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A Permanent Health Care Solution

*“Bless the LORD,
O my soul, and
forget not all his
benefits: . . . who
healeth all thy
diseases; Who
redeemeth thy life
from destruction;
who crowneth
thee with
lovingkindness
and tender
mercies; . . . so
that thy youth is
renewed like
the eagle’s.”
—Psalm 103:2-5*

DURING THE PAST CENTURY, because of advances in medicine and many other fields, man’s life expectancy has increased substantially. Worldwide, it has more than doubled. A person born in 1916 was expected to live, on average, no more than 35 years. A century later, in 2016, this number had increased to 72 years. In the United States, life expectancy at birth has risen from 52 years in 1916 to just under 80 years now, an increase of more than 50%.

Accompanying these increases in life expectancy, however, has been the financial pain and strain of skyrocketing costs. Whether doctor, hospital,

medication, rehabilitation, long-term care, health insurance, or other expenses, the total cost of health care has risen to unprecedented, and seemingly unsustainable, levels. According to 2015 data published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, annual health care costs are slightly under \$10,000 per person in the United States. To put it another way, expenses related to health care presently make up a staggering 17% of our country's total economic output, and this is likely to increase to 20% by the year 2020.

HEALTH CARE REFORMS

Over the years, many proposals have been offered, and some enacted into law, which attempt to ease the burden of health care expenses to the consumer. Most of these programs have also been designed to provide benefits to those who would otherwise be unable to afford medical care. One landmark example was in 1965, when legislation was enacted that introduced Medicare, covering both hospital and a significant portion of medical expenses for senior citizens.

Other health care reforms have been put into place in intervening years. The most notable of these was in 2010, when the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, also known to most simply as the Affordable Care Act, or by the nickname "Obamacare," was enacted. This legislation was designed to eliminate the practices of some insurance companies to screen pre-existing conditions, load premiums, cancel policies on technicalities, and put caps on annual and lifetime coverage. It was also intended to create price competition by enabling consumers to compare and

shop for insurance through a web-based health insurance exchange, while preserving private insurance and health care provider options already in place.

NEW ADMINISTRATION—NEW PROPOSALS

With Donald Trump's victory in last year's presidential election, a new administration and a different political party has entered the White House. The incoming president, not surprisingly, has called for a different health care plan, and the repeal of the Affordable Care Act. Since its enactment seven years ago, numerous objections have been raised against the current system. Some of these are: It imposes a tax penalty on people who do not purchase health insurance; the tax penalty, in turn, pressures healthy people to purchase policies they do not want; the system provides for income-based subsidies; and it increases taxes on wealthy Americans and segments of the medical industry to help finance the plan's overall implementation.

At the time of this writing, a bill to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act sent to the U.S. House of Representatives by President Trump's team has been withdrawn. Ultra-conservative Republican members of the House said it did not go far enough towards the dismantling of the present system, and vowed to vote against it. This, along with complete Democratic Party opposition to any repeal, doomed the legislation's passage. In coming weeks, further developments will most likely transpire, including perhaps the introduction of revised legislation to Congress.

Regardless of what happens as a result of the present administration's handling of the issue of health care, no plan which may be approved by

Congress and signed into law is likely to get a majority of people excited. The health care situation in America presents a simple, but stark, reality. We cannot afford to have it, but we also cannot afford to be without it. Like many of the problems of our day, it seems not to have a workable solution.

Indeed, any solution is only temporary. Health care, even at its best, is a matter of adding a few more years to the dying process. In many cases, it is simply making a person as comfortable as possible until the inevitable end—death—arrives. Man alone can offer no permanent method for achieving lasting health and life, regardless of what he may accomplish in the way of health care for a few short years. There is an answer, though, to humanity's continuing desire for health and life. It does not involve doctors, hospitals, man-made medicines, or health insurance. Rather, it is the permanent healing power of God.

THE GREAT PHYSICIAN

In our opening text, God is represented as a great physician who heals all the diseases of his people. The Prophet Isaiah additionally foretells a day when earth's inhabitants "shall not say, I am sick," and prophecies of a time to come when all blind eyes shall be opened, deaf ears unstopped, the lame will leap, and the mouth of the dumb shall sing.—Isa. 33:24; 35:5,6

Disease and death are man's greatest enemies. We know this from observation and experience, for the seeds of disease and infirmity are working in all of us, leading gradually to disability, aging, and finally death. Despite the best efforts of twenty-first

century medical science, millions succumb to this great enemy while they are young and at the prime of life. Every aspect of man's present existence is made uncertain by the inevitability of death.

REALITY OF DEATH TAUGHT IN THE BIBLE

Diseases of all kinds are simply an evidence that the human race is dying. They are the attendants of death, and the Apostle Paul informs us that Christ must reign until he has destroyed this enemy. (I Cor. 15:25,26) The destruction of death will include the elimination of disease which brings it to pass. The Apostle John, describing the meaning of the vision given to him by Christ, said that a time was coming when there would be "no more death," that God would remove tears from all eyes, all pain would cease, and grief and mourning would end. (Rev. 21:4) Indeed, one of the things which stamps the Bible with the mark of authenticity is that it proclaims the reality of death by its promises that God plans to eradicate this great enemy in his due time.

The Scriptures reveal that it is God's purpose to make an end of sin and death through his son Christ Jesus, and that through him health and life would come to the people. This fact is emphasized by a message Jesus sent to John the Baptist. John had been imprisoned, and while previously he had announced Jesus as the foretold Messiah, and thoroughly believed that he was, he later sought reassurance. In this frame of mind, he sent two of his disciples to Jesus asking, "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?"—Matt. 11:3

Jesus asked the messengers to return to John and tell him what they had seen. They saw that all

manner of diseases were being healed, and even the dead were being raised. They also witnessed that the gospel was being preached to the poor. (vss. 4,5) Jesus knew that John the Baptist would take these things as proof that the Messiah, the Christ, truly had come, for John knew that these were the works which God had promised the Messiah would accomplish on behalf of the people.

HEALING A FOREGLEAM

As we have already seen, Jesus healed various diseases and infirmities of the people. The twelve apostles were also given this power. An example of this was the healing by Peter of the lame man who sat at the entrance to the Temple asking alms. This man had been lame from the time of his birth, but when Peter gave the word of authority, he was restored to soundness of limb. When the people inquired by what authority and power this man had been healed, Peter explained that it was through Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom they had crucified.—Acts 3:1-16

However, Peter did not stop with this answer to their question. Instead, he continued and explained that after Jesus Christ returned at his Second Advent, there would come “times of restitution of all things.” This time of general restitution, or restoration, Peter further explained, had been foretold by the mouth of all God’s “holy prophets since the world began.”—vss. 20,21

The lesson here is clear, and the conclusion unmistakable. Peter had healed a lame man. It was accomplished through his belief in Christ. Using this as the basis of his sermon, the apostle explained that there would be a time of general

restoration following the return of Christ, and that it was this which all God's prophets had foretold. God's program to return health and life to the people, therefore, was not due to be inaugurated until after Christ's Second Coming and the establishment of his kingdom.

DIVINE PROMISES

This feature of God's plan has not failed, nor will it fail. When put into operation, it will result in a complete fulfillment of all the divine promises of health and life. All the blind eyes will be opened; all the deaf ears will be unstopped; all the lame will be healed. No one in the entire world who accepts the provision of God's grace through Christ will then need to say, "I am sick."

We see that the public mind in ancient times expected some outstanding demonstration of divine authority and power on the part of those whom they accepted as having been sent by God. Israel's God had fought for them in battle and destroyed their enemies. Some of his prophets had raised the dead. The Jews in Jesus' day would find it difficult to accept Jesus as the greatest of all their prophets—indeed, the one whom they had said would come—if his works were not greater than all the previous prophets.

