



*The  
Heavenly  
Call*

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**DAWN BIBLE STUDENTS  
ASSOCIATION  
PO BOX 521167  
LONGWOOD, FL 32752-1167**

**[www.dawnbible.com](http://www.dawnbible.com)**



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# Introduction

The recent centuries of this Gospel Age have seen the growth of democratic governments with their elected representatives throughout the world.

But none can compare to the greatest election that the world is ever likely to see, that is the election of the Church of the living God.

This has all been enabled by the advent to this earth and subsequent death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This book, a compilation of a series of articles from the 2009 *Dawn* magazine, draws together all the different aspects of the Heavenly Father's wonderful eternal purpose pertaining to this Gospel Age Call and its everlasting significance.

## CHAPTER 1

# The Eternal Purpose of God

*“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love.”—Ephesians 1:3,4*

**W**ith this issue and the beginning of another new year, *The Dawn* magazine will introduce a new series of articles that will feature various aspects in connection with the present Gospel Age call to the church. This call has emanated from our loving Heavenly Father who is gathering a select number from among the present evil world who will share as members of our Lord Jesus' bride. The word “called” identifies those Christians who have thus responded to this wonderful invitation. Together they will comprise the body of Christ, our Lord being the Head, who will inherit the divine nature in a heavenly home that has been especially prepared for them.

When this great work of the present age has been completed, the full number of the called

and faithful ones will all be brought together in the first resurrection. They will then share with our glorified Lord as members of the promised seed class that will bring the blessing of life and peace to all the families of the earth in accordance with the Abrahamic promise. (Gen. 22:16-18) This will take place under the administration of Christ's future kingdom, and the terms of the New Covenant which will then be established on the basis of truth and righteousness. God's plan and purpose is to institute a work of reconciliation for the sin-sick human family, and to offer everlasting life to all of the obedient of his human creation. This new law and world order will take place under the direction of Christ's rule, and will introduce to the human family the necessary provisions whereby they may attain everlasting life on a perfected earth with the Christ as its just mediator.

The Prophet Isaiah spoke of the endearing relationship with the Heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus that the New Creation, who are presently being called in Christ, will enjoy, and the glory that shall ultimately speak of his name. In the distant past, the prophet wrote in connection with those who would be called to this glorious inheritance that would be accomplished during this Gospel Age. "Even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him." (Isa. 43:7) The revelator echoed these prophetic promises with the words that will be spoken by the heavenly host who will proclaim, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."—Rev. 4:11

When he wrote to the brethren at Rome, the Apostle Paul pointed out that those who are being called during this present age are called to the same glorious nature and inheritance as was our Lord Jesus during the time of his earthly ministry. "We are buried with him [Jesus] by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." (Rom. 6:4) This is a remarkable prospect for each of us to consider, and with great humbleness of mind.

### **PAUL'S LETTER**

In consideration of the featured text of this lesson, and the opening verses of Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus, we soon recognize a true sermon of grace in itself. It points to the very high level of love and devotion that the apostle possessed in accordance with his brethren's spiritual growth and welfare as New Creatures in Christ Jesus. His words were meant to encourage them to greater faithfulness in their walk in the narrow way of sacrifice, and they also serve to arouse a greater sense of faith in our own consecrated walk during these closing years of the Gospel Age.

In Paul's introductory remarks, he spoke of the Heavenly Father's preparation in connection with this wonderful calling which began many ages ago, even from before the foundation of the world. In reference to God's ultimate purpose, the apostle said, "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved."—Eph. 1:5,6

The apostle's use of the word "predestinated" in his letter lends special attention and recognition to the Heavenly Father's foreknowledge in determining long beforehand the class of Christians who would respond to his calling of a New Creation. The call would go out to members of the fallen race who were under the sentence of death because of sin. There would thus be a predetermined number who would respond to the call. By his special provisions of grace these Christians would be made acceptable to him through their faith in Jesus' blood which had been shed for them as their Savior. John's account bears record, "Jesus saith unto him [Thomas], I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (John 14:6) "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."—Rom. 5:1

The Apostle Paul made this point clear in his letter to the Ephesians when he explained, "In whom we have redemption through his [Jesus'] blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence."—Eph. 1:7,8

## **A SPIRITUAL CALLING**

There are various points of emphasis in connection with the church's calling in Christ Jesus that is truly a most wonderful and blessed inheritance. In the apostle's letter to Timothy, he spoke of this as a "holy calling" and added, "not according to our works, but according to his own

purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began.” (II Tim. 1:9) When he wrote to the church at Philippi, Paul directs our attention to the further dimension of this call, and emphasized that he was using all of his strength and effort to reach the mark for the prize which he said was the “high calling” in Christ Jesus. (Phil. 3:14) In his message to the Hebrew brethren, he addressed them as “holy brethren,” and partakers of a special inheritance promised to the saints. He told them that it was a spiritual or “heavenly calling” in Christ Jesus.—Heb. 3:1

### **SAINTS OF GOD**

In the context of our featured scripture, we note that Paul greeted the church at Ephesus as “saints” and as the “faithful” children of God who were being called “in Christ Jesus.” To them he proclaimed, “Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Eph. 1:1,2) The word saints means to be sacred or holy, and these brethren at Ephesus were among the special class of Christ’s followers who were being called out of the world by the Heavenly Father, and were consecrating their lives to him and to the service of the Truth. They were of the overcoming class of believers in Christ. The apostle took seriously his own opportunity and responsibility to care for this special class of Jesus’ faithful followers, and appreciated his privilege to supply their spiritual needs and progress in the narrow way.

### **THE MYSTERY OF GOD’S WILL**

On one occasion during our Lord’s earthly ministry, the disciples of Jesus asked him why he

spoke and taught in parables. “He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.” (Matt. 13:11) The Master was speaking about the church—his faithful people who would be told about the mysteries of the kingdom. Peter said, “The promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.”—Acts 2:39

In our featured text, Paul also spoke of the mystery of the heavenly calling, and that it has gone out to the church of Christ only during this present Gospel Age. He wrote, “Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.”—Eph. 1:9-12

Again, when writing to the brethren at Colosse, Paul spoke of God’s mystery and said, “Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you [among you, *Marginal Translation*], the hope of glory.” (Col. 1:26,27) The mystery is that Christ will share his glory with others, a class of 144,000 faithful followers who hear the Father’s

call, and desire to become members of the body of Christ with Jesus as their head.

## **THE SPIRIT OF PROMISE**

The marvelous calling to which we are responding is the Heavenly Father's blessed promise to us. "In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise." (Eph. 1:13) The saints of the most high God have thus received the seal or mark of the Holy Spirit of God which provides us with a new standing as sons of God, and with the seal of adoption. This gives us the Father's blessed assurance that we shall inherit the kingdom promises when we have faithfully endured and carried out the tests of love and devotion to him.

The apostle then points to the blessed promises from God, "Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory." (vs. 14) The word "earnest" means that it is God's pledge until such time when we shall receive the actual inheritance that he has promised us. "The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power."—vss. 18,19

Paul encourages us to a higher degree of faithful endeavor, saying, "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing

one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in the one hope of your calling.”—Eph. 4:1-4

### **JOINT-HEIRS WITH CHRIST**

Paul explained this wonderful assurance and relationship that we have with the Heavenly Father in his letter to the church at Rome, when he said, “As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”—Rom. 8:14-18

The faithful class who are being called during this present time are children of the Heavenly Father, and begotten of his Holy Spirit. They will share as joint-heirs with our Lord Jesus in his kingdom. “If ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” (Gal. 3: 29) “Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”—Gal. 4:6,7

The apostle again writes, “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his

purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?"  
—Rom. 8:28-31

## **BE YE HOLY**

In his first epistle, the Apostle Peter also spoke about the glorious and precious promises of our spiritual calling, and the need for us to walk in newness of life. He said, "Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy." (I Pet. 1:13-16) Peter is pointing to the glorious hope of our High Calling, and the severe trials that are necessary to fit us for an exalted position in our heavenly inheritance. It will require casting the weights of worldly cares, hopes, and ambitions aside that we may obtain the prize of our High Calling in Christ Jesus. Holiness is the standard of righteousness, and must be diligently sought after.

## **A SEPARATED PEOPLE**

The called-out Christians constitute the consecrated church class who are separate and distinct from the rest of the world of mankind.

The Apostle Peter explained, “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar [purchased, *Marginal Translation*] 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

This special class are a New Creation—a new order of beings who are chosen of God and are heirs of his special favor. The royal priesthood’s head is our Lord Jesus, and the under priests are anointed in him for the future great work of blessing all the families of the earth. The Christ, head and body, will be the antitypical “royal priesthood” under the administration of Christ’s future kingdom. The “holy nation” of which Peter spoke are the spiritual Israelites that are now being gathered out of all nations, tongues, and people. They are a “peculiar [purchased] people” who have been called from the world into the marvelous light of God.

Further in his letter, Peter also pointed out, “Even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow in his steps.” (vs. 21) The true class of saints must all suffer with Christ even as the apostle has again stressed, “The God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.”—I Pet. 5:10

In his second epistle, Peter wrote concerning the blessed calling of God, and said, “Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord, According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the

knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”—II Pet. 1:2-4

### **NOT MANY WISE OR NOBLE**

We note God’s words which were spoken to Samuel when he spoke favorably concerning Eliab whom he believed the Lord would anoint. We read, “The LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.”—I Sam. 16:7

This is an important lesson for the called of God to contemplate. When writing to the church at Corinth, the Apostle Paul made some comparisons between the worldly wise and those who are presently being called by the Holy Spirit of God. He wrote, “Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written [Jer. 9:23,24],

He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.”  
—I Cor. 1:26-31

James tells us, “Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?”—James 2:5

### **MADE PERFECT IN WEAKNESS**

We catch a glimpse of the true character and nature of the apostle, when he wrote, “He [the Lord] said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.”—II Cor. 12:9,10

Our Heavenly Father is seeking the meek, the humble and those who are willing to learn of him and to follow the only true pattern, our Lord Jesus. “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”—Rom. 12:1,2

### **FROM GLORY TO GLORY**

The consecrated life of the true child of God who has been called from the present evil world, is one of spiritual growth and development as a New Creature in Christ Jesus. It is a lifetime work, and it is taking place under the care and

keeping of our loving Heavenly Father. Paul expressed this transformation in his letter to the Corinthian brethren, saying, “We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” (II Cor. 3:18) “As it is written [Isa. 64:4], Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.”—I Cor. 2:9,10

### **GIVE DILIGENCE**

The call to the divine nature has been the Heavenly Father’s great mystery and secret of the ages, to select a class as the bride for his only begotten Son. This class is called from the sin-sick and death-ridden world of mankind. Thus we heed the admonition of the Apostle Peter, who said, “Give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”—II Pet. 1:10,11 ■

## CHAPTER 2

# Gentiles are Called

*“Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.”—Acts 15:14*

**F**or centuries, the nation of Israel had received exclusive favor from God as recorded by Moses, when he wrote, “Thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth.” (Deut. 7:6) This is substantiated by the Prophet Amos, who also said, “Hear this word that the LORD hath spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying, You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.”—Amos. 3:1,2

In the Apostle Paul’s letter to the church at Rome, he wrote concerning Israel’s special position of divine favor. “What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.” (Rom. 3:1,2) “Oracles” are divine utterances from the Heavenly

Father, and suggest a very high level of favor. When Stephen stood and spoke before his accusers he used the same word oracles in his defense. He referred to Moses and made it clear that he had received the oracles from God's angel. "This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear. This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us: To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt, Saying unto Aaron, make us gods to go before us: for as for this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him."—Acts 7:37-40

### **EXCLUSIVE FAVOR ENDS**

This special period of favor lasted until the conversion of Cornelius, the first Gentile convert, and the receiving of the Holy Spirit by Gentiles as recorded in Acts, chapter 10.

From the account, we read in part, "While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit."—Acts 10:44,45

The nation of Israel was then cast off from favor, as proclaimed by Jesus. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even

as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.”—Matt. 23:37-39

When we look back at those days of the Early Church, we note that the heavenly call went out exclusively to the nation of Israel. As the Heavenly Father’s special people, we also observe his faithfulness in keeping his Word to the chosen ones of Israel. However, that exclusive favor brought penalties for unfaithfulness and disobedience. Thus Jesus proclaimed, “Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.”—Matt. 21:43

### **THE KEY SCRIPTURE**

The words of our featured scripture (Acts 15:14) were spoken by James in response to a problem that had arisen in the Early Church in which certain men were teaching that without circumcision after the manner of Moses, they could not be saved. (vs. 1) A dispute had arisen in the ecclesia and, because of the seriousness of the issue, Paul and Barnabas travelled to Jerusalem while declaring the conversion of Cornelius and the Gentiles along the way. They arrived there to discuss their concerns with the apostles and elders of the Early Church.—vss. 2-6

### **THE DISPUTE**

After being warmly greeted at Jerusalem, they met to consider the matter of Gentile conversion. “When there had been much disputing, Peter rose

up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Spirit, even as he did unto us; And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.”—vss. 7-11

The two prominent guests arose and, “Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me.” (vss. 12,13) He then spoke the words recorded in our featured scripture, and added, “To this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written [Amos 9:11], After this I will return, and build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.”—vss. 15-17

## **LESSONS FROM THE PAST**

The nation of Israel has a very long and colorful history. They had endured God’s chastisement long before their house was left desolate as a result of their not having accepted our Lord

Jesus as their promised Messiah. Neither had the heavenly call yet been heard. One of the more severe punishments the Israelites suffered was their seventy years of captivity in Babylon centuries before Jesus had been born. Daniel was one of those who had been taken captive at that time, and in his and other prophecies there are important factors leading up to Jesus' First Advent.

### **DANIEL'S PRAYER ANSWERED**

When Daniel realized that the determined time of Israel's captivity was nearing its end, he went to the Heavenly Father in prayer to seek his will in connection with the return and favor to the people of Israel.

God answered his prayer through the angel Gabriel, as recorded by Daniel. He wrote, "Yea, while I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation. And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding." (Dan. 9:21,22) The angel then proclaimed, "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city."—vs. 24

Daniel's contemporary, the Prophet Ezekiel, was also given information by God that revealed important aspects of his will for the Israelite nation, and which provided the key to understanding the time features. Under the guiding hand of God, the prophet wrote, "I have appointed thee each day for a year." (Ezek. 4:6) Thus Daniel understood that the seventy weeks that were determined upon Israel were not intended to be

four hundred and ninety days, but rather four hundred and ninety years. This was a very important point in connection with the Heavenly Father's ultimate plans and purposes.

## **UNDERSTANDING REVEALED**

Daniel then understood that his people would soon be delivered from their long period of captivity under Babylonian rule, and that the nation of Israel would once again be restored to exclusive divine favor. True to Gabriel's prophetic announcement that a commandment would go forth to restore and rebuild Jerusalem (Dan. 9:25), Babylon was soon conquered by the power of the Medo-Persian empire. Cyrus, the king of Persia, then made a decree to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, therefore ending their captivity by Babylon.

The particulars in connection with these exciting events concerning the children of Israel are recorded by Ezra, who wrote, "Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah [Jer. 25:12-14; 29:1-10] might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah."—Ezra 1:1,2

## **THE PROMISED MESSIAH**

When God's angel Gabriel visited Daniel, he also gave him detailed information that led up to the coming of Messiah the Prince, the purpose of

his becoming a perfect man, and coming to earth as a ransom sacrifice for the sins of the sin-sick human family. (Dan. 9:24,25) One of the first things Jesus did was to ask John the Baptist to baptize him at the Jordan River which officially began his earthly ministry. The angel's words also revealed that Messiah would be "cut off, but not for himself," and that this would occur "in the midst of the week." It was exactly three and a half years after Jesus began his ministry that he was put to death in the foretold middle of the week of seven years, thus fulfilling the angel's proclamation from God.—vss. 26,27

### **RETURNING FAVOR**

The returned favor to Israel was again exclusive, but during Jesus' ministry there were certain Gentiles who also sought blessings from our Lord. It is recorded that on one occasion he met a woman who asked for his favor. We read, "Behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us." (Matt. 15:22,23) Although she had been ignored by our Lord the woman was very persistent.

The account continues, "He answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their

masters' table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour."—vss. 24-28

The Canaanite woman was one of several Gentiles who received blessings from Jesus from time to time, but they were few in number when compared to the great majority of natural Israel who received the benefits of our Lord's teaching and healing on a regular basis.

### **I HAVE CHOSEN YOU**

This exclusive favor to Israel was shown in different ways. For example, the twelve apostles were chosen from Israel, and they became the foundation members of the Early Church. Judas, however, failed in his calling and had to be replaced. The apostles decided to make a selection of their own, but they had overlooked the fact that it was not their position to select the apostles. This appointment could only be made by the Heavenly Father and his Son Jesus. "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you." (John 15:16) Later, Saul of Tarsus, who was also a Jew, was called by the Heavenly Father to replace Judas.

