through these experiences that we need to be convinced that, while we may not be able to discern all of the providences of the Lord, he is still dealing with us. We must learn that his tender mercy is over all our affairs, even when all we can see are threatening and dark clouds of trouble. “All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose,” the Apostle Paul says.—Rom. 8:28

It is important to realize that our loving Heavenly Father is the guiding light of our lives, and he will not permit us to be tested above that which we are able to bear. (I Cor. 10:13) The Apostle Paul wrote, "Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised)." (Heb. 10:23) We know and trust that all of God's promises will be fulfilled. He rewards those who diligently seek him even though, at times, his rewards are not immediately demonstrated. Thus Paul further reminded the Hebrew brethren, "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward."—vs. 35

Examples of Faith

Among the Israelites who had been taken captive to Babylon, there were many of God's faithful servants, such as Daniel; his three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; Ezekiel; and others. To these, Jeremiah wrote, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. The Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord."—Lam. 3:22-26

For a long period of time, the people of Israel, especially their kings, had been for the most part unfaithful to God. They had worshipped false gods, and in many other ways they were disobedient to the Lord. According to the Mosaic Law they could have been justly put to death. As Jeremiah explains,

however, God showed his compassion and mercy toward them. Instead of consuming them in death, he permitted them to be taken captive into Babylon.

While the nation as a whole had been disobedient unto the Lord, there were noble exceptions among them—notably the aforementioned Daniel and his three companions. These remained loyal to God while in Babylon, even at the risk of their lives. Paul, when speaking of Daniel, said that he, by his faith, “stopped the mouths of lions.” (Heb. 11:33) Daniel was courageous in his loyalty to God, and from this comes the expression, “Dare to be a Daniel.”

Because of the wonderful manner in which the Lord enabled Daniel to interpret Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of the great image, he was highly exalted in the government by the king. (Dan. 2:31-48) He continued thus to be honored by the rulers of Babylon and was very highly placed in the subsequent kingdom of “Darius the Median.” (Dan. 5:31) The scriptural record further states, “It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom an hundred and twenty princes, which should be over the whole kingdom; And over these three presidents; of whom Daniel was first: that the princes might give accounts unto them, and the king should have no damage. Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm. Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him.” —Dan. 6:1-4

Delivered from Lions

Because of Daniel's faithfulness in his devotion to God, those who were plotting against him said, "We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God." (Dan. 6:5) Surely this is a wonderful testimony concerning Daniel's loyalty to the God of Israel. His enemies then prevailed upon King Darius to "establish a royal statute, and to make a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions."—vs. 7

The king was not aware that this was a plot against the life of Daniel whom he loved and trusted, so he made and signed the decree. (vss. 8,9) Since the laws of the Medes and the Persians could not be changed, when Darius discovered the intent of his advisers it was too late to do anything about it. He could only hope that Daniel's God would deliver him. The king knew that Daniel would continue to worship his God even though it might result in his death.

Daniel continued openly to pray to God and was discovered by his enemies, who were no doubt spying on him. Consequently, and much against the king's desire, Daniel was cast into a den of lions. From the scriptural account, we read, "Then the king went to his palace, and passed the night fasting: neither were instruments of musick brought before him: and his sleep went from him. Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions. And when he came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel: and the king spake and said to Daniel, O

Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?”—vss. 10-20

Daniel’s reply to the king was, “O king, live for ever. My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions’ mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt.” (vss. 21,22) Concerning God’s angels the psalmist wrote, “The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.” (Ps. 34:7) How wonderfully true this was with Daniel’s deliverance from the lions’ den. Surely he must have rejoiced because of God’s protecting hand over him, and it was a wonderful and powerful witness concerning Daniel’s God.