This was one reason why Jesus' ministry was accompanied by miracles—the healing of the sick and the raising of the dead. In doing this, however, he was also giving object lessons of what he, as the promised Messiah, would do for the whole world, and upon a permanent basis, when God's due time would come for this feature of his plan to be inaugurated.

RESTORATION—DURING CHRIST’S KINGDOM

It is God’s will that ultimately all who accept Christ and obey the laws of his kingdom will be restored to health and live forever as human beings. Each of the holy prophets, in one way or another, foretold a worldwide program to bring health and life to mankind. Jesus referred to it as a time of “regeneration.” (Matt. 19:28) As already noted, the Apostle Peter described it as the “times of restitution of all things.” Jesus, however, did not initiate this program at his First Advent, nor did he promise any of his disciples that they could expect to be divinely cured of their physical ailments because of their faith in him.

The work of restoring the human race to life is to be accomplished during the thousand-year reign of Christ. (Rev. 20:6) During the short period of Jesus’ First Advent ministry, he preached the hope of the kingdom. In connection with his oral message he gave many practical demonstrations of what kingdom blessings would mean for the people when the due time arrived for the promises of God to be fulfilled. Jesus’ miracles, as we have already noted, were not designated to initiate a program of healing for this present age, but were intended to be illustrations of the divine purpose for the Messianic kingdom.

SIN ALSO TO BE REMOVED

Leprosy was prevalent in Jesus’ day, and at that time it was considered incurable. Because of this it was a fitting symbol of sin, which, from the standpoint of human ability, is also incurable. Death came into the world because of sin. (Rom. 5:12) When Jesus cleansed the lepers of his day, he was

illustrating God's intention ultimately to remove the blight of sin from the earth and to destroy death, the result of sin.

On this point, God had promised through the Prophet Isaiah: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land." (Isa. 1:18,19) Notice that the promise does not assure a home in heaven, but that the willing and obedient "shall eat the good of the land," because they will be cleansed from sin.

OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL

As noted earlier, the Prophet Isaiah, in his forecast of the time when mankind would be restored to health and life, wrote that all the blind eyes would be opened. He also prophesied that the lame would leap like a deer. It was in keeping with this that Jesus, to show forth the glory and power of his coming Messianic work, restored sight to some of the blind in his day, and healed various of the lame. (Matt. 15:30) By these and other miracles done for a limited few, he foreshadowed the "times of restitution," which will not just be for some, but for all who come to heart obedience to the righteous laws of the kingdom.

Death itself will be destroyed by divine power. Through the agency of Christ's kingdom, God "will swallow up death in victory," and "wipe away tears from off all faces." (Isa. 25:8) Jesus illustrated this promised victory by awakening some from the sleep of death, thus demonstrating that this great enemy

does not stand in the way of God's plan for restoring the people to health and life. Indeed, the tears of sorrow which the family and friends of Lazarus had shed, including those of Jesus, were wiped away when he was awakened from death.—John 11:31-45

While Jesus awakened Lazarus and others who had died, they did not remain alive. However, all who are awakened during the millennial reign of Christ and who then obey the laws of that kingdom will gain life everlasting. The purpose of their awakening will be to give them the opportunity to learn, believe, obey from the heart, and live forever. It will be only those who refuse to hear and obey that will be “destroyed from among the people.”—Acts 3:23

“SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS”

The time when God's program of healing and restoration takes place is symbolically described in the prophecy of Malachi as the rising of the “Sun of righteousness . . . with healing in his wings.” (Mal. 4:2) What a meaningful illustration is given here. For 6,000 years, mankind has been enshrouded in the darkness of sin, sickness, and death. Satan, the god of this “present evil world,” has blinded their minds concerning the true God of love. (II Cor. 4:4; Gal. 1:4) Not knowing God, they have stumbled in darkness on the “broad” road that leads to destruction.—Matt. 7:13,14

However, when the kingdom of Christ becomes operative for the blessing of the people, how different it will be. The Sun of righteousness will then be shining. Associated with Jesus in this work of enlightening and blessing the world will be his church. Concerning these, Jesus said that they

would “shine forth as the sun” in that glorious kingdom.—Matt. 13:43

They will share with him in the “greater works” which Jesus promised. (John 14:12) How much better the restoration of the kingdom will be than the healing efforts of today. God’s ways and plans are always better than those of men. Therefore, let us continue to pray for his kingdom to come, and for his will to be done in earth, even as it is done in heaven.—Matt. 6:10

Our opening text says of God, the great physician of mankind, that he will heal all diseases, provide life through redemption, pour out loving-kindness and tender mercy, and renew the youth of all. What a glorious prospect for mankind is thus set forth by the Creator. It is, indeed, his ultimate purpose concerning the human race. Though the “wages of sin is death,” along with its accompanying processes of sickness and disease, we are assured that “the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”—Rom. 6:23

SYMBOLS OF LIFE

John the Revelator records the various symbols, which he saw in vision, that describe the blessings of health and life that will be available to all under the administration of Christ’s kingdom. First, he speaks of a “pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.” (Rev. 22:1) The throne of God is symbolic of the divine authority that will be exercised in the earth through Christ’s kingdom. The association of the Lamb with this picture reminds us that the blessings of life represented by the river will be available

only because of the shed blood of the “Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”—John 1:29

We next note the revelator’s reference to the “tree of life,” which was beside the river, and that the leaves of this tree are “for the healing of the nations.” (Rev. 22:2) How thankful we are that the people of all nations are to be given the opportunity to be healed, and to partake of the symbolic tree of life, from which the human race was once barred because of sin. (Gen. 3:24) John also informs us that when the river of life is flowing for the blessing of the people, the invitation to partake of its life-giving nutrients will be extended to “whosoever will.” We read: “The Spirit and the bride say, Come. . . . And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”—Rev. 22:17

The bride who gives the invitation to “come” is the church of Christ, united with him in glory. (II Cor. 11:2; Rev. 19:7,8; 21:2,9) These will have proven worthy of this high position by suffering and dying with him during this present Gospel Age. In God’s plan these, who are “faithful unto death,” are rewarded with “glory and honour and immortality,” and will reign with Christ. (Rev. 2:10; Rom. 2:7; II Tim. 2:10-12) They will share with him in the wonderful work of healing all mankind from their diseases and extending everlasting, perfect human life to all who will accept the invitation to drink of the water of life. “Blessed” will be those “that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life.” (Rev. 22:14) Thus, with so many promises of the Bible to strengthen our faith, let us look forward with joyful anticipation to God’s permanent health care solution for all mankind! ■

God's Sustaining Love

*Key Verse: "Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights."
—Jonah 1:17*

*Selected Scripture:
Jonah 1:1-17*

Instead of obeying God's instructions, "Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD."—vs. 3

We are not informed as to the reason Jonah failed to follow the Lord's instructions. As subsequent events demonstrated, serious consequences may ensue if we disobey God's commands. In this instance, a great storm arose and the winds were so fierce that the ship was in peril of being destroyed. The mariners were very fearful, cried unto their gods and cast their cargo into the sea. While this was occurring, Jonah was asleep in the bottom part of the ship. The captain found Jonah and told him to call upon his God to deliver them from the effects of the storm. Additionally, the sailors cast lots in an attempt to determine the cause of their troubles, and the lot fell

THE BOOK OF JONAH IS unusual because prophets in the Old Testament normally were commissioned to speak to the nation of Israel. In this instance, however, God directed his servant, Jonah, to command the inhabitants of a heathen city, Nineveh, to repent of their wickedness.—Jonah 1:1,2

Instead of obeying God's instructions, "Jonah rose up to

upon Jonah.—vss. 4-7

When the ship's crew demanded to know of his background, Jonah replied, "I am an Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land. Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, Why hast thou done this? For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them."—vss. 8-10

Jonah acknowledged that his refusal to follow God's command was the cause of their difficulties. He advised them that by throwing him overboard the sea would become calm. However, they were reluctant to do so and rowed hard to reach safety, but the sea grew more tempestuous. As a last resort, they cast Jonah overboard, and the sea became calm.—vss. 11-15

Our Key Verse demonstrates that God did not allow Jonah to drown. He made provision for his eventual rescue by having him swallowed by a large fish, in whose belly he remained for "three days and three nights." Thus, even though he disobeyed by not going to Nineveh, God manifested his love by preserving Jonah in this miraculous manner. As followers of Christ, we too at times may choose not to obey God's will through weakness of the flesh. However, God is merciful to us, as he was with Jonah, and delivers us from potential harm that might have come to us by reason of our disobedience. Hence, we are provided a new opportunity to demonstrate our faithfulness.

