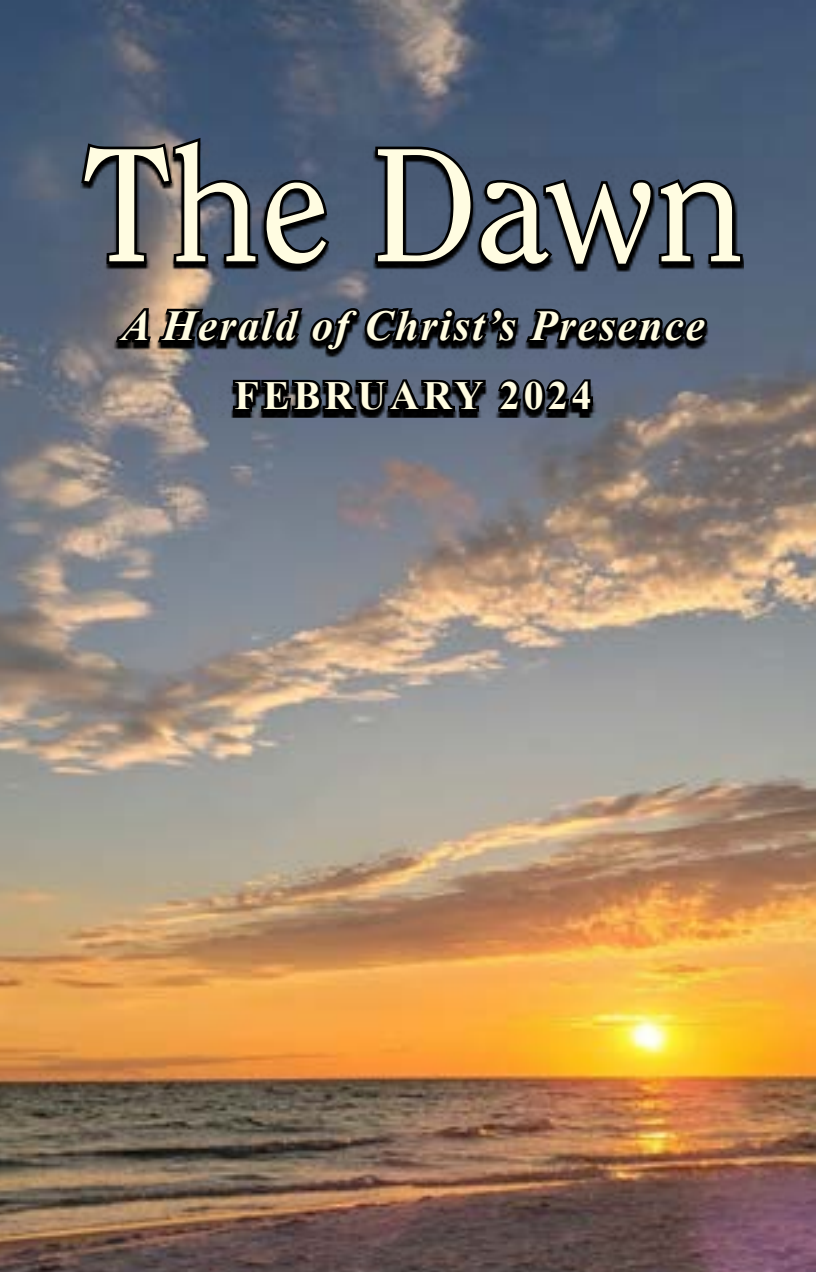
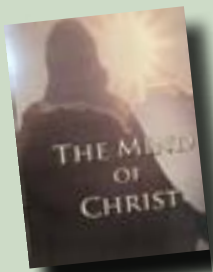


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The Covering Garments

*“Unto Adam also
and to his wife did
the LORD God
make coats of
skins, and clothed
them.”*

—*Genesis 3:21*

THIS LESSON'S FEATURED

Scripture speaks of the garments that the Heavenly Father provided for our first parents, Adam and Eve. They had transgressed his divine law and had thus brought

upon themselves and their unborn progeny the forewarned condemnation and sentence of death. (Gen. 2:16,17; 3:16-19) This was a seeming state of eternal hopelessness for the human creation, and rescue from their plight seemed impossible. A faint hint, however, points to the fact that rescue was a possibility, and that hint came in the form of the coats which God provided the condemned pair.

The coats of skins were related to the divine concept of atonement. In the Hebrew language in which this Old Testament scripture was written, the root word for “coats” means “to cover.” The root word for “atonement” also means “to cover.” Thus the garments provided Adam and Eve were the earliest indicators of a meaningful truth. God

had planned a way by which the transgressions of mankind could be expiated without violating the exacting demands of his divine justice. That is, the sin of Adam and Eve could, by a yet undisclosed means, be “covered.”

The coats provided by God were merely symbolic of our first parents’ need to be covered as a result of their sin and the penalty which demanded their death. “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” (Heb. 10:31) Adam and Eve realized their nakedness after their disobedience to God’s law. (Gen. 3:7) This is in the same sense that the Israelites would later be characterized as being naked following their transgression when they made the golden calf at Mount Sinai. The scriptural account reads, “Moses saw that the people were naked; (for Aaron had made them naked unto their shame among their enemies:) ... It came to pass on the morrow, that Moses said unto the people, Ye have sinned a great sin: and now I will go up unto the LORD; peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin.”—Exod. 32:25,30

Unless Adam’s transgression could somehow be covered, or otherwise expiated, divine justice would not allow him nor his posterity any hope of returning to covenant relationship with God. Because of their disobedience they had been justly condemned, and they would be held in the prison house of death in perpetuity. It was the atoning blood of Jesus’ sacrifice to which the coats ultimately pointed. Israel entered into covenant relationship with God at Mount Sinai, and their atonement and covering for sin served as a further illustration, or type, of the same future grand fulfillment through Jesus. This divine principle of

atonement is seen in the words of the psalmist, who wrote, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." "Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people; thou hast covered all their sin."—Ps. 32:1; 85:2

RECONCILIATION IMPLIED

Many centuries after Adam's fall into sin and death, God gave his promise to Abraham, saying, "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice." (Gen. 22:16-18) In that promise is the prospect of full reconciliation between God and man, the implication being that the penalty of death wrought upon the human family by Adam's transgression would, in due time, be reversed. These prophetic words point to reconciliation for the entire human family in due time, and relate to the requirements of God's justice, the immutable principle which governs the very foundation of his throne as revealed in his Word. "Righteousness and justice are the foundation of thy throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before thee."—Ps. 89:14, *Revised Standard Version*

FIGURES OF THE TRUE

Divine justice was illustrated at Mount Sinai when Moses presided over the ceremonies that established the Law Covenant between God and Israel. The Apostle Paul recounts the occasion, saying, "When Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people, Saying, This is the blood of the testament [Hebrew: covenant] which God hath enjoined unto you.

Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry. And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission. It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For 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. 9:19-24

In the above passage the apostle says that everything which occurred ceremonially at Mount Sinai served as patterns, or types, of the true. Therefore, the sin that was figuratively covered by sacrificial blood in Moses’ day will be actually removed by the sacrificial blood of Christ—the true, or antitypical, atonement.

TYPICAL ATONEMENT

The blood of animals used at Mount Sinai pointed forward to the blood of Jesus, which would be shed many centuries later for the whole world. The sprinkling of “the book” prefigured Christ’s shed blood satisfying divine justice. The subsequent sprinkling of “the people” illustrated the cleansing, restoring and reconciling of mankind to God. In all, the arrangements at Mount Sinai illustrated that God and man will be reconciled only after Adamic condemnation, human imperfection, and estrangement from God are not merely covered, but entirely removed.

The arrangement between God and Israel established at Mount Sinai was breached by Israel, thereby

severing their position of atonement. Foreknowing Israel's inability to keep the Law, God introduced an annual Day of Atonement in conjunction with the nation's Tabernacle arrangement, many particulars of which are recounted in Exodus, chapters 25-31 and Leviticus chapter 16. God's role and purpose state: "This shall be a statute for ever unto you: that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, ye shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, whether it be one of your own country, or a stranger that sojourneth among you: For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the LORD."—Lev. 16:29,30

Typical reconciliation was made annually between God and Israel on each Day of Atonement. Israel's transgressions were thus reckoned as covered by the blood of animal sacrifices as offered by Israel's high priest. The freshly reconciled condition made possible the continuation for another year of the covenant relationship between God and Israel. For many centuries, the atonement day sacrifices were Israel's only hope. They alone stood interposed between that nation and divine justice. "It shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish."—Deut. 8:19

ANTITYPICAL, TRUE ATONEMENT

Later, the Apostle Paul declared that the antitype to which Israel's atonement day provision had been pointing had arrived with the earthly ministry, sacrificial death, and resurrection of our Lord

Jesus. He says, “By so much more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant.” (Heb. 7:22, *New King James Version*) The apostle then explains, “But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, seeing He always lives to make intercession for them.”—vss. 24,25, *NKJV*

The old Law Covenant permitted the Jews alone to have access to God through the atonement day rituals. These were presided over by a long succession of priests from the lineage of Aaron. When the Christ class is completed, it will bring all mankind back to God through Jesus—the greater High Priest of a better covenant than was provided under Israel’s Law.

