

The Dawn

Herald of Christ's Presence



The DAWN

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No More Curse

“Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life.”
—*Genesis 3:17*

BECAUSE OF DISOBEDI-

ence to the divine law of God, the sentence of death was placed upon Father Adam. A second aspect of this judgment, however, also includes the curse which was placed

upon planet Earth and man’s environment. This has contributed greatly to the overall decline in health and vigor in the human family, which ends in the grave.

From the scriptural record, we read the first part of this judgment. “The LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”—Gen. 2:15-17

THE DYING PROCESS

There is an important dimension in this pronouncement that is also revealed in the scriptural record, and which puts the matter in proper

perspective. In connection with the instructions to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil God said, “in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” *Young’s Literal Translation* renders this last phrase, “dying thou dost die,” pointing to the fact that a dying process would immediately begin if Adam sinned.

We know that Adam did not die on the very day this sentence was pronounced but lived for 930 years. The record states, “All the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years: and he died.” (Gen. 5:5) In God’s reckoning, a day is a thousand years long, during which Adam experienced the dying process. “Beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.” (II Pet. 3:8) Therefore, Adam died within the period of a single day according to God’s method of measuring time.

THE EARTH CURSED

The second aspect of God’s judgment against sin and disobedience concerned the earth itself, and the very ground that Adam and his offspring would need to produce food to keep themselves alive. “Unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou

taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”—Gen. 3:17-19

IN SORROW

It would be difficult to describe the depth of sorrow that was experienced by our first parents during their life span which ended in death. The word “sorrow” means to worry, to grieve, or to be in pain, and was first used in connection with God’s judgment toward Mother Eve. “Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.” (Gen. 3:16) The psalmist explained in words we can all surely relate to: “The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.”—Ps. 90:10

DAVID’S LAMENT

The Psalmist David put into perspective the terrible results of sin, death, and the cursed earth that he had been experiencing. From one of his psalms, we read, “O LORD, rebuke me not in thy wrath: neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure. For thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore. There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin. For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me. My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness. I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. For my loins are filled with a loathsome

disease: and there is no soundness in my flesh. I am feeble and sore broken: I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart. Lord, all my desire is before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee.”—Ps. 38:1-9

THE POLLUTED EARTH

The Prophet Isaiah speaks of the cursed earth, and that sinful man has polluted it. He wrote, “Behold, the LORD lays the earth waste, devastates it, distorts its surface and scatters its inhabitants. And the people will be like the priest, the servant like his master, the maid like her mistress, the buyer like the seller, the lender like the borrower, the creditor like the debtor. The earth will be completely laid waste and completely despoiled, for the LORD has spoken this word. The earth mourns and withers, the world fades and withers, the exalted of the people of the earth fade away. The earth is also polluted by its inhabitants, for they transgressed laws, violated statutes, broke the everlasting covenant. Therefore, a curse devours the earth, and those who live in it are held guilty. Therefore, the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men are left.”—Isa. 24:1-6, *New American Standard Bible*

PESTILENCES

When Luke, the Bible historian and Gospel writer, described events that would transpire at a future time, he included Jesus’ words that spoke of “famine and pestilence.” They would especially identify and distinguish a particular period as a time of great trouble upon the earth. (Dan. 12:1) This was foretold to come upon the people of the earth during the closing years of this “present evil world.”

(Gal. 1:4) We are now living, we believe, in this period of mankind's history, and are witnesses of the unprecedented events that so mark our time in Bible prophecy. Luke wrote, "Great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven."—Luke 21:11

MAN'S CONSTANT STRUGGLE

Throughout history, mankind has had to struggle against all kinds of adversity, and some of these many factors continue to cause the early loss of life among the human family. In many cases, this is derived from pestilence, plagues, and disease, and there have been various methods of carrying them, such as insects and rodents. Among humanity itself has come the spread of diseases, viruses, and many forms of sickness. Man has also fallen victim to famine and starvation, often caused by bad weather conditions such as droughts, flooding, or freezing conditions. These have been major factors, and have seriously affected the world's supply of food. Loss of crops has also occurred because of insect or weed infestation. The struggle against these and many other foes of the human family has been endless.

As the earth's population has increased dramatically during the past century and a half, the adversities that confront the human family have become more difficult to control. In the past, farms were smaller and pest infestation was more limited and easier to control. In recent decades, farms have become larger, thereby making it possible for pests, disease, and devastating weather events to advance over many acres of cropland.

SCIENTIFIC CONTROLS

Supplying food for the more than eight billion people now living on our planet is becoming ever more critical, and man is desperately trying to find solutions to many complex problems. One major example is pest control. Pesticides have been developed and are used widely to help save food crops from many types of insects and disease. Herbicides are also used to control the “thorns and thistles” that were introduced in Adam’s generation, and which continue to infest and inhibit the production of food. The divine sentence of the cursed earth is a continuing reality.

The use of pesticides has increased crop production and in many cases has ensured a higher quality of produce. However, pesticides are also toxic chemicals that are specifically designed to kill harmful insects, and some of these products have caused severe problems when they are consumed by humans. In the case of animal food production, drugs such as antibiotics and hormones are being used to increase growth and cut down on feed consumption. Residues of these drugs can also be hazardous to humans. The level of harm from exposure to pesticides, as well as animal antibiotics and hormones, is therefore related to the concept that the more you consume, greater is the risk.

MODERN CHALLENGES

The challenge is to balance a reliable, high quality food supply with the need to protect people from unnecessary exposure to chemicals. The limits for human consumption have a narrow margin for safety, and past experience has shown that a pesticide that

may be initially thought as safe for human consumption may have undesirable effects. The chemical “DDT” is one such historical example because of its environmental persistence and ability to accumulate in body fat. As a result, the use of DDT was banned in the United States in 1972, and in the rest of the world in 2004. However, it is still used in some parts of Africa, Asia, and South America.

Antibiotics are drugs that are designed to kill bacteria but are also used in animal food production to promote growth and cut down the amount of feed required. Overuse of these drugs increase the possibility of breeding antibiotic-resistant strains of bacteria. Control of antibiotics is required to help reduce the amount of antibiotic residue left behind in meat products.

In a recent development, the H5N1 “Bird Flu” virus has decimated the poultry industry over the last three years. In the United States alone, it is estimated that 148 million chickens have been euthanized since 2022 to try and contain the spread of the virus. Thankfully, only a very small number of cases have been reported among humans, and the virus does not spread from person to person. However, all have been affected by shortages of eggs and other related food items, and prices have escalated greatly.

Thus we see that in spite of the development of chemicals, hormones, and other farming advances which our forefathers never heard of, the struggle against the age-long pest population, weeds, and disease continues. This is strong evidence that the curse placed upon our planet Earth as a result of sin and death has not yet been lifted.

