

The Star of Bethlehem

*“Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.”
—Matthew 2:2*

THE WORDS OF OUR text are those of the three Magi, or wise men, of the east. As they said, they had come to worship the King of the Jews because they had seen his star in the east. They came to Herod in Jerusalem and inquired of him where they might find him. Herod didn’t know, but he called in the chief priests and scribes to find out where the Messiah was to be born, and they unhesitatingly said Bethlehem, referring to

the prophet’s words, “Thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel.” (Mic. 5:2) Herod then privately talked to the Magi and told them to search Bethlehem and report back to him when they found him.

When the Magi left Herod they saw the star again and followed it into Bethlehem, and it stood over the house where Mary and Jesus were staying. They were warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod. So they left after bringing them gifts by another route. Meanwhile, Joseph was instructed by God to take Mary and the child to Egypt immediately because Herod would seek to destroy the child, and Joseph left by night for Egypt. When the Magi failed to return to Herod, he ordered all children of two years of age and younger, in Bethlehem, to be slain.

At this time of the year many planetariums will feature special lectures on the Star of Bethlehem wherein they explain how this phenomenon may have occurred. Recently an astronomer, David Levy, published his scientific explanation of the Star of Bethlehem.

The article was published on December 23, 2001, in *Parade*, the syndicated magazine section of many United States newspapers on Sunday. The article entitled, “Star of Wonder” was preceded by questions such as “Was the Star of Bethlehem a real event in the ancient sky?” and the comment, “Astronomers ponder the mysterious bright object that led

the Magi to Jesus' birthplace." Also, it was said, "Modern astronomy can show us how the sky looked on any date in history—including that miraculous night two millennia ago." Finally, a comment was made that "for centuries some observers thought the Star of Bethlehem was a comet. A bright comet did appear in the eastern sky in 5 B.C." We publish the article in its entirety.

"In forty years of watching the sky, I've been struck again and again by its spiritual majesty. As an astronomer, I have a scientific interest in the nature of the Sun and Moon, the planets, comets and stars. At the same time, a darkening sky and a starry night never cease to fill me with wonder, a feeling of awe shared with diverse individuals who have watched the sky over thousands of years—including a group of wise men who, 2000 years ago, saw an unusual 'star' that eventually led them to the newly born Jesus Christ. The story is told in Matthew 2:1-10. The role of the star is described in the following verses:

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,

"Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. ...

"Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.

"And he sent them to Bethlehem, ...

"When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.

"When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.'

"What was that star? Can its appearance be explained in terms of modern astronomy? Or was it a miracle that defies scientific explanation? Astronomers today, using sophisticated instruments, such as state-of-the-art planetariums, can reconstruct the appearance of the sky on any given night in history—including that miraculous night two millennia ago—and have proposed various theories to explain the Star of Bethlehem scientifically. Such theories are not meant to diminish the mystery and power of the Star, or the Christmas story. As astronomers—not theologians or biblical scholars—we read Matthew's words and then use

technology, mathematics and the laws of astro-physics to figure out what in creation might have occurred.”

DANCE OF THE PLANETS

“The most plausible theory suggests that the star that appeared over Bethlehem may have been Jupiter, the largest planet in our solar system and the second brightest after Venus. To understand how this could be, you need to know a few things about planetary motion.

“As the ancients knew well, the planets move through the sky relative to the ‘fixed’ stars (planet comes from the Greek word for “wanderer”). Today we know that the planets, like the Earth, orbit the Sun. As seen from Earth, they change their positions from night to night, generally moving eastward through a series of constellations known as the Zodiac.

“But the planets don’t always move eastward. At times they appear to reverse their course, moving westward for two or three months before turning back and heading eastward again. This is called ‘retrograde motion.’ It happens because the planets farther from the Sun than we are—from Mars to Pluto—take longer to complete one orbit. Thus, Jupiter moves eastward until a time comes when the faster-orbiting Earth overtakes it; then it suddenly seems to be moving west (in retrograde). The effect is the same as when you’re in a car that overtakes a slower car. As you begin to pass it, the other car appears to slow down, and at the moment of passing, it appears to move backward. These planetary ‘dances’ have been going on from the time the solar system was formed 4.5 billion years ago and were occurring when the Magi looked at the stars and saw a wondrous event that has not happened since.”

INTERPRETING THE DANCE

“The observations of ancient sky-watchers were as accurate as their technology would allow. But, unlike modern astronomers, they saw in the motions of the stars and planets a connection with life on Earth, often portents of significant human events—a practice that today we call astrology.

“This way of thinking about the stars may have arisen from a real need in early agricultural societies. For example, the ‘rising’ of the star Sirius just before the Sun heralded the annual Nile floods, and the early evening

rising of Capella, the goat star, was a sign of winter storms on the Mediterranean.

“Magi, according to biblical scholars, were wise men—originally a respected Persian priestly caste—whose practices included observing the motions of the stars and interpreting their meaning, a combination of both astronomy and astrology as we define those terms today.”

JUPITER’S MOTION: A SIGN?

“Matthew writes that the wise men asked Herod where they could see the newly born King of the Jews, predicted throughout the Old Testament and heralded, they said, by ‘his star in the east.’ Educated sky observers of the time would have paid attention when, on Sept. 14, 3 B.C. (our planetarium programs tell us), Jupiter appeared to pass very close to the star Regulus, ‘the King’s star.’

“When two planets—or a planet and a bright star—appear to get close together, the event is called a conjunction. The conjunction of Jupiter and Regulus occurred in the eastern sky.

“In the ensuing months, Jupiter headed eastward, stopped and reversed direction. On Feb. 17, 2 B.C., the planet passed even closer to Regulus. Continuing its dance, Jupiter passed Regulus a third time on May 8. Thus, over nearly eight months, the Magi saw Jupiter appear to draw a circle, or crown, above the King’s star, beginning in the east. Would astrologers have interpreted this as a prediction of a royal birth in Judea?

“Jupiter’s role continues: Five weeks after its third conjunction with Regulus, Jupiter formed a dramatic alignment with Venus, a celestial event almost unheard of in the history of astronomy. The sequence, which took place on the evening of June 17, 2 B.C., was first brought to light by the American astronomer Roger Sinnott. As the sky darkened over Babylonia, Sinnott tells us, Jupiter and Venus drew closer and closer until, at 8:51 that night, the two planets appeared virtually to kiss each other, fusing into a single brilliant star in the western sky, seemingly pointing the direction to Bethlehem.

“This scenario, centering on Jupiter, might explain in modern terms what came to be called the Star of Bethlehem. There are other, entirely different explanations. (It could have been a comet, for example. Or it may have been a ‘miracle,’ impossible to explain scientifically.) But if

we look up at Jupiter on this silent night, it might help to bring back that amazing event from long ago—thanks to the miracle of modern astronomy.”

What does the Bible say about the birth of Jesus? No date is given in the Bible, and the generally accepted date of December 25, A.D. 1, cannot be correct based on other scriptures. The firmest date we can estimate is based on Luke 3:1-3. “Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judaea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he came into all the country about Jordan, preaching the baptism of repentance for the remissions of sins.”

The time that John started his ministry as a voice in the wilderness, preparing the way for the Messiah, was in the spring of A.D. 29. We also know that John was six months older than Jesus. (See Luke 1:36). It is most likely that John started his ministry when he was thirty years old. This makes the date of Jesus’ birth around October, 2 B.C.

