

The Dawn

A Herald of Christ's Presence



The DAWN

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Giving Thanks

*“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*

A number of countries in different parts of the world have thanksgiving or harvest holidays and festivals. In the United States, the Thanksgiving Day holiday is celebrated on the fourth Thursday of November, and

in Canada on the second Monday of October. Other countries celebrate similar holidays in some form at various other times of the year. Any special day of thanksgiving is commendable and provides an opportunity to offer thanks to our Creator for the many blessings of life. However, for Christians who have dedicated their lives to serve our loving Heavenly Father and to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, every day should be one of thanksgiving. “In everything give thanks,” the Apostle Paul admonished.—I Thess. 5:18

Paul's Encouraging Words

In his letter to the church at Colossae, Paul took an additional opportunity to encourage and strengthen his fellow Christians to a deeper sense of thankfulness and appreciation to God for all of his

bountiful blessings. He told them, “Let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom: teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” Then, as recorded in our featured scripture concerning giving thanks, he reminded them, “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.”—Col. 3:15-17

As already noted, those who are genuinely dedicated to the Lord and to the doing of his service should consider every day as being one of thanksgiving. The blessings that are provided by God that we value so highly and cherish so fondly, are showered upon us on a daily basis. Therefore, our thanksgiving for these blessings should not wait, but be expressed to the Lord before the close of every day in which they have been received. We read, “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.” (Lam. 3:22,23) Because our Lord’s love and mercy is manifested toward us every day, it is our privilege to express our thanks to him daily.

The Coming Kingdom

For those who are not acquainted with the wonderful plan and purpose of God concerning the future reconciliation for the sin-sick and dying world, there may be a reluctance in rendering thanks to God. Some may be distracted by the many problems and difficulties of everyday life, as

well as by the many troubles in the world around them. However, truth-enlightened Christians are not discouraged by these things. They recognize these conditions as being part of the foretold pattern of trouble with which this present Gospel Age is now coming to a close. They see this great time of trouble as a time of preparation for Christ's future kingdom, a "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." (II Pet. 3:13) Mankind is being prepared to welcome the divinely established kingdom of righteousness that will soon be established over all the earth. Therefore, the storm clouds of trouble should not dampen our spirit of thanksgiving, but rather increase it.

One of the great causes of our thanksgiving is that the Lord has opened the eyes of our understanding to recognize the significance of what is now taking place all around us. We are thankful that we are living at such a time, and can speak to our friends and neighbors concerning the rapidly approaching kingdom of God, under the rulership of Christ. This is in harmony with what the Psalmist David wrote. "All thy works shall praise thee, O LORD; and thy saints shall bless thee. They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and talk of thy power; To make known to the sons of men his mighty acts, and the glorious majesty of his kingdom."—Ps. 145:10-12

God's Love and Mercy

In addition to being thankful that the Lord has given us an understanding of his glorious plan for man's redemption, we can also be thankful for his love and mercy bestowed upon us individually. By these, and by the power and influence of his Holy

Spirit, God has kept us each day in his loving care. He has strengthened us to be faithful to our “high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 3:14) If we have been living up to our blessed privileges, each day will be one of thanksgiving and will find us standing more firmly in our consecrated walk than ever before.

It is through the understanding of God’s wonderful plan revealed through his precious Word, the Bible, that we have come to catch a glimpse of some of the glory that is manifest through his marvelous character—his love, wisdom, justice, and power. How precious indeed is this knowledge. The Prophet Jeremiah wrote, “Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.”—Jer. 9:23,24

A Blessed Assurance

God assures us in the foregoing verses that he delights in exercising his “lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness” to those who truly know him. Through the knowledge of the message of the Gospel, we realize that God has displayed his great love toward the human family by sending his only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus, to be the Redeemer and Savior of the sin-afflicted world of mankind. We are told in the Scriptures that ultimately this wonderful gift will be appreciated by all people. Its untold blessings will lead to the restoration of life to all who will then accept the provisions of his divine love and obey the

laws of the righteous kingdom that is now drawing near.—I Tim. 2:5,6; I John 4:14; Isa. 26:9; Jer. 31:34