At first, all witness activity was centered in Jerusalem. The eleven apostles as well as other disciples continued to reside there as Jesus had instructed them to do. "Being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence."—Acts 1:4,5

## **EXTENDING THE HEAVENLY CALL**

After the Holy Spirit of God had come upon this small group of specially called believers, many new converts began to join with the apostles in Jerusalem. The call to become members of the body of Christ required a certain amount of organized effort. Therefore, key people were motivated by the Holy Spirit to travel to other geographic locations so that the work could be extended in those areas. It was no doubt in this way that the Heavenly Father touched the heart of a certain Levite who lived on the island of Cyprus. In the scriptural account, we read, “Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles’ feet.” (Acts 4:36,37) No doubt this was God’s way of bringing Joses to Jerusalem where he could also share in sending forth the message of Truth concerning the heavenly call.

There were still many Israelites in the Holy City who had come to Judah from other places to celebrate the Passover. Some of these stayed there, and became disciples of our Lord. Among these were certain Hellenists, or Greek-speaking Jews. Later on, some of the widows of this group began to complain that they were being neglected in their share of community supplies. When word of this situation reached the apostles, they sought to correct the problem by having deacons appointed to oversee this particular service.

## **STEPHEN CALLED**

One of those deacons was Stephen, who is believed to have been a Hellenist. Because of his

humble service, God granted him new opportunities for the service of the Truth where he could exercise his talents in a more public manner. His preaching of Jesus as the promised Messiah, however, caused major confrontation with some of the other Greek-speaking Jews who were not believers. The scriptural account of his ministry, trial and sentence to death by stoning is recorded in Acts, chapters 6 and 7.

From that account we read in part, “Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people. Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.”—Acts 6:8-10

How true were the words of the Master who had foretold, “I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist. And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolk, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name’s sake. But there shall not an hair of your head perish.”—Luke 21:15-18

Concerning the young brother Stephen’s fate, we further read, “Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God. And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place,

and the law: For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us. And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.”—Acts 6:11-15

Worldly-minded men procured witnesses and bribed them to make false charges against Stephen. The official representatives of the Sanhedrin—the elders and scribes—misrepresented his words and placed him on trial to face the charge of blasphemy. But his face shone as with an angelic beauty before the council.

### **DEFENDER OF THE FAITH**

After speaking eloquently before his accusers, Stephen then said to them, “Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.”—Acts 7:51-53

Thus the “stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears” to whom Stephen spoke became full of rage and immediately demanded his life. They killed him by stoning him to death, and the young convert who had readily accepted the Heavenly Father’s call died for his faith. Stephen’s death had a severe impact upon the Master’s disciples in Jerusalem. This profound evidence of increasing persecution caused many to move away and settle in distant places. Some

left for former homelands, and others who were natives of Judea decided to go with them.

### **SCATTERED ABROAD TO PREACH THE CALL**

The heavenly call for a New Creation in Christ Jesus had taken another tragic step forward with the martyrdom of Stephen. The wonderful call was to continue to go out throughout this present Gospel Age even to our own day, and in many distant places.

“Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word.”—Acts 8:1-4 ■

## CHAPTER 3

# The Conversion of Saul

*“As he journeyed, he came near Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven: And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?”—Acts 9:3,4*

**I**n part two of this series entitled the “The Heavenly Call,” we reflected upon our Heavenly Father’s invitation to Gentile believers who were living during the period of the Early Church. In Part 3, we will address the special call to the great Apostle Paul who was a Jew, “Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee.”—Phil. 3:5

### **REPLACEMENT FOR JUDAS**

By his miraculous conversion to become a faithful follower of our Lord Jesus, Paul proved to be one of the most powerful and important voices in connection with the heavenly calling that has ever been proclaimed throughout this present Gospel Age. He had been personally and directly chosen by our resurrected and

ascended Lord Jesus to assume a major role in connection with that calling. (Acts 9:15) He also became the twelfth apostle, taking the place of Judas Iscariot who had betrayed Jesus during the closing scenes of his earthly ministry.

The apostle recounts for us some of the circumstances that surrounded this most remarkable event. He said, "It came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest."—Acts 22:6-8

## **APOSTLE TO THE GENTILES**

The Apostle Paul had been called by the Lord to address a specific group of his followers. He explained this in his letter to the church at Rome, where he wrote, "I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office." (Rom. 11:13) This proclamation was remarkable evidence of the Heavenly Father's ultimate will concerning Paul's calling. It also shows that it was God's will that the call was to be extended to those who were not Jews, and Paul was thus enabled by his ministry to carry that invitation forward to the Gentile believers.

Further to this, we learn, too, that during his ministry he was given supernatural visions, as we read, "How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter." (II Cor. 12:4) To help him carry forward the heavenly calling to the

Gentiles, he received the Holy Spirit of God that gave him the ability to speak in foreign tongues. —I Cor. 14:18

Paul's extensive and prolific writings make up a major portion of the Greek New Testament. His frequent references to the Hebrew Old Testament scriptures and types also provide us with the most spiritual and meaningful commentary on those scriptures that has ever been written. In Acts 13:9, Luke recorded that the apostle had two names, "Saul, (who also is called Paul,)" and it has been suggested that as the apostle to the Gentiles he chose to be known by his Greek name Paul, rather than by his Hebrew name Saul.

## **EVENTS RECORDED BY LUKE**

Divine providence has provided us with an important and accurate account of Jesus' earthly ministry through the detailed writings of Luke, who was also a physician. (Col. 4:14) He was a traveling companion to Paul (Acts 20:4-6; Philem. vs. 24), and by his authorship we learn most of what is now available about the life and ministry of the great apostle.

The Gospel of Luke (Luke 1:3,4) and the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 1:1) were both written by Luke. Both were addressed to Theophilus, who was evidently a Christian believer of high standing. Further to this, Luke takes up his account of Jesus' ascension (vs. 2), where he had left off in his Gospel (Luke 24:50-53), where he provides additional and important details.

## **THE MAN PAUL**

We first learn of Saul at the time when Stephen was stoned to death. The account was recorded by

Luke, who wrote, “The witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man’s feet, whose name was Saul.” (Acts 7:58) This overly zealous Pharisee had willingly participated in young Stephen’s death by guarding the garments of those who were hurling the stones that took his life.

Luke further writes, “Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.”—Acts 8:1-3

Saul had a special reason for wanting to travel to Damascus. He was not satisfied to limit his activity against members of the Early Church at Jerusalem, and he sought to pursue some of those who may have escaped. “Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.”—Acts 9:1,2

### **A BLINDING LIGHT**

While en route to Damascus with his traveling companions, he was stopped and suddenly struck blind by a brilliant light from heaven. When he realized that the one confronting him was the Lord Jesus whom he was opposing, he was greatly frightened and confused. “The men

which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.”—Acts 9:7-9

## **SAUL MEETS ANANIAS**

As a result of this very powerful and moving experience, Saul had a complete change of heart. He had lost his misdirected zeal, self-confidence, and self-assurance. At the time this incident took place, there was a disciple to whom the Lord had already appeared in a vision, and instructed him to go to Saul. “There was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.”—vss. 10-12

The prayers of Saul did not go unheeded. We learn, “Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake.”—vss. 13-16

## **ISRAEL'S FAVOR ENDING**

This episode in the life of Paul occurred about one year before Israel's exclusive favor was to end. In these words to Ananias, our Lord gave one of the first direct indications that Gentiles would be invited to share in the spiritual body of Christ. Ananias did as he had been instructed—"Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit."—vs. 17

It is of particular note that Ananias greeted the blind man Saul with the words, "Brother Saul." His eyesight was immediately restored, and he was immersed into Christ. (vs. 18) Having been without food for three days and nights, he ate and was strengthened, and stayed with the disciples at Damascus for several more days. (vs. 19) Luke then informs us, "Straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God."—vs. 20

## **TAUGHT BY GOD**

At the time the historian wrote this account, he did not give details as to how Saul obtained his very deep understanding of the Scriptures. However, we do learn some of this information from the apostle's own writings. In his letter to the Galatians, he confirms his appointment as an apostle by Jesus and the Heavenly Father. He wrote, "Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead)." —Gal. 1:1

The apostle then proceeded to write about his complete conversion from that of obeying and pleasing men and his fervent zeal for Judaism, to that of obeying and pleasing God. He proclaimed, "As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers."—Gal. 1:9-14

He then recalled, "When it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus."—vss. 15-17

The apostle speaks of God having sent him into Arabia to receive very special knowledge through direct revelations. This was a great honor and privilege, but it did not make him either proud or high-minded, as he later revealed in his letter to the brethren at Corinth. "I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church

of God.” (I Cor. 15:9) It is likely that one of the reasons why God did not instruct him to go to Jerusalem after leaving Arabia, was because of the very strong feelings that had been generated against him, and that continued to prevail there. Some still did not trust him, and might believe that he was secretly trying to entrap them in some way.

## **A HUMBLE SERVANT**

The special calling of Paul and the direct revelations that were given to him by our Lord Jesus and the Heavenly Father are confirmed again in his letter to the Corinthians. He acknowledged that anyone who had undergone experiences such as he had might have a tendency to boast about them. He answered that possible question by saying, “Is it necessary to boast? It is not profitable indeed, but I will come even to visions and revelations of the Lord. I know a man, in Christ, who above fourteen years since—(whether with a body, I know not; or without a body, I know not; God knows;)—such a one suddenly conveyed away to the Third Heaven. And I know this very man, (whether with a body, or without the body, I know not: God knows;) That he was suddenly conveyed away into paradise, and heard indescribable things spoken, which it is not possible for a man to relate. Respecting such a person I will boast; but respecting myself I will not boast, unless in my weaknesses. For if I should desire to boast, I shall not be unwise; for I will speak the truth; but I forbear, lest anyone should impute to me more than what he sees me to be, or what he hears from me. And in order that I might not

be unduly elated by the transcendancy of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me—an Angel adversary—that it might afflict me; so that I should not be much exalted.”—II Cor. 12:1-7, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*

## **SPECIAL REVELATIONS**

The scriptural account does not tell us how long Paul was in Arabia receiving these special revelations, but it was perhaps several months. After this remarkable experience, we learn that he returned to Damascus, and “straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.” The reaction of the unbelieving Jews in Damascus was one of amazement, knowing that Saul had come there before to take the believers in Christ as his prisoners. No one, however, could refute his powerful logic when preaching of the resurrected Lord Jesus.

Not all who heard him preach appreciated his message, and a plot was underway to silence him. “After that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him.” (Acts 9:23) When the brethren learned of their plot, they helped the apostle to escape and make his way back to Jerusalem. However, the apostles and disciples at Jerusalem were still afraid of Paul, thinking that he had entered in among them to spy.

## **PAUL GOES TO JERUSALEM**

Most of the brethren at Jerusalem found it difficult to accept Paul as a true brother in our Lord Jesus. However, there was one particular disciple whose name was Barnabas who realized that Paul had been truly converted to Christ, and saw the great apostle for what he truly was.

He had been convinced that his remarkable experiences had come from no other source but the Lord himself. Barnabas knew that the matter with the other brethren at Jerusalem had to be resolved, and he took the opportunity to speak with him. He then took Paul to the apostles and insisted that they learn the truth of the matter firsthand and of the complete change that had occurred in his life.

In the scriptural account, we read of this most interesting experience in the life of the Apostle Paul. "Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus." (vs. 27) Afterward, the apostles and disciples did accept Paul, and welcomed him to become one of them by entering into their activities and speaking in the name of the Lord Jesus.

### **HELLENISTS SOUGHT HIS LIFE**

As Paul began his ministry, his preaching brought him in contact with the Hellenists who also began plotting against him. "He spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him. Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus. Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, were multiplied."—vss. 29-31

The word "Grecians" in this scripture means Hellenists, and refers to those Jews who spoke

Greek. Paul's logical and persuasive preaching of the Scriptures caused a disturbance among some of them. This was not unusual, because problems among them had occurred before. Luke records, "In those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration." (Acts 6:1) As was the case at Damacus, they too plotted against Paul and sought ways to take his life.

### **PAUL RETURNS HOME**

The disciples in Jerusalem learned of the Hellenist's plot to kill Paul, and for his own safety they persuaded him to return to his home in Tarsus, which was a city in Asia Minor in the province of Cilicia. They provided for his safe escort by way of Caesarea, a port city from which he was able to sail to Tarsus. He remained there for a period of time, perhaps two years. Luke wrote, "Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, were multiplied."—Acts 9:31

### **GLADLY WAS THE WORD RECEIVED**

After that time, the Lord caused a respite from the severe persecution that had been directed against his special people which had existed especially since the time of Jesus' crucifixion. This was no doubt very beneficial to the members of the Early Church, and it helped them in many ways. They then became more acceptable in Israel's society, and employment was more

readily obtainable to them. As a result, the communal arrangement that had been tried for a time became less important and soon ended. It is noteworthy that there is no further mention in the Scriptures concerning this type of shared close-living social structure, either continuing or being revived among those of the brethren living at that time.

The main interest of Luke, the historian, in writing an account of the Acts of the Apostles was in connection with the spiritual growth and development of the followers of our Lord. He recorded for us information that large numbers of believers were added to the church at that time. "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." (Acts 2:41) The increase in the numbers of brethren in the church came from all the ranks of Israel, and showed how God's blessed High Calling was yet exclusively upon that nation, even as the last prophetic week of their favor was rapidly coming to an end.

### **ISRAEL'S FAVOR ENDS**

The nation of Israel's special time of favor ended even as it had been foretold centuries earlier by their prophets. Among God's prophets was Amos who wrote, "Hear this word that the LORD hath spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying, You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."—Amos 3:1,2

When Jesus' ministry was drawing to a close, he taught an important lesson concerning the

fig tree that soon withered away. Matthew records, “When he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away. And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away!”—Matt. 21:19,20

### **ISRAEL’S HOUSE LEFT DESOLATE**

Our Lord Jesus proclaimed that Israel’s house would be left desolate soon after his crucifixion and earthly ministry had been completed. He said, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.”—Matt. 23:37-39

### **PAUL’S LABOR NOT IN VAIN**

The great apostle became very prominent among Jesus’ followers, and especially those who had heard the heavenly call and had responded by being baptized into Christ. As a replacement for Judas, it is evident that he rose above some even of the original twelve apostles, some of which are rarely named outside of the apostolic lists. He wrote, “By the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”—I Cor. 15:10 ■

## CHAPTER 4

# Many Heard and Believed

*“The hand of the Lord was with them:  
and a great number believed, and turned  
unto the Lord.”—Acts 11:21*

**D**uring this present Gospel Age, a wonderful invitation to share with our Lord Jesus in the great restoration work of his future kingdom has been extended to those with hearing ears throughout the world. Under Christ’s righteous rule, the sin-sick and dying human family will be lifted up and given an opportunity to obtain the right to life that was taken away because of father Adam’s disobedience to the divine law.

### **THE EARLY CHURCH**

In the days of the Early Church, those who went to other areas to preach this message of the heavenly call, went to the Jews only. “Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.” (Acts 11:19) The record states, “Some of them were men of

Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus.”—Acts 11:20

Because of intense persecution, many Jewish brethren from Jerusalem had gone to other places, and they helped spread the message of Truth. Sometimes their Gentile neighbors heard the message and, as their interest in the Gospel increased, some of them also became believers and began associating with their Jewish brethren.

### **BELIEVERS AT ANTIOCH**

The scriptural record indicates that Gentile believers in Antioch were among those who had heard the message of Truth. The apostles who were in Jerusalem learned of this, and Barnabas was selected to go there. He had previous association with Greeks when he lived in Cyprus, and no doubt understood their language. When he arrived, he found a mixed congregation of Jewish and Grecian brethren who were rejoicing together in the knowledge of God’s plan and heavenly calling, and were eager to learn more.

Barnabas set about to assist them as much as he could in further study and joint fellowship. “He was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.” (vs. 24) As a result of his valuable help, the church in Antioch began to prosper and, through their witnessing activities, many others were also added to the church. As Barnabas witnessed this increasing interest in the Truth by Gentile brethren, he recalled what the Lord had declared about Paul’s special ministry to the Gentiles. He believed that Paul would have a vital interest in the call to the Gentiles, and

he set out for Tarsus to find him. "When he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch."—vs. 26

## **BARNABAS AND PAUL**

Barnabas and Paul were selected as elders in the church at Antioch, along with three other brethren whose names we learn from Luke's scriptural record. "Now there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul." (Acts 13:1) As teachers, these brethren had very diverse backgrounds, and all came from distant places.

Barnabas had lived at one time on the island of Cyprus; Saul came from Tarsus in Asia Minor; Lucius was from Cyrene, a city in northern Africa, in what is now Libya. It is not known with certainty where Simeon came from, but since the name Niger which means black and is associated with him, he evidently came from the African continent. Manaen was from Jewish royalty, being a foster brother to Herod the Tetrarch, and most likely originated in Jerusalem.

During this time, a famine was experienced in this area of the world which severely affected the church members who were living in Jerusalem, and who were already quite poor. When the congregation at Antioch learned of their plight, they took up a collection and sent it by the hands of Barnabas and Paul to help their friends in

Jerusalem. No doubt this was of much help to the brethren. This mission also afforded Barnabas a chance to give a firsthand report of the witness work which was being accomplished among the Gentiles, and he emphasized that it was prospering very well. It also gave him an opportunity to better acquaint the brethren at Jerusalem with Paul and his important part in the work.