It is interesting to note that the astronomical phenomenon presented by Mr. Levy to explain the Star of Bethlehem took place much before December 25, A.D. 1, in 2 B.C. It was earlier in 2 B.C. than the date we can estimate by biblical information. Furthermore, we know that pictures which show the three Magi coming to the stable where Jesus was born cannot be correct because they came after Jesus was born and his family had moved from the inn to a house. Also, Mary (and Joseph) had gone to Jerusalem after the days of Mary’s purification had ended, to present Jesus to the Lord when he was forty days old. The time estimated for the arrival of the Magi is anywhere from three or four months after Jesus was born to as much as two years. The latter number is based on the edict issued by Herod to have all children two years old and younger to be slain in Bethlehem. Herod had interrogated the Magi carefully as to the time of the events which caused them to seek the King of the Jews.

The Magi found the house where Jesus was residing and went in to pay him homage and to deliver their gifts. Being warned by God to not go back to Herod, but to return homeward by another route, they did so. Meanwhile, Joseph was directed by God to take Mary and the child and

to flee to Egypt, which he did that very night. When the Magi failed to return to Herod he ordered all children of two years of age and younger to be slain. This fulfilled the prophecy of Jeremiah 31:15, “Thus saith the Lord; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rahel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not.”

The prophecy did not stop with the prediction of this great tragedy, but continues, “Thus saith the Lord; Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy. And there is hope in thine end, saith the Lord, that thy children shall come again to their own border.”—vss. 16,17

Rahel representing all the mothers of Bethlehem, and environment, is comforted with the promise of the restoration of all those children slain by Herod.

Meanwhile, the one who would make this possible by becoming the ransom for all mankind was safe in Egypt where the family stayed until Herod died. Joseph and Mary were not people of wealth. The gifts brought by the Magi permitted financing of their journey to Egypt and to return to Nazareth later.

The Star of Bethlehem being a conjunction of the two planets was first proposed by Kepler as occurring in B.C. 7 with Jupiter and Saturn in conjunction, a much earlier and unlikely date. Mr. David Levy not only suggests a date much closer to the actual time, but also leaves the door open when he says there may be other explanations. It could have been a comet, or a miracle, he said, but we know that it did happen as a fulfillment of God’s plan.

Dedicating to God

Key Verse: “For this child I prayed; and the LORD hath given me my petition which I asked of him: Therefore also I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the LORD. And he worshipped the LORD there.”

—I Samuel 1:27,28

*Selected Scriptures:
I Samuel 1:20, 26-28;
2:1-8*

OUR LESSON BEGINS WITH Elkanah, a faithful Israelite. He was the husband of two wives. One wife, Hannah, had no children; the other Peninnah, had many sons and daughters. (I Sam. 1:2,4) Every year, as the family gathered for sacrifice and worship at the house of the Lord, Peninnah taunted Hannah’s barrenness, further discouraging her. Finally, at one of these annual feasts, Hannah went to pray privately, pouring out her heart to God. In her prayer (vs. 11), she vowed that if the Lord would grant her a son, she would dedicate him to the Lord all the days of his life. In doing so, she promised to raise such a son to know God and to be dedicated to his service.

Eli the priest noticed Hannah alone, her lips moving, but no audible words coming out of her mouth. Concluding she was drunk and making a spectacle of herself, he rebuked her. Hannah, however, defended herself, saying that she was presently in sorrow, stating “I ... have poured out my soul before the Lord.” (vss. 13-15) Evidently, the power of her speech convinced the priest. Without knowing the content of her prayer, Eli exercised his religious authority, assuring Hannah that God would hear her prayer and grant her request. Her countenance changed from sorrow to joy; she returned to her rightful place in the family, and in due time conceived and bare a son. She named him Samuel, saying, “Because I have asked him of the Lord.” (vs. 20) As indicated by this verse, the name Samuel means “asked of God.”

After Samuel was weaned, Hannah, remembering her promise to God, brought the young child to the house of the Lord. The words of our Key Verse show she now intended to fulfill her vow by devoting her son to God, not for a limited period of time, but for his whole life. The phrase I have ‘lent him to the Lord’ as rendered in the *King James Version* would be better translated “I have returned him to the Lord.” This is in keeping with the promise she had made prior to conceiving this long-desired son. In I Samuel 2:1-10, we have the beautiful prayer of Hannah in response to all that the Lord had done for her. She was indeed an example of faith. In faith she prayed and in faith she delivered a son. Through faith she raised Samuel in preparation for a life of dedicated service. Finally, also by faith, she returned this young boy back to God for the rest of his life.

Among the lessons we can glean from Hannah’s experience, two in particular stand out. First, the power of prayer, even in what may seem to be the most dire of circumstances, should never be underestimated. God, the Creator of the universe, always has his ear attuned to those of his people who in faith, sincerity, and humility, approach him with their petitions. As stated in James 5:16, “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” Second, the blessings received by those who dedicate themselves and their stewardship to God far outweigh the trials and sufferings that may come as a result of such dedication. “The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it.”—Prov. 10:22

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Preparing the Way

Key Verse: *“Thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways.”*

—*Luke 1:76*

Selected Scripture:
Luke 1:67-80

THE WORDS OF OUR KEY Verse are those of Zacharias the priest, the father of John the Baptist, and are part of his prophetic utterance concerning the purpose of John’s life and the blessed hope for all Israel that would come shortly through the birth of their Messiah, Jesus. Zacharias first blesses the God of Israel for having provided, through the coming Messiah, their means of redemption. He even alludes to the fact that Jesus would come

through the lineage of David. (Luke 1:69) He continues his prophecy by reminding us that this redemption and salvation was spoken “by the mouth of his holy prophets, which have been since the world began.” (vs. 70) Perhaps one of these he had in mind were the words in Jeremiah, “The days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.”—Jer. 23:5,6

Zacharias goes on in his prophecy and states that three things will take place as a result of this coming salvation. First, the nation of Israel would be saved from their enemies and from those who hate them. Second, God’s covenant which he swore to Abraham would be remembered. And third, they would finally serve God in holiness and righteousness. (Luke 1:71-75) Although Jesus, Israel’s Messiah, provided the means of their salvation (and that of the entire world) nearly two thousand years ago, these three resulting blessings have not yet taken place, but will most assuredly happen in due time during Messiah’s Kingdom, to be established here upon the earth. In the meantime, since Jesus’ First Advent, he has been selecting out a ‘little flock’ of faithful followers, those who will be associated with him in the coming time of blessing to

Israel described above, which blessings will extend to all the families of the earth.—Gen. 12:3

In the Key Verse, Zacharias describes the role of his son John, that he would be a prophet, and would prepare the way for the coming Messiah. He continues, in verse 77, by stating that this preparation was to be in the form of making known to the people this impending great event of salvation, and to cause them to prepare their hearts through repentance from sin and turning back to God, from whom many had strayed. Thus being in a proper condition of heart and mind, they would be ready to receive their Messiah and the salvation which he would bring.

Zacharias concludes his prophecy by reminding us that this salvation is through the tender mercies of God (verse 78), and he likens the coming of the Messiah to the light of the rising sun. “The dayspring [margin: sunrising] from on high hath visited us, To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” (Luke 1:78,79) As similarly stated by the Prophet Malachi, “the Sun of righteousness [shall] arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall.” (Mal. 4:2) Truly Zacharias and his son John were blessed by the Lord to be able to speak of these coming blessings and to have the opportunity to prepare men’s hearts to receive them.