FORESHADOWINGS

The Law Covenant was intended to provide illustrations and foregleams of that new and better covenant. Aaron, who was anointed as high priest, functioned under the Law Covenant. He offered the sacrificial blood of bulls and goats in the sanctuary of Israel’s Tabernacle. That priesthood and those various ceremonial practices collectively foreshadowed the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. These illustrated the better means by which a future New Covenant will be established for all of earth’s people—Jews and Gentiles.—Isa. 42:6,7; 49:6; Luke 2:30-32

On Israel’s annual Day of Atonement, it was not sufficient that a sacrificial death merely occur. For it to be effective, the evidence of sacrificial death, the blood, had to be taken into the Most Holy

compartment of the Tabernacle, and sprinkled on the mercy seat by the high priest as an offering to God on Israel's behalf. (Lev. 16:14-17) The antitype was fulfilled by the sacrificial death of the perfect man Jesus. His blood, shed at Calvary, was entirely sufficient in value as an offset for Adam's transgression. It would free mankind from its Adamic condemnation.—John 1:29; Rom. 5:18,19; I Cor. 15:21,22; I John 1:7

The liberating benefit of that value would have never reached mankind had there been no high priest qualified to take that value into heaven itself and there to figuratively sprinkle it before God. The qualified priest is the resurrected Lord, Christ Jesus. Paul wrote, "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession." (Heb. 4:14) Again the apostle said, "Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens."—Heb. 8:1

Christ's earthly ministry accomplished a major step in the Heavenly Father's ultimate purpose to restore the sin-sick and dying human family. In his letter to the Hebrew brethren, the Apostle Paul further wrote, "Though he [Jesus] were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him." (Heb. 5:8,9) The ransoming value of Jesus' sacrifice at Calvary was first applied on behalf of the members of the church during the present Gospel Age. Upon the church's completion, the value of Christ's death will be applied to benefit the remainder of

mankind. “He is the propitiation [Greek: atonement] for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.”—I John 2:2

JESUS A SURETY

Israel’s priests inherited their position generation by generation, their authority being derived from their predecessors. Beginning with Aaron, the installation ceremonies of these are recounted in Leviticus, chapter 8. Christ was made High Priest of an order superior to that of Aaron by divine declaration. “Inasmuch as He was not made priest without an oath (for they have become priests without an oath, but He with an oath by Him who said to Him: The Lord has sworn and will not relent, You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek), by so much more Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant. Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood.”—Heb. 7:20-24, *NKJV*

Just as the promise to Abraham, quoted earlier from Genesis 22:16-18, was made with an oath, likewise Christ—the true seed to whom the Abrahamic promise was referring—was made a High Priest by an oath. Through the power and authority of that superior priestly office all the nations of the earth will be blessed. The High Priest is imbued with the ability to take sin and all of its effects entirely away. It is that ability of Christ, the better and greater High Priest, concerning which the Prophet Isaiah wrote, “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though

they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”—Isa. 1:18

JOHN’S PRONOUNCEMENT

The Prophet Isaiah compares sin to the color red, and this word has been translated from the Hebrew word “Adam.” The forgiveness of sin, in comparison, is related to the color white, as in snow or wool. The relationship of wool to the eradication of sin was declared by John the Baptist centuries later when he identified the Lord Jesus as a sacrificial lamb, and proclaimed, “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”—John 1:29

Not until that pronouncement at the First Advent of Christ was the divine concept of forgiveness of sin expressed in this connection. It was to this truth that the garments provided by God to Adam and Eve symbolically pointed. From that time forward, salvation would be predicated upon faith in Christ to take sin away, and faith in his ability to render that which was “red” to become “as white as snow.” The Apostle Paul would become a most able and prolific expounder of that profound truth.

FAITH DEFINED

In the eleventh chapter of his epistle to the Hebrews, Paul defines faith, then cites several examples of its exercise by the elders of prior ages. He explains, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report.” (Heb. 11:1,2) The apostle then declares faith as the indispensable element in the forgiveness of sin. “Without faith it is impossible to please him [God]: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and

that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”—vs. 6

The divine promise to bless all the nations of the earth was predicated upon the faith of Abraham. There would have been no such promise given him if he had lacked a mature, crystallized faith. In this present Gospel Age, and during the next age, all mankind will be saved from their prior condemnation in Adam. In addition, those who seek God will be rewarded if they come to him through faith in Christ Jesus. The coverings provided Adam and Eve after their transgression in Eden were rudimentary illustrations of what Christ’s sacrifice will ultimately accomplish for all mankind under the administration of Christ’s kingdom to bless all the families of the earth.

THE “LITTLE FLOCK”

By the end of this present Gospel Age, a “little flock” of footstep followers of Christ, a very small minority of the human family in advance of the world, will have manifested faith sufficient to have pleased God. “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”—Luke 12:32

Those relative few will have proven acceptable to God for the single reason that by the various trials of the narrow way during this present life they will have manifested the same faith exemplified in Abraham and personified by Christ Jesus. “Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” (Matt. 7:14) To these faithful alone the promise now applies, “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on

such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.”—Rev. 20:6

THE REMAINDER OF MANKIND

God will not directly interact with mankind during the thousand years of Christ’s kingdom, Christ being interposed between them as Mediator of the New Covenant. “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 17:31) The church, when completed, will join its “head” and master, the Lord Jesus Christ, as he assumes the role of Mediator between God and man. (Col. 1:18; I Tim. 2:5,6) In that day, the Lord Jesus and his resurrected church will constitute that “prophet” about whom Moses spoke. “Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you.”—Acts 3:22; Deut. 18:15

Under the benevolent rule of that prophet, the fallen and degraded human family will learn the laws, principles, and purposes of the kingdom. They will be taught the life-giving benefits of righteousness, justice, and obedience. The human family will come to understand what the church is now privileged to know—the vital relationship of faith in Christ Jesus and reconciliation to God. “All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, ... To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not

imputing their trespasses unto them; ... For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”—II Cor. 5:18-21

PREFIGURED IN EDEN

As the garments provided Adam and Eve had prefigured, the atoning blood of Christ was mercifully provided as a wonderful means for mankind's recovery and reconciliation to their Heavenly Father. “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.”—John 3:16,17

The Apostle Paul proclaims, “When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” (Rom. 5:6-8) Let us rejoice in the provision our loving Heavenly Father has made for the covering of Adamic sin, and let us be ever thankful for the opportunity which will result for all mankind to come back into harmony with their loving Creator. ■

*“It is of the LORD’S mercies
that we are not consumed, because
his compassions fail not. They are new every
morning: great is thy faithfulness.”
Lamentations 3:22,23*

The Greatness of God

Key Verse: “*He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.*”
—Isaiah 40:29

Selected Scripture:
Isaiah 40:9-31

TODAY’S KEY VERSE IS given in two statements to encourage Israel during the time they would be captive in Babylon. The first statement is, “He giveth power to the faint.” Israel had mostly forgotten that they were a chosen nation of God by a covenant. “The LORD did not set his heart

on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other nations, for you were the smallest of all nations! Rather, it was simply that the LORD loves you, and he was keeping the oath he had sworn to your ancestors.” (Deut. 7:7,8, *New Living Translation*) They had also failed to recall the psalm declaring God’s power to deliver whom he will, even from Babylon: “O LORD, God of our ancestors, you alone are the God who is in heaven. You are ruler of all the kingdoms of the earth. You are powerful and mighty; no one can stand against you!” (II Chron. 20:6, *NLT*) These words to the afflicted and downtrodden Jews were spoken as an incentive to remember God’s attributes of love and power, and to regain their trust in him.

The second statement in today’s Key Verse is: “To them that have no might he increaseth strength.” Isaiah reminds the people that God will strengthen those who are conscious of their weakness and look to him for support. “Since I am afflicted and needy, Let the Lord be

mindful of me. You are my help and my deliverer.” (Ps. 40:17, *New American Standard Bible*) These statements of our Key Verse were a message of hope and encouragement for the Jews who were feeling weak and powerless. It was a reminder to them that God is always there to help when it is needed most. In Isaiah 40:31 the prophet speaks of those who rely on the Lord for strength: “They who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.”—*English Standard Version*

These words of the greatness of God are also to be a comfort to spiritual Israel during this present Gospel Age by grace through Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul assures us of this power in II Corinthians 12:9,10 (*New International Version*): “[Jesus] said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” The Apostle Peter likewise tells us our trials give us a share in Christ’s sufferings which will be rewarded when his glory is revealed.—I Pet. 4:12,13

Jesus gives us the ultimate words of encouragement for our spiritual strengthening: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”—Matt. 11:28-30, *NIV*

The greatness of God is manifested to us through his Word to give strength to those following in Jesus’ footsteps. As Paul wrote, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” (Phil. 4:13) Thus, let us remember the power of the Heavenly Father’s greatness, as manifested through his Son. ■

Deliverance from the Fiery Furnace

Key Verse: *“Then Nebuchadnezzar spake, and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king’s word, and yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God.”*
—Daniel 3:28

Selected Scripture:
Daniel 3:1-30

the gods.” (Dan. 3:25, *Revised Version*) Nebuchadnezzar acknowledged it was the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego that had delivered them from perishing. He

TODAY’S LESSON TELLS

the familiar story of three young Jewish men in Babylonian captivity who refused to bow down and worship a golden idol when threatened with execution by King Nebuchadnezzar. After having earlier interpreted the king’s dream, Daniel was appointed to the highest position in the royal court. (Dan. 2:27-48) In return for this reward, Daniel requested Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego be put in charge of all the affairs of the province of Babylon. —vs. 49

Our Key Verse recounts the king’s reaction following the protection and deliverance of these three from the fiery furnace. Nebuchadnezzar had seen four men walking around unharmed in the furnace and remarked that the fourth was “like a son of

would decree that no one could say anything against the God of these three faithful Hebrews.—vs. 29

Miracles alone, however, cannot make lasting changes to the heart, and there did not seem to be an enduring reform in the king's conduct. Shortly after this account the king would have another dream which Daniel interpreted as showing his downfall and humiliation. (Dan. 4:4-33) Nevertheless, God was longsuffering with Nebuchadnezzar, and the king's last recorded words seem to show a sincere reform. "Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven; all his works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase."—vs. 37

We can learn much from our lesson. First, live a principled life. While disagreeing with Nebuchadnezzar's policies and values, the three Hebrew young men chose to honor God and serve with excellence when appointed to be in charge over the affairs of the province of Babylon. This gave them the platform to speak before the king and be an example of faith to their fellow Israelites in a time of despair resulting from their captivity.