### **GENTILES HEAR THE CALL**

The church at Antioch wanted to expand their witness activity, and decided to send Barnabas and Paul to sow the seeds of Truth in outlying countries. Thus, as the ministry in Antioch continued, God, through the Holy Spirit, said, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away."—Acts 13:2,3

Concerning Paul's principal ministry we read, "The Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel." (Acts 9:15) However, before he went to the Gentiles, he usually visited the synagogues in an attempt to convince his kinsmen that Jesus was the Messiah. This was the general pattern established by Barnabas and Paul, even though their mission was for the Gentiles as well.

### **ISRAEL'S UNBELIEF**

This special interest in his own people is revealed in his letter to the brethren at Rome. "I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow

in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh: Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.”—Rom. 9:1-5

The apostle knew that the prophecies foretold the unbelief of his people, and that God would not find a sufficient number among them to complete the body of Christ. He had a strong desire for their salvation which caused him to write, “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.” (Rom. 10:1) Again he writes, “I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office: If by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them.”—Rom. 11:13,14

Israel’s unbelief would not be turned away until their Messiah would come at his Second Advent, and Paul was able to say, “I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.”—vss. 25,26

## **TITUS A FELLOW HELPER**

One of those who later became a travelling companion to Paul was Titus. He is not mentioned in the Book of Acts, but we know from Paul’s

other writings that Titus accompanied the apostle and Barnabas when they visited other ecclesias. For example, we learn from the scriptural account, “We have sent with them our brother, whom we have oftentimes proved diligent in many things, but now much more diligent, upon the great confidence which I have [he hath, *Marginal Translation*] in you. Whether any do inquire of Titus, he is my partner and fellowhelper concerning you: or our brethren be inquired of, they are the messengers of the churches, and the glory of Christ.”—II Cor. 8:22,23

We also read, “When we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears. Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus.” (II Cor. 7:5,6) The apostle made clear, “Therefore we were comforted in your comfort: yea, and exceedingly the more joyed we for the joy of Titus, because his spirit was refreshed by you all.” (vs. 13) When Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem, the Jewish brethren were given a good example of the Gentile believers who had heard the heavenly calling, and were now members of the body of Christ.—Gal. 2:1-3

In his letter to Titus, Paul reveals his special love and feeling of close relationship that he had for him. He wrote, “To Titus, mine own son after the common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Savior. For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee.” (Titus 1:4,5) We thus learn that toward the close of Paul’s ministry he

sent Titus to the island of Crete to help the brethren. Although specific information is lacking, he evidently remained there for a considerable period of time and served as an elder in the congregation.

## **ANTIOCH OF PISIDIA**

On the Apostle Paul's first pilgrim journey, he and Barnabas made their way to Antioch of Pisidia. This city was located in the interior and mountainous region of Asia Minor, which distinguishes it from Antioch the capital city of the Roman province of Syria where the Truth had been preached before. Many Jews were living in Pisidian Antioch where they had established a synagogue.

From the scriptural record, we read, "When they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down. And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on."—Acts 13:14,15

Some of those who were present to hear the apostle's message of Truth were very interested in what he had to say and wanted to hear more. "When the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath. Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God. And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God."—vss. 42-44

## **JEWS WERE ENVIOUS**

Some of the Jews became very upset when they saw so many people coming to hear the message of Truth, and they began to oppose and blaspheme Paul as he was speaking to them. “Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.” (Acts 13:46) Paul then referred them to the words of their own prophet, when he continued speaking, “ So hath the Lord commanded us, saying, [Isa. 49:6] I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.”—vs. 47

The apostle was making an important connection, and we turn again to Isaiah’s prophetic words where we read, “Thus saith the Lord, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages.”—Isa. 49:8

## **THE ACCEPTABLE TIME**

This present Gospel Age is the “acceptable time” for this wonderful work of the heavenly calling to proceed, and to help find a people for God’s name. James said, “Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.” (Acts 15:14) When this very special day of salvation has been completed and the full number of the Christ has been brought together, the Heavenly Father will then bring the whole world into

covenant-relationship with himself under the terms of the New Covenant. These members are now preparing themselves for the future work of its glorious administration.

## **REJOICING GENTILES**

The Gentiles who were listening to Paul speak that day in Antioch of Pisidia, pointed to the fact that no longer was the message concerning the Truth confined to the Jews or their synagogue. “When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed. And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region.”—Acts 13:48,49

The Gentiles to whom the Lord was extending the heavenly call understood and believed the wonderful message of Truth. However, the opposing Jews convinced the authorities to expel Paul and Barnabas from the area, but not until the new disciples in Pisidian Antioch were established in the knowledge of the Truth, and had received evidences that the Holy Spirit of God was working among them. We can only imagine the sense of joy that Paul and Barnabas felt when they left that area and recalled the many blessings they had received from ministering to these new brethren in Christ.

## **THE CALL WENT TO ICONIUM**

From Luke’s record, we learn that Paul and Barnabas set out again on their journey. “It came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed.” (Acts 14:1) The

unbelieving Jews in Iconium opposed these two servants of God and the message of Truth that they were proclaiming. They enlisted the support of unbelieving Gentiles to the point where the whole city was divided against Paul and Barnabas, which created an intense situation. They even devised a plot to stone the servants of God, but with much courage they remained for several weeks to continue preaching the Word before they were forced to leave. In the meantime, they did much to help the new disciples of Christ at Iconium to become established in the faith.

### **AT LYSTRA**

Concerning these two men of God, we read, “They were ware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about: And there they preached the gospel.” (Acts 14:6,7) While they were in Lystra a very strange experience occurred concerning a man who had been lame from birth, and had never walked. The Apostle Paul healed the man because he recognized that he had great faith. The people who witnessed this wonderful miracle were so overcome by their emotions that they began believing that Barnabas was Jupiter and Paul was Mercury—gods who had come to them as men. As the excitement grew, the local priest of Jupiter arranged to offer a sacrifice to them as if they were gods. Paul and Barnabas had a difficult time trying to stop the proceedings, and to convince the people that they were just ordinary men like themselves. They rent their mantles and spoke to the crowd, explaining to them about the true God who made heaven and

earth, and finally restrained the crowds from offering their sacrifice.—vss. 8-18

### **PAUL LEFT FOR DEAD**

In the meantime, the Jews of Antioch and Iconium joined forces and followed Paul and Barnabas to Lystra. They convinced the people that they were imposters and began stoning Paul. There are no details given of the incident, but no doubt as the stones began to hit Paul he recalled the circumstances of Stephen's stoning over which he had presided. We learn that the apostle had evidently entered into a state of semi-consciousness, was dragged outside the city's walls and was left for dead.—vs. 19

### **TAKEN TO DERBE**

“Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.” (vs. 20) It must have been seen as a miracle to the bystanders who watched as Paul regained his consciousness and returned with the disciples, probably to one of their homes. There he partially regained his strength, while the disciples discussed a plan for getting him away safely. When he could travel again, Barnabas, and perhaps some others, took him to the neighboring town of Derbe. There, perhaps, one of the families took the apostle in, and nursed him back to health in their home. It was no doubt the home of Timothy's family who resided there, and of whom Paul speaks so highly in later writings, where we read, “Then came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a

Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek: Which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium.”—Acts 16:1,2

### **PAUL’S LOVE FOR TIMOTHY**

In one of the apostle’s letters to Timothy, we learn just how much he loved this young brother. He begins with a beautiful salutation to Timothy which expresses his appreciation for him and his example of faithfulness to the Lord. “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus, To Timothy, my dearly beloved son: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day; Greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy; When I called to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also. Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands.”—II Tim. 1:1-5

Through this letter, we learn of the great respect that Paul had for Timothy’s mother and grandmother, who were each consecrated in Christ and both of whom he knew. His letter also reveals some of the very painful experiences that he had endured when he was first brought to their home. “Thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at

Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.” (II Tim. 3:10-12) At the time of the apostle’s first visit to the home of Timothy’s family he was likely but a very young lad. He would have thus been aware of some of Paul’s special trials and persecutions, and particularly the care given to him when he arrived there from Lystra.

### **SUFFERING ADVERSITY**

It is evident that the Adversary, Satan, had tried again to suppress God’s purpose concerning the heavenly call, and the spreading of the Truth message to those who had a hearing ear. We recall Paul’s commission as a special servant of God. “The Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake.” (Acts 9:15,16) Again we read, “That we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.”—Acts 14:22

The apostle was learning that those who faithfully follow Christ Jesus must suffer persecution. He knew that all the brethren would experience persecutions as well, and that they too might learn this same lesson. Those who had tried to kill Paul must have followed up by also persecuting the brethren living in these same cities.

If Paul had been killed by the stoning at Lystra, God’s wonderful plan for the heavenly calling would have suffered a major setback to the preaching efforts in Asia Minor. Barnabas

was spared this stoning experience perhaps because he was the older man of the two, and it would have been much more difficult for him. Paul's youth and vigor helped him to recuperate more rapidly.

Some might believe that such an experience which almost cost the apostle his life, would have persuaded Paul to avoid those cities where there was such severe opposition to the Lord's work. But he could not let these newly found brethren struggle on their own when they needed his assistance. In each of these visits, he and Barnabas were forced to leave prematurely because of persecution. Paul's love for these brethren grew as he witnessed their consecration and devotion to God. The stoning incident had weakened him physically, but the success in finding so many interested brethren required that more attention be given to their needs. After staying awhile and finding many disciples in Derbe, he and Barnabas started back, retracing their steps to Lystra, Iconium, and Antioch, confirming the Truth to the disciples and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and encouraging them to endure what persecutions would come upon them.—Acts 14:21,22 ■

## CHAPTER 5

# Paul Has a Vision

*“A vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing and appealing to him, and saying, Come over to Macedonia and help us.”—Acts 16:9, New American Standard Bible*

The divine order and ultimate purpose in preaching the Truth and making known the invitation for the heavenly calling is shown by the manner in which the Apostle Paul’s ministry was being directed by our Lord Jesus. This was manifest to the faithful followers of our Lord Jesus whose hearts had been opened to the special invitation during this present Gospel Age to share as members of the spiritual body of Christ in our Lord’s future kingdom. We will consider some of the remarkable events that were taking place at that time, and that immediately preceded the vision given to Paul.

### **FORBIDDEN BY THE HOLY SPIRIT**

Luke, the historian, was a companion to the apostle. He carefully recorded the unusual circumstances that eventually led to what Paul saw and heard as a result of the Lord’s direct intervention in his ministry. He writes, “They passed through the Phrygian and Galatian region, having been

forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia; and after they came to Mysia, they were trying to go into Bithynia, and the Spirit of Jesus did not permit them; and passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas.”—Acts 16:6-8, *NASB*

It is apparent from the scriptural account that Paul’s intentions were to preach the message of Christ to as many prospective brethren in Asia Minor, Phrygia, Galatia, Bithynia and wherever else he could possibly reach. However, we learn that in some manner that is not explained to us, the Spirit of Jesus did not allow him to continue with his ministerial plans. Although there were no details given to him at that time, he would soon receive a vision as to what our Lord’s instructions were. He would learn that there were some of the Lord’s people in Macedonia, and they were waiting anxiously to hear about the heavenly call as it was being proclaimed by the apostle to the class of believers in Christ Jesus.

### **DIRECTED BY THE LORD**

It is important to realize from this brief record that the Gospel message was not to be preached everywhere indiscriminately in an effort to find hearing ears for the Truth. This dramatically indicates that the Truth work was being carefully directed by the Heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus. Paul had no way of knowing that there was a serious need for him to go to Macedonia and to minister to them. This redirection of his service to the Truth was revealed to him only when he and his companions had reached the western side of Asia Minor, and had arrived at the port city of Troas. It was there that he experienced the vision, and where he saw a man of

Macedonia entreating him to come there to help them.

At a later time, the apostle was again permitted to go into the other areas of Galatia, Phrygia, and Bithynia, but at this particular time it was necessary for him to help those who were then being prepared by God to receive the invitation of the heavenly call, and to become members of the body of Christ.

### **COME AND HELP US**

Luke's record confirms, "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." (vs. 9) The apostle wasted no time in preparing himself to make the journey as requested. "After he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavored to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them. 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, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days."—vss.10-12

### **GOD'S WILL MANIFEST**

There are various instances in the Scriptures where certain servants of God received visions, some of which were given for assurance of divine favor. On one occasion, we read, "After these things the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." (Gen. 15:1) At another time it is recorded, "Israel took

his journey with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices unto the God of his father Isaac. And God spake unto Israel in the visions of the night, and said, Jacob, Jacob. And he said, Here am I. And he said, I am God, the God of thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation: I will go down with thee into Egypt; and I will also surely bring thee up again: and Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes.”—Gen. 46:1-4

At other times, visions were more specific and gave direction in the doing of God’s will. This had occurred earlier in connection with the Apostle Paul’s experiences. After the glorified Jesus had appeared to Saul of Tarsus, Saul had a vision in which he saw a man named Ananias lay his hands upon him so that he might recover his sight. (Acts 9:10-12) In the context of this same chapter, we read about Ananias being directed to the very house where Saul was staying in Damascus. (vss. 11-19) When the apostle later went to Corinth, he preached to both Jews and Gentiles; but, when opposition arose among them, he decided to preach only to the Gentiles. (Acts 18:1-6) God spoke to reassure him. “Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.”—vss. 9,10

## **THE JOURNEY TO MACEDONIA**

Having received the special instructions from the Lord, Paul and his travelling companions prepared to leave for Macedonia. (Acts 16:10-12) From the record, we learn that Luke accompanied the apostle on his journey. In proof of this, we

note in the above scripture text where the historian states, “we endeavored to go” (vs. 10), “we came with a straight course” (vs. 11) and “we were in that city abiding certain days.” (vs. 12) From this point in time it becomes apparent that Luke became a more active member of the apostle’s missionary activities, and the Heavenly Father wanted him to record Paul’s ministry.

When they arrived in Philippi—the chief city of Macedonia—they found that there was no synagogue, but instead there was an open park area by a river where the Israelites could gather for prayer. It was not unusual for Jews to use such places for devotional services. A similar place was used for prayer by Jesus when he was in Galilee. “It came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.”—Luke 6:12

## **HEARTS WERE OPENED**

Paul and the others made their way to this riverside gathering place on the Sabbath Day and found certain women of Israel assembled there for worship. We read, “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.”—Acts 16:14

We are immediately impressed by the fact that Lydia’s heart had already been opened by God. He is the one who opens the heart to understand and appreciate his word of Truth, and Lydia was one of those who had especially been seeking him. She and other members of her family had formed the nucleus of a small ecclesia in her city. “When she was baptized, and her household, she

besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.”—Acts 16:15

Being given to much hospitality and no doubt yearning to learn more about the Truth, Lydia invited Paul and his companions to stay in her house during their visit at Philippi. Paul was hesitant to accept her kind invitation, not wanting to impose upon her, but she encouraged them and opened her home to them. In the meantime, the apostle continued to go to the place by the river to preach to others who were seeking knowledge of the heavenly call and to learn more about having a place in the body of Christ. We are not told how many interested people responded to the apostle’s message, nor their names.

### **WOMAN WITH A SPIRIT**

As Paul walked to the place of prayer one day, he was met by a woman who had powers of divination. She was able to foretell events because she was possessed by a familiar spirit, and her masters had profited a great deal from her special powers. (vs. 16) “The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation. And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour.”—vss. 17,18

The spirit quickly obeyed the apostle, thereby making this maidservant of little use to her owners since she had lost her peculiar powers. The masters of the slave girl were so angry that they seized Paul and Silas. They took them before

the magistrates of the city, and accused them of creating a disturbance, and of preaching customs that were unlawful for Romans to observe.

“The multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.” (vss. 22-24) These two faithful servants of God were not able to sleep that night because of the pain of their wounds. They had been thrown into the “inner prison” or dungeon which was usually reserved for the vilest of criminals. There they were confined by stocks which further added to their discomfort.

### **A MIRACLE AT MIDNIGHT**

Luke records, “At midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one’s bands were loosed. And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here.”—vss. 25-28

The jailor had been awakened by all of this commotion, and saw the open prison doors and assumed that all the prisoners had escaped. Fearful of the consequences, he drew his sword and was ready to kill himself. But Paul encouraged

him to not harm himself. All the prisoners were still there, no doubt due to Paul and Silas who had convinced them all to stay. The jailor asked for lamps; and then in gratitude fell down before Paul and Silas, subsequently leading them out of the prison and into his home, which was probably nearby the prison.

### **THE JAILOR AND HIS HOUSEHOLD**

The jailor then asked what he must do to be saved. Paul and Silas answered him by saying, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” (Acts 16:31) The jailor must have overheard an earlier discussion between these two servants of God and some of the other prisoners on the matter of being saved. Otherwise it is not likely that he would have asked this particular question.

The apostle and Silas convinced the jailor and his entire family to accept the provisions of the heavenly call. “They spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.”—vss. 32-34

### **BLESSINGS AT MACEDONIA**

Paul and his companions were surely rejoicing in the wonderful manner in which they had been directed to make their pilgrimage to Macedonia. They were richly blessed by travelling to Philippi where they received Lydia and her household’s warm welcome. They were again unexpectedly

blessed in their experience with the jailor and his family who desired to know the Truth and God's wonderful plan of salvation for the human family.

