

## Forgiveness

**FORGIVENESS IS AN** important teaching in Christianity. The hope of all the world depends upon God's forgiveness of the sins of mankind. Few people in the world are aware of the need for forgiveness, nor seek it. Last May the world's attention was directed toward this need when the pope made a specific trip to Greece and Syria, trying to bring a reconciliation with the Eastern Orthodox churches, and to bring peace and forgiveness to the Middle East. It was front page news for several days in May as the pope took a six-day pilgrimage in the footsteps of St. Paul.

### MAKING AMENDS

His first stop in Athens was reported in the "*New York Times*" on May 5, 2001, as follows:

"John Paul II tried to mend the ancient rift with the Orthodox faith today by expressing 'deep regret' for the misdeeds of the Roman Catholic Church as he made the first papal visit to Greece since the churches were one.

"The pope lamented the 'disastrous sack of the imperial city of Constantinople,' the massacre and pillaging of the heart of the Byzantine Empire, beginning in 1204. The sack of the home of the Eastern Church by the armies of Crusader knights was one of the historic grievances that had kept the Greek Orthodox Church so resistant to a papal visit—and prompted some ultraconservative Orthodox priests to protest the pope's arrival by tolling church bells in mourning.

"For the occasions past and present, when sons and daughters of the Catholic Church have sinned by action or omission against their Orthodox brothers and sisters, may the Lord grant us the forgiveness we beg of him,' the pope said.

"Archbishop Christodoulos, the leader of the Greek Orthodox Church, led other Orthodox bishops in the meeting room of his residence in loud applause. Roman Catholic cardinals accompanying the pope followed their lead, but clapped softly.

“The day—which included the reading of a joint statement by the two religious leaders, warm embraces and other signs of a thaw—was a turning point for the Greek Orthodox Church, which has long sought an apology from the Vatican. It was also a personal triumph for John Paul, who has long dreamed of brokering reconciliation with Eastern Orthodox churches, especially that of Greece, which is one of the more conservative and influential.”

This was not the first attempt made by the pope to seek reconciliation with the Eastern Orthodox Church. He made his first trip in 1999 to Romania, and prayed alongside Patriarch Teoctist. A later visit to Georgia was more chilly. The leader of the main Orthodox church in Ukraine has reportedly asked the pope to abandon his plan to visit Ukraine in June. So has the Russian patriarch, Alesky II. And, as noted in the news release, a large part of the clergy in Greece opposed his visit.

#### FORGIVING ONE ANOTHER

Another news release a few days later, in the “*Bergen Record*” for May 8, 2001, told of his visit to Syria and particularly the city of Quneitra (formerly 50,000 people, but now only a few families live there because Syria wants to keep it as a monument to Israeli crimes). The press release said, “The 80-year-old pontiff knelt for twenty minutes on a wooden stand on the shattered stone floor of a Greek Orthodox church—within view of an Israeli radar station across the valley.

“‘May all believers find the courage to forgive one another, so that the wounds of the past may be healed, and not be a pretext for further suffering in the present,’ the pope said, looking exhausted on the third day of a pilgrimage to promote reconciliation.

“He offered a prayer for the youngest victim of the seven-month Palestinian uprising, a 4-month-old girl who died when Israeli tanks shelled a refugee camp in the Gaza Strip, an attack that followed Palestinian mortar fire on two Jewish settlements.

“Relations between Syria and Israel have been especially tense since Israel fired on Syrian targets in Lebanon last month. Syria has vowed to retaliate, but so far President Bashar Assad has only increased his rhetoric against Israel, lambasting it as a ‘racist’ state. Syria has demanded that Israel return all of the Golan Heights, which Israel captured in 1967.

“In Quneitra, winds buffeted the area and chilled the inside of the church that, like the rest of the city, is in ruins.

“Applause broke out as Pope John Paul arrived in a black limousine after a one-hour drive from Damascus and entered the church. The crowd of several thousand included former residents bused in for the day and U.N. peacemakers from Austria who patrol the buffer zone separating Syrian and Israeli soldiers.

“The Syrian government says Israeli forces sacked Quneitra before handing it back to Syria in 1974. Israel, which still holds most of the rest of the Golan Heights, says it was damaged in fighting.

“The visit to Quneitra was part of the pope’s four-day tour of Syria, where he has tried to reach out to Muslims and Christians alike. On Sunday, he became the first pope to visit a mosque, in the walled old city in Damascus.”

During the pope’s visit to Syria the news media reported on Assad’s attempts to have him side with the Arabs. The report said, “Assad harshly attacked Israel during the pope’s stay, saying Israelis ‘tried to kill the principles of all religions with the same mentality in which they betrayed Christ ...’ and asking the Roman Catholic Church to side with the Arabs.

“The pope, again, refused to be drawn in, instead repeating calls for the need for reconciliation.

“‘We pray to you for the peoples of the Middle East,’ he said. ‘Help them to break down walls of hostility and division and to build together a world of justice and solidarity.’”

## JEWS OFFENDED

The pope’s silence concerning this verbal attack on Israel offended the Jews who were disappointed in his lack of support for them. Thus, the trip to Syria did not gain much of anything for the pope’s program of bringing reconciliation. Recent events in Tekoa of the West Bank of Israel (the murder of two 14-year-old boys) has released a surging tide of hate; “a tide of hate flowing from Palestinians to Israelis and from Israelis to Palestinians. The hate does not ebb back and forth now; it runs at full flood, overwhelming those who hate and those who do not, and those too young to know what hate is.” (Quotation from “*Time Magazine*,” 5/21/01)

## CAN FORGIVENESS BE REQUESTED FOR OTHERS?

The question that arises is: Can the pope ask God to forgive those perpetrators of crime one thousand years ago? The procedure accepted by the Roman Catholic Church would permit this. Members of the church are supposed to confess their sins to the parish priest, and he, in turn, seeks their forgiveness through a chain of authority such as bishop, archbishop, cardinal, and pope. However, our understanding of the way God grants forgiveness is through prayer. Jesus taught his disciples to pray, saying, “If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”—Matt. 6:14,15

But how can those who died 1,000 years ago ask for forgiveness? They will be given that opportunity by being raised from the dead. As Jesus said, “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment.” (John 5:28,29, *Revised Standard Version*) God’s plan is to give everyone an opportunity to know the Truth (I Tim. 2:4) and to make amends for the wrongs they have committed. Each one is responsible for his own sins and must seek the Father’s forgiveness.

## OUR LORD’S LESSON ON FORGIVENESS

When Jesus was upon earth he taught the people of Israel; he told them how to approach God in all matters, including forgiveness. Recorded in Luke 7:36-50 is one such lesson. Jesus had been invited for dinner by Simon, a Pharisee. As he sat reclining at dinner in Simon’s house, a woman who was a sinner came to anoint Jesus with an alabaster box of ointment. As she knelt behind him at his feet, she was so overcome with emotion that she began to weep, and her tears fell on Jesus’ legs. She then was embarrassed, and wiped the tears with her hair, kissed his feet, and anointed them. Simon, who was observing all of this, said to himself, “This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.” (Luke 7:39) We are not told the nature of the woman’s sins, but it is evident that she made mistakes in her life and was penitent.