The earth and its people are cursed because of disobedience to God, and the reality of that condemnation rings ever more clearly in our day. “Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”—Gen. 3:16,17

NATURAL CONTROL

Among scientists, some have called attention to the fact that certain species of helpful insects or birds may be used to control others that are harmful and destroy food crops. Using natural insect control and organic pest control methods to prevent harmful insects from infestation is, they say, preferable to having to kill them with insecticides.

Natural control can have positive and negative effects. Most of the time control is introduced to an area to protect it from a harmful and invasive pest that dwells there. The control is introduced to lessen the competition among the invasive species. However, the introduced control species does not always target the intended pest population only. Control agents that are not restricted to a single species, or a small range of species, do not always make good biological control agents, and may become invasive species themselves. Numerous cases of such unintended consequences are well known to have occurred over the last several decades.

Other cases have proven more beneficial. The praying mantis is known to devour huge quantities of harmful insects every day. The ladybug will also

eat mites and aphids that often attack fruit trees. Finding and using natural methods may sometimes be as easy as introducing some of these natural enemies such as parasites, predators, pathogens, or competitors into a food crop. Other helpful predators include spiders that are also able to control pest populations.

Some plants such as dill or basil repel unwanted bugs, while others attract helpful insects such as butterflies. Diseased plants attract unwanted pests more readily than do healthy plants. Therefore, it is important to keep the plants healthy by building up the soil with organic fertilizer, mulch, and compost. Introducing crop rotation is another positive method. Planting different varieties of crops each year in the same plot of land will also inhibit a buildup of certain harmful insects and weeds.

With further research and scientific experiments, biological control could potentially help lessen future pest infestation of the world's food crop production. Biological control is being used more today and may hopefully reduce the use of many pesticides and herbicides.

DIVINE WISDOM MANIFEST

Despite progress in his efforts, man has never been able to invent, or develop, any type of control or method that will completely eliminate harmful insects, weeds, pests, or crop and animal disease. The problems are too widespread and varied wherever the human food supply is grown. However, scientists point out the simple fact that the earth would have been totally overrun by insects and weeds long ago except for the many species of

helpful birds and insects that eat the unwanted species, and this has helped keep the infestation under control to a limited extent.

Thus is seen the great wisdom and controlling hand of a loving Heavenly Father that will not allow the total devastation of all flesh upon the earth. Without his guidance all flesh would have been destroyed long ago, and there would no longer be any hope for the perfecting of the sin-sick and dying human race. God created the earth to be inhabited, and it will never pass away. From the words of Solomon, we read, “One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever.” (Eccles. 1:4) God has given man certain limited insights into basic physical laws and principles, but all knowledge comes from him. “The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun. Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us.”—vss. 9,10

GOD’S POWER

The marvelous working power of God may be employed to bring either a curse or a blessing. This was demonstrated in the life of the nation of Israel when they were in bondage to Egypt. Israel’s bondage to Pharaoh serves to illustrate mankind’s bondage to sin and death under Satan. Israel’s release from bondage pictures the human family being released from the sentence of death by means of the redemptive work of Jesus.—Rom. 5:18,19; Heb. 9:12,15; I Tim. 2:5,6

In the case of ancient Israel, God brought forth upon Egypt the plagues as recorded in Exodus, chapters 7 to 12. First, water was turned to blood, and then came the frogs. Next came the plagues of lice, flies, and the disease of murrain, an infectious disease affecting cattle and other animals. Then were the boils, and the hail accompanied with storms and darkness. All of the plagues were under the control of God, and he was the only one who could stop them. During this time, God's power was also used to spare the nation of Israel. (Exod. 8:22,23; 9:4-7) The psalmist also provides an overview account showing that it was only by God's power that the people of Israel were freed from their bondage in Egypt.—Ps. 78:44-51

REVERSING THE CURSE

The Prophet Isaiah foretold God's future plan to bring blessings to all mankind. He wrote, "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing: the glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon, they shall see the glory of the LORD, and the excellency of our God." (Isa. 35:1,2) When describing this wonderful scene in symbolic language, Isaiah also wrote, "Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing: for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water: in the habitation of dragons, where each lay, shall be grass with reeds and rushes."—vss. 6,7

In reference to this future time under the administration of Christ and his faithful followers of this present age, the psalmist also said, “Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it: thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water: thou preparest them corn, when thou hast so provided for it. Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly: thou settlest the furrows thereof: thou makest it soft with showers: thou blessest the springing thereof. Thou crownest the year with thy goodness; and thy paths drop fatness. They drop upon the pastures of the wilderness: and the little hills rejoice on every side. The pastures are clothed with flocks; the valleys also are covered over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing.”—Ps. 65:9-13

A COVENANT OF PEACE

Our loving Heavenly Father will establish a “covenant of peace” with the people through the greater “David,” Christ Jesus and his faithful followers, as recorded by the Prophet Ezekiel. “I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd. And I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the LORD have spoken it. And I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land: and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods. And I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing. And the tree of the field shall yield her fruit, and the earth shall yield

her increase, and they shall be safe in their land, and shall know that I am the LORD, when I have broken the bands of their yoke, and delivered them out of the hand of those that served themselves of them.”—Ezek. 34:23-27

NO MORE CURSE

All the obedient of mankind will be restored to a perfected planet Earth, and the curse that has existed since our first parents fell into sin will be no more. The reign of Christ will be set up with power and authority over the affairs of the world and its people. John the Revelator wrote of God’s vision that speaks of this wonderful hope for the human family, and brings it into perspective. “He shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse: but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him.”—Rev. 22:1-3

NO MORE SORROW

The ultimate plan and purpose of our loving Heavenly Father is to restore the obedient of his human creation to perfect life here on a restored, perfected earthly home. The prophet of God looked down the long stream of time from his day and described this wonderful scene. He wrote, “The redeemed of the LORD shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be

upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away.”—Isa. 51:11

John the Revelator, too, was moved by the Holy Spirit of God, and wrote, “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful. And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.”—Rev. 21:4-6 ■

WEEKLY PRAYER MEETING TEXTS

MAY 1—“The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.”—Matthew 20:28 (Z. ’03-407 Hymn 28)

MAY 8—“And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life.”—I John 2:25 (Z. ’03-175 Hymn 78)

MAY 15—“Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.”—Habakkuk 3:17,18 (Z. ’03-94 Hymn 119A)

MAY 22—“God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.”—II Timothy 1:7 (Z. ’97-170 Hymn 90)

MAY 29—“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: ... Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”—John 14:27 (Z. ’97-306 Hymn 252)

David's Sacrifice

Key Verse: “*And king David said, ... I will verily buy it for the full price: for I will not take that which is thine for the LORD, nor offer burnt offerings without cost.*”
—***I Chronicles 21:24***

Selected Scripture:
I Chronicles 21:14-30

THE LORD SAID OF DAVID

that he was a man after his own heart. (I Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22) This was not because David never sinned, but because of his humility and repentant heart when his sins were called to his attention.

