

The Dawn

Volume LIX, Number 11

(USPS 149-380) November 1991

Second-class postage paid at Rutherford, N.J. Published monthly by The Dawn Bible Students Association, 199 Railroad Avenue, East Rutherford, NJ 07073. \$1.00 a year; Great Britain 60p. Write to foreign addresses for other prices.

Canada: P.O. Box 175, Postal Station F, Winnipeg, Man. R2L 2A5

British Isles: Associated Bible Students, P.O. Box 136, Chesham, Bucks. HP5 3EB

Australia: Berean Bible Institute, 1 Springfield Street, Briar Hill, Victoria 3088

France: Association des Etudiants de la Bible-Publications Aurora, B.P. 3066, 68062 Mulhouse CEDEX

Germany: Tagesanbruch Bibelstudien-Vereinigung, Postfach 4 D8567, Neunkirchen am Sand

Greece: He Haravi (The Dawn), Afexiou 81 Ano Ilisia, GR 15771 Athens

Italy: Aurora, Via S. Leonardo 21, Ottaviano 80044, Napoli

New Zealand: P.O. Box 1358, C.P.O. Auckland

South America: El Alba, c/o Avel y Milo Lupsor, Calle Almirante Brown 674, Monte Grande, Buenos Aires, Argentina

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HIGHLIGHTS OF DAWN

'Reeling' and 'trembling' are two prophetic expressions which so well describe our world today. It is often observed by statesmen and historians that now our problems are so complex that the only real solution is a one-world government. But the existing fragmentation of the political, economic, ethical, and social aspects of our world, all selfishly motivated, have rendered this solution virtually impossible.

Our world is being pulled in so many different directions that it lacks stability and a firm objective. Recent events in Russia and the Middle East, as well as financial and economic upheavals worldwide, give cause to feel that the future is very uncertain. Many tremble with fear, not knowing where we are going.

God prophetically predicted this situation. Does he have a solution?

This Reeling and Trembling Earth

"The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall be removed like a cottage; and the transgression thereof shall be heavy upon it; and it shall fall, and not rise again."

— Isaiah 24:20

OUR TEXT IS a graphic description of a topsy-turvy world order headed blindly and staggeringly toward inevitable destruction. In this same chapter of Isaiah's prophecy, almost all of which is similarly prophetic of the overthrow of Satan's world, we are told that the earth is "made empty," and is "laid waste." The prophet also

declares that the earth is "turned upside down," and "mourns." The same earth, according to this prophecy, is seen to "fade away," and to be "broken down," "dissolved," "moved exceedingly," and "removed like a cottage."—Isa. 24:1,4,19,20

The earth here mentioned is, obviously, not this literal planet upon which we live. The literal earth cannot mourn, nor does it need punishment for transgressions. The term is used to denote what we call the world, or the world order. In the fourth verse of the chapter, the words earth and world are used interchangeably. Just as the term earth is symbolic, so all the various expressions which are employed to describe how the symbolic earth is destroyed are also pictorial. The use of so many of them conveys the unmistakable thought that Satan's world or empire is to be completely destroyed. Satan's world must indeed be destroyed before God's new world can be established—that world described by the Apostle Peter as one "wherein dwelleth righteousness."—II Pet. 3:13

Beautiful and meaningful is the descriptive language of the Bible, however. Both the Old and New Testaments give us numerous pictures of events now taking place in the world. The prophecies identify the present period of human experience as the 'Day of the LORD', 'the Day of Jehovah'. It is 'the time of the end' of the Gospel Age, in which man-made rulership, based upon selfishness, and guided largely by misleading human philosophy, is crumbling to its fall.

Not knowing that the time has come for divine intervention in the affairs of men, human wisdom still hopes to erect a new and better world upon the ruins of the old one. Temporarily, and to a limited degree, this may be accomplished. But, the prophecies of the Bible show clearly that before the events of this Day of the LORD are completed, the long-promised kingdom of the LORD will have taken the place formerly occupied by the changing

institutions of men. This is why it is called the Day of the LORD.

It is also called the Day of Vengeance of our God, and the "day of wrath." (Isa. 61:2; 63:1-4; Ps. 110:5) Yet we are not to get the idea of divine malice. God has established certain laws in harmony with which he operates, and those who come into conflict with these reap the penalty of their course. Thus, today humankind is reaping the result of unrepented selfishness and sin.

What the Prophet Isaiah described as the Day of Vengeance, the Prophet Daniel spoke of as "a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation." (Dan. 12:1) The Prophet Malachi says concerning the same period, "Behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble." (Mal. 4:1) The Prophet Joel, foretelling the same time of distress upon the world, speaks of it as a "day of clouds and of thick darkness." (Joel 2:2) Jesus refers to this time as one of "great tribulation," so ruinous in its character that if it were not cut short, no flesh, human or lower animals, would survive its ravages.—Matt. 24:21,22

The prophetic lightnings spoken of in Psalm 97:4: "His lightnings enlightened the world; the earth saw, and trembled," are a symbolism illustrating what the Prophet Daniel described as an "increase of knowledge." (Dan. 12:3) Many of our great statesmen and writers now recognize the relationship between education and present world chaos. While the worldly-wise recognize that it is the enlightening influences of our day that have started the common people on the march for freedom, yet they do not see that this has come in fulfillment of Biblical prophecies, and because God's time has come to establish his kingdom.

For centuries the theory was held that knowledge in the hands of the common people was a dangerous thing, and it was indeed dangerous to the hereditary ruling clas-

ses. Every possible effort was made to keep the people in general, in ignorance. That was during the period styled the Dark Ages. But the time came when God wanted the people to obtain knowledge. His symbolic lightnings began to enlighten the world, and the first effect of this is what we see happening all over the earth today.

The lightning symbolism is especially meaningful in connection with the prophecy of Joel, which describes this same period as one of "clouds and thick darkness." How apt indeed is the figure. Truly, lightning flashes in the midst of the gloom and perplexity of this cloudy day are the great principles of truth and justice in contrast with which the world's present disorder is so manifest. A flash of lightning from the obscured throne discloses here one error, and there another, concerning the social, political, governmental and scientific views and practices of the past, and incites the masses to press for better things to which they feel they are justly entitled. Never before have such conditions prevailed.

How clearly the prophetic lightning flashes from God's throne are helping to reveal corruption in the world, dishonesty in high places, hence emphasizing more and more the need for radical changes to be made in the world economic setup. But, how to right these wrongs the world is not able to see, with the result that we hear conflicting ideas, voices, theories, threats, all of which add to the confusion and increase the trembling of the social earth, and weaken the powers of the symbolic heavens. Today, indeed, the earth is trembling as much from the din of wordy conflict, as it has in the past from the hammer blows of global war!

In the midst of all this trouble and tumult, what is the attitude of the LORD's truly consecrated and faithful people? Are they, too, in fear and doubt and confusion? Not if they are living up to their privileges as watchmen in Zion. (Isa. 52:8; Mic. 7:4) True, the LORD's people suffer from the same distresses as do the worldly, but knowing

the outcome, they lift up their heads in confidence knowing that not only their deliverance in the first resurrection is near, but that the deliverance of the earth from the thralldom of sin and death also hastens on.

Through the Scriptures, the LORD's people are given a clear knowledge of the divine plan, with its times and seasons, which enables them to both see the necessity for the present method of divine discipline upon the world, and also the peaceable fruits of righteousness which shall result therefrom. In the midst of the storm and babble of this great Day of the LORD they hear the commanding voice of God, and their hearts rejoice. They have full confidence in his ability to bring order out of confusion. They realize that in the judgments of this day, it is the LORD who speaks from heaven—from the high place of authority and control, and they give thanks that at long last he is calling a halt on unrestrained human selfishness by preparing to set aside the order of things which selfishness produced, that his own long-promised kingdom may be established in its place.

The lightning flashes portrayed in the prophecies are symbolic of knowledge along all lines as it affects the course of human behavior. Spiritual truth, as it applies to God's will for his own people, is revealed through the Scriptures, and disseminated by the consecrated followers of the Master. To understand the prophetic meaning of the times in which we are living, is, therefore, to be regarded as a special favor from the LORD. Hence our attitude should be one of great gratitude toward God for the beautiful truth he has granted us the privilege of seeing, and with which we have the blessed privilege of being identified. Our gratitude should be manifested by an increasing zeal in helping to bring that truth to the knowledge of others.

Our eyes of understanding should discern clearly the Battle of the Great Day of God Almighty now in progress; and our faith, guiding our eyes of understanding through

the Word, should enable us to see the glorious outcome—Messiah's kingdom! The Battle of the Great Day of God Almighty is in progress. It is a battle that has its stages of gradual development. Its general character is that of a struggle of light against darkness, of liberty against oppression, of truth against error. It is so widespread in its application, and so universal in all its ramifications, that no one symbolism could fully describe it.

In addition to the prophetic pictures already mentioned, the Scriptures describe it as the "fire of God's jealousy." (Zeph. 3:8) Nahum 1:3,6,7, informs us that "His way is in the whirlwind and in the storm." It is also prophetically described as a "flood of mighty waters," and "a great earthquake."—Isa. 28:2; Rev. 16:18

Through the Prophet Jeremiah, the LORD indicated that to a greater or lesser extent, militarism forms a prominent part of this great day of trouble, saying, "I will call for a sword upon all the inhabitants of the earth." (Jer. 25:29) A similar thought is suggested in Isaiah 34:3, where the kingdoms of the earth, symbolized as mountains, are said to be melted with the blood of armies.

Still another symbolism of the prophecies, is that of treading the "winepress." Prophesying of Christ during the early part of his second presence, the prophet said, "I have trodden the winepress alone; . . . and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments." (Isa. 63:1-6) We believe that this work began in 1914 with World War I, and has been growing in severity year by year. As with the battle of the great day of God Almighty, the symbolic treading of the winepress continued throughout World War II, and other more localized conflicts, and still continues.

Another symbolism depicting the overthrow of constituted authority, particularly that of rulers who governed Continental Europe prior to World War I, is that contained in Daniel's prophecy, which illustrates the accomplishment of the divine purpose as the smiting of

the human-like image seen by Nebuchadnezzar in his dream. This image, according to the prophecy, was to be smitten by a stone cut out of the mountain without hands. This stone, according to Daniel 2:44,45, represents the kingdom of God.

The former church-state rulership in Europe has already been destroyed during the intervening years between World War I and World War II, while the remaining fragments thereof are even now being ground to powder preparatory to being blown away as the chaff from a summer threshing floor. (Dan. 2:32-35,44) Europe is no longer ruled by the Gentile Times royalty, but by governments which have arisen out of the masses of the people.