Even though Simon had not expressed himself audibly, Jesus knew what was in his mind, and presented a parable to him, saying, “There was

a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most?" (vss. 41,42) Simon answered, "I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most." Jesus answered, "Thou hast rightly judged." (vs.43) Jesus then proceeded to tell Simon how he neglected to wash his feet, as a good host would have done, and gave him no kiss, and did not anoint him; whereas the woman had washed his feet with her tears, and ceased not to kiss his feet, and anoint his feet. He said, "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little." (vs. 47) It was not that Simon was more righteous, for "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23) Everyone needs forgiveness.

## HOW TO ATTAIN FORGIVENESS

To be worthy of forgiveness, the Lord's people must not only desire it, but also be in the proper heart condition to receive and appreciate it. These, and related conditions of forgiveness, are beautifully set forth in God's instructions to Israel when he said, "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." (II Chron. 7:14) This was told to Solomon at the dedication of the Temple. Note the conditions required for forgiveness, such as humility, prayer, seeking the Lord, and reform.

Since, by nature, all of us are members of a sinful and fallen race, we frequently do those things which cause us to stand in need of forgiveness. To obtain this forgiveness we must humble ourselves by acknowledging our need. If we are proud and pretend that we do not need God's mercy, his grace will not be extended to us.

Another condition of forgiveness is that we pray. The Lord has made a wonderful provision through Christ whereby we might approach him in prayer to seek forgiveness. The Apostle Paul speaks of this as going to the "throne of grace," as he writes, "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." (Heb. 4:16) Likewise, we must seek our Heavenly Father's face if we would obtain his grace and forgiveness. And our Father will

oblige by lifting up his “countenance” upon us and giving us “peace.”—Num. 6:24-26

This experience can only be realized if it is diligently sought, and people turn from their wicked ways. We thank God that provision has been made in his plan of salvation to give everyone an opportunity to seek him and receive forgiveness. This will be when God makes a New Covenant with the nation of Israel, as recorded in Jeremiah 31:33, and says, “They shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”—Jer. 31:34

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## Answering God's Call

***Key Verse: "I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me."  
—Isaiah 6:8***

***Selected Scripture:  
Isaiah 6:1-12***

**ISAIAH WAS ONE OF** Israel's major prophets who lived about seven hundred and fifty years before our Lord Jesus was born. He was moved by the Holy Spirit of God to record certain events that would occur many years in the future. In our key scripture the prophet portrays a future time when, during the present Gospel Age, the earnest followers of our Lord Jesus would gladly answer the call to consecrate their lives to him with the words, 'Here am I, send me.'

In Isaiah's prophetic vision of chapter six he includes a description of the glorious throne of our Lord as a temple which has been lifted up and filled with the Lord's train. It is a heavenly scene as represented by the seraphim, each having six wings. "One cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory."—vs. 3

The Israelites were God's chosen people, and had enjoyed blessed favors in their privileged circumstances. In the wonderful providence God had provided Israel was to be the doorway to this glorious temple scene. If they had been faithful, God would have blessed them abundantly in his grand plan of reconciliation on behalf of the sin-cursed human family. The whole church of God in the future spiritual kingdom could have consisted of the children of Israel.

Due to unfaithfulness the Jewish nation was removed from this special relationship as represented in the shaking of the temple doorposts, and the glorious scene becoming obscured. "The posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke." (vs. 4) The prophet elaborates further, "And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and

understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.” (vss. 9,10) The heart condition of the people of Israel was wrong, to which Jesus later refers.—Matt. 13:14,15

There were those among the Israelites who were faithful to the Lord, and recognized they were “undone.” (vs. 5) Realizing their own unworthiness and sinful condition they humbled themselves before God. Later Gentile converts received an invitation to share in this great work of the kingdom. It is no longer a scene dominated by Israel. The Apostle Peter, commenting about this class, says, “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.”—I Pet. 2:9

Isaiah, who represents the called-out church of God in the vision, had his lips touched with a live coal from off the altar, making him a man of clean lips or language. This hot coal could have come from the brazen altar where the Atonement Day sacrifices were offered and would symbolize atonement for Isaiah and those he represents. These faithful children of the Most High have, throughout the Gospel Age, gone forth to proclaim the Word of God. As they have done, let us continue to answer God’s call by proclaiming this inspiring Truth.

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## Trusting God's Care

**Key Verse:**

***“Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.”  
—Isaiah 7:14***

**Selected Scripture:**

***Isaiah 7:1-6, 10-17***

**THE KEY VERSE IS A** prophecy written by Isaiah hundreds of years before the time when Jesus would be born into the world as a perfect man. Moved by the Holy Spirit of God the prophet also reveals a specific name which would identify this special child as our Lord Jesus. This promise was confirmed by Matthew when he wrote about the blessed event to take place. He also revealed the meaning of the name in which he said, “Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.”—Matt. 1:23

The significance of the name Immanuel, ‘God with us,’ is manifest evidence that God’s blessing truly was with the children of men. Our Lord’s birth was a great step forward in the plan of reconciliation for the sins of the world. “We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.” (Heb. 2:9) Jesus was a marvelous gift from the Heavenly Father to the poor, sin-sick human family.

Jesus had many names, or titles, that serve to describe various aspects of his wonderful nature and purpose. During the time of his prehuman existence he was known as the ‘Word’ of God. John says, “And the Word [*Logos*, Greek] was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.”—John 1:14

According to the flesh Jesus said, “I am the root and the offspring of David.” (Rev. 22:16) This special reference to the seed of David points to the origin and development of David as a type in the Scriptures—including the typical promise, “I will give you the sure mercies of

David.” (Acts 13:34) He also said, “I am ... the bright and morning star.” (Rev. 22:16) This pertains to his presence prior to when “the Sun of righteousness [shall] arise with healing in his wings.”—Mal. 4:2

Our Lord Jesus was the only begotten “Son of God.” (John 10:36) He has been the “advocate” to the faithful members of his church during the present Gospel Age (I John 2:1), and he will be the “mediator,” together with his faithful bride, of the New Covenant which will bring blessings to all the families of the earth in his glorious kingdom.—Heb. 12:24

Isaiah provides even further dimension to some of the aspects of his name as well as the powerful office he will assume in the kingdom. “Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”—Isa. 9:6

The whole family of mankind will come to love and worship the only name “under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12) They will learn to trust God’s providence and care over the human family in providing Jesus as their ‘everlasting Father.’ He will, together with the Church as his bride, bring mankind up to perfection in the Millennial Kingdom.

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## Accepting God's Judgment

***Key Verse: "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!"***  
**—Isaiah 5:20**

***Selected Scripture:***  
***Isaiah 5:1-7, 20***

**GOD DECLARES WOE TO** those persons who practice and harbor unrighteousness. They must suffer the consequences for their willful actions, and will have to accept his judgment in all things in due time. Evil doers have misrepresented the beauty and harmony of God's marvelous purpose and character, and have substituted the things of darkness for the light of truth. Attempts have been made to blame God as a reason for such behavior, but no wrongdoing may ever be attributed to him. James expresses this well, "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God:

for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man."—James 1:13

The selected scripture for this lesson is known as the parable of the vineyard. In the parable, preparations were made for a very special planting. Obstacles had been cleared from the field with a fence built around it, and an observation tower erected to protect it from enemies. The choicest specimens of vine were then selected for planting with a winepress nearby to harvest the crop.