Delivered from a Fiery Furnace

Daniel’s three young friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, likewise had their loyalty to their Heavenly Father severely tested. It was demanded of all the people in the Babylonian empire that they worship a great image which the king had ordered to be erected that he might impress his subjects with the greatness of his authority and power. The penalty for refusal to bow down to this image was death by being cast into a fiery furnace.—Dan. 3:1-6

Because of their loyalty to God, Daniel’s three friends refused to obey the decree of the king. Thereupon the king summoned them before him and said, “Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of musick,

ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?"—Dan. 3:12-15

The reply of these three courageous servants of God was direct and to the point. They said to the king, "If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up." (vss. 17,18) The record continues, "Then these men were bound in their coats, their hosen, and their hats, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace." The fire had been made so hot that even those who threw the Hebrews into it were themselves burned to death.—vss. 19-23

God sent an angel and delivered the three Hebrews. The king said, "Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God." (vs. 25) The king was impressed and gave commandment that the people of the realm should not say anything against the God of the Hebrews. (vss. 28,19) As for the three Hebrews themselves, their faith in the ability of their God to deliver them had been strengthened, although they would not have lost their faith in God's providence for them had it been that they should perish in the fiery furnace.

There is a vitally important lesson in this well-known experience of the three Hebrews. While God is always abundantly able to deliver his people

from physical harm, he does not always do so. His providential care over his people is not always manifest in the same manner in their individual experiences. He may permit some to suffer and die. Others he might deliver from suffering and permit them to continue in his service for a while longer, though perhaps under difficult circumstances.

Worthies of Old

This point is enlarged upon in chapter eleven of Paul's letter to the Hebrew brethren. Here he writes of the faithful lives of God's worthies of old. The apostle names many of them, such as Abraham, Moses, and David. He then tells of many others, "Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again."—Heb. 11:33-35

It will be noted that all of the ancient people of faith in this listing had their faith visibly rewarded by the protection and deliverance which their Heavenly Father afforded them. Through faith they knew, as did Daniel and the three Hebrews, that the God whom they served was able to deliver them, and in their case he did.

However, this was not true of all the Ancient Worthies. Paul writes that "others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; ... others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with

the sword [unlike those who “escaped the edge of the sword”]: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.”—Heb. 11:35-40

These “others” were just as much the objects of God’s care as were those who were delivered from prison and from threatened death. These were mocked and scourged, and God did not interfere. They suffered “bonds and imprisonment,” and God did not deliver them. They were “sawn asunder,” as Isaiah, by tradition, is reputed to have been. They were destitute and seemingly uncared for. It was by faith that they realized that the great God of heaven permitted their trying experiences for some good purpose although they could not always—perhaps seldom—understand what that purpose was.

They knew, although they may not have expressed it in these words, that their God was too wise to err and too loving to be unkind. They knew that their privilege and responsibility as his servants was to be loyal to him regardless of what the cost might be. They knew by faith that, in the end, God would give his best to those who left the choice with him. Paul also states that their faith included that of a future “better resurrection;” rather than an immediate, but only temporary, deliverance in the present life.—vs. 35

Spiritual Israelites

Christians at the present time should be greatly encouraged by the realization that our loving Heavenly Father is also dealing with us in much the same way as he did with his faithful people of old. His dealings we see exemplified in the life of Jesus and in the experiences of those in the Early Church. Jesus was delivered from an angry mob near the beginning of his ministry and at other times. (Luke 4:29,30; John 7:44; 8:59) However, the Heavenly Father withdrew his protection at the end and allowed him to be crucified. We can understand God's workings in the case of Jesus, for his role was to give his flesh for the life of the world. (John 6:51) We may not always understand, though, why God allows us, the followers of Jesus, to suffer.

