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God's Unshakeable Kingdom

*“Wherefore we
receiving a
kingdom which
cannot be moved,
let us have grace,
whereby we may
serve God
acceptably with
reverence and
godly fear.”*

—*Hebrews 12:28*

THE YEAR 2019 WAS, LIKE many which preceded it, full of mixed reviews, depending on one's perspective of events. Among those more optimistic about current conditions, emphasis is most often put on the United States economy, which is now entering its eleventh year of “recovery” since the great recession of 2008-2009. Strictly according to the numbers, the U. S. stock markets performed very well in 2019, establishing new highs on numerous occasions during the year. Others point out that unemployment in this country reached lows in the past year which have not been seen in over half a century. Continued low interest rates during the year are

also generally considered to be a positive factor for the overall performance and growth of the economy.

However, for many the generally positive economic news in 2019 harbors considerable uneasiness as to the future, as people wonder when and how severe the next economic slowdown or full-blown recession will be. Are we creating another economic “bubble” which will soon burst? Are the positive aspects of the economy so tenuous that even a small “hiccup” in national or world affairs will have a major negative domino impact?

Aside from what might be considered the generally good performance of the United States economy during the past year, most of the other major issues facing this country as we enter 2020, both on the domestic as well as the international fronts, present a much more sobering picture. We note below just a sampling of the ongoing events, issues and challenges that are significantly impacting this country as we begin the New Year:

Trade war with China and other countries.

Immigration policy, reform and enforcement.

Mass shootings, and the related gun control debate.

Out of control homelessness, especially in major western U. S. cities.

Continuing healthcare debate, rising costs, and insurance availability.

Climate change, global warming, and related environmental issues.

Cybersecurity concerns within government, business, infrastructure and private homes.

Energy debate regarding use of fossil fuels, wind, solar, and nuclear power.

Continued concerns with regard to rogue nations such as Iran and North Korea.

Distrust of Russia and its leaders.

Nearly constant conflict in the Middle East, involving most recently Israel, Syria and Turkey.

Possible rebuilding and strengthening of ISIS and other terrorist organizations.

Impeachment proceedings and uncertainty as to possible outcomes.

Presidential election year in 2020, with over twenty candidates currently running.

From the vantage point of the average citizen, the above list, which is only a partial tally of the many critical issues facing this country today, presents nearly insurmountable challenges for finding and implementing reasonable solutions. To the sincere student of the Bible, however, upon the pages of Scripture lie the only truly viable answers to these and the many other problems facing this country and the world. These solutions are centered in the loving plans and purposes of the Creator, our Heavenly Father, who will soon manifest them to all nations, societies and peoples of the earth.

DISTRESS, PERPLEXITY AND SHAKING

Considering the foregoing brief review of man's present situation, it is safe to say that as we enter the twentieth year of the "new millennium," the world is most assuredly in a precarious position, aptly described by Jesus as "distress of nations, with perplexity." (Luke 21:25) It is the time foretold in other prophecies of the Bible when, symbolically speaking, there would be a great "shaking" in order

that everything out of harmony with the divine will might be removed.

In the context from which our opening text is taken, the Apostle Paul prophetically likens this present time of shaking to the upheavals of nature that occurred at Mount Sinai when God's law was given to Israel and his covenant was established with them at the hands of Moses. The reason for this comparison is that the time is soon approaching for the inauguration of the "New Covenant" to be made with the "house of Israel and the house of Judah," by which the divine law will be given not only to Israel but also to the Gentiles and all people.—Jer. 31:31-34; Isa. 49:5-13; Acts 15:16,17

The giving of God's law to Israel through his servant Moses at Mount Sinai involved certain natural disturbances. The mount, as Paul describes it, "burned with fire," and there was "blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words," a voice which the apostle says, "shook the earth." (Heb.12:18,19,26) This language describes, in a prophetic manner, the world trouble, distress and turmoil of our day which will accompany the overthrow of Satan's empire, and which will "bind the strong man." (Matt. 12:29; Rev. 20:1-3) Then will come the establishment of God's kingdom, under the rulership of Christ, whom Paul says will be the "mediator of the new covenant."—Heb. 12:24

In verse 26 the apostle refers to the "shaking" that would occur in connection with the inauguration of the new covenant. Here he quotes from Haggai 2:6,7, which reads, "Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth,

and the sea, and the dry land; And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come." The "heavens," the "earth," the "sea," and the "dry land," are all symbolic expressions referring to various aspects of the "present evil world," which will be removed and replaced by God's kingdom of righteousness.—Gal. 1:4

The literal heavens that we observe are made up of the sun, moon and stars. Jesus said that in connection with the "distress of nations" there would be, symbolically speaking, "signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars." He then explains what these signs would be—namely, that the "powers of heaven shall be shaken." (Luke 21:25,26) The "heavens" mentioned by the prophet Haggai and by Jesus in the foregoing passages well represent the various aspects of spiritual control and influence among mankind by means of the many religions and religious institutions of the earth.

In the symbology of these prophecies we may think of the "earth" and the "dry land" as the more or less stable, material aspects of human society. However, this stability is lost because of the great shaking of all the earth's societal attributes, which Jesus says brings about the "distress of nations." The land, also, is "dry" in the sense that there is a famine in the land, not of literal water, "but of hearing the words of the LORD."—Amos 8:11

Haggai refers also to the shaking of the "sea," to which Jesus adds the descriptive words, "the sea and the waves roaring." The literal roaring of the oceans and waves are of such force that in times of severe storms no manmade power can control them. Similarly, the symbolic roaring of

the restless, discontented masses of mankind are a force and strength that no earthly power or government can subdue nor control. Indeed, throngs of people today are combining their energy and influence in rebellion against former norms as they clamor for rights, whether real or fancied.

What a vivid picture we thus have of our world today! The prophet Isaiah wrote, “Woe to the multitude of many people, which make a noise like the noise of the seas; and to the rushing of nations, that make a rushing like the rushing of mighty waters!” (Isa. 17:12) We have witnessed this “rushing” and “roaring” as it has continued throughout the year just past, and, at the beginning of 2020, it is unabated.

We note again the significance of the words in Jesus’ prophecy that the “powers of heaven” shall be shaken. It is true that, generally speaking, church membership is still relatively strong in many parts of the world. Fear of the unknown future of the human race, perhaps, causes many to seek some sort of religious haven. However, religion has lost most of its control over world affairs, while irreligious conduct, godlessness and crime all continue to increase. This breaking down of religious standards and the weakening of godly influences in the consciences of the people have contributed much to the fear and perplexity that now plague the world in which we live.

THE REMEDY

The remedy for all this is, as noted earlier, the kingdom of Christ. Every footstep follower of Jesus hopes to have a share in the work of this kingdom. It is reassuring to note that in the Bible’s prophecies

pertaining to the time of “shaking,” through which we are now passing, frequent mention is made of Christ’s followers, and of the glorious hope which supports them in this “time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation,” prophesied by Daniel. His words are immediately followed by the promise, “And at that time thy people [God’s people] shall be delivered.”—Dan. 12:1

In the prophecy of the 46th Psalm we are provided this same line of thought. Because “God is our refuge and strength,” the psalmist writes, “Therefore will we not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.”—vss. 1-3

After mentioning the Lord’s provision for his people who are dwelling in the “tabernacles of the most High,” the psalmist continues, “God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God shall help her.” (vss. 4,5) In this prophecy, all human institutions, kingdoms and governments are shaken and removed. Paul describes it as “the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.”—Heb. 12:27

What are those things which “cannot be shaken?” David’s answer is, “God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved.” The reference to “she” is that of the “bride of Christ,” the class of footstep followers of Christ being developed during the present age, who will be joined in “marriage” to Jesus, the Lamb of God, to rule with him in his Messianic kingdom. (II Cor. 11:2; Rev. 19:7; 21:2) We note the

harmony of David and Paul's testimony. "She" shall not be moved, David says, and that "which cannot be shaken," of which Paul writes, is the kingdom of Christ in which his faithful "bride" will share.

The "kingdom which cannot be moved" has not yet begun to rule over mankind. However, the development of those who would eventually be its rulers began at Jesus' first advent. In his parable of the wheat and the tares, the "field," which he said symbolizes the world, was sown with wheat seed. This "good seed," Jesus explained, represents the "children of the kingdom." At the time of "harvest," the tares, or false grain, are removed, and the members of the wheat class are exalted and "shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." (Matt. 13:24-30,36-43) We see, then, that the kingdom "wheat" class, which began its development nearly two thousand years ago, is to be completed at the end, or harvest, of the present age, and will then take control over the earth.

