

## When No One Would Survive

*“If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.”*

—*Matthew 24:22, New International Version*

**ONE OF THE IMPORTANT** signs of our Lord Jesus’ presence is the development of nuclear bombs that have the capability of annihilating all life upon earth many times over. Work on applying the energy holding chemical atoms together began after World War I, which war ended with an armistice in 1918.

This development became more feverish when World War II started, but only the United States of America was successful in developing, testing, and using a nuclear bomb. Such bombs were dropped on the Japanese cities, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in 1945, and were influential in bringing an end to World War II.

It was then that Albert Einstein said, “The annihilation of all life upon earth has now become a technical possibility.”

### USA, SUPERPOWER

For a while the USA was the only nation possessing the capability of manufacturing such weapons. This did not last long. The newly formed United Nations in 1946 formulated disarmament plans and set up a UN Atomic Commission to make proposals for the peaceful use of atomic energy and for the elimination of weapons of mass destruction.

As the emerging cold war divided the Western nations and the Communist countries, the Commission in 1948 reported an impasse in creating an international agency to control all potentially dangerous atomic power. The situation became more acute when, in 1949, the Soviet Union became the second nuclear power in the world. Great Britain became the third in 1952, France the fourth in 1960, the People’s Republic of China the fifth in 1969, and India the sixth in 1974. Today it is estimated that there are 44 countries that have some degree of nuclear capability.

## THE COLD WAR

The “Cold War,” that began after World War II, was a term used to describe the shifting struggle for power between the Western nations and the Communist bloc of countries. After the cease-fire of World War II, Russia began an expansionist program, taking over countries in Europe such as East Germany, Poland, Austria, Hungary, Romania, Czechoslovakia and the smaller countries of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. Likewise Yugoslavia and Bulgaria became a part of the Communist bloc.

Expansions in Asia resulted in resistance by the West and costly wars being fought—the Korean War and the Vietnamese War. In particular, Africa was ripe for Communist picking and skirmishes occurred all over the continent. It is noteworthy that nuclear weapons were not employed in any of these shooting wars, even though an arms race had begun by the two superpowers, the USA and USSR.

Both nations stockpiled huge quantities of nuclear weapons and had increased the firepower of the bomb manifold times with the advent of the hydrogen bomb. Advances continued and today the firepower of these bombs is measured in megatons. One megaton is equal to one million tons of TNT. In World War II days the blockbuster bomb had a striking force of one ton of TNT. How can we visualize a bomb that has the equivalency of millions of tons of TNT?

## COMPLETE DEVASTATION

Although actual figures have never been published (and are kept secret by both nations), it is generally supposed that the United States has nuclear bombs equivalent to one hundred trillion tons of TNT and the Soviet Union has the equivalent of sixty trillion tons. These figures boggle the mind and the imagination.

If we could properly comprehend (as Einstein at the beginning was able to comprehend), we would be frightened at the contemplation of what would happen if the explosive power that these two nations have stockpiled was ever used in an all-out war. These materials far exceed the power necessary to destroy all life upon earth.

## DISARMAMENT PROPOSALS

During this time of fierce competition for supremacy by the two superpowers, people became aware more and more of the possibility of quick execution of all life upon earth. This was the concern in the late 1940's of many of the scientists who worked on the bomb. Their efforts and the UN efforts to ban nuclear weapons met with failure. When Stalin died in 1953 there was hope again, as Soviet policy relaxed, of working toward such a ban; but this, too, did not last long. In 1957 the Soviets launched their Sputnik, and demonstrated superior technology to that achieved by the USA. Both were working on ballistic missiles to deliver powerful warheads against specific targets. Both Khrushchev (successor to Stalin) and John Dulles (Secretary of State, USA) grimly threatened massive retaliation for any aggression by the other.

The original Commission formed by the UN in 1945 to promote disarmament of nuclear weapons did not succeed. A subcommittee was formed after test explosions were made by the USA on the hydrogen bomb in 1952 and by the USSR in 1953. The need for negotiations on disarmament took on a new urgency. The Committee included representatives from the USA and the USSR, plus those from Canada, Great Britain and France. The Committee met intermittently from 1954 to 1957, but instead of succeeding in their mission, more distrust emerged from this endeavor.

The hope of working towards disarmament received a severe blow in 1961 as the Soviet Union resumed testing of nuclear weapons. The only deterrent to the arms race was the use of satellites to spy on one another, and the delivery of rockets and war heads for missiles erected by the Soviets in Cuba brought about a tense confrontation between the two superpowers, USA and USSR, in 1962. The arms race resumed and people learned how to live in fear.

## ARMS LIMITATIONS

Meanwhile, the committee formed in 1953 was restructured several times, and from 1972 to 1974 opened talks on Strategic Arms Limitation (SALT I). The intent of SALT I was to stop the escalation and multiplication of arms and weapons that would be used specifically to carry nuclear warheads. For example, the treaty limited the United States to 1,054 land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM's) and the

Soviet Union to 1,607. Both countries equaled or exceeded these limitations. The treaty also said that the U.S. could increase its submarine missile total from 656 to 710, and the U.S.S.R. from 740 to 950, if they retired one land-based missile for every additional submarine missile. The Soviet Union exercised this option; the United States did not. But since SALT I limited the number of missiles delivering a single nuclear warhead, both sides proceeded to develop a missile carrying multiple warheads, each warhead capable of going to a separate target; and this, of course, made the treaty meaningless.

SALT II talks followed and added limitations in delivery systems for nuclear warheads such as ICBM's and heavy bomber planes. The distrust that the two super powers had toward each other severely limited disarmament of any kind.

## FREE ELECTIONS

Then political changes began to take place in Russia. The new Prime Minister, Gorbachev, introduced *glasnost* to the people, intending to wipe out hate toward others and to develop good feelings toward fellow countrymen and outsiders. Revolutionary ideas began to emerge in the Communist bloc of countries. Strong feelings opposing Communism were developing in Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia. Such feelings, when they emerged before, were quickly subdued by Red Army tanks and soldiers. Somehow Poland's Solidarity movement under Lech Walesa survived and free elections held June 4, 1989 removed the Communists from power in that country. Other Communist bloc countries followed, having free elections as tabulated below:

<b><u>COUNTRY</u></b>	<b><u>YEAR</u></b>
Hungary	1990
Czechoslovakia	1990
East Germany	1990
Russia	1991

## RUSSIA'S ROLE TODAY

These changes from Communism to democratic forms of government seemed to spell the end of the struggle for nuclear weapon supremacy. However, the stockpiles of weapons accumulated over the last sixty years

remain in storage. There has been less fear of nuclear warfare by men because of the political change in Russia, and the economic problems that have plagued Russia since the change. We know, however, that Russia continues as an important player in this suicidal game of nuclear arms. A recent news release demonstrates this quite well. An article in the April 21st "*Newark Star Ledger*" said under the caption, "*Russia's lower house to consider nuclear arms test ban treaty*" The article continues:

"ASSOCIATED PRESS MOSCOW—The Russian parliament's lower house takes up the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty today, just a week after it broke a year-long nuclear arms deadlock by ratifying the START II Treaty.

"The hearing in the State Duma, the lower house, is to be a closed session—a frequent move when issues involving classified information are discussed. Defense Minister Igor Sergeev, Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov and Nuclear Power Minister Yevgeny Adamov were expected to give reports at the hearing.

"Dmitry Rogozin, chief of the chambers' international affairs committee, predicted earlier this week that the treaty would receive overwhelming support.

"Even the Communists, who opposed START II, are expected to join in voting for the test ban treaty.

"The Interfax news agency reported yesterday that a majority of the Communists in the Duma would approve the treaty if an amendment is included to delay release of the ratification document until China and the United States ratify it.

"That amendment, if passed, apparently would be only a symbolic statement. The treaty will not go into effect unless it is ratified by all 44 countries considered to have some degree of nuclear capability.

"Besides the United States and China, other holdouts include Egypt, Pakistan, India and North Korea.

"The U.S. Senate rejected the treaty last year, with opponents arguing that it would undermine the country's weapons program and that compliance by other countries could not be assured.