Still another symbolism picturing the blows of destruction being dealt Satan's empire before God's kingdom can be established, is that given to us by the Apostle Paul. He likens the trouble to birth pangs which come upon a woman in travail. (1 Thess. 5:1-3) There are suggestions in the prophecies that there were to be three of these major spasms of trouble. In Daniel's prophecy they are shown as, first, the smiting of the image, then its being ground to powder, and finally, the wind blowing away the dust.

Note, for example, Joel's prophecy: "Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the Day of the LORD cometh, for it is nigh at hand; a day of darkness and of gloominess, and day of clouds and of thick darkness. . . . A fire devoureth before them; and behind them a flame burneth. . . . The earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble: the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining."—Joel 2:1-3,10

Whatever the symbolism used by the prophets of old to describe one or more of the events transpiring in the momentous Day of the LORD, back of them is the fact that God takes the responsibility for the overthrow of this

present evil world, and explains to us that he accomplishes this end through the prophetic increase of knowledge—the flashing of his lightnings.

The trembling of the earth as a result of Jehovah's lightnings is a very comprehensive symbolism. It may tremble as in a storm, or in the wind, or from fire, or earthquake, or floods, or in other ways, but it continues to tremble until it finally falls. Then the kingdom of Messiah will be established in its place.

There can be little doubt that we of the present generation are witnessing the foretold death-throes of a world order. It is what the Scriptures elsewhere describe as the end of the world. (Matt. 13:39) World distress incidental to the transitional changes now occurring has caused men and women of all nations to long for a new and better world. We can well understand the desire of the democracies to do all in their power to make sure that the new world will be a free and happy one. We are not speaking disparagingly of human efforts when we say that there can be no ideal world order until the kingdom of Christ is established.

It seems that there is nothing which should engender such hope and courage in the hearts of humanity today more than to know that out of all the chaos and trouble experienced by the present generation there is soon to emerge an era of genuine and lasting peace and joy. And it is just this that we can and should expect, not because man will finally triumph over his selfishness, but because God has intervened in the affairs of men, and will soon establish divine control over the nations. In the last verse of the chapter from which our text is taken, we are given assurance that "the LORD of hosts shall reign in Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously."—Isa. 24:23

Jerusalem was the capital city of Judea, and Zion hill in Jerusalem was where the government of Israel centered. The promise of God to reign in Zion would, therefore,

denote actual God-control in human affairs. This symbolism of the divine kingdom is mentioned many times in the prophecies of both the Old and New Testaments. In the 2nd Psalm, 6th verse, God declares, "Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion." The psalmists then explains that God's king, who is Christ Jesus, will dash the nations to pieces like a potter's vessel.

In the 14th chapter of Revelation, Jesus and his entire church are shown to be together on Mount Zion. The prophecy of Obadiah gives us the same portrait of the kingdom, declaring that "Saviours shall come up on Mount Zion, . . . and the kingdom shall be the LORD's." (Obad. 21) It seems clear from these references that the term Zion is used in the Scriptures to denote the exalted status of Christ and his church as they reign together for a thousand years to uplift and bless the sin-sick and dying world.

Micah 4:2 declares that "the Law shall go forth of Zion, and the Word of the LORD from Jerusalem." This is another of God's promises in which the term Zion is used symbolically to represent the divine Christ. There is good reason to believe, also, that the term Jerusalem is used here to describe the earthly or visible operations of the new kingdom. The laws of that kingdom emanate from Zion, that is from Christ and his church. Hence there will be no need for legislators, because there will be no occasion to change or amend the laws—nor will new laws be needed to meet emergencies.

But these laws will need to be made known, and the people will need instruction in their proper application. This will be done through the earthly representatives of the kingdom—the Word of the LORD going forth from Jerusalem. Those who will represent the Christ in the Jerusalem activities of the kingdom have already been selected by God, and prepared by him for this high position of trust as world educators under Christ. In Matthew 8:11 and Luke 13:28,29, they are identified by Jesus as

being Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the prophets. In Psalm 45:16 they are referred to as the fathers of Israel, and the promise is given that they shall be made "princes" in all the earth.

Should we view this Scriptural portrait of God's new world from the human standpoint, it would probably seem quite impractical, and we would have good reason to ask, Will it work? But we must remember that this is not a humanly devised Utopian arrangement. If it were only that, it would be a fool's paradise, indeed. But, thank God, it is his new arrangement for a sin-sick, war-weary world. The Creator of the universe, the great First Cause of all life, has planned it, and certainly he would not make promises to the human race which he is not able to fulfill. □

IT IS a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD, and to give praises unto thy name, O Most High. To show forth thy lovingkindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every night, upon an instrument of ten strings, and upon the harp with a solemn sound.



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LESSON FOR NOVEMBER 3

Serving the Church

KEY VERSE: *"They all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more."* — Acts 20:37,38

SELECTED SCRIPTURE: Acts 20:17-31

PAUL WAS GOING back to Jerusalem, and he wanted to arrive there by the Day of Pentecost. Though his time was limited, he did want to fellowship once more with the elders of the Ephesus ecclesia, so he boarded a ship from Assos to Miletus. Miletus was about 36 miles south of Ephesus, and from there Paul sent messengers to Ephesus to invite the elders to make the day's journey to Miletus to meet him.

And they came. The fact that they made this great effort to see the apostle reveals the enormous confidence and fervent love they had for him. One reason Paul was anxious to see these brethren is revealed in his words: "Be-

hold, I go bound in the Spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: save that the Holy Spirit witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions ['wait for me', *Margln.*]' — vs. 22,23

Paul seemed sure that he would not be able to visit the brethren in Ephesus again, for he said to the elders that they would see his face no more. (vs. 25) In the shadow of this uncertainty, the apostle delivered his farewell message to the Ephesian elders. Under the circumstances, some would only be concerned about their forthcoming troubles, but Paul testified: "None of these things move me, neither

count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God.”—vs. 24

Paul reminded them that he had not shunned to declare unto them “all the counsel of God,” and that he had “kept back nothing that was profitable.” He had taught them “publicly,” and in their homes.—vss. 27,20

Paul then admonished them as elders to, “take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own [Son’s] blood.”—vs. 28

Experience has proved that servants in the church who do not take heed unto themselves are not qualified to effectively watch over the spiritual welfare of others. Elders must not think more highly of themselves than they ought to think. Pride of mind and heart distorts spiritual vision and makes ineffective what otherwise could be a blessed ministry of the

truth. Taking heed to one’s self also implies careful and prayerful study of the truth. One cannot minister to others what he does not understand himself.

The elders at Ephesus took Paul’s admonition to heart and watched faithfully over the flock so that the “wolves” and the false apostles were discovered and exposed. “Watch, and remember,” Paul said to them, “that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.” (vs. 31) Paul had set the elders of Ephesus a good example, and now he wanted them to follow that example—to follow him as he followed Christ.

Paul’s discourse ended, they joined in a closing prayer, and the elders bade the apostle farewell. It must have been a touching moment for them all, for we read that “they all wept sore, and fell on Paul’s neck, and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship.”—vss. 37,38 □

Facing Crisis

KEY VERSE: *"The night following the Lord stood by him and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome."*—Acts 23:11

SELECTED SCRIPTURE: Acts 21:26-33, 37-39

THE HOLY SPIRIT had testified that bonds and imprisonment awaited Paul at Jerusalem, and that prophecy was being fulfilled. He was arrested by Roman soldiers, largely to protect him from the Jewish mob and the riotous condition thus created.

Paul, ever alert for opportunities to bear witness to the truth, asked the Roman officer to allow him to speak to the mob from the steps of the castle, and this permission was granted. His witness was largely in the nature of a personal testimony as to the reason he had become a disciple of Jesus of Nazareth.

He reminded his hearers that at one time he felt the same way about Jesus' disciples as they did and that he had been zealous in his ef-

forts to stamp them out. He told of the miracle on the Damascus road by which he came to realize that Jesus was indeed the Messiah.

Realizing that Paul was not pacifying his accusers, the Roman officer ordered him taken into the castle and scourged. As they began to carry out these instructions, "Paul said unto the centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man that is a Roman, and uncondemned?" (Acts 22:25) The centurion reported this to the captain, and warned him, "Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman." (vs. 26) After Paul convinced the captain that he was indeed born a Roman citizen, the situation changed. The captain knew that he must try to find out from Paul's ac-

cusers what they had against him.

The chief priests and all their council were ordered to appear in the castle, and Paul was brought before them to plead his own cause. He said, "Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day." (Acts 23:1) With this, "the High Priest Ananias commanded them that stood by to smite him on the mouth." (vs. 2) Paul, somewhat angered by this action, said to him, not knowing that he was the High Priest: "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall: for sittest thou to judge me after the Law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the Law?" (vs. 3) When he was told that he had reviled a High Priest, he said, "I wist not, brethren, that he was the High Priest: for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people."—vss. 4,5; Exod. 22:28

This was a noble reply which should have helped the Council to realize that here was a man who knew God's Law and was endeavoring to live in harmony with it. But

when men are blinded by intolerance and prejudice, they are seldom able to reason correctly.

Paul may not have known why a visit to Jerusalem was vitally connected with his going to Rome. But there is little doubt that when the Lord stood by him in the castle that night, and assured him that he would go to Rome, the whole picture opened up before him.

Now Paul knew that his visit to Jerusalem was not only to give a witness to the Jews in Judea, but when this was accomplished, he was to give a witness at Rome also.

The very next day, and for his own safety, Paul was escorted out of Jerusalem by the Roman army to the city of Caesarea, where he was to have an audience before the Roman governor. There Paul made an appeal to be heard before Caesar in Rome, rather than be returned to Jerusalem for trial. This was legally his right as a Roman citizen. In time Paul was brought to Rome. □

Speaking Up for Your Faith

KEY VERSE: *"I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come."*—Acts 26:22

SELECTED SCRIPTURES: Acts 26:1-8, 22,23,27-29

BEFORE A CONVENIENT opportunity came to send Paul to Rome, King Agrippa and his sister, Bernice, "came unto Caesarea [where Paul was held prisoner] to salute Festus," the Roman governor. (Acts 25: 13) Festus took this opportunity to tell Agrippa about his prisoner, and Agrippa asked to see and hear Paul. Paul must have realized that nothing he could say to Agrippa would change the status of his case. So here we find the great apostle happy simply because he was to have an opportunity to witness for the truth. He knew that Agrippa was well acquainted with the viewpoints and customs of the Jews.