Thus, while everything else is shaken to the point of being removed, "she," the wheat class, the bride of Christ, "shall not be moved." Maintaining her standing of favor with the Lord, in his due time, she is exalted to live and reign with Christ. (Rev. 20:4,6) What a comforting assurance this is as we face the uncertainties of 2020. This does not mean, however, that the Lord's people will necessarily be shielded from trouble. We may expect to share in many of the experiences which come upon the population in general.

The Lord's promise that "she shall not be moved" does not apply to our fleshly life or circumstances. Indeed, those who hope to actually and fully receive

the “kingdom which cannot be moved” must daily sacrifice the flesh and its interests. They continue, daily, to present their bodies “a living sacrifice,” and it is only when that sacrifice is completed, even “unto death,” that these will have an abundant entrance into the kingdom.—Rom. 12:1; Rev. 2:10; II Pet. 1:10,11

Although we know that we must suffer and die with Jesus if we are to live and reign with him, we can, nevertheless, view the increasing chaos of the world with a peace and tranquility of mind and heart that the majority of mankind cannot possess. We can have this hopeful and reassuring viewpoint because we know the meaning of the events which are taking place around us. In short, they give notice that the world is nearing the time when its long looked-for age of prosperity, health and life will become a reality.

The world today sees many looming threats on the horizon. Many are concerned by the thought that the laws, institutions and governments that have held the world together up until now are rapidly losing their stability. It is not a pleasant outlook, either for the present generation or for the present-day children who will make up the next generation. Indeed, as many people view current conditions, they see a dark night before them, with little hope for the light of a new day.

MAN’S EXTREMITY—GOD’S OPPORTUNITY

The Scriptures, however, speak differently. While “weeping may endure for a night,” the psalmist says, “joy cometh in the morning.” (Ps. 30:5) Man’s present extremity is to be God’s opportunity, which

he will exercise through the agencies of Christ's kingdom. When the time comes for the power of this kingdom to manifest itself, the people will have learned that they cannot solve their own problems. They will then know that while technology, science and other types of knowledge can accomplish many wonderful things for man's benefit, they cannot raise a barrier against the tide of human selfishness, greed and desire for power.

Meanwhile the Lord, in his wisdom, has permitted man to develop the potential to destroy his own world by various means. It is because of the foretold "increase of knowledge" in this "time of the end" that man has been able to devise and construct their terrible implements of destruction, whether they be nuclear armaments, chemical and biological weapons, terrorist bombs, or the many other examples of destructive instruments found in the world today. (Dan. 12:4) Because of this, and without excusing man's own responsibilities in the matter, some of the prophecies represent God as destroying the selfish institutions of earth which have given rise to these awful tools of devastation.

Quoting again from the 46th Psalm, we read: "The heathen [or nations] raged, the kingdoms were moved: he uttered his voice, the earth melted." (vs. 6) The prophecy continues with verses 8 and 9: "Come, behold the works of the LORD, what desolations he hath made in the earth. He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire."

The divine permission of evil along all lines is in order that man may learn firsthand the terrible

results of sin and his own part in it. (Rom. 7:13) It is not difficult to see that even a limited use of the present potentials for mass destruction will help the world to realize more vividly than at any time in the past the utter futility of this means of settling disputes. Thus, the people will be more willing and ready to accept the kingdom rule and abide by its righteous regulations.

In verse 10 of Psalm 46 the Lord speaks prophetically to a devastated world, saying, "Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen [or nations], I will be exalted in the earth." There is much noise in the world today, as represented by the claims and counter claims, the boastings, the threatenings, of the various nations and their leaders. God, however, is not in their thoughts. They use the created things of God to prepare for the destruction of one another, but ignore the Creator who brought into existence the very elements which they improperly use.

Thankfully, this will not continue forever. In God's due time, when his wisdom decides that the people of earth have learned the necessary lessons, through his kingdom agencies then prepared and ready to function, he will say, "Be still, and know that I am God." Many today wonder what God is doing about the chaotic and distressing conditions of the world. Indeed, many doubt that there is an all-powerful Creator at all who is able and willing to do anything for his human creatures. These doubts will soon be swept away, however, when the kingdom which cannot be moved begins to exercise its righteous rule over the nations.

Zephaniah 3:8,9 is another prophecy which emphasizes this thought. We quote: “Wait ye upon me, saith the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy.” Then the prophet adds these heart-assuring words concerning what God has in store for man following this period of great trouble: “For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent.”

In the original Hebrew, the expression “one consent” means “one shoulder.” In Isaiah 9:6,7 we are told that the righteous kingdom soon to come will be upon the “shoulder” of the son given “unto us” by God to redeem the race from the penalty of sin—Christ Jesus. Zephaniah’s prophecy assures us that after Satan’s world is destroyed in the great time of trouble, the people will be enlightened, and will support Christ’s new government with one accord, together putting their “shoulder” to it. What a glorious prospect!

THE NATIONS’ DESIRE

In the prophecy of Haggai 2:7, previously quoted, we have a somewhat similar thought. “I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come.” The legitimate and righteous desires of the nations will, of course, be fully satisfied by the kingdom of Christ. However, throughout the centuries the nations have had other “desires” that will not come to them in the kingdom. Their desire for conquest and control of

other nations will not be satisfied, nor will they be permitted to exploit one another.

The *Rotherham Emphasized Bible* seems to give the proper thought of this prophecy. It reads, "I will shake all the nations, and the delight of all the nations shall come in." This suggests that the true desire and delight of the nations then will be to serve the new king and to cooperate in the arrangements of the kingdom. Haggai's prophecy was given in connection with the rebuilding of Israel's temple at Jerusalem, and projects the prophetic significance of that work down to this end of the age when soon the symbolic "holy city, new Jerusalem," will come down "from God out of heaven."—Rev. 21:2

We are informed that in this "new Jerusalem" the "Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it." (vs. 22) Then, in corroboration of Haggai's prophecy, John the Revelator tells us that the nations "shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. . . . And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it."—vss. 24,26

The Biblical expressions, "holy city," "new Jerusalem," and "government," are all symbolic of the kingdom of Christ, that glorious kingdom which the footstep followers of Jesus are now endeavoring to prove worthy of "receiving." This kingdom will not be "moved." It is a sure inheritance for all who put their trust in it and prove worthy to share in its glory.

We do not know the details of what the world's experiences will be throughout 2020, nor, indeed, of our own. We do know that, regardless of what

may happen, the kingdom which we are being prepared to “receive” will not and cannot be moved. It is a certainty because it is promised, designed, and prepared by God, our loving Heavenly Father. The only question at all is concerning our own individual worthiness to enter into that kingdom as a joint-heir with Jesus.

One service we can render to the glory of God is to bear witness to the kingdom, assuring the people that a glorious new day is approaching. This is our great privilege, and it is this the psalmist foretold that the Lord’s people would be doing, when he wrote, “All thy works shall praise thee O LORD; and thy saints shall bless thee. They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power; To make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom,” the kingdom which is unshakable and immoveable.—Ps. 145:10-12 ■

WEEKLY PRAYER MEETING TEXTS

JANUARY 2—“Ye are not your own. For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.”—I Corinthians 6:19,20 (Z. ’97-35 Hymn 191) R2099:4

JANUARY 9—“Who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive?”—I Corinthians 4:7 (Z. ’03-430 Hymn 21) R3278:2

JANUARY 16—“Instant in prayer.”—Romans 12:12 (Z. ’95-215 Hymn 298) R1866:1

JANUARY 23—“Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God.”—I Corinthians 7:24 (Z. ’99-155 Hymn 259) R2488:3

JANUARY 30—“Jesus spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.”—Luke 18:1 (Z. ’95-214 Hymn 65A) R1865:4

The Ark Brought into the Temple

Key Verse: *“I have surely built You a lofty house, A place for Your dwelling forever.”—I Kings 8:13, New American Standard Bible*

Selected Scripture:
I Kings 8:1-13

OUR KEY VERSE EXTOLS

the heart-felt sense of privilege that Solomon experienced at the honor of building a house for the Lord, referring to it as “a lofty house.” In this phrase, we are reminded of these words from the Book of Isaiah: “For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.” (Isa. 57:15) The God of Israel, high and lofty though he be, dwelt in the new temple through his shekinah [“that which dwells”] glory which shone on the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant.