Second, allow trials to give you strength. The Apostles tell us trials are essential in our Christian walk if we are to be made perfect in character, and we should therefore rejoice in them. (James 1:2-4; I Pet. 4:12,13) We are promised there will never be a trial so difficult that we cannot bear it.—I Cor. 10:13

Third, give glory to God through your testimony. He can protect us from any "fiery furnace" experience we may face if it is his will to do so. Otherwise, let our trust in him be testified with words like those of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: "If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. But even if he doesn't, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up."—Dan. 3:16-18, *New Living Translation* ■

Lions' Mouths Shut

Key Verse: *“My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions’ mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt.”*
—Daniel 6:22

Selected Scripture:
Daniel 6:1-28

THIS IS THE SECOND TIME in the book of Daniel that we find an account of Jews being sentenced to death for practicing their faith. All four—Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego [their Babylonian names], and Daniel—had been taken to Babylon before the destruction of Jerusalem because they demonstrated excellence that could be used in King Nebuchadnezzar’s service. (Dan. 1:3-7) That excellence was immediately displayed when they refused to defile themselves with the royal food and wine, insisting on a simple diet of vegetables and water.

The result: “In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.”—vss. 8-20, *New International Version*

Our previous lesson, as well as today’s, both involve conspiracies against these four faithful Hebrews. (Dan. 3:8; 6:13) In both accounts they were given inescapable death sentences, and the two narratives state that they were saved from death by the mighty power of God. This would have been believable by Israelites, who knew that God did so to save those specially used to accomplish his purposes.—Ps. 34:7; 91:11

Babylon had been conquered by Medo-Persia, whose king was Darius. The king was impressed by Daniel's performance as one of three administrators looking over the affairs of the kingdom. Because "an excellent spirit" was in Daniel, Darius planned to make him ruler "over the whole realm."—Dan. 6:3

This caused the overlooked administrators to begin plotting against Daniel, but they concluded, "We will never find any basis for charges against this man Daniel unless it has something to do with the law of his God." (vs. 5, *NIV*) They appealed to the king's vanity and position of power to enact an edict that anyone asking a petition of any god or man other than Darius for thirty days should be thrown into the lions' den. The conspirators said to the king that "all" had agreed to this proposal. In this, however, they had lied to Darius, for he was unaware that Daniel was not among the "all."

The Prophet Ezekiel later wrote that only Noah, Daniel, and Job could save themselves through their righteousness if they were in a country that God determined to destroy because of their sins against him. (Ezek. 14:14,20) Now facing a den of lions reserved for executing enemies of the state, God had determined to save Daniel because of his righteousness. Quoting Daniel 6:21-23 from the *New International Version*, we read: "Daniel answered, May the king live forever! My God sent his angel, and he shut the mouths of the lions. They have not hurt me, because I was found innocent in his sight. Nor have I ever done any wrong before you, Your Majesty. The king was overjoyed and gave orders to lift Daniel out of the den. ... No wound was found on him, because he had trusted in his God."

Daniel gave all glory to God in this experience. It was divine power that shut the lions' mouths because of Daniel's innocence. Peter tells us God will shut the mouth of that "roaring lion," the devil, if we are vigilant and sober-minded when he attacks.—I Pet. 5:8 ■

The Vision Shall Speak

Key Verse: *“The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.”*
—**Habakkuk 2:3**

Selected Scripture:
Habakkuk 2:1-4

THE PROPHECY OF HABAKKUK is set in the kingdom of Judah during the rule of evil King Jehoiakim prior to the Babylonian conquest. Israel’s unfaithfulness to Jehovah had led them to ask for a king like all the nations surrounding them. (I Sam. 8:5) After granting their request, Israel was ruled by kings who were alternately faithful and unfaithful to God. Eventually, Israel became divided into two kingdoms, Israel and

Judah, after King Solomon set up shrines to idols to please his many foreign wives.—I Kings 11:4-12

The first two chapters of the Book of Habakkuk record a dialogue between the prophet and God. Habakkuk asked the Lord, “How long, O LORD, must I call for help? ... Wherever I look, I see destruction and violence. ... There is no justice in the courts. The wicked far outnumber the righteous.” (Hab. 1:2-4, *New Living Translation*) God replies, “Look around at the nations; ... I am doing something in your own day, something you wouldn’t believe even if someone told you about it. I am raising up the Babylonians ... cruel and violent people.

They will march across the world and conquer other lands.”—vss. 5,6, *NLT*

Habakkuk then raises additional questions to God: “Surely you do not plan to wipe us out? ... You are pure and cannot stand the sight of evil. Will you wink at their treachery? Should you be silent while the wicked swallow up people more righteous than they?” (vss. 12,13, *NLT*) As chapter two opens, the prophet models the perfect response for those who look for the Lord’s will in their lives; he is going to watch and wait. “I will climb up to my watchtower and stand at my guardpost. There I will wait to see what the LORD says and how he will answer my complaint.”—Hab. 2:1, *NLT*

Jehovah quickly replies: “Write my answer plainly on tablets, so that a runner can carry the correct message to others.” (vs. 2, *NLT*) The Hebrew word for tablets refers to wooden planks prophets would write upon and then display for all to see. This implies writing in large, legible print so a runner could read it when passing by. Thus, Habakkuk was to write God’s response clearly so those who read and understood the plain message could tell it to others.

The Lord’s answer to Habakkuk is a clear statement that those who rule with evil and cruelty will themselves be destroyed. “Look at the proud! They trust in themselves, and their lives are crooked. But the righteous will live by their faithfulness to God.”—vs. 4, *NLT*

In the vision of God’s plan, he has allowed the permission of evil in the earth for a limited time. However, it is the divine purpose to eradicate evil and its results in the coming Messianic kingdom. This will be the “appointed time” referred to in our Key Verse. Of this, Paul writes, “Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ, Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father: To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”—Gal. 1:3-5 ■

A Tree Planted

“He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.”
—*Psalm 1:3*

IN THE PICTORIAL LANGUAGE of the Bible, God often uses trees to represent a group or body of people. For example, an olive tree is used in the New Testament to represent fleshly Israel. It is this illustration that Paul employs in Romans 11, where he shows that the natural descendants of Abraham, as

the seed of promise, are broken off as branches from this tree, and Gentile branches are ingrafted to take their places. In our opening text, however, a tree is used to represent individual servants of God rather than a group. As individuals who have entered into the divine service, we must all be “trees of righteousness.”—Isa. 61:3

The significance of the illustration expressed in our text is enhanced by the explanation that the tree is planted by rivers of water. The Hebrew word translated “rivers” is defined as small channels of water, as in irrigation. This suggests two streams serving to irrigate the tree planted between them. The ancient Israelites were well acquainted with

arid and parched ground, hence the illustration of a tree planted between rivers or small channels of water is a very meaningful illustration of the wondrous way in which God supplies the needs of his faithful people.

There is meaning also in the fact that the tree is “planted.” It is not a wild tree of the fields, but one planted and tended. Thus we are reminded that the people of God are such by divine providence and planning. While it is our privilege to cooperate with the Lord in connection with our becoming his people, yet the Scriptures make it plain that he is the one who is responsible for the planting.—Isa. 61:3

One of the lessons taught by the tree illustration is referred to by Paul in Colossians 2:6,7, where he speaks of those who are walking in the footsteps of Jesus as being “rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith.” As the roots of a tree push themselves downward and absorb the nutrients of the soil, so a Christian takes hold of the great and precious promises of the Word of God, and thereby is nourished and strengthened to withstand the storms of opposition that beat against him. The roots of faith push deep into the knowledge of the divine will and plan, while the tree of character grows upward, developing and maturing the rich fruits of the Holy Spirit of God.

Thus seen, the roots of a tree have two functions; namely, that of taking hold of the ground to support the tree, and serving to absorb the moisture and mineral elements of the ground for the growth of the tree. It is our faith that takes hold of the “ground,” that is, the understanding of God’s Word of Truth, which nourishes and establishes us

as New Creatures. If our faith is small, we will be easily uprooted, and will fail to absorb from the Word of God the necessary nourishment for a healthy growth in grace. Our standing in the Lord, being rooted in him, and our resulting ability to cope with the difficulties of the Christian life, depend upon the measure of our faith. "According to your faith be it unto you," the Scriptures say, and again, "this is the victory [Greek: the means of success] that overcometh the world, even our faith."—Matt 9:29; I John 5:4

WELL ROOTED AND STURDY

While we, as Christians, are growing in character-likeness to our pattern, Christ Jesus, our roots of faith should be reaching ever deeper into the Word of God. If this be true, then we are becoming established and settled. A tree that is well-rooted in the earth is sturdy, unyielding to winds and storms. So it is with those whose faith has been properly established. We should be so fixed, so established in the promises of God's Word that no wind of doctrine can overthrow our faith. (Eph. 4:14) It is not an evidence of Christian virtue to be continually looking around for something new. Such an attitude demonstrates a lack of that necessary faith by which we are rooted and grounded in Christ.

Having once made the truth of God's plan our own, we should not permit ourselves to be moved away from that position. A tree whose roots are not firmly fixed in the earth cannot properly grow. Such a tree is sure to lack in vigor and growth. So with Christians, there can be no healthy Christian growth, nor can there be vigorous spiritual life

unless the soul becomes fixed and settled in the Truth, as it is centered in Christ Jesus.