"Russia strongly criticized the vote, although at that time it had not ratified the pact. But under newly elected President Vladimir

Putin\* Russia appears to be trying to seize the initiative in pushing arms control issues.

*\* Putin, at his recent inauguration, said that he would seek to make Russia a first-class power again.*

“The ratification of START II, which was completed on Wednesday with approval by the upper house, ended years of Russia obstructing the treaty and bounces the issue back to the United States, where the Senate must approve amendments worked out by U.S. and Russian negotiators after the Senate ratified the pact in 1996.

“START II ratification also cleared the way for talks to begin on further arms reductions under a proposed START III.

“Ivanov, the foreign minister, is to leave for the United States on Sunday for meetings on arms control issues, including the tense disagreement between Washington and Moscow over the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.”

It is evident that Russia, with its stockpile of nuclear weapons, continues as an important player in the nuclear arms test ban and reduction treaties. At least we have progressed from SALT (Strategic Arms Limitation) which tried to place a limit on the increase for the stockpile, to START (Strategic Arms Reduction) which starts reducing the pile. But there has been no agreement reached yet.

Will any nuclear bombs be dropped again? On this question, no one has any certain knowledge.

We do know that those days (living with the threat of utter annihilation) will be shortened. Will this be brought about by the success of START II or START III? Mistrust and deception are the likely cause for failure of this approach. Will the shortening of the days come about because of the realization of the awful consequences of nuclear arms warfare, so that intelligent men will never employ such weapons? It only takes one demented person who has access to such firepower to set off that kind of warfare.

## FOR THE ELECT'S SAKE

So then, what is meant by our Lord's words, “But for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened”? What is involved is the interpretation of the Greek word *dia*, which in this case has been translated ‘for the sake

of.’ This Greek word is a preposition, and has been translated ‘for the sake of’ forty-five times in the New Testament, ‘because of’ twenty-nine times, ‘by’ two hundred forty-five times, and ‘for’ fifty-eight times. The predominant translation of this preposition is ‘by.’

When Jesus spoke these words in Aramaic, most likely he had in mind ‘by,’ saying, “But by the elect those days shall be shortened.” This would be in harmony with God’s purpose in selecting this “people for his name” (Acts 15:14), who also are called “the elect,” or “chosen,” and who, during the Gospel Age are being selected by God to be joint-heirs with Jesus and to live and reign with him a thousand years.—Rev. 20:4

We believe that these words of Jesus are not expressing that the days are to be shortened ‘on behalf of’ the elect. Rather, it is because the kingdom of Christ will take over in the affairs of men, putting an end to a possible disastrous and devastating war using these indescribably potent nuclear weapons. Our Lord’s words, then, are simply stated as saying “but by [or because of] the elect those days shall be shortened.” It is because the elect class (the church), pictured as the bride of Christ, “hath made herself ready.”—Rev. 19:7

Pictorially, the Book of Revelation appears to show the following sequence of events:

1. The destruction of Babylon (false religion)—Rev. 18:21
2. The marriage of the Lamb—Rev. 19:7
3. The going forth of the Christ (Jesus and the glorified church) to conquer the forces of evil—Rev. 19:11-15
4. The conquest and destruction of the beast and the false prophet—Rev. 19:19-21
5. The binding of Satan—Rev. 20:1-3

It is through the fulfillment of these symbolic events that the ‘days are shortened.’

As we contemplate God’s wonderful plan we can join the Psalmist David, and say with him, “Many, O Lord my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.”—Ps. 40:5

Likewise, we can echo the beautiful expressions of the Apostle Paul who has garnered the sentiments of several Old Testament tributes to God, saying, “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.”—Rom. 11:33-36

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## The Source of Life

***Key Verse: “For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.”***  
—***Colossians 1:19, 20***

***Selected Scripture:***  
***Colossians 1:15-28***

**THE APOSTLE PAUL SAYS** Jesus was the only direct creation of God. While he was the firstborn of every creature, Paul tells us he was also the image of the invisible God and that all things in heaven and earth were created by him, both visible and invisible. That our Lord existed with the Father in an exalted nature and condition before the beginning of Creation is clearly stated in the Scriptures. (Prov. 8:22) After God created this first being of his direct creation, they worked together in creating all things in heaven and earth. After man’s creation, God rested.

In Psalm 89:27, the psalmist refers to Jesus as Jehovah’s “firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth.” We learn that Jesus was destined to have all preeminence, and after fulfilling God’s will in becoming a ransom for all mankind he was rewarded as written: God “hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body.” (Eph. 1:22,23) God has entrusted all his Divine plan to Christ for bringing peace and order throughout his domain.

The apostle tells us we have been redeemed through the blood of Christ and “delivered ... from the power of [Satan’s dominion of] darkness ... into the kingdom of his [God’s] dear Son.” (Col. 1:13) It was by the shedding of his precious blood on the cross as the ransom sacrifice to atone for father Adam’s transgression that our Lord made atonement for the sins of the world. First, however, Jesus, as the High Priest, entered the true tabernacle in heaven to present the ransom price to God, making satisfaction for all who would follow in his steps.—Heb. 9:24

‘For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell.’ Here, we learn that Jesus should have complete authority over all things, both in heaven and earth. The Scriptures frequently speak of the church as being ‘in Christ,’ giving the thought of membership in his body. The word Christ signifies ‘anointed,’ and all who will be of the Royal Priesthood will be anointed with the Holy Spirit. As the anointing of the kings and priests in Israel was the Divine evidence that they were accepted to office, so it was with our Lord Jesus. The Apostle Peter, delivering a sermon in the house of Cornelius, said, “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost [Spirit] and with power.” (Acts 10:38) He was set apart to be the great antitypical King and Priest “after the order of Melchizedek” (Ps. 110:4), in the thousand-year kingdom of Christ. He was not to be in the Levitical priesthood after the order of Aaron.—Heb. 7:11

The holy oil poured upon Aaron’s head illustrates the anointing of our Lord at the time of his consecration. (Ps. 133:2) The oil ran down to the very skirts of Aaron’s garments, thus typifying the anointing of the body of Christ, which is the church. This descent of the Holy Spirit upon the church was manifested at Pentecost. Paul said this was “Christ in you, the hope of glory.” (Col. 1:27) Since the word Christ means anointed, I John 2:27 reveals that “the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you.”

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## The Fullness of Life

***Key Verse: “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.”***  
—Colossians 2:6, 7

***Selected Scripture:***  
***Colossians 2:6-19***

**THE CONTEXT FROM** which our text is taken shows that the Apostle Paul is contrasting various hopes with the hope of the Gospel. These other hopes might establish a person in some different kind of faith and course in life. Paul, however, is addressing those who believe that God has sent his Son into the world to be the Redeemer of the race of Adam and to deliver mankind from the power of sin and death and into the fullness of a new life. All these who are in Christ Jesus believe this is “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”—Jude 3

Paul urged those to whom he wrote, to continue in this faith, and not to try combining earthly philosophy with this heavenly message. They had received Christ, “In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge,” and now he admonishes them, “Lest any man should beguile you with enticing words.” (Col. 2:2-4) They were not for one moment to think any human teaching could be mixed with the Divine message; for any other doctrine would serve only to confuse the heavenly message in the minds of the hearers.

Having stated the matter in this way, the apostle then uses a forceful illustration to show how we are to progress in Christ. Turning from the figure of a man walking in Christ, Paul gives us the picture of a tree, the root of which goes downward and the trunk of which reaches upward, to obtain that nourishment which will give it strength and stability. A tree that is well rooted in the earth is hard to uproot. The only way to retain our spiritual life is to continue to root ourselves in the heavenly soil—the promises of God—and to remain there.

The Scriptures promise that God purposed to have a seed of Abraham through whom a blessing would come to all the families of the earth. We have learned that not only Christ Jesus, the Head, but also the church, are to be the seed of Abraham, and share in the same faith, the same promise made to Abraham. (Gal. 3:27-29) Each individual called has the opportunity of exercising his faith, and learning more about the Divine will. He is being built up as a member of the body of Christ, and is to grow into fullness of life. The growth must not stop there; fruit must be borne. How careful we should be that our standards of judgment and our estimates of character are fashioned after the pattern of the Master. Let us judge ourselves rigidly along these lines in order that we may indeed become like our Lord and win his final approval.