God now makes his dwelling within us. Paul teaches this, saying, “Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?” (I Cor. 3:16, NASB) Again he writes, “You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy

temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.”—Eph. 2:19-22, *NASB*

By God’s presence in our hearts, we are changed “from glory to glory.” (II Cor. 3:18) “For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate, says the Lord. And do not touch what is unclean; and I will welcome you. And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me, Says the Lord Almighty.”—II Cor. 6:16-18, *NASB*

Through the work of God’s Holy Spirit we are sanctified. As such we seek to honor him each day by subjecting each thought, word and action to his divine will. Though we fail to attain his standards of perfection, by faith he forgives us and grants us grace to make up for our deficiencies. It is true that “God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.”—Eph. 2:4-8, *NASB*

God’s “throne of grace” is a place where we today may experience his “shekinah” glory. “Let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” (Heb. 4:16, *NASB*) Bible commentators have observed that in the phrase “throne of grace,” Paul was making reference to the spiritual realization of the ark’s mercy seat, or propitiatory. (Rom. 3:25) Let us daily rejoice in the blessing of bringing the “ark” of God’s presence into the temple of our body. ■

Solomon Praises the Lord

Key Verse: *“He said, Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who spoke with His mouth to my father David and has fulfilled it with His hand.”—I Kings 8:15, New American Standard Bible*

Selected Scripture:
I Kings 8:14-21

THE GRAND SPECTACLE

of inaugurating God’s temple was an auspicious occasion. Solomon in regal finery stood before the nation of Israel and led them in the dedication of the new and holy place. Years of planning, design, laboring and enormous expense had finally come to this climax. Even so, the beginnings of the temple preceded Solomon’s efforts. It was his father, David, who first proposed the house, but his vision was not to be fulfilled during his lifetime.

Solomon noted this fact, “Now Hiram king of Tyre sent his servants to Solomon, when he heard that they had anointed him king in place of his father, for Hiram had always been a friend of David. Then Solomon sent word to Hiram, saying, You know that David my father was unable to build a house for the name of the LORD his God because of the wars which surrounded him, until the LORD put them under the soles of his feet. But now the LORD my God has given me rest on every side; . . . Behold, I intend to build a house for the name of the LORD my God, as the LORD spoke to David my father, saying, Your son, whom I will set on your throne in your place, he will build the house for My name.”—I Kings 5:1-5, NASB

As Solomon recounted these things to King Hiram, it is likely that he was moved deeply at the remembrance of his father David. A faithful son, Solomon would seek to honor the memory of David by bringing his aspirations to a full realization. Thus may sons honor their fathers as they bless their memory and carry on their vision. David was not permitted to build the house because he was a man used for war; thus, it was not yet the due time. Nevertheless, it was well that Solomon took up this task. The Lord had commanded Israel, “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you.” (Exod. 20:12, *NASB*) This was a magnificent example of honoring his father’s memory—to put so much time, energy and wealth into fulfilling David’s vision of God’s house.

There are means available to us today whereby we may follow Solomon’s example. We may steadfastly honor the godliness our natural fathers have exhibited, emulating their examples of following God and his principles in daily life. Additionally, on a higher level, we can honor our Heavenly Father by dedicating our life to the building of his temple. Here we speak of the spiritual temple, built upon Jesus as the cornerstone and the Apostles as the foundation.—Eph. 2:19-22

The Apostle Peter wrote: “You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For this is contained in Scripture: Behold, I lay in Zion a choice stone, a precious corner stone, and he who believes in him will not be disappointed.”—I Pet. 2:5,6, *NASB*

May we, as Solomon did, offer up praises to God by faithfully living according to legacy of his perfect will, as exemplified in his Son, Christ Jesus. “For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.”—II Cor. 1:20 ■

Solomon's Prayer of Dedication

Key Verse: "Listen to the supplication of Your servant and of Your people Israel, when they pray toward this place; hear in heaven Your dwelling place; hear and forgive."—I Kings 8:30, New American Standard Bible

Selected Scripture: I Kings 8:22-39, 52, 53

OUR KEY VERSE SETS THE

tone of Solomon's prayer. Its overarching theme is this: when we sin and repent God is always at the ready to forgive, deliver from iniquity, and bless us. Solomon's prayer is prophetic of the experiences that the Israelites would endure in the centuries to follow this great event. Let us consider the sentiments of this prayer and understand that it is a template for the experiences coming to God's people in succeeding generations.

"If a man sins against his neighbor and is made to take an oath, and he comes and takes an

oath before Your altar in this house, then hear in heaven and act and judge Your servants, condemning the wicked by bringing his way on his own head and justifying the righteous by giving him according to his righteousness. When Your people Israel are defeated before an enemy, because they have sinned against You, if they turn to You again and confess Your name and pray and make supplication to You in this house, then hear in heaven, and forgive the sin of Your people Israel, and bring them back

to the land which You gave to their fathers.”—vss. 31-34, *NASB*

Solomon’s prayer continues, “When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain, because they have sinned against You, and they pray toward this place and confess Your name and turn from their sin when You afflict them, then hear in heaven and forgive the sin of Your servants and of Your people Israel, indeed, teach them the good way in which they should walk. And send rain on Your land, which You have given Your people for an inheritance. If there is famine in the land, if there is pestilence, ... whatever plague, whatever sickness there is, whatever prayer or supplication is made by any man or by all Your people Israel, each knowing the affliction of his own heart, and spreading his hands toward this house; then hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and forgive and act and render to each according to all his ways, whose heart You know, for You alone know the hearts of all the sons of men.”—vss. 35-39, *NASB*

Even in his rebukes God shows mercy and patience toward those in whom he longs to see acts of repentance. “The LORD longs to be gracious to you, And therefore He waits on high to have compassion on you. For the LORD is a God of justice; How blessed are all those who long for Him. O people in Zion, inhabitant in Jerusalem, you will weep no longer. He will surely be gracious to you at the sound of your cry; when He hears it, He will answer you.” (Isa. 30:18,19, *NASB*) The psalmist similarly declares the logic and beauty of God’s justice and mercy working together. “If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, That You may be feared [reverenced].”—Ps. 130:3,4, *NASB*

Truly, “sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation.” (II Cor. 7:10, *NASB*) May we take to heart the theme of Solomon’s dedicatory prayer—that repentance, in a Godly manner, leads to salvation. ■

God Will Be With Us

Key Verses: ***"May the LORD our God be with us, as He was with our fathers; may He not leave us or forsake us, that He may incline our hearts to Himself, to walk in all His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His ordinances, which He commanded our fathers."**—I Kings 8:57,58, New American Standard Bible*

Selected Scripture:
I Kings 8:54-61

A PROFOUND THOUGHT

and blessed notion is supplied in the phrase, "that He may incline our hearts to Himself." God will actively incline our hearts to obey all his ways, commandments, statutes and ordinances. This is of incalculable value in the Christian's life. Paul echoes this idea: "So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." (Phil. 2:12,13, NASB) We note from the Apostle's words that God works in us to will and to do his good pleasure if we obey and work together with him. Thus is provided a definitive

statement regarding God's commitment to us.

Another assurance of God's fidelity towards us is found in these words: "Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, I will never desert

you, nor will I ever forsake you, so that we confidently say, The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid. What will man do to me? Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.”—Heb. 13:5-7, *NASB*

The assurances to Christ’s Church that she will never be forsaken reaches a high point in these words of Paul: “If God is for us, who can be against us? He that did not hesitate to spare his own Son but gave him up for us all—can we not trust such a God to give us, with him, everything else that we can need? Who would dare to accuse us, whom God has chosen? The judge himself has declared us free from sin. Who is in a position to condemn? Only Christ, and Christ died for us, Christ rose for us, Christ reigns in power for us, Christ prays for us!” (Rom. 8:31-34, *J. B. Phillips New Testament*) Truly, if God and his Son Christ Jesus are for us, no one can condemn us—not even ourselves, because we leave the judging to God.