A prophetic lesson from this account is brought to our attention in the New Testament. "As Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." (Matt. 12:40) This symbolism illustrates that Christ's experience of being in the sleep of death for three days, and his subsequent resurrection, will ultimately prove beneficial for the entire race of sinners, whom the wicked residents of Nineveh may appropriately picture. ■

God's Love Preserved

Jonah

Key Verse: *“I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD.”*
—Jonah 2:9

Selected Scripture:
Jonah 2:1-10

“Thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me. Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple. The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God.”—vss. 3-6

The foregoing passage contains several lessons for consideration. Jonah realized that although those of the ship's crew were the instruments used to cast him overboard, it was at God's direction they were motivated

IN TODAY'S LESSON, AS chapter 2 commences, although Jonah is in the belly of the fish, he is conscious and begins to pray to the Lord. His expressions are closely related to those of the Psalmist David, and suggest Jonah's familiarity with the Scriptures. (Ps. 42:7; 18:6) Additionally, the words of Jonah's prayer give evidence that his petitions were answered affirmatively by God.—Jon. 2:1,2

to do this. Now, though entombed in the belly of the fish, he was in a protective environment because he did not drown. Jonah's greatest concern was not the calamity he was experiencing, but rather the feeling of being separated from God. Nevertheless, he did not consider himself to be in a hopeless situation. In anticipation that his prayers would be looked upon favorably, he trusted that he would once more view the Temple in Jerusalem.

In verse 7, we note that when Jonah realized he could not deliver himself from his present condition in the belly of the fish, he turned to the Lord in prayer. He also acknowledged that his resistance to God by running from the command to go to Nineveh was like being an idolater, saying, "Those who regard vain idols Forsake their faithfulness." (vs. 8, *New American Standard Bible*) Thus, Jonah recognized that by his disobedient course he was substituting his own judgment for the will of God.

On the principle that "all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition," there are lessons from Jonah's experience that we, as followers of Christ, can learn and apply in our lives today. (I Cor. 10:11) One of the most important is that of obedience to God's instructions, as opposed to following self-will. The Heavenly Father does not communicate directly with us in an audible manner or through angelic messengers as in ages past. However, through obedience to the principles outlined in the Bible as expressed by Christ and the apostles, we can be assured of divine favor and blessing, thereby reducing the need for chastisements to be administered because of waywardness on our part.

Our Key Verse relates Jonah's penitent gratitude for God's mercy and his vow to follow divine instructions in the future as directed. Jonah is then delivered from the belly of the fish onto dry land, and prepares to follow his initial commission to preach repentance to the people of Nineveh.—Jon. 2:10 ■

God's Love for Nineveh

Key Verse: “*God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not.*”
—*Jonah 3:10*

Selected Scripture:
Jonah 3:1-10

days' journey. And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.”—vss. 3,4

We note the number forty in the preceding passage and acknowledge its use in the Bible as a period of testing or judgment, not only for the people of Nineveh, but also as it relates in general to various features of God's plan. Some illustrations of such usage include Moses' being in the mount forty days and nights during which the Israelites, failing to wait for his return, “corrupted themselves” by erecting a golden calf to worship; and the forty years of Israel's wandering in the wilderness

EVEN THOUGH JONAH deliberately fled from God by traveling originally towards Tarshish, the prophet was given a second opportunity to carry out his commission and deliver the Lord's message to Nineveh.—Jon. 3:1,2

This time Jonah obeyed the Lord. The account states: “So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three

as punishment for their failure to go in and possess the promised land by faith after the return of the twelve spies. (Exod. 24:18; 32:1-7,26-28; Num. 14:33,34) In the New Testament, we note that Jesus, following his baptism in the Jordan River, spent forty days in the wilderness during which time he was tempted by the devil.—Luke 4:1,2

Jonah preached only one message to the Ninevites, and the Scriptures do not indicate whether he gave them any signs or wonders that this prophecy would be fulfilled. Nevertheless, the people of Nineveh accepted the word of the prophet and believed in God. They proclaimed a fast and “put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them,” giving credit to the words which Jonah spoke to them in the name of God. Even the King of Nineveh accepted Jonah’s message and repented. He took off his royal robes and sent forth a decree that no one was to eat or drink in the land, not even the animals of their herds. He considered the possibility that through repentance, God might relent and the people would not perish.—Jon. 3:5-9

Our Key Verse suggests the changes in Nineveh happened with great speed and thus its destruction by the Lord was averted. God withheld his judgment and decided not to punish the Ninevites for their sins because they repented. His loving demonstration of forgiveness, even to a pagan people, is a powerful lesson for believers in Christ as to how God views sincere repentance from any of our indiscretions.

As imperfect specimens of humanity, even spirit begotten believers realize it is possible to be overtaken by sin, whether unintentional, partially willful, or fully willful with the potential for the direst of consequences. When acts of sin occur, they need to be quickly acknowledged and repented of if we are to be restored to God’s favor. Prayer and filling our minds with holy thoughts are two effective tools for preventing or reducing the incidence of sin in our lives.—Ps. 19:12-14 ■

God's Pervasive Love

Key Verse: *“Should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?”*
—Jonah 4:11

Selected Scripture:
Jonah 4:1-11

in being used as an instrument to accomplish God's intended purpose, Jonah became despondent to the point of wishing to die, because mercy had been extended to the sinful inhabitants of Nineveh. In response, God questioned Jonah's heart attitude by inquiring of him whether he had any justifiable cause for his manifestation of anger.—vss. 3,4

Jonah then departed from the city and created a booth to shelter himself in order to observe what would happen in Nineveh. The Lord caused a gourd to grow above Jonah's head, thus providing him shade from the atmosphere surrounding him. This arrangement provided comfort for Jonah. However, subsequently the

AS THIS NARRATIVE draws to a close, Jonah's displeasure at Nineveh's repentance is expressed to God. (Jon. 4:1) “He prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.”—vs. 2

Rather than rejoicing at the ultimate success of his mission

gourd was attacked by a worm, and by the next day the plant had completely withered. After the sun arose, Jonah was subjected to a strong east wind and the hot sun shone upon his head. Once again, Jonah expressed the wish that he could die.—vss. 5-8

God attempted to reason with Jonah, and asked him, “Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death. Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night.”—vss. 9,10

In our Key Verse, God asserts that he has great interest in the recovery of repentant sinners, such as had occurred with the inhabitants of Nineveh. Jonah’s priorities were misplaced, however, because he was more concerned about the destruction of a sheltering plant than seeing the people of the city of Nineveh turn from their evil ways.

As Christians today, we observe great wickedness in society on a global scale. How privileged we are to understand that God has provided his Son, Christ Jesus, who gave his life as a sacrifice that all may learn of the Heavenly Father’s mercy towards sinners. Believers who follow in the footsteps of the Master will be given the opportunity of assisting him in restoring all the willing members of the human family back to the perfection that was lost in Eden. During God’s kingdom of righteousness, as divine beings, Christ and his church will offer perfect life on earth to those who have repented from their sinful ways, and who obey from their heart the righteous precepts which will be taught to all people.