The next morning the magistrates of Philippi sent word to the jailor to release Paul and Silas, but Paul refused to leave. He contended that he was a Roman citizen who had been beaten and imprisoned unlawfully, and that he had been condemned without a court trial. There was great fear on the part of the magistrates when they heard this, and they went to entreat Paul and Silas to leave their city in peace.

The scriptural record described what happened. "The serjeants told these words unto the magistrates: and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans. And they came and besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city. And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed." (vss. 38-40) The two faithful servants of God eventually complied, but not before they had finished their preaching activity in that particular city. The jailor and his family were now new members of the congregation, along with other brethren who are mentioned by Luke, but not named.

## **THE CHURCH AT PHILIPPI**

We learn a little more about some of these brethren and their names through the letter that the apostle wrote to the church at Philippi. It was written when he was a prisoner at Rome, and of which he makes mention. "So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace

[Caesar's court, *Marginal Translation*], and in all other places; And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear."—Phil. 1:13,14

His letter included greetings to all of the bishops and deacons who were at Philippi. (vs. 1) Paul said to them, "Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God upon every remembrance of you." (vss. 2,3) Paul referred to some of the brethren, and we thus learn who a few of them were. He said, "Therefore, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved. I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord. And I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life."—Phil. 4:1-3

### **THE SISTERS AT PHILIPPI**

It is interesting to note that Paul included the names of some of the more prominent sisters who were members of the ecclesia at Philippi. He evidently singled them out because of his deep appreciation for their loving spirit for the Lord, as well as for their special and untiring service to the other brethren in the ecclesia. During Paul's day, the general position and respect for women in Macedonia was quite different than that found in other places where he had visited. At that time, monuments had been erected to women by public bodies in Macedonia. As well, women were also permitted to hold property.

When Paul and his companions arrived in Philippi, we learn from Luke's record that they first sat down in the park area to speak with a group of women who had gathered there for prayer on the Sabbath. (Acts 16:13) It was Lydia who soon separated herself from the rest of the women and identified herself. She was one of the sisters whose heart the Lord Jesus had especially prepared for the apostle's arrival. (vs. 14) Later on, it is recorded that it was to Lydia's home that the apostle and his companions went, after they had been released from prison. It was also from there that they departed Philippi, and set out on their way to Thessalonica.—vs. 40

It is suggested, therefore, that the apostle, when writing his letter to the church at Philippi, included a special greeting in which he said, "I intreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women which laboured with me in the gospel." This may have been addressed to Lydia, and he wanted to be especially remembered to her in his letter written to the congregation there. We note that Paul also sent Christian greetings to several of the sisters, and included their names when he sent his letter to the church at Rome. (Rom. 16:1-15) We learn that the apostle had dictated his thoughts to Tertius who in turn wrote the letter, and who also sent his greetings to the brethren at Rome.—vs. 22

### **EPAPHRODITUS**

In this letter to the church at Philippi, Paul also remembered Epaphroditus. He was a very dear brother, and had made the long journey to Rome with a gift to the apostle from the Philippian brethren. He reveals the great love

and appreciation that he had for this brother in Christ and said, “Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction. Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity. Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account. But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God.”—Phil. 4:14-18

## **RECOLLECTIONS OF MACEDONIA**

Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke had spent many weeks preaching the Truth and helping to establish the ecclesia at Philippi. A congregation had been started there, and the brethren were learning much about the heavenly call and other important subjects in relation to the wonderful Word of God.

This is revealed to us when he wrote to the church at Thessalonica. Paul spoke of their also having assisted the new brethren in Christ who were at Macedonia. “Ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Spirit: So that we 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.” (I Thess. 1:6-8) The apostle

again said, “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.”  
—I Thess. 2:1,2

While Paul and his companions were at Thessalonica they found a synagogue, which they attended on the Sabbaths. There he reasoned with the Jews from the Scriptures for a few weeks. (Acts 17:1,2) His preaching was fruitful in encouraging several of them, both men and women, of the heavenly call and the wonderful words of Truth. They soon began meeting together as an ecclesia in Jason’s home. (vs. 5) The message concerning the wonderful invitation of the heavenly calling was being sent out as designed by our loving Heavenly Father for his ultimate blessing of the whole human creation, and the promise that all of the willing and obedient will be lifted up to the joys of Christ’s kingdom. ■

## CHAPTER 6

# The Heavenly Call is Heard at Athens

*“Now those who escorted Paul brought him as far as Athens; and receiving a command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible, they left.”—Acts 17:14, New American Standard Bible*

**F**rom the scriptural record, we learn that it was necessary for the Apostle Paul and his companions to suddenly leave his newly found brethren at Thessalonica and Berea in order to escape mob violence and threats to his life. He was escorted to safety by his friends to a port city where he then boarded a ship bound for Athens. As he departed, he left word for both Timothy and Silas to join him at Athens when they had finished their ministerial activities in Thessalonica and Berea.

### **PAUL’S CHANGE IN PLANS**

In Luke’s scriptural record, we learn about some of the important and interesting details that led up to the apostle’s sudden change in plans, and that led to his escape to Athens. Soon after arriving at Thessalonica on his

pilgrimage, the Jews began to be threatened by the apostle's ministry in that area. "The brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews." (Acts 17:10) The church at Berea was composed of serious students of the Truth. "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."—vs.11

Paul was overjoyed with the new brethren in Christ at Berea because of their keen interest and love for the Truth. This could be seen in their spiritual growth as revealed in the historian's account. Reading further, we note, "Many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few. But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people."—vss. 12,13

## **SILAS AND TIMOTHY**

Although Paul departed from Berea, Silas and Timothy remained there. "Then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still. And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed."—vss. 14,15

From the apostle's other writings, we learn that Timothy dwelt at Thessalonica for a time. This is recorded in his first letter to the Thessalonians, where he said, "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 fellow-labourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith.”—I Thess. 3:1,2

### **THE AFFLICTIONS OF CHRIST**

Preaching the wonderful word of Truth and of the heavenly calling during this present Gospel Age was a cause for much affliction to those who carried forth its message during the time of the Early Church. The apostle addressed this point in his letter, as we further read, “That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto. For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know. For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain.”—vss. 3-5

### **TIMOTHY’S GOOD REPORT**

The young brother Timothy’s presence with the church at Thessalonica was a blessed one, and he carried back to Paul a very good report of his experiences. “Now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you: Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith: For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord. For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God.”—vss. 6-9

## **ATHENS A CULTURAL CENTER**

While waiting in Athens for his companions to arrive, Paul was not idle. “Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him.” (Acts 17:16,17) Athens was the most celebrated city in ancient Greece, and it was especially noted as a learning and cultural center. This included studies in the arts, sciences, music and philosophy. A few centuries before, when Alexander the Great conquered the world, and during the height of the Grecian Empire, it was known as the capital of the world. Although it was forced to yield that distinction to Rome, it still retained its reputation as the cultural center of the then known world. Many outstanding men came from Athens, including Aristotle, Plato, Socrates, Sophocles, and Demosthenes.

## **SEARCHING FOR GOD’S PEOPLE**

Athens, however, did not immediately appear to be part of the Apostle Paul’s plans to search out a people for God’s name. He found himself there mainly because persecution and the providence of the loving Heavenly Father had driven him there. He probably did not expect to stay there any longer than was necessary, and as soon as Silas and Timothy joined him there he planned that they would leave.

Here among the most learned men of the ancient world, there were three thousand idols. It has been said that no matter where anyone would stand in Athens, his eyes would range

over innumerable temples, altars, and various statues of gods. Of all the cities in the world, Athens boasted of having the most learned and cultural activities, and yet it was the most idolatrous. Religion was exploited in stone, silver, and gold.

When Paul went to the synagogue, it is recorded that he reasoned with the Jews, but there are few details written about his visit there. It is not indicated whether he found either acceptance or violent opposition. Perhaps the Jews had come considerably under the influence of worldly wisdom, and that he found little by way of response to the Truth. Not only did he attempt to reason with the Jews, but he also sought out people who were religious, successfully finding them in the marketplace. As the apostle could speak Greek fluently, he was able to reason effectively with many people, informing them of Jesus and the heavenly calling extended to believers in Christ during this Gospel Age. Luke records some of what took place at these meetings. "Disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him." —Acts 17:17

### **ATHENIAN PHILOSOPHERS**

We read, however, "Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babblers say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection."—vs. 18

Men in all parts of Athens soon heard about the Apostle Paul's presentations of new ideas

and thoughts that they were not familiar with. He was assisted in his efforts to spread these glad tidings by the customs of Athenians themselves, who spent their leisure time in discussing and deliberating over the newest thoughts on philosophy. We are informed that this was their major form of entertainment. "They took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is? For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean. (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.)"—vss. 19-21

## **GODS AND GODDESSES**

Throughout ancient civilizations there were numerous deities. The pattern among each was similar, but each god or goddess had a different function that mainly consisted of control over the natural elements of the earth. Unknown to Paul, a law had been passed in Athens that prohibited the introduction of any more new gods. It seems that the three thousand they already had were more than enough.

Perhaps one of the reasons for adopting the new Athenian law which attempted to limit the introduction of any more gods was that the number they already had was so large. When Paul's preaching relating to the resurrection of Jesus reached the ears of the Epicureans and Stoicks—two major groups of philosophers—they decided to charge him with violation of this law and brought him before the Areopagus, which was the supreme court of Athens.

The Greek deities were thought to live on the top of Mount Olympus, or sometimes in the air above it. However, they were free to wander about the world at will. Although Zeus was the chief ruler, there were many other gods and goddesses. Some of the well-known were Hera, Apollo, Artemis, Ares, Hermes, Aphrodite, Athena, Poseidon, Demeter, and Persephone.

## **MYTHOLOGY**

It is thought by some that much of this mythology may have had its origin during the time that the angelic creation materialized and came to earth in the days before the Flood. During that early time in the earth's history, some of these mighty beings took on human form and intermarried with the daughters of men. The scriptural record explains, "It came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, That the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose."—Gen. 6:1,2

## **MIGHTY MEN OF OLD**

This unauthorized union produced a hybrid race, and it also contributed to much evil in the earth during Noah's time. "There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown. And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."—vss. 4,5

Greek mythology even refers to this, speaking of gods coming and going to and from the earth, marrying fair maidens and of their offspring performing mighty deeds. The number of deities increased with mythology, as these events of Noah's day began to be told and were being handed down from one generation to another. This is a possible indication that mythological worship had its beginning with the fallen angels of Noah's day.

### **PAUL'S SKEPTICAL AUDIENCE**

Apostle Paul was a proclaimer of strange gods, and they wanted to know what his new doctrine was. (Acts 17:18,19) However, their statements about Paul were not complimentary and they called him a "babbling." It seems more likely that they wanted to prevent him from speaking in public and found an opportunity in what they thought was a violation of the law.

Paul's teachings were contrary to theirs, and he had introduced an entirely new idea of there being a resurrection from the dead. His audience no doubt realized that their law forbidding new gods could then be used to prevent him from further preaching these strange new truths. We are not told what the penalty would have been if the Areopagus had decided that the apostle was guilty, but whatever the prospect may have been he was not in a very friendly environment.

### **TEMPLES, ALTARS AND STATUES**

While looking around Athens, Paul had examined many of the inscriptions on the various altars, temples and statues, and noticed that one of them was dedicated particularly to an

“Unknown God.” Perhaps in their concern to not overlook any deity, the Athenians had erected this special altar in their honor. It was around the existence of this distinctive altar to the unknown god, that Paul wisely took advantage in developing his message in response to the people of Athens.

### **THE UNKNOWN GOD**

From Luke’s account of what actually happened when the Apostle Paul rose to preach the wonderful message from God’s Word, we read, “Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars’ hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.”—Acts 17:22,23

In Paul’s opening remarks, it is interesting to note that he referred to the men of Athens as being “too superstitious.” The word superstitious is derived from a Greek word meaning, “a demon or pagan god.” [*Vine’s Dictionary of New Testament Words*] The apostle thus made the important connection with the giants or mighty men of Noah’s day who had not kept their former estate and had married the daughters of men. This produced a hybrid race of people that were destroyed during the flood.

### **THE TRUE GOD**

The apostle then quickly turned his attention to explaining the meaning of the true God, the supreme ruler of the universe. He emphasized that they could never make a likeness of him with

gold, silver, or precious stones and place him in a man-made temple. He explained to them, “God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands.”—vs. 24

Paul proclaimed to the people of Athens that the mighty Creator that he worshipped had created all life upon earth and that all life was dependent upon him for their existence. He continued, “Neither is worshipped with men’s hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation.”—vss. 25,26

The apostle spoke of the loving and eternal Heavenly Father, and that “they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device.”—vss. 27-29

## **THE APOSTLE’S LOGIC**

It is interesting to note the great tact and logic that the Apostle Paul used in presenting his message, and how well he was able to use a form of teaching that was accepted as truth by them. Upon this foundation of truth he built the further structure of God’s wonderful plan and design for his human creation. He did this by quoting from the writings of their own Greek poets.

As Paul stood there being judged by the supreme court of Athens, he reminded his listeners that they will come under judgment too. He then said, “The times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.”—Acts 17:30,31

### **ONLOOKERS MOCKING**

The great Supreme Creator of the universe, of whom he spoke, has appointed a day in which he will judge all the inhabitants of the world, and has appointed his own judge for this task. Paul proclaimed that the proof of this lay in the fact that this judge had been raised from the dead. “When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter. So Paul departed from among them. Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.”—vss. 32-34

Paul had made it clear to his listeners that he was not introducing a new god, but was speaking about a God that they already worshiped as the unknown God. It was not necessary for the court to hear more of his defense, so he was free to go. When the crowd took over with its shouts and disorder he then left.

### **THE LORD’S CALLED ONES**

Athens was not a place that the Apostle Paul had particularly planned to visit, but it seems

reasonable to conclude that the Lord overruled in his circumstances to take him there. His peculiar trials helped to put him in contact with several of the Lord's people who were being called. Only two of these are named, and their names appear only here in the Scriptures. One of these was Dionysius, a judge of the Areopagus, and the other was a woman called Damaris. These newly called brethren adhered to Paul and he became their teacher, and established a congregation there.

Although the Scriptures do not provide us with much information concerning them, it is possible that Paul may have spent several weeks in Athens while waiting for the arrival of Silas and Timothy. They had been very busy helping the brethren in Berea and in Thessalonica, and did not come as quickly as Paul had anticipated.

It is necessary to go to sources outside of the Scriptures to obtain information about our Christian brethren who were living in Athens. It has been said that Dionysius, the most prominent of these, was immersed and later became an elder in the congregation. According to traditional historical writings he is known as the first bishop of Athens, and later suffered martyrdom. Our Heavenly Father has often shaped the circumstances in the lives of those he calls to be his people so they can hear his Word and to be brought into the body of Christ. He knew in advance about Paul's detour to Athens where a few were waiting to learn about God's plan and the wonderful features concerning the heavenly call. ■

## CHAPTER 7

# The Last Pilgrimage

*“I will return again unto you, if  
God will.”—Acts 18:21*

**T**he Apostle Paul spoke these words of endearment to the Jews who were gathered at the synagogue in Ephesus. He had stopped there for a brief visit at the completion of his second pilgrim journey, but could not stay there long because he was on his way to keep the feast with the brethren at Jerusalem. From there, he made his way home to Antioch and the brethren. (Acts 18:19) It is believed that the apostle stayed at Antioch for about a year before setting out again on his third and last pilgrimage. At that time, he rejoined his colaborers—Timothy, Silas, and Luke—in witnessing the word of Truth and the heavenly call to the scattered people of God.

### **THE HISTORIAN’S RECORD**

In Luke’s historical record of the beginning of this third trip, he provides the only reliable although brief information that we have. “After he had spent some time there, he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples.” (vs. 23) Paul had proclaimed the wonderful word of

Truth to some of the new brethren in Christ in this same area while passing through on his previous journeys. At that earlier time, the Heavenly Father had not permitted him to go into certain areas of Asia and particularly to the city of Bithynia.—Acts 16:7,8

At this point in Paul's experiences, the Apostle Peter provides additional reference concerning some of these brethren. In his first epistle, he wrote, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied."—I Pet. 1:1,2

On this third missionary journey, we learn that Paul went throughout these regions revisiting and ministering to the churches that he had helped establish there on his previous trips. Although the province of Galatia was not specifically mentioned as having been visited by Paul and Barnabas on their earlier journey, we recall how persecution and the threat of stoning had caused these two brethren to flee from Iconium in Lycaonia into the surrounding country. Lycaonia bordered on Galatia, and Derbe was located on the Galatian border. It seems reasonable therefore that the surrounding country of which Luke had made mention no doubt included parts of Galatia. We read, "They were ware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about: And there they preached the gospel."—Acts 14:6,7

## **ASIA MINOR IN ANCIENT TIMES**

Portions of the central region of Asia Minor were referred to as Galatia, including not only the province by that name, but certain parts of other provinces as well. Galatia derived its name from the Gauls who had invaded and conquered the area in the third century B.C. Later, the Romans conquered it and Galatia then became a Roman province. When the territory was made subject to Rome, it was much larger in scope than the old Galatia had been. Thus the churches at Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe of Lycaonia were called churches of Galatia. These were all established by the Apostle Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey.