It is also unwise to indulge in a curiosity as to what this or that new theory may teach. For one who has never known the Truth there might be some justifiable reason for such a course. Indeed, until the Truth is found we cannot but be on the lookout for that which satisfies our longings as nothing else can do. However, if we found the Truth of God's Word and have thoroughly proved it to be such, to go hunting for new pastures in which to feed is unwise. In the plan of God there is an inexhaustible field both for mental and spiritual activity, so there would seem to be no need to seek for an enlarged sphere of thought.

SUNSHINE AND RAIN

A tree does not utilize the same natural elements at all times, as it is not always flooded with sunshine, but needs also the rains and storms for its development. Similarly, the child of God needs varied experiences and sometimes a change of environment to best develop all the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Our Heavenly Father, the Great Husbandman, knows just what experiences each one of his "trees" needs in order to properly grow in stature and strength. (John 15:1; I Cor. 3:9) The amount of sunshine and the amount of rain are governed by him who supplies all of our needs. In his wisdom God knows how to vary the conditions and environment of our spiritual development without disturbing the process of rooting and growth, but strengthening our position with each experience.—II Cor. 9:8-11; Phil. 4:19

How thankful we should be for the assurance of such wise and loving care! If we attempted to choose for ourselves the things most needed for our spiritual growth, we would be almost certain to choose that which would bring spiritual decline, or even worse. How important it is, then, that we humbly and continually submit ourselves to the care of the skillful Husbandman, earnestly cooperating with him, that we may grow and become strong and immovable—firmly established.—I Cor. 15:58; Col. 1:23; I Pet. 5:10

The vigorous growth of a tree, together with the amount of fruitage it bears, is a good indication of the depth and spread of its roots. A tree that is not deeply and firmly grounded cannot bring forth rich, luscious fruit, nor is such a tree able to furnish cool, refreshing shade for man. So the Christian's faith must be deeply grounded in Christ if he is to bear the fruit of the Spirit. The rooting process in the Christian life, as in a literal tree, is unseen, and can be judged only by outward manifestations. If we are truly rooted and grounded in the Truth, that fact will manifest itself more and more by our growing likeness to the image of Christ, who is our pattern and inspiration.—Rom. 8:29; II Cor. 3:18

AN ESTABLISHED CHRISTIAN NOT AN EXTREMIST

It is a mistaken notion sometimes expressed by those not well acquainted with the Word of God, that to be established in faith and doctrine is to be an extremist or intolerant. Indeed, to be superstitiously established in the traditions of men not based upon the teachings of God's Word, would likely lead to such a condition. This is not true,

however, of those who, having studied God's plan and made it their own, tenaciously hold to it because they know it to be firmly founded upon the Word of God. Each day, our faith and character structure is being tested as to what sort it is, and only if we are rooted and grounded in God's Word will we be able to stand this test.

A well-rooted, healthy, and sturdy tree also puts forth leaves and bears fruitage. A tree "planted by rivers of waters," in addition to being strongly rooted and established, bears leaves of outward profession as well as the fruit of the Spirit. If our faith is deeply rooted in the Word of God, we will not only be unyielding against Satan's attacks through winds of false doctrine, but our professions and fruitage will be known to those with whom we come in contact, and they should be able to note the fruit of the Spirit displayed in our daily lives.—I Tim. 6:12; Gal. 5:22,23; Eph. 5:9

FORTITUDE

The Apostle Peter writes, "Add to your faith virtue." (II Pet. 1:5) The word here translated virtue properly means fortitude, or moral excellence. This might suggest that virtue is the first visible manifestation of the fact that the roots of faith are taking hold of the Word of God. Such fortitude, or strength of character, might therefore be well represented by the visible trunk of the tree, and not only enables us to show forth the Truth to others, but also molds our own lives into the image and likeness of Christ.

To start with, we are, as New Creatures, only young plants, as it were. Like the young plants not

yet fully grown and able to withstand the winds and storms, we are prone to sway backward and forward in the face of adversity. Trials, which to the sturdy and more mature Christian seem light, to one less developed appear to be grievous. However, God tempers the storm for each—those new in the Christian way as well as for those more mature. Thus we have the assurance that as long as our faith is resting in the Heavenly Father, he will help us to bear whatever may come of trial or sorrow.

KNOWLEDGE

Peter suggests knowledge as next in order, following virtue. One of the wholesome results when we face opposition to God's Word and to our endeavors to walk the narrow way of righteousness, is that of sending us back again to the Word of God to confirm the reason for the hope that is in us. (I Pet. 3:15) When we try to explain the Gospel message to others, we may find that there are questions put to us which are difficult to answer. This leads us to a more earnest study, sending us to the "rivers of water" to refresh our understanding as well as to satisfy our hearts.

The branches of the tree might well represent this outgrowth of knowledge which will be the result of a strong faith and resolute fortitude. As trees of righteousness, therefore, we should seek to be well-rounded in the knowledge of God's Word. This means that we should not become specialists along any one line of knowledge, but seek to attain and be profited by all that the Bible has for us.

With some, the natural tendency may be to study principally the chronological phases of God's plan. Others may find their liking gratified chiefly in the study of the symbolisms of Revelation. Still others may specialize in trying to unlock all the prophecies of the Bible. Those more devotionally inclined may give most of their efforts to searching out all that the Bible says along these lines. Some, who by nature find it most to their liking to be active in the promulgation of the Gospel message, may spend their available study periods chiefly in finding Scriptures to use in these efforts.

All of these, and many other areas of Scripture, are profitable to us and should be part of our program of Bible study. (II Tim. 3:16,17) However, just as a natural tree would look odd and be far from pleasing to the sight if it contained only one branch protruding in one or another direction, so the Christian whose growth in knowledge is centered principally along only one line of study will not be properly "furnished unto all good works." As a one-branched tree seems out of place in a grove of fully branched trees, so will the Christian who specializes in one aspect of Scripture appear in a congregation of well-developed trees of righteousness.

In reality, all our study of God's Word should be with the primary objectives of attaining a knowledge of God, understanding his will concerning us, and developing a Christlike character. Inasmuch as the Heavenly Father has provided us with all that the Bible contains, we should seek to develop our branches of knowledge most especially along these lines, that we might make our "calling and election sure."—II Pet. 1:10

FRUITAGE

If a tree had no branches, it could bear no fruit. This is true also with respect to trees of righteousness. How could we bear the fruits of the Spirit if we had no knowledge of God revealed to us through his glorious plan of salvation? Yet, while knowledge is important, we must remember that no tree grows just for the purpose of producing branches alone. The branches of a tree are for the eventual bearing of fruit, so the objective of Christian knowledge is the bearing of the fruits and graces of the Spirit. If the sole object of our study of God's Word is to show ourselves "approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed," then the result of our study will be manifested in the growth of the fruitage of Christian character, the sum of which is love.—II Tim. 2:15

With most trees, the leaves appear before there is any fruit to be seen. It is also so with us as trees of righteousness. It is proper that our professions of faith and knowledge should be indicated from the very time that we begin to learn that the Lord is gracious. If they are sincere and from the heart, it will not be long before a more substantial evidence of a knowledge of God in our hearts becomes manifested in the fruitage of Christian character.

What a beautiful illustration of Christian character we thus have in a well-developed tree laden with fruit! How well it illustrates the life of the child of God, full of faith, and courageous in the doing of God's will. Such ones are not afraid to testify about Christ, as illustrated by the leaves of profession, nor do they hide the fact that they are striving to mold their life to conform to the image

of Christ. In such a character there is to be found a well-rounded knowledge of the Bible, a knowledge, moreover, that bears fruit in everyday life.

In a healthy Christian life, even as in the case of a sturdy tree, there is real strength, as illustrated by the trunk and root system. However, if our knowledge of God's Word is no more than merely something to talk about—or merely a profession, as illustrated by the leaves—we are likely to become unstable, moved about with new ideas that come along.

In this entire symbolism, however, no matter how deep-rooted a tree may be in the good soil from which it grows; no matter how sturdy its trunk; irrespective of the health and number of its branches, and the beauty of its leaves; its existence is in vain unless it bears good fruit. With trees of righteousness, we may have a strength of faith and character to resist opposition, a well-rounded knowledge of God's plan, and be eloquent in our professions of the Gospel message. Yet, if we "have not love," our Christianity is in vain.—I Cor. 13:1-3, *Revised Version*

Fruit trees are not grown primarily for their foliage, but for their fruit. If we are, indeed, trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, we have been planted by him in order that his qualities of divine character may be made known to, and bless others, through us. This fruitage, unlike mere profession, is the actual development of Godlikeness in our lives. It is that development of Christian character which renders truly helpful all that we do for others, and which also glorifies God, because it is his likeness operating in our lives.