The apostle urges that we become established in the faith. This term refers to “the faith once delivered unto the saints.” (Jude 3) Satan will attempt to divert our minds into other channels, to draw our attention to some new thing. The Lord will not accept little undeveloped sprouts for the kingdom; he wants those that have grown and matured—strong, sturdy “trees of righteousness.” (Isa. 61:3) Peter advised us, “make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”—II Peter 1:10,11

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## The Way of Life

**Key Verse:**  
*“Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.”*

—*Colossians 3:17*

**Selected Scripture:**  
*Colossians 3:1-3, 5-17*

**EACH ONE WHO PROFESSES** to be a Christian speaks and acts in the name of the Lord Jesus. We should, therefore, endeavor to keep this fact continually before our minds, to the intent that our actions and words may properly represent our Lord and honor the name which he has permitted us to bear.

The Apostle Paul tells us we are “ambassadors for Christ,” “who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament [Covenant].” (II Cor. 3:6; 5:20) If it is an honorable matter for an ambassador to represent one great nation of earth, how much more honorable it is for one to represent the heavenly kingdom and its King of kings. Keeping this thought in mind will be of great assistance in the development of the new nature; and in aiding the transforming power of battling the besetting tendencies of the old nature!

“Our citizenship is in heaven,” says the Apostle. (Phil. 3:20, *New International Version*) “They are not of this world, even as I am not of this world,” says our Master, Jesus. (John 17:16) While we are still living in this world among aliens and strangers we are not of it. We have transferred our allegiance and citizenship to the heavenly kingdom, set free through the merit of him who loved us and bought us with his precious blood. (I Pet. 1:18,19) Let us keep in mind the apostle’s words, “Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.”—Col. 3:17

Another scriptural figure represents us as the members (of the body) of Christ (I Cor. 12:27), under our Lord as our Head, “because in this world we are like him.” (I John 4:17, *NIV*) When Jesus was here in the flesh he suffered the just for the unjust, that he might bring men to God. When the prophets spoke beforehand of “the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow” (I Pet. 1:11), those sufferings included not only

those of Christ, the Head, but also the ones to be endured by the members of his body. We should marvel not ... if the world hate us for we know that the world hated him before it hated us.—John 15:18; I John 3:13

Those with a hearing ear and enjoying the Lord's great plan are called to be joint-heirs with him in his kingdom. The faithful are to be changed from a human to a spirit nature in a resurrection like that of our great Head, and to a new way of life. All these are called upon to demonstrate their loyalty by walking in the Master's footsteps. Our Lord does not expect absolute perfection from us, but he does expect us to do all in our power to glorify him in our bodies and our spirits which are his.

We are, as God's chosen people, to "clothe [ourselves] with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity."—Col. 3:12-14, *NIV*

Deuteronomy 6:4,5, expresses the righteous way of life a Christian is expected to follow. It reads: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might."

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## The Grace of Life

**Key Verse:** “*That the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.*”  
—*Philemon 6*

**Selected Scripture:**  
*Philemon 4-21*

**THE EPISTLE OF PAUL** to Philemon—his close friend—concerns Onesimus, who had formerly been Philemon’s slave, but had run away from his Christian owner. Onesimus, having fled to Rome, met Paul while the apostle was being held prisoner there, and was converted by Paul to Christianity. Although Onesimus heard of Christianity in the home of Philemon, he had not become a consecrated believer until he visited Paul in Rome.

Slavery was freely practiced in the days of the Apostle Paul. It is estimated that throughout the Roman empire the number of the enslaved was very large compared to those that were free. In any case, Paul knew that such social differences should not interfere with Christian relationships and wrote, “There is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.”—Col. 3:11

Paul reasons that Onesimus should now be treated by his master, not as a slave, but as a brother in Christ. Paul’s persuasive letter to Philemon was an effort to mediate between the two, and on this basis to negotiate a resolution for this grave situation.

Paul speaks highly of Philemon’s faith and love: “I always thank my God as I remember you in my prayers, because I hear about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints. I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ. Your love has given me great joy and encouragement, because you, brother, have refreshed the hearts of the saints.”—Philemon 4-7, *New International Version*

Paul appealed to Philemon on behalf of Onesimus—speaking as an aged man and also as a prisoner of Jesus Christ—whom he said was his own son in Christ. (vs. 10) The apostle said, “I know you have found him

use less in the past but he is going to be useful now, to both of us. I am sending him back to you: will you receive him as my son, part of me? I should have dearly loved to have kept him with me: he could have done what you would have done—looked after me here in prison for the Gospel’s sake. But I would do nothing without consulting you first, for if you have a favour to give me, let it be spontaneous and not forced from you by circumstances.” (vss. 11-14, *Phillips*) Paul continues, “Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back for good—no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a man and as a brother in the Lord.

“So if you consider me a partner, welcome him as you would welcome me. If he has done you any wrong or owes you anything, charge it to me ... I will pay it back—not to mention that you owe your very self. I do wish, brother, that I may have some benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. Confident of your obedience, I write to you, knowing that you will do even more than I ask. And one thing more: Prepare a guest room for me, because I hope to be restored to you in answer to your prayers. ... The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.”—vss. 15-25, *NIV*

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## The “Great Salvation”

**IN THIS CHAPTER** the apostle reminds us of how surpassingly great is the offer of salvation which the Lord has made to the church, and of how important it is that we listen very earnestly, and obey every condition attached to this offer; that we should hold fast to these truths, for our very life depends upon thus giving heed. Paul also reveals that the redemption of the fallen race involved the exaltation of God’s only begotten Son, and that first he should partake of the human nature, becoming acquainted with the troubles and sickness of fallen man. By his own death he provided the ransom, and in the course of these experiences, was trained for the highest possible position in the universe—at the right hand of the throne of God. The chapter closes by revealing our Lord’s sympathetic understanding of our frailties, which should cause us to lift up our hearts in thanksgiving that we are accounted worthy to be associated with him in his work, both now and in the future.

### CHAPTER 2

**VERSE 1** “Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.”

This refers us to the preceding chapter in which evidence is presented that Christ is now highly exalted above all angels, therefore speaks with the highest authority and from the standpoint of complete experience—that when he speaks it is not a light matter which we can afford to ignore or forget. We are given a similar thought in Proverbs 4:13, which reads: “Take fast hold of instruction; let her not go: keep her; for she is thy life.”

Our interest ought to be increased and intensified as we appreciate more fully the dignity and high authority of Christ, the One who has spoken to us in these last days. For the children of God, ‘taking heed’ should be considered a ‘must.’

Time and events are passing. We cannot stand still. If we are to go forward we must give particular attention to the messages of our Lord lest, while our attention is on other things, his life-giving instructions be allowed to ‘slip away’ from us and we would thus be without their helpful

and guiding influence. Despite the pulling of our natural inclinations and of other influences, we must hold our minds with firmness and determination toward the Word of God, the truth.

It is necessary that we continue to read and study the things which we know to be the truth, as well as keep them fresh and straight in our minds, for we are ‘leaky vessels.’ The whole thought of this verse is that our spiritual life depends upon our heeding the Master’s word, and we cannot afford to treat it lightly or ignore it. Taking heed is vital to our very existence!

**VERSE 2** “For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward.”

These ‘angels’ seem to be those used by God in connection with the Law Covenant which, Paul explains, was “ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.” (Gal. 3:19) The Law Covenant was strictly enforced—the word ‘spoken by angels was stedfast,’ that is, basic or binding.

The Greek word translated ‘transgression’ means ‘to walk along side of’ rather than ‘in the path marked out,’ thus suggesting a possible show of righteousness while actually overstepping the Law’s requirements.

The word ‘disobedience’ is from the Greek word *parakoe*. It is used three times in the New Testament. It means ‘a mishearing.’ In *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott* the interlinear word-for-word translation renders it as ‘imperfect hearing.’ Those who disobeyed the Law Covenant received a ‘just’ punishment—justice was the basis of this covenant.