Of that time, the Bible states: “The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” (Rev. 22:17) How wonderful is God’s plan of salvation. ■

The Gospel Spreads to Macedonia

“A vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.”
—Acts 16:9,10

THE BOOK OF ACTS WAS written by the physician, Luke, one of the many Greek Gentiles called by God. Up to this point he had described the events of the Early Church in the third person. In the preceding verses of Acts chapter 16, Luke tells how Paul, Silas, and Timothy had traveled through the land of Asia Minor. Apparently, it was about the time that Paul received the vision cited in our opening text to come to Macedonia, that Luke joined him, Silas, and Timothy, because Luke then switches to the first person “we” in his narrative.

From this time forward, Luke became a very active part of Paul's missionary work in the search for God's people. "Immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia," Luke writes. "Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis; And from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia."—vss. 11,12

WORK IN PHILIPPI

On the Sabbath, after Paul and his three companions had arrived at Philippi, they went to a place outside the city by a riverside where devout women were gathered together to pray. (vs. 13) It was not unusual for Jews to use such places for devotional services. As Paul began to speak to the women, Luke records, "A certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul."—vs. 14

What depth of meaning is shown in the statement that Lydia's heart was opened by the Lord. He is the one who opens the heart of those who desire to understand his word of Truth. Lydia was one being sought by God. She, as well as her family, were baptized at the river, and formed the nucleus of the new church in Philippi. Being very hospitable, and no doubt yearning to learn more about the Truth, Lydia entreated Paul and his companions to lodge in her house, to which they agreed.—vs. 15

DAMSEL FREED FROM EVIL SPIRIT

Paul continued going to the riverside outside of Philippi, speaking with others gathered to pray. One day, as he walked, Paul had a most peculiar

experience. A female servant, who had powers to foretell events because of being possessed by an evil spirit, met Paul and those with him. (Acts 16:16) Her masters profited a great deal from her powers, and because of this she was considered a valuable property. As she followed Paul's party she cried out, "These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation." (vs. 17) This continued to occur for several days—each time Paul would be seen by her in the town.

Finally, Paul, being upset by her behavior, commanded the evil spirit to come out of the woman. The spirit obeyed him, thereby making this maid-servant of little use to her owners, since she had lost her special powers. The masters of the slave were so incensed they seized Paul and Silas and took them before the local magistrates, accusing them of disturbing the city and of preaching customs unlawful for Romans to observe. (vss. 18-21) The large crowd that had assembled to observe the proceedings agreed with the accusations. Consequently, the magistrates had Paul and Silas beaten, and then commanded that they be put into the "inner prison"—its most secure and dark section—and have their feet fastened in stocks.—vss. 22-24

MIRACULOUS RELEASE FROM PRISON

Paul and Silas, perhaps unable to sleep from the pain of their wounds, began to pray and to sing hymns, which was a powerful witness to the other prisoners who heard them. As they did this, there was suddenly an earthquake, so severe that it shook the prison to its very foundations, broke open the prison doors, and loosened the chains that bound

the prisoners. The jailer, awakened by all this commotion, saw the open prison doors and assumed that all the prisoners had escaped. Fearful of the consequences, he drew his sword to kill himself. However, Paul cried in a loud voice that he should not harm himself, because all the prisoners were still there. This was due, no doubt, to the leadership of Paul and Silas, and the great witness given by their prayers and singing of praises to God.—vss. 25-28

The jailer asked for lights, and upon seeing all the prisoners still there, fell down in humble gratitude before Paul and Silas. Convinced that there was no risk they would escape, the jailer led them out and took them to his home, which probably was next to the prison. He then asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Paul told him, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” (vss. 29-31) This scripture is often quoted by Christians as the formula for obtaining salvation—simply believe in Jesus. However, the jailor must have overheard an earlier discussion between Paul and Silas and the prisoners on the matter of being saved, as well as the prayers they uttered, or he would not have asked the question in the way he did.

As a further indication that more than mere belief in Jesus was required for salvation, a detailed study of “the word of the Lord” and God’s plan for salvation was presented by Paul and Silas. (vs. 32) This resulted in the jailer and “all his house” accepting the full message of the Gospel. After they had dressed the flogging wounds of Paul and Silas, the jailer and his family were all baptized, following which everyone in the house stayed for a meal

and fellowship. The occasion was a joyous one, as they spoke together of God's wonderful plan until the next day.—Acts 16:33,34

In the morning, the magistrates sent word to the jailer to release Paul and Silas. However, Paul refused to leave, rightly contending that he and Silas were Roman citizens who had been beaten and imprisoned unlawfully, not having been convicted by a court trial. There was great fear on the part of the magistrates when they heard this, knowing that they had put Paul and Silas in prison illegally. They went personally and entreated Paul and Silas to leave the city. The two eventually complied, but not before they finished their work in Philippi.—vss. 35-40

CONGREGATION AT PHILIPPI

The jailer and his family were now members of the ecclesia at Philippi, along with other brethren who are mentioned by Luke, but not named. Later, in his epistle, Paul identifies some of these. He speaks of Euodias, Syntyche, Clement, and "those women which laboured with me," a reference which undoubtedly includes Lydia. He lovingly spoke of all "my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life." (Phil. 4:2,3) We also hear of Epaphroditus, a Greek brother from Philippi who journeyed to Rome with a gift for Paul.—vs. 18

Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke had spent much time in Philippi. A congregation had been started, and the brethren were learning much about God's Word. Even so, they needed further help. Luke was left with the church at Philippi to assist them. We believe this to be the case, since Luke once again resumes the use of the third person in his writing.

Later, he returns to the first person, when Paul stops again at Philippi during his third missionary journey. (Acts 20:5,6) Thereafter, it appears from the record that Luke continued with Paul to Jerusalem, and then on to Rome.

ON TO THESSALONICA

Paul, Silas, and Timothy once again went on their way, their next destination in Macedonia being Thessalonica. In that city, Paul knew someone whom he referred to as a kinsman, or fellow countryman, named Jason, who opened his home to the travelers. Paul mentions Jason later, saying, “Timotheus my workfellow, and Lucius, and Jason, and Sosipater, my kinsmen, salute you.”—Rom. 16:21

At Thessalonica, they found a synagogue, which they went to on three successive Sabbaths. There Paul reasoned with the Jews from the Scriptures. His preaching was fruitful in convincing several men and women, both Jews and Greeks, of his doctrine. (Acts 17:1-4) Soon they began meeting together as an ecclesia in Jason’s home. Paul’s success, however, was resented by unbelieving Jews, and as time went on they enlisted the aid of mischief-makers in the town to harm Paul, forcing him and Silas into hiding. Going to the home of Jason to lay hands on Paul and Silas, and finding them gone, they took Jason and several other brethren captive and brought them before the city authorities. They accused them of disturbing the peace and threatening the sovereignty of Caesar by claiming no other king than Jesus. Although Jason and the brethren were released, it was quite evident that it would be unwise for Paul to remain. Therefore, he,

Silas, and Timothy were sent under cover of night to the neighboring town of Berea.—Acts 17:5-10

“MORE NOBLE” BEREANS

In Berea, Paul found the Jews in the synagogue much more responsive to the message. Apparently, their leaders had taught them to study and prove their beliefs by the Scriptures. This prepared them to consider Paul’s teaching with a sincere desire to learn. The Bible record commends them with these words: “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.”—vss. 11,12

Today, we often hear the terms, Berean Bible Students, or Berean studies. These names are derived from the noble Jews of Berea, who diligently searched the Scriptures to determine whether that which they were being taught was supported by the Word of God. We should do likewise, as only a “thus saith the Lord” should be considered clear support for any doctrinal teaching. God rewarded the Berean Jews by bringing many of them into the body of Christ. These formed the nucleus of another congregation of the Lord’s people, to which were added Gentiles as well.