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Believing God's Promise

*Key Verse: "Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us."
—Matthew 1:23*

*Selected Scripture:
Matthew 1:18-25*

OF ALL THE BIRTHS EVER recorded in human history, that of the child Jesus is most extraordinary. Joseph and Mary, although espoused to each other, had not yet consummated their marriage according to Jewish customs of the day. It is under these circumstances that Mary was found to be with child. Joseph, described as a "just man," (Matt. 1:19) did not want to have knowledge of this spread to the general public, as it would bring great ridicule and suffering to Mary, so he decided to keep the matter quiet and arrange for a private divorce that would not cause a great stir. As

Joseph thought on these things, an angel appeared to him in a dream and announced that which was conceived in Mary was by the power of God. The angel said, "Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit."— vs. 20

We notice that Joseph was a descendent of David, as was Mary. (See Matthew 1:1-16 and Luke 3:23-38.) He then told Joseph not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife, as no sin was involved in her conception. The statement that her conception was of the Holy Spirit simply meant that it was the power of God that had planted the seed in her womb. Although this seems impossible from the human standpoint, we should not be surprised that God's power could be used in this way. After all, it was his power that created man, and which "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life." (Gen. 2:7) Since God had the power to create man, he also had the power to plant the seed of a new life in Mary's womb.

The angel concluded his remarkable message by telling Joseph that the child would be named Jesus, which means Savior, "for he shall save his

people from their sins.” (Matt. 1:21) Was it possible that Joseph and Mary had been the ones specially selected by God to bring forth the Savior of mankind, the Messiah, to raise him up and nurture him as a child until he reached manhood? Yes, that was God’s will, not arrived at in some haphazard manner, but according to that which had been prophesied hundreds of years earlier. The Key Verse recorded in Matthew is actually a quotation from Isaiah 7:14. This, as well as many other scriptures of the Old Testament, prophesied of the birth of Jesus and the purpose of his life—that of providing a ransom.

The seed planted in the womb of Mary was that of the only begotten Son of God, he who had been directly associated with God in the heavens since before the foundation of the world. The Apostle Paul speaks of Jesus as having left his heavenly state and being “made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” (Phil. 2:7,8) The Key Verse also gives the name Emmanuel to Jesus, meaning ‘God with us.’ God was now truly dealing with mankind, not personally, but through his Son who would soon be born and eventually die as “a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.”—I Tim. 2:6

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Learning to Grow

Key Verse: “Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.”

—Luke 2:52

***Selected Scripture:
Luke 2:40-52***

IT WAS EVIDENT AS THE young child Jesus grew, that he was not to be like other children of his generation. Whereas it would seem normal for a child to develop wisdom and the spiritual graces as they approach full adulthood, yet in Jesus we see these characteristics operating in a lad of less than twelve years of age. Luke 2:40 states, “The child grew, and waxed strong ... , filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon

him.” It was a tribute to his upbringing by Mary and Joseph and their reverence for the Lord (see lesson for December 21), as well as the fact that he was the only begotten Son of God, that caused Jesus to develop these qualities so early in life.

Every year Jesus’ parents and other family members went to Jerusalem to keep the Feast of the Passover, as required by the Jewish Law. When he was twelve years old they made this trip once again, “after the custom of the feast.” (vs. 42) On this occasion, however, Jesus desired to do more than just be with the family and so, when his parents and other family members left Jerusalem after the feast to return to Nazareth, he stayed behind, unknown to Mary and Joseph. After traveling for a full day they realized their son was missing from the group, and they returned to Jerusalem to see if they could find him.

After looking for three days, they did not find their son Jesus. If they had but realized the spiritual mindset of their beloved son, they would have no doubt looked much more quickly in a place such as the Temple for his whereabouts. It was indeed there, in the house of God, that they found him. Jesus’ presence in the Temple at the young age of twelve was not merely as an observer, but as an active participant in the conversation that took place among the Jewish religious leaders. “After three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing

them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers.”—vss. 46,47

Mary explained to her son that she and Joseph had been searching for him to the point of sorrowing, fearing that perhaps something evil had befallen him. Jesus’ reply was rather surprising, “Why were you searching for me? ... Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” (vs. 49, *New International Version*) Although Jesus’ response to his mother’s concern seems on the surface to be a little disrespectful, it really was not. He simply was reminding her that if she had stopped to think about who he was, as had been told to her, as well as Joseph, by the angel prior to his birth, she should not be surprised at all to find him there in the Temple. Notice though that Jesus, upon realizing the great concern of his mother, immediately left the Temple and joined the family again for the trip back to their home. “He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them.”—vs. 51

It is after this experience that we find the words of our Key Verse recorded, giving us the indication that Jesus continued to be an obedient son to his earthly parents, and that he also continued to grow spiritually, ‘in favour with God.’ Thus, he was growing into manhood, to be the one who would eventually give his life for our redemption.

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The Latter Days of Creation

“**GOD SAID, LET** there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years: And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so. And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the fourth day.”—Gen. 1:14-19

The chief development during the fourth epoch was the appearance of the sun, moon, and stars. It was on the fourth ‘day’ that the power of God operated to clear the atmosphere to make the sun, moon, and stars visible.

THE FOURTH “DAY”

As we have observed, verse one declares that “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth,” indicating that the ‘heaven,’ which would include the sun, moon, and stars, had been created and in existence previous to the developments which took place in the fourth day, or era. Verse sixteen declares that God ‘made’ two great lights, ‘the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night.’ While the Hebrew word here translated made (*asah*) is often used in the Bible to describe a work of creation, it has a much wider use which justifies the thought that what occurred on the fourth day was that the sun and moon, which had already been created, were ‘caused’ to rule the day and the night.

Here are a few examples of the broader scriptural use of this word: Referring to “strangers,” or non-Hebrews in the land, we are told that Solomon “set [*asah*] threescore and ten thousand of them to be bearers of burdens.” (II Chron. 2:17,18) Solomon did not create these men, he merely appointed or ‘set’ them to their tasks.

Again, “Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set [*asah*].” (Prov. 22:28) The reference here is not to the creating of a landmark, but to its appointment, or establishment.

The same Hebrew word is translated ‘appointed’ in Job 14:5. The text reads, “Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou has appointed [*asah*] his bounds that he cannot pass.” Here the reference is to God’s appointment of the maximum time man, in his fallen, sin-cursed condition, is permitted to live.

II Chronicles 24:7 is another example. The text reads, “The sons of Athaliah, that wicked woman, had broken up the house of God; and also all the dedicated things of the house of the Lord did they bestow [*asah*] upon Baalim.” They did not create these ‘dedicated things of the house of the Lord,’ but ‘bestowed’ them.

These wider uses of the Hebrew word *asah* justify us in understanding Genesis 1:16 to mean that God caused, set, or appointed ‘two great lights’—two great lights, that is, which had previously been created—one to rule the day, and the other to rule the night. Not until this fourth epoch, or era, therefore, did time begin to be divided in units the length of which are determined by the sun. This is irrefutable proof that the creative days are not twenty-four-hour days, but long eras, or epochs, of time.