**VERSE 3** “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him.”

This ‘great salvation’ is the most wonderful offer ever made to any being—angel or man. How can we ‘escape,’ that is, how can we keep from suffering loss if we ‘neglect’ to give heed to the terms and conditions upon which we may hope to attain such a glorious reward? It is a priceless jewel, and how tragic that anyone should let it slip away from him simply through neglect!

Let us endeavor to maintain our love for the truth, the revealed will of God, by going over its various features continuously. To fail in this is to neglect that which the Lord has provided as a means whereby we may

attain the great salvation. In this verse it is clearly indicated that “the High Calling of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:14), the “heavenly calling” (Heb. 3:1), had not previously been offered to God’s people. (See: Hebrews 10:19,20; John 3:13,25-31; II Corinthians 6:2; Matthew 11:11; Acts 2:29-36; John 14:2) God’s dealings with the natural seed of Abraham were designed to prepare them for this special call. But when Jesus came to them (‘his own’), very few received him (John 1:11), so the call went to the Gentiles.

This special invitation, or ‘High Calling,’ was so important that the Heavenly Father selected his beloved Son as the one to introduce it, the one who was to be the ‘captain’ of those who would strive to attain ‘so great salvation.’

First among those to hear the Gospel call were the apostles and disciples of Jesus. These were eyewitnesses of his miracles, and heard personally his gracious words of instruction pertaining to the “mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt. 13:11) John writes of this, saying: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life, ... declare we unto you.” (I John 1:1-3) The Apostle Peter confirms this, saying: “We have not followed cunningly devised fables, ... but were eyewitnesses of his majesty.”—II Pet. 1:16

**VERSE 4** “God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to his own will.”

In support of the human mouthpieces who, in the beginning of the age, bore witness of Jesus, and of the ‘great salvation’ which began to be spoken by him, was God himself, the Heavenly Father. His testimony was given by the display of his power as manifested in the many miracles performed by Jesus, and in the gift of the Holy Spirit which came upon the waiting disciples at Pentecost. As one miracle followed another, it became a progressive assembly of evidence increasing in weight and importance. What a wonderful introduction this was to our High Calling! What a vast assembly of Divine agencies was used to bring this glorious opportunity to our attention!

**VERSE 5** “For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak.”

This text has been used as an indirect proof that the world before the Flood was under the administration of angels. That world was indeed governed by angels, as other scriptures show. (Genesis 6:4; I Peter 3:19,20; II Peter 2:4,5; Jude 6) However, the apostle's use of the word 'for' suggests that he is referring back to verse 2, where the administration of the Law Covenant is mentioned, in which the angels had an important part.

Whether we think of the attempt of the angels to govern the antediluvian world, or of their service in connection with the administration of the Law Covenant, the lesson the apostle is emphasizing here is equally apparent; for there was a failure in both cases. Now we are assured that no such failure will occur in connection with the governmental arrangements of the world to come. Christ will then be the King, and associated with him will be those who, as his joint-heirs, have attained the 'great salvation' so that they "live" and "reign" with him.—II Tim. 2:11,12

**VERSE 6** "But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the Son of man, that thou visitest him?"

David is the 'one' who testified, and the 'certain place' is Psalm 8:3-8. This question is the inevitable result of meditation upon the immensity of creation in comparison to the puny efforts and the nothingness of man. The vast forces and distances of the universe should humble us. The Creator, who made this vast system of worlds, has provided a balance of forces that enables man to live and be happy, providing him with abundance. Surely our gratitude should lead us to exercise supreme confidence and trust in such a Creator, and to consider it a great privilege to be deemed worthy to serve him.

The Greek word translated 'visitest' in this text means 'to inspect and select;' and, by extension, 'to go to see in order to relieve.' Paul's use of the text in this connection would indicate that the chief 'visit' referred to prophetically by the psalmist is the coming of God's beloved Son to the earth—first, to redeem the fallen race—and then, to restore those who accept this provision of Divine grace. Thus God visits the human race representatively in the person of his Son.

Many are remembered and visited by God in other ways also, such as in the sunshine and rain; and by means of all the bountiful blessings

which are daily showered upon us. (Ps. 116:12) We might think of God's visits as being like those of a physician visiting the sick, and the purpose of this is that many may ultimately be cured of all ills and afflictions. It is this that will be accomplished by Jesus.

**VERSE 7** "Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands."

The thought here is, a little 'less' than the angels, not 'a little while inferior,' as some have suggested in their effort to prove that God's design for man is that he shall ultimately be exalted to the spirit nature. If we are to understand God's plan it is essential to keep this distinction of natures in mind. Man is a human being, an earthly creature, created by God to inhabit the earth. Angels are on a higher plane of life, and were created so. It is not God's plan for men to become angels.

The glory refers to Adam, the progenitor of the human race as originally created by God. His glory was that of perfect manhood, in the image of God. The Apostle Paul refers to it as a 'terrestrial' glory. (I Cor. 15:40) Man was also created to be a king—the king of earth. He was given dominion over the lower animals. Thus he was given honor as well as glory. This was the "first dominion" referred to in Micah 4:8, and "the kingdom prepared ... from the foundation of the world," mentioned by Jesus.—Matt. 25:34

**VERSE 8** "Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him."

Alas, man lost his dominion, glory and honor. Now we behold him in misery and distress as a result of his own willfulness and disobedience. Despite man's pride and boastfulness, he is not able to deliver himself from the result of his sin; and now the human race is threatened with complete destruction.

**VERSE 9** "But 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."

Here the apostle clearly indicates the Divine purpose to restore man's original dominion of earth. We do not see this accomplished, but we see the outworking of this Divine purpose in the coming of Jesus to redeem

the fallen race—‘we see Jesus.’ We see that Jesus was made the exact counterpart of father Adam, that he, like Adam, was made ‘a little lower than the angels,’ and that this was in order that he might suffer death, thus providing a corresponding price by laying down his perfect human life for the perfect man Adam, who forfeited his life. It was for this purpose that Jesus poured out his soul unto death.—Isa. 53:6,12

**VERSE 10** “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.”

It *‘became him’*; that is, it was what we should expect of an all-wise Creator, that in his plan to exalt ‘many sons’—that is, the entire church—to glory, that he should make the Captain, their Leader, the first one to attain this high position, ‘perfect through sufferings.’ Suffering and death is the path to glory for all these sons, and Jesus was no exception.

This does not imply that Jesus was imperfect by nature before he suffered and died. Rather, he was developed, trained, and perfected as our Captain by means of suffering. A young man, for example, may be a noble person, yet he could not be a physician until he was trained for that purpose. So Jesus was trained by suffering, and thus was perfected for the high offices he now occupies in the Divine arrangements. One of these is in being the Captain of our salvation.

In a very similar way all Jesus’ body members, his followers, those whom he leads to glory by inviting them to walk in his footsteps, are perfected for their position of glory with him by means of suffering and trials—trials which are seasoned with joy so that their experiences as a whole teach them to trust and love their Heavenly Father. How blessed to share these experiences with Jesus, of whom it was prophetically written, “Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?”—Ps. 56:8

**VERSES 11-13** “For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee. And again, I will put my trust in him. And again, Behold I and the children which God hath given me.”

These are the proof texts which the apostle quotes to establish the great truth of the oneness of the Christ company. Jesus’ disciples are his

‘brethren,’ and so stated in David’s prophetic reference (Ps. 22:22) to this congregation of the sanctified, that is, those who are set apart in the Divine plan as partakers of the heavenly calling.

‘And again,’ writes Paul. He then proceeds to quote another proof text, as though conscious of the scriptural rule that important matters should be established by the mouth of more than one witness. His second quotation is from Isaiah 8:18, and refers to the ‘children’ whom the Heavenly Father gave to be the associates of Jesus; thus they were his brethren. Possibly Jesus had this text in mind when, in his prayer, he said: “Thine they were, and thou gavest them me.” (John 17:6) What a loving exchange between the Father and the Son—a reward and rejoicing for both.

**VERSE 14** “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the Devil.”

These ‘children,’ those whom Jesus was not ashamed to call his ‘brethren,’ were all originally Adam’s children, therefore by nature ‘flesh and blood.’ In order for them to be partakers of the ‘great salvation’ as the brethren of the glorified Jesus, it was necessary that they be redeemed from death.