## **THE JUDAIZERS**

These churches were also being visited by Judaizing teachers from Jerusalem who were questioning Paul's ministry and authority, and were seeking to convince some of the new brethren in Christ to accept and observe the Mosaic Law instead of Christ. Paul referred to this troubling problem in his letter to the church at Galatia. His message of Truth was based on faith in our Lord Jesus, "knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified."—Gal. 2:16

Again, Paul proclaimed, "I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which

I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.”—vss. 19-21

## **BRETHREN OF THE EARLY CHURCH**

On this third journey, the apostle wanted to go to Ephesus again as he had promised. Near the end of his previous pilgrimage, he had stopped there but could only stay a short time, and he was now on his way to keep that promise.

By that time, the Word of God and the message concerning the heavenly calling to the church had spread to other regions, and congregations now existed in the provinces of Phrygia and Lydia. The apostle had to pass through this area to reach Ephesus, and so he stopped to visit the brethren in those places. Antioch, Colosse, Laodicea, and Hierapolis were cities in that region where classes had been previously organized.

We learn about some of these ecclesias in his letter to the Colossians. He addressed his letter, “To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (Col. 1:2) In this letter, we also read, “Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God. For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis.”—Col. 4:12,13

Again we note Paul’s salutation, when he wrote, “Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea,

and Nymphas, and the church which is in his house. And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.”—Col. 4:15,16

Several brethren from these classes were also mentioned by Paul. One of them was Epaphras who was associated with the Colossian church. We read, “Ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ. (Col. 1:7) Tychicus came from that same area and was also mentioned by the apostle. “All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you, who is a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellowservant in the Lord.”—Col. 4:7

## **PAUL ARRIVES AT EPHESUS**

From Luke’s record, we read, “It came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus: and finding certain disciples.” (Acts 19:1) The upper coasts which the historian referred to included the province of Lydia where the congregations of Smyrna, Philadelphia, Sardis, and Thyatira were located. These churches were not specifically mentioned by Paul, but were used by the Apostle John in Revelation as examples of different periods of the church’s history during the present Gospel Age.

When Paul arrived in Ephesus, he was introduced to some new disciples of the Lord and he asked them whether they had received the Holy Spirit. Their response was that they had never even heard of the Holy Spirit. This led him to ask them about the nature of their baptism. “It came about that while Apollos was at Corinth,

Paul having passed through the upper country came to Ephesus, and found some disciples, and he said to them, Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? And they said to him, No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit. And he said, Into what then were you baptized? And they said, Into John's baptism."—vss. 1-3, *New American Standard Bible*

The apostle then proceeded to speak of the baptism into our Lord Jesus. "Paul said, John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in Him who was coming after him, that is, in Jesus. And when they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking with tongues and prophesying. And there were in all about twelve men."—vss. 4-7, *NASB*

### **AQUILA, PRISCILLA AND APOLLOS**

During the intervening time of Paul's absence from Ephesus, we learn from the scriptural record some interesting details about Aquila and Priscilla, and their study of the Scriptures with Apollos who was a Jew. No doubt their discussions included a more complete understanding of the doctrine of baptism. Luke writes, "Now a certain Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, came to Ephesus; and he was mighty in the Scriptures. This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he was speaking and teaching accurately the things concerning Jesus, being acquainted only with the baptism of John; and he began to speak out boldly in the synagogue.

But when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. And when he wanted to go across to Achaia, the brethren encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him; and when he had arrived, he helped greatly those who had believed through grace; for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, demonstrating by the Scriptures that Jesus was the Christ.”—Acts 18:24-28, *NASB*

### **THE CHURCH AT EPHEBUS**

During Paul’s previous visit to Ephesus, there apparently was no ecclesia yet established in that city. The scriptural record does not give information concerning whether some of the new members of the church at Ephesus had become interested in the Truth through the ministry of Apollos. They may have arrived there from Judea, but they gave evidence that they were true disciples of Jesus. They had been immersed a second time with the correct knowledge and meaning of baptism, and they also manifested the true spirit of our Lord.

When the apostle returned to Ephesus, his doctrines soon began to arouse opposition, and the other disciples left the synagogue to begin meeting in a place known as the School of Tyrannus. “He went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God. But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus. And this continued

by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.”—Acts 19:8-10

### **THE SCHOOL OF TYRANNUS**

Tyrannus had been a sophist and a teacher of Greek philosophy. When he was converted to Christianity, he offered his school as a meeting place where both Gentiles and Jews could study and worship together. These gatherings, which continued for several years, attracted the attention of many people throughout the region of Asia as recorded by Luke the historian. Perhaps Paul met there with the Ephesian brethren while he stayed at the home of Aquila and Pricilla.

### **CASTING OUT DEMONS**

Through his preaching and performing of miracles, Paul became well known throughout the city and surrounding area. Ephesus was a prominent Greek city—a city of the Ionians in Asia Minor which was located across the Aegean Sea from the mainland of Greece. It was a seaport, with crossroads of traffic and trade, and was known as the gateway of Asia Minor. In addition to the commercial traffic, religious pilgrimages also took place there. The city was distinguished for its temple to the heathen goddess Diana. It was a place of black magic, witchcraft, and sorcery and, as a result, the apostle had many occasions for casting out evil spirits.

Several itinerant Jewish exorcists were in Ephesus at that time. They had seen the apostle's success in casting out evil spirits and they attempted to do likewise. “Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call

over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so.”—Acts 19:13,14

The response from the evil spirit was recorded by Luke and is most interesting. “The evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye? And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.”—vss. 15,16

Soon this event became publicized throughout the city and it had a profound effect upon the people, especially those who were involved in the magic arts. “This was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.”—vss. 17-20

### **DEMETRIUS INCITES DISTURBANCE**

At the entrance of the harbor of Ephesus stood an immense statue of Artemis, which was known as Diana by the Romans. She represented the goddess of fertility and was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. For the great festivals held in the month of Artemision, which corresponds to our months of March and April, visitors would come to Ephesus from all areas of

Asia Minor to give homage to her. Luke records an episode that took place at the hands of Demetrius who did not like what the Apostle Paul was teaching. He was telling the people that they should not worship their goddess of Diana or any other man-made image, and Demetrius wanted to put a stop to this teaching.

“A certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen; Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth. Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands: So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshipeth.”—vss. 24-27

Demetrius found a hearing ear in support of his contention. “When they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians. And the whole city was filled with confusion: and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul’s companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre.” (vss. 28,29) The situation quickly became unruly, “And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not. And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure himself into the theatre.”—vss. 30,31

As the uproar increased, great confusion arose. "Some therefore cried one thing, and some another: for the assembly was confused; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together. And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defence unto the people. But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians."—Acts 19:32-34

### **ORDER REESTABLISHED**

Luke has recorded some interesting details that emphasize the very high position of honor that the goddess of Artemis occupied in Ephesus, and the role she played in the lives of its citizens. The Apostle Paul's untiring ministry and voice of Truth was surely overruled for the benefit of the true followers of Christ Jesus in that city.

We read, "When the townclerk had appeased the people, he said, Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter? Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly. For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess. Wherefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies: let them implead one another. But if ye inquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly. For we are in danger to be

called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse. And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly."—vss. 35-41

## **SPIRITUAL GROWTH AT EPHESUS**

The apostle had kept his promise to return to visit the brethren at Ephesus, and this pilgrimage would prove to be the last time that he would see them face to face. The pure message of Truth and the knowledge of the heavenly calling had been faithfully proclaimed to the ecclesia by Paul and his companions. The local church thus prospered and grew, and they were even able to send out many elders to serve other smaller churches and isolated brethren in the area.

The spiritual growth of the Ephesian church is reflected in our Lord's words, recorded by the revelator, "I know thy works, and thy labor, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: and hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted."—Rev. 2:2,3

## **PAUL'S FAREWELL TO EPHESUS**

In his final message of farewell, Paul reflected on his experiences and left them with these words of encouragement. "Now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and

to all the flock, over the which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.”—Acts 20:25-28

In his message, he cautioned the brethren to exercise greater vigilance in their walk of faith. “I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.”—vss. 29-32

With these words of encouragement, admonition and warning, the Apostle Paul left the church at Ephesus to continue the final phase of his voyage which lay ahead. ■

## CHAPTER 8

# Testifying to the Grace of God

*“Now, behold, bound in spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions await me.”—Acts 20:22,23, New American Standard Bible*

**T**hese sobering words were spoken by the Apostle Paul and were recorded by Luke, who was a historian and a companion to the apostle on his many journeys. Paul spoke these words to the Ephesian brethren who had gathered together to bid him farewell as his third pilgrim journey was drawing to a close.

He realized that troublous times were indeed awaiting him when he would leave his dearly beloved brethren at Ephesus and make his way to Jerusalem. Yet he willingly put his life and ministry in the hands of the loving Heavenly Father, and said, “None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more.”—Acts 20:24,25

## **RECOLLECTIONS**

The apostle then reflected on his ministry and labor of love, and reminded the brethren at Ephesus, “I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.” (vs. 27) He then brought their attention to the fact that they had been given responsibility of being overseers in their new Christian life, and that they should help to further establish their fellow members in Christ Jesus. He also admonished them to be on guard against false brethren who would seek to draw them away from the Truth as they had been taught. “Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.”—vss. 34,35

## **THE PARTING SCENE**

Luke has recorded the apostle’s departure, saying, “When he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all. And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul’s neck, and kissed him, Sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship.”—vss. 36-38

These parting words of Paul must have been very sobering to the members of the church at Ephesus, but especially for the elders of the

ecclesia. They realized that the responsibility for this congregation of the Lord's people would now be on their shoulders. They could no longer look forward to any more future visits by Paul to help resolve any of their problems. They knew that the only strength they could derive from the apostle any more would be through his wonderful example of faithfulness under trial, and the depth of his teachings of the Truth.

## **VALUABLE EXPERIENCES**

Preaching the glad tidings of the Truth provided Paul and his companions with valuable experiences which helped them all to become more faithful in their consecrated walk in "newness of life" with our Lord Jesus. (Rom. 6:4) We also see his wonderful Christian growth that is often reflected in the letters that he wrote to the various churches which he helped to establish. Many of these were written after he had gone through much suffering for the cause of Truth. We believe that all of his experiences were especially directed by the Heavenly Father.

This same spirit of love and care for the spiritual interests of his brethren is also shown when he wrote to the brethren at Thessalonica. He encouraged them by saying, "Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more. For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour."—I Thess. 4:1-4

## **SEEKING GOD'S WILL**

As the apostle's ministry was drawing to a close, we believe that the Heavenly Father had already begun to prepare him for his final witness for the Truth, and one which would be accomplished under very different circumstances than any he had previously encountered. The events that were to occur, and the way in which he would respond to them would ultimately affect his growth as a faithful follower of Christ Jesus. He no doubt sensed that his life would be in danger in his service to the Heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus. We catch a small glimpse from the scriptural account that has been recorded. Luke wrote, "After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome."—Acts 19:21

The apostle knew through the Holy Spirit that his presence in Jerusalem would ultimately lead to his arrest, many fiery trials, and finally the end of his earthly life. The brethren would never see his face again. He knew perhaps more deeply than any of the other apostles that when the especially appointed leaders of the Early Church had all finished their courses in death, the Adversary would create many problems among them, and ambitious leaders would arise to draw them away with new and false teachings.

## **JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM**

From the scriptural record, we learn some of the interesting details of Paul's journey. "It came to pass, that after we were gotten from them, and

had launched, we came with a straight course unto Coos, and the day following unto Rhodes, and from thence unto Patara: And finding a ship sailing over unto Phoenicia, we went aboard, and set forth. Now when we had discovered Cyprus, we left it on the left hand, and sailed into Syria, and landed at Tyre: for there the ship was to unlade her burden.”—Acts 21:1-3

When the ship docked for a seven-day layover at Tyre to unload its freight, Paul and his companions took advantage of the opportunity to meet with the disciples who lived in that city. When they learned that the apostle was travelling to Jerusalem, they tried to dissuade him from going there because they feared what would happen to him. The church in that city was composed mainly of Jews, many of whom had fled from Judea because of persecution, and they were keenly aware of the hazards that awaited them there.

### **STOPOVER AT TYRE**

At the end of the seven-day stopover at Tyre, the entire congregation gathered to bid the apostle farewell. “When we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way; and they all brought us on our way, with wives and children, till we were out of the city: and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed.” (vs. 5) The whole group knelt down on the shore before the ship, praying, and embracing the travelers before returning sadly to their homes. It was truly a scene of loving concern, tender care, and the deep faith in our Lord. They had developed much in the fruits of the Holy Spirit and in the Truth.

## **VISITS AT PTOLEMAIS AND CAESAREA**

Paul and his traveling companions traveled on to Ptolemais and stayed one day with the brethren there. The next day the apostle and his companions left for Caesarea where the group stayed with Philip. Several years earlier Philip had been selected by the church at Jerusalem to be one of seven deacons. (Acts 6:5) From the scriptural record, we learn that he was now married and the father of four daughters, all of whom were consecrated to the Lord and in active service for the Truth.

The congregation at Caesarea was originally composed of Jews only, but after God's exclusive favor to Israel ended, Cornelius and his family, as well as other Gentiles, were brought into the family of God. The account tells us that Cornelius lived in Caesarea (Acts 10:24), but no mention is made of him during this final visit of Paul. It is believed that Philip also made Caesarea his home.—Acts 8:39

## **AGABUS' MESSAGE**

Paul and his companions stayed in Caesarea for several days, "As we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus." (Acts 21:10) God used a prophet who delivered a clear message to Paul and the others as to what they might expect at Jerusalem. "And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Spirit, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem."—vss. 11,12

The reaction to Agabus' proclamation was very emotional. The brethren of Caesarea, and those traveling with Paul, pleaded with him that he should not go to Jerusalem. They wept because of the difficult trials that lay ahead for the apostle. However, Paul knew that the Lord was arranging circumstances for his faithful servant. Those who were traveling with him now understood that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things.

"Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus." (vs. 13) His companions realized they could not change Paul's plans. "And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done. And after those days we took up our carriages, and went up to Jerusalem. There went with us also certain of the disciples of Caesarea, and brought with them one Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge."—vss. 14-16

## **AT JERUSALEM**

Paul and his traveling companions were warmly greeted by the brethren when they came to Jerusalem. Soon after their arrival Paul went to see James and the other apostles and elders in the local ecclesia. He presented his firsthand report in connection with the Lord's blessing upon his ministry and extending the message of the heavenly call. The brethren glorified God when they heard this report. However, some Christians living in Jerusalem had heard rumors about the apostle and that he was teaching that Jews should not observe the Law. Although the rumor was not true it had to be settled.—vss. 15-21

## **RUMORS ABOUND**

Since the time of Pentecost, the church at Jerusalem had grown very much in size. The great majority were Jews who had been raised to observe the Law and to give it great respect. The apostles were concerned that the faith of many of these might be affected if they believed these false rumors about Paul's view concerning the Law. They suggested that Paul demonstrate his regard for the Law of Moses by joining with four brethren who had taken a Nazarite vow. "Them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law."—Acts 21:24

The ceremony took seven days and was concluded by shaving the head and offering appropriate sacrifices. Near the end of the days of purification, some Jews from Asia came to the Temple to worship. "When the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him, Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place."—vss. 27,28

## **RESCUED BY ROMAN SOLDIERS**

They incited still other Jews to seize Paul and charged that he was preaching against the Law. They said that he had defiled the Temple by bringing Gentiles into it, a charge based on

erroneous conclusions that Paul had been seen with a Gentile. As the mob increased they began to beat him. Except for the intervention of the Roman commander and his soldiers, Paul might have been killed.

The scriptural account describes the scene. "All the city was moved, and the people ran together: and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple: and forthwith the doors were shut. And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them: and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul. Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains; and demanded who he was, and what he had done."—vss. 30-33

When Paul had been put in chains, the commander tried to learn who he was and what he had done. As the crowd cried "away with him" the apostle was taken to the castle in the custody of the soldiers to protect him. (vss. 36,37) As he was about to be taken into the castle, he spoke to the commander in Greek. He assured him he was not to be confused with a notorious rebel leader, but that he was a law-abiding citizen of Tarsus. He requested and was granted permission to speak to the people.—vs. 39

## **A MARVELOUS TESTIMONY**

Paul appealed to the people as he stood on the castle steps. The mob grew quiet as he began to speak to them in Hebrew. He gave them a brief account of his background, emphasizing his zeal for the Law and his persecution of the first

Christians. Then he proceeded to give a detailed description of his encounter with the glorified Jesus and how this had completely changed his life. He told how he had gone to Jerusalem, desiring to tell everyone of the great change that had taken place in his life.—Acts 22:1-21

## **A ROMAN CITIZEN**

In spite of his bonds, the apostle had accomplished what he had never been able to do when he was free. He had been given the opportunity of witnessing to a multitude of Jews in Jerusalem. Whether any that heard him changed their course of life as he had done we are not told, but it is possible that a few may have been among the Lord's people who heard Paul speak on that day.

“They gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live. And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air, The chief captain commanded him to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be examined by scourging; that he might know wherefore they cried so against him. And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?” (vss. 22-25) When the chief captain heard this he asked Paul how he had acquired his citizenship, and Paul answered him that he was “free born.” (vs. 28) The commander became fearful when he learned this. His earlier order to bind Paul was not lawful if he were a Roman, so he was set free.