The Apostle Peter addressed this very point, when he wrote, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy."—I Pet. 4:12,13

James Killed

The Early Church was bitterly persecuted by various leaders during the first century. We read, "Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword." (Acts 12:1,2) Herod also placed Peter in prison until after the Passover thinking that then he would also have him put to death. However, the Lord in

this case intervened by sending an angel to deliver Peter.—Acts 12:3-10, *Revised Version*

Under the circumstances, Peter was no doubt surprised at his miraculous release. He went immediately to the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark, where the brethren were holding a prayer meeting. They were so surprised by his arrival that at first they could not believe he was really there. (vss. 11-17) The question remains why God would deliver Peter from certain death at the hands of Herod while not delivering James. The brethren no doubt had prayed for James as well as for Peter. Although James had been killed, it is certain that the prayers for him gave him strength to bear up faithfully during his final hours of trial. Peter, by their prayers, was able to sleep during the night even though he was chained to prison guards awaiting death.

This emphasizes a precious reality which has been true for all of the Lord's faithful people. God sustains them in their trials, even though he does not always deliver them. The Lord has promised to provide a way of escape when trials are too severe to bear. (I Cor. 10:13) Sometimes that escape is through death. This was so for God's ancient people, and it has been true throughout the present Gospel Age. Perhaps Stephen could not have endured being pelted with rocks for a great length of time, but God permitted him to fall asleep in death, thus "delivering" him quickly from the cruel torture being inflicted upon him by his enemies.—Acts 7:59,60

Faith Tested

The trials of the Lord's people are designed to test their faith in him and to be a witness for him. If, every time we suffered a bit of pain either of

body or of mind, the Lord would at once deliver us from the distress, we would probably be very thankful, but our faith in his love, mercy, and compassion would not be completely tested. This would be walking by sight and not by faith. (II Cor. 5:7) True faith is that which believes in God regardless of the circumstances with which we are surrounded or the distresses that we suffer. Regardless of any and all circumstances, such faith will continue to believe that God rewards those who diligently seek him.

True faith is that which will not permit us to shrink from the narrow path of sacrifice no matter how many, nor how fierce, the foes we see ahead in that path. Through sickness or other difficult circumstances, we may realize that death is not far away. However, such an expression of faith will firmly trust our loving Heavenly Father's assurance that he knows what is best for us. We will not permit the pleasures of living, or the threat of dying, to separate us from him, and we will be able to say from our hearts, "great is thy faithfulness."—Lam. 3:23; Rom. 8:35-39

We will know, by faith in the promises of God, that our ultimate and glorious deliverance from all enemies and all our distresses, will come through death, if indeed, we are faithful even unto death. (Rev. 2:10) It was this kind of faith that enabled the ancient people of God to maintain their trust in and loyalty to him. They endured their afflictions, suffering, and even death, refusing deliverance upon the terms of their enemies.

As previously noted, it seems clear that those heroes of faith, the worthies of old, did have a hope of the resurrection. In a prayer to God, Moses said,

“Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, Return, ye children of men.” (Ps. 90:3) Job said, “All the days of my appointed time will I wait [in death], till my change come. Thou shalt call [in the resurrection], and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands.” (Job 14:14,15) Those ancient ones may not have known the details of God’s plan of salvation as we are privileged to know it today, but they testified to their faith. They had “hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.”—Acts 24:15

The “just” as mentioned by Paul would surely include those who looked for the resurrection, the hope of which inspired the Ancient Worthy class to faithfulness. When Daniel was informed concerning the great “time of trouble” through which we are now passing, he was assured that then his people would be delivered. (Dan. 12:1) While Daniel’s people here referred to would include all of the Lord’s faithful servants in every age who have longed for deliverance, this promise must have been a great source of strength to Daniel himself. It was made plain to him how this great deliverance would be wrought. It would be through a resurrection of the dead: “Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake.” Daniel was further told: “Go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest [in the sleep of death], and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.”—vss. 2,13

Lift Up Our Heads

Real and comforting has been the hope of spiritual Israel for “deliverance” in the resurrection, the “first resurrection” promised to those who are

symbolically “beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God.” (Rev. 20:6,4) This hope should be especially real to the Lord’s people at the present time. We are living in the time when we see the signs described by Jesus relative to the time of his presence and the end of the age being fulfilled. (Matt. 24:3, 27-39; Luke 21:25-27) Just as Jesus stated in our featured text, “When these things are beginning to occur, raise yourselves, and lift up your heads; for your deliverance is drawing near.”—Luke 21:28, *Diaglott*