On Mars Hill in Athens Paul appealed to the common people regarding God not being aloof or distant from them. “The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things; and He made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation, that they would seek God, if perhaps they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and exist.”—Acts 17:24-28, *NASB*

We praise our Heavenly Father and rejoice in his presence with us. For those yet in ignorance of him, we look forward to the time when they too will “find Him,” knowing that he is “not far from each one of us.” ■

All Things Have Become New

*“Therefore if any
man be in Christ,
he is a new
creature: old
things are passed
away; behold, all
things are become
new.”*

*—II Corinthians
5:17*

THE APOSTLE PAUL’S reference in our opening text to those who are “in Christ” as new creatures, together with his statement that to these old things have passed away, and all things have become new, is found in an interesting and revealing context. The three preced-

ing verses read, “For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then all were dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more.”—II Cor. 5:14-16

Here we have brought to our attention that those to whom Paul refers as new creatures are those who have been so moved by divine love, as

revealed through the sacrifice of Jesus for the sins of the entire world, that they have concluded that their lives belong to the Lord. Henceforth, these have resolved that they should no longer live for themselves, but for him who loved them and died for them. Looking throughout the world, we find that the majority of the human race has as their goal in life the attainment of material advantages which they are persuaded will contribute to their happiness, and to the happiness of their families. Their outlook and desires are not necessarily sinful. It is just that their own interests, and the interests of those who are near and dear to them, are their foremost concern.

Many, of course, are dedicated to noble causes, such as the aid of the sick and helpless. These are to be commended for their sacrificial service to humanity. Some in this category think of their service as, in some fashion, being done unto the Lord; this also is good. However, whether we think of those who live almost entirely unto themselves, or those who devote their lives to the service of others, the vast majority do not fall into the category described by Paul. He describes a small, unique group—those who have concluded that because they have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, they do not actually belong to themselves at all, but to the Lord. Motivated by this viewpoint, they devote themselves wholly to the doing of his will.

These give up the idea entirely of living for self, or for any other purpose than to do the will of God. They accept the headship of Christ over their lives and have been baptized into his body. This is described by Paul as being “in Christ,” and it is

these, the apostle declares, who are new creatures. Those of this class who remain faithful to their vows of consecration will become part of a “new creation,” and will be “partakers of the divine nature.” (II Pet. 1:4) Paul speaks of these as being “created in Christ Jesus unto good works.” (Eph. 2:10) Even now, while still in their fleshly “embryo” condition, they are “new” and different from all the world around them.

WHAT IS NEW?

To begin with, this creation is “new” in the sense that those who have entered into this relationship with God have renounced self and self-will and have dedicated themselves completely to the doing of the Heavenly Father’s will. This they have done of their own volition. Having been brought into contact with the great fact of divine love as expressed through the sacrificial work of Jesus, this love has constrained them to give up their earthly hopes, aims and ambitions and to follow the example of Jesus, who laid down his life in the doing of his Father’s will.

It is to this point of full surrender that God is drawing those whom he would make new creatures in Christ. When they thus give themselves wholly over to God and to the doing of his will, he begets them with the power and influence of his Holy Spirit. This newly “begotten” life in Christ Jesus is what Paul identifies as a “new creature.” It is concerning the new creature that the apostle says, “old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”

The next three verses tell us more about these “all things.” Paul states: “All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ,

and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God."—II Cor. 5:18-20

Herein is God's response, given through the apostle, to our consecration to do his will rather than our own. We have given up our vocation of serving self, and now the Lord gives us a new vocation, which is to serve as ministers of reconciliation, using the "word of reconciliation." Since reconciliation to God is possible only through Christ, we act as ambassadors of Christ in this important ministry, or service. Instead of working for self, we are now working for and with God. Paul subsequently states the matter clearly: We are "workers together with him."—II Cor. 6:1

MUCH INVOLVED

This new vocation in which we are fellow workers with God and his Son, Christ Jesus, is possible only through divine grace. As members of a fallen and dying race, God could not use us in his service except by providing redemption through the blood of Christ, and the resulting covering of his "robe of righteousness." (Isa. 61:10) However, God has made this provision, and we have the assurance that in this new vocation our imperfect works will be acceptable to him. Truly this opportunity to be co-workers with the Heavenly Father is a glorious new treasure!

In II Corinthians 6:3 Paul speaks of “giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed.” This suggests the necessity of great carefulness on our part. Our share in the ministry must be conducted in a way that will be pleasing to the Lord, and a glory to his name, and so far as possible we should be in all things properly approved “as the ministers of God.” (vs. 4) We should do this, Paul says, “in much patience.” In our fleshly vocation we might have previously given little thought to patience. When things failed to go as we would have liked we may have displayed a great deal of impatience, but now spiritual principles must override the fleshly responses in all areas of our lives.

Paul continues, “In afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings.” (vss. 4,5) In our vocation of making a way for ourselves in the world there are difficulties of various sorts. We may often find it necessary to discipline ourselves along various lines, and for most of us much labor is involved. We have considered it part of the cost to go through all these experiences in our earthly vocation in order to obtain what Paul elsewhere describes as a “corruptible” crown.—I Cor. 9:25

Here again, however, a great change has taken place as a result of being “in Christ” and having become “new creatures.” We still have many trials and difficulties, as have all the footstep followers of Jesus throughout the present age. More than ever we need now to be on the alert, not to make sure of success in our own temporal business, but that we might know the Lord’s will for us in all of life’s affairs and be faithful in doing it. More than ever,

also, we need to discipline ourselves in order to bring every thought, word and deed into subjection to the will of God through Christ. (II Cor. 10:5) We do these things now, not to promote self, but that we might be the better prepared to serve in our new vocation as ambassadors of Christ and to obtain an “incorruptible” crown.

NEW METHODS

Paul continues: “By pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by love unfeigned, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left.” (II Cor. 6:6,7) When self-advantage and promotion were our chief interest, we may not have been too seriously concerned with the qualities here mentioned by Paul. We may not have deliberately violated accepted human ethics, yet perhaps we were not too rigidly careful along these lines. With these things, also, a great change has taken place.

In the pursuit of our vocation as ambassadors of Christ, nothing but the highest degree of purity, Paul says, is acceptable. Indeed, God’s standards along all lines of character are higher than those of the world. Our habits of thought are also very important in this regard. Paul wrote, “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.”—Phil. 4:8

“By knowledge,” Paul says. In our temporal vocation a certain amount of knowledge is necessary to

successfully carry out those responsibilities. In our new, spiritual vocation knowledge is also necessary—knowledge of the work we have been called to do. The Lord has given us this knowledge in his Word of Truth, and in his wonderful plan of the ages revealed therein. It is this knowledge that we use as workers together with Christ, and as ministers of reconciliation.

We also need to be longsuffering, Paul reminds us. We certainly need to be longsuffering in our earthly vocation, because there are often trying circumstances we must endure. However, we need this quality of character even more now because we have to endure the tests of faithfulness which the Lord permits to come upon us. If we are to be loyal ambassadors of Christ we must be faithful and longsuffering in this service, even to the end of the way, for it is only those who are faithful unto death who will receive the crown of life.—Rev. 2:10

Kindness is another virtue, Paul states, that is very much needed by those “in Christ.” Some are more kindly disposed by nature than others, but when we only pursued our fleshly careers, we probably did not give a large amount of thought to the matter of being kind. Now, however, the exercise of kindness is a necessity in all the affairs of life. We should be kind to all those with whom we come in contact, even to the unthankful and the unholy. (Luke 6:35) In this, as in all things, we have Jesus as our example, and he was kind even to those who persecuted him and put him to death.

“By the Holy Spirit,” Paul adds. Prior to coming into Christ, we did not have the Holy Spirit of God to guide and motivate us. We had, to either a

greater or lesser degree, the spirit of self and the spirit of the world. Even the spirit of the Adversary may have influenced us. Now, however, God has given us a new spirit, the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a very precious part of our present heritage as new creatures in Christ. By it we are begotten to a new life and anointed to preach the glad tidings. It bears witness with our spirits that we are the children of God. (I Pet. 1:3; Isa. 61:1; Rom. 8:14,16) We are sealed by the “holy Spirit of promise.”—Eph. 1:13; 4:30

To the extent that we are emptied of self, we can be filled and controlled by the Holy Spirit. In its various manifestations it is the spirit of love, of patience, of goodness, of sympathy, and of all the other righteous qualities of our Heavenly Father’s character. How blessed indeed we will be in our new vocation if we are filled, guided and controlled by the Holy Spirit of God and exemplify these characteristics. In this we will be approved as the ministers of God.