However, the Apostle Paul was kept in custody for his own protection by the Roman governor

for two years. As a Roman citizen, Paul had made an appeal for an audience before the Caesar in Rome, and it was necessary that he remain in custody until his case had been presented to Caesar and arrangements could be made for his departure from Jerusalem. (Acts 25:10-12) It is interesting that he had earlier spoken of his intention to go to Rome after his visit at Jerusalem. (Acts 19:21) It is doubtful that he could have ever foreseen the circumstances that would make this journey possible.

### **JOURNEY TO ROME**

Luke recorded the occasion, “When it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus’ band. And entering into a ship of Adramyttium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia; one Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us. And the next day we touched at Sidon.” (Acts 27:1-3) God’s wonderful providence was surely manifest to Paul and his companions when they arrived at Sidon. The centurion who was in charge of Paul and the other prisoners graciously allowed the apostle and his fellow travelers to visit a group of brethren who resided in Sidon. “Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself.” (vs. 3) The apostle had been held in custody for two years, and it surely must have been a source of much joy to share fellowship again with the brethren at Sidon.

When it came time to continue on their way toward Rome it was getting too late in the season for travel in that part of the world. After a windy

journey they arrived at the port city of Lycia where they boarded a ship that was headed for Italy. When they had made their way to Crete they took refuge at Fair Havens where they waited for the storms to cease. Paul warned the ship's owner that it was too dangerous to continue, but they set sail again. The strong winds blew them off course, and it became necessary to toss cargo overboard to help lighten the vessel.

### **GOD'S ANGEL ASSURED PAUL**

As the situation grew more desperate, the apostle spoke to those who were on board the ship. "After long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss. And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship."—Acts 27:21,22

The Heavenly Father had sent his angel to reassure the apostle that he would be delivered safely to Caesar, and that there would be no loss of life on the vessel. "There stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island."—vss. 23-26

The situation grew increasingly desperate, and the ship ran aground, crashed into the rocks and broke up. However, all who were on board the stricken vessel made their way safely to shore even as the angel of God had said. They found

themselves on the island of Melita, and they were treated very kindly by the local inhabitants. (Acts 28:1,2) Paul and his companions wintered on the island, during which time the apostle healed many who were sick and had a variety of diseases.

## **ARRIVAL IN ITALY**

We learn about the final portion of the voyage from Melita to Italy from the scriptural record. We read, “After three months we departed in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux. And landing at Syracuse, we tarried there three days. And from thence we fetched a compass, and came to Rhegium: and after one day the south wind blew, and we came the next day to Puteoli.”—vss. 11-13

Having arrived at Puteoli they were greeted by a group of brethren with whom they stayed for seven days of fellowship. They later traveled on to Rome where other brethren also came to meet him. The centurion then delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard. (vs. 16) Soon after his imprisonment, Paul got in touch with Jewish religious leaders in the city and explained why he had been brought to Rome. He also told them that he had been falsely accused by the Jews at Jerusalem.

## **A FINAL MESSAGE OF TRUTH**

The Scriptures do not record the events as they unfolded in the final days of Paul’s life. It is believed that he was brought before Nero and condemned to death. From his letter to Timothy, he wrote, “I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a

good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me.”—II Tim. 4:6-9

We do know that Paul used his declining physical strength in proclaiming the wonderful message of Truth to those who had an ear to hear the Heavenly Father’s invitation and heavenly calling in Christ Jesus. The apostle was one of the most powerful voices ever heard during the Early Church era. His tireless achievements during the many years of his extensive ministry were centered around his activity in establishing new classes of consecrated followers of Christ Jesus in many widespread places. He served a critical role in sending forth the message of Truth to a small but select class of believers in Christ Jesus often under very difficult circumstances. As we contemplate his zeal and faithfulness to this great cause, an often overlooked but equally important work was also being accomplished in the spiritual growth and development of his own consecrated walk in newness of life, and as a faithful member in the body of Christ.

“Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.”—Acts 28:30,31 ■

## CHAPTER 9

# Sustained by the Hand of God

*“Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.”—Acts 14:17*

**A**fter the death of the Apostle Paul, the message proclaiming the heavenly calling to the foot-step followers of our Lord Jesus entered a new phase. No longer did the many classes that he had established and the numerous consecrated brethren in Christ have the opportunity of his Christian fellowship, powerful ministry and wise spiritual counsel. The members of the Early Church would go on to endure much in the way of experience in the name of their beloved Savior. This would include physical suffering and abuse at the hand of those who would seek to corrupt the glorious message of Truth.

However, our loving Heavenly Father was not about to abandon his specially called people, or to leave himself without a true witness in the world. We know that God has sustained his dearly loved and cherished faithful ones in all ages and

places, even during the darkest period of the Middle Ages.

It was the blessed apostle who proclaimed, "I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew. Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying, Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life." (Rom. 11:1-3) We are thus assured by the great apostle who then pointed out that God's hand was all powerful and sustaining. He continued, "What saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal. Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace." (vss. 4,5) Many precious stones have been gathered out during the long centuries of the present Gospel Age call to "The Christ." (I Pet. 2:5) They will reflect the marvelous grace and glory of the loving Heavenly Father under the administration of Christ's future kingdom of righteousness.

## **THE GOSPEL AGE CHURCH**

For nearly two thousand years, the heavenly call has gone out to true and honest-hearted followers of our dear Lord Jesus. During all of this time, there has been a common faith and purpose among the consecrated believers in Christ. In his short epistle Jude addressed this very point, when he wrote, "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto

you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” (Jude 3) The called ones in Christ have willingly accepted the invitation to present their lives in complete consecration to the Heavenly Father. He has sustained them by the power and enlightenment of the Holy Spirit of Truth and his loving hand throughout this very long and difficult period of time.

Thus have the faithful upheld the Truth at great cost, and with much long-suffering and patient endurance. They have been upheld by the wonderful promises of God. “Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.” (Rom. 15:4) “Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.”—Rev. 14:12

## **FALSE CHRISTS WOULD ARISE**

When Jesus’ earthly ministry was drawing to a close, he spoke about false Christs that would arise to deceive the consecrated people of God. He was well aware of the fierce trials that yet awaited his little flock of believers. “Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.” (Matt. 24:23,24) Jesus knew the power of Satan and the degree of evil that he was capable of inflicting upon his faithful followers.

In his second epistle to the church at Thessalonica, the Apostle Paul also cautioned the brethren

to not be deceived by those who did not have the proper spirit of the Truth, and would in turn spread false teachings by either word or action.” (II Thess. 2:2) He then proclaimed, “Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.” —vss. 3,4, *New American Standard Bible*

Paul was warning the brethren that the spirit of apostasy was already manifest and in their midst. “The mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. And then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.”—vss. 7-10, *NASB*

The Gospel Age was in its early stages, and the apostle warned of an apostate system that would deceive many and cause a great falling away from the true faith. However, he explained that it was necessary that this should take place to test the followers of Christ before the promised day of the Lord should come at the end of the age. Errors would creep in, and selfishness and pride would replace the wonderful spirit of the Lord. The message of Truth and the invitation to share in Christ’s future kingdom would be set aside as the worldly spirit intensified.

## THE REVELATION

The Book of Revelation is our Lord's last message to the members of the church—to those who would respond to the heavenly calling during this present Gospel Age. The Apostle John was given a series of visions that contained elaborate symbols which revealed our Lord's wonderful care and guidance for his consecrated people. In chapters two and three, the Revelator was given an overview of the churches' experiences, trials, and spiritual growth which at that time lay nearly two thousand years into the future. The mighty hand of the Heavenly Father would sustain his people with the Holy Spirit of Truth, and lead them to victory in spite of the continued opposition of Satan. "I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night."—Rev. 12:10

The Scriptures pointed forward not only to certain historical events that were about to take place, but they also served in a prophetic sense to foreshadow the spiritual growth and development of the church of Christ during their walk in newness of life. As these visions were about to be revealed to John, he was told, "Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter; The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches."—Rev. 1:19,20

## **JESUS' MESSAGES TO HIS PEOPLE**

During John's day, there were seven churches that existed in the seven cities that are named in Revelation 1:11. However, it seems clear that they served to portray a grander meaning, and were intended to represent important aspects of the church's spiritual growth during its long and difficult history over the two thousand years since his day. In a larger sense, these experiences indicate valuable lessons for all the church class throughout this present Gospel Age. The admonition of our Lord Jesus was, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." (Rev. 2:10) Although these inspiring words were directed to the church at Smyrna, they represent the hope of each one of the entire consecrated body of Christ throughout this Gospel Age. The number "seven" also stands to mark these churches' spiritual development in a very special way. In the Book of Revelation, the number "seven" appears many times, including seven seals, seven trumpets, seven plagues, and other references to the number seven, and it is also found in many other places in God's Word.

### **FIRST MESSAGE**

The first message in this group of seven was addressed to the Early Church at Ephesus. (Rev. 2:1-7) It was sent by our Lord Jesus who holds the "seven stars in his right hand," and who walks "in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks." (vs. 1) The word Ephesus means "first" or "desirable" and describes the spiritual condition of the church during the Apostle Paul's day. He was a wonderful servant in promoting the Truth to the Early Church, and he had received

visions from God. In this message to Ephesus, the brethren living at that time were commended for their labors of love, patient endurance, and for hating the deeds of the Nicolaitans—those who were growing weary of God’s arrangements for conducting the affairs of his people, and favored having a clergy class to rule over them. Those at Ephesus were also chastised for leaving their “first love” for the Lord, and were encouraged to repent from their error lest the light of their candlestick be removed from them.—vss. 4,5

A most blessed promise was given to the faithful members of the church at Ephesus. “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.”—vs. 7

## **SECOND MESSAGE**

Our Lord Jesus was “the first and the last,” and the one who was “dead” but now “is alive,” and he addressed this second message to the church at Smyrna. (Rev. 2:8-11) The word Smyrna means “bitter” and points to the bitter persecutions suffered by those who loved the Truth and were responding to the glorious heavenly calling that went forth during that early period in the church’s history. The Apostle John was a special servant to the Lord’s people during that period.

The Scriptures speak well of the brethren who were living at that time. In respect to them, we read, “I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.” (vs. 9)

The brethren were suffering much for the Truth, yet they proved faithful to the High Calling they had received in Christ Jesus. These events took place during the cruel reign of Emperor Diocletian. The account also tells us that these faithful followers of Jesus were accused by false brethren who are described as being from the synagogue of Satan because of their defiling spirit.

Again, the brethren were given a blessed promise that if they were faithful to their High Calling they would receive a great reward. “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.”—Rev. 2:11

### **THIRD MESSAGE**

When the Lord addressed the third church at Pergamos (Rev. 2:12-17), he informed them that he possessed a “sharp sword with two edges.” (vs. 12) The name Pergamos suggests “earthly elevation.” It applies to that period in the church’s earlier history that saw a spiritual decline and growing relationship between members of the church and the powers of the state. They were losing the spirit of their first love for the Truth. From the scriptural account, we read, “I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan’s seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.” (vs. 13) A few faithful brethren were opposing the rise of apostasy, and had thus earned the title, “my faithful martyr.”

We learn that some were beginning to fall under the influence of the doctrine of Balaam,

and this was leading to spiritual immorality and the committing of fornication, which was totally unacceptable to the Heavenly Father. They also were chastised for turning to the teachings of the Nicolaitans, which had been an earlier warning to the brethren at Ephesus. It was leading them to the development of a clergy class and its lordship over the Lord's people.

The faithful at Pergamos also received a special promise. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that received it."—vs. 17

#### **FOURTH MESSAGE**

The fourth message was sent by the Son of God, who has eyes like a "flame of fire," and feet "like fine brass," to the church at Thyatira. (Rev. 2:18-29) The word means "sweet perfume of sacrifice" and describes the spiritual condition of the few humble members of the church who were living during the period of the Middle Ages. It was a time that may be compared to the multiple evils of Jezebel, a self-proclaimed prophetess who sought to seduce the servants of God to commit fornication.

Although tested severely, the spiritual life of the truly consecrated child of God was accepted by the Lord as a sweet perfume of sacrifice, even at the time when the apostate system reigned with complete power and authority with the state. Jesus told them, "I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first."—vs. 19

Blessed promises were held out to those faithful members of the little flock who rejoiced in their heavenly calling. “He that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star.”—Rev. 2:26-28

### **FIFTH MESSAGE**

The message to the church at Sardis was sent by the one who had the “seven Spirits of God and the seven stars,” to those who had a name that had life yet appeared to be dead. (Rev. 3:1-6) The word Sardis means “to strengthen that which remains” and points to the very darkest hour of the Dark Ages. It was a time when the voice of Truth was nearly snuffed out. The few remaining faithful ones were aroused to the changing scene of the time, and the work of the early reformers who were challenging the apostate system.

“Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.”—vss. 3,4

Because of their faithfulness to the Truth they were given wonderful promises for their steadfast courage. “He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.”—vs. 5

## **SIXTH MESSAGE**

Jesus sent the sixth message to the church at Philadelphia. (Rev. 3:7-13) He was holy and true, and had the “key of David.” He could open and no man could shut, and he could shut and no man open. (vs. 7) The meaning of the word Philadelphia is “brotherly love” and points to a new era of reformation and liberty that was transpiring. It was also reflected in the spiritual life and growth of the followers of our Lord Jesus. Centuries of bondage, confusion, and decay were being challenged, and a new time of revival and restoration was being made available in the study of the Scriptures.

The expression “I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it” suggests new liberties for thought, and an opportunity to bear witness to the Truth that had previously been denied. (vs. 8) Jesus said, “Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.”—vs. 10

The rewards for faithfulness are promised from the storehouse of God’s promises. “Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name.”—vs. 12

## **SEVENTH MESSAGE**

The seventh and last message to the people of God was sent by Jesus who was the “Amen,” and

who was the “faithful and true witness” of God. He was the “beginning of the creation of God.” He sent it to Laodicea (Rev. 3:14-22), which means “justice for the people.” It marks the Second Presence of our Lord following his promised return, and the watchers who were on hand were led by the ministry of Pastor Charles T. Russell. For well over a century, the message of Truth has been spread worldwide to countless numbers of the Lord’s people during the closing years of this present Gospel Age and its harvest.

The church at Laodicea was chastised for being lukewarm. They were “neither cold nor hot,” and believed themselves to be “rich.” Neither did they recognize their state of spiritual weaknesses and would be spued out of the Lord’s mouth as a consequence. (vss. 15-17) Thus they were admonished to seek after heavenly riches and to anoint their eyes with the wonderful “eyesalve” of God’s Word and its unfolding riches. (vs. 18) In connection with our Lord’s message they were told, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”—vs. 20

In each of the seven messages from the Lord to his followers, they were promised a rich reward for their faithfulness. To the church at Laodicea, we read, “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.”—vs. 21

## **MEAT IN DUE SEASON**

The Lord’s “knock” as a part of his message to the Laodicean church is one of the evidences of

his presence at the end of this Gospel Age. It aroused his followers to a fresh, new study of the Scriptures, and especially those prophecies pointing to the promised return of our Lord, and the closing features of the Gospel Age call to the church.

During his earthly ministry, Jesus had taught, “Ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.”—Luke 12:36,37

Those of his followers who were watching the prophetic events of the foretold ending of the age, were privileged to be served by our Lord at his table with a bountiful spiritual feast of refreshing Truth. “Every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”—Heb. 5:13,14

Those who hunger and thirst after Truth and righteousness will partake of the spiritual food that has been provided. May we all be strengthened and thus renew our vows of consecration, and strive more diligently to make our calling and election sure. Let us praise him for all the way that he has sustained us by his powerful and caring hand. ■

## CHAPTER 10

# Suffering for Christ

*“If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us.”—II Timothy 2:12*

**T**he words of this scripture show the direct relationship between faithfulness under trial, and sharing with our Lord Jesus in his future kingdom for blessing the human family. Those who are willing to stand the test of obedience during this present Gospel Age will share as joint-heirs with our glorified Lord. “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”—Rom. 8:16-18

During Jesus’ earthly ministry he spoke of the spiritual reward that will be given to those who suffer for his name and are faithful to their High Calling. “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say

all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”—Matt. 5:10-12

The followers of our Lord must take up their cross when they have committed themselves to him in full consecration even unto death. “Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.” (Matt. 16:24,25) The one who seeks to preserve his life and its comforts, is the one who will not share joint heirship with our glorified Lord in his future kingdom. It is only through much tribulation that we may share in the heavenly glory and participate in the blessing of all the families of the earth.

## **THE GOD OF THIS WORLD**

The Apostle Paul also pointed to the fact that Satan, the Devil, is the god of this world, and would be allowed to severely test them and all the others who would respond to the heavenly call during this present Gospel Age. “In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.”—II Cor. 4:4

The faithful followers of Jesus have responded to the wonderful invitation of the heavenly calling in Christ Jesus. During their walk in the narrow way of sacrifice they have been on trial for their loyalty to the Truth of his Word. Those who prove themselves faithful unto death will

receive the “crown of life.” (Rev. 2:10) This is the grandest of all gifts from our loving Heavenly Father to his faithful children.