Therefore, Paul here explains the philosophy of the ransom, which involved the necessity for Jesus becoming a man, and as such, dying the “just for the unjust.” (I Pet. 3:18) Involved, also, in this is Jesus’ authority ultimately to destroy the Devil.

How does Satan have the ‘power of death’? The Greek word here rendered ‘power’ has the thought of the authority of office, and is often translated ‘dominion’ or ‘authority.’ The dominion which Satan has seized and misused has become one of death—the reign of sin and death. Paul describes him as the “god of this world.” (II Cor. 4:4) Satan has his dominion taken away, and he himself is bound at the beginning of the millennium; and at its close he is destroyed.—Rev. 20:1-3,10

**VERSE 15** “And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.”

The whole human race are subject to the bondage of death, but not all are held in bondage by the ‘fear’ of death. Who, then, are these who are

so afraid of death that they are held in bondage because of it? This seemingly refers to a class of consecrated ones who fear the suffering and sacrifice involved in their consecration and who, because of this fear, are held back from their privileges and opportunities of suffering with Christ so that they fail to qualify as members of the 'little flock' who partake of the 'great salvation.' Later, these are delivered and their robes made white in the blood of the Lamb. They are described by the Revelator as a "great multitude," which comes up through great tribulation. They will not reign with Christ, but will be servants in the antitypical, spiritual temple.—Rev. 7:9,13-16

**VERSE 16** "For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham."

The Greek word here rendered 'verily' is used only this once in the New Testament. It is the equivalent of saying, "As we all know." *James Moffatt's Bible Translation* says: "of course." It was so well known in the Early Church that Jesus, in becoming the seed of Abraham, had to first partake of flesh and blood, and not the nature of angels, that John made this a test of whether or not one's faith was of God: "Every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God."—I John 4:3

**VERSE 17** "Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people."

What depth of wisdom is in God's plan, that Jesus should share the woes and difficulties which beset men so that he might be a merciful High Priest! He is merciful because he realizes the difficulties, the weaknesses which beset his followers, and humanity in general. He was made like unto his brethren 'in all things.' This does not mean that Jesus was imperfect, or that sin was ingrained in his nature. His 'brethren' are 'New Creatures,' and Jesus was tempted in all points as these are tempted.

As a result of observation and association, however, Jesus became familiar with the trials which beset the human race in general, and particularly those who become New Creatures, yet still have to battle against the motions of sin in their flesh. This adds to his sympathy for us, gives him mercy and understanding in dealing with us as our Advocate

at the throne of grace. By the same token, as the Head of the priestly class which will deal with the world of mankind during the millennium, he will also be sympathetic, and will be glad to do everything possible to help the repentant ones of the human race back to perfection and to full at-one-ment with the Heavenly Father, the Creator.

**VERSE 18** “For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.”

Jesus suffered much agony of mind and body rather than yield to evil. Thus he was ‘tempted’ or tried, so knows how to bring to our aid the things which helped him in his times of need. These things are suggested to us through the Word, and therein we are instructed in the proper use of all the means of Divine grace made available through our merciful and loving High Priest. When we go to the Father in prayer we can be assured that the merit of his sacrifice has been applied on our behalf and we are also assured that our puny and imperfect efforts are acceptable. He is able to render aid by the power of sympathy, knowledge, and experience. For this he was fully trained.

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***Dawn Bible Students Association***

## A Shelter for God's People

*“Thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy.”*  
—*Psalm 61:3*

**BECAUSE OF THE UNCERTAINTIES** of human life, its trials and tribulations, sorrows and troubles, experienced under the reign of sin and death, mankind realize that they need shelter. Hence, all seek such shelter as may be available, or such as they can contrive. For instance, in addition to a

roof over their heads, men need shelter from financial worries, generally secured by money or real estate. They need protection from law breakers, hence the police forces of civilized lands; shelter from the forces of hostile governments provided for in armies and navies. Such arrangements as insurance companies do a great deal toward bridging over the uncertainties of life. These, as well as many other things, secure for the human being a measure of peace and safety.

When the psalmist says, “Thou hast been a shelter for me,” he is the spokesman for the consecrated people of God, the Christian church of the Gospel Age. Whatever shelter we may enjoy along natural lines, resulting from some of the foregoing human ordinances and arrangements, is attributed by Christians not to chance or good fortune, but to God’s providence for his people; for it is largely through these means that God fulfills the apostle’s assurance. We have the “promise of the life that now is”; and again, the words of the Apostle Peter: “His Divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life”—all things which are necessary so far as the present life is concerned. Peter also adds, “and godliness”; that is, all we need in order to develop that godlike character as seen in our Lord and Exemplar, Christ Jesus.—I Tim. 4:8; II Pet. 1:3

While thankful for whatever shelter we may enjoy along natural lines, we realize that the special needs of the Christian are spiritual ones, and that the Lord’s people specially need shelter as New Creatures in Christ Jesus. This is doubtless what the psalmist had in mind when, reviewing past experiences, he said, ‘Thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy.’

Many illustrations of this shelter of Christians are brought to our attention in Holy Writ. For instance, as a shelter from the great catastrophe of the Flood, which destroyed “the world of the ungodly” (II Pet. 2:5, I Pet. 3:20-22), God provided an ark for Noah and his family—a type of Christ. We are protected through Christ from the great antitypical “fire” (II Pet. 3:12), which is to cause the present evil world to pass away.

## ISRAEL'S SHELTER

As a shelter for Israel's firstborn from the destruction of the tenth plague, God provided the blood of the Passover lamb. “When I see the blood, I will pass over you.” Exodus 12:13 is a beautiful picture of the shelter from condemnation provided for the firstborn of the Gospel Age, the church of the firstborn, through the blood of Christ, our Passover Lamb.

Again, if a man had accidentally killed his fellow and was in danger of his life being taken by the next of kin (the Divine arrangement under the Mosaic Law), God provided six cities of refuge, to one of which the man slayer might flee for shelter until his case could be investigated. (Num. 35:9-29) This was a fitting picture of the refuge provided in Christ for all but willful sin against light and knowledge.—Heb. 10:26

“Other                    refuge                    have                    I                    none;  
Hangs                    my                    helpless                    soul                    on                    Thee.”

—*Hymns of Dawn*

Another typical shelter was that provided for Elijah in the cleft of the rock at Horeb. The account tells us that after being awakened and provided with some special food by the messenger of Jehovah, Elijah went in the strength of that meat forty days until he reached the mount of God. (I Kings 19:7,8) The true church, as the antitype of Elijah, reached the antitypical mount of God by the close of the ‘Times of the Gentiles,’ A.D. 1914. When ‘Michael stood up’ he began the work of overturning the old order of things in this present evil world, as the General of Jehovah.—Dan. 12:1; Rev. 11:17

The three stages of this great Time of Trouble seem to be pictured by the three exhibitions witnessed by Elijah while sheltering in the cave: the strong winds breaking in pieces the rocks; the earthquake; the fire; followed by the “still small voice.” (I Kings 19:9-12) In the antitype we

see how the winds of war have been followed by the symbolic earthquake—the great social revolution; this phase of the tribulation being helped forward by the Second World War, even more destructive than the first. This, according to Biblical prophecy, leads on to a period of general lawlessness (fire) which completes the destruction of the present order of things in church and state; to be followed by the ‘still small voice’ of truth, eventually to be heard by all during the thousand years of Messiah’s kingdom.