Expressing his innermost feelings, David wrote, “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.” (Ps. 51:10) He recognized that, by nature, his heart was not always clean, and that through weakness of the flesh he was

prone at times to manifest a wrong spirit. Nevertheless, he was not sympathetic toward his sins and prayed to God that he might be cleansed, that a “right spirit” might be renewed within him.

An example of David's repentant heart is when he sinned before the Lord by disobeying the command not to number the people of Israel, in spite of the protests of Joab, captain of the hosts. Then the Lord spoke to Gad, David's seer, or prophet, and instructed him to tell David to choose one of the three choices of chastisement for this transgression: three years of famine, three months to be destroyed by enemies, or three days of pestilence. Realizing his own weakness, David, in humility, declined

to make a choice and explained he preferred to leave the matter in the hands of the Lord, knowing that “very great are his mercies.”—II Sam. 24:2-4; I Chron. 21:1-13

God chose the three days of pestilence chastisement, and in a very short time seventy thousand men of Israel died. Then God sent an angel to Jerusalem to destroy it, but soon after said to the angel, “It is enough, stay now thine hand. And the angel stood by the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite.” David pleaded with God, acknowledging it was he that had sinned and not the people, and asked for God’s chastisement to be upon himself.—vss. 14-17

Through the angel, God instructed David to go and “set up an altar unto the LORD in the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite,” and offer sacrifice to the Lord. Ornan first “saw the angel” and then saw David arrive. David asked to pay “full price” for the threshingfloor. After buying it, he offered “burnt offerings and peace offerings, and called upon the LORD.” The Lord “answered him from heaven by fire upon the altar of burnt offering.” Based upon these sacrifices, the Lord stopped the plague.—vss. 18-28

The sincerity of David’s devotion to the Lord is revealed beautifully by his insistence that he buy at full price Ornan’s threshing floor for use in offering sacrifice to the Lord, rather than accept it as a gift or pay a lesser amount. He explained that he did not want to present burnt offerings to the Lord which cost him nothing. (vs. 24) This is a good lesson for all of God’s people. If we sacrifice in the Lord’s service only that which we do not need anyway, or which we have no other use for, we give little or no evidence of true devotion to him.

As a final note to this account, the threshingfloor of Ornan, which David bought, was the place where Solomon would later build the temple, “the house of the LORD.”—II Chron. 3:1 ■

Solomon Dedicates the Temple

Key Verse: “The priests could not enter into the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD had filled the LORD’S house.” —II Chronicles 7:2

Selected Scripture: II Chronicles 7:1-7,11

THE TEMPLE SOLOMON built was an illustration of a greater, spiritual temple which God is building during the present Gospel Age, made of Jesus and his “little flock.” (Luke 12:32) Paul states, “ye are the temple of God.” (I Cor. 3:16,17; 12:27) Our Lord Jesus is the “foundation” of this heavenly temple.—I Cor. 3:11

Each literal stone selected to be part of Solomon’s Temple was “made ready before it was brought”—cut, shaped, and polished ahead of time in order to fit exactly into its final location in the Temple. Therefore, when the time came to assemble all the stones together to complete the building, there was no need for a hammer or chisel. (I Kings 6:1-7) This foreshadowed how God is preparing, developing, and proving each of his consecrated ones now. The trials and difficulties of life are pictured by the chiseling and polishing which came upon each literal stone, illustrating the preparation of each member of the body of Christ for a future work.

Peter adds, “Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.” (I Pet.

2:5-9) This spiritual temple in heaven will soon be completed at the end of the present Gospel Age, when the last member of the “little flock” is found faithful unto death.—Rev. 2:10

After the Temple was completed, Solomon had the Ark of the Covenant, which pointed forward to Christ Jesus and his faithful followers, brought into the Temple. Then the Levites, musicians, and singers, “praised the LORD, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever.”—II Chron. 5:1-13

Solomon then kneeled down and offered a prayer of dedication to God. (II Chron. 6:12-42) When he finished praying, “fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices,” indicating God’s acceptance, “and the glory of the LORD filled the house.” When all the children of Israel saw the fire coming down and the glory of the Lord upon the Temple, they “praised the LORD, saying, For he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever.”—II Chron. 7:1-3

Solomon’s Temple was to be “a house of prayer for all the nations.” (Mark 11:17, *Revised Version*; Isa. 56:7) This is an illustration of how, during the Messianic Age, after the spiritual temple will have been completed and glorified, all nations will begin to draw near to God. In order to do so, they will need to draw near this spiritual temple, because the glory of God will be revealed in her. Paul, referring to this time which will soon come, writes: “For the earnest expectation of the creation waiteth for the revealing of the sons of God.”—Rom. 8:19, *RV*

All mankind will then be invited to approach the Lord in worship, through the completed spiritual temple—Christ Jesus, “the head of the body, the church,” along with the completed church, the “bride” class. (Rev. 22:17; Col. 1:18) Through “the Christ” class mankind will approach the Father, and all who shall hear their message and obey it will be glad. The “good tidings of great joy” will have then come to all people.—Luke 2:10 ■

Worship Is Restored

Key Verse: *“All the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.”*
—Ezra 3:11

Selected Scripture:
Ezra 3:1-6,10-13

Jewish captives to return to Israel and “build the house of the LORD God of Israel.”—Ezra 1:1-3

The first work of the returned Jews was to build an altar to offer burnt offerings, as written in the Law of Moses. In the second year of their return, “the foundation of the temple” was constructed. All the people were “praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel, ... because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid.”—Ezra 3:2-6,8-11

The sounds were discordant—some of joy, some of weeping. Those who looked forward in hope for the future, shouted for joy. Those who looked backward in time, and pictured before their minds Solomon’s grand Temple, wept as they thought of the insignificance of the present one in comparison. (vss. 12,13) Similarly among the Lord’s followers today, there may be some

EVENTS RECORDED IN THE book of Ezra occurred at the close of the 70 years desolation of the land of Israel and captivity of the Israelites in Babylon. At that time Cyrus, king of Persia, declared that God had given him all the kingdoms of the earth and appointed him to “build him a house at Jerusalem.” Consequently, Cyrus issued a proclamation allowing the

who weep or are cast down, perhaps nostalgic for the past, when they should be rejoicing for the future. Paul's exhortation is, "forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead." (Phil. 3:13, *International Standard Version*) Let us keep in mind that each day we are, in fact, one day closer to the fruition of all our hopes, not only for ourselves but for all mankind.