Concerning God's gift of grace provided through our Lord Jesus, the Apostle Paul proclaimed, "Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift." (II Cor. 9:15) We, too, are thankful for his gift because of what Jesus' ministry means to those who are striving to follow in his footsteps of sacrifice. We also give thanks for the knowledge of what his ministry and ultimate sacrifice will mean for the whole world of mankind during Christ's future kingdom. He will then be earth's new king who will be manifest in power and great glory. (Rev. 5:12,13; 17:14) Under his rulership, all the enemies of God and of man will be destroyed, even the greatest enemy—death. "He must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death."—I Cor. 15:25,26

Restoration to Life

When mankind is awakened from the sleep of death during that future time, and in keeping with the ultimate plan of God, each one will be given the opportunity of being restored to perfection and to live forever on a perfected earth. (John 5:28,29, *New American Standard Bible*; Acts 24:15) The people will then understand that, while temporarily they have suffered as a result of the reign of sin and death, the plan of God through Jesus has been steadily progressing for their everlasting joy. They will learn, too, that God delights to exercise his lovingkindness on their behalf, for which they will gladly give thanks.—Jer. 9:24

The true followers of our Lord Jesus since Pentecost have had the great joy and privilege of suffering

and dying with him. They have been given the promise that, if faithful to their covenant of consecration, they shall also live and reign with Christ in his future kingdom. In the second letter to his beloved Timothy, the Apostle Paul said, "It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him."—II Tim. 2:11,12

High Priest and Good Shepherd

One of the most important aspects of our Christian faith for which we may give thanks, is our Lord Jesus—our sympathetic and loving High Priest who was "touched with the feeling of our infirmities." (Heb. 4:14,15) He is also our Good Shepherd who tenderly leads us. Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep. ... I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep."—John 10:11,14,15

As Christians, we recognize that Jesus is our Head and we are members of his body. (I Cor. 12:12; Eph. 4:15,16; Col. 1:18) As our Head, he directs us in the way that we should go, and the manner in which we may serve him. If we walk in his steps faithfully and are subservient to him, we will no longer exercise our own wills, or seek to walk in our own ways. (I Pet. 2:21-23) We will seek to know the will of God and watch for his guidance in our lives.—Rom. 12:2; Eph. 6:6

If we do the will of God as "the called" of him, all things will work together for our good, and we will have peace of mind and heart. (Rom. 8:28; Phil. 4:7) What a blessing this is in the present world of

chaos and fear. It is the peace of God that rules in the hearts of all those who, through faith in Christ, trust in the merit of his sacrifice as a “robe of righteousness.” (Isa. 61:10; Phil. 3:9) We thus yield ourselves fully to the doing of the Heavenly Father’s will as expressed through his unspeakable gift. Paul said, “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 [Greek: brought to full development] through sufferings. 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.”—Heb. 2:10,11

Soldiers of Christ

As Christian soldiers under Jesus our leader, we must avoid the entanglements of this present evil world. “The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.”—II Tim. 2:2-4

The Apostle Paul admonishes Christians, “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”—Eph. 6:11,12

The apostle then outlines the necessary armor that we will need to fight a good fight of faith. He says, “Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of

God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”—vss. 13-17

Our Captain

We are very thankful that we have our dear Lord Jesus as the Captain of the great salvation to which we have been called. By following his leadership and by keeping on the whole armor of God, as we have been admonished to do, we will be kept from falling. We continue to rejoice in the glorious hope that is set before us in the Gospel. Another important feature of that great hope is that in due time, if we are faithful unto death, we will be associated with Jesus as our heavenly Bridegroom. (II Cor. 11:2) As prospective members of his bride, we will have the blessed privilege, through the power and authority of Christ’s coming kingdom, to invite the poor groaning creation to partake of the wonderful blessings that have been prepared for them. We read, “The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”—Rev. 22:17

The Holy Spirit

Christians should be thankful also for the ministry of the Holy Spirit on their behalf. Having been begotten by God’s Holy Spirit to a new life in Christ

Jesus, we are commissioned to proclaim the Gospel, or glad tidings, of the coming kingdom. (Matt. 24:14) The witness of the Holy Spirit assures us that we are now considered the children of God. "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together."—Rom. 8:16,17