Let us raise ourselves, for it is no time to be prostrate and idle. We are to be active in our witness for Jesus and for the Word of God. It is a time also to lift up our heads with hope, courage, and rejoicing. The clouds of trouble are hanging low over the peoples of the earth. Mankind and its leaders are distressed, and their hearts are filled with fear. We know that the troubles in the world may well bring additional hardships upon us, but this does not cause us to hang our heads in discouragement.

Let us meditate upon the words of the psalmist as we await the “great deliverance” of not only the church, but also of all humanity, from this present world of sin, suffering, and death. “There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: ... The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. ... He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire. Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.”—Ps. 46:4-10

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The Image of God

*“God created man
in his own image,
in the image of God
created he him;
male and female
created he them.”*

—*Genesis 1:27*

Philosophers tell us that man, as he exists today, is far more brilliant and advanced than he ever was before in history. Their claim is that evolution has brought us to this point. The contention

that each generation is much brighter than the preceding one, has been reached because scientists have ascertained from their calculations that man has existed on earth for millions of years, improving with each generation. With each generation having become more advanced, they conclude that man has now reached a very high level. Is this philosophy correct?

How glad we are that the great Creator of the universe has provided us with a source of information from which we can discover what is truth and what is mere philosophy. He has extended an invitation to us, saying, “Let us go into the house of the Lord,” and by entering his house of learning we will come to find God’s own testimony regarding man.—Ps. 122:1

We learn from this source, the Bible, that man is “of the earth,” and that God formed him from the

“dust of the ground.” (I Cor. 15:47; Gen. 2:7) By breathing, or infusing into him, the “breath of life, ... man became a living soul.” In this succinct description of the creation of man, there is not even a slight suggestion of one form of life evolving from another, or of a less complex variety becoming a more complex being. God created each species as a separate and distinct variety of life, as we read in chapter one of Genesis. After each step taken to prepare the earth to support life, and after each separate creation of plants, fish, birds, and earth creatures, God declared that “it was good.”—Gen. 1:10,21,25,31

In Genesis 1:26,27 we read that “God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” We notice in God’s statement that he suggested a plural thought: “Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, ... and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.” From this declaration it is evident that when God created man in his own image, “male and female created he them,” he meant that both Adam and Eve would be quite similar to himself in various ways.

The words “image” and “likeness,” in the Hebrew language mean resemblance or model. Man was made to model God. How was the perfect man, Adam, a model of God? It was surely not as far as his body was concerned. Our Creator is a far superior being—a spirit being—and man is only a fleshly creature, of the earth. However, our Creator did make man as a reflection of his image in some respects. In part, this resemblance, or image, lay in man’s ability to reason, to remember, to perceive abstract as well as straightforward ideas, to make

moral judgments, and to possess intellectual and aesthetic qualities.

The perfect man, Adam, was given a God-like quality of conscience, which enabled him to distinguish between right and wrong. He was given a free will so that he possessed full exercise of his powers of choice. Were this not so mankind would be mere machines, and our actions would be controlled by someone else. However, this is not the case. If it were, there would be no exercising of abilities or talents, and no chance of developing individual characters. This freedom of choice, of course, can be good or bad, depending upon how it is utilized.