The nation of Israel is the vineyard which had been carefully planted and nurtured by God, as recorded by the prophet. "The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant." (Isa. 5:7) The Israelites were God's chosen people and various symbols in this lesson point to the many arrangements that were made for their special inheritance and prominent role in the plan of God. The promised seed in which all the families of the earth were to be blessed, under the terms of a new and better covenant, was to be selected from the children of Israel.

After abundant care and effort, the fruitage became a disappointment to the Lord. “He looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes.” (Isa. 5:2) Instead of the expected abundant harvest the crop of wild grapes was small and sour tasting. During a long period of time, God’s protection and guidance continued with his people, together with the Divine promises of the future kingdom of righteousness.

At the time our Lord Jesus came unto his own people he was rejected by them, and their nation was laid waste. Concerning this Isaiah says, “Now go to; I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down: And I will lay it waste: it shall not be pruned, nor digged; but there shall come up briers and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.” (vss. 5,6) Disobedience among the people that God blessed so richly led to utter destruction, and the nation was destroyed and its people scattered.

The lesson today for the Lord’s people, as spiritual Israelites, is to make themselves ready for a place in Christ’s kingdom. They must be of the proper heart condition to receive the great and precious promises. Failure to do this will result in God’s judgments, even as they were pronounced upon natural Israel.

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## Experiencing Sin's Consequences

**Key Verse:** *“The LORD was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight: there was none left but the tribe of Judah only.”*  
—II Kings 17:18

**Selected Scripture:**  
II Kings 17:6-16, 18

**AFTER THE DEATH OF** Solomon the twelve tribes of Israel were eventually divided into two separate factions. Ephraim was the dominant tribe which occupied the land in the north, and the name came to stand for the entire ten tribes of the northern kingdom. Judah, remaining in the south, became the southern kingdom.

Much jealousy and hatred existed between the two groups which led to open hostility, with the ultimate division of tribes. Ephraim was the more unholy of the two groups, and was seen to be more reprehensible because of their lack of respect and appreciation for the many blessings which the Lord had showered upon them. All of Jacob's descendants, from both divisions, had dishonored God by their disobedience. By God's direction they were about to experience the consequences of their sinfulness.

The context of this lesson centers around Ephraim's captivity at the hands of the powerful Assyrian armies. As a result of their captivity the people were deported to other places that had come under Assyrian control. The land of Israel, on the other hand, was repopulated by others who had also been conquered by the invading Assyrians. This was a common tactic used to break the national spirit. It caused confusion among the people who found it nearly impossible to rally together in a common cause to retaliate against their invaders.

The captivity of Ephraim was permitted by God to teach the tribes of Israel an important lesson. They had failed to appreciate his wonderful providence and love for them. They had gone after false gods and teachings, and had become so degraded that they had even allowed their own sons and daughters to pass through the fire believing it to be an acceptable sacrifice to these false gods. God allowed them to have their own way in the matter without any interference from him. He wanted

them to experience the hopeless lost condition of the Gentiles. This feeling of being lost and separated from God took on added meaning as they became assimilated into the social structure of the Assyrians gradually losing their identities as privileged Israelites.

Having inherited the Abrahamic Covenant with its blessing of all the families of the earth through a promised seed was a special legacy left to the children of Israel. When the ten tribes separated from the two tribes, however, an important selection became apparent, as recorded, “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh [epithet of Messiah] come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.”—Gen. 49:10

Throughout this period there was greater religious faith within Judah, and the faithful ones in Ephraim removed themselves to identify with Judah. Judah began to be represented by the most devout and faithful of Israel.

The ten tribes had removed themselves from a direct share in the Abrahamic promise. They had experienced the consequences of sin by being cut off from Divine favor, and God continued to provide the way for the eventual birth of Messiah through the loins of Judah.

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## The Works of Faith

**THERE IS A** tendency on the part of some to insist that faith is of greater importance in the Christian life, than works, while others overemphasize the value of works. Either viewpoint is wrong, for when these two essential elements of Christian character are seen in their true light, it becomes apparent that a comparison cannot be made between their relative importance, for neither one can properly exist without the other. No one can possess true Christian faith without manifesting it by his works, for James declares that “faith without works is dead.” (James 2:17,20) Nor can a Christian perform works acceptable to God other than those which manifest his faith. This is the thought Paul gives us when, commending the Thessalonian brethren, he speaks of their “work of faith” and their “labour of love.” (I Thess. 1:3) Nowhere in the Bible is this proper relationship of faith and works more clearly set forth than in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews.

**VERSE 22** “By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.”

Joseph had been richly blessed by God while in Egypt, and highly honored by Pharaoh, but he knew that Egypt was not his home, nor the home of his people. He believed that in God’s due time the Hebrew children would be taken into the land of promise. He mentioned this, and gave instructions that when it occurred, his bones should be taken to Canaan. This was expressive, perhaps, of his faith in the resurrection. Not understanding the resurrection hope as clearly as it was later set forth in the New Testament, he may have supposed that the actual bones which he possessed when he died would be restored. But Paul explained, “Thou sowest not that body that shall be.”—I Cor. 15:37

**VERSE 23** “By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king’s commandment.”

The word translated ‘proper’ in this verse is translated “fair” in Acts 7:20, where Stephen also applies it to Moses, saying that when he was born he was seen to be “exceeding fair.” The *Marginal Translation* renders this, ‘fair to God.’ The Greek text justifies this translation. In Exodus 2:2, where we are first told about the birth of Moses, he is referred to as a “goodly child.” Apparently Stephen understood that Moses’ parents saw in this child one whom the Lord desired to use in a special way. This would explain why their faith in God was especially demonstrated by their risking the wrath of Pharaoh in not obeying his edict concerning the destruction of all male Hebrew babies, and hid him for three months.—Exod. 2:2

**VERSES 24-26** “By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.”

It will be remembered that by Divine overruling Moses’ own mother enjoyed the privilege of caring for him during his childhood years, and it is apparent from Paul’s comment concerning his faith that the mother must have taught him thoroughly concerning the promises made to Abraham, and the hope of the Hebrew children in the coming of that “seed” which was to bless all the families of the earth. (Gen. 22:18) Whether or not at that early date the descendants of Abraham had learned to speak of the ‘seed’ of promise as the Messiah, is not revealed in the Scriptures. However, Paul so understood the promises, and he knew that Moses’ decision to be loyal to the promises and to the God of his fathers was equivalent to taking a stand for the Messianic cause.

From this standpoint, all the suffering of the Ancient Worthies resulting from their loyalty to God and to his promises could properly be referred to as the ‘reproach[es] of Christ,’ for all those promises were related to their hope of the coming Messiah. They suffered because of their faith in the Messianic cause. This is quite different from the privilege the church of the Gospel Age has had of suffering “with” Christ, of being “planted together” in the likeness of his sacrificial death.—Rom. 8:17; 6:5



Moses must have been greatly inspired by the promises of God which his mother related to him as a child. The fact that he knew about the God of Abraham, and about the promises he had made, clearly indicates that his mother had these things in mind from the time of his birth, and that it was her faith in the promises that led her to hide this ‘exceeding fair’ child, and thus to save his life. It is doubtful if she was still living when Moses led the nation out of Egypt, but how she will rejoice when, in the resurrection, she learns of the wonderful manner in which the Lord rewarded her faith!