### **TEMPTER OF GOD’S PEOPLE**

The principle of our testing, chastening, and patient endurance has been recorded in the Scriptures for our admonition. It was written long before the invitation to the High Calling in Christ Jesus went forth. In the writings of Job, we learn about a certain occasion when Satan presented himself before the Heavenly Father. Even at that early time it was apparent that Satan was a powerful and opposing force that our Heavenly Father permitted to be unleashed against a man of righteousness. Satan was given liberty to plot against Job and to cause him great pain and distress. However, he was not permitted to take his life.

Of this encounter, we read, “Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them. And the Lord said to Satan, “From where do you come?” Then Satan answered the Lord and said, “From roaming about on the earth and walking around on it.” And the Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil.” Then Satan answered the Lord, “Does Job fear God for nothing? Hast Thou not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But put forth Thy hand now and touch all that he has; he will

surely curse Thee to Thy face.” Then the Lord said to Satan, “Behold, all that he has is in your power, only do not put forth your hand on him.” So Satan departed from the presence of the Lord.” —Job 1:6-12, *New American Standard Bible*

Later, Satan returned to present himself to the Heavenly Father and was questioned about Job’s loyalty to righteousness. “Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the Lord. And the Lord said to Satan, “Where have you come from?” Then Satan answered the Lord and said, “From roaming about on the earth, and walking around on it.” And the Lord said to Satan, “Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man fearing God and turning away from evil. And he still holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to ruin him without cause.” And Satan answered the Lord and said, “Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. However, put forth Thy hand, now, and touch his bone and his flesh; he will curse Thee to Thy face.” So the Lord said to Satan, “Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life.”—Job 2:1-6, *NASB*

## **JESUS TEMPTED**

When our Lord Jesus left his heavenly home to become a perfect man and become the Redeemer of the human family, he too was permitted to be tempted by Satan. This took place soon after Jesus had been baptized by John the Baptist in the River Jordan, and had received the Holy

Spirit of Truth from his Heavenly Father. (Matt. 3:13-17) The Gospel record provides the details. “Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungered.”—Matt. 4:1,2

Satan took the opportunity to tempt Jesus when he was in a weakened state due to his fasting for forty days and nights. “When the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” (vss. 3,4) The Devil challenged Jesus to be the Son of God. Having possessed perfect human qualities of mind, memory, and body he answered the tempter by pointing to the wonderful words of scripture that came from the mouth of God.

“Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the Temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.” (vss. 5-7) The Temple overlooked the Valley of Hinnom high above the surrounding area. Satan wanted our Lord to recklessly expose himself to danger and to receive a miraculous deliverance from danger, but he again pointed to the Word of God for his answer.

“Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them;

And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.” (vss. 8-11) As the “god of this world” Satan attempted to display his power, and to impress upon Jesus that it would be in his best interest to cooperate with him—the Adversary of the church—instead of giving his life for the sins of the world.

### **OUR MIGHTY FOE**

Satan is the great deceiver and enemy of the human family, but especially to the Lord’s people who are being called during this present Gospel Age. He is a mighty foe and much more powerful and crafty than any one of us. Jesus also commanded him to depart from Peter, “He [Jesus] turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.” (Matt. 16:23) Luke recorded, “Then entered Satan into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve.” (Luke 22:3) The revelator has written that Satan is also called “the Devil,” and is otherwise known as the “great dragon” and that wily “old serpent.” (Rev. 12:9) He especially targets the Lord’s footstep followers, and is “the accuser of our brethren” “before our God day and night.”—vs. 10

### **SPIRITUAL WICKEDNESS**

In addition to Satan, the great enemy of the Lord’s people and “prince of the power of the

air” (Eph. 2:2), the Apostle Paul points to the agents of darkness—the hosts of powerful demons and wicked spirits—that oppose the narrow way of the consecrated New Creature in Christ Jesus. These unseen agents of the great Adversary exercise unholy influences, and also plot to ensnare and entrap the members of the body of Christ.

Paul thus admonishes us, “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”—Eph. 6:11-13

### **CHASTENING NECESSARY**

One of the great principles that govern the calling, selection, and glorification of the faithful class of the Christ is that testing and chastening are the means by which the Lord’s people will be shaped and fashioned for a place in Christ’s kingdom. The Apostle Paul addressed this matter in his letter to the brethren at Corinth, saying, “Those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, And He scourges every son whom He receives. It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.” (Heb. 12:6-9, *NASB*) Yet, the consecrated child of God is promised all necessary help from our loving Heavenly Father, even a guardian angel

to watch over each of his people. The psalmist wrote, “The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.” —Ps. 34:7

### **THE BRIDE TESTED**

Paul wrote, “God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.” (II Cor. 4:6,7) Because the faithful followers of our Lord are still in the flesh, they must heed the apostle’s admonition. “We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.”—vss. 8-10

The apostle counted it all joy to suffer tribulations of all manner, knowing that these testings would work out the peaceable fruits and graces of the Holy Spirit of God in his character and life. From another standpoint, he relates his afflictions to that of sharing with our Lord in his suffering and as members of his body.

### **MANIFOLD TEMPTATIONS**

In his first epistle, the Apostle Peter brings our attention to the many temptations that surround us. “Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be

found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.” (I Pet. 1:6-9) Thus are we assured that the consecrated child of God who is walking in the narrow way of sacrifice will find themselves being severely tested for their faith.

Peter speaks of our temptations further in his epistle and says, “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.” (I Pet. 4:12-14) “Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.” —vs. 19

## **ENDURE ALL THINGS**

When writing to his beloved Timothy, the apostle provides a glimpse of his trials as a New Creature in Christ. “Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound. Therefore I endure all things for the elect’s sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we

suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us: If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.”—II Tim. 2:9-13

“Thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience, Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”—II Tim. 3:10-12

### **MADE SPECTACLES**

Paul spoke of his experiences as an apostle. “I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. We are fools for Christ’s sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised.”—I Cor. 4:9,10

The apostle then reiterated some of the ways we are being tested for a position in the future kingdom of the Christ. He said, “Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace; And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day. I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you. For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me.”—vss. 11-16

## **FILLING UP THE AFFLICTIONS OF CHRIST**

The apostle was pointing out that our walk in newness of life is seen by others, even by the angels. When writing to the called-out brethren at Colosse, he also emphasized that the footstep followers of our Lord Jesus during this present Gospel Age are being privileged to share in the sufferings and death of our Lord Jesus. He explained to them, “If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister; 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. 1:23,24) Thus are we made spectacles as we walk in newness of life with our dear Lord Jesus.

Paul emphasized that we are to be “grounded and settled” in truth and righteousness. We must be rooted in the Truth of God’s Word, and our convictions should enable us to be grounded to the point that we will not be swayed by the teachings and traditions of fallen mankind—“Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.”—Eph. 4:13-15

## **CAST NOT AWAY YOUR CONFIDENCE**

When writing to the Hebrew brethren, the Apostle Paul reminded them of the great struggle in which we all grow in the discipline of the Lord. He said, "Call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; Partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance. Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise."—Heb. 10:32-36

Throughout the approximately two thousand-year history of the present Gospel Age, the invitation to the heavenly calling has been received by individual followers of our Lord Jesus whose main purpose in their lives has been to make their calling and election sure. It has been a long and difficult journey, but we believe that the time is growing ever closer for the completion of the grand work that began with the wonderful ministry of our beloved Lord Jesus. Let us not become discouraged nor turn back, but go forward as we approach the fruition of all of our hopes and desires in the invitation that has been extended to each of us who are walking in the narrow way. ■

## CHAPTER 11

# The Master's Return and the End of the Age

*“As he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?”—Matthew 24:3*

One of the closing scenes of our Lord's earthly ministry has been recorded in this scripture. Jesus' disciples were asking him about his return, his later ministry and the events that would take place at that future time. They were especially anxious to know what he meant about the destruction of the Temple, and whether there would be any indication as to when this great event was to take place.—Matt. 24:1,2

### **LAST MESSAGE TO THE JEWS**

In his last public ministry at Jerusalem, Jesus had told the Jews that because of disobedience and lack of appreciation for God's wonderful providence over them as a nation, their house

would be left desolate. “Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.” (Matt. 23:36-38) He also revealed the fact that he would soon be leaving them, “I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.”—vs. 39

### **THE FAREWELL ADDRESS**

In Jesus’ farewell discourse to his disciples in the upper room, he spoke more specifically about his future return. He said, “Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”—John 14:1-3

Again he said, “Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe. Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world [Satan, II Cor. 4:4] cometh, and hath nothing in me. But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence.”—vss. 28-31

## **FROM THAT TIME FORTH**

When the Son of God began his earthly ministry, the Apostle Peter recognized him and understood who he was. At that very time, he started to prepare his disciples with the certain knowledge that his Heavenly Father had sent him into the world for a very special purpose. He explained to them that it was necessary for him to die for the world, and then he would be resurrected and highly exalted. From the scriptural record, we read, “He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.”—Matt. 16:15-17

Then we read, “From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.”—vs. 21

## **THE HOLY SPIRIT**

The disciples of Jesus were given glimpses of the ultimate purpose of his ministry from time to time, and no doubt they often thought about the kingdom that he had so often spoken of. However, their understanding remained sketchy and very limited until they received the power of the Holy Spirit.

After Jesus died, had been resurrected, and was preparing to ascend into heaven to be reunited with his Heavenly Father, his disciples were not yet clear what was really happening. “When they had come together, they were asking Him,

saying, 'Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?' He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.' And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight."—Acts 1:6-9, *New American Standard Bible*

When the disciples came to witness this marvelous scene, they were joined by two other men who also came to be with Jesus at this very special time in his earthly ministry. Their glistening white clothing suggests they were angels who had been sent forth by God. The disciples were the only ones who saw Jesus ascend and disappear into the clouds above. The two angels proclaimed that he would return in the same way at the end of this present Gospel Age. Thus we are informed that the manner in which we were to expect our Lord to return would be in an invisible state as a spiritual being.—vss. 10,11

The disciples were only beginning to appreciate the true meaning of the marvelous events that had taken place, but they would understand more clearly when they received the blessed gift of the Holy Spirit of Truth from their loving Heavenly Father. Of that special time and place, we read, "When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent, rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them

tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.”—Acts 2:1-4, *NASB*

## **THE ROAD TO EMMAUS**

When Jesus was resurrected, he came upon two of his disciples who were making their way toward Emmaus. The three of them then continued together on their journey, the disciples not realizing that their companion was the resurrected Jesus, until they later broke bread together. As they were conversing along the way Cleopas (Luke 24:18) spoke about the recent and tragic death of their Master Jesus at the hand of the chief priests and rulers of Israel. Their companion then reminded the two disciples that the Scriptures and prophecies, those of which he himself had perhaps taught them during his ministry, clearly foretold his death. He said, “Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.”—vss. 26,27

## **THE APOSTLE’S WARNING**

During the time that the Master was to be absent, Satan, the Devil, would be allowed to severely test the Lord’s people and draw them away, if it were possible, from the Truth and the wonderful invitation of the heavenly calling. In his letter to the church at Thessalonica, the Apostle Paul warned the brethren to be aware of Satan, and wrote, “Now we beseech you, brethren,

by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.”  
—II Thess. 2:1-3

Even at that time in the history of the Early Church, the apostle could see visible evidences of the impending falling away, when he warned them, “For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.”—vs. 7

### **THE DISCIPLES' QUESTION**

When the disciples were inquiring about the time that Jesus would return (Matt. 24:1-3), they did so by using the word [*parousia*, Greek] which really means “to be present” rather than “coming” as the word has been translated in our featured scripture. In addition, they spoke about the end of the world, and used the word [*aion*, Greek] which means “age” instead of world.

Their choice of words was no doubt divinely overruled to reveal much greater meaning and deeper significance, because they pointed forward many centuries to the time of our Lord’s invisible Second Presence. This very special time would also mark one of the closing features of this present Gospel Age during which the heavenly call was to be extended to the faithful followers of Christ. After that calling has been completed he would then establish his kingdom of righteousness over all the earth.

During the intervening period of time, Jesus ascended to the presence of his Heavenly Father, and there he offered him the merit of his sacrificial life which would first be given on behalf of his true followers. This was explained by the Apostle Paul when he wrote, "Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us."—Heb. 9:24

### **THE WATCHERS**

Jesus' disciples could not have known that his Second Presence was not to occur for nearly another two thousand years, although he had promised to be with them in spirit throughout the long intervening centuries of this present Gospel Age. (Matt. 28:20) However, that great event would mark in a very special way a new era in the spiritual life and experiences of his faithful followers. They would be blessed by greater light and understanding of the Scriptures, and would share in increased activity to spread the unlocked secrets of Truth to those who would have an ear to hear.

At that wonderful juncture of time in the history of the world, only the watchers would recognize the momentous events that would mark the closing years of this Gospel Age. We have Jesus' own recorded words, when he said, "Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is. For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his

servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch.”—Mark 13:32-34

Jesus’ admonition was that all of his people were to “watch,” but especially those who would be living at the end of the foretold age. “Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.”—vss. 35-37

This admonition meant that his followers were to be alert and be ready to recognize the signs of the times. They were encouraged to study the prophetic events that would transpire in the world around them. Again, we read Jesus’ words in Luke’s gospel, “Take heed to yourselves, lest at any time your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting, and drunkenness, and cares of this life, and so that day come upon you unawares. For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man.”—Luke 21:34-36

## **THE LAODICEAN CHURCH**

The message to the Laodicean church was the last of seven messages given to God’s people during this present Gospel Age. It pointed to our Lord Jesus’ return, and to the foretold time that the scriptural treasures were to be unlocked and made known to the “watchers.” The revelator wrote, “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and

he with me.” (Rev. 3:20) This was a very special promise to the consecrated followers of Jesus that the time had arrived for them to receive the riches of hidden Truth that were to be unlocked and revealed to them.

The admonition to the watchers was that they were to have their loins girded about them, and their lights burning. They should also prepare themselves for their Lord’s return so that when he had arrived and knocked, they would open the door to him without any hesitation. A rich blessing would lay in store for his people, because our invisible returned Lord would be present with them and serve them with abundant spiritual food.—Luke 12:35-37

This blessing was the promised “meat” in due season that was to be given to the church, and of which the Prophet Daniel had written many centuries before. “Thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.” (Dan. 12:4) Daniel would like to have known the meaning of what he had written, “I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things? And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.”—vss. 8,9

## **UNLOCKED SECRETS**

Faithful brethren were on hand at the appointed “time of the end” who were diligent students of the Heavenly Father’s wonderful word of Truth. They were also ready and willing to labor in his vineyard and to share in the sending forth of precious Truths that had been locked

up and kept secret from the worldly-wise for centuries. The message was therefore made known, and sent forth by word of mouth and by the printed page to those who had an ear to hear the words of Truth.

The significance of our Lord Jesus' Second Presence, and other important end-time prophecies began to be studied with greater interest and clarity. There was increased anticipation to the revealed fact that Christ Jesus was to soon set up a glorious kingdom of righteousness and peace over all the earth. Furthermore, those who had faithfully walked in the narrow way of sacrifice would be privileged to share with the Master as members of the Christ in dispensing life-giving blessings to the poor groaning human creation. The watchers realized that the time was drawing near for our Lord Jesus' long fore-told kingdom to be established.

### **RANSOM, RESURRECTION AND RESTITUTION**

There was a fresh study of the basic and fundamental doctrines of Truth, with special attention given to the scriptural teachings in connection with the ransom, resurrection and restitution. With the advancing and clearer light of Christ's presence, it was seen that our Lord's ransom sacrifice was given on behalf of the whole world of mankind, and not just for a select few. Consideration was given to Paul's letter to Timothy, where he wrote, "This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself

a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.”  
—I Tim. 2:3-6

A resurrection for all who are in their graves is a major feature of Christ’s glorious future kingdom as he had promised. “Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear shall live. For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself.” (John 5:25-27, *NASB*) This wonderful work will be accomplished under the administration of the Christ. “Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.”—vss. 28,29, *NASB*

Restitution blessings will be available to all of the willingly obedient under the righteous rule of Christ’s kingdom. (Acts 3:20,21) This great work is shown under the terms of the Abrahamic Covenant, where it is stated, “That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.”—Gen. 22:17,18

## **THE SEED OF PROMISE**

Jesus was the antitypical seed of promise, as explained by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the brethren at Galatia. “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And

to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.” (Gal. 3:16) Those who are being called during this present age of sacrifice and will have proven faithful to their heavenly calling are promised to have a share in the seed of blessing during the time of Christ’s future kingdom. This point was emphasized by Paul, when he said, “If ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” (vs. 29) For further clarification, he said, “Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.”—Gal. 4:7

### **THE SIN OFFERING**

Having learned to rightly divide the Word of Truth, the doctrine of the two salvations was seen with greater clarity. The first salvation indicated a spiritual reward for those who would respond to the heavenly calling during this present Gospel Age. The second salvation points to the sin-sick and dying human family who are to be blessed under Christ’s future kingdom of righteousness here on the earth.