### THE TRUTH OUR SHELTER

In the midst of these experiences, God’s consecrated people are specially sheltered and protected by the truth, and by God’s providential care. The prophet intimates this, saying, “Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast.”—Isa. 26:20

Thus, in this dark nighttime which is settling down upon the world, when the stormy winds of strife as well as of false doctrine are becoming more and more violent, our Heavenly Father has made ample provision for his people, providing us with the whole armor of God, bringing us into the secret place of the Most High, and under the shadow of the Almighty.—Ps. 91:1

May past experiences of God’s faithfulness and care for his own give us strong consolation, and good hope for future days; for he is the same, he changes not. (Mal. 3:6) Our Redeemer, too, is similarly unchangeable, as we are exhorted to remember: “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, and for ever.”—Heb. 13:8

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## Our “Iron Gates”

*“They came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord.”  
—Acts 12:10*

**WHEN JESUS MET THE MOB** at Gethsemane, which had come out from Jerusalem to arrest him, Peter drew his sword, and in an effort to rescue Jesus from his enemies, cut off the ear of a servant of the high priest. Jesus commanded Peter to put up his sword, and then indicated that he had merely to ask

the Father and twelve legions of angels would be sent to protect and deliver him.—Matt. 26:51-53

Later, when Jesus was before Pilate, charged with claiming to be a king, this Roman governor was somewhat irritated because the Master was so uncommunicative. He asked Jesus if he did not realize the authority of his position, and what it would mean to get a favorable decision from him. But Jesus answered, “Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above.”—John 19:11

### GOD’S WILL FOR JESUS

These two statements, by which Jesus affirmed his complete confidence in his Heavenly Father’s overruling providence in his life, should be a great source of confidence to us who are following in his steps. While Jesus did not expect that his Heavenly Father would deliver him from all trouble, he had no doubt of Divine ability to do this. He knew that he was to die for the sins of the world. If he should be spared from suffering and death, how then, as he himself asked, would “the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?”—Matt. 26:54

Shortly after Jesus began his ministry, the religious rulers of Israel commenced to show their opposition. They would like to have done away with him long before they did. Jesus knew this and avoided situations which would give them their coveted opportunity. His Heavenly Father cooperated with him in this, and we may be sure that all the powers of the Roman Empire enlisted on the side of the Master’s jealous enemies

could not have touched so much as a hair of his head until the due time came.

But there was a due time in God's plan for the Redeemer to give his life for the sins of the world. Jesus knew when that time had come. He told his disciples even before he went to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover with them for the last time, that he would there be arrested and put to death. He knew that this was God's will for him.

True, twelve legions of angels were ready to protect him from harm. These were more powerful than all the legions of Rome. Pilate would have been helpless to do anything against the Master had it not been permitted by God. But Jesus knew that it was the Father's will that he should die, so he did not ask for the "twelve legions of angels" (Matt. 26:53) to protect him from his enemies. His only way of escape from trial, now that his hour had come, was through death.

## WE WALK IN HIS STEPS

As Jesus was, so are we in this world. We have covenanted to walk in his steps, to be dead with him. We know what it meant for Jesus to be crucified, and we freely use the word to describe our own experiences. As we endeavor to walk in his steps, many may wonder why we have such severe trials—why the Lord does not deliver us from "fiery furnace" (Dan. 3:6) experiences and allow us to enjoy the apparent joy and peace which seemingly fill the lives of other Christians.

There are many promises to assure us of God's ability and willingness to protect us from harm. "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High," says David, "shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." (Ps. 91:1) The Almighty is just as capable of sending those 'twelve legions' of angels to protect us as he was when Jesus was delivered into the hands of his enemies.

But with us, as with Jesus, there is a 'due time' as well as a 'due way' of deliverance. So the lesson we need to learn is simple trust in our God, and humble submission to his will. Jesus said, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me." (Matt. 26:39) Nevertheless, Jesus desired that his Heavenly Father's will be done more than he desired release from suffering. This should be our attitude in every trial, hardship, perplexity, in every disappointment, and in every faith-trying experience with which we are confronted.

## GOD'S WILL FOR PETER

Our text brings before us a marvelous providence of God in the life of the Apostle Peter. The miraculous power of God was employed through an angel to deliver the apostle from prison and from death at the hands of Herod. This deliverance was accomplished, not because it was the general plan of God at that time to protect all his consecrated people from bodily harm, but because he had further service for Peter to perform, and further lessons for him to learn.

In the beginning of the chapter we are informed that Herod “stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.” (Acts 12:1,2) No angel was sent to prevent this killing. We cannot believe that this was because James was not faithful to the Lord. It was simply that God had another way for him to ‘escape.’ God’s providential care for his people is not always manifested in the same way.

As Herod ‘stretched forth his hands’ further, Peter was caught and imprisoned. In doing this, Herod was seeking to please the Jews over whom he ruled as the representative of Caesar. It was the Passover season, and he was sufficiently acquainted with Jewish customs to realize that until these special days were over the interests of the Jews would be well taken up; so he decided to hold Peter in prison until afterwards, and then bring him forth and make a public demonstration of his killing.

Meanwhile, the church prayed. We cannot imagine that these consecrated Christians ‘demanded’ of God that he use his power to protect Peter. They, no doubt, also prayed on behalf of James, who was ‘killed with the sword.’ Jesus also prayed while in Gethsemane—“If it be possible, let this cup pass from me.” (Matt. 26:39) But in Jesus’ case it was not ‘possible,’ that is, it was not the Lord’s will for him.

Nor was it the Lord’s will that James be spared from death at the hands of Herod. But the disciples did not lose their faith. They prayed for Peter also. It was the Father’s will that Peter should also die as his Master did. Jesus had prophesied this. (John 21:18,19) But, as with Jesus, so with Peter, and so with every one of us, there is a ‘due time’ for all our experiences, and this was not the due time for Peter to finish his course in death.

Peter was “kept in prison,” we read, “but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.” (Acts 12:5) What a picture this conjures up in our minds! Peter in prison, the church outside—in the home of Mary, the mother of Mark—praying. These devoted disciples had no assurance that the hands of Herod would not reach them also, but they prayed for Peter.

## PETER’S CONFIDENCE IN GOD

Meanwhile, Peter, chained between two soldiers, was “sleeping.” (vs. 6) What an example of faith! Chained between two guards, held in prison with a threat of execution hanging over him, yet Peter slept! He had such confidence in the Lord that he was able to leave everything completely in his hands, knowing that whatever his will might be for him, it would be the best.

Peter, who was so greatly disturbed when Jesus was arrested, and who attempted to use his sword to deliver the Master from his enemies, had learned his lesson. He had learned it so completely that now, when similarly held in custody and threatened with death, he could lie down and sleep, leaving the outcome of his experience wholly with the Lord. This circumstance reminds us of David’s attitude. When his enemies were pressing hard against him, he wrote:

“Lord, how are they increased that trouble me! Many are they that rise up against me. Many there be which say of my soul, There is no help for him in God. But thou, O Lord, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head. I cried unto the Lord with my voice, and he heard me out of his holy hill. I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the Lord sustained me.”—Ps. 3:1-5

So it was also with Peter. He knew that the Lord was his shield and his salvation, so he ‘slept.’ Peter also ‘awaked’ because the Lord sustained him. An angel of the Lord appeared before him “and smote Peter on the side.” The angel raised Peter up and said to him, “Arise up quickly.”—Acts 12:7

What a startling—and at the same time, happy—awakening this must have been! When, in faith, Peter fell asleep chained between the two guards, there may have been a fleeting thought pass through his mind that possibly he would be smitten by them, awakened, and hurried to his execution; but little did he realize that he would be awakened by an angel!

He was not only awakened, but his chains also fell off, and he was bidden to arise. He was told to gird himself, put on his sandals, and follow the angel. Peter obeyed. This indicated that he was to leave the prison. But how? True, he was no longer bound by chains to his guards, but he was still locked up within the prison. How was he to escape? Would he not be apprehended by other guards, and could he hope to get through the doors of the prison to freedom on the outside?

These questions may have occurred to Peter, but the account does not record them. We only know that Peter “followed” the angel (Acts 12:9), being unaware of just what was happening. He was not sure that he was actually awake. Perhaps, thought he, I am only having a dream, or seeing a vision. But the important thing is that he ‘followed.’

Peter followed the angel of the Lord, and did exactly as he was instructed. There is a lesson in this for all of the Lord’s people when they are passing through their severe trials. As ‘ministering spirits’ they are always near to help and direct us. Happy are we if we follow their leadings!

These angels do not now speak to us audibly, nor do they appear in visible form; but they are able to overrule in our experiences in such a manner as to be a positive and directing influence in our lives. We often speak of the ‘providence’ of God. But do we realize that our ministering spirits are shaping this providence? They may not always lead in the direction of lighter burdens, or less fiery trials, but if we follow them they are sure to lead us finally to victory and glory.