**VERSE 27** “By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.”

The reference in this verse to forsaking Egypt evidently applies to the Exodus, when Moses led the whole nation out of bondage; for, when he left Egypt at the age of forty and fled into the land of Midian, it was largely because of his fear that Pharaoh would have him killed as punishment for slaying an Egyptian. This is further borne out in Exodus 4:19 where the Lord, in giving Moses courage to return to Egypt, assured him that those who formerly sought his life were now all dead.

Later, however, when Pharaoh let the Israelites leave the country, he said, “Get thee from me, take heed to thyself, see my face no more; for in that day thou seest my face thou shalt die. And Moses said, Thou hast spoken well, I will see thy face again no more.” (Exod. 10:28,29) There is no evidence here of fear. Moses was ready to forsake Egypt, and to take the Israelites with him, trusting in Him who was invisible to care for them as they journeyed toward the promised land.

**VERSE 28** “Through faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them.”

Moses received specific instructions concerning the sprinkling of the blood and keeping the Passover feast. Not to have obeyed these instructions would have represented a serious lack of faith in the Word of God. His faith was rewarded in the passing over of Israel’s firstborn.

**VERSE 29** “By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned.”

It required great confidence in God and in the assurance of his protection, for Moses and the Israelites to pass through the Red Sea as they did. This was truly a work of faith. While it may be possible to

explain this miracle, it is not necessary to do so in order for us today, who have faith in God's promises and power, to believe the Biblical record of what occurred. Christian faith would be lacking its most essential element if it did not believe that God is able and willing to do things for his people that they are unable to do for themselves.

**VERSE 30** "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days."

Here the faith of Joshua, the successor to Moses, comes prominently to the fore. When he received instructions from the Lord concerning the strategy to be used in capturing Jericho, he did not question the wisdom of the plan, though from the human standpoint it would not seem to be a procedure which would result in victory. But he believed God. The Israelites followed his leadership, and their faith was crowned with victory. Many have also endeavored to explain this miracle, but we should exercise the same faith as did Joshua, and believe that God gave them the victory. Faith that does not go beyond human ability to understand is not genuine faith at all.

**VERSE 31** "By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace."

James tells us that Rahab's faith resulted in her justification (James 2:25)—not a justification to life, but to a position of friendship with the Lord, a friendship based upon her confidence in his promises. It is a mistake to suppose that the term justification is used in the Bible only to describe the life standing of those on behalf of whom the merit of Christ has been applied. The subject of justification takes on a new luster, and becomes simple and understandable, when we recognize the wider use the Bible makes of the term.

Rahab's initial work by which she demonstrated her justifying faith, was her concealing of the spies. She hid them on the roof of her home, concealing their presence by covering them with flax; and then, when she was asked where they were, she further concealed them with her tongue. In expressing her willingness to do this, she explained to the spies that the people of the city had heard of Israel's victories over their enemies, and had become very fearful, and for herself she had concluded that if Israel's God was as great and powerful as the reports indicated, the thing to do was to yield oneself to him and become his servant. This was

apparently the beginning of her change of heart and conduct. See Joshua 2:8-13.

Rahab is called Rachab in Matthew 1:5, where we find her in the same honorable position as Ruth in the lineage of Jesus. After the fall of Jericho, she evidently accepted the faith of the Israelites and became one with them, marrying Salmon. Thus her faith and courage in protecting the spies were rightly rewarded by God at that time. Paul indicates, she demonstrated her worthiness of a position with the Ancient Worthies in their “better resurrection.”—vs. 35

**VERSES 32-34** “What shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: 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.”

Here Paul ceases to give detailed examples of individual faith, realizing that his letter would become altogether too lengthy. He begins to generalize, mentioning a few more names and incidents as a group, finally omitting even names, including all the remainder in the expression, ‘and of the prophets.’ The subduing of kingdoms is evidently a reference to Gideon’s victory over the Midianites (Judges 7); Barak’s over the Canaanites (Judges 4); Samson’s over the Philistines (Judges 14); Jephthah’s over the Ammonites (Judges 11); David’s over the Philistines, the Moabites, the Syrians, the Edomites, and the Ammonites.—II Sam. 5:17-25; 8:1; 8:2,10-12

These ‘wrought righteousness,’ that is, they stood for a righteous cause, and their faithfulness was accounted unto them for righteousness. They ‘obtained promises.’ Here the Greek word rendered promises is the same as used by Paul when he tells us that after Abraham endured he “obtained the promise.” (Heb. 6:15) It is a word which is slightly stronger in meaning than the one used in the statement that “God made promise to Abraham.” (vs.13) Paul uses it to convey the additional thought of assurance.

‘Stopped the mouths of lions,’ is a likely reference to Daniel’s experience in the lions’ den.

‘Quenched the violence of fire.’ This seems to be alluding to the experience of the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace.

They ‘escaped the edge of the sword.’ When Israel was faithful to the Lord, the nation was protected from their enemies, and in their weakness, the faithful were made strong. They were given strength also to put to flight the ‘armies of the aliens’ who entered their land for purposes of conquest.

**VERSE 35** “Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection.”

While there were two occasions when children were awakened from the sleep of death (I Kings 17:17-23; II Kings 4:18-37), the reference here seems to be more particularly to the hope of a future resurrection for their loved ones which was engendered in the hearts and minds of all the women in Israel by the promises of God. See Jeremiah 31:15-17.

Others were ‘tortured’ says Paul, ‘not accepting deliverance.’ The Greek word here rendered tortured is a very strong one, meaning to be stretched out on a rack and tormented. The Scriptures do not record any incidents of literal torture in this fashion. Paul may have used the word as symbolic of the severe trials of various kinds to which the faithful of Israel were subjected. The three Hebrews, for example, were offered deliverance from the fiery furnace if they would worship the image which had been set up.

Such devotion to principle, Paul explains, was inspired by faith in a ‘better resurrection.’ The Prophet David explains that those who were “fathers” in Israel, are to be made “princes in all the earth.” (Ps. 45:16) Jesus explained that in the kingdom they will be recognized by the people of the whole earth—from east, west, north, and south—as the Lord’s representatives. To occupy this position as the human representatives of the kingdom, they will need a measure of perfection from the start, and this seems to be what is implied by the expression, ‘better resurrection.’ The world in general will reach perfection by a gradual process, but the Ancient Worthies, having proved their faithfulness under trial, will be thus rewarded when first awakened from the sleep of death.

**VERSES 36-38** “Others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were

sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.”

If all the detailed experiences of the Ancient Worthies were known it would doubtless be found that Paul is here alluding to trials which literally came to one or more of them. Hanani was imprisoned for his faithfulness. (II Chron. 16:10) Micaiah was also put in prison. (I Kings 22:26,27) Jeremiah also thus suffered. (Jer. 32:2,3) Zechariah was stoned. (II Chron. 24:20,21) Traditional writings say that Isaiah was sawed in two by Manasseh, the evil king who succeeded Hezekiah to the throne of Judah.