We should never forget the lessons we have learned from our past sins or shortcomings, including "chastening of the Lord" and our striving to be rightly "exercised" by such experiences. (Heb. 12:5-11) However, to remember them does not mean to constantly mourn over them, because "we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ." The merit of Christ's sacrifice covers all of our unwilling blemishes and mistakes. (I John 2:1,2; 1:7-10) We should "keep pursuing the goal to win the prize of God's heavenly call."—Phil. 3:14, *ISV*

In some ways, this scene recorded in the book of Ezra could also be indicative of conditions and events that will take place in the world soon after the end of Armageddon. At that time small groups of people, having faith in God, will turn toward him and joyfully accept the new conditions and arrangements on earth. Progressively, all mankind will eventually approach God, as Israel in olden times approached the Lord, through the spiritual temple.—Rev. 21:1-4

Mankind on earth will praise and give thanks to our Heavenly Father for his great goodness, mercy, and love. (Ps. 136:1) "In the last days, the mountain of the LORD'S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, ... and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem."—Isa. 2:2-4 ■

A Covenant Renewal

Key Verse: “We will
not forsake the
house of our God.”
—*Nehemiah 10:39*

Selected Scripture:
Nehemiah 10:28-39

ARTAXERXES, KING OF

Persia, made a decree during the 7th year of his reign, that any Israelites who had been held captive in Babylon were now free to go to Jerusalem with Ezra, who was a Jewish scribe

and priest. Additionally, Artaxerxes ordered that silver and gold be provided to the Israelites in order for them to buy the offerings needed to sacrifice to the God of Israel and to procure whatever else was needful for the house of God.—Ezra 7:1-27

Thirteen years later some of the Jewish men, who had gone with Ezra to Jerusalem, returned to Babylon. They told Nehemiah, a Jew who was the king’s trusted cupbearer, the devastation which still existed in Jerusalem. Upon hearing this report Nehemiah prayed to the Lord. He confessed the sins and shortcomings of Israel and asked God to grant him mercy before the king, when he would ask to be sent to Jerusalem to rebuild the city. Thanks to the grace of God, Artaxerxes granted Nehemiah his request.—Neh. chapters 1 and 2

The first work Nehemiah did was to rebuild Jerusalem’s walls. (chapters 3-6) Later, Ezra was called upon to read to the congregation of men and women the law which God had given to Moses. The Levites explained the Law “distinctly” to the people, so everyone would “understand.”—Neh. 8:1-8

“All the people wept, when they heard the words of

the law,” realizing they had been under God’s chastisement because they had not obeyed him. Then Nehemiah, Ezra, and the Levites said unto all the people: “This day is holy unto the LORD your God; mourn not, nor weep.” ... “For the joy of the LORD is your strength.”—vss. 9,10

After this the people worshipped the Lord and confessed their sins, recounting their past transgressions throughout the history of Israel. (Neh. 9:1-37) They vowed to “make a sure covenant” with God, which they wrote and then sealed. (vs. 38) They also promised “to walk in God’s law,” to contribute to all the offerings for the Lord, and to “not forsake the house” of their God.—Neh. 10:28-39

This scene, recorded in the 10th chapter of Nehemiah, could be similar to what will occur during the earthly phase of God’s kingdom. At that time mankind shall return from the land of the enemy—the great enemy, death. God, through the Prophet Jeremiah, said: “I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow. ... Thus saith the LORD; Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears, ... saith the LORD; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy.”—Jer. 31:13,16; I Cor. 15:26

At that time, God will make a “new covenant” with Israel. “This shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them. ... I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” (Jer. 31:31-34) As the rest of mankind are brought forth out of the grave, they will also be given the opportunity to return to the Lord under this covenant.—Isa. 56:6-8; 2:2-4 ■

The Knowledge of Good and Evil

“The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.”
—Genesis 2:8,9

ONE OF THE MOST important features of God’s plan is the knowledge of good and evil. Its importance encompasses all planes of intelligent existence. Having an appropriate understanding of this subject goes beyond a surface appreciation of a good act versus an evil one, or a good word versus an evil one. A complete understanding of good and evil gets to the core of our, and all intelligent creation’s, innermost thoughts, motives, and will. We suggest here five progressive steps necessary

for a proper and complete understanding of good and evil.

1) Know the outward manifestation—the action or word—as to its goodness or lack thereof.

2) Know the thoughts and motives which prompt good and evil actions.

3) Measure both the actions (step 1) as well as the thoughts and motives (step 2) which prompt them when compared to the standard of the Scriptures—the divine standard.—Heb. 4:12

4) Based on comparing actions, thoughts, and motives to God's standard, be able to quickly and consistently distinguish and discern between what is truly good versus that which is otherwise evil. Put another way, develop a trained consciousness, or conscience, of good and evil.—Heb. 10:22; 9:14

5) Apply such discernment, understanding, and consciousness, through experience, to the development of a character which, over time, tends more and more toward good, both as to motives, thoughts, and will, as well as to actions, deeds, and words.—James 1:22-25

These steps are what will be required for all mankind to learn in Christ's coming kingdom if they are to attain perfection and, hence, everlasting life on the earth. For those currently seeking to follow in our Lord's footsteps, however, it is critical that we be doing these things today in order to make our calling and election sure. (II Pet. 1:10) Two conditions at present make this effort a challenge. First, because we are sinful by nature it is not natural, nor is it pleasant according to the flesh, to follow the five steps outlined. The flesh rebels against the idea of examining actions and motives, and measuring them against the divine standard. Our fallen flesh does not like to change, as it is truly an "old man," set in its ways, and content with the status quo. (Eph. 4:22) The second

reason why this process is especially difficult now is that, for the most part, it goes against the trend of the world around us. A correct understanding by mankind today of the principles of good and evil is woefully lacking, and it is surely part of what is leading the world further and deeper into the “time of trouble,” which if not shortened, the Scriptures tell us, would result in man’s own destruction of himself.—Dan. 12:1; Matt. 24:21,22

THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL

To understand how to apply the steps of truly knowing good and evil requires that we review how these principles came into being in God’s plan as it relates to man. Much of this is laid out for us in the opening chapters of the Bible, Genesis 2 and 3. In chapter 2, as the narrative of Creation is given, we have the first veiled hint of these principles. The record states that in the midst of the garden paradise God prepared for man’s dwelling were two trees bearing most unusual names. Verse 9 states, “Out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.” Our focus here is not on the “tree of life,” so we will skip discussion of it until later, but what of this other tree, the “tree of knowledge of good and evil”? What kind of literal tree it was does not really matter, and we are not told. We do know that it bore fruit, which we will see is of significance. The true import of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was in what it symbolized. From this verse alone it is not possible to know the full extent of the symbol, as all it

really indicates is that this tree in some way pointed figuratively to two principles—good and evil—and that it would be important for man to have knowledge of them.

In the same chapter of Genesis, we find a second reference to this tree, of which God instructed man to not eat. These verses state, “The LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” (vss. 16,17) Here again it is evident that the import of what God instructed Adam was a figurative reference to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, although it was evidently a literal tree. The command itself was clear, and not figurative at all. Do not eat of the fruit of this tree, else you will die. This second reference clearly adds the thought to this symbolic tree that both good and evil have results and consequences.