Soon, however, the unbelieving Jews of Thessalonica who had previously caused trouble there, heard of the success that Paul, Silas, and Timothy were having in Berea, and came to incite the townspeople against them. Again Paul, who was the main target of their attack, was compelled by the brethren

to leave. They were so concerned about Paul's welfare that they advised him to leave the province of Macedonia by sea and travel to Achaia, or Greece, and the city of Athens.—vss. 13-15

Paul was reluctant to leave these two new congregations at Thessalonica and Berea, as they needed to be further strengthened and established in the faith. He left Silas and Timothy at Berea for that purpose, but soon called them to Athens to assist with the work there. Later, however, we have record that Paul sent Timothy from Athens back to Thessalonica to further establish the brethren in the faith. (I Thess. 3:1,2) Indeed, we can see that the work of searching for God's people was "great, but the labourers . . . few."—Luke 10:2

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE THESSALONIANS

The remarkable way in which God's Holy Spirit guided the lives of these new brethren becomes evident when we read Paul's epistles to the Thessalonians. Most Bible historians believe he wrote his first letter to them while he was in Greece, either from Athens or Corinth, not long after he had left Macedonia. Reading Paul's letter gives us insight into the fine character of these brethren. "We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God." (I Thess. 1:2-4) Here we particularly note Paul's reference to their "election of God," signifying to us that the call to be of the "body of Christ" is not an indiscriminate one.

Paul also speaks of how they had turned away from idols to worship the true God. This informs us that the ecclesia was composed mainly of Gentiles, since Jews were not idol worshipers, and, as indicated previously, most of the Jews of Thessalonica had not been receptive to his teachings. Paul's words to these new Gentile brethren were: "Our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake. And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit: So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing. For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come."—I Thess. 1:5-10

ZEALOUS BRETHREN

The zeal demonstrated by these brethren is surely marvelous to note. They had learned of God's plan in only a matter of months, and under difficult circumstances—as a result of trouble from unbelieving Jews. Yet in a very short time they were preaching to others throughout their province and in other places as well. By doing so they were assisting Paul, and the Lord, in the work of searching for God's

people. Indeed, this was God's way of spreading the message, and would continue to be so throughout the Gospel Age.

Paul continues, saying, "Yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain: But even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention. For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile: But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts. For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness; God is witness: Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us."—chap. 2:1-8

SUFFERING FOR CHRIST

Paul desired to see these brethren again, but he could not do so at that time. He recognized that this situation was influenced by the Adversary, saying: "We would have come unto you, even I Paul, . . . but Satan hindered us." (vs. 18) The evil circumstances in Thessalonica did not abate. With Paul gone, the brethren there received the brunt of the persecution. It was as bad for them in Thessalonica as it was in *(Continued on page 36)*

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(Continued from page 31) Jerusalem for the brethren residing there.

This situation is made clear by Paul earlier in the chapter, when he wrote: "Ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judaea are in Christ Jesus: for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews: Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men: Forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved."—I Thess. 2:14-16

PAUL'S CROWN OF REJOICING

These brethren were especially dear to Paul. He further wrote: "We, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire. . . . For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy." (vss. 17,19,20) Continuing, Paul says: "Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone; And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the Gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith. . . . Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith."—chap. 3:1,2,7

Thus, at that time, it was not possible for Paul to see these brethren again. It was not until his third missionary journey that Paul visited the churches in Macedonia again. Among those he met at that

time were Aristarchus and Secundus. They were from Thessalonica, and accompanied him after leaving Macedonia for the final time. (Acts 20:4) Little is written of Paul's last visit to Macedonia, but we feel confident that he found the brethren progressing well in the service of the Lord and in their development, thus confirming their "election of God." ■

Wherever You Go

*Take Christ's Spirit wherever you go,
His image on your countenance show,
His power, your strength for service impart,
His love overflow from a radiant heart.*

*Dwelling in him reflects his light,
Only his Word teaches aright,
His Spirit is power, his love more so,
Do carry both with you wherever you go.*

—*While Marching to Zion, C. K. Hindle*

WEEKLY PRAYER MEETING TEXTS

MAY 4—"The LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart."—I Samuel 16:7 (Z. '03-171 Hymn 198)

MAY 11—"For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter."—Psalm 44:22 (Z. '03-408 Hymn 8)

MAY 18—"We which have believed do enter into rest."—Hebrews 4:3 (Z. '99-253 Hymn 273)

MAY 25—"Be not overcome of evil."—Romans 12:21 (Z. '97-267 Hymn 256)

The Perfect Spring

“Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall ye not know it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert.”

—*Isaiah 43:19*

EACH YEAR, THE ARRIVAL of the spring season brings a sense of joy and anticipation to people all over the world, the time of year varying depending on the hemisphere in which they reside. Many hearts are lifted up when witnessing the renewal of life that springs forth from the cold and barren ground after a harsh winter has ended. Indeed, the name “spring,” given to this season of the year, originated in the 14th century, when it was referred to as “springing time.” How harmonious are the words of our opening scripture with the thought of renewed life in each spring season.

The spring months of each year bring about new beginnings, as the eternal cycle of life, put in place by our great Creator, continues. The earth is warmed from the increasing length of daylight hours, as its axis begins its annual tilt toward the

sun. We have faith that this annual cycle of nature will always come to pass on time, even as it has since the days of creation. However, we may ask, what do these things pertaining to the physical world mean to the child of God? Furthermore, what significance do they portend for the world of mankind beyond a mere appreciation of the natural realm? Let us consider the many ways in which the Scriptures answer these questions, and provide insights into God's plan based on this annual season and its symbolic beauties.

IMPORTANT EVENTS IN THE PLAN OF GOD

As consecrated children of God, the spring of each year first turns our minds to the commemoration and anniversary of Jesus' death. This was a vital event in the plan of God, and one which had to take place prior to, and in order for, any "springing forth" of life to occur. The date of Jesus' death was calculated based on the arrival of the spring equinox, and as detailed in God's instructions to Israel concerning their keeping of the Passover. (Exod. 12:1-6) Thus, this year, footstep followers of the Master celebrated the Memorial of his death after sundown on April 9th, this being its proper anniversary.

When God instructed the Israelites concerning the Passover, he also told them to eat of unleavened bread. (vs. 8) In addition, they were to dispose of any leaven, or yeast, that was in their houses. So important was this, that God proclaimed a seven-day feast immediately following the Passover, the primary purpose of which was to fully rid their homes of all vestiges of leaven. God's instructions were: "Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread;

even the first day ye shall put away leaven out of your houses.” (Exod. 12:15) There were serious consequences for those who were careless and disobedient to the commandments of God. The same verse continues: “Whosoever eateth leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel.”

We might liken the requirements of this annual feast of Israel to what many would today call “spring cleaning.” Leaven, or yeast, corrupts and spoils easily. Thus, it is a fitting symbol of sin. The Apostle Paul spoke of the deeper and spiritual meaning of leaven, explaining its correlation to sin, and connecting it to Jesus’ sacrifice as the antitypical Passover lamb. “Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.”—I Cor. 5:6-8

These are powerful words from the apostle, pointing out our need to continually rid our spiritual house—our mind and heart—of all vestiges of sin, as we daily keep the feast of our consecrated walk. Although we may especially think of this responsibility as we focus on Jesus’ death in the spring of the year, the ridding of any leaven in our character is a daily task, regardless of the season.

OUR SPECIAL PRIVILEGE

When Jesus instituted the Memorial of his death, he instructed his disciples, “This do in

remembrance of me.” (Luke 22:19) Only Jesus could be represented as the antitypical “Lamb of God,” for only he could take away the “sin of the world,” thus providing the opportunity of salvation for the entire human family. (John 1:29) However, because of this, as consecrated believers during this Gospel Age, we have the privilege of partaking of a cup of spiritual blessing, and being constituted as members of Christ’s “body.”