The Holy Land was especially suited by its geologic formation and its wilderness aspects to afford shelter to persecuted persons. So it did to one hundred of the Lord’s prophets whom Obadiah hid in a cave (I Kings 18:4,13); and also to Elijah. (I Kings 19:9,13) All remember the story of how David hid in a cave when Saul was persecuting him.

The world (*kosmos*) of the prophets’ day was not worthy of those faithful representatives of God. Nor did the people of the world then know that those whom they persecuted were proving themselves worthy, by their faithfulness, of a high position of honor in God’s new world, as the human representatives of the Divine Christ.

**VERSE 39** “These all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise.”

They had the assurance that their unwavering fidelity to truth and righteousness was pleasing to God, but they did not receive the fulfillment of the promises God made to them. That must wait until they are raised from the dead.

**VERSE 40** “God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.”

Here is a clear statement of one of the important truths of the Bible, one which reveals that, in the plan of God, all do not receive the same reward. ‘Some better thing’ is provided for the church of this Gospel Age than that which will be received by the Ancient Worthies. John the Baptist was the last of the Ancient Worthy class, and of him Jesus said that while none greater had ever been born of women, yet the least in the

“kingdom of heaven” would be greater than he. (Matt. 11:11) The ‘kingdom of heaven’ here mentioned by Jesus is the spiritual phase of that kingdom. Jesus will be the chief one therein, and the church, exalted to the Divine nature, will reign with him. But John the Baptist as one of the Ancient Worthies, will be in the human or earthly phase of the kingdom.

In chapter nine, verse thirteen, Paul speaks of the blood of bulls and of goats, and also the “ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean.” *“Tabernacle Shadows of the Better Sacrifices”* points out that the bullock sacrificed on Israel’s Day of Atonement typified Christ, while the sacrifice of the goat pointed forward to the church’s share in the “better sacrifices” of the Gospel Age. (Heb. 9:23) It is also suggested that the ashes of the heifer mentioned in this verse typified the sacrifices of the Ancient Worthies.

We believe that this is the right viewpoint, and it seems not unreasonable to us that Paul had this in mind when writing the eleventh chapter of this wonderful epistle. Having referred to that in the type which represents the sacrifices and sufferings of God’s people in two ages, he then shows how realistically it has worked out, and continues to be true in the actual experiences of those who are loyal to the Messianic cause.

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***Dawn Bible Students Association***

## In the Night Watches

***“My soul shall be  
satisfied as with  
marrow and fatness;  
and my mouth shall  
praise thee with  
joyful lips: When I  
remember thee upon  
my bed, and meditate  
on thee in the night  
watches.”  
—Psalm 63:5, 6***

**PSALM 92:1 DECLARES** that “It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord,” also to “sing praises” unto the “most High.” The more we learn about our God through an increasing understanding of his Word, the greater will be our desire to sing his praises. As our knowledge of him deepens into a personal acquaintance with him, through the outworking of his providence in our lives and the fulfillment of his promises of grace to help in every time of need, it should make our lives flow in endless songs of praise to the God of our salvation.

The Lord referred to David as a man after his own heart, and in many of his psalms the sweet singer of Israel declares his love for the Lord and his delight in the law of his God. In one of them he writes:

“The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb.”—Ps. 19:7-10

### DAVID'S MEDITATIONS

David speaks of meditating upon the Lord in the ‘night watches.’ It was these meditations that enabled him to write:

“When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?” (Ps. 8:3,4) And again, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his

handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.”—Ps. 19:1,2

The hours from sundown to sunrise in David’s time presented a somewhat different situation than they do today. Now the electric light, and other means of artificial illumination, very nearly turn night into day, with the result that the vast majority of the people keep active, either in work or in pleasure, for such long hours that there is scarcely time left for the proper amount of sleep, and seldom is there any opportunity for quiet meditation.

This was not the case in David’s time. With the flicker of a dim flame from the burning of olive oil almost the only means of securing light after the sun went down, probably most people spent much more time in bed than is the custom now. Since the body requires only a certain amount of sleep, there were doubtless many sleepless hours during the night.

In the case of David, while he was a shepherd boy, and later as leader of Israel’s army, he no doubt spent many of his nights under the canopy of heaven. It was under these conditions that he rejoiced as he meditated upon the goodness of the Lord, and marveled at the wonders of Creation. It would not be unreasonable to suppose that the subject matter of many of David’s beautiful psalms took shape in his mind as he thus meditated during the night watches. How wonderfully such surroundings would prepare him for the influence of the Holy Spirit which guided him in his inspired writings!

#### “FOR OUR ADMONITION”

David was truly a man of God, and the spirit of devotion and praise found in his writings is a sincere expression of his own heart, a heart that had been given to the Lord. When he wrote, “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want,” (Ps. 23:1) he was expressing his own feelings in the matter, giving utterance to his own confidence in the keeping power of his God.

Beyond the expression of his own delight in the Lord, David was inspired by the Holy Spirit to pen messages peculiarly fitting to the needs of the people of God during the present age. Indeed, in the Divine providence, this is the chief purpose of his writings, even as it is of the writings of all the Old Testament prophets; for, as the apostle declares, “not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister.” They wrote “for our



admonition” upon whom the ends of the ages have come.—Rom. 15:4; I Cor. 10:6,11; I Pet. 1:12

This being true, we might think of David’s experience of meditating upon the goodness of the Lord upon his bed during the night watches as having a counterpart even more blessed in our own experiences. We are not suggesting the making of a type of his experiences, but merely that they remind us of something greater in the Divine arrangement than literally lying upon a bed meditating upon the goodness of the Lord during the dark hours of a night.

In God’s creative design there are seven ‘days.’ Each of these days began with an ‘evening’ and closed with a ‘morning.’ In each case the evening of the creative days marked an obscure beginning, with darkness settling down into a night, until the morning marked the close of each period. So it was when sin and death came upon the scene at the beginning of the seventh creative day. From then until now, the world has been passing through the long hours of a night of darkness. “Weeping” has continued throughout this night, David tells us, “but joy cometh in the morning.”—Ps. 30:5

## RESTING BY FAITH

During this long night of weeping the world has been greatly distraught and unsettled. But those who have had faith in the promises of God have enjoyed rest of mind and heart. This has been particularly true of Jesus’ followers during the Gospel Age. Paul wrote concerning these, saying, “We which have believed do enter into rest.” (Heb. 4:3) We are keenly aware of the evil with which we are surrounded, and of the motions of sin in our flesh, but we place our faith in the finished work of Christ on our behalf and know that through him and his kingdom all evil will eventually come to an end, and that even death itself will be destroyed.

Thus we are at rest. It is a rest ‘by’ faith, and a rest ‘in’ faith; that is, in the “most holy faith,” (Jude 20) the foundation of which is the meritorious sacrifice of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Based upon the merit of the shed blood are all the various features of the Divine plan of salvation—the heavenly calling of the church, the hope of restitution for the world, its explanation of the Divine permission of evil, and the assurance that evil will not rise up the second time.

All this, and more, is contained in our ‘most holy faith,’ that wonderful outline of the Divine plan in which we find peace of mind and rest of heart. No matter how dark the night, or how far distant the morning hours at times may seem, we can continue to rest in this bed of Divine promises, and while we rest, continue to sing the praises of our God.