“By love unfeigned,” Paul continues. True love is completely unselfish, and this is one of the qualifications which must be possessed by new creatures in Christ Jesus, to whom has been given the ministry of reconciliation. In every aspect of this ministry in which we have the privilege of participating, we must be motivated by love—love for God, for the brethren, for the world, and even for our enemies. (Matt. 22:37-39; I John 3:14; Luke 6:27,28) So far as our flesh is concerned, this will, at times, place us at a disadvantage. However, as new creatures this will not matter, for, after all, we have covenanted to sacrifice the flesh and all its interests in our effort to know and to do God’s will. *(Continued on page 36)*

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(Continued from page 31)

In our conduct of the ministry of reconciliation we are to use the “word of truth,” Paul explains. In our earthly vocations we may have previously sought to attain our ends by the aid of human philosophy and the wisdom of this world. Now, however, the Lord has given us the “word of truth” to use in our service to him. It is God’s plans and purposes which we present in our ministry, not our own. At the very center of that plan is Jesus as man’s Redeemer and Savior. Paul endeavored, and we should do likewise, to be “determined not to know any thing” among those with whom we come in contact in the Lord’s service “save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” (I Cor. 2:2) This is the very basis of our spiritual profession as ministers of our Heavenly Father.

THE POWER OF GOD

Before we became new creatures in Christ Jesus, when our goal was more or less to get along well in life, we utilized whatever “power” suited our purposes best. Sometimes it may have been the power of money, influence, or perhaps of prestige. Now we have been given something new. We conduct the ministry of reconciliation in the power of God. It is a rich blessing to know this, for it should do away with the temptation to use worldly methods in the conduct of the Lord’s work.

Knowing that the power of God is enlisted on behalf of his work, we will know that there can be no failure. As a consequence, we will realize that when we present the word of reconciliation and there are no apparent results, it is the Lord’s will

that it should be thus. Understanding this, we will continue to be faithful in the proclamation of the truth regardless of what the fruitage may be. “In the morning” we will sow the seeds of truth, and “in the evening” we will not withhold our hands, knowing not which will prosper, or whether the power of God will produce results from both our morning and evening efforts.—Eccles. 11:6

God’s power is infinite and unlimited. There is nothing that can interfere with the accomplishment of all his good purposes. The word which has gone forth from him—the word of reconciliation which he has given to us—will not return to him void, but will accomplish all that he pleases, and it will prosper in all the purposes for which he has sent it. (Isa. 55:10,11) How wonderful it is to know that we have been made co-workers, partners, with the Almighty Creator, and what peace of mind and of heart this should give us! We realize our own limitations, but when we consider that our Heavenly Father is our partner in our new, spiritual vocation, we have nothing to fear, for everything will be accomplished exactly as he has planned.

THE ARMOR OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

In our earthly vocation we may have surrounded ourselves with all the protection we could muster. In the world generally, even carnal weapons are not considered out of place as a means of offense and defense against enemies. In this also the Lord has given us something new. He has provided us with what Paul refers to as “the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left.” In Ephesians 6:10-18, the apostle presents in considerable detail the

various items of this spiritual “armor.” In a general way it would appear that each part of this spiritual armor represents a particular application of the truth which is designed to protect us. Let us note below Paul’s words.

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God: Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.”

What a marvelous provision from God! This armor protects our heads, our hearts, and our feet. It encircles us by the girdle, or belt, of truth, which is a symbol of servitude. Indeed, in our spiritual vocation, we are dedicated to the service of the “word of reconciliation.” Our armor has a sword also—“the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” This sword is not used to destroy our enemies, but to provide words of reconciliation. It is also designed to refute the evil devices and cunning, crafty lies of the

Adversary. This sword assists, too, in putting down the selfish ambitions of our own flesh which rise up against the new creature and seek to hinder faithfulness in the new vocation given to us by the Lord.

While prayer may not be, strictly speaking, a part of the Christian's armor, it is nevertheless most important to us in maintaining contact with our loving Heavenly Father. Thus Paul mentions it in the immediate context of his description of the armor. (Eph. 6:18) "Prayer keeps the Christian's armor bright," wrote the poet, and even "Satan trembles when he sees the weakest saint upon his knees." Therefore, symbolically, we are reminded that through prayer all the sources of divine power are made available to new creatures in Christ.

GOD'S PROVISION OF "ALL THINGS"

Truly the "all things" which are of God, and which are precious to us as new creatures, and so vitally important in our new vocation, are a wonderful evidence of God's love. In Romans 5:5 Paul speaks of the love of God being "shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which he has given unto us."

May we, by the Lord's grace and help, daily endeavor to be emptied of self, that we might be filled and controlled by his Spirit. Being filled by his Spirit, let us engage daily in the development of its various fruits and graces of Christian character. (Gal. 5:22,23; II Pet. 1:5-7) As we abound in the Spirit and its fruitage we can continue to go forth in our spiritual vocation as new creatures, confident of the Lord's approval and blessing. ■

“The Shelter of the Most High”

“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.”

—*Psalms 91:1, New International Version*

THE WORDS OF THE psalmist David were directed by God’s Holy Spirit. They record many promises of guidance and comfort for the footstep followers of Christ with whom God would specially deal throughout the

present Gospel Age. Viewed from this standpoint, the words of our text testify to God’s divine protection over those whom he has called to be “joint-heirs with Christ.”—Rom. 8:17

Psalms 91 promises many blessings to those who dwell “in the shelter of the Most High.” This place of divine protection cannot be a physical location somewhere on earth because God “dwelleth not in temples made with hands.” (Acts 7:48; 17:24) Let us therefore consider what is represented by the “shelter of the Most High” and what we must do in order to reach, and to obtain, all of the associated promises given in this Psalm.

THE HOLY PLACE

Elsewhere in the Psalms we are told of “the holy place where the Most High dwells.” (Ps. 46:4,5, *NIV*) In the New Testament we read concerning the fact that Christ Jesus, as a result of his faithfulness unto death as man’s Redeemer, was raised by the mighty power of God to his own “right hand”—that is, to the “holy place” where God dwells. (Heb. 9:24; 10:12; 12:2) A similar, future reward is promised also to Jesus’ faithful footstep followers.—Rom. 2:7; Rev. 2:10; 20:4,6

The psalmist’s reference to the “shelter of the Most High” emphasizes particularly, however, that God’s care and protection of his people is a present blessing and privilege. We believe this is appropriately pictured in the Old Testament by the “Holy” compartment of Israel’s Tabernacle. The Holy symbolizes our present condition of full consecration to God and our individual development as a “new creature” in Christ. (II Cor. 5:17; Heb. 9:1,2,6) As the Scriptures point out, we have been made “partakers of the heavenly calling,” concerning which God has begotten us “with the word of truth.”—Heb. 3:1; James 1:18

The Apostle Peter assures us that we have been made a “holy priesthood” to offer up sacrifices which are “acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.” (I Pet. 2:5) We do not offer material things to God such as animals, cakes and wine as did the priests of Israel under the Tabernacle arrangement. Rather, we offer our entire life to God, as Paul urges: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”—Rom. 12:1

Those who are now, symbolically speaking, dwelling in the Holy condition of the Tabernacle, have renounced all human aspirations and hopes. Indeed, entering into this holy relationship with God requires the symbolic death of the human will, and the doing of the Heavenly Father's will to the best of our ability. Paul states further concerning this lifelong work: "Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God."—vs. 2

DWELLING IN THE SHELTER

To "dwell" in the shelter of the Most High does not signify being close to God only once or twice a week, nor merely when we are having a particularly difficult problem. To dwell means to constantly abide in a mental attitude of closeness to our Heavenly Father. Such a mindset takes time to develop, but by diligent effort it eventually becomes a fixed part of our habit of thought. Thus, whenever any situation arises in our daily life in which we must make a decision or react, we will first think and ask ourselves, "What is God's will in this particular experience?"

Being in the shelter of our Heavenly Father is a condition which many around us may not understand. Even those closest to us, whether family or even our brethren in Christ, can know only partially about God's personal watchcare over us. However, the Scriptures indicate that God knows fully our heart and innermost attitude toward him—that which influences the decisions we make and the things which we say and do. (Ps. 44:21; Jer. 9:24)

Thus, our attitude of mind is vitally important and is a barometer of our closeness to the Heavenly Father.