Love must be the sum total of the motives which prompt all that we say and do, else God will not be pleased with us as trees of righteousness. As cited earlier, Paul writes, "If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am become sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And if I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profiteth me nothing."—I Cor. 13:1-3, *RV*

The fruit of a natural tree does not appear full-sized and ripened all at once, so the fruitage of the Christian life is a matter of gradual growth and final ripening. In the case of natural fruit, there is first the bud, then the flower, followed by the small unripe fruit, and finally the mature, luscious product of the tree. So with Christian character, there is a development. The Apostle Peter writes concerning the gradual development of fruitage, telling us to add to our faith "fortitude, and to fortitude knowledge, and to knowledge self-control, and to self-control patience, and to patience piety, and to piety brotherly-kindness, and to brotherly-kindness love."—II Pet. 1:5-7, *The Emphatic Diaglott*

The genuine, fully ripened fruit of the Spirit embodies the same qualities of loving character which our Heavenly Father and his beloved Son, Christ Jesus, possess. For us, this fruitage includes a love for the brethren, a love for righteousness, and a love for all that is in harmony with God. (John 13:34,35; Heb. 1:9; I John 5:2,3) Yet, it is even more than this. Divine love was of a quality

which displayed interest in us while we were yet sinners—a love that went out to the entire estranged world of mankind, a race alienated from God through sin. Indeed, while we were yet sinners, God manifested his love toward us through the gift of his beloved Son to be our Redeemer.—Rom. 5:8; John 3:16,17

As trees of righteousness, we have not borne the rich, fully ripened fruit of love until we, too, can love our enemies, as Jesus did. We must be willing to make sacrifices in order to bless those who, through their ignorance, may be displaying their animosity toward us.—Matt. 5:43-45

SIMULTANEOUS DEVELOPMENT

In comparing trees of righteousness with literal trees, we are to remember that the roots, trunk, branches, leaves, and oftentimes the fruit, develop more or less simultaneously. That is to say, the roots of a tree do not become fully developed, pushing down deeply and laying hold firmly upon the earth, before there is any evidence of the trunk. A short root is followed quickly by a small slender trunk, which shoots out its spindly branches bearing their tender leaves. With some varieties of fruit trees, fruit also appears while they are yet very young. The parallelism of this should be true in the Christian life. If, as trees of righteousness, we develop as we should, the whole tree, including roots, will continue to develop over the course of our Christian life. Thus we should not find ourselves in the position of having a strong faith, but no love, or of making great outward professions, yet lacking stability of character.

We should remember, too, that as we grow and produce fruit, the Great Husbandman, in addition to permitting the winds of opposition and storms of persecution to test and strengthen the fiber of our characters, will prune us. If we show a tendency to shoot out branches of human knowledge on which may develop the fruitage of selfishness, God, in his love, and in his own wise way, may clip those branches, thus demonstrating to us the folly of our ways.—John 15:1,2, *Diaglott*; Heb. 12:5-7

Above all, let us remember that if we are truly trees of righteousness we are in the Lord's hands. Not only was it through his gracious providence that we became "trees," but only by his loving provision and tender care, may we continue to grow and bear fruit. In our opening text, the psalmist declares that God's trees of righteousness will prosper. This is a spiritual prosperity due to the blessing of the Heavenly Father, and which manifests itself in the rich fruitage of love, without which no effort of the Christian can profit anything. Let us, then, continue to look to the Lord, and seek his blessings, guidance, and care in all that we say and do. Thus, as trees of righteousness, we may, indeed, be a glory to the name of our Great Husbandman. ■

*"O LORD, I give my life to you. I trust in you
my God! ... Show me the right path, O LORD;
point out the road for me to follow. Lead
me by your truth and teach me,
for you are the God who saves me. All day
long I put my hope in you."
Psalm 25:1,2,4,5 New Living Translation*

The Missionary Tour of Paul and Barnabas

*“Separate me
Barnabas and
Saul [Paul] 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*

THE APOSTLE PAUL'S

first major effort in proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ was at Antioch in Syria. After preaching briefly at Damascus and Jerusalem, and escaping from those who sought to kill him, he went to his home city of Tarsus, perhaps to await an indication of the Lord's will as to

how, where, and when he should engage more actively in the ministry. (Acts 9:19-30) He did not have to wait long, for Barnabas sought him out and persuaded the apostle to accompany him to Antioch, there to share with him and others in the work of proclaiming the Gospel.—Acts 11:25-30

The work in Antioch prospered. The church grew, not only in numbers, but among the local brethren

several developed into competent servants so that it became apparent that the services of Barnabas and Saul were no longer so vitally needed. In addition, there were now Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen as servants to the church at Antioch. The Holy Spirit indicated to the brethren, as stated in our opening text, that Barnabas and Saul should now begin a special work to which God had called them. With fasting and prayer, they were sent on their way. "So they, being sent forth by the Holy Spirit, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus."—Acts 13:1-4

PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY TOUR

Saul, whose name now had been changed to Paul, took the place of Judas Iscariot among the twelve apostles by divine appointment. He was now embarked on his first missionary tour, being accompanied by Barnabas and also joined by John Mark. (Acts 13:5,9) It is interesting to note that while these two served together in Antioch they are referred to as Barnabas and Saul, but soon after they began their travels, the order was changed to "Paul and Barnabas."—vss. 43,46

The first recorded missionary activity of their journey was in Salamis, where "they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews." (vs. 5) While Paul was made a special apostle to the Gentiles, he did not hesitate to witness to the Jews whenever and wherever he found an opportunity.

Salamis was on the island of Cyprus, "When they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Barjesus: Which was with the deputy of

the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man.” The deputy called for Barnabas and Paul to come and speak to him, as he “desired to hear the Word of God.”—vss. 6,7

The sorcerer, however, withstood Barnabas and Paul, “seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith.” Then Paul, “filled with the Holy Spirit, set his eyes on him, And said, O full of all subtilty and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand.”—vss. 8-11

Here was Paul’s first exercise of divine authority and power in the ministry as an apostle. The fact that the sorcerer, by Paul’s act, was made blind, was very impressive, and from that time on we find him the leader of the group and in most instances the spokesman. Indeed, in God’s providence this great apostle had now been elevated to his ordained position in the ministry of the Gospel and the brethren. Even the deputy of the country, whom the sorcerer tried to prevent hearing Paul’s message, was impressed, and “believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.”—vs. 12

PAUL AT ANTIOCH IN PISIDIA

From Paphos on the island of Cyprus, Paul and his companions sailed north to Perga, in Pamphylia, which was one of the coast regions in the south of Asia Minor. No information is given us concerning

their visit to Perga, except that here John Mark left the party and returned to Jerusalem.—Acts 13:13

“From Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia.” The Antioch from which Paul and Barnabas had started on their journey was in Syria. Reaching Antioch in Pisidia they “went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down.” Here again, we find Paul seeking out the devout Jews to witness to them. In the synagogue Paul’s opportunity soon came. After reading a portion of the law and the prophets, the rulers, seeing these strangers in their midst, sent word to them saying, “Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.”—vss. 14,15

Paul did not need to be urged. He “stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience.” Then Paul, in his usual forthright, though diplomatic manner, presented the Gospel of Christ to the Jews assembled in the synagogue. He first traced Israel’s traditional religious background, which he affirmed as being true, and which was highly treasured by every devout Israelite.—vss. 16-23

Wisely and skillfully, Paul then referred to John the Baptist, who apparently occupied an honored position in the minds and hearts of most Jews. He explained to them that John had announced the presence of Jesus, their Messiah, placing him in a very high position by saying that he was not worthy even to unloose his shoes. The audience knew that it was their own people in and around Jerusalem who had insisted that Jesus be put to death. Paul explained to them that although the Jews of Judea did not know it, actually the prophecies in

which they professed to believe had foretold that this is exactly what they would do.—vss. 24-29

“But God raised him from the dead.” (vs. 30) This was the keynote of Paul’s message. No matter how they might try to explain the crucifixion of Jesus, or insist, perhaps, that their compatriots in Jerusalem had acted wisely in putting him to death, their arguments would have no weight at all in face of the fact that God had raised him from the dead. Had Jesus been a sinner, a blasphemer, a traitor to Israel, and an enemy of the nation, God would not have raised him from the dead.

Paul proceeded to show that the resurrection of Jesus, as well as his death as man’s Redeemer, had been foretold by God through his holy prophets. He said, “We declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.”—vss. 32,33; Ps. 2:7

Then, as recorded in Acts 13:34, Paul quoted another prophecy from the Old Testament which he indicates implied the necessity for Jesus to be raised from the dead. It was the words of Isaiah 55:3, in which God assured the prophet that he would give him “the sure mercies of David.” This prophecy is related to the covenant which God had previously made with David.

Nathan had explained to David God’s covenant, saying, “When thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house

for my name [the immediate fulfillment of this was through David's son, Solomon], and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. ... My mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever."
—II Sam. 7:12-16

David sensed, in part at least, the importance of this promise and in response said, "Who am I, O Lord GOD? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord GOD; but thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come." (vss. 18,19) David could not, of course, know the full extent of that "great while" which he sensed was implied by God's wonderful promise to him. However, when, as the Apostle Paul indicates, we find that the resurrection of Jesus was related to its fulfillment, it begins to take on a meaning that is truly wonderful.

Paul spoke under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and he was also well acquainted with the prophetic testimony concerning the kingdom of David, so in his association of these prophecies with the resurrection of Jesus, we have a clear example of properly interpreting the Word of God. Isaiah wrote concerning Jesus, the Messiah, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace

there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.”—Isa. 9:6,7

The apostle would also know of the angel's declaration to Mary when announcing to her that she was to be the mother of the Messiah. “Fear not, Mary,” the angel said, “for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.”—Luke 1:30-33

By reading the history of the successive kings in the royal line of David, from his death to the overthrow of Zedekiah, one is impressed with the manner in which, through the overruling providences of God, the Davidic line of kings was not permitted to be destroyed. Jesus, through his birth, belonged to that family and was the true heir to David's throne. (Matt. 1:1-17) He had no sons, however, and he himself was killed by his enemies. From the human standpoint, this would mean the end of this royal line of kings.

God intervened, not to save the rightful king from death, but to raise him from the dead. Thus, as Paul indicates, the mighty power of God was utilized to make certain the “sure mercies of David”—that is, to fulfill the promise made to David, which was based upon mercy. In view of the circumstances,

it was in this manner that Paul saw in the Davidic covenant a forecast of Jesus' resurrection.