First Paul recounted his pre-conversion life, saying, "After the most straitest sect

of our religion I lived a Pharisee. And now," Paul continued, "I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers: unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, King Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews."—Acts 26: 5-7

Paul left no question in Agrippa's mind regarding what 'hope' it was to which he referred—the hope of the resurrection of the dead. "Why," he asked Agrippa, "should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?" (vs. 8) The doctrine of the resurrection is, of course, thought to be 'a thing incredible' by practically the whole world, even to this day. Of all the

religions of the earth, the Christian religion is the only one that teaches the resurrection. And even here, the falsehood of inherent immortality has voided the true understanding of the resurrection. Certainly the teaching of the resurrection should not be thought 'a thing incredible'—not when we take into consideration that it is the great Creator of all life who has promised to raise the dead.

Paul related to Agrippa his never-to-be-forgotten experience which took place on the Damascus road, when he saw that blinding light and heard a voice asking, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" and learned that the one speaking to him was Jesus of Nazareth! Then Jesus said to him: "Rise, and stand upon thy feet: for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee." (vss. 14-18) Paul then added, "Whereupon, O King Agrippa, I was not dis-

obedient unto the heavenly vision."—vs 19

Agrippa held no hatred in his heart for Paul, and could see no reason why he should be put to death simply because he had espoused the cause of Christ and because his conscience would not permit him to be disobedient to the heavenly vision. Agrippa said to Festus, "This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Caesar."—Acts 26:32

Many disadvantages and hardships were certainly involved in being held prisoner. Without doubt Paul took this into consideration before appealing to Caesar. He knew that the way to Rome as a prisoner would be a difficult one. But Paul knew that the LORD wanted him to go to Rome, and to Rome he would go. His consecration to the LORD was so complete that he was willing to go not only where the LORD wanted him to go, but also in the way the divine will was indicated to him. Just as he was willing to die at Jerusalem, so now he was also willing to continue on to Rome as a prisoner. □

Proclaiming the Gospel

KEY VERSE: *"Paul dwelt two whole years . . . preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him."*—Acts 28:30,31

SELECTED SCRIPTURE: Acts 28:21-31

PAUL FINALLY ARRIVED in Italy after many hardships during a perilous voyage by ship. They had been shipwrecked on the Isle of Melita, and marooned there for three months. Their ship was destroyed, so they boarded "a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle." The vessel made stops at several ports before arriving at Puteoli. Here the prisoners were put ashore. There were some brethren in Christ at Puteoli, so Paul and Luke remained there for seven days, fellowshiping with them. "And so," wrote Luke, "we went toward Rome."—Acts 28:14

From the standpoint of the flesh, there was little to be thankful for, even now that they had reached Italy and would shortly be in Rome.

After all, Paul was going to Rome as a prisoner.

Paul did not know what awaited him. Caesar's government could take any action it chose. But the LORD revealed the way before him, one step at a time. That was all Paul needed—he was always ready to take that one step. Paul had learned that with each step of the way there were both trials and joys, and that in all these the LORD was with him.

The LORD had sent the brethren from Rome to meet the apostle. This gave him the needed courage to complete those last miles of the journey and to face whatever experiences awaited him. Upon reaching Rome, the prisoners were delivered to the captain of the guard, "but Paul was suffered [allowed]

to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him.”—vs. 16

The apostle was permitted to live for two years in his own hired house. (vs. 30) While this was much better than being in prison, he was not a free man. He was constantly chained to a soldier. However, he was given freedom of speech and could have his friends visit him; and Paul made full use of these privileges for the further spreading of the Gospel, to the glory of God.

Paul waited only three days after his arrival before beginning his witnessing activities. First he sent for the chief Jews, because they had expressed a desire to hear him. They had said, “Concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against.”—vs. 22

They set a day when they would visit Paul at his home to hear his testimony. Many came to hear Paul, who “expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the Law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening.” (vs. 23) What a day of witnessing

this was for the apostle! The results were as always—“some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.”—vs. 24

After Paul had finished, these leaders among the Jews disputed among themselves. Then, as a final word to them, Paul quoted one of Isaiah’s prophecies, which foretold the failure of the Israelites to accept the Gospel. He explained that because of this, the Gospel was going to be preached to the Gentiles, to give believers from among them an opportunity to be fellow-heirs of the promises.—vss. 25-29

Here Luke brings his record to a close, adding simply that Paul dwelt two years in his own hired house, “preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.” (vss. 30,31) We know from this that Paul had an active two years, but no details are available except those which we are able to glean from epistles which he wrote during this period. □

Ransom and Sin Offering

“For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well-doing, than for evil-doing. For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit.”

—I Peter 3:17, 18

GOD'S PLAN FOR the deliverance of mankind from sin and death is based upon the giving of a sacrifice. In the Garden of Eden, soon after the LORD said that the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head, the idea of sacrifice was introduced by the offerings which were brought before God by Cain and Abel. The Apostle Paul referred to Abel's offering as "more excellent" than Cain's, and it was accepted by God, whereas Cain's was not. (Heb. 11:4) It seems evident that the LORD had revealed which sort of offerings would be acceptable to him, and if the offering were motivated by the proper spirit.

From the time Abel offered his sacrifice to the LORD until the First Advent of Jesus, sacrifices continued to be offered to the LORD, many of these on altars specially built for the purpose. Noah offered a sacrifice after leaving the ark. (Gen. 8:20, 21) Abraham was called upon by God to offer his son, Isaac, as a burnt offering, and when he proved his willingness to do this, a ram was substituted. (Gen. 22:6-13) There was the sacrifice of the Pass-over lamb, and later all the various sacrifices associated with the services of Israel's Tabernacle, and later the Temple.

These sacrifices were identified in various ways, depending upon their purpose and the circumstances

under which they were offered. Some were called sin offerings, others burnt offerings; and there were trespass offerings, peace offerings, wave offerings. Bulls and goats were used for these offerings, as well as lambs, birds, grain, and wine. Whatever the nature of the offerings might be, the LORD demanded that the offerer present his best. Nothing blemished was acceptable to the LORD.

For the want of a better word to describe them, we could say that all these sacrifices made by the LORD's ancient people were merely typical. They did not effect actual reconciliation with God. They did not remove the guilt of sin and the condemnation to death resulting therefrom. However, to the extent that the offerers were sincere of heart in presenting their sacrifices to the LORD, God was pleased, and they were blessed.

Speaking particularly of the sacrifices offered in connection with the Tabernacle services under the Law, Paul wrote, "The Law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comer thereunto perfect; for then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshipers once purged should have no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year."—Heb. 10:1-3

The Situation Changed

With the First Advent of Jesus a fundamental change came. Paul refers to this, saying, "Wherefore when he [Christ] cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the Book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God. Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not,

neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the Law; Then :said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.”—Heb. 10:5-10

Thus we see that with the coming and sacrifice of Jesus, God no longer accepted typical sacrifices. It is also apparent that those sacrifices of the past pointed forward to the sacrificial work of Jesus, and as we shall later see, in a lesser sense to the sacrifices of his footstep followers. The primary difference between the typical sacrifices and the antitypical is that the first consisted of gifts which the offerer brought to the LORD—lambs, goats, etc.—while the latter is the sacrifice of human life, and human bodies; not those of others, but of one’s own.

“A body hast thou prepared me,” Paul quotes Jesus as saying. (Heb. 10:5) This was his human body, his flesh, which he gave for the life of the world. (John 6:51) We, too, in ‘filling up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ’, are admonished to present our bodies “a living sacrifice,” with the assurance that they will be acceptable to the LORD. (Rom. 12:1) The combined sacrifices of Jesus’ body and the bodies of his true followers are described by Paul as the “better sacrifices”—better, that is, than the typical sacrifices of the past.—Heb. 9:23

Different Purposes

The divine plan for the redemption of the human race from sin and death indicates that different purposes are accomplished by the better sacrifices of this Gospel Age. Fundamental to all these is, of course, the ransoming of Adam and his progeny from death. This could be accomplished by none other than Jesus himself. Being born into the world perfect, he was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners, and therefore was not under condemnation to death. (Heb. 7:26) Thus Jesus, in sacrificing his uncondemned life, was able to “ransom them [the

world of mankind] from the power of the grave," and to "redeem them from death."—Hos. 13:14

This basic feature of the 'better sacrifices' is clearly seen when we comprehend the meaning of the Greek word from which the word ransom is translated in I Timothy 2:5, 6. According to *Young's Concordance* this word means 'a corresponding price'. The thought is amplified by the statement in the Law; "Life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot." (Deut. 19:21) In the case of Jesus and the 'ransom' he provided, it was his perfect human life that was given as a substitute for the perfect life of Adam—which Adam forfeited through disobedience to the divine law.

Having provided a ransom which, in due time, would lead to the release of Adam from death's condemnation, it meant that the unborn race in his loins at the time of his sin would also be redeemed. Thus Paul states it, "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." (I Cor. 15:22) Obviously no one but Jesus could thus give his life as a corresponding price, and it was for this purpose that he "poured out his soul unto death." (Isa. 53:12) Nothing more than the sacrificed life of the perfect man, Jesus, was needed to bring about the release of the entire human race from Adamic condemnation.

Other Sacrifices

While Jesus alone, by his "once for all" (Heb. 10:10) sacrifice, provided the opportunity for release from condemnation to death because of sin, the Scriptures make it abundantly clear that his followers are also invited to, and do, lay down their lives in sacrifice which is acceptable to God. We have already noted Romans 12:1, which exhorts us to present our bodies a living sacrifice, with the assurance that such a sacrifice would be holy, and acceptable to God. This language, and the idea which it conveys, is clearly based upon the typical sacrifices of the past in which the bodies of beasts were offered in sacri-

fice; and it reveals that as followers of Jesus we do have a part in the antitype of those sacrifices.

The Apostle Peter is equally specific in this matter. He wrote, "Ye also . . . are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up . . . sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ." (1 Pet. 2:5) Here the apostle not only assures us that we can offer sacrifices acceptable to God, but associates our position with the typical priesthood. One of the main functions of Israel's priests was to offer sacrifice; and now, as antitypical priests, we are to offer sacrifice.

These sacrifices are acceptable to God by or through Jesus Christ, Peter explained. By nature we are members of the condemned and dying race, and would have nothing to offer which would be acceptable to God. But, upon the basis of faith in Jesus Christ and his atoning work on our behalf, we are released from original condemnation—"unto justification of life," as Paul explained it. (Rom. 5:18; 4:25) Paul wrote, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." (Gal. 2:20) This is simply another way of saying that we are now reckoned as being alive, or having life, because the merit of Christ's perfect sacrifice, symbolized by his shed blood, has been imputed to us. Thus we can present our bodies a 'living' sacrifice.