#### “HIS OWN ACCORD”

Peter followed the angel “past the first and the second ward.” (vs. 10) Thus far there was no interference. Who, or what, could interfere with the angel of the Lord? Then they came to the iron gate which led to the city. This, apparently, was the last barrier, but it was a formidable one. Probably Peter was thoroughly awake by this time, and fully understood what was taking place. Did he wonder how, or by whom, that iron gate would be opened?

We do not know. The account simply tells us that the gate opened of “his own accord.” In this enlightened day of modern inventions, gates and doors are opened by means of ‘electric eyes.’ The person

approaching the door passes through a magnetic circuit, thus breaking it. This sets an electrical mechanism into motion which opens the door.

No such man-made device opened the iron gate of that Roman prison in which Peter was incarcerated. The Lord had his own ‘electric eye’ which, as the angel and Peter approached the iron gate, went into action and swung it wide open. It was a miracle, but only by a miracle could the Lord deliver his servant and make him available to render further service to his people.

Peter and the angel passed through the iron gate into freedom, and then the angel departed, leaving Peter to find his way to the home of Mary, and to his friends and brethren who were praying for him. The direct services of the angel were no longer needed, reminding us that the Lord gives us help only to the extent actually necessary. He furnishes us with our daily bread a day at a time—not for a year in advance.

After he passed the iron gate and was out of prison, the angel no longer being with him, Peter meditated on the meaning of what had happened. He came to the definite conclusion that there was no other explanation than that the Lord had sent an angel to deliver him. Fortified by this knowledge, he sought out the house of Mary, the mother of Mark. It was here that the brethren were praying for him. He knocked at the gate, attracting the attention, at first, of only a “damsel” (vs. 13)—a girl probably too young to be taking a serious interest in the prayers of the brethren.

But she recognized Peter, and quickly reported it to the others, too excited to even think of opening the gate to permit Peter to enter. When she told the brethren that Peter was out by the gate, they said to her: “Thou art mad.” (vs. 15) This does not necessarily indicate that these brethren lacked faith in the efficacy of their prayers. One of their number had already been killed by Herod. Perhaps they had concluded from this that Peter would also be killed.

Probably their prayers were more in the nature of the one offered by Jesus (Matt. 26:39), “If it be possible, let this cup pass” from Peter. The main burden of their prayers was probably that Peter be given grace and strength to meet this severe test. And how wonderfully these prayers were answered! It may have been through prayer that Peter was able to lie down and sleep while chained to the two guards.

God's providence is not always the same for all his people. James was killed by Herod, but Peter was saved from death at that time. He was saved for further service—saved to continue feeding the Lord's sheep as he had been commissioned by Jesus—saved in order that through his continued faithful ministry he might further strengthen the brethren, as Jesus had also told him he would have the special privilege of doing.

## OUR IRON GATES

We look back upon the experiences of Jesus and the apostles, noting the miraculous manner in which God dealt with and blessed them, and almost wish that we could have been there and shared in some of those thrilling episodes. Sometimes our walking with the Lord may seem void of many outstanding evidences that he is actually by our side, that his angels are encamped round about us, that every detail of our lives is being supervised by his wisdom, that we are protected by his power, and spiritually enriched by the abundance of his grace and love.

Has it ever occurred to us that it requires greater faith to trust the Lord when the outward manifestations of his keeping power are difficult to discover? Peter could always look back upon his experience of being delivered from Herod's prison as a proof of God's overruling providence in his life. It was so definite, so outstanding, that there could be no mistaking its blessed and reassuring implications! The opening of his 'iron gate' was a lasting memorial of God's power to deliver him from evil.

We all have our 'iron gates' to pass, however. And if we are following the Lord's leadings, putting our trust fully in him, our 'iron gates' may also open as we approach them—and when they do, they will seemingly open of their own accord. We do not need to force the opening of these 'gates' in an attempt to escape from trials which the Lord in his wisdom sees that we need.

## IN PLEASANT PLACES

Of Jesus it was prophetically written, "Lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage." (Ps. 16:6) The thought here is of prescribed limitations of action or experience. Jesus had a measured course in which to walk, and to be pleasing to his Heavenly Father it was necessary for him to keep within those boundaries.

So it was with Peter, and so it is with us. This is illustrated by the manner in which Peter was led out of the prison. He followed the angel who led him past the first and second wards, and then to the iron gate which opened of its own accord. Had Peter decided that he knew a better way out of that prison, and had not followed the angel, he would not have been delivered. Let us suppose that Peter knew the location of the iron gate, and realizing that the angel was leading directly to it, decided to take another route, hoping to find an exit not so firmly closed. We know what the result would have been.

That short journey from the prison dungeon, past the wards, and through the iron gate to freedom, illustrates our entire walk in the narrow way. In this 'way' our 'lines' of direction and limitations have 'fallen.' They are the 'lines' contained in our covenant by sacrifice.

We start out in our consecrated life with the determination that we want only the Lord's will to be done. The 'lines' which mark out his will are clearly traceable in his Word. We claim his promises to lead us and to give strength for every time of need. We are conscious of the fact that his 'angel' is by our side, so we have no need to fear.

Often we may wonder about the experiences which loom up before us! Is it not true that frequently when we awaken in the morning we wonder, perhaps almost fear, how we will get through certain experiences which we know we will have to face that day? They are sometimes only little things, but nevertheless they are our 'iron gates.' But, if we follow the 'angel' and do not attempt to go in some other direction which for the time may seem better to us, they will frequently open of their 'own accord' as we approach them.

If we are noting well all the little experiences of our lives, we will find that many 'iron gates' open for us every day. The Christian should be able each night to look back and praise the way the Lord has led him that day. He should be able to discern the opening of the 'iron gates' and give thanks for the abundance of the Lord's strength, wisdom, mercy and love.

In the case of Peter, the 'iron gate' stood between him and freedom. But, even more important, it also stood between him and service to the Lord and the brethren. We also have this type of 'iron gate.' No consecrated follower of the Master is contented when not doing

everything possible in the service of the Lord. But with all of us there are hindrances, 'iron gates,' that keep us back from doing as much as we would like to do.

### WHERE LINES FALL FOR US

With some, it may be family ties which the Lord in his wisdom does not deem best to change. You may try to peer beyond the 'iron gate' and think how wonderful it would be if it would only open and permit you to go out into the service of the Lord as Peter did. But evidently the Lord's 'lines' have not thus 'fallen' for you; not yet, at least.

Perhaps there is a service you can render within the confines kept closed by your 'iron gate.' Remember the case of Paul. From the time he was taken into protective custody in Jerusalem by the Romans, throughout his long and tedious experiences en route to Rome, and then for years as a prisoner in Rome, he was inside his 'iron gate.' The angel of the Lord did not lead him to freedom as was the case of Peter.

Paul found service nevertheless. He witnessed to princes and rulers, to prison guards, and to many who called on him. From behind the 'iron gate' in Rome he sent letters to the brethren to comfort and strengthen them. Whatever the 'iron gate' may be that is preventing you from serving as freely as you would like—whether it be family ties, illness, lack of opportunity, or other circumstances over which you have no control—leave the matter in the Lord's hands.

Peter did. Chained between the two guards, he fell asleep! We can 'sleep' also; that is, we can rest in the Lord, even though we may feel that we are chained and restrained. It would have done Peter no good that night to lie awake and worry about the chains which were binding him, or about the iron gate which stood between him and freedom.

When Paul and Silas were in prison in Philippi, they sang hymns. In his own way the Lord delivered them, and in connection with their incarceration the jailer received the truth. So let us endeavor to 'rest' in faith, and to rejoice in the Lord, no matter on which side of the 'iron gate' our 'lines' may have fallen.

### HOW IRON GATES OPEN FOR US

We may be striving for victory over some imperfection of the flesh—a weakness which may be keeping us bound or held back in our progress

in the narrow way. The Lord can open this 'iron gate' for us also, if and when it is his will. The lesson he wants us to learn in all these experiences is that he knows what is best for us as New Creatures in Christ Jesus. Happy are we if we learn this lesson and never try to force open our 'iron gates' by our own strength.