The Apostle Paul spoke of this special privilege when writing to the brethren at Corinth, saying, “The cup of blessing, for which we bless God,—is it not a participation of the blood of the anointed one? The loaf which we break,—is it not a participation of the body of the anointed one? Because there is one loaf, we, the many, are one body; for we all partake of the one loaf.” (I Cor. 10:16,17, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*) The great privilege of which Paul speaks is that because we have partaken of the symbolic blood and body of the “anointed one,” Jesus, we “are one body.”

Being counted as a part of the Lord’s body indeed provides a cup of great blessing to us, but it also means sacrifice. Even in this, however, we are to rejoice. Regarding his own sacrifice, Paul said of himself, “Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body’s sake, which is the church.” (Col. 1:24) Here we again note the Apostle’s reference to the church as Christ’s “body.” What a springing forth of new spiritual life is thus implied by our appropriation of the benefits of Christ’s sacrifice, and being constituted members of his body.

SPRING AND THE RESURRECTION

“To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” (Eccles. 3:1) As noted in the foregoing, it is proper that we take special note of Jesus’ death in the spring of the year, and our resulting privilege of being members of his body, as well as the responsibility we have of ridding our hearts and minds of the leaven of sin. Beyond this, however, is the “springing forth” of life epitomized in the grand hope of the resurrection. Jesus was the first to realize this hope. On the third day following his death, Christ rose from the dead, and became “the firstfruits of them that slept” in death. (I Cor. 15:20) The faithful members of the body of Christ, who are being developed during this present Gospel Age, will also be raised to a heavenly inheritance with their Master. They are part of the “firstfruits” class Paul speaks of in this verse.

The scriptures also promise a renewal of life for mankind in general, as they too will be given the opportunity, on earth, for a full resurrection, or restanding, before God. Jesus promised, “An hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.” (John 5:28,29, *New American Standard Bible*) This opportunity for the whole human family will come under the administration of Christ Jesus and the faithful members of his body in the coming Messianic kingdom.

SUMMER AND WINTER

The psalmist wrote concerning the wonders of Creation, but spoke of only the seasons of the greatest

climate extremes—summer and winter—as encompassing the annual cycle of nature. He said, “The day is thine, the night also is thine: thou hast prepared the light and the sun. Thou hast set all the borders of the earth: thou hast made summer and winter.” (Ps. 74:16,17) The Prophet Zechariah also spoke of summer and winter in relation to Christ’s coming kingdom. We read, “In that day living waters will flow out of Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea and the other half toward the western sea: it will be in summer as well as in winter.” (Zech. 14:8, *NASB*) That is, the “living waters” of Christ’s kingdom will gush forth continuously, regardless of season, and encircle the earth, from the east to the west.

The provision of blessings that will be made available for the human family during Christ’s kingdom is also described by the revelator: “He shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst . . . , and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month.” (Rev. 22:1,2) By this, we realize that the fruitage of the kingdom, provided for man’s nourishment and development, is not to be available in only certain seasons, but “every month.”

“WINTER IS PAST”

Solomon wrote, “Lo, the winter is past; The rain is over and gone; The flowers appear on the earth; The time of the singing of birds is come, And the voice of the turtle-dove is heard in our land.” (Song of Sol. 2:11,12, *American Standard Version*) These

highly symbolic words point forward to the time of Christ's kingdom, when the world will be refreshed under the loving arrangements of the Heavenly Father. The reference to "winter" aptly describes the present reign of sin and death, a long season which has overshadowed the human family as the result of Adam's transgression. The past 6,000 years has indeed been a barren, cold, forbidding and dark period of earth's history under the leadership of the great Adversary, Satan. With few exceptions, men have struggled with the difficulties of this life for a few short years, with their hopes and dreams ending in the grave.

In Jesus' prophecy concerning the time of trouble at the end of the present Gospel Age, he speaks of a "winter" period upon the earth. He says, "Woe to them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! And pray ye that your flight be not in the winter. For in those days shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of the creation which God created unto this time, neither shall be. And except that the Lord had shortened those days, no flesh should be saved: but for the elect's sake, whom he hath chosen, he hath shortened the days." (Mark 13:17-20) How thankful we are, however, that after the present winter of trouble, the springtime of the kingdom will renew life upon the earth!

"THE RAIN IS OVER"

In Solomon's words previously cited, he says that "the rain is over and gone." In this usage, the word "rain" is derived from a Hebrew word meaning "to shower violently," as in a terrible storm. The violent storms of the present troubled world, Solomon

prophecies, will come to an end, following which “flowers [will] appear on the earth,” evidences of a new season. Such words beautifully portray God’s ultimate purpose of blessing the human family.

Rain, whether in the form of a storm or a refreshing shower, results in a renewal of life to the earth. From this standpoint, we can view rain in a symbolic manner as always bringing about blessings from the Heavenly Father. Speaking on behalf of God, Moses said, “My doctrine shall drop as the rain, my speech shall distil as the dew, as the small rain upon the tender herb, and as the showers upon the grass.” (Deut. 32:2) The Prophet Hosea also speaks of the Lord’s blessings coming as the rain. “Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord: his going forth is prepared as the morning; and he shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth.”—Hos. 6:3

The “latter and former rain” seem to prophetically denote the abundant showers of Truth poured out as a result of Jesus’ First Advent, and his invisible presence now during the time of his Second Advent. These former and latter rains have been especially for the benefit of Christ’s consecrated followers, those who have entered a covenant relationship with God and presented themselves as “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God,” their “reasonable service.”—Rom. 12:1

Between Christ’s First and Second Advents, a long period intervened during which there was little in the way of showers of Truth. Elijah’s pronouncement to the evil king of Israel points forward in a prophetic manner to this time of drought. “Elijah the Tishbite, . . . said unto Ahab,

As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.” (I Kings 17:1) The Apostle James reveals to us the length of this time. He states that Elijah “prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.”—James 5:17

In ancient Jewish calendar reckoning, which used 30 day months, “three years and six months” equated to 42 months, or 1,260 days. Using the scriptural designation of a “day for a year,” as found in God’s dealings with Israel, the long period without rain of which Elijah spoke prophetically describes a span of 1,260 years. (Num. 14:34; Ezek. 4:6) This aptly represents the portion of the Gospel Age during which the apostate church-state system suppressed the dispensing of the “rain” of Truth. John the Revelator also spoke of this same period, and foretold that God’s “two witnesses,” the Old and New Testaments, “shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth”—that is, covered up and concealed.—Rev. 11:3

We believe that this long period of drought is over, and that the “latter rain” has come as a result of our Lord’s Second Advent, or presence. We again read the words of James, who wrote of this time, saying, “Be patient, then, brethren, till the presence of the Lord; lo, the husbandman doth expect the precious fruit of the earth, being patient for it, till he may receive rain—early and latter; be patient, ye also; establish your hearts, because the presence of the Lord hath drawn nigh.”—James 5:7,8, *Young’s Literal Translation*

FURTHER SIGNS OF SPRING

In the verses quoted earlier, Solomon speaks of the singing of the birds. The *New American Standard Bible* interjects a further thought: “The time has arrived for pruning the vines.” A sure evidence that winter is past and spring has arrived is the return of the birds—announcing their presence with joyful song. Springtime is also a time of pruning, in order that vegetation may grow more profusely, and bring forth abundant fruitage during the new growing season. The spiritual fruitage that we, as consecrated believers, desire to produce also requires the pruning of our characters by God, that we might “bear much fruit.”—John 15:1-8

Solomon speaks of “the voice of the turtle [dove].” Doves are especially noted for their soft cooing. They have gentle and clean habits, and are often used as symbols of peace and purity. Turtledoves and pigeons are the only birds that were permitted to be offered in sacrifice under the Mosaic law. “If the . . . offering to the LORD be of fowls, then he shall bring his offering of turtledoves, or of young pigeons.”—Lev. 1:14

We quote the following account of events that took place shortly after Jesus’ birth: “When eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS. . . . And when the days of her [Mary’s] purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord; . . . And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.” (Luke 2:21-24) As Luke writes, these things were done in accordance with the

Jewish law. (Lev. 12:1-6) We rejoice that, in a much larger sense, Jesus will bring to all mankind peace, and the opportunity to develop a pure, gentle and loving character in his coming Messianic kingdom.