THE FIFTH “DAY”

“God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth. And the evening and the morning were the fifth day.”—vss. 20-23

The power of God continued to operate. In the fifth day, or epoch, his power, or Spirit, caused the waters to ‘bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth.’ ‘Great whales’ appeared during this era; and doubtless also it was during this time that the giant prehistoric animals were brought forth. Both fish and animals of all kinds were created ‘after his kind.’

This principle of ‘after his kind’ is God’s way of saying that in the animal kingdom, even as he stipulated concerning the vegetable kingdom, species are fixed, and that no amount of tampering by man can change them. In all the annals of history there is no recorded instance of one species, either of plant or animal life, evolving into another species. The Apostle Paul knew this, and wrote, “All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds.” (I Cor. 15:39) None of these can be changed.

The record of the fifth day says, concerning sea life, that the ‘waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind: and every winged fowl after his kind.’ The spawning and hatching of fish, especially the larger varieties, requires a great deal more time than twenty-four hours. The same is true in the reproduction of birds. Yet these are shown as taking place within the fifth day. We mention this because we believe it shows clearly that these creative periods were much longer than twenty-four hours.

‘God blessed them,’ the records states, ‘saying, Be fruitful, and multiply.’ In the great economy of God, all his sentient creatures receive his blessing. The capacity of the shellfish to appreciate life may be very limited; nevertheless to have life at all is a blessing. Thus, from the very beginning of God’s revelation of his designs, we note that he is benevolent, kind, and that all his works reflect, not only his wisdom and power, but also his love.

THE SIXTH “DAY”

“God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.”—Gen. 1:24-26

The sixth creative day, or epoch, witnessed a further development of animal life. In this day the domestic animals were created, as well also as

the ‘beast’ of the field, and the ‘creeping things.’ In verse twenty-four we read, ‘God said, Let the earth bring forth,’ which might suggest something less than an individual creation of the many species of animals and creeping things. The next verse, describing the same work, says that ‘God made the beast of the earth after his kind.’ The important consideration is that life in any form does not spring forth spontaneously. From the shellfish to man, every form of life was created by God, regardless of the methods which he may have employed.

The crowning work of the sixth day was the creation of man. Special emphasis is given to this, and more details. Indeed, it was in preparation for man that the work of all the other days of creation, including the beginning of the sixth day, was carried forward. Man was the highest order of God’s earthly creation—‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion.’

Man was created to be king of earth, and when the great design of the Creator concerning him is completed, the earth will be filled with perfect human beings, exercising their original God-given dominion (Ps. 90:3), thus they will bask in the sunshine of his love forever. Paul wrote that “we see not yet all things put under” man, but, as we continue we will discover the Scriptures abundantly testifying that ultimately man’s dominion over the earth will be restored, to the glory of God, and to the eternal joy of his human creation.—Heb. 2:8

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The Giver and the Gift

*“God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”
—John 3:16*

THE FACT THAT THE true birth date of Jesus was in October and not December does not hinder his followers from rejoicing in the knowledge that he was born, and that he came into the world as the gift of God to be the Redeemer and Savior of the human race. Despite the fact of original sin and the whole world continuing in rebellion against God, he still loved the human race. Throughout the four thousand years from the

transgression of our first parents to the birth of Jesus, the Creator had continued to bestow many blessings upon the fallen race, causing the sun to shine, and the rain to fall, upon both the just and the unjust. But not until the coming of Jesus had God manifested his love for his human creation in such a marvelous manner.

GOD’S GREAT GIFT

Reason tells us that God’s gift of his Son was at a tremendous cost to himself. The *Logos* was the first and only direct creation of God—his beloved Son. He was daily, constantly, his Father’s delight, the Scriptures indicate, and occupied a high position of trust and responsibility in the heavenly realm. But the Father gave him up, commissioning him to lay aside the heavenly glory to become a man in order that he might sacrifice his humanity for the sins of the world. (I John 2:2) In our text, God’s great love is indicated as being represented in such a gift—‘God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son.’

In our meditations concerning the practical significance to us of God’s great gift, it is well to pause for a moment and note that giving is indeed the true manifestation of Divine love. No matter how we might like to sidestep this fundamental truth concerning Divine love as we see it exemplified in the Creator, and as we should endeavor to copy it in our

own lives, we must ultimately face the fact that where there is no impelling desire to give, even to the point of making costly sacrifices in order to do so, we can very well doubt the genuineness of the love which we like to think is ruling in our own hearts and lives. If we are godlike we will be givers.

THE SPIRIT OF GIVING

The idea of giving seems to captivate the minds of millions at this season of the year. To the extent that it is wholehearted and unselfish, it creates a refreshing change in the attitude even of the world. But too often the real origin of this spirit of giving is lost sight of and, because of this, the spirit of unselfish joy as expressed in giving, and exemplified in God's gift of Jesus to be the world's Redeemer, is largely forgotten. We should not be surprised at this, but it is well that the Lord's people endeavor to keep their thoughts and practices in focus with the real principles involved. Those of us who are enlightened by present Truth should by all means endeavor to remember the real significance of the birth of Jesus, and seek to emulate the pattern of love that is thus set before us.

God's gift of his Son was, from one standpoint, an act of pure charity, in the sense that he was giving to those who were in no position in any material way to reciprocate. This viewpoint is the one that should largely govern Christians in their giving. When we think of it from this standpoint, we at once recognize that true Christian giving is not something to be practiced merely once a year, but is to be a daily laying down, a daily giving up, of what we possess of time and strength and means, in order that through us blessings may flow to others, even to those who may be strangers to us, and who may never know the part we had in their blessing. Such is true Christian giving.

Because God loved, he gave, and he gave that which was very costly. So it will be with all who are truly godlike. Let us not think of Christian giving as the bestowing of that which we do not need, or merely the overflow of bounties with which God blesses us. Such giving would not represent genuine sacrifice. If we merely give the time to the Lord which is left over after we have taken care of our own interests, we have made no sacrifice. If we give to him merely the surplus of strength that we still possess after doing all we feel like doing for ourselves, we are not laying

down our lives in his service. If we give the means which we reasonably and safely conclude we will never need for ourselves, our gift has not been a costly one, nor have we followed the example of the widow who gave her “two mites.” (Mark 12:42) The prize for which we are running is a “pearl of great price,” and unless we are willing to give up all that we have in order to acquire it, that pearl will never be ours.—Matt. 13:45,46

JESUS THE PERFECT GIFT

We should appreciate the gift which the Heavenly Father made to us and to the world! Jesus is the center of all our hopes. Through his blood all the precious promises of God have been made yea and amen. He is our “all in all” (Eph. 1:23), the “chiefest among ten thousand” (Song of Sol. 5:10), and the One who is “altogether lovely.” (vs. 16) He is God’s gift to us, not for a day merely, but for every day—not for this year only, but for every year, for he is with us always, and will continue to be with us even to the end of the way. He has promised that beyond the veil he will receive us unto himself, that where he is, there we will be also. (John 14:3) What a gift—a Savior, a friend, a brother, and in glory, a Bridegroom!