We might, presumably, force open an 'iron gate' which is standing between us and what we would like to do. But if we did, how could we know that it was the Lord's will? This does not mean that we should go through life in a spiritually listless manner, taking little or no interest in the Lord's providence. If we are fully consecrated to the Lord, watching and praying for his guidance and blessing, we will want to be serving him.

If an 'iron gate' is standing between us and his service, we will sincerely want to be on the other side of it, but only if it be his will. If it opens of its own accord, then we will rejoice and with diligence enter into the wider field of service thus made possible. But, if the 'gate' remains closed, we will gladly do what we can on the inside.

There is an 'iron gate' that stands between all the Lord's people and that glorious liberty of the sons of God beyond the veil. While we are this side of that 'gate' we are all bound and hindered by the flesh, and other circumstances, from doing the things that we would. But in the Lord's due time this last 'iron gate' will also open of its own accord. Then we will be truly free, and will also be in the presence of our God, where there are pleasures forevermore!

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## The Greatness of His Power

**IT IS GOOD TO THINK** about, and ponder, God's mighty power—the same power that created the universe. The Apostle Paul wrote, “[I] cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.”—Eph. 1:16-23

Although his prayer embraces all of the church during the Gospel Age, at the time Paul wrote the words of this prayer, he was located far away from his Ephesian brethren, and he expected that he might not see them again. The Ephesians had been given God's pledge that, after hearing the word of truth, they would be sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise which was the earnest, or down payment, of their spiritual inheritance. Paul asked God to grant them wisdom and understanding of the principal features of his plan, especially further enlightenment regarding the hope of their calling and of the great work which Jesus came to do.

### WE SEE GOD'S POWER

The apostle sought God's direction for them in order that they might advance in grace and knowledge of the truth, and so he prayed that they might be more closely acquainted with Jesus, their Redeemer. They had already made considerable progress in this regard under Paul's teaching, but he felt that through a greater measure and influence of God's Holy

Spirit they might explore a still unfathomed depth of knowledge in God's plan.

In verse 18 Paul points to the eye as the instrument by which we see. He says that it is with the eyes of our understanding—the eyes of our heart, our inner being—that we perceive the truth. Paul not only wished our hearts to be right, but he prayed that our understanding of the truth coming from God might be opened to our mind. What a privilege beyond measure it is for one to be made fully acquainted with the hope to which the Lord has called us! We eagerly anticipate the fulfillment of “the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the Gospel.”—Col. 1:5

What a privilege we have as God's people, to understand how gloriously rich is our Father. We do not think of God as one needing to receive a further inheritance than he now possesses, because he owns everything. What more would he need?

#### OUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE FATHER

The psalmist reveals the intimate relationship between God and the true church in Psalm 132:13, saying, “The Lord hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation.” The Prophet Malachi describes the church as being made up of the Lord's own personal jewels: “They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.” (Mal. 3:17) Speaking for God, Solomon confirms that the Lord's people are God's special treasure—the glory of his inheritance.—Eccles. 2:4-8

In Paul's prayer (Eph. 1:19-21), he expresses his desire that those of God's elect in Ephesus should be fully acquainted with their Heavenly Father's mighty power, not only on their own behalf, but also as it relates to the salvation of all mankind in the world to come. The religion they professed was one in which this mighty power of God would be manifested toward them, and would continue until they reached their final inheritance at the end of their course. In his letter to the church at Ephesus, Paul describes the exceeding greatness of God's power not only for those saints in the church of Ephesus, but he is teaching all of us who believe, according to the working of his mighty power.

The Apostle explains (I Corinthians 12:6) that there are “diversities of operations” of the Holy Spirit. Then he adds, “It is the same God” who

works in each of us. He has given each of us the Holy Spirit, not only for our own individual benefit, but to the profit of the entire body of Christ. When we consider the subject of the Holy Spirit, we are thinking of the transforming might of God's Holy power and influence—his capacity, or ability, to create or perform any work he desires within the context of his Divine plan.

## GOD'S ENERGY EMPLOYED ON OUR BEHALF

In Ephesians 1:19 and 20, Paul points to God as he exercises the working “of his [mighty] power to us-ward who believe,” and adds, this is the ‘working’ of the same “mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead.” These terms, ‘working’ and ‘wrought,’ have been translated from a Greek word from which we derive the word ‘energy.’ The power which God is exerting in us, even now in this age, is the same power or energy of the Holy Spirit which he employed in raising the Lord Jesus from the tomb. This, in turn, was followed by Jesus’ resurrection to glory at the right hand of his Father in heaven. In due time, the same Divine power will be employed in raising all the dead from the grave. It is even that same power which God employed in all his vast work of creation from the very beginning.

We call to mind when Paul, on another occasion, wrote to his brethren in the church at Thessalonica. He said that he constantly thanked the Lord that they had received the word of God which they heard from him, and they “received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.” (I Thess. 2:13) It was Divine revelation through God's Holy Spirit that convinced these brethren the message they heard from Paul was not from men, but—as it really was—God's Word. It was God's Holy Spirit, his holy power and influence, working in the lives of those whose faith was strong. Paul gave this same enlightening message to the Philippian, when he said to them: “It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”—Phil. 2:13

The Apostle Peter tells us that the prophets of old made careful search and investigation when they prophesied about the grace that would come to them. He said this was the time to which the Spirit which was in them pointed, because it foretold the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. What did he mean, ‘glories that would follow’? We believe

he spoke not only of his personal glory in the kingdom, but of all the blessed features of God's kingdom, especially the glory of restitution. He says the prophets tried to discover when and how the understanding of their prophecies would be revealed. But God told them that the matters they were speaking of were not for themselves, but for you. Peter says these very prophecies which have now been made plain to you were revealed by those who preached the Gospel to you, guided by the same Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Then he adds, "which things the angels desire to look into [understand]."—I Pet. 1:10-12

## THE MYSTERY OF GOD

When writing to the Corinthians, Paul says, "We speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: But we [Paul] speak the wisdom of God in a mystery [*"mysterion"*], even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." Paul continues: "But God hath revealed them [*"mysterion"*] unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God."—I Cor. 2:6-10

When the apostle proclaims the Divine wisdom which is hidden in a mystery, he is describing that which the eyes of other men—men of the world—have neither understood, nor even perceived. He is setting forth the value and beauty of those things which God has prepared for his people. All the world had been strangers to these features of God's plan until he revealed them to his people by his Spirit. It is not by any of our own faculties or abilities that we understand them, but solely through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, which has made them plain to us. Concerning this, the Apostle asks, "What hast thou that thou didst not receive?"—I Cor. 4:7

Continuing, Paul explains, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God." (Rom. 8:16) And then he assures us that through the Holy Spirit we may have an exact and thorough knowledge of the things of God, and, except for our relationship to God as his sons, we would remain under the same cloud of darkness as other

men—men of the world. In considering the wonderful features of God’s plan, Paul was moved to burst forth in joyful praise and acclamation: “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!”—Rom. 11:33

## GIFTS TO THE CHURCH

Paul was not alone in this work of making plain the Gospel, but he had coworkers to assist him. He points out that God has given the church gifts of “apostles; ... prophets; ... evangelists; ... pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”—Eph. 4:11-13

God has given the church these gifts of wisdom and knowledge, so that we “henceforth be no more children [immature], tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.”—vss. 14-16

Paul is saying, by speaking the truth in a spirit of love, we must grow up into Christ, who is the Head of the body. Under his control, all the 144,000 different parts of the body of Christ fit together, and the whole body is held together by every joint with which it is provided. So, from the energy of the Holy Spirit that works in each separate part—of which each is one part—the whole body grows and builds itself up through love.

Paul explains, in I Corinthians 12:12-14, “For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many.” Paul continues: “Now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.”—vs. 18

There is no division in the body, but all the parts have the same concern for one another. If one part of the body suffers, all the other parts suffer

with it; if one part is praised, all the other parts share its happiness. All consecrated brethren are parts of Christ's body. These are participating members of the body, and 'members in particular.' These who comprise the body will be involved in the completion of the Christ, Head and Body.

Let us rejoice that "the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come."—Eph. 1:18-21

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