The seal of the Spirit is God's assurance that if we do our part he will not permit anything to hinder us from attaining that to which he has called us through Christ Jesus. Paul thus encourages, "That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ. 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."—Eph. 1:12,13

The Holy Spirit also ministers through the Word of Truth as set forth in the Scriptures. We give much thanks for the precious Word of our loving Heavenly Father. Without this we would know nothing concerning the glorious Truth in connection with the divine plan and purpose. Let us always cherish the Bible because it is the spiritual food that continues to sustain us. (John 6:35) Its prophecies enlighten us concerning the times in which we are living, and its promises inspire and encourage us to continue on in the path of righteousness faithfully, even unto death. (Rev. 2:10) The Bible also outlines the divine will for us, and explains the meaning of our trials. How appropriately the psalmist wrote, "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path."—Ps. 119:105

The Word of the Lord and his abundant providence in our lives are great causes for our thankfulness to him. “O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day. Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep thy precepts.”—vss. 97-100

God’s Word Endures

God’s wonderful Word gives new meaning and purpose in the lives of his people. Its perfect law, testimonies, statutes, and commandments are guidelines of Truth. In this connection, the Psalmist David wrote, “The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes.” To this, he adds, “The fear [Hebrew: reverence] of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward.”—Ps. 19:7-11

Let us all be thankful for the privileges of service that we have enjoyed during our Christian walk. It is a joy to make known the glad tidings of the kingdom, and to lay down our lives for the brethren. It is by this labor of love that we demonstrate to our Heavenly Father the genuineness of our desire to know and serve him. (I John 3:16; Heb. 6:10) It

should be a great cause for giving thanks that we have been given opportunities to demonstrate that we are dedicated to service and to the doing of his will in our lives.

Faith will permit us to move mountains of difficulties that could otherwise hinder us from letting our light shine out for the blessing of others. We want a faith that will not permit us to hide the light of Truth under a bushel with the spirit of indifference.—Matt. 5:14-16

Praise and Thankfulness

Praise and thanksgiving are closely associated in the Bible. Thanksgiving is an expression of appreciation to God for all the rich blessings that he showers upon us from day to day. We can express our thanksgiving to him in the privacy of our own minds and hearts, and in the presence of his people. To praise means to give glory to, extol, or honor. We can praise God in our prayers. We can also praise him by making known the virtues of his glorious character.

Peter wrote, "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." (I Pet. 2:9) We show forth the Lord's praises by speaking of his wondrous works, and as shown in the precious doctrine of his glorious plan. We praise him by bearing witness to his love, as exemplified in the gift of his Son, and to what this unspeakable gift means to us now and will yet mean in terms of the blessings and joys soon to come for all mankind.—John 3:16,17

While it is thus appropriate to express our thanks to the Lord in our prayers and to praise him for his goodness, we also demonstrate our appreciation for all he has done for us by faithfulness in doing his will. We give thanks to God for his loving care when we demonstrate by our attitude that we have faith in his promises of grace to help in every time of need. (Heb. 4:16) This is a rich blessing that the Lord showers upon those who give themselves wholly to the doing of his will. Our words of thanksgiving would lack vital meaning if our hearts were not fully surrendered to the Lord and were not trusting him completely to supply all of our needs.—Phil. 4:19

Paul wrote, “Rejoice in the Lord always: and again I say, Rejoice. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful [anxious] for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”—Phil. 4:4-7

Let us take the opportunity each day to give much thanks to our loving Heavenly Father, who has called us out of darkness and into the marvelous light of Truth. The Apostle Paul expressed it well in our opening scripture. “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.”—Col. 3:17 ■



Samuel Administers Justice

Key Verse: *“Samuel spake unto all the house of Israel, saying, If ye do return unto the LORD with all your hearts, then put away the strange gods and Ashtaroath from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the LORD, and serve him only: and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.”*
—I Samuel 7:3

Selected Scripture:
*I Samuel 7:3-11,
15-17*

During this period of Israel's history, Samuel was their Judge, chosen by the Heavenly Father. In this position, he was called upon to administer justice among the people, and to also encourage them to serve God with their whole heart. This was not an easy task for Samuel, due to the people's tendency to fall into the sins and ungodly practices of their heathen neighbors. At this time, in particular, Israel was guilty of worshipping the gods of the Philistines. Because of this, God allowed them to be subservient to that nation.