Paul, proceeding with his sermon, quoted yet another prophecy of Jesus' resurrection: "Thou wilt not ... suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." (Ps. 16:10) Paul reasoned that this could not refer to David himself because he did see corruption. Indeed, David was still dead. He "fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption."—Acts 13:35-37

After establishing the fact that Jesus, in fulfillment of prophecy, had been raised from the dead, Paul then made the practical application of this Truth to the lives of those who could believe it. He continued: "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man [Jesus] is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses." Paul closed his sermon with a note of warning that they should not in a spirit of unbelief lightly dismiss what he had said.—vss. 38-41

Verse 42, from the *Revised Version*, states that "as they went out, they besought that these words might be spoken to them the next sabbath." The next verse explains that "many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God."—*King James Version*

"And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God." (vs. 44) Here was a spontaneous response to Paul's preaching. There had been no previous publicity

by cooperating congregations, no high pressure advertising, and no importing of an audience from distant cities. One brief sermon had been preached by the Apostle Paul, and the news concerning it had been circulated, with the result that the following Sabbath nearly the entire city gathered together to hear Paul.

We are not to assume that all these people were genuinely interested in the Gospel of Christ. Much of the excitement was, no doubt, based on curiosity. After all, Paul had said some startling things. He had declared that a certain one, even Jesus of Nazareth, had been raised from the dead. Certainly the urge to hear more about something as sensational as this would be irresistible. Millions, even today, gather once each year to commemorate, at least in practice, the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

“But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy.” They began to oppose Paul and Barnabas, “contradicting and blaspheming.” However, this did not discourage these ardent missionaries. “Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing you put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.”—vss. 45,46

Paul understood the principles of the divine arrangement. He knew that the opportunities of the Gospel of Christ were to be offered to “the Jew first,” and that then the Gentiles were also to have an opportunity. (Rom. 2:9,10) The apostle then quoted a prophecy to show that God had made provision for the Gentiles in his great plan of redemption through Jesus.—Acts 13:47; Isa. 49:6

“When the Gentiles heard this,” the record states, “they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.” (Acts 13:48) The expression “as many as were ordained to eternal life” does not mean that these were predetermined to be saved and go to heaven when they died, and that the remainder of this great multitude who gathered to hear Paul had been foreordained by God to be tortured in hell-fire forever, as many theologians have shamelessly taught.

The Greek word here translated “ordained” literally means “to arrange in an orderly manner.” We read in Acts 15:14 that “God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.” It was not God’s plan to convert all the Gentiles during the present Gospel Age, but merely to select from them a small company who, through devotion and self-sacrifice, would prove worthy to reign with Christ in his kingdom. (Rom. 8:16,17; II Tim. 2:11,12; Rev. 20:6) This work of selection has been done by God in an “orderly manner.”

Jesus said, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.” (John 6:44) Whether it was Paul’s preaching, or the humble efforts of a devoted Christian in witnessing to his next door neighbor, it has been only as God “draws” that there has ever been a genuine response to the Gospel message. Thus it has been accomplished in an “orderly manner,” for our Heavenly Father is a God of order. (I Cor. 14:33) His drawing has been based on heart qualities and other considerations which he knows will, if the individual proves faithful, blend with his plans for the later blessing of all mankind.

In the Lord's providence, Paul and Barnabas found it necessary to move on from Antioch. They had no choice, for "the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against" them, "and expelled them out of their coasts. But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium."—Acts 13:50,51

In Iconium, the general pattern of events for Paul and Barnabas continued as they had experienced in other places. First there was the witness in the synagogue. Then the unbelieving Jews began to oppose, stirring up the spirit of riot among the Gentiles. Paul and Barnabas continued their efforts in the city as long as they could. However, they left when they learned that there was a plot to inflict physical violence upon them.—Acts 14:1-6

From Iconium they fled to Lystra and Derbe, other cities in that region. Here Paul had the opportunity of healing a man who was "impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked. ... And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voice, saying in the speech [language] of Lycaonia, The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men. And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker."—vss. 8-12

Thinking that they were gods, the people prepared to offer sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas, but when the missionaries learned of this plan, they cried out to the people, "Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all

things that are therein: Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. 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 14:14-17

These to whom Paul thus witnessed were Gentiles, so his approach was quite different from that which he used in a Jewish synagogue. He called their attention to the goodness of God as manifested in the loving provisions he had made for all nations. If they had not heard of this true God before, the one who had created the heaven and the earth, it was because he had permitted them to go along in their own way without interference. Nevertheless, even though they did not know him, and had never given him thanks for his daily blessing, he loved them. It was necessary that they understand and appreciate this basic truth before Paul could lead them further into the mysteries of the Gospel.

The record does not state whether any of these accepted Paul’s message or were impressed by it. Seemingly, before it had time to take root in their hearts, unbelieving Jews of Antioch and Iconium, who had followed Paul and Barnabas from those cities, appeared on the scene, and stirred up the people to stone Paul. He was rendered unconscious and given up as dead. However, he revived, and the next day he and Barnabas continued their journey to Derbe.—vss. 19,20

THE RETURN JOURNEY

After they had preached the Gospel in Derbe, and “had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium and Antioch, Confirming [Greek:

strengthening] the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue [persevere] in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.” (Acts 14:21,22) These “disciples” whom Paul and Barnabas thus confirmed in the faith were those who had believed during their first visit to these cities.

Without doubt all these new disciples had suffered persecution, so it was explained to them that this was part of the cost of discipleship, that only by suffering with Christ could they hope to reign with him in his kingdom. Under these circumstances, it is unlikely that any continued in the way of the Gospel except those who had genuine faith. There was no present reward except the peace and joy of knowing that the great plan of God through the Messiah was progressing to a glorious consummation.

Paul instructed them in the importance of working together in an orderly manner, and of choosing those competent among them to serve as leaders and teachers. Thus we see that Paul was not only an evangelist, but a pastor also, a genuine caretaker of the flock, instructing the disciples in all their needs.—vs. 23

After visiting a few more places, the details of which are not given, Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch in Syria, from which they had started on this first missionary tour. Arriving there they gathered the brethren together who had sent them out, and to whom a report was therefore proper, and “they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.” (vs. 27) How we rejoice at the manner in which God used these faithful missionaries to initiate the spread of the Gospel to new regions of the world! ■

What Manner of Persons Ought We to Be?

“Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?”
—II Peter 3:11

THE FUTURE INSTITUTION of Christ’s kingdom was one of the chief sources of inspiration for the Early Church. While the Apostle Peter did not look for these blessed events in God’s plan to occur prior to his death, yet it was his hope that they were near

at hand. The establishment of Christ’s kingdom—the “new heavens and a new earth”—meant, of necessity, that the heavens and the earth over which Satan is the ruler would have to be dissolved.—II Pet. 3:13

This vital truth was emphasized by Peter to impress upon the Lord’s people the worthlessness of all hopes, ambitions, and joys which have their foundations and their associations in the things of this present world. The fact that these things were

to be dissolved, and that the followers of Christ were looking forward to having part in the new heavens and the new earth, should have been a great incentive to them in giving all diligence to make their “calling and election sure.”—II Pet. 1:10

“What manner of persons ought ye to be,” Peter inquires in our opening text, “in all holy conversation and godliness?” If this question was a serious consideration in his day, how much more weighty it is now when we stand at the very threshold of the new dispensation, and are in the midst of the turmoil and trouble which will bring to an end the current world order.

IMPORTANT TO OUR DAY

Soon, we believe, Satan’s rule over the present world will be ended, and mankind will stand face to face with the blessed conditions of the established kingdom of God throughout all the earth! (Matt. 6:10) Within a comparatively short time also, the true church is to finish her earthly course. How important it is, then, that we properly “redeem the time,” zealously carrying out in our hearts and lives the divine will for us in these climactic days.—Eph. 5:16; Col. 4:5

It is not merely a fanciful notion, a pleasing illusion of the mind, that we are living in the Day of the Lord, when the old world order is passing away. (II Pet. 3:10) Indeed, the more we study the prophecies of the Bible pertaining to this time, the more vividly we realize the importance of the days in which we are living. Truly, we stand in awe when we realize that it is the blessed privilege of the saints today to see many fulfillments of prophecy,

long awaited by the faithful throughout the centuries, actually transpiring.

COMFORT ONE ANOTHER

In seeking an answer to Peter's question, "What manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?" we are reminded of Paul's practical application of our understanding of God's Word: "Wherefore comfort one another with these words." (I Thess. 4:18) "These words" which the apostle suggests be used for the comforting of the Lord's people, are those in the preceding verses. (vss. 13-17) These tell of the coming resurrection of all those asleep in death. They speak also of the "coming" [Greek: *parousia*, or presence] of our Lord Jesus, his descending from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God; also that the dead in Christ rise first, and that those who are alive and remain are to be exalted together with him in the "air"—the spiritual phase of the kingdom.

To those unacquainted with God's Word, the Dark Age concept of Christ visibly descending from heaven with a shout and with a literal trumpet surely would not be very comforting. However, to those who understand the real meaning of these symbolic expressions, and the glorious truths which they set forth for the enlightenment and encouragement of the saints at this time, they are indeed comforting. In fact, the truths pertaining to the end of the present age are of vital importance to the people of God, because they signal we are living very near to the time when all mankind, both the living and those in the grave, will be

brought forth into the earthly phase of the kingdom.

It will be at this time that the words of John the Revelator will be fulfilled: “I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”—Rev. 21:3,4

Our life of holy conversation and godliness should, therefore, be one filled with thoughts, words, and activities in keeping with the glorious prospect of these events bringing about a time of joy and blessings to all the families of the earth. We are to comfort one another with these thoughts, and not merely to learn about them and then keep them to ourselves. We are not to be ashamed of our knowledge of the unfolding of God’s eternal purpose concerning mankind, nor think it unimportant and therefore relegate it to an obscure place in our belief and ministry.