Adam Chose Sin

Adam, that glorious, first-created human being, was endowed with every physical and mental blessing. All of his surroundings had been prepared to maintain his well-being. The Creator very clearly instructed Adam that if he would obey the righteous law of God he would live; if he disobeyed God's just command he would die. (Gen. 2:15-17) The Creator's instructions were very simple. The responsibility of Adam's worthiness to live forever in the Edenic paradise depended upon his own freedom of choice. Sadly, he was led to choosing sin through disobedience. As a result of his fall from perfection, the entire race that Adam and Eve brought forth were born in sin, and under the penalty of death through inheritance.—Ps. 51:5; Rom. 5:12

The reign of sin and death has continued, and will continue, until God's purpose for permitting it has been served, and the due time for it to end

arrives. In his love God did provide a redeemer, a ransomer, even his own beloved Son, Jesus Christ, who would “taste death” for every man. (Heb. 2:9) This provision for the salvation of man from his righteous sentence of death was a “gift” of free grace.—Rom. 5:15-18

As a result of our first parents’ fall into sin, and over the many centuries since, those qualities which from the beginning identified man as being in his Creator’s image have been found in only a relatively small portion of the entire human family to any marked degree. Indeed, some noble beings have sought to cultivate such graces of God’s majestic character; while there are others who have merely put on a veneer of godlikeness. This veneer can result in a pleasant outward demeanor, but little of the genuine purity of character with which God created our first parents may be truly in their hearts.

Since God cannot work with those lacking in the true graces, he has diligently sought out those of the human family who have shown the qualities of mercy and love from the very core of their beings. These he has favored throughout the ages, to accomplish the outworking of his plan. Let us consider one of these favored ones, who during a major portion of his life displayed some of these finer qualities. This was David’s son, Solomon.

Lessons from Solomon

Solomon’s freedom of choice in later years led him to fall victim to the demands of his many wives, and as a result he displeased God very much. Yet in his youth he was highly favored of God. Solomon seemed to inherit from his father the qualities of

thoughtfulness, the ability to rule, appreciation for the goodness of the Lord, which David had earlier learned at the feet of Nathan, the holy prophet.

When David became aged and too feeble to rule, his son Solomon, at the youthful age of twenty, took the heavy responsibility of ruling Israel. We can well appreciate the prayer David uttered on behalf of his dear son. Those who are fathers with sons can readily appreciate David's concern for Solomon. We share this same feeling toward our sons, that they might find grace in the sight of God, and that they might walk with him uprightly.

In I Chronicles 28:9,10, the words that David spoke to his son are recorded: "Thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever. Take heed now; for the Lord hath chosen thee to build an house for the sanctuary: be strong, and do it."

The Lord had chosen Solomon for the building of a sanctuary, which had been David's lifelong dream. Helped and advised by God's faithful prophet, Nathan, and with the favor of God, Solomon entered quickly into the spirit of his father's plan for building the Temple. He knew that the welfare of Israel rested in their adherence to the Law of God, and their worship of Jehovah.

Solomon Asks for Wisdom

In Solomon's great love for God he offered a thousand burnt offerings at Gibeon. He wanted so much

to please God that he prepared this great offering to his Creator. While he was at Gibeon the new young king had a dream in which the Lord appeared to him. (I Kings 3:5) God said unto Solomon, “Ask what I shall give thee,” and Solomon’s answer was a beautiful one—one which could only come from a loving heart. Solomon said, “I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in. ... Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?”—vss. 7-9

God appreciated the genuine expression of Solomon’s heart. He answered his request in a wonderful way, giving Solomon a “wise and understanding heart.” None with an ability to judge so wisely as Solomon was ever found again among imperfect men. (vss. 10,12) Because of his unselfish request, God also promised, “I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days. And if thou wilt walk in my ways, to keep my statutes and my commandments, as thy father David did walk, then I will lengthen thy days.”—vss. 13,14

As Solomon awoke from his dream, he enjoyed the realization that he had been pleasing to God in his request. He came to Jerusalem and offered peace offerings and burnt offerings before the Ark of the Covenant. (vs. 15) Shortly thereafter he undertook the great task of building Israel’s Temple, as instructed by the Lord.