The Purpose

Every aspect of God's plan of salvation has a purpose. What, then, is the purpose of Christian sacrifice and suffering? Broadly speaking, it is that others might be blessed. Colossians 1:24 reads, "Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church." Here we learn that our sacrifices and suf-

ferings are for the sake of our fellow-members in the body of Christ—for their benefit, that is.

This is in keeping with the admonition to lay down our lives for the brethren. But what is accomplished by this? The Scriptures explain that we build one another up in our most holy faith, and thus help to prepare them for glory, honor, and immortality in the kingdom. In II Corinthians 4:12 Paul put it another way. He said, "Death worketh in us, but life in you," the brethren. As we lay down our lives for the brethren, it contributes to their receiving life through Christ. While the life-giving merit is in the blood of Christ, our sacrifice is the means used whereby that merit becomes vital in the lives of our fellow-members of the body of Christ. We pass on to them the 'word of reconciliation' by our daily sacrifices in ministering the Gospel of Christ.—II Cor. 5:19

By these co-operative sacrifices, made acceptable to God through the merit of the ransom, the 'bride' (Rev. 21:2,9) of Christ is made ready for her association with the Bridegroom in the kingdom work of dispensing life to all who will accept it upon the terms of belief and obedience during Christ's thousand-year meditorial reign. It will be then that "the Spirit and the bride" will say, "Come, . . . and . . . take of the water of life freely."—Rev. 22:17

It is in this way that the merit of Christ's shed blood will be made available in the next age for the world of mankind. The followers of Jesus, who are suffering and dying with him now, could properly be said to be laying down their lives for the world of mankind. These were spoken of by Paul as being "planted together" in the likeness of Jesus' death, which of course, was a sacrificial death. Paul described this as a baptism into Christ's death—that is, a death baptism.—Rom. 6:3-5

In I Corinthians 15:29-32 Paul discussed the suffering and death of the Christian, using the expression, "baptized for the dead." In the context Paul argued that if

there were not to be a resurrection of the dead, then this death baptism for the dead would accomplish nothing. This shows clearly that our sacrifices are designed in the great plan of God to accrue to the benefit of mankind during the "times of restitution of all things."— Acts 3:19-21

A Sin Offering

The reason Jesus died, and the reason we have the privilege of dying with him, is that God has designed these sacrifices as part of his plan to rid the world of sin. Hence these antitypical 'better sacrifices' of the Gospel Age are properly called sin offerings, even as were the typical sacrifices of the Jewish Age. Sin offerings accomplish different things. The Scriptures declare that Jesus' soul, his life, was made "an offering for sin." (Isa. 53:10) This offering provided redemption from sin and death. The offerings of his body members, however, are related only to the *administering* of the life-giving blessings made available by the ransom—but this also pertains to the stamping out of sin, hence is spoken of by Paul as a dying unto, or for sin.

This is shown in Romans 6:10, 11. We quote, "In that he [Christ] died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." Jesus did not die 'unto sin' in the sense that he was once a sinner and then ceased from sin, as we do. The only way Jesus could die 'unto sin' was as a sin offering. And Paul says that we should "likewise, [or in the same manner] reckon ourselves to be dead unto sin."

There are two key words in this statement by Paul. The one, as we have noted, is '*likewise*', which indicates that we die as a sin offering even as Jesus did. The other key word is 'reckon'. Jesus did not 'reckon' that he was dying unto sin, for he actually gave a perfect life as an accept-

able sacrifice, an offering for sin which provided redemption for Adam and his race. But we can only 'reckon' that we are dying unto sin; but since the LORD, through the inspired Apostle Paul, authorized us so to reckon, it makes it bona fide, and we know that our offering is accepted on this basis.

The reason we are authorized to reckon that we are dying unto sin is that the merit of the ransom has been imputed to us to make our sacrifice acceptable. To suggest that our imperfect sacrifices would not be accepted by God for this purpose after the imputation of Christ's merit, would be to question, by implication, the efficacy of the ransom. Yes, brethren, the imputation of the merit of the ransom does make it possible for us to present our bodies a living sacrifice, with the assurance that they have been made holy in God's sight, and will be acceptable for the purpose designed by him.

"For Christ Also"

Our text presents further confirmation of our share in the great sin offering feature of the divine plan. "It is better," Peter states, "if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well-doing than for evil-doing. For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the Just for the unjust." Here the key word is 'also'.—"Christ *also* hath once suffered for sins." This means that if we are suffering because of well-doing, and in keeping with the Heavenly Father's will, we are suffering for sins, that our sacrifices are considered as a sin offering.

And note the further revealing statement in this text—"the Just for the unjust." Jesus was 'just', or 'justified', by virtue of his own inherent perfection. He was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners. (Heb. 7:26) We are 'just', or 'justified' before the LORD because our imperfections are covered by the blood. The merit of Jesus' perfect sacrifice is imputed to us. Thus we too, even as Jesus, when we are laying down our lives follow-

ing in his steps, are suffering and dying, the just for the unjust. Actually, this is but another way of saying that we are being "baptized for the dead."

Foreshadowed

This wonderful partnership we enjoy with our Lord Jesus in the work of reconciling estranged humanity to the Heavenly Father is clearly foreshadowed in the Atonement Day services as conducted in the ancient Tabernacle in the wilderness. On that typical Day of Atonement, two animals were offered for sins. One of these was a bullock, and the other a goat. Both animals were sacrificed in the same manner. They were slain at the door of the Tabernacle. Their fat and life-producing organs were burned on the brazen altar in the Court. Their carcasses were burned outside the camp of Israel; and their blood sprinkled on the Mercy Seat within the Most Holy.

Paul refers to this in Hebrews 13:10-13. Verse 10 reads, "We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the Tabernacle." The altar referred to here is the brazen altar in the Court of the Tabernacle, when sin offerings were burned on it. The law governing the use of the altar for this purpose reads, "No sin offering, whereof any of the blood is brought into . . . the Holy, . . . shall be eaten: it shall be burnt in the fire."

—Lev. 6:30

Here Paul is saying that the altar which we have, or which typifies our sacrifice, is the brazen altar in the Court when used for sin offerings. It is because of this, or "for," as Paul puts it, "the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach."—vss. 11-13

There is no escaping the conclusion from this clear statement by the Apostle Paul that the animals offered for the sins of Israel on their typical Atonement Day foreshadowed the sacrifices of Jesus and his church; the bullock, offered first, representing Jesus, and the goat, representing the church, his followers. This is the significance of our sacrifice as we follow in the footsteps of Jesus. This is the 'altar', the opportunity of sacrifice and suffering which we have and which is acceptable to God through the merit of Jesus.

The Practical Lesson

While the Scriptures make it clear that the followers of the Master do share with him in the work of reconciling fallen humanity to God, we should not overlook the practical application of this great truth which Paul suggests. We quote: "By him therefore [that is, through the merit of Christ] let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."—Heb. 13:15, 16

'To do good and to communicate'. This is the life endeavor of every true follower of the Master. And it is with such sacrifices that God is well pleased. Paul again wrote, "Let us not be weary in well-doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all, . . . especially unto them who are of the household of faith." (Gal. 6:9, 10) This is what our share in the 'better sacrifices' means to us in terms of everyday living. It would be of little value to know of this feature of the divine plan unless it influences us actually to lay down our lives in divine service, doing as much good as we can now, and looking forward to that glorious future opportunity of sharing with Jesus in the blessing of all the families of the earth.

Thanksgiving

***"O give thanks unto the LORD; call upon his name:
make known his deeds among the people."***

—Psalm 105:1

FOR THOSE WHO are endeavoring to be faithful in following the Master, every day is one of thanksgiving to the LORD. Every day these are conscious of the many benefits they are constantly receiving from the bountiful hand of their Heavenly Father. They recall that by heredity they are members of a sin-cursed and dying race, and are not entitled through their own righteousness to enjoy God's favor. They are thankful, therefore, for God's love which provided a Redeemer in the person of his beloved Son, and that their imperfections are now covered by the merit of his shed blood.

We are thankful that the LORD has opened the eyes of our understanding to behold the beauties of his character as they are revealed through his great divine plan of the ages. Through this understanding we are inspired to lay down our lives in his service, knowing that through his loving provision in Christ Jesus our imperfect works will be acceptable. (Rom. 12:1) While we have not made a bargain with the LORD to exchange earthly blessings for a heavenly reward, we are thankful for the heavenly calling which is extended to all those who, in the proper spirit and with understanding, respond to the call to walk in the Master's footsteps.—Heb. 3:1

We know that the way in which we walk is narrow and difficult, and we are thankful for the many assurances of the Word that our Heavenly Father will guide and strengthen us in every step, that he will never leave us, nor forsake us, nor permit us to be tested above that which we are able to bear. We are thankful that when we have been fully planted together with Jesus in his death, having proved faithful unto death, suffering and dying

with him, we will live and reign with him. How blessed it will be when we reach the end of the way to receive the promised "crown of life"!—Rev. 2:10

We are thankful for the generous provision of restitution which our Heavenly Father has made for the world of mankind, and for the provision of the divine plan that those who live and reign with Christ will have the privilege of dispensing these blessings to all the families of the earth. We are thankful that during the thousand years of the messianic kingdom the knowledge of God's glory will fill the earth as the waters cover the sea, and that ultimately all will know the LORD, from the least unto the greatest. Then the whole world will truly give thanks unto the LORD for his goodness to the children of men. □



WEEKLY PRAYER MEETING TEXTS

NOVEMBER 7—"I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the Word of God."—Revelation 20:4 (Z. '00-285 Hymn 277)

NOVEMBER 14—"Take heed unto yourselves, . . . for grievous wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them."—Acts 20:28-30 (Z. '04-74 Hymn 145)

NOVEMBER 21—"My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations."—James 1:2 (Z. '02-133 Hymn 216)

NOVEMBER 28—"When He giveth quietness, who then can make trouble?"—Job 34:29 (Z. '96-259 Hymn 201)

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| Duncan | CKAY 1500 | 9:00 a.m. |
| Duncan | CKAY 1500 | 7:30 p.m. |
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| Nanaimo | CHUB 1570 | 9:30 p.m. |
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MANITOBA

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| Winnipeg | CKJS 810 | 9:00 a.m. |
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| Leamington | CHYR 710 | 5:00 p.m. |
| St. Thomas | CHLO 1570 | 10:45 a.m. |