We must keep in mind that at this point we have no record that Adam knew fully the principles of good and evil, or their consequences. He had seen and experienced good, but not evil, and so was inadequate in some respects to completely fathom the import of what God had told him. Yet he did have an understanding, we believe, of life versus death, because he had surely witnessed both take place among the lower animal creation. He had no doubt seen the propagation process of the lower creation, and the beauty of a newly born animal life. He also surely knew, perhaps even being told by God, that the lower animals were not created to live forever as was man, and he likely had seen the

death, in a natural and peaceful manner, of various members of the animal creation. He knew, therefore, from observation, what death was—oblivion, nonexistence, a returning to the dust of the earth. Knowing this, he had sufficient knowledge to understand that a failure to comply with God's command to not eat of the tree would result in his experiencing the same fate—death and resulting oblivion—which he had seen in the lower animals. Adam knew of God's goodness. He knew what life and death were, and being created in the image of God, he must have known that it was important to follow the commands of the very one who had created him.

SATAN'S LIES

In Genesis, chapter 3, we have the record of Satan's temptation, through the serpent, of Mother Eve. How Satan used the serpent, and what form it took, are not detailed in the scriptural account, only that it was more subtle than any of the other creatures in the garden. (vs. 1) After Eve correctly stated, recorded in verses 2 and 3, the penalty that had been pronounced if they ate of the forbidden tree—death—Satan told the first of several lies. We read in verse 4, "The serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die." Satan did not deny the commandment God had given, and which Eve had correctly repeated to him. However, he blatantly denied the punishment that had been stated would result from disobeying God's commandment. This is the great lie which not only was part of his deception of Mother Eve, but it is the lie that has permeated religious beliefs of every variety for thousands of

years, even to this very day. The Lord's consecrated people, begotten with the Spirit of Truth, are a part of the small minority on earth today who correctly understand the true nature and reality of death.

To Satan, the open and bold statement he had just made was perhaps designed partially to catch Eve's attention, and to lure her into the more subtle nature of what he said next, as recorded in verse 5, "For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." Satan here suggested that eating of the forbidden fruit would bring them much wisdom and knowledge, so much that Adam and Eve would become gods [Hebrew: *Elohim*, or mighty ones], just like their Creator and, as such, they would certainly know intuitively, just as God does, all the principles of good and evil. According to Satan, the fruit of the tree itself would give them that knowledge, and they would never need fear to fall into sin because such intuitive knowledge would surely result in their avoidance of sin and hence its consequences. He even boldly said in this verse, "God doth know" that all these things would result if they but ate of the fruit. These were all lies of our great Adversary, Satan.

Satan has used these additional lies down through the ages, causing fallen and deceived man to believe that he knows himself, without any help from God, what is good and evil. The results of this have been disastrous. Such thinking has, through the centuries, produced a continued lowering of the standard of righteousness, to the point now in this present "time of trouble" much of mankind cannot make a proper distinction between good and evil. (Dan. 12:1) This

has occurred because man has taken God out of the equation for the most part, taken away his divine standards, and replaced them with their own faulty ones, which have at their source the lies and deceptions of Satan.—John 8:44

FALLING TO TEMPTATION

Going back to the account in Genesis 3, we now see the full extent of Satan's temptation, not just his one blatant lie, but also the other subtle ones. Continuing the account in Genesis chapter 3, verse 6 says, "When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat." The first thing we notice here is that nearly all of Eve's attention was drawn to the fact that the tree and the fruit looked good to the eye of the flesh. Perhaps she thought of Satan's statement that she would not surely die and reasoned that such a goodly tree and such beautiful looking fruit could not possibly cause death if eaten. Satan's statement seemed plausible. In addition, the tree seemed to have a particularly attractive, almost mysterious, aura about it, which made it stand out from all the other trees and be desired as a result. Of all the trees in the garden, it seemed to be the one that could perhaps bring wisdom and an understanding of good and evil, just as it was so named. The more Eve pondered all his statements, the more she evidently felt that the serpent must be right. Everything he had said made sense to her, and so she, and her husband with her, took of the fruit and did eat.

OBEDIENCE THE REAL TEST

The beginning of Genesis 3:7 says, “The eyes of them both were opened.” Was Satan right after all? He indeed had said their eyes would be opened to gain the wisdom necessary to be gods, and know intuitively good and evil. Although this verse does say that their eyes were both opened, what they were opened to was not wisdom at all, but their nakedness, not just literally, but figuratively their nakedness before God as having been disobedient to his commandment. They were guilty, and they knew it immediately. This is what their eyes were opened to see. Their conscience was seared. They knew they had done evil rather than good in the sight of their Creator. Their eyes were now just beginning to open, in a much different way than Satan had promised in his lies, to the knowledge of good and evil.

In reviewing the experience of Adam and Eve, for all the wiles of Satan expressed through the serpent, and in spite of all the lies he told, the fact remains that simple obedience to God’s instruction was the real test to our first parents. God gave a command, and there was no need to try and rationalize or dilute it. It did not matter what the tree looked like, nor its fruit. It did not matter what the name of it was. It did not really matter what the penalty was, or even whether Adam or Eve believed the penalty would be carried out. What only should have mattered was that God, the Creator, had given a command to his creation, one that was simple, easy to understand, and easy to keep. Simple obedience was all that was needed, but was absolutely what God required. This principle of (Continued on page 36)

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(Continued from page 31) obedience and, we might add, heart-obedience, has been and always will be the ultimate test for all of God's intelligent creation that must be passed in order to attain life on any plane. Obedience lies at the very core of truly understanding good and evil. Eve, as well as Adam, in all their rationalization and thinking concerning the beauty of the tree, its desirable fruit, its attractiveness, and their skepticism of the penalty, missed what the true test was, and thus failed it—the test of obedience. It is this lesson which the Lord's people now, and all mankind eventually, must learn if they are to truly come to a full knowledge of good and evil.

LESSONS FOR THE CHURCH

As we walk in this narrow way, we must learn the principles of good and evil, and then strive to have our character molded along those properly understood lines. These principles are, as Paul says in Romans 12:9, "Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good." Let us look again at the five steps identified at the outset, and provide a touchstone with reference to each.

1) Know the outward manifestation, the action or word, as to its goodness or lack thereof.

Let us continually examine our actions, words, and deeds daily, to see if they are truly good, or if they are perhaps tainted with even just a small measure of evil. If they are, let us always remember to ask the Lord, and others if necessary, for forgiveness for any evil word said or deed committed.—II Cor. 13:5; Luke 11:4

2) Know the thoughts and motives which prompt good and evil actions.

Let us examine our hearts and motives to see if they are founded on good and pure intents. The Scriptures state, “Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” (Prov. 4:23) “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts.”—Ps. 139:23

3) Measure the actions, as well as the thoughts and motives which prompt them, against the standards of the Scriptures, the divine standard.

Continue to look to the standard contained in the Scriptures as the measuring rod of our actions as well as our motives and thoughts. Do not water down the standards of good, nor compromise the seriousness of evil, by human reasoning or rationalization. Use the Word of God as that powerful two-edged sword, which pierces “even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”—Heb. 4:12

4) Based on comparing actions, thoughts, and motives to the divine standard, be able to quickly and consistently distinguish and discern between what is truly good versus what is otherwise evil, and develop a trained consciousness of good and evil.