This wonderful knowledge we have is not because we are wiser than others, nor more worthy, but simply because of God’s grace in permitting us to know “the mystery of the kingdom of God.” (Mark 4:11) Surely this is great cause for rejoicing, and for praising our God. Now, while it is still dark, we are privileged to rest upon this soul-satisfying bed which the Lord has provided for us!

### RESTING BUT AWAKE

Our rest of faith in Christ, and in the great plan of God of which he is the center, is not designed to induce sleep. While we are resting upon this ‘bed’ of present Truth during the world’s dark night of sin, sorrow, and death, we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Concerning this Paul wrote, “Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.”—I Thess. 5:5,6

‘Let us watch and be sober.’ In our text David speaks of the night watches. In order to participate in a night watch one has to be awake and alert. Night watching is a very old institution, made necessary because of the sin and selfishness of fallen man. Darkness serves as a sort of natural protection for prowlers, thieves, opposing armies, or whoever would rob another or inflict damage upon him or his property. As an offset to this, watchmen are stationed to detect the approach or presence of enemies, and to sound an alarm.

Obviously, a watchman would fail of his duty if he fell asleep. It is not his privilege, during the night, to ‘sleep, as do others.’ Rather, he is to watch and be sober. And, as Christians, this is our position during the nighttime of sin and death. We are ‘watchmen’ in Zion, and we should keep alert and be on guard against the approach of enemies of whatever nature they might be which would rob us, or others of the Lord’s people, of their heritage in Christ Jesus.

Paul continues, “They that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober,

putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.” (I Thess. 5:7,8) This is symbolic language. To ‘sleep’ suggests spiritual lethargy, and to be ‘drunken’ indicates an intoxication by false theories, doctrines, and hobbies.

We can avoid these conditions, Paul reveals, by ‘putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.’ In his letter to the Church at Ephesus, he admonishes us to “put on the whole armour of God,” that we may be able “to stand against the wiles of the devil.”—Eph. 6:11

The Truth, in its many aspects, and in its various applications in our lives, is the Christian’s armor. The very truths in which we find peace and joy and rest are also our protection against the insidious attacks of the Adversary during these dark hours of the night. It is for this purpose that the Lord gave us the Truth.

## NOT IN DARKNESS

Among the very important truths which guard the Christian’s heart and life today is a proper knowledge of the times in which we are living. It is this that Paul speaks of particularly when reminding us of our privileges as watchmen. We quote:

“Of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.”—I Thess. 5:1-4

The reason the ‘day of the Lord’ does not overtake the ‘brethren’ as a ‘thief in the night’ is because they are awake and faithfully watching. In this lesson Paul is closely following the thoughts presented by Jesus concerning the time of his Second Presence and the end of the age. Jesus said, referring to a possible advanced knowledge of his coming, “Of that day and that hour knoweth no man.” (Mark 13:32) For this reason he admonished his disciples to watch.

Paul says, ‘Of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you.’ Jesus said that no one would know in advance, and Paul was not assuming that he did know, but he added, ‘Yourselves know

perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.' The Thessalonian brethren knew this perfectly because they had confidence in what Jesus had said on the point.

The thieflike coming of the day of the Lord was to be true only so far as the outside world and drowsy professed Christians were concerned. 'Ye, brethren, are not in darkness,' Paul insisted, 'that that day should overtake you as a thief.' When Jesus gave his great lesson pertaining to the time of his Second Presence, admonishing his disciples to watch because they did not know the day nor the hour, he did not say in so many words that their faithful watching would be rewarded by a discernment of his presence and the beginning of the day of the Lord. But this is how Paul understood what the Master had said. That is why he wrote, Ye, brethren, are not in darkness that that day should overtake you as a thief.

This can be true only of those who are awake. 'Let us not sleep, as do others,' Paul wrote. Concerning the saints who would be living in this time, and to whom, because of their faithfulness, the Lord would reveal his presence, Daniel wrote, "Blessed is he that waiteth, and cometh to the thousand three hundred and five and thirty days."—Dan. 12:12

'Blessed' indeed is the David class in this most wonderful time during which we are now living! From the human outlook it is the darkest period of all time. In this darkness there is fear and apprehension. So frustrated is human wisdom that peace is feared almost as much as war. It is the time referred to in Psalm 46:2,3, when the symbolic "earth" is being "removed," and when the "mountains" are being "carried into the midst of the sea."

But we will not "fear" wrote David. "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in [this time of] trouble." (vs.1) He is helping in every needed way, and especially by having favored us with a knowledge of the Truth. When on every hand there is unrest, nervous apprehension, chaos, and distress, we have a bed upon which we can recline and rest.

If we keep properly awake during these dark hours, watching the on-moving events in the great plan of God, the very things which increase the world's fears, make our rest more complete. For among the things we see as watchers in Zion is the near approach of morning. Indeed, the Morning Star has already appeared, and through the din and confusion

incident to the death of Satan's world, we discern the first gray streaks of dawn!

## SINGING ALOUD

Surely, as David wrote, our souls are 'satisfied as with marrow and fatness.' The rich feast of Truth, the "meat in due season" (Matt. 24:45) served to the household of faith by our returned Lord, satisfies our longings as nothing else could do. It is as manna from heaven, sweet, nourishing, and soul-satisfying.

When we think of the many blessings which the Lord has so abundantly bestowed upon us, we cannot help, while resting upon our beds during the night watches, to sing aloud the praises of our God. We are resting but not sleeping, and we sing the "song of Moses" and "the Lamb."—Rev. 15:3

In Psalm 92:1, where David says, "It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord," he also speaks of showing forth his "lovingkindness." (vs.2) We give thanks to God in our personal and collective prayers to him, but we show forth his praises when we speak of his loving-kindness to others. To sing the high praises of God calls for activity in making known the glorious Gospel of the kingdom.

This is the great privilege of all who have been called out of darkness into the marvelous light of the Divine plan. We rejoice in the fatness, the richness of the 'meat in due season' upon which it is our privilege to feed. Resting upon our bed in the night watches we delight to meditate upon the goodness of the Lord, and to give thanks to him for his boundless grace.

But this should not be all. The result of our meditations should be a bursting forth in song, even the new song which the Lord has given us to sing. And when we take into consideration all that the Lord is doing for us, how can we keep from singing? Surely we will want to praise the Lord with joyful lips!

In Psalm 92:3 David speaks of praising the Lord "upon an instrument of ten strings." We might think of these 'ten strings' as representing the various fundamental doctrines of the Divine plan. It is the beautiful harmony of these doctrines, when these strings are played upon by those who have learned the new song, that really brings praise to our God.

These doctrines reveal the wisdom, justice, love, and power of our God, which, blended in perfect harmony and unison, make up his glory. It is our privilege now to show forth this glory, while, resting upon our beds, we joyfully contemplate the time now nearing when a knowledge of his glory will fill the whole earth as the waters cover the sea. (Hab. 2:14) Praise ye the Lord!

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***Dawn Bible Students Association***

## “Present” with the Lord

***“We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.***

***Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.”  
—II Corinthians 5:8,9***

**IN VERSES 1 TO 4** of this fifth chapter of II Corinthians, Paul contrasts the Christian’s body of flesh with the future heavenly body received in the resurrection. He speaks of the fleshly body as a ‘tabernacle’ in which a Christian lives. In this tabernacle, he says, “we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven.” “Not for that we would be unclothed,” he adds, “but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.”