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| Montreal | CFMB 1410 | 5:15 p.m. |
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| Rosetown | CJYM 1330 | 9:45 a.m. |
| Weyburn | CFSL 1190 | 8:45 a.m. |
| Estevan | CJSL 1280 | 8:45 a.m. |

Argentina (Spanish)

| | | | |
|---------------------|-------------|----------|------------|
| Buenos Aires (Sat.) | FM Malvinas | 91.5 MHZ | 10:00 p.m. |
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British West Indies

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| Grand Cayman | Radio Cayman | 9:30 a.m. |
| Trinidad | Radio Trinidad | 610 10:30 p.m. |

Chile (Spanish)

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| Santiago (Sat.) | Radio Panamericana | CB 142 | 10:00 a.m. |
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| Hong Kong | Radio Villa Verde (Fri.) | 6:00 p.m. |
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| Voice of Hope (Wed.) | 945 AM | 10:30 p.m. |
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Italy (Italian)

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| Europa Radio Milano | 83.3-FM | 11:30 a.m. |
| Euro Tele Radio Calabria (Fri.) | MHz 102 | 5:30 p.m. |
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Nigeria

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|-----------------------|--|-----------|
| Radio Africa (Thurs.) | | 7:45 p.m. |
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Panama (Spanish)

| | | |
|-------------|----------|------------|
| Panama City | HOQ 1250 | 10:30 a.m. |
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Philippines

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|---------------|---------------|-----------|
| Manila (Sat.) | DZAM 1026 KHz | 7:15 p.m. |
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South Africa

| | | | |
|-----------------------|-------------|--------------------------------|-----------|
| Joubert Park (Thurs.) | SWAZI Music | Radio 1400 & shortwave 49 & 60 | 9:00 p.m. |
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Sri Lanka

| | | |
|----------------|-----------------|-----------|
| Columbo (Sat.) | Radio Sri Lanka | 7:15 p.m. |
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Tonga

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| Nuku' Alofa (Mon.) | | 10:15 a.m. |
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Uruguay (Spanish)

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| Montevideo | Radio El Espectador | 810 8:30 a.m. |
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"Ye are the light of the world."



THE BIBLE ANSWERS TV Programs . . .

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|--------------------|----------------|-----------------------|----------------|----------------------|----------------|
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| Montgomery | 56 | Portland | 57 | Broken Bow | 28 |
| CALIFORNIA | | MARYLAND | | Muskogee | 19 |
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| Lancaster | 38 | MICHIGAN | | Tulsa | 33 |
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| Jupiter | 9 | Bolivar | 8 | Pittsburgh | 63 |
| Naples | 9 | Philadelphia | 20 | SOUTH DAKOTA | |
| Orlando | 21 | Starkville | 5 | Mitchell | 16 |
| St. Augustine | 22 | Tallahatchie | 11 | TENNESSEE | |
| St. Petersburg | 35 | MISSOURI | | Harrogate | 18 |
| Tallahassee | 9 | Cameron | 35 | Heiskell | 12 |
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| GEORGIA | | St. Louis | 7 | TEXAS | |
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| Cordele | 55 | Lincoln | 67 | Corpus Christi | 50 & 7 |
| Dublin | 36 | NEVADA | | Mt. Pleasant | 54 |
| Savannah | 55 | Las Vegas | 39 | San Antonio | 67 |
| ILLINOIS | | NEW JERSEY | | Sulphur Springs | 18 |
| DeKalb | 7 | Hammonton | 8 | UTAH | |
| Plano | 30 | NEW YORK | | St. George | 55 |
| Rockford | 45 | Glens Falls | 8 | VIRGINIA | |
| Urbana | 1 | Jamesstown | 8 | Gloucester | 51 |
| INDIANA | | Oneonta | 15 | Norfolk | 68 |
| Evansville | 52 | Rochester | 40 | WASHINGTON | |
| Indianapolis | 11 | Syracuse | 14 | Wenatchee | 27 |
| IOWA | | NORTH CAROLINA | | Yakima | 60 |
| * Cedar Rapids | 13 | Burlington | 16 | WEST VIRGINIA | |
| Marshalltown | 39 | Charlotte | 15 | Huntington | 55 |
| KANSAS | | Henderson | 34 | * Logan (Mon) | 12 |
| Junction City | 6 | Lenoir | 53 | WISCONSIN | |
| Waterville | 26 | Raleigh | 63 | Wausau | 43 |
| KENTUCKY | | Wilmington | 10 | PUERTO RICO | |
| Morehead | 10 & 7 | OHIO | | Mayaguez | 42 |
| Mt. Sterling | 6 and 2 | Akron | 29 | | |
| LOUISIANA | | Ashland | 59 | | |
| Jennings | 13 | Cincinnati | 25 | | |
| New Orleans | 61 | Delaware | 56 | | |
| | | Youngstown | 20 | | |

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Our Profession

"We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man. For it became him for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings."

—Hebrews 2:9,10

THE WORDS OF this passage of Scripture are very sobering indeed. To think how willingly the Lord Jesus came from heaven to earth as a human being, having been made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, is a great lesson in humility for us. Despite his high position in heaven as an archangel of God, and despite his perfection as a man, he was not ashamed to call his disciples brethren. (vss. 11-16) Continuing with his consideration of this subject, Paul wrote, "Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people."—vs. 17

There is a similarity of thought between Jesus 'taking upon himself flesh and blood' (vs. 14), and 'being made a little lower than the angels'. These are simply two ways of stating the same thought. And by wording the idea in these two ways, emphasis is placed upon the necessity of Christ being made flesh, not only to become our ransom price, but also to experience life under the difficult circumstances provided in the imperfect, fallen world of mankind. It was necessary for him to become a sym-

pathetic High Priest to suffer the vicissitudes and hardships of the unfriendly world.

The first High Priest of Israel, Aaron, had learned great sympathy for his people by the things which he suffered in Egypt. In the first chapter of Exodus we read how deeply Israel suffered. Pharaoh made them serve him with extraordinary rigor—even taking away their straw for making bricks, but they still had to fulfill their quota or be cruelly punished. We read, "Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh treasure cities, Pithom and Raames. . . . And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage." (vss. 11,14) From these arduous incidents, Aaron, who later became the first High Priest of Israel, learned how to be sympathetic with his people.

Jesus also qualified as a sympathetic High Priest by the things which he suffered in common with all mankind, and beyond that, the injustices and cruelty he suffered for serving God faithfully. His loyalty to the LORD led him from Jordan to Calvary, sacrificing all the way. And in this allegiance he proved himself worthy to be the High Priest of our cause.

The Apostle Paul, as recorded in Hebrews 3:1, admonished us to "consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus." And again in Hebrews 10:21,22, he said, "Having a High Priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water." In ancient times, the work of the High Priest was to purify the people, and to bring them closer to God.

What did the apostle mean when he used the term, 'the High Priest of our profession?' One who endeavors to be a 'professional' person must expend a great deal of time, money, and effort, and in many cases, all his time and effort, to learn the profession of his choice—for instance, a profession in medicine, aerospace, or physics. Many

years are spent at universities studying, passing tests, and working as interns under close supervision, before they can be considered professional people.

There is another meaning of this word—it can also mean that a person has professed or confessed allegiance to something, or some cause. In our case, and in the case of Jesus, his loyalty was to God and to righteousness. Both of these meanings fit in very nicely with the picture we would like to draw of Jesus as the High Priest of our profession.

We have been privileged to have been called to follow after this wonderful profession! An invitation has come to us to be part of the priesthood of which Jesus was the High Priest. What steps must we take to be successful in our profession? Let us consider for a moment the scripture recorded in I Corinthians 1:26,27, "Ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of this world to confound them which are mighty."

Indeed, this is the case, and for very good reason. We, as Christians, have been called from every walk of life. But only a very few have been chosen from among those the world consider noble, or rich, or wise. Instead, God has chosen those to make up the church class who have great faith and are willing to follow Jesus wherever he will lead them.

We have not been taken out of the world, but instead we are left in the world where we receive experiences which will teach us our profession. We will learn patience and sympathy, trust in God, and love for him, for our brethren, and for the poor world of mankind. In our hands we have the textbook of God, the Bible the Word of God, the bread of life. Through study of this book, we learn beautiful lessons in the lives of the ancient people of God, through the lives of the apostles, and especially the

life of Jesus, which are necessary for our training to hold a 'professional' place in God's kingdom.

But how can we, with so little in the way of talents and abilities to offer, and having such lowly stations in this life, become professionals who will some day be useful to God? In Philippians 2:12 and 15 we read, "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear [reverence] and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. Do all things without murmurings and disputings: that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world."

What an encouraging thought! As a result of our faith in Jesus as our Ransom, our Heavenly Father considers us blameless, without rebuke in his sight, and he bestows the Holy Spirit upon us he begins a work in us. Where are we while this remarkable change is taking place in our lives? The apostle tells us that this work is done while we are in 'a crooked and perverse world'. This evil world, then, is the university in which we were accepted and have qualified to learn our lessons. There we shine as lights, educated with our only textbook, the Word of God, and with the experiences God sends to us.

In Philippians 4:11-13, the Apostle Paul outlines the attitude he had toward God's instruction during his life, and indicates that we, too, must have this same point of view. He said, "I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

A wonderful illustration of the Christian life is given to us in the life of Joshua. He, too, was being trained in the

university of life for a future profession as an Ancient Worthy. Examining the Bible account, there is left to us no doubt that God trained Joshua to do a great work even during his lifetime—to bless the whole nation of Israel. The meaning of the name Joshua is, “The LORD is with us,” or, “Saviour.” It has the same meaning as the name Jesus. In Numbers 13 we are given a list of the twelve men whom Moses sent to spy out the land when they first reached the borders of Canaan. Oshea, or Joshua, the son of Nun, is listed as one of the spies—he was one of the two faithful spies.—vs. 8

The need for a savior was brought forcibly to mind in Israel during the trying times when Israel was waiting to escape from Egypt. While Jehovah administered the ten plagues to induce Pharaoh to release God’s people, no doubt many sons in Israel were named Oshea, or Joshua, or Jesus, in the hope, and with the prayer, that one of them would indeed be their savior.

Egypt is a picture or type of the world under subjection to Satan. Joshua was just a young man when he came out of that land. This is significant, indicating that he was not in sympathy with sin and unrighteousness, but wished early in his life to be separated from it. Many scriptures tell us that Joshua was one of Moses’ most dependable young men, whom he could call upon to minister to him whenever he needed help. (Num. 11:27,28) When we look up the word minister in **Strong’s Concordance**, we learn that the meaning of the word is ‘a menial’, or, in other words, a servant who served his master continually, and one who learned how to please his master.