ATTITUDE ALL-IMPORTANT

Our attitude in life is of very great importance. In the book of Proverbs, we are essentially told, “We are what we think.” (Prov. 23:7) Thus, our complete dedication to do God’s will, as was also true with Jesus, is a very real matter. Consider the example of two people who are having the same circumstances in life, perhaps in terms of a health problem, or some other difficulty. One person might find strength in the realization of God’s overruling providence in the experience. The other person, however, might live in more or less despair, not having the faith to trust God’s care.

Consecration entails much more than merely a one-time act of giving our heart to God. Rather, it is a promise, or vow, which must be kept daily. (Ps. 116:14) Jesus instructed his followers saying, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.” (Luke 9:23) To delight in doing God’s will, as Jesus did, we must not only seek to know his will for us, but to fulfill it each day to the best of our ability. Only by mentally renewing our vow of consecration each day can this be accomplished.

Our attitude should be like that which the psalmist expressed, “Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD.” (Ps. 19:14) Such an attitude enables us to have communion with God, and through the power of his Holy Spirit, to search out and know

his will and plan. (I Cor. 2:9-14) If we are faithful unto death, we will have the great privilege of sharing with Christ Jesus in God's great project of restoring all mankind, which will be carried out in the coming Messianic kingdom.

DWELLING CLOSE TO GOD

The psalmist says in our opening verse that those who dwell in the shelter of the Most High will find rest "in the shadow of the Almighty." To be standing in the shadow of someone signifies being very close to that person. Therefore, to abide in the shadow of the Almighty implies living very close to God. There are many mighty ones in the world, and numerous mighty angels. However, here we are told that we have the privilege of dwelling within the shadow of the one Almighty God of the universe. Thus, the opportunity of dwelling close to God is a grand and wonderful favor which we should appreciate each moment of our Christian walk.

Verse 2 of Psalm 91 says, "I will say of the LORD, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust." Here the word translated "refuge" is from a Hebrew word which elsewhere in the Old Testament is rendered "trust" and "hope." If we have made the Heavenly Father our refuge, then truly all our trust and hope is placed in him. In the Scriptures we are told, "I have put my trust in the LORD God," and "The LORD will be the hope of his people."—Ps. 73:28; Joel 3:16

In Psalm 91:2 the word "fortress" is also used. It is derived from a Hebrew word that is used numerous times when referring to the places, or "strongholds," where David went for relief from

his enemies. (I Sam. 22:4,5; 24:22, *NIV*) Repeatedly in the Psalms we are promised that God is our “fortress,” a stronghold in whom we can place all our cares, and by whom we can be led and guided, even in the midst of our enemies.—Ps. 18:2; 31:3; 71:3

THE FOWLER’S SNARES

The words of our lesson further state: “Surely he will save you from the fowler’s snare.” (Ps. 91:3, *NIV*) We believe, prophetically, it is Jesus who is pictured here speaking, telling his prospective bride, his footstep followers who are being called and developed during the present Gospel Age, what God will do to protect them. The *Isaac Leeser* translation connects verses 2 and 3 together as one sentence, rendering them as follows: “I will say of the Lord, who is my refuge and my stronghold, my God, in whom I ever trust, that he will surely deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the pestilence of destruction.” Jesus expressed this trust in God, not only for himself, but also for all his consecrated followers, as he indicated in his prayer the night before his death.—John 17:11-15

In olden times, a “fowler” was someone who hunted birds, usually by means of traps, such as with the use of a snare or net. The “fowler’s snare” suggests the various deceptions which Satan uses against individuals who are striving to do God’s will. One of the snares Jesus warned his followers about is that of allowing ourselves to become overburdened with the “cares of this life.” If we allow ourselves to become engrossed with the concerns and worries of present temporal affairs, we can easily be drawn away from the Lord. Jesus admon-

ished his followers to “watch and pray” in order to recognize and avoid this snare.—Luke 21:34-36

Another “snare” which Jesus has alerted us to is the “deceitfulness of riches.” (Mark 4:19) If we have some amount of prosperity or even a desire to achieve prosperity, we might be tempted to place less trust in the Lord and become entangled with the delusionary appeal of earthly riches. Rather, we are admonished by the Master to lay up “treasures in heaven.”—Matt. 6:19-21

A snare which Satan will often try to use consists of temptations which, if yielded to, would lead to the development of pride. Pride can be defined as having a feeling of self-satisfaction from one’s own achievements. It could be pride in something we did, or have come to understand, or perhaps an obstacle we overcame. We must continually remind ourselves that everything we have and can do is of the Father. (I Cor. 4:7; James 1:17) Jesus, who was perfect in every way, said, “I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things.” (John 8:28) How much truer is this for us, who are imperfect.

The Adversary also uses the snare of discouragement. We might become discouraged with our perceived lack of progress in the narrow way, or with how we may have responded to various trials and testings in the past. Let us remember, however, the Apostle Paul’s words: “There is nothing in us that allows us to claim that we are capable of doing this work. The capacity we have comes from God.”—II Cor. 3:5, *Good News Bible*

We note that Psalm 91:3 says we shall be saved from “the fowler’s snare.” However, the required condition for this deliverance is stated in verse 1,

that we must dwell in the “shelter of the Most High”—that is, live in full consecration to the Lord. One who has such an unbending determination to do God’s will, cannot be plucked out of the Father’s hand. Along these lines Jesus said, “My Father, who has given them [his disciples] to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand.”—John 10:29, *NIV*

CHANGING DECEPTIONS

Satan changes his methods of attack and deception at various times in order to suit the conditions then present. During the Dark Ages, there were relatively few Bibles and most people were unable to read for themselves. During that time, Satan’s deceptions were relatively simple, using fear, superstition, and darkness to confuse many people regarding our Heavenly Father and his precious promises. However, now, as we approach the end of the present age, the Scriptures indicate that “knowledge shall be increased.” This includes religious knowledge. (Dan. 12:4) Consequently, Satan has had to develop new, stronger delusions in order to deceive the people.

In the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew, Jesus prophesied that at the time of his return and subsequent invisible presence, “false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible.” (Matt. 24:24, *NIV*) We believe the Heavenly Father’s truth is our protection against such deceptions. God’s plan, as outlined for us in the many Bible helps which have been made available to the Lord’s people here at the end of the age, assist us in understanding and harmonizing the

Scriptures, and help protect us against the various deceptions which the Adversary is bringing forth at this time.

DELIVERED FROM “DEADLY PESTILENCE”

Verse 3 of Psalm 91 continues by stating that God will save us from “the deadly pestilence.” A pestilence is an epidemic or plague which attacks many people, often with great loss of life. Paul warned the brethren about false teachers who are “ruining whole households.” (Tit. 1:11, *NIV*) Some of the Lord’s people have seen or experienced situations in which a whole group or large number of people have been carried away by some deception, resulting in spiritual sickness or “pestilence.”

Thankfully, in some cases, after perhaps a long time has passed, individuals may be delivered from such a condition because all along they had been dwelling in the shelter of the Most High and had maintained their full consecration to the Lord. By accepting God’s will and following his leadings, they learned valuable lessons and were delivered in God’s own way and time from what might have otherwise been a “deadly pestilence.”

UNDER HIS WINGS

The psalmist continues, saying, “He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge.” (Ps. 91:4, *NIV*) Here we see the closeness of our Heavenly Father to those who are dwelling in the shelter of absolute consecration. It is similar to the way a mother hen protects her chicks from heat, cold, or danger by covering them with her wings. In Old Testament times, a common Hebrew metaphor was that their king would “cover” or “shade” those

who were dependent on him, thus giving them protection. (Judg. 9:15) Likewise, we are assured that our Heavenly Father is the protective shelter or “shade” over his people.—Ps. 36:7; 121:5; Isa. 25:4; 51:16

The latter part of verse 4 states, “His faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.” In ancient times both the shield and the rampart were very important to a soldier, providing defensive protection from the darts, arrows, and other weapons sent by an enemy. The shield was a personal defense, while a rampart was a fortification, or barrier, which provided protection to a large number of soldiers. The Christian’s defense, of course, is not founded upon manmade weapons or defense. Rather, as Paul says, “The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds; Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God.”—II Cor. 10:4,5

God’s “faithfulness” mentioned by the psalmist includes the divine promises and truths recorded in the Scriptures. God’s “exceeding great and precious promises” are our protection against the deceptions of the Adversary. (II Pet. 1:4) In addition, Paul urges us, saying, “Put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground.” (Eph. 6:10-13, *NIV*) Arming ourselves with these spiritual weapons is absolutely necessary at the present time.