As the glorious truths pertaining to the establishment of the Messianic kingdom constituted the inspiration of the Early Church, still more should it be the basis of our rejoicing now. This is especially so as we see many evidences all around us that the “elements” [Greek: orderly arrangements] of this world—the civil, religious, social, and financial systems—are, symbolically speaking, continuing to “melt with fervent heat,” and that soon the “new heavens and a new earth” will be established.—II Pet. 3:12,13

LOVE—A CRITICAL TEST

Examining ourselves with the thought that no promise of the Lord, nor any requirement of his, should be overlooked in view of the importance of the times in which we are living, we are reminded of the apostle's lesson in I Corinthians 13 on the importance of love. Paul reminds us that even though we may have faith sufficient to remove mountains, but have not love, it profits us nothing. (vs. 2) It would be of no avail for us, by faith, to be aware of the prophetic fulfillments of our day, and the imminence of Christ's kingdom, if they did not inspire within us that burning love for God and his people which will cause us to devote our all to the divine service, laying down our lives for the Lord, the Truth, and our brethren.

The Apostle John reminds us of the vital test of love, saying, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. ... And we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." (I John 3:14-16) In the light of this inspired testimony, we can see that love is not to be viewed as merely a shallow goodness. We are not to suppose that the true love of God is really in our hearts simply because we have no animosity toward others, hence would not knowingly do them injury. The love which is the true motive of "holy conversation and godliness" is a principle that will move us to lay down our lives in sacrifice and service for others. The practice of justice will keep us from injuring our brethren and our fellow men, but love will prompt us to serve and do good unto all.—Gal. 6:10

Our love for the brethren should include all. While the Apostle Paul says, "The Lord knoweth them

that are his,” our knowledge is not as complete and comprehensive as his. (II Tim. 2:19) Our knowledge of them is limited. Therefore, our service for the brethren should not be limited to those few with whom we may be immediately associated, but should reach out in an effort to acquaint all who may have a hearing ear with the glorious Gospel message that has been such a comfort and encouragement to us.

LABOR OF LOVE

The Heavenly Father could have made it easy for us to serve the brethren had he so desired. He could in his own way let us know exactly who the individual brethren are in our area and arrange matters so that all we would need to do is to call upon them with the Word of Truth. They, in turn, would accept and we would rejoice in the privilege of thus being used of the Lord to communicate his message to his people.

However, in God’s wisdom, and as a test of the genuineness of our love, he arranged that it should be done in a more difficult way—one which calls for self-sacrifice, labor, reproach, and persecution. That is why the apostle, in Hebrews 6:10, refers to our ministry on behalf of the saints as a “labour of love.”

Unless we are not only willing, but also rejoice, in the privilege of laboring for the Lord, we can seriously question just how much the true love of God has filled our hearts. In response to this labor there may be little apparent results. We may spend weeks, months, or even years in ministering the Gospel to others, yet seldom if ever be rewarded with a certain knowledge that our efforts have really borne fruit in the enrichment of other hearts and lives.

Thereby, however, God tests our faith, as well as our love. After all, the principal result of what we do is the preparation of ourselves for joint heirship with our Lord and Master, Christ Jesus. If faithful we will later have the privilege of sharing with him in the enlightenment and blessing of all mankind. How profitable, indeed, will be our efforts for a few fleeting years in this life, if thereby we are found faithful unto death, receive the crown of life, and are privileged to share in bestowing God's blessings to all the sin-cursed and dying race!—Rev. 2:10; 3:21

We should learn to view matters from God's standpoint. The apostle says that "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love." (Heb. 6:10) What does it matter whether others hear, or whether they forbear, whether they appreciate our efforts or are indifferent to them? What does matter is the fact that God does not forget. As a result, we enjoy the rich blessings of faith and hope now, and will be rewarded with all the superlative joys of the kingdom in his glorious presence by and by. (Ps. 16:11; I John 3:1,2) What more could we ask?

Despite the fact that in these last days we have witnessed outstanding fulfillments of prophecy to reassure us of the verities of the Scriptures, it seems more difficult than ever to maintain a burning zeal for the Truth and the brethren. The Lord has permitted such conditions to arise among his people. These are calculated to test their individual loyalty to him. How are we meeting this test? Are the beauties of the Gospel message still an inspiration to us that will carry us on to self-sacrifice in making known its glories to others? Were we zealous in the past merely because others were zealous?

The message of the Scriptures today is the same, and it should be just as vital an influence in our lives as in the past. Jesus is still the Captain of our Salvation, and the spiritual food which he served to his people here in the end of the Gospel Age should still ring clear in our hearts, minds, words and actions, just as it did in the days of the Early Church. (Heb. 2:10; Luke 12:42) We still should be singing today, even as in the past, "Send out thy light and truth, O Lord; Let them our leaders be."

—*Hymns of Dawn*, #260

If our faith in God's Word is what it should be, then it becomes a reality to us—something which actually leads us in the footsteps of the Lord, irrespective of how few or how many may similarly be walking in the same narrow way. We are to forget many things which "are behind." Paul said he was doing this. (Phil. 3:13) On the other hand, we can with profit look back to some of the "former days," if thereby we can be inspired to return to our "first love" and enthusiasm for the Lord and his Truth.—Heb. 10:32; Rev. 2:4

In Hebrews 10:32, referenced above, Paul admonished those to whom he was writing to do this very thing. According to this verse and the one which follows, they were at one time zealously engaged in a ministry of love to the saints, but they had seemingly permitted a spiritual lethargy to creep over them. In his effort to revive that first love, Paul admonished them to "call to remembrance the former days." Indeed, their zeal in the former days had led to a "great fight of afflictions," and they had been "made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions." Yet they "took joyfully

the spoiling" of their goods, knowing that they had in "heaven a better and an enduring substance."—Heb. 10:33,34

Here is a lesson which is vitally important for any who for one reason or another may have permitted their "first love" and zeal to slacken. It is a mistaken notion that God wants his people to outgrow that wholehearted and irrepressible enthusiasm with which they responded to his love when he first shone into their hearts with the Gospel. What God particularly wants is to see that zeal continue until it consumes our lives even unto death in his service. May we not all, then, with profit, call to remembrance the "former days," not merely as a pleasant memory, but with the view of having our zeal rekindled thereby, that we may continue our labor of love faithfully to the end of our earthly sojourn.

Jesus sets forth signs in his prophecy of Matthew 24 that would indicate certain conditions leading up to and including his Second Presence and the end of the age. One of these is his warning that because iniquity would abound, the love of many would wax cold. (vs. 12) Here, then, is another reminder that we should especially be on guard that the conditions to which the Master refers could cause a cooling off of our love and zeal. Surely, if we are giving proper consideration to what manner of persons we ought to be, we will not only avoid iniquity in our own lives, but will not permit the iniquitous influences with which we are surrounded to turn us away from the course of sacrifice. Rather, we will "endure unto the end," and thus obtain our salvation.—vs. 13

WHEN INIQUITY ABOUNDS

What is this iniquity to which the Master referred? As a practical lesson we can think of it as applying to anything that may be out of harmony with the Lord and his teachings. Throughout the course of the Christian age, iniquitous practices of false leaders in the church have contributed to the dampening of zeal on the part of many. This should not be so with us. Our relationship to God through his Word of Truth should be so independent of others that even if those who have taught us should turn aside from the narrow way it would not influence us.

Many are the tests today—fiery darts of the Adversary—which tend to dampen the zeal of the followers of Christ if their eyes are not steadfastly fixed upon him and their hearts filled with his love. Ingenious, for example, are the arguments which might be presented from various sources as to why the Lord's consecrated people should now hide their light and keep it only for themselves and a select few. On the contrary, Jesus said, "Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." —Matt. 5:14-16

In another example, perhaps a personal grievance that one may have toward another member in the ecclesia is permitted to influence his reasoning, until he justifies his position of antagonism toward the entire group and their activities. Here is a case where iniquity is permitted to enter into one's

own heart and grows to such an extent that love waxes cold.

Let us seek to rise above petty personal things that have no real bearing on the fundamentals of Truth and our relationship thereto. What does it matter if someone may say something which does not please us? What if something is said even purposely to injure us? Is not the Heavenly Father able to overrule and to cause such things to work together for our good? (Rom. 8:28) Let us not permit iniquity to enter our hearts and take us away from the Lord, the Truth, and the brethren.

As we give closer consideration to what manner of persons we ought to be, let us remember that first and foremost we should try to be like Christ, "changed into the same image." (II Cor. 3:18) If we are truly endeavoring to follow his example, we should remember that he was tested "in all points like as we are, yet without sin." He was reviled, he was persecuted, he was finally put to death, and yet in his dying moments, Jesus continued to be a faithful ambassador of his Father. (Heb. 4:15; 12:3; I Pet. 2:23) Let us remember that the servant cannot expect to be above his Master, and that if we are true servants we will daily strive to be more like him.—John 15:20

"THINK ON THESE THINGS"

"Holy conversation and godliness," if genuine, are not qualities that we can wear merely as a veneer. True godlikeness springs from within, and is based upon our habits of thinking. Peter's question, "What manner of persons ought ye to be?" will be answered according to the manner in which

our thoughts are controlled. True Christian thinking is beautifully outlined by Paul in Philippians 4:8, where we read, “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”

There are many good and praiseworthy things with which we are surrounded, and upon which our minds can profitably dwell. Nevertheless, we believe that, as Christians seeking to have our minds filled with the things which truly pertain to life and godliness, we will do well to give special thought, first, to our Heavenly Father and his beloved Son, then to the Truth in all its resplendent glory, and finally, to the brethren. If our hearts and minds are filled with things pertaining to God, to his plan, and to his people, these pure, noble, praiseworthy, and virtuous thoughts will be constantly overflowing for the blessing of others. By holy conversation and godliness we will be used of the Heavenly Father to serve and comfort one another and be able ambassadors to the world, sharing with them the glorious message of the Gospel of the kingdom.—Matt. 24:14 ■

*“We have not stopped praying for you
since we first heard about you.*

*We ask God to give you complete knowledge
of his will and to give you spiritual wisdom
and understanding.”*

Colossians 1:9, New Living Translation

ENCOURAGING LETTERS

LIGHT IN DARKNESS

Dear Dawn: First I want to thank you for the countless numbers of the wonderful booklet *Dawn* [magazine]. It has been a blessing and a valuable teaching tool.