The time came when the two faithful spies, Caleb and Joshua, and the remaining ten unfaithful spies, returned from their exploration of the land of Canaan. We read: “Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh, which were of them that searched out the land, rent their clothes, and they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land, which we passed

through to search, it is an exceeding good land. If the LORD delight in us, then he will bring us into this land and give it us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. Only rebel not against the LORD, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread unto us: their defence is departed from them, and the LORD is with us, fear them not. But all the congregation bade stone them with stones, and the glory of the LORD appeared in the Tabernacle of the congregation before all the children of Israel."—Num.14:6-10,22-24

The attitude of the children of Israel was just like the spirit of the world. Caleb and Joshua had given a true report, and their faith assured them that God would guide them safely into the Promised Land. But the report of the ten spies concerning the fierceness of the Canaanites, filled the hearts of the people with fear. They were so frightened they wanted to kill Caleb and Joshua before they could be led into what they pictured as sure disaster. Their faith was lacking.

They had no faith in God, their great Deliverer. Although they knew that God had released them from their devilish oppressors by causing the death of the firstborn of the land of Egypt—although they knew how their great God had delivered them by parting the Red Sea, while Pharaoh and his hosts drowned in its waters—although they also knew of his leadings through the desert, and his miraculous provision of food and water in the wilderness—still they had no faith that he could vanquish their enemies and lead them safely by the hand of Moses, his servant, into the land which he had promised them.

God had reserved a punishment for those wicked men who would not give their blessing to the venture, and to approve, in faith, the entering into the Land of Canaan. God told them, "Because all those men which have seen my glory, and my miracles, which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now these ten times, and have not harkened unto my voice; surely they

shall not see the land which I swear unto their fathers, neither shall any of them that provoked me see it: but my servant Caleb, because he had another spirit with him and hath followed me fully, him will I bring into the land whereinto he went: and his seed shall possess it.”—Num. 14:22-24

We might think it strange that Joshua was not praised for his faithfulness in this account, as well as Caleb. Joshua had rent his clothes just as Caleb had, and he was just as strong for the LORD as Caleb had been. Joshua recorded his account of this, saying, “Forty years old was I when Moses the servant of the LORD sent me from Kadeshbarnea to espy out the land; and I brought him word again as it was in my heart. . . . I wholly followed the LORD my God. And Joshua blessed him and gave unto Caleb the son of Jephunneh Hebron for an inheritance.” (Josh. 14:7-13) It is significant to note that Caleb received an earthly inheritance through the High Priest, while Joshua received none of the land. Just as a sidelight, we make mention that this indicates that Joshua represented our Lord Jesus, who gave up his right to life here upon the earth. However, he had an incorruptible inheritance in heaven.

In Exodus 24:13-14 we read: “Moses rose up, and his minister [or servant] Joshua: and Moses went up into the mount of God. And he said unto the elders, Tarry ye here for us, until we come again unto you: and behold Aaron and Hur are with you: if any man have any matters to do, let him come unto them.” For forty days and forty nights Joshua was with Moses in the mount. Thus we know he did not have a hand in the manufacture or worship of the golden calf. Then, “Moses turned, and went down from the mount, and the two tables of the testimony were in his hand: the tables were written on both their sides; on the one side and on the other were they written. And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was written of God, graven upon the tables.

And when Joshua heard the noise of the people when they shouted, he said unto Moses, There is a noise of war in the camp. And he said, It is not the voice of them that shout for mastery, neither is it the voice of them that cry for being overcome: but the noise of them that sing do I hear.

“And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf, and the dancing: and Moses’ anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount.” (Exod. 32:15-19) Note that when Moses and Joshua were near enough to hear the noise, it was Joshua who commented about the activity in the camp. He had been in the mount for the forty days and nights with Moses no doubt remaining at a lower level on the mountainside until Moses returned to him.

As in the case one who is learning from another more mature master, such as Moses, Joshua watched him, he stayed close behind his master, he walked closely in the footsteps of Moses. We quote another passage which gives indication of Joshua’s continued closeness to Moses: “It came to pass, when Moses went out unto the Tabernacle, that all the people rose up, and stood every man at his tent door, and looked after Moses, until he had gone into the Tabernacle. And it came to pass, as Moses entered into the Tabernacle, the cloudy pillar descended, and stood at the door of the Tabernacle, and the LORD talked with Moses. And all the people saw the cloudy pillar stand at the Tabernacle door: and all the people rose up and worshiped, every man in his tent door. And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend. And he turned again into the camp. But his servant Joshua, the son of Nun a young man, departed not out of the Tabernacle.” Exod. 33:8-11 Here is another incident which emphasized how much trust God placed in Moses’ young friend and helper, Joshua. Moses, though growing old, had not lost any of

his hearing or his sight, and his vigor was just as strong as when he pleaded with Pharaoh to release the children of Israel from Egypt. "The LORD said unto Moses, take ye Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay thine hand upon him: and set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation; and give him a charge in their sight. And thou shalt put some of thine honor upon him, that all the congregation of the children of Israel may be obedient. And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest who shall ask counsel for him after the judgment of the Urim before the LORD."—Num. 27:18-21

"Joshua was full of the Spirit of wisdom; for Moses had laid his hands upon him: and the children of Israel hearkened unto him, and did as the LORD commanded Moses."—Deut. 31:14

Speaking again to Joshua, the LORD said "There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. Be strong and of a good courage, for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I swore unto their fathers to give them. Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the Law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest."—Josh. 1:57

Up to this time, Joshua had received no earthly blessing—no inheritance in the Promised Land—but he had the blessing of dividing the land to God's people. He and the High Priest were able to allocate to each tribe the portion of land which, put altogether, made up the country that the LORD had promised Abraham. Joshua had learned his lessons well, and followed his master, Moses. He had surely earned his degree through many

years of hardship, hard work, and the exercise of great faith.

In this lesson we recognize in Joshua a wonderful picture of Christ and his body, his church—the Messiah—in the wilderness, or in the world. This is illustrated in many of his experiences:

First, Joshua had a prior view into the Promised Land. He was one of those that went in and returned enthusiastically with a great report. He saw the magnificent clusters of grapes growing by the refreshing rivers. He saw the wonderful cattle and sheep. He must have been filled with the Spirit of the LORD when he saw the wonderful provisions God had made for his children. We, too, have this same privilege. Not only do we rejoice and luxuriate in the generous provisions of his love and favor, his offer of justification, and the invitation to be his children on the divine plane, but, as well, through the Word of God, and through our study of the Scriptures, we can look to the blessings of the Millennial Age when all mankind will be restored, and our great God will receive the honor and glory which he so richly deserves. We recognize by the signs our Master gave us that we are living very close to this wonderful period of joy and blessing! And we have the privilege of knowing that as the time draws nearer, our Heavenly Father will show us more and more about the ages of glory to follow, and his design for the things to come.

Even now we begin to see beyond the Millennial Age, into the eternal ages of glory! Of these ages to come almost nothing has been revealed to us, but because our God is so glorious, we know his plans and purposes for eternity will also be glorious.

Secondly, Joshua learned firsthand how to be prepared for his profession by receiving lessons directly from the LORD God. He had mountain top experiences which he shared with Moses. In working with Moses as he dealt with the people of God, he was taught humility by one

who has been called the meekest man in all the earth. We believe that Moses was the most humble of all God's Ancient Worthies. Joshua had the zeal and the exhilarating experience of running behind Moses, of following in his footsteps, and of learning how to deal with God's people. Surely this too reminds us of the blessed portion which the church now enjoys.

As was mentioned in the beginning of this lesson, Jesus came into the world, not only to offer his life as a ransom price, but to learn to be a sympathetic High Priest. In the experiences of Joshua we find that he, too, learned from the character and principles that he saw exemplified in Moses. As he learned more and more to appreciate those qualities, he followed Moses' example in his judgments of the people. As we read in Exodus and Leviticus, Joshua truly followed Moses' model faithfully, learning all the lessons that God intended to teach him.

Thirdly, Joshua was filled with the Spirit of wisdom by the laying on of the hands of Moses. Remember, God said to Moses, "Give him some of thine honor." Joshua had the unspeakable blessing of having the hands of Moses laid on him that he might receive some of his honor. We too brethren, have received this same blessing. We too, receive this indwelling of the Holy Spirit. We will have the Spirit grow in us, if we too are willing to follow in the footsteps of our Lord and Master. If we pray for it, he will give each an increase of the Spirit, by sending experiences to us, which, if rightly exercised by will so invigorate us, and fill us more and more with that wisdom which comes from above!

Fourth, and lastly, we would say that Joshua's aims were the same as ours are. Our hope is that we may lead the children of God—the whole world of mankind—into their Promised Land—the kingdom for which we all pray, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven." May it be soon! □

Brother Robert Robinson, England

Light and Truth

IN THE FIRST chapter of the Gospel of John, verse 17, we read: "The Law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. No man has seen God at any time, the only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father he hath declared him." And again in this same chapter, verse 4, John wrote: "In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness: and the darkness comprehended it not."

With these words the apostle told us that the Law was only a shadow of the true light that was to come. In his Gospel, John recorded the life and words of that true light. As stated in John 12:46, for example, Jesus said, "I am come a light into the world." But the Apostle John himself showed that this record is far from complete. (John 21:25) And, more importantly still, the Lord had clearly indicated that there were other deeper truths which he desired to impart to us. "I have yet many things to say unto you but you cannot bear them yet." (John 16:12) At the same time, he indicated by what means this further revelation would be imparted to us. "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of Truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth, for he shall not speak of himself, but whatsoever he shall hear that shall he speak, and he will show you things to come."—John 16:13

We might ask, however, In what way will the Holy Spirit actually impart this information? We certainly do not hear it by any audible or sensory means. For an answer we look to the words of John in our first quotation to note that this true light had been 'shadowed out' in the

writings of Moses—in the Law. This fact is abundantly testified to by the words of our Lord to the scribes and Pharisees, “Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life, but they are they that testify of me, and ye will not come to me that ye might have life.”