WE NEED NOT FEAR

Verse 5 of Psalm 91 begins, “You will not fear the terror of night.” (*NIV*) The Bible indicates that at the end of the present age, as the nighttime of

trouble in the world increases in severity, "Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world." (Luke 21:26, *NIV*) However, the psalmist promises that those who are dwelling in the shelter of the Most High, having God's faithfulness and promises as their shield and rampart, will not have such fears because they know that the blessings of Christ's kingdom will soon be poured out for all mankind.—Rev. 21:1-5

We also need not fear "the arrow that flies by day." (Ps. 91:5, *NIV*) In another place we similarly read of such opposition: "They sharpen their tongues like swords and aim their words like deadly arrows." (Ps. 64:3, *NIV*) These "deadly arrows" may include the sharp ridicule, slander, or evil-speaking directed toward us because of our faith in God's promises. Such attacks may sometimes come from sincere, though misguided, religious leaders or their followers. Yet, none of these arrows can hurt those who have God's faithfulness and promises as their shield and rampart, and who are dwelling in the shelter of the Most High.

"The pestilence that stalks in the darkness," is another condition which we are not to fear. (Ps. 91:6, *NIV*) Here we believe the "darkness" includes the God-dishonoring religious teachings which developed during the Dark Ages, many of which continue to be taught in the religious systems of today. By searching the Scriptures, however, and discerning the harmonious light of truth contained therein, we do not dwell in spiritual darkness, nor do we have the fears associated with such false teachings that others may have.

Verse 6 continues, saying, "Nor the plague that

destroys at midday.” (*NIV*) The Bible indicates that the Gospel Age will end with a time of trouble in which all of the present, imperfect human institutions and systems in which people have long placed their trust will be removed. The Apostle Paul speaks of this as a time of great shaking, during which these former systems will be taken away in preparation for God’s kingdom, with Christ as its ruler. “Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens. The words ‘once more’ indicate the removing of what can be shaken . . . so that what cannot be shaken may remain.” This time of trouble will bring various severe tests, but those having God’s truth as their shield and rampart will not be in fear, because they have placed their trust in “a kingdom that cannot be shaken”—God’s kingdom.—Heb. 12:26-28, *NIV*

“A thousand shall fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.” (Ps. 91:7, *NIV*) Indeed, it is possible for those who have once known the truth of God’s Word to fall from their steadfastness. However, we are given the comforting assurance, “it will not come near you,” if we are dwelling in the shelter of the Most High. Upon the basis of our daily dedication to the doing of God’s will, we will have his continual care and guidance over all of our eternal interests.—Rom. 8:28

GOD IS OUR DWELLING

Later in Psalm 91 we read, “If you make the Most High your dwelling—even the LORD, who is my refuge—then no harm will befall you.” (vss. 9,10, *NIV*) What a wonderful promise is here given! God, the Almighty Creator of the universe, is vitally

interested in our spiritual development. He tells us, "I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands." (Isa. 49:16) We are always before our Heavenly Father's face, and he takes a constant, personal interest in our welfare.

Although each of us will continue to have experiences which will test our faith and trust in God, nothing can happen to us which will affect our eternal interests, if we continue to dwell in the shelter of the Most High. If we call upon God, he gives us this promise: "I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him."—Ps. 91:15, *NIV*

Let us each continue to dwell and rest in the shadow of the Most High, placing all our hope and trust in God's faithfulness, and in his sure promises. "LORD, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill? He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart and has no slander on his tongue, who does his neighbor no wrong and casts no slur on his fellow man, who despises a vile man but honors those who fear the LORD, who keeps his oath even when it hurts, who lends his money without usury and does not accept a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things will never be shaken."—Ps. 15:1-5, *NIV* ■

*What shall we then say to these things?
If God be for us, who can be against us?
He that spared not his own Son,
but delivered him up for us all,
how shall he not with him also freely
give us all things?—Romans 8:31-32*

Statistical Report

For the year ended September 30, 2019

AS WE HAVE DONE for the past eighty-seven years, the Dawn continues to engage in the work of preaching the Gospel of the kingdom. We invite all who so desire to share with us in this work. The Dawn is privileged to provide material to groups and individuals throughout the world to use in their witness efforts. The activities of the Dawn are streamlined through phone and computer services, and the work continues by the Lord's grace and blessing.

During 2019 the Dawn was able to increase its witnessing expenditures in several categories compared to the previous year. These increases comprised both domestic and foreign activities, including the categories of radio, television, and other media advertising. In recent years, foreign activity has increased substantially, and in 2019 comprised nearly 30% of our total witnessing expenditures.

In total, the Dawn's witnessing expenses in 2019 were 5% below the previous year. We had a net operating deficit, excluding bequests and investment income, of (\$431,699), compared to a 2018 deficit of (\$434,115). The table below provides details of operating revenue and expenses for the 2019 fiscal year:

Income	Receipts	Expenditures
Revenue (excluding bequests and investment income)	<u>\$82,761</u>	
Expenses		
Radio (domestic)		\$ 66,535
TV (domestic)		42,460
Radio and TV (foreign)		29,547
Internet and Other Media		89,702
Pilgrim Service (domestic and foreign)		12,229
Other Foreign Support		15,388
Shipping/Mailing (domestic and foreign)		66,328
Outside Printing		467
Shop Operating Expense		27,756
Plant Operating Expense		118,667
House Operating Expense		<u>45,381</u>
Total Expenses		\$514,460
Less Income	<u>82,761</u>	
Net Operating Deficit	<u>\$(431,699)</u>	

The Dawn has projected to maintain witnessing expenditures in 2020 at similar levels to 2019. Our 2020 budget limits to no more than \$400,000 any reduction in total cash and reserves during the year. Further increases in witnessing expenditures will be considered if additional opportunities arise, and for which necessary resources are available.

ACTIVITIES

The Dawn magazine is available in nine foreign languages, either in printed or online format. The English *Dawn* is printed in India for the Indian brethren and the witness efforts there. An audio version is available on the Dawn's website, on any mobile device, or on CD.

In addition to *The Dawn* magazine, *Hope* and *Life After Death* booklets continue to be printed

and sent by repeat requests to funeral homes throughout the United States. There is also a steady stream of print jobs as we reprint booklets and tracts as required.

The translation of various *Dawn* magazine articles has begun in Uganda, and booklets are being printed in that language for use by local ecclesias as well as in public witness work. The Dawn continues the partnership with our brethren in Italy in the work of preaching the Gospel of the kingdom. In addition to publishing the Italian *Dawn*, we also provide booklets and tracts for witness work.

The *Frank & Ernest* radio program is currently broadcast on nineteen stations in the United States, as well as on stations in South Africa, West Africa, India, the Caribbean, Central America, South America, and the Philippines. The Dawn also sponsors thirty-second radio and television spot announcements offering Dawn booklets throughout the United States each month.

In 2019 the Dawn placed five ads in four different almanacs. The ads offered the booklets, *Why God Permits Evil*, *Life After Death*, *Hope For a Fear Filled World*, and *Israel in History and Prophecy*. This continues to be one of our most effective methods of advertising. Responses are received daily by mail, phone and email.

The Dawn website yields requests for literature from many countries around the world. It also has available for online reading or download thousands of pages of current and archived booklets, books, *Dawn* magazine issues, and other offerings.

In 2019 the Dawn continued its Internet keyword advertising on Google and Microsoft for 39

booklets in English, 12 booklets in Spanish, 8 booklets in French, and 3 booklets in German. During the past year, the number of “clicks” to these keywords, which brings the user to the Dawn’s ad page for viewing, was over 214,000 for all languages combined. The viewing of these ads generated nearly 2,300 mail responses for booklets. Booklets read online as a result of the same ads totaled approximately 8,600. In addition to mail responses and booklets read online, a person can also download the advertised booklets from the ads. Statistics for downloaded booklets are not currently available from our Internet Service Provider. In 2020 we plan to add new booklet offerings, possibly include an additional language, and implement other changes in order to further enhance responses in this highly effective area of the Dawn’s witness activities.

The Dawn’s YouTube channel, “The Dawn Magazine—Monthly Video,” continues to be a popular method of presenting the message of Truth. During the past year 34 videos were added, including 21 thirty-second TV ads, bringing the total number of videos posted on the channel to 108. During the year, the videos were viewed 2,900 times, for a total of over 20,000 minutes.