Let us more fully realize that by doing this we are partaking of God’s Word as meat rather than milk, as stated in the words of Paul in Hebrews 5:14, “Strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” In this verse, we see a direct connection between the meat of God’s Word and the discernment of good and evil, and that this can only happen if we “by reason of use,” or habit of use, continue to exercise our

spiritual senses. Only then will God's Word be that meat which gives us discernment of good and evil.

5) Apply such discernment, understanding, and consciousness, through experience, to the development of a character which, over time, tends more and more toward good—both as to motives, thoughts, and will, and also to actions, deeds, and words.

Let us continue to realize that all of this is a life-time work. It will not be done in a day, a month, or a year. It cannot be done perfectly, nor will we always be pleased with our progress. Let us remember, however, that we have a great High Priest and Advocate, Jesus, and also a Heavenly Father, both of whom love us as parents love their child. (Heb. 3:1; I John 2:2; John 16:27) They desire as much, yea, even more than we do ourselves, that we be successful in this endeavor, so "Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." (Gal. 6:9) Notice the scripture does not say we shall reap if we are perfect, or we shall reap if we do righteously 75% of the time, or stay clear of evil 80% of the time. No, we shall reap "if we faint not," that is, if we continue pressing on.

ALL MANKIND TO KNOW GOOD AND EVIL

If we are faithful even unto death, if we fully come to a knowledge of good and evil, and develop the resulting character likeness of our Lord, we will have the most blessed privilege imaginable, that of assisting the remainder of mankind in the next age with the remaining part of their learning experience with good and evil. (Rev. 20:4,6) We will have the opportunity of helping them see and experience the contrast between the evil that they once

knew and experienced in this life as a result of man's fall, and the good they will be showered with through the blessings and teachings of the New Covenant in Christ's kingdom. (Jer. 31:31-34) Then, having fully eaten of the tree of the knowledge of both good and evil, mankind individually will be able to stand before their Creator whole, fully developed through experience, their eyes truly opened to God's character, and their being and character fully perfected and worthy of everlasting life.

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil will have then accomplished its figurative work and exist only in memory, and the only remaining tree in the midst of man's restored earthly paradise will be the other symbolic tree spoken of in Genesis 2:9, the "tree of life." Revelation 22:14 speaks of this glorious time and condition at the end of the kingdom, "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." We pray that this time will soon come, that all may truly have an accurate knowledge of good and evil and will have learned its eternal lessons. ■

Faith

*God guide you through each troubled day,
When all seems dark and clouds are gray,
God give to you the blessed gift
Of faith that trusts till shadows lift,
Of faith that finds through each day's length
He is love, your comfort and your strength.
—Songs of the Nightingale*

The Voice of the Shepherd

“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.”
—John 10:27

THE APOSTLE JOHN WAS

one of our Lord’s closest companions, and in his Gospel account he has recorded many of the important events and

marvelous words which were spoken by the great Master Teacher during his earthly ministry. John has devoted the entire tenth chapter to the subject of the shepherd and his sheep, from which our featured scripture is taken. These verses reveal the closeness that marked Jesus and his people who have faithfully followed him throughout this present Gospel Age.

A TRUE BONDING

There is a particular intimacy that exists between a shepherd and his sheep, basically because they live together. Shepherds know the lay of the land, where the best grazing is, where the fewest predators are, and where they can best guard and care for their flock. At the time our Lord spoke these words, the average shepherd was responsible for taking care of about one hundred sheep. Often, however, several

shepherds would combine their flocks with those of other shepherds who may have been grazing their animals nearby. Despite the seeming confusion that might result from this practice, all of the shepherds knew their own sheep and all of the sheep knew their own shepherd.

The psalmist wrote, “O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.” (Ps. 95:6,7) In another of the psalms, we read, “Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands. Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing. Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. 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; and his truth endureth to all generations.”—Ps. 100:1-5

The Prophet Isaiah also draws our attention to the shepherd and his care over the sheep. “Behold, the Lord GOD will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.”—Isa. 40:10,11

THE SHEEPFOLD

Jesus was preaching to the people who had come to hear his teachings when certain Jews encircled him with demands to reveal to them his identity and purpose. (John 10:22-24) The words of our

featured scripture were directed to those Jews whose hearts had not been open to accept his wonderful message, nor to appreciate the miraculous works which he accomplished during his earthly ministry.

Earlier, the Master had explained to them, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he that entereth in by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. To him the porter openeth; and the sheep hear his voice: and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him: for they know not the voice of strangers. This parable spake Jesus unto them: but they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them.”—John 10:1-6

PLACE OF REST

The sheepfold represents the place of rest and protection which our loving Heavenly Father has prepared for his consecrated people during the long centuries since Pentecost. “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.”—Acts 4:12

Sheep are known for their gentleness, meekness, and obedience to the shepherd in whom they have put their trust. “Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved,

and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”—John 10:7-10

THE GOOD SHEPHERD

Jesus spoke of himself as being both the “door” and the “good shepherd.” (vss. 9,11) There was only one door, which no one else could open. He opened that door of redemption by giving his life for the sheep. This wonderful feature of the Heavenly Father’s plan and purpose will be made known to all people under the administration of Christ’s future kingdom, and for the blessing of all the families of the earth. (Gen. 22:18; Acts 3:25; Gal. 3:8) As the true sheep know their shepherd, so also does the shepherd know his sheep.

Thus the Master made clear, “I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. But he that is an hireling, and not the shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, seeth the wolf coming, and leaveth the sheep, and fleeth: and the wolf catcheth them, and scattereth the sheep. The hireling fleeth, because he is an hireling, and careth not for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep.” (John 10:11-15) The Heavenly Father knew Jesus intimately, had full confidence in him, and entrusted the care of the sheep to him.

OTHER SHEEP

Jesus also taught that there would be other sheep for him to look after. When the Christ class will be

set up in power and authority during his coming kingdom, the whole human family will be given the opportunity to learn the ways of truth and righteousness. The obedient will receive the right to life here on a glorious and perfected earth. (Matt. 6:10) This will include the countless numbers of mankind who will be resurrected from the grave and given an opportunity to walk up the highway of holiness. (Hos. 13:14) The Prophet Isaiah wrote concerning this future blessing, saying, "An highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall be called The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon, it shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there: And the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."—Isa. 35:8-10

Our Lord was speaking of that blessed future time, and also explained, "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd. Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This commandment have I received of my Father."—John 10:16-18

From the Gospel of John, we again read, "There was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings. And many of them said, He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him? Others said,

These are not the words of him that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind? And it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, and it was winter. And Jesus walked in the temple in Solomon's porch. Then came the Jews round about him, and said unto him, How long dost thou make us to doubt? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly."—vss. 19-24

In response to the Jews' angry inquiry, John recorded, "Jesus answered them, I told you, and ye believed not: the works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me. But ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep, as I said unto you. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one. Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him."—vss. 25-31

FALSE SHEPHERDS

The Israelites were the covenant people of God, and he dealt exclusively with them through their mediator Moses. However, through pride, ambition, and arrogance the religious leaders of the Jewish people were not good shepherds to those who looked to them for guidance and instruction. The Prophet Ezekiel addressed this fact. "The word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD unto the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks?"