The above statements of our Lord, and of the Scripture confirm quite conclusively two important facts; firstly, that our Lord is most certainly delineated for us in the Old Testament, and when we search them out we may find him there; and secondly, that if we come to him he will, in accord with his own word “guide us into all truth” through the Spirit. Since this is so it would seem most appropriate that we turn, then, to Moses to learn more of our dear Lord, particularly in the light of the supporting teachings of the other apostles.—Eph. 4:21; I Pet. 1:10,11

Our opening texts indicate that the Scriptures would have much to teach us of our Lord as the true light which will reveal to us the character of God, our Heavenly Father, and this would be very much in line with the teaching of the Lord and the Apostles. (John 12:45;17:26) They would surely direct our minds to this wonderful revelation: “This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.”— I John 1: 5

Let us look into the illustration of light in the Old Testament which will help us to understand why God used it to represent Jesus. First our minds rest on the thought of the Shekinah glory—that miraculous light which shone out from between the cherubims which graced the Ark of the Covenant, or Mercy Seat, in the Tabernacle. Psalm 80:1, for instance, reads this way: “Thou that dwelleth between the cherubims, shine forth.” And again, we read in Exodus 25:22, “I [God] will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the Mercy Seat, from between the two cherubims.” Again we find information

recorded in I Samuel 4:4 and II Samuel 6:2 on this subject: "The LORD of hosts, which dwelleth between the cherubims." So too, we read in Isaiah 37:16: "O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, that dwellest between the cherubims."

It is at once obvious that the 'light' here is the light of the presence of God. However, it is just as clear that there would be one who would be the agent of communication between God and Israel—the High Priest—with whom he would "commune from above the Mercy Seat." That the High Priest represented Christ is understood by most students of the Bible. But what may be less understood is that the ephod worn by the High Priest might give us a beautiful illustration of the work of Christ in bringing to us the mind of our Creator and Heavenly Father. Primarily the use of the Urim and Thummim contained in the ephod is what we wish to consider, but a description of the ephod and the breastplate of judgment might also be of interest, and shed light on our subject.

As recorded in Exodus 28:1-8, God instructed Moses how to make the vestments for the High Priest. The first thing he told him to make was the ephod. Now the ephod is a short garment which covers the priest down to the waist as a tunic without sleeves. It was a magnificent garment being interwoven with all the beautiful colors prescribed in all the Tabernacle work. The ephod was put over the head and worn across the chest and across the back, and it was held around the middle by what is described as the 'curious girdle', made of gold.

Exodus 28:9-29 deals with those things that relate to the ephod. First of all, there were two onyx stones which were each engraved with the names of six of the tribes of Israel, and these were set in gold ouches or clips, and were placed on the shoulders of the ephod. They were suspended by two chains of pure gold of 'wreathen work' and attached to the breastplate. In verse 15 we read, "Thou shalt make the breastplate of judgment with cun-

ning work; after the work of the ephod thou shalt make it; of gold, of blue, and of purple, and of scarlet, and of fine twined linen, shalt thou make it." This breastplate of judgment, or pouch, as in fact it was, was then ornamented with four rows of precious stones upon which were engraved the names of the twelve tribes. This was then even more securely attached with a lace or cord of blue. The purpose of which was beautifully described in verse 29: "Aaron shall bear the names of the children of Israel in the breastplate of judgement upon his heart, when he goeth into the Holy Place, for a memorial before the LORD continually." Into the breastplate of judgment were then placed the Urim and Thummim, "and they shall be upon Aaron's heart, when he goeth in before the LORD, and Aaron shall bear the judgment of the children of Israel before the LORD continually."—vs. 30

What an excellent lesson we now have for spiritual Israel! We see our dear Lord Jesus pictured as a great High Priest (Heb. 8:1; 10:21) going continually before our Heavenly Father, bearing our names before God upon his heart. And, yet more wonderfully, our judgment has been laid upon his great and loving heart! How differently we would view our judgment if it were not so arranged by a wise and loving God: "He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come to God by him [grace upon grace: we are brought to God upon the heart of Christ] seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us."—Heb. 7:25

In this 'shadow' of the better things to come (Col. 2:17), we see a special work of our dear Lord in the Urim and Thummim. Therefore it would be good to look more closely at this particular ordinance, "stirring up our pure minds by way of remembrance that we may be mindful of the words which were spoken before of the holy prophets" (II Pet. 3:2), and endeavoring to walk more closely to the Word of the LORD.

The word Urim has the meaning 'light' and Thummim means 'truth'. Both words, being in the plural form, are thus emphatic, and give the sense of light in its greatest brilliance, and truth in its most complete form. Again, in this we see foreshadowed the perfection of our Lord, and can thus realize how wonderful a counselor and advocate we have, as he goes in and out of the Most Holy seeking the advice and approval of God, as did Aaron. In this way he can reveal to us the mind of our Heavenly Father and his will for us.—Matt. 11:25-27; Phil. 3:15

There are many instances where Israel, individually or collectively, came before the LORD to have his decision on some problem or other. We must do so also. Perhaps the best illustration of how completely and marvelously the Word of Scripture along this line is fulfilled for us by our Lord is found in Proverbs 16:33: "The lot is cast into the lap but the whole disposing of it is in the hand of the LORD." The translation here is not the best; for the word 'lap' we should read 'bosom', which at once clarifies this text. We here see again the High Priest with the breastplate upon his heart making known the mind of God through the Urim and Thummim, because they were the instruments, in some undisclosed way, of indicating a 'yes' or 'no' indication from Jehovah. But this expression carries with it a further lesson for spiritual Israel, which is the relationship of close and intimate contact between the parties involved. The scriptural expression, "face to face" (Gen. 32:30), comes at once to mind. But here something even much closer is implied, and the beautiful words of our Lord now come to our minds and hearts, "No man has seen God at any time, the only begotten Son which is in the *bosom* of the Father, he hath declared him."—John 1:18

With this thought comes a further revelation—that the deeper insight into the mind of the Heavenly Father can only come to us through the intimate communion of the Son with the Father, and then our communion with the

Son. (I Cor. 2:16) This aspect of revelation through the Urim and Thummim continues to be brought to our attention in the Gospel of John. Here we read: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I sendeth receiveth me, and he who receiveth me receiveth him who sent me." (John 13:20) The Spirit of truth that dwells with, and within us, will teach us all things. Surely the work pictured for us by the Urim and Thummim is shown here, and because that is so, it is elegantly described to us in the very next incident that followed these words. The record in John continues, "When Jesus had thus said, he was troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. Then the disciples looked one on another, doubting of whom he spoke. Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples whom Jesus loved. Simon Peter therefore beckoned to him, that he should ask who it should be of whom he spoke."

Peter had realized that there was only one person in that room to whom the Lord could discreetly make the revelation, and that was John. In a voice only audible to his Lord, "he then lying on Jesus' breast saith unto him, Lord, who is it?" (vss. 21-25) Then by word and sign, to him alone who rested on his bosom, the betrayer was revealed.

May the LORD grant that we, too, may ever grow closer to our Lord Jesus and our Heavenly Father in love, so much so that he may, by this divinely appointed way, remove from us every secret fault, that thus cleansed and resting on his bosom, we may be made one in holiness, as he is with his Father.—John 17:23 □

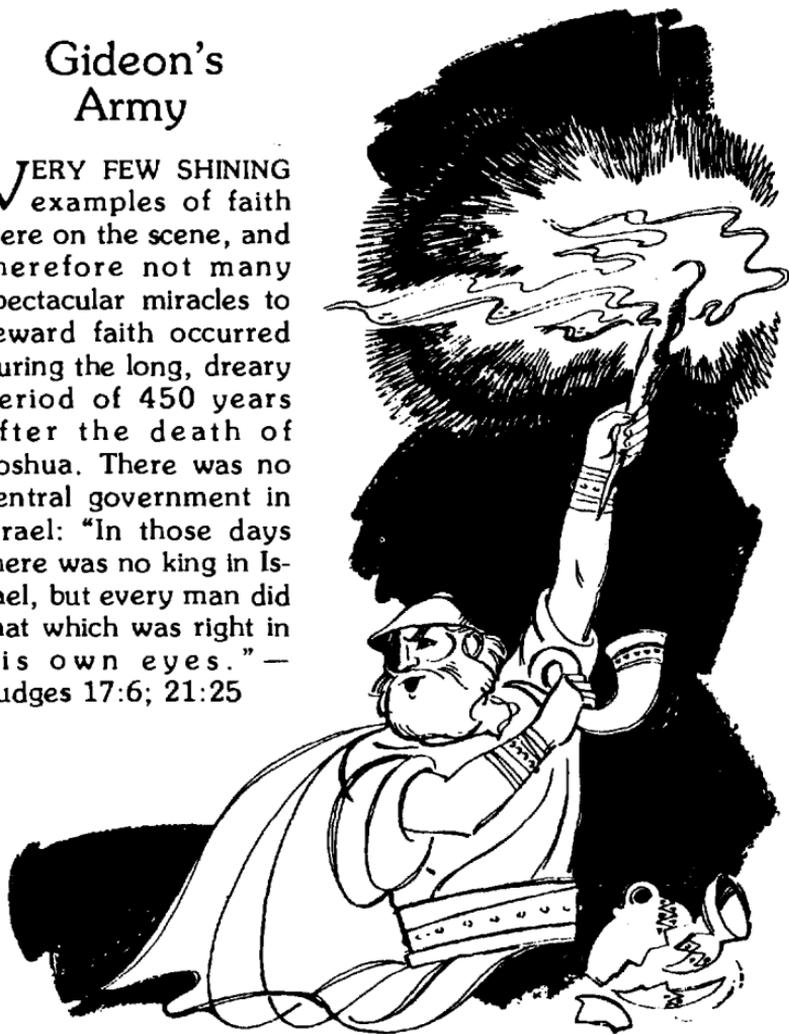


ENTER INTO HIS gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting. —Psalm 100:4,5

THE GOLDEN THREAD SERIES—Part 21

Gideon's Army

VERY FEW SHINING examples of faith were on the scene, and therefore not many spectacular miracles to reward faith occurred during the long, dreary period of 450 years after the death of Joshua. There was no central government in Israel: "In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes." — Judges 17:6; 21:25



Evidently, in some cases, the people were quite in harmony with the laws of righteousness. But more often, their decisions led them away from God's laws, and into the heathen practice of idol worship—worship of Baal, Baal-Berich, Baalim, and other false gods. (Judges 1:11; 8:33) Because his people turned their backs on him, the true God, Jehovah, allowed their enemies, the Canaanites, to rule over them and to terrorize them. If Israel had obeyed the command of God to drive out the residents of Canaan from the Promised Land, along with their worship of false gods, this long, bleak period of subjection to heathen nations could have been avoided.