But do we appreciate this gift enough? Are we well enough acquainted with him? Do we study his example sufficiently, and are we faithful enough in our endeavor to copy him as our pattern? Naturally there is much sentiment associated with the birth of Jesus, but it is well to remember that Jesus’ birth was merely a means to an end, and that end was his growth to manhood’s estate, and the laying down of his perfect life that he might be a “propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” (I John 2:2) It is the man Christ Jesus who is our Exemplar, the One who says to each of us, “If any man will come after me [be my disciple], let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”—Matt. 16:24

Thus we see Jesus, God’s gift, not only as the One ‘altogether lovely,’ and full of grace and truth, but we also see him as a faithful toiler in his Father’s vineyard, daily giving up his strength in the doing of the Father’s will, sacrificing his all that others might be blessed. He was resolute in his loyalty to God, and courageous in his defense of the Truth, and unafraid before his enemies. This was Jesus, the gift of God to us!

JESUS OUR EXAMPLE

As we cherish this gift from year to year, and throughout all the years, our commemoration of his birth should likewise be of a permanent character. Hence, as we reach the end of another year, and look forward to the privileges, the opportunities, and the responsibilities of 2004, may it be with the question in our minds and upon our hearts, How much can I show my appreciation for God's gift to me? How well am I emulating the example of giving which is set before me in our Heavenly Father, and also in his beloved Son?

If we are faithful, if we “do these things,” we will have an abundant “entrance . . . into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ,” and will have the privilege of reigning with him. (II Pet. 1:10,11) But the time is short. We will need to stretch every nerve and strain every muscle, if we are to qualify for that abundant ‘entrance’ for which we are hoping and striving.

There is no time to become “weary in well doing;” no time to pamper the flesh, nor make “provision” for it. (Gal. 6:9; Rom. 13:14) There is no time for anything except to keep our minds and hearts fixed upon the Lord, his service, and his people. If we are letting time slip for other things, we should endeavor to redeem it, or ‘buy it back’ for use in our all-important task of making our calling and election sure. The poet has well said,

We are not here to dream, to drift,
We have hard work to do, and loads to lift.

So let us get on with the task at hand! Let us steady ourselves for lifting the loads and shouldering the responsibilities the Lord entrusts to us. To each one of us individually, and to all of us as a people, this year will be the best year spiritually of our Christian lives if we are determined, by the Lord's grace, to make it so. As a body of people, wonderful opportunities of service are in our hands. But we cannot get into the kingdom as a group. Only by individual faithfulness can this be done—faithfulness to the Lord, to the Truth, and to the brethren; faithfulness in our love; faithfulness in our service; faithfulness in our giving; faithfulness in everything that is outlined in the Word of God for us, and exemplified by Jesus, the Gift of Divine love.

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Glorify God

*“That God in all things
may be glorified
through Jesus Christ.”*

—I Peter 4:11

TO GLORIFY GOD MEANS to praise, honor, and magnify him. In all this, obviously, we also give honor to his Son, our Lord Jesus. “All men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father.” (John 5:23) The Father,

however, is greater than the Son, and it is to our Father that the glory preeminently belongs. And the Lord Jesus would have it be so.—I Cor. 15:27,28

DIVINE INTUITION

To foretell future events accurately is a miracle, and God has caused history to be written for us in advance. From ancient times our Father has declared in his Holy Word the things that are not yet done, saying, “My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.” (Isa. 46:10) This is a grand, triumphant note for us; a wonderful stimulus to our faith—all God’s purposes shall be accomplished.

We have been very richly blessed by noting how history from past ages, even to this our day, has been fulfilling Divine prophecy in a marvelous way. We can, by this means, discern where we are on the stream of time. From some of the Divine declarations yet to have fulfillment, we know that God’s holy name shall in due time be glorified in all the earth.

GLORY WORLDWIDE

When Moses wanted to see God’s glory, he was taken into the mount and placed in a cleft of the rock. He heard this proclaimed to him: “The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.” (Ex. 34:6) The very center of light and life will be honored and glorified by every creature, not only in heaven, but also on earth; and all the world will know God. Any who, during the Millennial Age (which precedes the ages of glory), will have proved themselves to be incorrigibly wicked, after having had a full and fair opportunity to

attain life by obedience to the kingdom requirements, will be mercifully cut off. They certainly will not be subjected to everlasting torment. They will not be allowed to be a blot in God's kingdom.

“As truly as I live, [it is written] all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord.” (Num. 14:21) It will be filled with his honor, perfection, excellence, and magnificence. “The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.” (Hab. 2:14) As Moses saw in the mount, the glory of God is his goodness.

NOT YET FILLING THE EARTH

God has already performed great things for his name's sake, and his mighty power shall be made known, but it is obvious that the knowledge of his glory does not yet fill the earth as the waters cover the sea; this Divine promise will be fulfilled. Concerning some of these great things already done, we recall parts of a message God sent to Pharaoh, “Let my people go, that they may serve me. ... There is none like me in all the earth. ... I have raised thee up [Pharaoh], for to show in thee my power,” or more correctly speaking, “I have allowed thee to remain (*Leeser Translation*), for to shew in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth.”—Exod. 9:13-16

WONDROUS WORKS

This was fulfilled in the wondrous deliverance at the Red Sea. “Dividing the water before them, to make himself an everlasting name. ... So didst thou lead thy people, to make thyself a glorious name.” (Isa. 63:12,14) The psalmist, speaking of the same incident, says, “He saved them for his name's sake, that he might make his mighty power to be known.” (Ps. 106:8) The world in general, however, has not appreciated such mighty works.

It is written, “I will speak of the glorious honour of thy majesty, and of thy wondrous works.” (Ps. 145:5) We see that the very pinnacle of God's wondrous works respecting his glorious name and mighty power, relating to the past, present, and future, centers in and through his beloved Son.

A most wondrous work is seen when, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16) In harmony with the

Father's will, Jesus most willingly, gladly, and lovingly, gave himself "a ransom for all." (I Tim. 2:6) Following his cruel death upon the cross, Jesus was raised from the dead by the mighty power of God, and was highly exalted. These were wondrous works.

Later, at Pentecost, God's precious, holy influence was shed forth upon the consecrated followers of Jesus, and from that day until now, this Holy Spirit has been wonderfully influencing each member of the true church.

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Today, we are living in one of the greatest dispensational changes in the world's history. Here are some of the signs of the times in this our day: many running "to and fro, and knowledge" rapidly increasing (Dan. 12:4); an assembling of the "nations" (Joel 3:2); "men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth" (Luke 21:26); "distress of nations, with perplexity" (with no way out) (vs. 25); conditions which mark the end of the "times of the Gentiles" (vs. 24); members of the true church (the wheat) being gathered; and the tares bundled together. (Matt. 13:30) Since the 'times of the Gentiles' ran out, the attention and hopes of Jews worldwide have centered more and more upon the new nation of Israel, in the land which God has returned to them. They are yet to receive the land in a very special sense, and with lasting rich blessings, when they turn to him and his beloved Son. Wondrous works are these.

Worldwide conditions speak to us of the Lord's invisible presence. He is doing great works preparatory to the bestowing of rich kingdom blessings in the earth.