Paul knew that in his day, and throughout the age until the ‘harvest,’ for a Christian’s earthly tabernacle to be “dissolved” (vs. 1) meant being ‘unclothed,’ or naked, until the resurrection. He would be, to use the language of I Corinthians 15:37, a “bare grain” sown in death, there to remain until given his new spiritual body in the resurrection.

To be clothed ultimately with a heavenly body has been the hope of many Christians. Paul says, “He that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.” (II Cor. 5:5) This ‘earnest of the Spirit’ is a small token of the joy and blessing faithful Christians will have when, in the resurrection, their hope matures into reality.

In several instances Paul uses the reality of the future reward to such faithful Christians to illustrate the blessings which in a small way we now enjoy by faith. He says that “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) This does not mean that our resurrection has actually taken place, but merely that we should walk as though it had—in ‘newness of life.’ When Jesus was resurrected, all his former environment and experiences were left behind. By faith, we should endeavor to live as

completely apart from the world and from all the “old things” of life as possible.—II Cor. 5:17

In Ephesians 1:3 Paul employs this same method of illustrating the new life of the Christian. Here he speaks of our being blessed “with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” These ‘heavenly places,’ indicate the high position of glory to which Jesus was exalted in his resurrection (vs. 20), and by faith we are now dwelling with him in these heavenly places.

In the language of our text Paul is employing the same method of illustrating our present heritage as New Creatures in Christ Jesus. As we have seen, he first speaks of our earthly tabernacle in which we ‘groan,’ contrasting it with our ‘house which is from heaven.’ Thus he reminds us of the unsatisfactory conditions which we must now endure, and holds before us that great ecstasy of joy which we will experience when in the resurrection we receive our new heavenly bodies.

Then the apostle explains that even now we have a ‘down payment’ on this future reward, for by faith we can be ‘present with the Lord’ while actually dwelling in our earthly tabernacles. In verse 9 he says that “We labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of” the Lord. Here he is speaking symbolically, using our present sojourn in the flesh and also our glorious future home in heaven as illustrations of that which we experience as Christians while actually still in ‘this tabernacle.’

How apt the illustration is! Just as the one great hope of every faithful Christian is to be in the actual presence of the Lord and to experience the fullness of joy which this will mean, so now, while still this side the veil, we find our greatest joy in being ‘present’ with the Lord. We experience this by faith. Through our study of the Word, meditation upon the Truth, fellowship with his people, our activity in his service, and through prayer, we can even now be present with the Lord.

On the other hand, there is a certain amount of time in every Christian’s life which must be devoted to material things. It is necessary to make a living, and to give a proper amount of time and consideration to those who are near and dear to us according to the flesh. The Scriptures enjoin this upon us, and we accept these privileges with thanksgiving, and endeavor to use them to the glory of God.



While we are engaged in these earthly pursuits, it is not always possible to be present with the Lord in the sense of meditating upon his Word, fellowshiping with his people, or working directly in his vineyard. However, as Paul says, we labor, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of the Lord. It is the earnest desire of every Christian to be pleasing to the Lord in everything he does, whether it is providing for his own, or enjoying more directly the spiritual blessing implied in the thought of being present with him.

## THE JOY OF HIS PRESENCE

Great are the joys of faith which we now experience while in this symbolic manner we are ‘absent from the body’ and present with the Lord. It is such a true delight for the New Creature that we earnestly endeavor to manage every possible moment of the day that is not rightfully devoted to other things in order that we may have more time to spend with our Lord.

Immediately after using this meaningful illustration of our present privileges as New Creatures, Paul adds, “We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body.” This is a reference to our present trial period while in the flesh. It is what we do while still in the flesh, the ‘body,’ that will determine our fitness for our home in heaven.

It is a practical test to which the Lord is putting us. If we are genuinely longing to be actually with him in heavenly glory, where we will experience fullness of joy throughout eternity, it will be natural to seek every possible opportunity we can to be near him now.

By using this as a guide we can in large measure determine for ourselves how genuinely we are longing to be in the actual presence of the Lord. If we are content now to be “at home” in the body (vs. 6), and do not experience a sense of great loss when we are not by faith present with the Lord, it might well indicate that we are not earnestly setting our affections on things above.

## HEAVENLY PROSPECTS

If we prove faithful, and in the “first resurrection” (Rev. 20:5) are exalted to heavenly glory, it will mean not only being ushered into the actual presence of our Heavenly Father, but meeting also all the faithful

saints of the entire age face to face. There we will see Paul, John, Peter, James, Jude—in fact all the apostles; also those other faithful souls mentioned in the Bible in connection with the experiences of the Early Church.

There, too, we will meet the holy angels, and become acquainted with those who were our “ministering spirits” while we walked in the narrow way. (Heb. 1:14) What a joy that will be, and how wonderful it will be to learn of the many times they miraculously protected us from harm as New Creatures, keeping us from falling!

From beyond the veil we will also have contact with the Ancient Worthies, who will then be princes in all the earth. True, they will be human beings, while the church will be on the Divine plane; nevertheless, the faithful overcomers who make up the church in glory will have full knowledge of the Ancient Worthies, and will be directing their ministry.

The ‘great company,’ is referred to by Paul as being in “the general assembly and church of the firstborn.” (Heb. 12:23) Indeed, Paul mentions all those with whom it will be our privilege to be associated, and says that we are “come unto,” or, in a better translation, are “approaching unto” them.

We are approaching unto “mount Sion,” he says, “and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels. To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect [the Ancient Worthies], And to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant.”—Heb. 12:22-24

What a glorious prospect! It surely is transporting, and how can we help longing for the day when the ‘earthly house of this tabernacle’ will be ‘dissolved,’ and in the “twinkling of an eye” (I Cor. 15:52)—now that we are in the harvest period at the end of the age—we are clothed upon with our house which is from heaven. The poet has well said, “How can I keep the longing back, and how suppress the groan.”

Let us remember the ‘down payment’ which is ours to enjoy even now. Do we earnestly look forward to cooperation with Abraham, Moses, David, and with all the prophets, in the work of the kingdom? Do we anticipate the joy of meeting Jesus, the apostles, and other faithful ones portrayed in the New Testament? Of course we do! Even now we can

meet them in the Word, for it is through the Word that the Spirit gives us the earnest of our future inheritance.

Have you ever thought of the Word of God as a place where you can meet, not only the Lord, but his faithful servants of both the Old and New Testaments? Every hour we spend in its pages, in addition to learning the Truth, we can be enjoying the inspirational company of those faithful patriarchs, prophets, and apostles, as well as Jesus himself and our guardian angels.

We can stand beside Noah, for example, as he preached righteousness and prepared for the coming flood. We can enter into the feelings of Abraham and be inspired by his faith. We can go with him on that three days' journey to the land of Moriah, ascend the mountain with him, and watch while he prepares an altar on which to sacrifice his beloved Isaac. We can hear the angel speaking to him not to slay Isaac.