At the time this story begins, Israel had been under the control of the land of Midian for seven years. These were a fierce, wealthy, nomadic, desert people, from the south and east of Israel. (Judges 8:26) They would swoop down without warning upon Israel's villages, and trample their grain fields with their swarms of cattle and camels until there was little to eat in the land. (Judges 6:5,6) The people were terrified and hungry, and began to cry to Jehovah for help.

When Israel turned to Jehovah, the true God, for help, he patiently heard their cries and sent them prophets to deliver them from the appalling hordes. At this time, the LORD sent them Gideon, a mighty man of valor, to deliver them from the Midianites.—Judges 6:7,8,11,12

An angel came from God to Gideon, calling him to serve as a prophet, and as general of Israel's army. The angel said, "Go, and save Israel from the hands of the Midianites. And the LORD said unto him, Surely I will be with thee and thou shalt smite the Midianites as if they were one man." Gideon was amazed that he had been chosen for this important position. He had a humble spirit, which is one of the special qualities necessary in order to be used for outstanding service to the LORD. He said, "Oh my LORD, wherewith shall I save Israel? Behold

my family is poor, and I am the least in my fathers's house." But to show his appreciation for this messenger from God, Gideon prepared a meal for the angel. Even now he did not realize that he had actually been speaking to an angel of the LORD! He cooked some meat, made unleavened cakes, and also prepared some broth. When Gideon presented the food to the angel, he made a strange request of Gideon: "Take the flesh and the unleavened cakes, and lay them upon this rock, and pour out the broth." And he did so. Then the angel of the LORD put forth the end of the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. Then the angel of the LORD departed out of his sight!—Judges 6:20,21

Since the angel had appeared to Gideon as a human being, it was only through the miraculous fire shooting out from the rock, burning up the meal, and then the sudden disappearance of his guest, that made Gideon aware he had really been visited by an angel!—Judges 6:22

Gideon was a young man of action, and once he was assured he was God's choice, he began with great energy the task of freeing the Israelites from the control of the Midianites. As a first step, Baal worship must be destroyed in the land. This was a severe test upon Gideon, for his own father, Joash, had established a grove of trees where this heathen worship took place. The same night the angel spoke to Gideon, he took ten of his servants to his father's grove. There they cut down the trees, broke apart the altar to Baal, built an altar to Jehovah, slew a bullock, and presented it as a burnt offering to God—using the wood from the heathen grove as fuel for the fire!—Judges 6:25-27

The men of the city were all Baal worshipers, and in the morning, when they learned of Gideon's acts, their reaction was violent. "Bring out thy son, that he may

die," they demanded of Joash, "because he hath cast down the altar of Baal, and because he hath cut down the grove that was by it." (Judges 6:30) Although Joash had built this altar himself, and had planted the grove which his son destroyed, he refused to give the men his son. He reasoned that if Baal were a real and powerful god, he could have protected his own grove, and his own altar! His confidence in the God of Israel was growing stronger. He gave his son another name, Jerubbaal, which means, "Let Baal plead," and he told the men, "If Baal be a god, let him plead for himself!"

When Baal's grove and altar had been demolished, and Baal had not taken vengeance against Gideon for this act, many in Israel began to trust in Jehovah once again, and to look to Gideon for leadership. Soon, trouble with the Midianites and Amalekites was really beginning to brew. 135,000 soldiers had gathered in the northern part of the territory of Manasseh, which is where Gideon lived. They camped with their tents and animals in the valley of Jezreel. They lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude, and their camels were without number, as the sand of the sea for multitude!—Judges 8:10; 7:12

Quickly, Gideon sent messages throughout the area of Manasseh, and north to several of the tribes such as Dan, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali, calling for brave men to come and meet the enemy. Events were moving rapidly. Gideon found himself surrounded with an army of 32,000 men, ready to follow his leadership in an offensive attack against Israel's heathen enemies. Gideon needed reassurance that God truly wanted him to be the general of that large army. He wanted a sign that the LORD was with him.

'Putting out the fleece', is an expression we use today, indicating that we wish to determine what God's will is for us. The expression comes from the test Gideon used to determine Jehovah's will for him. Gideon said to God, "If

thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said, behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said." (Judges 6:36-40) The LORD was patient with Gideon, and answered his request. The next morning, when he examined the fleece, it was indeed thoroughly soaked. In fact, a bowl full of water was squeezed out of the wool, while the ground around it had remained perfectly dry. This should have been very convincing proof, but still Gideon was not completely sure.

So he reversed the conditions, asking God, on the second test, to let the fleece remain dry, and let the dew fall on the ground. Again, the LORD honored Gideon's appeal, for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground! Now Gideon was certain that it was not simply by chance that the fleece was wet or dry, but by the hand of God. Now he was ready to command the LORD's army.

However, Jehovah had another lesson of faith for Gideon to learn: he must not depend upon the strength of Israel's large army which was ready and willing to fight. God told him it was too large! If the victory over the Midianites was won by an army of 32,000 men, they might claim the triumph was due to their might, or their skillfulness as soldiers, rather than due to the LORD's overruling. So there began a process of reducing the size of the army, until there were only 300 men left to follow Gideon into the battle against 135,000 Canaanites! God said, "It shall be, that of whom I say unto thee, This shall go with thee, the same shall go with thee; and of whomsoever I say unto thee, This shall not go with thee, the same shall not go."—Judges 7:2-7

Gideon's army was hand-picked by Jehovah, so that none of the three hundred were afraid to go into battle, and none were preoccupied with other thoughts. They

were a fully dedicated group. And clearly, if three hundred men overcame 135,000 fierce warriors, it was because God gave them the victory!

Looking down from the hilltops upon that huge and threatening armed force lying encamped in the valley of Jezreel below, Gideon was glad to know that the all-powerful Jehovah was with him. The LORD knew that Gideon was showing great faith in him, so he spoke to Gideon again, and told him to silently creep into the camp of the Midianites and, "thou shalt hear what they say." What Gideon overheard in the enemy camp as he lay hidden listening to the men talk, gave him great courage and firm confidence of victory. One man had a dream that a loaf of bread tumbled into their camp, hitting a tent and knocking it down. His companion who heard of his dream told him, "This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon, the son of Joash, a man of Israel: for into his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all the host." (Judges 7:13,14) Gideon was so encouraged that when he arrived safely back among his soldiers, he told them, "Arise: for the LORD hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian!"

Gideon's three hundred soldiers had been given no weapons or armor. Instead each received a trumpet, a burning torch, and an empty pitcher, in which they were to hide their torches. Can you imagine an army going into battle with such strange equipment? After furnishing his men with these articles, Gideon separated his troops into three groups spacing them well apart all along the ridges of the hills surrounding the enemy camp in the valley below. Then Gideon took his place among one of the little companies.

Their instructions were to do as he did. When Gideon blew his trumpet, they were to blow theirs. At the same moment each man was to break his pitcher suddenly, revealing his flaming torch. Then they were to shout, "the sword of the LORD and of Gideon!" The Midianite who

interpreted his friend's dream had said, "this is the sword of Gideon." The story of the dream and its interpretation must have spread throughout the camp; when they heard the shout of the three hundred echoing down the hillsides, they surely thought the dream was coming true, and fear must have filled their hearts!

Yes, fear and panic spread swiftly throughout the camp. The LORD set every man's sword against his fellow, and in the confusion of darkness and desperation of the night attack, the Midianites killed each other. As the disorder and turmoil increased, the enemy fled, and Gideon's victory was complete. Jehovah's victory was complete!

QUESTIONS

1. For 450 years, how was Israel governed? Was this a good arrangement for Israel? Did the people obey God's laws? What happened when they did not?
2. At the time of this story, who was Israel's enemy?
3. When the people cried for help, who did God send?
4. How did Gideon learn that God chose him to save Israel? Was he eager to be Israel's leader?
5. What was the first thing Gideon did?
6. Did this mark him as a leader who the young men of Israel would follow?
7. What does, 'putting out the fleece', mean?
8. From the thousands that came to serve in Gideon's army and follow him into battle, how many did he actually use?
9. Why did God want such a small group of men to fight such a huge enemy army?
10. What were the articles Gideon gave the 300 men of his army, and how did they use them?
11. What lessons can we learn from this story?

"I Wish I Knew What To Do!"

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OBITUARIES

The following brethren have recently finished their Christian course. We wish to express our sincere sympathy to the families and friends in the loss of these dear ones. We appreciate information concerning any brethren to be included in this list.

Sister Alice Suchy, Racine, WI—June 3. Age, 75.

Sister Mary Litwin, Portland, OR—August 3. Age, 76.

Sister Vivien Hawk, Allentown, PA—August 23. Age, 67.

Sister Jean S. Miller, Buffalo, NY—August 29.

SPEAKERS' APPOINTMENTS

Ministering the Glorious Gospel of Christ

| | | | |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|-------------------------------------|----------------|
| M. Balko Detroit, MI | November 24 | G.M. Jeuck Middletown, NY | November 3 |
| J. Grigalunas New Haven, CT | November 3 | J. Hausmann San Diego, CA | Nov. 28-Dec. 1 |
| R. Gorecki San Diego, CA | Nov. 28-Dec. 1 | L.B. Post Jersey City, NJ | November 23,24 |

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CONVENTIONS

Conventions are listed at the request of the classes who sponsor them. Please send your listing *IN WRITING*, at least three months before the date of the convention. If received in time, your convention will be listed for those three months.

JERSEY CITY PRE-THANKSGIVING CONVENTION, November 23,24—Masonic Temple, 1912 Morris Avenue, Union, NJ. For information contact: Mrs. Charlotte Teklinski, 84 Arthur Street, Ridgefield Park, NJ 07660
Phone: (201) 440-0925

DETROIT, MI, November 24—Redford YWCA, 25940 Grand River, Redford Township, MI. For information, contact the class

secretary: Frank Nemesh, 2183 Babcock Dr., Troy, MI 48084
Phone: (313) 649-6588

PHOENIX CONVENTION, December 27,28,29,30—Holiday Inn, 1600 S. Country Club Dr., Mesa, AZ Phone: (602) 964-7000. Address requests for reservations or information to: Mrs. Claudine White, 12310 Aurora Dr., Sun City West, AZ 85375
Phone: (602) 584-6654

If I could only surely know
That all the things that tire me so
Were noticed by my Lord—
The pang that cuts me like a knife,
The noise, the weariness, the strife,
And all the nameless ills of life—
What peace it would afford!
Dear Lord, my heart shall no more doubt
That Thou dost compass me about
With sympathy divine.
The Love for me once crucified
Is not the love to leave my side,
But waiteth ever to divide
Each smallest care of mine!

CAUSE FOR THANKSGIVING