God bless you each in your endeavours to bring His glorious light into this darkened world.—Australia

OPENED EYES

Dear Dawn: *The Dawn* magazine has opened my eyes to God's great plan for all mankind if faithful. In Christ's love.—NE

FRANK & ERNEST RADIO LISTENER

Dear Dawn: I thank you so very much for your booklets of *The Blood of Atonement* and *Our Lord's Return*. Super booklets!

I am your faithful [*Frank & Ernest*] listener on KAAY, am radio, and read all the booklets that you send, and have sent. God bless you.—AK

WORK OF THE KINGDOM

Dear Dawn: I appreciate the publication [*The Dawn*] so

much, and keep the work of the kingdom always in prayer. I also keep the Dawn family in prayer and send my warm Christian love.—OR

GROWTH IN KENYA

DawnBible: The Dawn publications have been of great help in my day to day study. The materials I received have really helped the Truth movement growth in Kenya. The material has also helped the Migori women Bible Students Radio program.

It is my prayer that the Dawn Bible Students will continue to supply us with more study material so as to make us effective in the harvest work.—Kenya

NAOMI, RUTH & BOAZ

Dear Dawn: There are 12 of us men studying the book of Ruth at our twice monthly study.

I was very interested to read the Naomi, Ruth & Boaz in the latest Dawn publication which I received today in the mail. Thank you for mailing *The Dawn* to me.—Australia

2024 MEMORIAL SUPPER DATE

The proper time for the annual observance of the Memorial Supper will be after sunset on Sunday, April 21, 2024.

Memorial Services in MP3 format are available for listening or download at:

dawnbible.com/memorial

DVD versions can be ordered free of charge.
Please send your request to:

Dawn Bible Students Association

PO Box 521167

Longwood, FL 32752-1167

Please place your order by April 1.

OBITUARIES

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

Sister Lidia Kopczyk, Melbourne, Australia—
December 8. Age, 91

Brother Lewis Draney, Salmon, ID—December 14.
Age, 69

Sister Ernestine Thomas, Dallas, TX—December
19. Age, 95

Sister Jann Lewis, Lakewood, CO—December 27.
Age, 92

Brother Vincent Gianno, St. Louis, MO—January
3. Age, 49

Brother Edward Baryla, Chicago, IL—January 11.
Age, 91

Sister Irena Kantor, Krakow, Poland—January 13.
Age, 77

SPEAKERS' APPOINTMENTS

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

W. Dutka

Sacramento, CA February 16-18

E. Kuenzli

Sacramento, CA February 16-18

M. Ensley

Sacramento, CA February 16-18

D. Rice

Sacramento, CA February 16-18

B. Keith

Sacramento, CA February 16-18

B. Siwak

Sacramento, CA February 16-18



MOVING?

If you are moving, please let us know six weeks before you move so that we can change the address on your Dawn subscription.

WEEKLY PRAYER MEETING TEXTS

FEBRUARY 1—"And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left."—Isaiah 30:21 (Z. '95-6 Hymn 312A)

FEBRUARY 8—"O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"—Matthew 14:31 (Z. '00-170 Hymn 361)

FEBRUARY 15—"Whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected."—I John 2:5 (Z. '97-312 Hymn 238)

FEBRUARY 22—"Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have."—Hebrews 13:5 (Z. '02-250 Hymn 121)

FEBRUARY 29—"God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him."—I John 4:16 (Z. '02-266 Hymn 296)

CONVENTIONS

These conventions are listed by request of classes who sponsor them. So your convention can be placed in these columns in time, make your request in writing three months before the date of the convention to Dawn Magazine, PO Box 521167, Longwood, FL 32752-1167

SACRAMENTO CONVENTION, February 16-18—IN PERSON AND BROADCAST ONLINE—Holiday Inn Express, 2224 Auburn Boulevard, Sacramento, CA 95821. Phone: (916) 923-1100. Contact J. Freer. Phone: (916) 879-4655 or Email: shootingln@aol.com

FLORIDA CONVENTION, March 2-4—IN PERSON AND BROADCAST ONLINE—New Location—Winter Park Lodge, 1495 Grand Road, Winter Park, FL 32792. Contact J. Slavich. Phone: (407) 494-8421 or Email: JohnSlavich@gmail.com

HIGHLAND PARK CONVENTION, March 16—BROADCAST ONLINE ONLY—Contact S. Koterba. Phone: (917) 554-2348 or Email: sandykoterba@gmail.com

ALBUQUERQUE CONVENTION, March 29-31—IN PERSON AND BROADCAST ONLINE—Sheraton Albuquerque Airport Hotel, 2910 Yale Boulevard SE, Albuquerque, NM 87106. Contact S. Thomassen. Phone: (505) 268-8170 or Email: srbt@juno.com

METRO DETROIT CONVENTION, May 4,5—IN PERSON AND BROADCAST ONLINE—Milford Senior Center, 1050 Atlantic Street, Milford Charter Twp., MI 48381. Contact B. Johnson. Phone: (248) 343-7636 or Email: beekystevej@aol.com

WEST NEWTON CONVENTION, May 4,5—IN PERSON AND BROADCAST ONLINE—Sewickley Grange Hall, 1011 Greensburg Pike, West Newton, PA 15089. Contact L. Mlinek. Email: lisa.mlinek@aol.com

HARTFORD CONVENTION, May 5—IN PERSON AND BROADCAST ONLINE—West Hartford Senior Center, 15 Starkel Road, West Hartford, CT. Contact J. Slivinsky. Phone: (860) 289-0116 or Email: djslivinsky@sbcglobal.net

CHICAGO CONVENTION, May 25,26—IN PERSON AND BROADCAST ONLINE—Doubletree by Hilton, 3003 Corporate West Drive, Lisle, IL 60532. Contact: T. Blackwell. Email: secretary@chicagobible.org

LOS ANGELES MEMORIAL DAY CONVENTION, May 25,26—IN PERSON ONLY—Norman P. Murray Community and Senior Center, 24932 Veterans Way, Mission Viejo, CA 92692. For meal/hotel information, contact J. Bullockus. Email: jlbullockus@gmail.com. For program information, contact M. Davis. Email: lmkdavis@earthlink.net

PORTLAND CONVENTION, June 28-30—IN PERSON AND BROADCAST ONLINE—Bible Students Retirement Center, 1801 NE 201st Avenue, Fairview, OR 97024. For convention accommodations, contact D. Burke. Phone: (636) 222-2923 or Email: dmburke62@icloud.com. Other information, contact B. Hislop. Phone: (503) 351-5551 or Email: bwhislop@aol.com

BIBLE STUDENTS GENERAL CONVENTION, July 20-25—IN PERSON AND BROADCAST ONLINE—University of Pittsburgh, 450 Schoolhouse Road, Johnstown, PA. Contact E. Kuenzli. Phone: (407) 670-4189 or Email: ekuenzli@cfl.rr.com



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To us the Scriptures clearly teach . . .

THAT THE CHURCH IS “THE TEMPLE” OF THE LIVING GOD

—peculiarly “his workmanship”; that its construction has been in progress throughout the Gospel Age—ever since Christ became the world’s Redeemer and the chief “corner stone” of this temple, through which, when finished, God’s blessings shall come “to all people”, and they find access to him.—I Cor. 3:16,17; Eph. 2:20-22; Gen. 28:14; Gal. 3:29

THAT MEANTIME THE CHISELING, SHAPING AND POLISHING

of consecrated believers in Christ’s atonement for sin progresses, and when the last of these “living stones,” “elect and precious,” shall have been made ready, the great Master Workman will bring all together in the first resurrection; and the temple shall be filled with his glory, and be the meeting place between God and men throughout the Millennium.—Rev. 15:5-8

THAT THE BASIS OF HOPE FOR THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD

lies in the fact that Jesus Christ, by the grace of God, tasted death for every man, “a ransom for all,” and will be “the true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world,” “in due time.”—Heb. 2:9; John 1:9; I Tim. 2:5,6

THAT THE HOPE OF THE CHURCH is that she may be like her Lord, “see him as he is,” be a “partaker of the divine nature,” and share his glory as his joint-heir.—I John 3:2; John 17:24; Rom. 8:17; II Pet.1:4

THAT THE PRESENT MISSION OF THE CHURCH

is the perfecting of the saints for the future work of service; to develop in herself every grace; to be God’s witness to the world; and to prepare to be the kings and priests in the next age.—Eph. 4:12; Matt. 24:14; Rev. 1:6, 20:6

THAT THE HOPE FOR THE WORLD lies in the blessings of knowledge and opportunity to be brought to all by Christ’s millennial kingdom—the restitution of all that was lost in Adam, to all the willing and obedient, at the hands of their Redeemer and his glorified church—when all the willfully wicked will be destroyed.—Acts 3:19-23; Isa. 35