Building the Temple

We recall how all the stones and the timbers for the Temple were prepared, shaped, and marked for

their particular places, and only when ready were they brought to the site. Every part fitted perfectly, and each came together with the next without the sound of a hammer, without the sound of an ax, or a tool of iron. (I Kings 6:7) Although each section of this great Temple had been prepared in different locations, when they were brought to the place destined for its erection, nothing had to be changed.

What a lesson this is for the Christian! We must not think for a moment that we can bide our time carelessly, and that when we come to the end of our lives, all of a sudden, miraculously, we will be fit for our place in the royal Temple. This is the time of preparation. We have to be shaped, chiseled, polished, and numbered now for the special place the Lord has in mind for us in his spiritual Temple.

We realize that Solomon's Temple pictured a greater structure. "Ye are the temple of the living God," Paul said. (II Cor. 6:16) The time for shaping and the time for laboring in the preparation of God's spiritual Temple is now. (I Cor. 3:9; Eph. 2:10; Phil. 1:6; 2:12,13) When all the pieces, or members, have been made ready during the course of their Christian lives—prepared in the midst of this "crooked and perverse" world—they will be fitted into their proper place in the symbolic heavenly Temple.—Phil. 2:15

There was much joyous celebration connected with the dedication of Solomon's Temple. (I Kings 8:65,66) There will be great joy in heaven and on earth when the Christ, the spiritual Temple of God, is complete, assembled, and when God's glory enters into it. All the earth will benefit from the completion of that Temple and will be blessed, even as natural

Israel reached the zenith of its prosperity under Solomon's reign.—Eph. 2:19-22; Rev. 3:12; 21:22-26

Our Day

Leaving the wise King Solomon at this point in his life, we return to a consideration of our day. We find that the Heavenly Father's invitation is still going forth to those in whom he finds a measure of man's original likeness to himself. Those who possess the original qualities of love and obedience to God respond to an even greater invitation and service than that of Solomon or other noble characters of past ages. The very fact that we still see some dedicating their lives to God in consecration to him, to follow in the footsteps of his only begotten Son, is evidence to us that this calling-out work and the related polishing, chiseling, and shaping, is still going on. We realize that this is indeed the method for working out the plan of salvation proposed long ago by the Heavenly Father. We further know that all things are working together for good to those that love God, those he has called according to his purpose, "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. 8:28,29, *Revised Version*

This Scripture informs us that a predetermined class—the church—must be copies, images, of God's Son, who is also a copy and image of the Father. As Christians, none of us in this life can become perfect as Jesus was, try as hard and long as we may. We also cannot take this honor upon ourselves by our own choice. If we have been invited to become a footstep follower of Jesus, this

honor was extended to us by God.—I Thess. 2:12; Heb. 5:4

This throws light upon the matter, for when we look at our fellow Christians, realizing they received the same invitation that we received, we will treasure their fellowship correspondingly. We have accepted the Father's invitation with thankful hearts—his gracious provision of Jesus' sacrifice making it possible for us to enter this relationship. By so doing, and by putting on the robe of our Savior's righteousness to cover our imperfections, making us acceptable to God by the merit of the ransom sacrifice of Jesus, we gladly consecrate our all to begin to do those things which are pleasing to our Heavenly Father, even at great cost to ourselves.—Isa. 61:10; Rom. 12:1; Eph. 1:5-7

Before taking this important step, we must have considered prayerfully what it means to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, and to become a copy of him. Our affections must be set on things above. (Col. 3:2) The new will, the new mind, must develop the fruits and graces of the Spirit. To become a copy of Jesus one must strive at all times to develop and to exhibit these character qualities. (Gal. 5:22,23; II Pet. 1:5-7) All sentiments that are pleasing to God and in harmony with the Spirit of the Lord must be striven after, although this will take a lifetime of development under the shaping influences of the Heavenly Father.