(Ezek. 34:1,2) They were not willing to lead their people to the green pastures of God's wonderful word of Truth, nor to the still waters of spiritual refreshment.

The prophet further wrote, "Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed: but ye feed not the flock. The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them. And they were scattered, because there is no shepherd: and they became meat to all the beasts of the field, when they were scattered."—vss. 3-5

The false shepherds of Israel permitted God's character and his ultimate plan and purpose to be misrepresented. "My sheep wandered through all the mountains, and upon every high hill: yea, my flock was scattered upon all the face of the earth, and none did search or seek after them. Therefore, ye shepherds, hear the word of the LORD; As I live, saith the Lord GOD, surely because my flock became a prey, and my flock became meat to every beast of the field, because there was no shepherd, neither did my shepherds search for my flock, but the shepherds fed themselves, and fed not my flock; Therefore, O ye shepherds, hear the word of the LORD; Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against the shepherds; and I will require my flock at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the flock; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves any more; for I will deliver my flock from

their mouth, that they may not be meat for them.” (vss. 6-10) In an even greater fulfillment, many of the Lord’s people have been led astray by the false shepherds of Christendom throughout the long centuries since the days of the Early Church.

JESUS CONFRONTS THE JEWS

The Master attempted to reason with the religious leaders of the Jews who were questioning him, but was unable to persuade them that he had ministered in his Heavenly Father’s name and had done many wonderful things. “Jesus answered them, Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me? The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God. Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; Say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God? If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know, and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him.”—John 10:32-38

It was apparent that the hearts of the Jewish leaders were hardened against him. Therefore, he travelled elsewhere to deliver the wonderful message of Truth to those who had ears to hear and accept his words. John records, “They sought again to take him: but he escaped out of their hand, And went away again beyond Jordan into the place where John at first baptized; and there he abode. And many

resorted unto him, and said, John did no miracle: but all things that John spake of this man were true. And many believed on him there.”—John 10:39-42

THE SHEPHERD’S PSALM

The psalmist wrote concerning the special relationship that exists between the shepherd and his sheep and declared, “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.” (Ps. 23:1) The word “LORD” which David used in this scripture is in reference to Almighty God—the Great Shepherd of all things. The Apostle Paul said, “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” (Rom. 8:28) In turn, our Heavenly Father has appointed his only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus, to oversee the little flock of Jesus’ faithful followers. “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”—Luke 12:32

David speaks of his realization of the shepherd’s personal and loving care over him. “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”—Ps. 23:2-4

To “lie down in green pastures” illustrates the rest of faith that the Lord’s people are promised, and the spiritual refreshment that they are provided. We are being led to streams of Truth and blessing, while being shielded from all foes and dangers which might harm us as New Creatures. (II Cor. 5:17) We can put our trust in the Lord even as the

sheep trust in the wonderful care of the shepherd. To walk in the “valley of the shadow of death” suggests that the Lord’s people have been called from the sin-sick and dying human family, yet with the realization that our Lord is with us to the end of our walk in faith.—Heb. 13:5,6

The psalmist was truly thankful for the shepherd’s care and said, “Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.” (Ps. 23:5,6) The truly consecrated child of God is feasting at the wonderful table of Truth that has been provided, especially during the harvest years of this present Gospel Age. His “goodness and mercy” will follow us until the end of our consecrated walk, and then, if faithful unto death, we will share in the blessings of the heavenly state in the Heavenly Father’s house.—Rev. 2:10; John 14:1-3

THE SHEPHERD’S PRAYER

Jesus, the “good shepherd,” was constantly in an attitude of prayer, and he often turned aside from the pressing issues that were before him to seek his Heavenly Father’s special counsel and guidance. His earthly ministry was rapidly drawing to a close, and John recorded the wonderful words which he spoke. “These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee. As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal, that they might

know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”—John 17:1-3

Our Lord had left his heavenly home to provide a ransom for the entire human family. He would soon die to fulfill that most important work. During his earthly ministry, the invitation was given to certain individuals that would become his apostles, and others who were to be of the Early Church. In his prayer, he said, “I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.”—vss. 4,5

The Master then turned his attention to his beloved disciples. They were truly consecrated and had come to Jesus as their shepherd. “As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” (Rom. 8:14) “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”—Phil. 2:13

In his prayer Jesus said, “I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word. Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me.”—John 17:6-8

John recorded further Jesus’ wonderful words on behalf of his disciples. “I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them. And

now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled. And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.”—vss. 9-14

BRINGING MANY SONS TO GLORY

The words of this prayer were spoken by our Lord on the night of his betrayal. He was on his way from the upper room, where he instituted the memorial of his death with his disciples, to the Garden of Gethsemane. It was given on behalf of his disciples and those who would be his special followers since Pentecost. Afterward, during the administration of his future kingdom of righteousness, the whole world would have the opportunity to believe on him. (John 3:16,17) The very next day after offering this prayer, he died as the ransom price for the sin-sick human creation. “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.”—Heb. 2:9,10

THE FLOCK OF GOD

The Apostle Peter spoke of the “chief Shepherd” and the “flock of God,” and put the wonderful relationship in perspective when he composed his first epistle. He wrote, “The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed: Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away.”—I Pet. 5:1-4

The Apostle Paul, likewise, wrote concerning the “great shepherd of the sheep,” who makes us lie down in green pastures and leads and guides us in the way of quiet waters. Our shepherd is always ready to care and assist us in the ways of righteousness and Truth. If found faithful, we will share in the marriage ceremony as his faithful bride. “Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”—Heb. 13:20,21 ■

*Those who see God’s hand in everything,
always leave everything in his hands.
—Deep Waters and a Bubbling Brook*

General Convention Bulletin

July 19-24, 2025—Johnstown, Pennsylvania

THE 2025 GENERAL CONVENTION will begin in less than three months. If you have not yet made plans to attend, now is the time to do so. We encourage as many as are able to join in the blessings of this annual gathering of the Lord's people. The convention will be held on the campus of the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown, Pennsylvania. Hotel-like rooms with private bathrooms in the Living-Learning Center (LLC), and family style apartments (also air conditioned) with private bathrooms (APTS), are available on campus. A child may sleep on a bedroom floor at no charge if both beds are occupied.

The convention program appears in this issue of *The Dawn* on the pages following the General Convention registration form. In addition to the special program services mentioned in previous announcements, there will be a three-person panel discussion on the subject: "Life in the Earthly Kingdom." In keeping with past years, there will be five Testimony Meetings throughout the convention, as well as vesper, praise, and devotional services. We believe these will all be edifying and uplifting as we strive daily to be faithful to the Lord.