Through the Word we can also enjoy a wonderful association with Moses—at the burning bush, before Pharaoh, leading the Israelites across the Red Sea, and receiving the Law from God. To quote Paul, “What shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets.”—Heb. 11:32

In the Bible, we meet these faithful servants of God, these saints of old, 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 faith,” and “turned to flight the armies of the aliens.” (Heb. 11:33,34) While through the Word we commune with various ones in this “cloud of witnesses,” (Heb. 12:1) we can rejoice the more in the thought of their “better resurrection” (Heb. 11:35) and their future high position in the plan of God as “princes in all the earth.”—Ps. 45:16

## IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In the same manner we can enjoy the fellowship of Jesus, the apostles, and all of the Early Church whose names are mentioned in the New Testament. We can, at will, spend an hour with the Master, or with any of his faithful apostles, or with all of them together. We can stand beside Jesus as he heals the sick and raises the dead. We can hear the gracious

words which fell from his lips, the lips of him who spoke as never man had spoken before, or has spoken since.

We can be with the Master as Mary anointed him with the precious ointment, and can smell the sweet odors that filled the room, betokening the outpouring of her heart devotion to him whom she loved. We can seat ourselves at the table in the “upper room” (Luke 22:12) on that last night before he was crucified, and hear him impart those wonderful words of life recorded in John, chapters 13 to 17. Then we can go with him to Gethsemane, to the judgment hall, to Pilate, to Golgotha. We can hear him in his dying moments summon sufficient strength to give a witness of the kingdom to the thief who was dying beside him.

We can read the opening chapters of Acts, and in our minds take our place with the disciples upon whom the power of God fell that day, and in some measure experience with them the joys of a reaffirmed faith, and the certain knowledge of what the Lord now wanted them to do.

Time fails to mention all the wonderful experiences of the Lord’s people which are recorded in the book of Acts. But they are all there for us to enter into, and from which to receive inspiration to continue our journey toward the heavenly Canaan. What a wonderful down payment of the future joys of fellowship with Jesus and the Early Church we can now enjoy if we will.

Paul, Peter, James, John, and Jude wrote letters to churches and to individuals of their day, and some general epistles. Actually they wrote those letters to us also. And how much closer it brings us to them, and to our Lord, to think of it in this way! The next time we feel that we would very much like to receive an encouraging letter from a fellow Christian in the narrow way, let us go to the Word, and read the letters which are there recorded for our admonition and joy.

Do we joyfully anticipate meeting those guardian angels who so faithfully serve us from day to day? We can also enjoy an earnest of this future experience because the Spirit of God has put in the Word many revealing accounts of the services of these angels. If we go with the women to the tomb of Jesus, we will there see the angel that announced to them that “he is risen.”—Matt. 28:6

Then, as we know, angels served to release the apostles from prison. We can visit those prisons, place ourselves in the position of those who

were incarcerated, and get some idea of what the ministry of the angels must have meant to them. We can turn backward and forward almost anywhere we will in the Bible, and come in contact with angels and their faithful ministry. While in this tabernacle we are approaching unto this ‘innumerable company of angels.’

We can enjoy sweet fellowship with the Lord by meeting him in his Word, for we are present with him when we are present with his people, and with his holy angels. Nor should we overlook the many direct and personal messages the Lord has constantly waiting for us in his Word. How reassuringly he talks to us when we meet him there—“I will never leave thee nor forsake thee”; “My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.”—Heb. 13:5; Exod. 33:14

### WITH THE LORD’S PEOPLE

We can also be present with the Lord while still dwelling in our earthly tabernacle through fellowship with others of like precious faith. When we go to any of the meetings, when we attend a Berean study or a testimony meeting, it is more than gathering with our brethren in Christ, for we are meeting also with the Lord. Jesus said that where even two or three were gathered in his name he would be present. And in spirit the Heavenly Father is also present.

Through weariness or other difficulties we might be tempted to give up meetings which we could attend with a little greater effort. We might feel that we can afford to miss the fellowship of the brethren, or that they do not particularly need us. But would we feel this way if we remembered that by failing to attend a meeting we lose an opportunity to be in this special way present with the Lord?

There are many of the Lord’s people who are not situated so they can enjoy the fellowship of their brethren. This may be due to isolation through distance or sickness, or other circumstances over which they have no control. Each saint of God yearns for the fellowship of his brethren, and through them with the Lord, but if circumstances are such that this is frequently or always impossible, he can still be present with the Lord through personal communion with him, and through the study of his Word. Every isolated brother or sister in the Truth can testify how wonderfully the Lord has made up the great loss of not being able to meet with his people, when his Word and Spirit have been sought.

## THROUGH SERVICE

When we are directly active in the service of the Lord we are also enjoying the blessedness of being present with him. This is because we are coworkers with him, partners in his glorious plan for the reconciling of the world. It is wrong to think that we are taking time from fellowshiping with the Lord when we are serving in his vineyard.

Paul wrote that “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself.” Now, he explained further, he has given this “ministry of reconciliation” to us, and thus we are made “ambassadors for Christ.” (II Cor. 5:18-21) Surely Christ was very close to his Heavenly Father when Paul could say that God was ‘in’ him. And he is in us in the same manner and for the same purpose.

Besides, as collaborators with the Lord it is essential, through his Word, to acquaint ourselves with his plans and purposes. This brings us into close contact and fellowship with the Divine architect. As we view the grandeur and harmony of his plan, our enraptured vision sees him ‘high and lifted up,’ and we rejoice in his glory as we endeavor to tell the whole world the blessed tidings of his kingdom.

How wonderful it is that in this way also we can be present with the Lord, and have the assurance that he is present with us! This should make every witness we give a sacred, blessed experience. It should add dignity and importance to every tract that we distribute. Let us try to realize that whatever we do in the Lord’s service, or wherever he asks us to go, we are not alone, for we serve in his presence, and by his grace and strength.

## MEDITATION AND PRAYER

Equally precious is the time we spend in the Lord’s presence through meditation and prayer. We all have our regular time for prayer, such as morning and evening. But in addition to these, it is our privilege to lift our hearts in prayer to God at any time, and under any circumstances. It may be in the factory, on a busy street, in the kitchen, or in the office—it matters not where—when, through meditation on the Lord’s goodness, peace and joy wells up within us; and then and there we can look up to him and say, Thank you, Lord, for taking me into your confidence and giving me a glimpse of your glory.

Problems may arise and the difficulties of the day might be bearing heavily upon us. The way ahead may not be clear, or some earthborn

cloud may have hidden the Lord's face. Whatever need we may have, we can go to him for help right at the time. His ear is ever open to the cries of our hearts, and his eyes "run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him."—II Chron. 16:9

During the times when it is essential to be at home in the body we can in our hearts rejoice in the Lord. There are usually moments with all of us, even during the rush of our everyday work, when thoughts of the Lord, of his Word and Truth, of his people, and of his work, can be enjoyed. Perhaps in a moment of great need a thought expressed in a testimony, or a reassuring text of scripture, will come to mind to help us remember that the Lord is near, that his "angel ... encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them."—Ps. 34:7

Truly the present heritage of the saints is rich and blessed! And may an ever deepening realization of our present privilege of being 'present with the Lord' give us increasing strength and courage to press forward toward the "fulness of joy" unto which we are now approaching, the joy of his actual presence—"pleasures for evermore"—as we dwell in our 'house' from heaven.—Ps. 16:11

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***Dawn Bible Students Association***