In 2019 the activity of the Dawn Pilgrim service continued to provide opportunities to visit isolated brethren and small ecclesias in various parts of North America. In addition to domestic Pilgrim service, in early 2019, four brethren from the U.S. took an extended trip to Australia. We are very thankful for their efforts, together with the assistance of our Dawn representatives in Australia, who helped organize this trip, a report of which

appeared in the August 2019 issue of *The Dawn* magazine. A trip was also made to Germany in late spring to visit and serve at the German General Convention.

Through the Recorded Lecture Service, *The Dawn* magazine is provided on a CD to seven subscribers each month. The Memorial Service is also offered in both audio and video format each year in *The Dawn* magazine to all who wish to place an order.

It has been the privilege of the Dawn to partner with ecclesias and service organizations in providing large quantities of literature to be used by the brethren in different parts of Africa in their witness efforts. These brethren are very zealous, and regularly send photos of their efforts.

We also provide literature for the brethren in Brazil and Colombia to assist in their witness activities. The work in these two countries is growing rapidly, and we are thankful to be able to share in it.

RELOCATION TO FLORIDA

Plans are going forward to relocate the operations of the Dawn to the Orlando, Florida area. A building has been leased to house the Dawn operations and the process of purchasing the necessary equipment is under way. There are over thirty brethren from the Orlando area who have made a commitment to assist with the work of the Dawn in its new location.

STAFFING

We could not accomplish our activities without the assistance of many brethren. Currently there are approximately twenty brethren in North America involved in the work, both on-site and remotely.

Overseas, we have the assistance of brethren in many foreign countries, including Australia, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Colombia, and Brazil. The brethren in Australia print the Cebuano Dawn for the brethren in the Philippines and coordinate the witness work there.

We thank all the brethren for their continued work and support. It is our privilege to labor with you in our Father's Vineyard.

In summary, we are thankful for the many willing hands and hearts of brethren throughout the world who have assisted directly and indirectly with the work of the Dawn during the past year. Without this help, the work could not continue. We are excited about the prospects for 2020, and for the new opportunities which will come about with the transition of the Dawn's operations to Florida. Most of all, we rejoice in the continued privilege of bearing witness to the truth given to us by our Heavenly Father.

We ask for your prayers on behalf of the work of the Dawn, as daily we seek to proclaim the Gospel message throughout the earth, and strive to be good stewards over the opportunities which God's providence has made available to us. ■

2020 MEMORIAL SUPPER DATE

The proper time for the annual observance of the Memorial Supper will be after sunset on Tuesday, April 7, 2020.

General Convention Bulletin

July 18-23, 2020—Johnstown, Pennsylvania

THE 2020 GENERAL CONVENTION will return to the beautiful facilities of the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown, Pennsylvania. Air conditioned hotel-like rooms with private bathrooms in the Living-Learning Center (LLC), family-style air conditioned apartments with private bathrooms (APTS), and housing with two rooms sharing one bathroom (not air conditioned) in other facilities will be available on campus. A child may sleep on a bedroom floor at no charge if both beds are occupied. Air conditioned apartments off-campus will also be available this year. These are located one-half mile directly west of the LLC.

All room and meal costs for children 12 years old or younger will be paid by the convention. In addition, 100% of the room and meal cost of those from ages 13 through 17 will be refunded if the young person attends at least 75% of the studies for his or her age group. This subsidy does not cover meals paid at the door.

The convention theme text is taken from Philip-
pians 4:7, "The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." Two dialogue sessions will feature discussion of the topics, "What is Truth?" and "The ecclesia arrangement at the end of the

General Convention Registration

330 Jasmine Road—Casselberry, FL 32707

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

	Brkfst	Lunch	Dinner	Bed
Friday, July 17, 2020				
Saturday, 18th				
Sunday, 19th				
Monday, 20th				
Tuesday, 21st				
Wednesday, 22nd				
Thursday, 23rd				
Check for package: 7 nights, all 18 meals <input type="checkbox"/> or 7 nights, 12 meals (no breakfasts) <input type="checkbox"/>				
Check: <input type="checkbox"/> private bath or <input type="checkbox"/> shared bath <input type="checkbox"/> double occupancy <input type="checkbox"/> single occupancy <input type="checkbox"/> interested in APTS				
Names and ecclesia name (age if under 18)				
Address:				

SPEAKERS' APPOINTMENTS

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

L. Griehs

Australia:
Anglesea, Victoria
January 24-27

H. Montague

Phoenix, AZ January 18,19

*Precious in the sight of the Lord
is the death of his saints.—Psalm 116:15*

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 Doris McGinnis, Mount Vernon, IL—November 21, Age, 97

Sister Virginia Sowers, Phoenix AZ—November 29. Age, 102

Brother Stanley Loper, Brunswick, GA—December 1. Age 63

Sister Calanthea Hughes, Jacksonville, FL—December 2. Age 65

Brother Albert Baumgarten, Red Deer, AB—December 8. Age 92

Sister Carlene Meyer, Georgetown, CA—December 12. Age 67

Sister Marjorie Hagensick, Chicago, IL—December 13. Age 88

CONVENTIONS

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

PHOENIX CONVENTION, January 18,19—Drury Inn, Happy Valley, 2335 W. Pinnacle Peak Road, Phoenix, AZ 85027. Hotel reservations, phone: (800) 325-0720. Confirmation #2369019. Reservation deadline, December 16. Other information, contact A. Mengos. Phone: (480) 390-3767 or Email: samengos@yahoo.com

AUSTRALIA CONVENTION, January 24-27—Camp Wilkin, Anglesea, Victoria, Australia. Contact R. Charlton. Email:australianbiblestudents@gmail.com

SACRAMENTO CONVENTION, February 14-16—Holiday Inn Express, 2224 Auburn Boulevard, Sacramento, CA 95821. Contact hotel for room reservations. Phone: (916) 923-1100. Specify “Bible Students” to receive special rate. For other information, contact K. Freer. Phone: (916) 879-4657 or Email: winnerwear@aol.com

FLORIDA CONVENTION, March 7-9—Holiday Inn Orlando International, 5750 T. G. Lee Blvd., Orlando, FL 32822. Phone: (407) 851-6400. Specify “Orlando Bible Students” for special rate by February 22. Online booking code: SBO. Other information, contact S. Jeuck. Phone: (407) 247-4641 or Email: sjeuck@aol.com

HIGHLAND PARK CONVENTION, March 28—DoubleTree by Hilton, 789 Connecticut Avenue, Norwalk, CT 06854. Phone: (203) 853-3477. Other information, contact S. Koterba. Phone: (917) 554-2348 or Email: sandykoterba@gmail.com

DETROIT PRE-MEMORIAL CONVENTION, April 4,5—Quality Inn Troy, 2537 Rochester Court, Troy, MI 48083. Contact P. Nemesh. Phone: (248) 649-6588 or Email: nemeshfp@aol.com

ALBUQUERQUE CONVENTION, April 10-12—Sheraton Albuquerque Airport Hotel, 2910 Yale Boulevard SE, Albuquerque, NM 87106. Send reservations and meal counts to S. Thomassen by April 1. Phone: (505) 268-8170 or Email: srbt@juno.com

NIGERIA CONVENTION, April 11—Agwa Ecclesia, Uzi Obudi Agwa, Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria. Contact V. Ekeh. Phone: 2348080205812 or Email: abiblestudecc@yahoo.com

BIBLE STUDENTS GENERAL CONVENTION, July 18-23—University of Pittsburgh, 450 Schoolhouse Road, Johnstown, PA. See pp. 59-61, this issue, for registration.

Preview of the Kingdom

Close your eyes for a moment to the scenes of misery and woe, degradation and sorrow that yet prevail on account of sin, and picture before your mental vision the glory of the perfect earth. Not a stain of sin mars the harmony and peace of a perfect society: not a bitter thought, not an unkind look or word; love, welling up from every heart, meets a kindred response in every other heart, and benevolence marks every act. There sickness shall be no more; not an ache nor a pain, nor any evidence of decay—not even the fear of such things. Think of all the pictures of comparative health and beauty of human form and feature that you have ever seen, and know that perfect humanity will be of still surpassing loveliness. The inward purity and mental and moral perfection will stamp and glorify every radiant countenance. Such will earth's society be; and weeping bereaved ones will have their tears all wiped away, when thus they realize the resurrection work complete.