PROPHETIC WORDS

The Bible speaks prophetically, using symbolic language, of the life-renewing blessings of God's coming kingdom. The Prophet Isaiah gives us this preview of that blessed day so near at hand. "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing. . . . In the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water."—Isa. 35:1,2,6,7

The psalmist wrote of the confidence we should have in God, even in the midst of the world's present troubles, knowing that he will soon intervene, and say, "Be still, and know that I am God." (Ps. 46:10) It is God, David also says, "Which stilleth the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the people." (chap. 65:7) The restless waves and tumult of mankind will become stilled under the mighty hand of God. Then, the psalmist continues, "Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it: thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water: thou preparest them corn, when thou hast so provided for it. Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly: thou settlest the furrows thereof: thou makest it soft with showers: thou blessest the springing thereof."—vss. 9,10

PRESENCE NOT GENERALLY KNOWN

When the Master was questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God would come, he said, “The kingdom of God comes not with outward show; nor shall they say, Behold here! Or there! For, behold, God’s royal majesty is among you.” (Luke 17:20,21, *Diaglott*) With these words, Jesus was telling the Pharisees that the kingdom of God was among them at that time in the sense that Israel’s rightful king—their foretold Messiah—was in their very presence. He, of course, was speaking of himself, yet due to their hardness of heart and lack of faith, they failed to recognize his presence as their Messiah at his First Advent.

Shortly after this, Jesus prophesied concerning his Second Advent presence, giving his disciples certain “signs” to look for. One of these concerned the days of the faithful patriarch Noah. Jesus said, “As the days of Noah—so shall be also the presence of the Son of Man; for as they were, in the days before the flood, eating, and drinking, marrying, and giving in marriage, till the day Noah entered into the ark, and they did not know till the flood came and took all away; so shall be also the presence of the Son of Man.”—Matt. 24:37-39, *YLT*

The point of this sign is that the people in general during Noah’s day did not know the significance of the time in which they were living, nor the events which would soon come to pass. They did not know, that is, until the calamity of the Flood was upon them. Noah knew, however, as did his family, for they believed what God had told them. He was a “preacher

of righteousness," Peter says, yet no one except his family gave heed to his words.—II Pet. 2:5

In Jesus' prophecy quoted above, he was not speaking of the time of his arrival, but of his Second Advent presence following his arrival. God was invisibly present with Noah and supervised the entire process of building the ark and preparing for the coming flood. Likewise, we believe, Jesus is now invisibly present, unknown to mankind in general, preparing the earth as well as the people for the end of this "present evil world," and the establishment of a "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." (Gal. 1:4; II Pet. 3:13) Just as Noah and his family put their faith and trust in God under most difficult circumstances, so now only the Lord's consecrated people know of the presence of Jesus, and have confidence that he is carrying out his Father's plans and purposes to bring about the establishment of his kingdom.

"Watch therefore," Jesus concludes, "for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come." (Matt. 24:42) The thought is—watch for the signs of his invisible presence, of which the "days of Noah" is but one example. A watcher, according to the scriptural use of the term, is one who is vigilant, attentive, on the lookout and wide awake. Faithful watchers during the time of the Lord's second presence display these qualities, because they know of the good things God has in store for mankind once the present "flood" of trouble is past. The vast majority of mankind, however, just as in the days of Noah, know not of his presence, or of his benevolent purposes.

A GLORIOUS KINGDOM

We look forward with anticipation to God's glorious kingdom soon to come. It will result in the betterment of man physically, morally, and spiritually, to an extent not experienced since our first parents fell from perfection. In fact, it is perfection that will be the grand result of this new day. Though a gradual work, it will surely be accomplished for all the willing and obedient. "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth," God says. "It shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."—Isa. 55:11

It is our present duty and privilege as footstep followers of the Lord to "Preach the word: be instant in season, out of season." (II Tim. 4:2) We are to continue to preach the "gospel of the kingdom" as a "witness unto all nations." (Matt. 24:14) Though most do not have hearing ears at the present time, mankind's "day of visitation" will soon come, in which all eyes and ears will be open to the glorious character, plans, and purposes of our loving God, and he will be glorified by all. (I Pet. 2:12) Concerning this time, God said through the Prophet Jeremiah, "They shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them."—Jer. 31:34

We have learned from our consideration of this subject that the thought of spring brings to our mind the hope of renewal and recovery. So it will be, by the grace of God, for the present weary, sin-sick, and dying world of mankind, as we look forward to the springtime of God's kingdom. The salvation that God has promised for his groaning creation is

to bring about full recovery—not merely a temporary fix to limited problems. It will be a new arrangement, with no influence from man’s great adversary, Satan, for he will be bound. (Rev. 20:1,2) We quote this kingdom promise from the prophet: “An highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; . . . the redeemed shall walk there: And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.” (Isa. 35:8-10) Most assuredly, this will be a glorious and perfect spring! ■

OBITUARIES

The following brethren have recently finished their Christian course. We wish to express our sincere sympathy to their family and friends in the loss of these dear ones.

Brother Bill Harp, Portland, OR—March 28. Age, 91

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General Convention Bulletin

July 15-20, 2017

THE 2017 GENERAL CONVENTION will begin in less than three months. If you have not yet made plans to attend, now is the time to do so. We encourage as many as are able to join in the blessings of this annual gathering of the Lord's people. The convention will be held on the campus of the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown, Pennsylvania. Hotel-like rooms with private bathrooms in the Living-Learning Center (LLC), family style apartments (also air conditioned) with private bathrooms (APTS), and housing with two rooms sharing one bathroom (not air conditioned) in other facilities are available on campus. A child may sleep on a bedroom floor at no charge if both beds are occupied.

The convention program appears in this issue of *The Dawn*, on the pages following the General Convention registration form. In addition to the special program services mentioned in previous announcements, there will be a panel discussion on the subject, "How do we cope with the modern world?" We believe consideration of this subject will provide timely discussion of challenges unique to our day that affect the members of our fellowship.

All room and meal costs for children 12 years old or younger will be paid by the convention. In addition, 100% of the cost of those from ages 13 through 17

will be refunded if the young person attends at least 75% of the studies for his or her age group. This subsidy does not cover meals paid for at the door.

The convention will provide one shuttle bus leaving the Pittsburgh airport in the early evening for the college in Johnstown on Friday, July 14. There will also be shuttle bus service leaving the college in the morning hours for the Pittsburgh airport on Friday, July 21. There will be a \$10 charge per person each way for this service. ■

	Ages	18 & up	***13-17
Breakfast		\$8.00	\$7.00
Lunch		10.00	9.00
Dinner		14.00	13.00
Total, three meals		\$32.00	\$29.00
Lodging (per night)			
**dbl occ (LLC or APTS)		\$42.00	\$37.00
dbl occ (non-LLC or APTS)		\$37.00	\$35.00
**single occ (LLC)		\$76.00	n/a
single occ (non-LLC)		\$42.00	n/a
PKG: 7 nights, 18 meals			
**dbl occ (LLC or APTS)		\$410*	\$375*
dbl occ (non-LLC or APTS)		\$275*	\$240*
**single occ (LLC)		\$616*	n/a
single occ (non-LLC)		\$319*	n/a

*If no breakfasts, deduct—\$35

**Air conditioned

***100% of these costs will be refunded if the young person attends 75% of the studies for his/her age group.

NOTE: A flat charge of \$5.00 per person, regardless of age or length of stay, and irrespective of lodging and meal arrangements selected, will be added to your invoice to help offset charges for university facilities which are incurred by the convention.