In addition, the watchers were enlightened with a clearer understanding of the doctrine of the church’s share in the sin offering. They began to study the Levitical types in more detail, where it is shown that the sacrifice of the bullock represents Jesus (Lev. 16:14), and the goat pictures the church class. (vs. 15) The Apostle Paul’s words in reference to this took on added meaning. Speaking of his own sacrificial life, he pointed out that he was also sharing in the Master’s sufferings. “If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away

from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister; 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. 1:23,24

In this connection, the apostle also explained, "The bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach."—Heb. 13:11-13

## **THE COVENANTS**

Better understanding concerning the basic doctrines of the covenants was also a special blessing to the watchers. We have noted the wonderful Seed of promise that will ultimately provide rescue for the entire sin-sick and dying human family. (Gen. 22:17,18) God's Law was given to the Israelites through Moses in the inauguration of the Law Covenant at Mount Horeb (Exod. 19:16-19), and it was validated by the blood of bulls and goats. The Apostle Paul confirms this in his letter to the Hebrews.—Heb. 12:18-21

The Prophet Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31-34) foretold God's provision for a New Covenant for the human family, and the Apostle Paul spoke about it in his letter to the Hebrew brethren. (Heb. 8:6-13) The old Law Covenant was merely typical of a new and better covenant arrangement that would be established and mediated under the administration of Christ's future kingdom. At

that time, the Christ will have the authority and power of office to give life to the people who learn obedience. Instead of the blood of typical animals of sacrifice, the New Covenant will have as its foundation the precious and saving blood of our Lord Jesus.

### **THE COMPLETED CHRIST**

For nearly two thousand years the heavenly call has gone out to those Christians who have willingly accepted the invitation. Together with our glorified Lord Jesus they will share in the great work of blessing the human family under the establishment of Christ's future kingdom. The Heavenly Father has set aside a thousand years to provide reconciliation to the human family's obedient, including all who are yet in their graves. When this glorious work has been completed under the mediatorship of Christ's kingdom, all will be delivered back to the Heavenly Father as explained by the Apostle Paul.

“Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.”  
—I Cor. 15:24-26 ■

## CHAPTER 12

# Harvest of the Gospel Age

*“This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.”—Matthew 24:14*

Jesus spoke these prophetic words to his disciples as his earthly ministry was drawing to a close. Taking them aside, he said that the message of Truth and the Heavenly Father’s invitation of the heavenly calling would continue to be preached throughout this present Gospel Age to all who had an ear to hear. Furthermore, that his consecrated followers would be given the privilege to participate in dispensing this gospel message concerning his glorious future kingdom, and the part that his faithful followers would share in it.

The commission to his followers was, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit; teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”—Matt. 28:19,20, *New American Standard Bible*

The Master was thus preparing his disciples that he would soon be departing from them. He wanted them to know that he would be physically absent from them for a long time, even during the dark centuries of the intervening Gospel Age until his promised return. However, he also assured them that his spiritual presence and guidance would continue over them during that period of time. This was very evident in his reassuring words, "I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

### **FULFILLMENT OF TIME PROPHECY**

Recorded history, as well as the prophetic words of scripture, indicate that the mid 1870s would point to the time that Jesus would return and be invisibly present with his people. The records foreshadowed a special time of revival and renewed interest in studying the Scriptures, and there would be an extensive harvest work conducted by the Lord's people. This would be done by way of the printed page, by word of mouth, and in other ways.

Jesus spoke of this special time when his disciples came asking him to explain the meaning of his teaching concerning the wheat and tares. (Matt. 13:36) The scriptural account records his answer and his reference to the end of the age. He said, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, and the field is the world; and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one; and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels."—vss. 37-40, *NASB*

## **SPIRITUAL FOOD**

A special feature concerning the time of which Jesus spoke, clearly points to the giving of the blessed meat in due season. Truth on many subjects had been hidden from the worldly wise, and would at that time be received by the true followers of Jesus upon his return. The expression “meat in due season” suggests that there was to be bountiful and rich spiritual food, and that our returned Lord himself would serve his faithful watchers at that time. He said, “Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.”—Luke 12:37

In connection with God’s prophetic Word, the Apostle Peter states that those who wrote the prophecies seldom understood their true meaning. “So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.”—II Pet. 1:19-21, *NASB*

In his first epistle, Peter also spoke of this when he wrote, “Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you.” (I Pet. 1:10) The apostle further stated that even the angels did not know the wonderful plans of the Heavenly Father. “It was revealed to

them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look.” —vs. 12, *NASB*

This had been acknowledged by Daniel earlier, when he wrote, “I heard the man clothed in linen, which was upon the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand unto heaven, and sware by him that liveth for ever that it shall be for a time, times, and an half; and when he shall have accomplished to scatter the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished. And I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things? And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.”—Dan. 12:7-9

## **HIDDEN TREASURES**

The Prophet Isaiah also proclaimed the wonderful blessing of Truth that God would give to his special people at the appointed time. “I will give thee the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that thou mayest know that I, the LORD, which call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel.”—Isa. 45:3

The wise admonition of Solomon provides further perspective for all who desire to look into the wonderful secrets of God. A proper heart attitude is necessary to receive the bountiful blessings that God has in store for his people. “My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine

heart to understanding; Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear [reverence] of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God.”—Prov. 2:1-5

## **THE SPIRIT OF FREEDOM**

True to the long-awaited promises of God at the prophetic end of this age, there were honest-hearted seekers for Truth who were searching the chronological records of the Scriptures in an effort to find evidence of the Second Advent of our Lord Jesus. After the dramatic and terrible events that had taken place during the recent French Revolution, a new sense of liberty was being experienced, not only in Europe, but especially in colonial America. A newfound sense of religious freedom led to a general awakening and interest in a study of the Scriptures. This liberty of thought gained momentum throughout the country during the nineteenth century.

## **THE ALLEGHENY CLASS**

In about the year 1870, a small class of Christian believers began to meet at Allegheny, Pennsylvania for the purpose of studying the Word of God. Those who gathered together at that time and place were Charles T. Russell, his father Joseph, his sister Mae, William I. Mann, A. D. Jones, W. H. Conley and perhaps a few others.

As a young man, Bro. Russell was very serious-minded, and had joined the group with the sincere desire to find scriptural answers and clarification to some of the doctrines that were then being taught by the churches. In those early days of

the Truth movement and in the study of the Bible, he came to the conclusion that our Lord Jesus had given his life in sacrifice for the entire human family that was under the sentence of death. Based on scripture, he was thus able to conclude that all who were in their graves would be granted the blessing of resurrection under the terms of the Heavenly Father's ultimate plan and purpose for the reconciliation of his human creation. Having attained a more clear understanding of the basic doctrines of ransom and resurrection, he was a few years later chosen as the ecclesia's elder and spiritual leader.

### **THE LIGHT OF MORNING**

About that same time, Nelson H. Barbour had been publishing a magazine called *The Midnight Cry* in Rochester, NY. He later changed the name of the journal to *The Herald of the Morning* to more accurately address the disappointment that had occurred in connection with certain expectations that he had made and the changing times which were at hand. Having given serious study to Biblical chronology, Barbour determined and addressed the concept that they were then living in the foretold end of the age, and that our Lord Jesus' Second Advent was soon to take place.

Bro. Russell contacted Barbour to discuss the Scriptures, especially in connection with our Lord's Second Presence. Their discussion led to Bro. Russell's being further enlightened on the object and manner of our Lord's invisible return and other time prophecies. Later, Barbour, and Russell as assistant editor, published a booklet under the title *The Three Worlds and Plan of Redemption*. This treatise brought the teachings

concerning restitution, resurrection, and the Second Presence together. John H. Paton, who lived in Almont, Michigan, had also been an associate of Barbour's, and he and Bro. Russell contributed articles for the magazine and promoted the message of Truth by traveling in the ministry.

This arrangement continued until Barbour openly denied the ransom doctrine, and at that time Bro. Russell and Paton both left Barbour to go their separate ways. Later, Paton disagreed on the Lord's invisible Second Presence, and began to promote his beliefs in his book *Day Dawn*, and later in his own publication, *The World's Hope*. Bro. Russell was unable to agree with him any longer and they, too, parted company. During this time, there were several others who shared in the initial harvest work by contributing articles or preaching activities, but within a few years Bro. Russell became the most prominent and influential figure within the Bible Student movement, both in America and abroad.

## **FOOD FOR THINKING CHRISTIANS**

In 1881, Bro. Russell wrote *Food for Thinking Christians* with the subtitle, "Why Evil was Permitted." He states that the design of the pamphlet was to supply what we believe to be "meat in due season" to fully consecrated Christians who hunger and thirst after a fuller knowledge of our Heavenly Father and his plans. He thus directly addressed the scriptures that pointed to our Lord's return, and the added blessing of his serving his faithful watchers with the spiritual food of Truth. (Luke 12:37; Rev. 3:20) Later, this

title was changed to *The Divine Plan of the Ages* which became the first of six volumes of *Studies in the Scriptures*. Although the message of Truth was substantially the same, its style was changed to make it more acceptable to the watchers and the general reading public, and that it would be more easily understood and appreciated.

## **TABERNACLE SHADOWS**

To reflect his serious study of the spiritual lessons presented in the Levitical types, *Tabernacle Shadows of the Better Sacrifices* was also published in 1881. It served as an important awakening to the deeper meaning and significance that had never before been appreciated, but was at that special time made known to God's royal priesthood. "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

This book revealed the fact that the Levitical types and shadows relate to our Lord Jesus' earthly ministry and sacrificial death, and also the life of sacrifice of the household of faith. Paul admonished, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."—Rom 12:1

## **A MAGAZINE OF TRUTH**

The first issue of a very special Truth magazine appeared in July, 1879 under the title: *Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence*. It was accompanied with the appropriate and

significant words of Isaiah who wrote, “Watchman, what of the night? ... The morning cometh.” (Isa. 21:11,12) It was published in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania with Bro. Russell as editor, and with five others who contributed on a regular basis. It started out as a monthly magazine with approximately 6,000 copies being printed.

The *Watch Tower* has the distinction of being the first magazine published that was devoted to the announcing of the return and Second Presence of our Lord Jesus. The author stated that the object of the publication was to proclaim that we are now living during the closing years of this present Gospel Age. Further, he said that it was designed not only to awaken the Lord’s people to a realization of this important fact, but also to assist them in putting on the whole armor of God that they may be able to stand in the evil day which would especially distinguish the closing features of this age—“the great day of the Lord.” Through the *Watch Tower* magazine, Bro. Russell was able to promote the fundamental doctrines of the Truth, with special emphasis on the ransom, restitution, and resurrection in harmony with the purpose of our Lord’s return, and the establishing of his future kingdom.

## **THE HARVEST WORK**

Although the harvest work had been carried out from a central point in the Allegheny, Pennsylvania area since the early days of the Truth movement, it was decided that it would be more functional to form a legally organized and centralized body for the managing, publishing, and distributing of the Truth message. In 1884, it was incorporated as Zion’s Watch Tower

Tract Society and brought under the laws of the state of Pennsylvania. A few years later, it was changed to Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society. It was a nonprofit corporation whose main purpose was to send out the Truth by way of magazines, books, pamphlets, tracts, and other religious material.

The harvest message was thus spread far and wide during the closing decades of the 19th century, and it increased dramatically when the 20th century arrived. This period in the history of the Truth movement witnessed a great interest in the message concerning the heavenly call and other important doctrines of Truth that had been made known by the Second Presence of our Lord.

## **THE BIBLE HOUSE**

As the Truth activities grew, it became necessary to expand the existing facilities and, in 1889, a modern four-story building was erected in Allegheny, Pennsylvania. It served as the Watch Tower headquarters, and became affectionately known among the brethren as the "Bible House." It was outfitted with equipment necessary to carry on the work, living quarters for the permanent staff, and a dining room for serving regular meals to the workers. From that location, Bro. Russell oversaw all activities in connection with the harvest work.

As the classes of Bible students grew and became better organized, qualified speaking brethren were sent out from the Bible House to serve the various ecclesias with a message of Truth, and to conduct public meetings when necessary. This endeavor proved to be a wonderful way to keep in touch with brethren who were living in

other areas, and it was eventually expanded into a full-time pilgrim service with regularly scheduled speaking visits.

## **EXPANDING THE WORK**

A major expansion of the harvest work took place in 1908 when the Mission Building, formerly occupied by the Plymouth and Congregational Church in Brooklyn, New York, was purchased. The building was completely renovated and became known as “The Brooklyn Tabernacle.” There was ample room for shipping and storage facilities in the basement and offices on the first floor. The second floor contained a large auditorium with a seating capacity for about eight hundred people.

Members of the staff were housed in a nearby and separate facility formerly occupied by Henry Ward Beecher. It was a four-story building that became the home for many brethren who came there to serve the Lord, and was known as the “Bethel Home.” It has been said that meal-time was a special event because of the inclusion of prayer, the singing of hymns, and scriptural questions and comments.

## **SENDING FORTH THE TRUTH**

For more than forty years Bro. Russell was actively engaged in sending forth the message of Truth in every possible way. He made known the Heavenly Father’s invitation during this present Gospel Age to those who would accept the heavenly call, and present their lives to God as a living sacrifice. (Rom. 12:1) Those who worked together as one family during this long period of time were richly blessed to share in this harvest work.

The truth concerning Christ's future kingdom as the only hope for the sin-sick world of mankind was proclaimed throughout the world in many ways and in many languages. Countless numbers of people heard the comforting message, and learned about Christ's future 1,000-year kingdom that would bring promised blessings to all the families of the earth, including those who were resting in their graves.

## **THE LAST PILGRIMAGE**

During his many years of proclaiming the harvest message, Bro. Russell never slackened his hand nor abated his energies in his faithful service to God. In October, 1916 he put the infirmities of his flesh aside, and started out on what would be his last pilgrimage. It was a transcontinental trip by train that would take him to the most distant parts of America.

Almost from the beginning of the trip difficulties arose, including delays, lost baggage, missing telegrams, and many other incidents that taxed his physical strength. Within a few days it was realized by some of the brethren who were traveling with him that he was not well. Later, it became even more evident that his physical condition had worsened, and the suggestion was made that they should return to New York City, but Bro. Russell was determined to continue on with his pilgrimage.

After having served the brethren for the last time at Los Angeles, California, Bro. Russell and his traveling companions boarded their train for the return trip to Bethel. His physical condition worsened continually, until he finished his consecrated course in death in the state of Texas

on October 31, 1916. Bro. Russell's earthly remains arrived at the Bethel Home in Brooklyn, New York on November 4th.

## **DIFFICULT TIMES**

Profound shock and sadness was experienced by great numbers of brethren and in Bible Student classes throughout the world when it was learned that Bro. Russell had died. They had lost their beloved pastor and were suddenly faced with confusion and major concerns for their spiritual future. Others soon took control over the Society, but no one could possibly assume the work that Bro. Russell had been responsible for during his many years of service. There was a growing lack of acceptance with the new management, and many longtime brethren began to feel uncomfortable with the new arrangements and began leaving to establish new groups or to remain isolated.

It wasn't until many years later, in 1929, that the brethren in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania arranged a reunion convention in October of that year in memory of Bro. Russell. It was well attended and from that time forward other classes began to arrange for additional conventions. A new spirit of revival intensified and brethren were blessed with new opportunities for fellowship, study, and the desire to continue in the harvest work.

## **THE DAWN**

After the success of the 1929 reunion convention, it was decided to hold one every autumn in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. This also led to further interest to continue serving in the harvest work.

Bro. Norman Woodworth had worked at Bethel with Bro. Russell and encouraged the brethren in the Brooklyn, New York ecclesia to sponsor a thirteen-week radio message in 1931 over station WOR in New York. For the format, they used the “Frank & Ernest” program that he had developed for the Watchtower Society in the 1920s, which they discarded. Dialogues of the program were printed and offered as a four-page Radio Echoes tract to interested listeners. When the radio contract expired, the program was discontinued from lack of funds, but the tract continued to be sent to those who had been receiving it.

The following year the Radio Echoes tract was enlarged and renamed *The Dawn* magazine. It was published at the beginning of each month, starting with October, 1932. The original four-page radio tract was still sent out on the 15th of each month under the name *The Dawn* thus making it a bi-monthly magazine. This arrangement was continued until the end of 1933 when the mid-monthly tract was discontinued. *The Dawn* magazine has been published uninterrupted since 1932, and celebrated its 90th anniversary with the October 2022 issue. Throughout this time it has proclaimed the message of Truth, and the invitation to the heavenly call to all who have an ear to hear.

From this small beginning, the Dawn Bible Students Association was established with Bro. Woodworth assuming responsibility as managing editor. The brethren had been eager to share in the harvest work that began in the early days of Bro. Russell. His Truth writings were reprinted, including the six volumes of *Studies in the*

*Scriptures, Tabernacle Shadows* and many other publications. The “*Frank & Ernest*” radio work was greatly expanded, and the Dawn pilgrim service brought many isolated and scattered brethren together again since the pastor’s death. In later years, TV programs were prepared, and now the Internet and other electronic media are being used as a means to proclaim the Truth.

Many of Jesus’ faithful followers have labored in the Lord’s vineyard during the course of these past 90 years. They have thus shared in publishing the heavenly call message that has gone forth during the harvest period of this present Gospel Age. We believe this work will continue until the final number of the Christ will have finished their course in death. Let us strive more faithfully to make ourselves ready for the great hope that lies before us.

The revelator has given us a glimpse of those faithful brethren who have heard the heavenly call and have prepared themselves for the heavenly inheritance. “Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.”—Rev. 19:7-9 ■