WORLD SHALL REMEMBER

Concerning all the mighty acts and wondrous Divine works in which God's Word is rich, recording countless numbers of them, very little is understood and appreciated by mankind in general. However, the whole groaning Creation will, during the Millennial kingdom of Christ; hear, understand, and appreciate the whole wonderful story. The books in the Word of God are to be opened to all mankind. (Rev. 20:12) Then "all the ends of the world shall remember [the Hebrew word used here means 'shall earnestly imprint'] and turn unto the Lord."—Ps. 22:27

A stupendous work will then be done by the glorified Christ—Jesus the Head, and the church his body. Faithfulness now, even unto death, will lead to joint-heirship with Christ in the heavenly phase of the kingdom. And the great work to be done will include the raising of earth's dead billions; bringing blessing and benefit to all the families of the earth; establishing God's glorious kingdom in the earth. For all eternity "there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain."—Rev. 21:4

GOD'S PURPOSES ACCOMPLISHED

The whole of the Divine purpose in Christ Jesus has fulfillment by the will of God. The zeal of Jehovah will perform it. The power of man and of Satan in the past will have become of no avail. What an incentive for us throughout our pilgrim journey to be faithful; to give diligence to make our calling and election sure, assisting others to do the same, and to honor and glorify our Father for such a sure and glorious prospect!

How enthusiastic we should be to say, "Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; and his greatness is unsearchable. ... I will speak of the glorious honour of thy majesty, and of thy wondrous works. ... Thy saints shall bless thee. They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power."—Ps. 145:3,5,10,11

JESUS FAITHFUL

It is with holy joy that we recall how Jesus, throughout his earthly ministry, honored and glorified his Father. "I seek not mine own glory," said Jesus. (John 8:50) He sought not his own praise and honor. This indeed is a valuable lesson for us. His prayer was, "Father, glorify thy name." (John 12:28) Jesus spent much time in prayer, meditation, and communion with his Father, that he might receive strength to hold on steadily to such a great purpose, upon which hung such momentous issues.

He determined always to submit his will to the Father's will, most absolutely, in full and complete consecration to God. 'Father, glorify thy name,' in thine own way at whatever cost to me; let thy character, wisdom, goodness, and plan of mercy be manifested and promoted.

FOOTSTEP FOLLOWERS

Jesus glorified his Father; and we, as consecrated children of God, do so also, 'that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ.'

In John 15:8 we read, "Herein is my Father glorified." This chapter teaches that Jesus is the "true vine," his followers are the "branches," and that his Father is the "husbandman." (vss. 1-5) Each fully consecrated child of God is an individual branch of the 'true vine.' But how is the Father glorified? It is by bearing "much fruit." (vs. 8) To do this, we must abide in Christ, the true vine.

Jesus said, "He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me [severed from me] ye can do nothing."(vs. 5) But what does this mean, to abide in Christ? We, as fully consecrated children of God, are to have no will of our own. Our will must be the will of our Lord Jesus, who has already declared that his will is the Father's will. The Spirit of Christ, the true vine, must permeate all branches, and the fruit of the vine must be in each individual branch, a Christlikeness being manifested.

Are we thus bearing fruit? If so, very good, but even this is no ground for complete contentment and satisfaction.

MORE FRUIT

Our Heavenly Father is the 'husbandman,' and "every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it [or more correctly, he cleanseth it], that it may bring forth more fruit." (vs. 2) This cleansing is not always pleasing. It is, at times, painful. But we should welcome every kind of pruning, cleansing, disciplining, and chastening, knowing that this is the way to bear more and more fruit, and to be more Christlike, more and more zealous to know and do our Father's will. Herein is our Father glorified.

How beautiful is the growing image of our Lord Jesus in the lives of his followers! Wherever that precious fruitage is manifested, how comely and lovely it is to all who love the Lord. Of these, Jesus can truly say, "Father, I am glorified in them." And we do know that whoever thus glorifies the Son, is also giving honor and glory to the Father.

LET YOUR LIGHT SHINE

Our Master exhorts, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." (Matt. 5:16) The Scriptures instruct us to speak and act that others will glorify

God, that being seen and heard, God may be honored and glorified; if not at present by all, then at a later date, in the day of their visitation.—I Pet. 2:12

Jesus, the “Light of the world,” has said concerning his true disciples, “Ye are the light of the world,” and he exhorts, “Let your light so shine;” see that you give light before men.—vss. 14,16

We may be tempted to place our light under a bushel. That would not only hide the light, but would tend to put it out. The Adversary can find many ways to extinguish our light, including the love of ease, the spirit of indifference, the fear of man, believing the High Calling closed, that no more witness work is required, also the one labeled, “weary in well doing.”—Gal. 6:9

GOSPEL SHALL BE PREACHED

The words of Jesus in Matthew 24:14 are, “This gospel [good news] of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness [testimony] unto all nations; and then shall the end come.” The true Gospel is today being proclaimed worldwide as never before; and we continue to praise the Lord for the various means which he has made possible for us to share in this proclamation.

In harmony with Philippians 2:14-16, we are to “Do all things without murmurings and disputings,” that we “may be blameless and harmless [inoffensive and sincere], the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; Holding forth the word of life.”

GLORIOUS MAJESTY OF THE KINGDOM

Have the people whom we meet day by day received any evidence from us that God has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light? May the sentiments expressed in Psalm 145 be true in our own case: that we shall bless our Father, and speak of the glory of his kingdom, and talk of his power, to make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom and his dominion endureth throughout all generations.

There is a sublime purpose that we should have ever before us—“Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” (I Cor. 10:31) This is stated very simply, yet it sets before us a very high standard. ‘Do all to

the glory of God' in the home, workshop, office, school, and factory, in our every dealing with the brethren, and with all people, and wherever we may be.

GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST

The world in general today seems to be madly shouting, "Glory to man in the highest." Yet the Lord in his infinite wisdom is still graciously, patiently, and lovingly permitting the true Gospel to be proclaimed in all the world as never before, for a testimony. But for how long? We do not know. What we do know is that we are still in the world, but not of it, and that our Master's words to us are, 'Ye are the light of the world.'

It is of primary importance that we give diligence to make our calling and election sure, that we daily study and meditate upon the inspired Word, developing, and manifesting, Christlikeness. And while doing this, we shall not fail to let our light shine before men, holding forth the word of life to the glory of God, for this is Christlikeness in action.

We, like Jesus, will need to spend much time in prayer. And at the close of each day we do well to ask ourselves in self-examination: "To what extent have I glorified my Heavenly Father, this day?"

'Whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.'

Dawn Bible Students Association

“Therefore, ... Walk Worthy”

“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.”
—*Ephesians 4:1*

THIS TEXT IS FROM THE pen of the Apostle Paul and we find, upon reflection, that it promises rich rewards. The word that is specially filled with promise is ‘therefore’ which correctly used is the word of a logical thinker. It suggests that previous to its use facts were stated that led up to a reasonable conclusion. For instance, if one were to say, “In this rich soil I have planted good seed to be well watered,” this fact would logically lead to a “therefore,” or “because of this

fact, I expect a good yield.”

THE INSPIRATION OF PAUL

Paul states the reason why we should walk worthy of our calling, saying “Are they ministers of Christ? ... I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, ... In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.”—II Cor. 11:23-27

The most interesting thing, however, is not Paul’s account of his numerous trials, but his appraisal of them when viewed beside our prospect. He wrote, “I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” (Rom. 8:18) What was the transcendent prospect of glory which Paul saw that could prompt him to say of his, and our, trials, “Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. ... We look not at the things which are seen, but

at the things which are not seen: ... the things which are not seen are eternal?"—II Cor. 4:17,18

If we could talk to Paul we would be prompted to inquire, "What did you see in detail that caused such deep devotions in your life?" Upon reflection would it be necessary to ask him? Does not the word 'therefore' in our text suggest that he has told us the reasons why he 'walked worthy,' and why we should so walk? Let us consider the numerous reasons stated by Paul in the first three chapters of Ephesians which lead up to his logical use of the word therefore.