General Convention Registration

330 Jasmine Road—Casselberry, FL 32707

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

	Brkfst	Lunch	Dinner	Bed
Friday, July 14, 2017				
Saturday, 15th				
Sunday, 16th				
Monday, 17th				
Tuesday, 18th				
Wednesday, 19th				
Thursday, 20th				

Check for package: 7 nights, all 18 meals
or 7 nights, 12 meals (no breakfasts)

Check: private bath **or** shared bath
 double occupancy single occupancy
 interested in APTS

Names and ecclesia name (age if under 18)

Address:

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Tuesday, July 18

Chairman: John Trzeciak, *Grand Rapids MI*

9:30 Morning Devotions

9:45 **Baptismal Discourse**

Robert Gorecki
New York NY

10:30 Intermission

11:00 **Immersion Service**

Michael Shilling
Washington DC

12:00 Close of Morning Session

2:00 Praise and Testimony Erwin Kalinski
Chicago IL

2:45 Intermission

3:15 **A New Earth—Isaiah 65:17**

Richard Doctor, *Chicago IL*
Jonathon Freer, *Dawn Pilgrim*

4:00 Intermission

4:30 Discourse Dan Wesol
Albuquerque NM

5:15 Close of Afternoon Session

Wednesday, July 19

Chairman: Chris Kuenzli, *Milwaukee WI*

9:30 Morning Devotions

9:45 Convention Business Meeting

11:00 Short Recess

11:15 Convention Business Continues

12:00 Close of Morning Session

2:00 Discourse

Jerry Wesol
Orlando FL

2:45 Intermission

3:15 Praise and Testimony

John Hummel
Detroit MI

4:00 Intermission

4:30 Discourse

Douglas Rawson
San Francisco Bay Area CA

5:15 Close of Afternoon Session

7:00 **The Battle Is the Lord's**

John Hull
(1909-1978)

7:45 Vesper Service

8:30 Songs in the Night

Thursday, July 20

Chairman: David Christiansen, *Seattle WA*

9:30 Morning Devotions

9:45 Praise and Testimony James Parkinson
Los Angeles CA

10:30 Intermission

11:00 **Panel Discussion—How do we cope
with the modern world?**

O. B. Elbert, *Delaware Valley PA*

Aaron Kuehmichel, *Chicago IL*

Rafal Niemczyk, *Vancouver BC*

12:00 Close of Morning Session

2:00 Discourse Len Griehs
Delaware Valley PA

2:45 Intermission

3:15 Discourse Tim Thomassen
Albuquerque NM

4:00 Intermission

4:30 Discourse Michael Costelli
Gulfport MS

5:15 Close of Afternoon Session

7:00 **Closing Discourse** Mark Davis
Los Angeles CA

7:45 Melodies of Praise

8:30 Love Feast

SPEAKERS' APPOINTMENTS

The speakers listed below are routed through the Pilgrim Department of The Dawn. Their visits are furnished free upon request. Write to: The Dawn Pilgrim Department, East Rutherford, NJ 07073. A visit will be arranged whenever possible.

J. Dolan

Ghana, Africa April 27-May 8

Kumasi, Accra, Cape Coast,
Dunka-on-Offin, Ayanfuri,
Atobease, Famanyo, Wunshen,
Arikuma, Amofo, Adesu

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

T. N. Alexander

Chicago, IL May 27-29

O. B. Elbert

Detroit, MI May 6,7
Los Angeles, CA 27,28

J. Freer

Detroit, MI May 6,7

R. Goodman

Chicago, IL May 27-29

L. Griehs

Los Angeles, CA May 27,28

S. Jeuck

Jacksonville, FL May 21

H. Montague

Los Angeles, CA May 27,28

J. Parkinson

Detroit, MI May 6,7

D. Rice

Jacksonville, FL May 7

T. Ruggirello

Jacksonville, FL May 7

R. Sconyers

Jacksonville, FL May 21

A Little Light

*It may be little we can do
To help another, it is true;
But better is a little spark
Of kindness, when the way is dark,
Than one should walk in paths forbidden
For lack of light we might have given.
—Poems of the Way*

CONVENTIONS

These conventions are listed by request of classes who sponsor them. So your convention can be placed in these columns in time, make your request in writing three months before the date of the convention to Dawn Magazine, 199 Railroad Avenue, East Rutherford, NJ 07073.

METRO DETROIT CONVENTION, May 6,7—Brighton Community Center, 555 Brighton Street, Brighton, MI 48114. Contact J. Kienast. Phone: (248) 496-5611 or Email: jenkienast@gmail.com

JACKSONVILLE CONVENTION, May 7—Holiday Inn Hotel, 620 Wells Road, Orange Park, FL 32073. For room reservations, contact the hotel. Phone: (904) 562-7407. Deadline for special room rates is May 4. Other information, contact C. Hughes. Phone: (904) 781-0506 or Email: clanky3@att.net

CHICAGO CONVENTION, May 27-29—Alta Villa Banquets, 430 N. Addison Road, Addison, IL 60101. Contact J. Farrell, 310 S. Lambert Road, Glen Ellyn, IL 60137. Phone: (630) 469-9511 or Email: secretary@chicagobible.org

LOS ANGELES CONVENTION, May 27,28—Burbank Auditorium, 406 Irving Drive, Burbank, CA 91504. For room reservations (subsidized rate of \$55/night ending April 23), contact N. Nekora. Phone: (310) 454-5248 or Email: npnekora@aol.com. Other information, contact T. Parkinson. Phone: (818) 288-2765 or Email: ti77park@gmail.com. Please place LABible in subject line of the email.

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

PORTLAND CONVENTION, June 16-18—Sheraton Portland Airport Hotel, 8235 NE Airport Way, Portland, OR 97220. Phone: (503) 281-2500. Contact B. or C. Hislop.

Phone: (503) 691-2699 or Email: bwhislop@aol.com or claudiahis@aol.com

PRINCE ALBERT/SASKATOON CONVENTION, July 1-3—Siwak Farm RR1 Stn Mpp, Prince Albert, SK Canada S6V5P8. Contact A. Siwak. Phone: (306) 764-7692 or Email: ahsiwak@inet2000.com

EAST SASKATCHEWAN CONVENTION, July 7-9—Sturgis Community Hall, Hwy. #9, Sturgis, SK, Canada. Contact N. Paley, Box 1522, Canora, SK S0A0L0. Phone: (306) 563-5441 or Email: thepaleys@sasktel.net

BIBLE STUDENTS GENERAL CONVENTION, July 15-20—University of Pittsburgh, 450 Schoolhouse Road, Johnstown, PA. For registration, see pp. 53-61 this issue.

NIGERIA GENERAL CONVENTION, August 25-27—Central School Obudi Agwa Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria. Contact C. O. Egbu, #24 Fayemi Street Coca Cola Mokola Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. Phone: 2348033339949 or Email: egbucaje@gmail.com

SEATTLE CONVENTION, September 2-4—(New location) Bastyr University, 14500 Juanita Drive NE, Kenmore, WA 98028. For reservations and information, contact L. Flinn. Phone: (206) 518-2678 or Email: laurie@flinn.us

*I love to tell the story
Of gracious, heavenly love;
How Jesus left his glory,
That wondrous love to prove.
I love to tell the story,
Because I know it's true;
It satisfies my longings,
As nothing else would do.
—Hymns of Dawn*