All room and meal costs for children 12 years old or younger will be paid by the convention. In

addition, 100% of the cost of those from ages 13 through 17 will be refunded if the young person attends at least 75% of the studies for his or her age group. This subsidy does not cover meals paid for at the door.

The convention will provide one shuttle bus or van leaving the Pittsburgh airport in the early evening for the college in Johnstown on Friday, July 18. There will also be shuttle bus or van service leaving the college in the morning hours for the Pittsburgh airport on Friday, July 25. There will be a nominal charge each way per person for this service.

A complete pricing table and registration form is provided immediately following this announcement for your convenience. ■

Ages	18 & up	***13-17
Breakfast	\$11.00	\$10.00
Lunch	13.00	12.00
Dinner	16.00	15.00
Total, three meals	\$40.00	\$37.00
Lodging (per night)		
dbl occ (LLC or APTS)	\$45.00	\$40.00
single occ (LLC)	\$80.00	n/a
PKG: 7 nights, 18 meals		
dbl occ (LLC or APTS)	\$445*	\$410*
single occ (LLC)	\$655*	n/a

*If no breakfasts, deduct—\$40

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

NOTE: A Convention Fee of \$15.00 per person, regardless of age, length of stay, or lodging and meal arrangements, will be added to your invoice to help offset convention expenses unrelated to lodging and meals.

General Convention Registration

330 Jasmine Road—Casselberry, FL 32707

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

	Brkfst	Lunch	Dinner	Bed
Friday, July 18, 2025				
Saturday, 19th				
Sunday, 20th				
Monday, 21st				
Tuesday, 22nd				
Wednesday, 23rd				
Thursday, 24th				

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

Check: ☐ double occupancy ☐ single occupancy
☐ interested in APTS

Names and ecclesia name (age if under 18)

Address:

Saturday, July 19

Chairman: O. B. Elbert, *Los Angeles CA*

9:30 Morning Devotions

9:45 Orientation by College

10:00 **Welcome Address**

Arbur Fernets
Vernon BC

10:45 Intermission

11:15 Discourse

Tom Ruggirello
Chicago IL

12:00 Close of Morning Session

Chairman: Russell Marten, *Puget Sound WA*

2:00 Discourse

Samuel Stalder
Bruchhausen Germany

2:45 Intermission

3:15 Discourse

Len Griehs
Phoenix AZ

4:00 Intermission

4:30 Discourse

Rick Suraci
New Haven CT

5:15 Close of Afternoon Session

7:00 **Symposium: Foes of the New Creation**

The World: Dan Wojcik, *Portland OR*

The Flesh: Michael Costelli, *New Orleans LA*

The Devil: Tim Malinowski, *Grand Rapids MI*

8:15 Songs in the Night

Sunday, July 20

Chairman: Peter Mora, *Los Angeles CA*

9:30 Morning Devotions

9:45 Discourse

Regis Liberda
Soultz France

10:30 Intermission

11:15 **Theme Discourse—I Peter 1:22**

“Love Out of a Pure Heart”

Stefan Thieme
Ludwigshafen Germany

12:00 Close of Morning Session

Chairman: Jon Kienast, *Berean Detroit MI*

2:00 Praise and Testimony

John Hummel
Metropolitan Detroit MI

2:45 Intermission

3:15 Discourse

John Bivol
Chicago IL

4:00 Intermission

4:15 **Panel Discussion: “Life in the Earthly
Kingdom”**

Robert Goodman, Moderator, *Orlando FL*

Ed Heidelberg, *Berean Detroit MI*

Brian Montague, *Highland Park NY*

5:15 Close of Afternoon Session

7:00 **Vesper/Discourse: “Fearfully and
Wonderfully Made”**

O. B. Elbert, *Los Angeles CA*

8:15 Songs in the Night

Monday, July 21

Chairman: Ernie Kuenzli, *Orlando FL*

9:30 Morning Devotions

9:45 Discourse

J. Slavich
Orlando FL

10:30 Intermission

11:15 Discourse

Homer Montague
Highland Park NY

12:00 Close of Morning Session

Chairman: Michael Shilling, *Washington DC*

2:00 Discourse

Austin Williams
Highland Park NY

2:45 Intermission

3:15 Praise and Testimony

Mark Allard
San Luis Obispo CA

4:00 Intermission

4:30 Discourse

Matt Kerry
Columbus OH

5:15 Close of Afternoon Session

7:00 **Dialogue: I Timothy 4:16 “Take Heed
to Thyself and to the Doctrine”**

Kome Ajise, *Sacramento CA*
David Stein, *Allentown PA*

8:00 Songs in the Night

8:15 Elders' Meeting

Tuesday, July 22

Chairman: Richard Doctor, *Chicago IL*

9:30 Morning Devotions

9:45 **Baptismal Discourse** Ernie Kuenzli
Orlando FL

10:30 Intermission

11:00 **Immersion Service** George Balko
West Newton PA

12:00 Close of Morning Session

Chairman: Byron Keith, *Seattle WA*

2:00 Praise and Testimony Ninan Andrews
Bellevue WA

2:45 Intermission

3:15 **Dialogue: I Corinthians 4:2 “Stewards
Must Be Faithful”**

Michael Balko
Orlando FL
Byron Keith
Seattle WA

4:15 Intermission

4:30 Discourse Jonathan Benson
Orlando FL

5:15 Close of Afternoon Session

Wednesday, July 23

Chairman: Stephen Jeuck, *Orlando FL*

9:30 Morning Devotions

9:45 Convention Business Meeting

11:00 Short Recess

11:15 Convention Business Continues

12:00 Close of Morning Session

Chairman: Len Griehs, *Phoenix AZ*

2:00 Discourse John Mottie
Greenfield OH

2:45 Intermission

3:15 Praise and Testimony David Wittbrodt
Metropolitan Detroit MI

4:00 Intermission

4:30 **Discourse: I Corinthians 14:26**
(*Phillips Translation*)
“Orderly Worship”
Timothy Krupa
Seattle WA

5:15 Close of Afternoon Session

7:00 Vesper Service

7:45 Songs in the Night

Thursday, July 24

Chairman: John Krasonic, *West Newton PA*

9:30 Morning Devotions

9:45 Praise and Testimony Randy Shahan
New York NY

10:30 Intermission

11:00 **Dialogue: Acts 15 “The Jerusalem
Conference”**
Richard Doctor, *Chicago IL*
David Rice, *San Diego CA*

12:00 Close of Morning Session

Chairman: Tim Malinowski, *Grand Rapids MI*

2:00 Discourse Mark Davis
Los Angeles CA

2:45 Intermission

3:15 Discourse William Dutka
Metropolitan Detroit MI

4:00 Intermission

4:30 **Closing Discourse** Todd Alexander
Columbus OH

5:15 Close of Afternoon Session

7:00 Melodies of Praise

“God Be With You ‘Til We Meet Again”