THE HEAVENLY PLACES IN CHRIST

The epistle begins with Paul's customary greeting, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus." After his salutation, his words and thoughts immediately turn heavenward to the Father, and we are impressed with the warmth that is found therein. Almost in the tender words of a prayer he writes, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." (vs. 3) To Paul it is so obvious that our Heavenly Father is a glorious being, worthy of the love of all his intelligent Creation!

After reviewing that the church, in the eternal plan of God, was designed for God's glory, Paul seems to be lifted up in gratitude and exultantly says, "To the praise of his glorious beneficence with which he graciously favored us in the beloved one." (vs. 6, *Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott*) This joyful exclamation helps us to appreciate the emotional stirrings of the heart of Paul, and further causes us to look again towards the Father that we also may see him in the majesty and glory that are his.

What are the thoughts that course through our minds when contemplating the glory of the Heavenly Father? As one devoted Christian stated the matter, "God's mighty intellect grasps with ease every interest of his far-flung domain, from immensity to minutia." How far-flung is his domain?

Today with the aid of the Hubble Telescope, astronomers find the universe to be much greater than they ever imagined. The distances between heavenly bodies measured in light years is beyond human comprehension.

Seeing through contemplation the glory of our God causes a further recognition of our own littleness. Our earth, among the stars of heaven, is like a grain of sand beside the wide expanse of ocean. And we, as individuals, helpless and sin-sick, fade into nothingness when viewed beside the earth. This appreciation of our own lack and littleness beside the majesty of the Eternal One causes Paul's next statement to overwhelm us. "Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself."—Eph. 1:8,9

THE MYSTERY OF HIS WILL

'Having made known unto us the mystery of his will!' None have merited this—it is all of grace! There has come to us knowledge of things which even "the angels desire to look into." (I Pet. 1:12) Among the children of men who have received knowledge of the mystery of his will Paul says, "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world ... to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, ... That no flesh should glory in his presence." (I Cor. 1:27-29) The fact that we have been invited into the inner council of God suffices Paul to conclude, 'Therefore, walk worthy.' However, Paul has much more to say!

There follows a brief statement of a vital part of the mystery of God's will revealed unto us—"That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him." (Eph. 1:10) Here is stated God's loving plan to use our Lord in the great work of establishing the kingdom—of reuniting with the Father all the willing and obedient. This heartwarming statement so brief and clear is yet appreciated only by the few.

THE BLESSINGS OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM

In spite of the numerous statements found in God's Word relative to the coming kingdom, few there are in the Christian world who receive it. To those of us who do, how blessed is the message! So often our hearts are touched by the scenes of woe before us—the lonely, the impoverished, the weak and sick, the degraded, and apathetic. We helplessly behold them, wishing we were empowered now to touch and

heal. Our hearts turn in gratitude to God because we know that some day, not too far distant, it shall change. Let us thank him for the promise of his Word concerning the new day when he “shall wipe away all tears from their eyes,” and when “there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”—Rev. 21:4

This precious knowledge of the coming kingdom of blessing enriches our lives and does much to take “the bitter from life’s woes.” It is so much a part of our thoughts, reactions, and planning that it would be impossible to imagine the bleakness of heart that we would experience without this knowledge. If we did not know there was a God, and we knew nothing of our Lord or his plan, would we not be most miserable? But we do know, because ‘he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; Having made known unto us the mystery of his will.’

Would not this knowledge of the coming blessings to all in itself suffice to warrant Paul’s exclamation, ‘Therefore [or because of this], ... walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called.’ Indeed, and every sign of sorrow, of imperfection, should cause us prayerfully to turn to our glorious Father and thank him for the promises of his Word.

THE LORD’S JEWELS

Paul, however, continues beyond this part of God’s plan of rehabilitation and lifts us to transcendent heights. He writes, “In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.” (Eph. 1:11) John wrote, “We shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” (I John 3:2) Jesus promised, “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.”—Rev. 3:21

We are little beings, sin-sick and helpless, yet we are invited to become a part of God’s own intimate family! How overwhelming is the thought that we, if faithful, shall one day enter into the presence of our God and there behold him in all his glory and majesty, and amidst the pageantry of heaven see our Lord Jesus also and realize that we are home! Our hearts glow as we read the tenderness with which the Eternal One looks down upon us, and through the Prophet Malachi, says, “They that feared

the Lord spake often one to another: and the Lord hearkened, and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels.”—Mal. 3:16,17

Viewing our own undone condition, we would be most disheartened were it not that God has promised that we shall be “his workmanship.” (Eph. 2:10) All about us are the evidences of his handiwork—his creative power—as the psalmist reminds us saying, “When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained.” (Ps. 8:3) From the great suns we turn to the dainty and exquisite beauty of the rose, fragrant and colorful. Wherever we look, from immensity to minutia, there is the evidence of his skill, wisdom, and power. Paul says he is “confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will finish it.” (Phil. 1:6, *Marginal Translation*) The wisdom, skill, and power used in framing the universe are all marshaled to the glorious end of preparing God’s New Creation for their home in heaven.

Paul reminds us that God revealed the ‘mystery of his will’ regarding the establishing of his kingdom on earth. In addition to this, God has invited us to become a part of his royal household. Would not this suffice to warrant Paul’s ‘therefore, walk worthy’? He continues, “In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.”—Eph. 1:13,14

SEALED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

In this statement Paul shows how we can be sure we are numbered among this invited class and have a prepayment of our inheritance.

Note the point that you were ‘sealed with that holy Spirit of promise.’ This word sealed means to impress or identify, and was probably borrowed from the practice of that ancient day for a king to identify a message, or a messenger, with a seal. A messenger would be identified by his credentials bearing the seal of his king, and this message would be

recognized as authentic for the same reason. Paul suggests we have received God's stamp, or seal, which should reassure us of our position.

Our seal, however, is not indicated by some outward mark, but by our possessing the 'Spirit of promise.' Paul says this Spirit of promise in itself is the seal, or that which identifies us as messengers of the king. The entire matter is made clear, by statements of Paul found in I Corinthians, chapter two.

The brethren of Corinth were reminded that it was not Paul's natural talents that persuaded them in the way. Instead it was a demonstration of God's power and Spirit, not man's wisdom. Paul says, "Howbeit 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 speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory."—I Cor. 2:6,7

This mystery is unseen by any eyes except those of faith. "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. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God." (vss. 9-10) For impressive emphasis Paul uses an illustration, "What man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him?" In other words, a man can appreciate the thoughts of another man because of the similarity of mind. A man could not discuss astronomy with a dog, or mathematics with a horse, because these lower animals do not possess man's mind. So, Paul reasons "the things of God knoweth no man, but [by] the Spirit of God." (vs. 11) God has said, "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."—Isa. 55:9

Man could never know the thoughts of God unless they were specially revealed unto him by the power of God. This is the exact point Paul is here making! "We have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." (I Cor. 2:12) Hence, one of the main functions of the Holy Spirit now is to reveal Truth, or the thoughts of God. It becomes manifest therefore, if we now know the mystery of his will, it is because God has directed it to us and not because of talents we possess, or because of chance acquaintance with others possessing such knowledge.