Not only must love for the Lord, the Truth, and the brethren be demonstrated, but there must also be a loving, sympathetic concern for the world. To be in the likeness of the Lord Jesus, we must have a deep regard for the groaning creation—

even for our enemies, those who would despitefully use us.—Matt. 22:37-39; John 13:34,35; Luke 6:27,28

Heart Obedience

Proverbs 4:23 states: “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” In the case of the footstep followers of Jesus, our right to be a part of God’s spiritual Temple will be determined upon how we develop our hearts now. We have this “treasure in earthen vessels,” and the burdens of the world and our weaknesses of the flesh will attempt to draw us away from our goal. (II Cor. 4:7) However, as with Father Adam, King Solomon, and even our Lord Jesus, we also have free choice in the matter of deciding to whom we shall render our heart obedience. We have not been coerced into serving the Lord, the Truth, or the brethren. It is our free choice. With our eyes fixed on Jesus, we can become like him. Our desire to walk the way Jesus walked, is a lofty one. Our goal is to fill the place in the Temple for which the Father has so graciously invited us, and it can only be reached by becoming conformed to the image of his dear Son.—Rom. 8:29; II Cor. 3:18

Perhaps we have wondered what the experience will be like, if faithful, of being resurrected as a spirit being, when blessed with the marvelous privilege of hearing the words, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord.” (Matt. 25:21) The Scriptures provide us with certain information in this regard.

Beyond the Veil

The Apostle Paul tells us, "If we have been planted together in the likeness of [Jesus'] death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection." (Rom. 6:5) What is our Lord's "likeness" since his resurrection? Hebrews 1:3 tells us that Jesus is the "express image," or exact copy, of God! Those who follow faithfully in Jesus' footsteps of sacrifice and service, and who through "patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality," will be made like their Lord and Head—all members of God's divine family.—Rom. 2:7

There is a further thought with regard to the expression "express image." It is true that our Lord had been in the likeness of the Father in his pre-human existence as the Logos. Even when he came to earth as a human being he was in the likeness of God, because his character was always in complete harmony with that of his Father. However, the Apostle Paul tells us that Jesus has now "sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high," having been obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Because of this, God highly exalted him and gave him a name that is above every name. Jesus is now, even more completely, in the "express image" of the invisible God, sharing the divine nature.—Heb. 1:3; Phil. 2:8,9; Col. 1:15

We read also, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear [Greek: become manifest], we shall be like

him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.”—I John 3:1-3

Thus we see that our Lord Jesus now is in the exact image and likeness of God, although our Heavenly Father has been and always will be greater than all. (John 10:29; 14:28; I Cor. 15:24-28) Jesus has been given this reward because of his faithful service. He never wavered in his submission to do his Father’s will, despite the cost. God has highly exalted him, and he is pleased to do the same for the “called, and chosen, and faithful” members of the church, Jesus’ bride, his body. (Rev. 17:14; 19:7,8; 21:2; I Cor. 12:12,27) These will be resurrected in the likeness of the Lord Jesus. This is a magnificent promise which we can, and will, inherit, if we are obedient and faithful, even unto death! (Rev. 2:10) Paul stated it this way, “Ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.” “As we have borne the image of the earthy [Adam], we shall also bear the image of the heavenly [the likeness of God].”—Col. 3:9,10; I Cor. 15:49 ■

A Little While

*“A little while;” now he has come;
The hour draws on apace—
The blessed hour, the glorious morn,
When we shall see his face.
How light our trials then will seem!
How short our pilgrim way!
The life of earth a fitful dream,
Dispelled by dawning day!
—Poems and Hymns of Dawn, 1890*

The Greatness of Our God

*How wonderful is our great God,
How little do we know
Of all the plans he has in store
For men on earth below.*

*His wisdom, justice, love and power
Shall work in full accord
To bless the peoples of the earth
Thru His dear Son—our Lord.*

*While trouble now doth hide His face,
And Satan seems to win,
'Tis only for the world to learn
The sinfulness of sin.*

*Soon shall Christ's Kingdom rule the earth—
And evil be no more—
The love of God shall fill each heart,
And Eden He'll restore.*

—Poems of the Way