Therefore the possession of this Holy Spirit of promise identifies us as children of the King. Thus Paul uses the illustration of a seal—we are sealed, or identified, as children, by possessing the Holy Spirit. The apostle’s second point is that, being sealed with the Spirit of promise, it also becomes “the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession.” (Eph. 1:14) The old English word, ‘earnest,’ would better be understood in the language of our day by the word ‘prepayment.’ Thus Paul says the possession of the Spirit of enlightenment now serves as a prepayment on the future inheritance promised the heirs of salvation.

Here again is an illustration from that faraway period, but in this instance it is a practice still in vogue in our day. Ofttimes when two parties enter into a contract, it is a practice for the one arranging for services to be done to tender unto the other a token payment, or prepayment. Thus it becomes forthcoming at the completion of the agreed upon services.

The apostle indicates that we have entered into a covenant with God. The Heavenly Father has promised an ‘inheritance,’ if faithful; but even now, we have received a prepayment which assures us of the promised joys if faithful. This Holy Spirit of enlightenment thus becomes our prepayment, to have and to enjoy, until the time we enter into our full reward. How blessed is our present inheritance and how gloriously it speaks of better things! It causes us to sing:

“O! the prospect! it is so transporting,
Reapers, hasten the gath’ring, we pray;
We rejoice in the glory that’s promised,
And the dawn of millennial day.”

—*Hymns of Dawn*, No. 32

How many helpful thoughts have been called to our attention by Paul’s ‘therefore.’ It serves to remind us of God’s majesty, and rich promise of a coming kingdom. It points to the transcendent glory that shall come to the church. Then there is reassurance to us who are of faltering faith that we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit, and this possession of the Holy Spirit of enlightenment becomes our prepayment of the inheritance.

GIVE THANKS

When Paul heard of others receiving the High Calling, to him it was not merely a statistic, nor was it to be viewed with doubt. With rejoicing and tender love he reached out toward them, saying, "I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers." (vss. 15,16) How touched would we have been if we were back with Paul and we overheard him bearing our name in prayer to the throne of grace!

What a blessed privilege still remains in praying for one another! When we view our brethren in deep distress and pray for them it tends to awaken a further interest in our hearts for them. Personal prayer for those who are being used of the Lord in spreading his Word causes us to realize just a little more our own responsibilities. A special prayer for those with whom misunderstandings arise, causes sweetness to fill our hearts. We sing:

“Prayer is appointed to convey
The blessings God designs to give,
In ev’ry case should Christians pray,
If near the fount of grace they’d live.”

—*Hymns of Dawn*

Not only did the apostle tell them of his prayers on their behalf, but one of such has been written out for them and for us. A prayer is recorded which shows much of Paul’s depth of appreciation and devotion to God. It reveals his intense interest and burning desire to serve his brethren.

GOD’S MIGHTY POWER

Paul prays, “[I make] 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.”—vss. 16-23

Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott, verse 17, reads, “That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you a Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the full knowledge of him!”

Paul’s appreciation of our God was wonderful. And when he started this prayer on behalf of others he was mindful of the glorious Father who heard. God is the “high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy.” He has said, “I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit.” (Isa. 57:15) Paul knew of God’s mercy and grace, and loving plans for all his creatures, so that his heart doubtless spoke as did the psalmist, “O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: ... To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary. Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee.”—Ps. 63:1-3

One portion of our hope which our minds can now approximate is the work of blessing all the families of the earth. We have been walking in the valley of the shadow of death, and how touched have been our hearts! Statistics have been quoted to show that in our day seventy-five percent of the world’s population have no beds in which to sleep, no shoes to wear, and do not get the equivalent of one nutritious meal a day. And the past has been even worse. In addition to privation there have been sickness, ignorance, and war to add to this misery. The world has an aching heart!

Thank God for his coming kingdom of blessing. By his matchless grace we shall have the privilege of reaching down with hands of mercy and love to the sin-sick world. By his grace we shall share in tearing back the veil of ignorance and hate that has so long beclouded man. By his grace we shall, with our Lord, be a part of that “Sun” which shall reach to the farthestmost part of the earth to heal and bless.— Mal. 4:2

Paul wants us to know ‘what [is] the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.’ God’s viewpoint of the church is that we are considered by him as ‘his inheritance.’ The church is called his jewels, his diadem, his special treasure. We read that our God “hath chosen Zion [the church]; he hath desired it for his habitation.” (Ps. 132:13) Perhaps, Paul, in praying that we should know of the ‘riches’ of God’s inheritance

among the saints, was attempting to impress upon us how much the Heavenly Father has looked forward to the completion of his family, his jewels. The realization of this gives new understanding to Peter's statement that we shall receive an abundant entrance "into the everlasting kingdom."—II Pet. 1:11

Paul prays that we may know 'what is the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe.' Following this is cited an illustration of the power exerted on our behalf, '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.'

The raising of Jesus from the grave to a great Divine being, in the "express image of his [the Father's] person" (Heb. 1:3), was the greatest demonstration of power that had ever been given. This took greater skill and power than the framing of the heavens with their array of island universes. The Creation of the heavens and the earth were the outgrowth of the Creation of the LOGOS. Glorious though our Lord was as the LOGOS—God's first creative act—yet there is no comparison in glory and power with the risen, Divine Lord. Jesus now is immortal and, as a Divine being, possesses the glory, intuitive knowledge, beauty of character, and inherent power and life, which are an intrinsic part of a being on this highest plane. Thus we realize that to create such a being as himself required on God's part 'the exceeding greatness of his power.'

Paul says it is this power that is being directed on our behalf; and understandably so, because we are to be awakened in the likeness of our Lord, a part of this New Creation of God. In another epistle Paul again speaks of God's efforts on our behalf, saying, "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." Subsequent to the verse is shown the reason all things are working together for our good. It is because those "whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son." (Rom. 8:28,29) If we are to be 'conformed to the image of his Son,' it will require this greater exertion of God's power. And is it not true that an important portion of the work upon the New Creation is the present fashioning of character through God-designed and permitted suffering, stress, and trial?

HEART APPRECIATION OF THE TRUTH

Paul's special desire for us, however, is not merely an intellectual understanding of the Truth. Rather, he prays that we may have a heart appreciation of the Truth while in the crucible of trial. Herein is a real test of faith. When beset by trial can we, with peace in our hearts, say we know that this is for our highest eternal welfare? Such tranquility of heart comes only with much faith. There are no shortcuts to this rest of faith; there are no magic formulas. When we are hard-pressed by difficulties—be they sicknesses, heartaches caused by misunderstandings, privations, or whatever—we must attempt to remember God's promise, 'All things work together for [our] good.' By taking the matter to the Lord in prayer, help can come.

Sometimes we can see the beauty of character the Lord would fashion in us through the trial. Ofttimes we can see no pattern that is being followed and we realize that if there be one we must be patient to see it. Frequently, we sense that the trial is being used to develop in us a deep faith in our God so that we will trust him where we cannot trace him. But faith and effort must be expended on our part till we, like Paul, can say, 'Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, ... for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.' Let us therefore ... walk worthy!

Dawn Bible Students Association