As time passed, Israel began to realize that because of their lack of faithfulness to God, they were not receiving his blessings and protection, and “lamented after the Lord.” (I Sam. 7:2) Sam-

uel, seeing this, spoke the words contained in our Key Verse. In his words we note three specific requirements are set forth in order for Israel to be delivered out of the

hands of the Philistines and return to the full favor of God. The principles contained in these words are also fully applicable to Christians today who may find themselves temporarily drawn away from their covenant with God.

Samuel stated that Israel must first put away the false, heathen gods they were worshipping. The first commandment originally given to Israel was: "Thou shalt not have other gods besides me." (Exod. 20:3, *Rotherham Emphasized Bible*) God could not be expected to bless them if they were not even worshipping him but instead looking to powerless and false gods. For the Christian, we would not think of literally worshipping a false god. However, there are many things in the world that could become "gods" to us—things that we might idolize and worship to a greater or lesser extent. These might include such things as earthly riches, worldly position, influence, abilities, and other such "gods" of this present evil world. Such must be put away from us if we desire to be in God's favor.

The second requirement set forth by Samuel was that the Israelites must prepare their hearts to serve the Lord. The meaning of the word "prepare" is to establish or fix. In this is the thought that, as we put away the false "gods" from our life, whatever they may be, the focus of our heart should become established, or fixed, only upon our Heavenly Father and his will for us. The essence of the Christian's consecration is the doing of God's will in every experience of life to the best of our ability. To do this requires that our hearts be continually fixed on him and his benevolent designs for our ultimate blessing.

The final step Samuel gave in his instructions to the Israelites was that they must serve God, and him only. This implied works on their part—keeping the various features of the Law arrangement and serving God actively. For the Christian, it is equally true that service to God and his cause is a requirement to receive his full blessing. The Apostle James says, "Faith without works is dead."—James 2:20 ■

David Prophecies of Christ's Kingship

Key Verse: "David reigned over all Israel, and executed judgment and justice among all his people."
—I Chronicles 18:14

Selected Scriptures:
II Samuel 23:1-7;
I Chronicles 18:14

David's righteous reign over

Israel, as stated in our Key Verse, was centered in the fact that he justly and fairly executed God's laws among the people. In this was foreshadowed the coming reign of righteousness of Jesus Christ and his bride, the church. When the angel Gabriel announced the coming birth of Jesus to Mary, he gave us this

important truth, saying, "Thou shalt ... bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. ... And the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David."—
Luke 1:31,32

Shortly before David's reign ended and he fell asleep in death, he spoke in a prophetic way of Christ's eventual kingship, as recorded in II Samuel 23:1-7. In verses 1 and 2, David says that he was "anointed of the God of Jacob," and that the "Spirit of the Lord" was with him, guiding his words as king over God's chosen people. Jesus, at the beginning of his earthly ministry, made a similar statement concerning himself, quoting from the Prophet Isaiah. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, ... he hath anointed me." (Luke 4:18) In the case of both David and Jesus, having God's anointing and his Spirit

was an assurance that they were the Heavenly Father's choice as ruler over his people.

David continues by saying that one who is selected to rule over men must be just, and rule with fear, or reverence, for God. (II Sam. 23:3) One so guided, he says, "shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds." (vs. 4) These are again prophetic words, speaking of Christ. He is the "light of the world." (John 9:5) Light represents the enlightenment of truth, and so it will be in Christ's kingdom. He will rise, symbolically speaking, as the sun to enlighten mankind to the knowledge of God and his ways. This will also be a time without the storm clouds of trouble that are found throughout the earth today—as David says, "a morning without clouds."

By his own admission, David knew that his rulership was "not so with God." (II Sam. 23:5) That is, it was not a peaceful time without clouds. Much of David's reign was spent fighting against the enemies of Israel. Yet, in the same verse, he claimed the promise of God's "everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire." David here spoke of the everlasting Abrahamic Covenant, in which God promised that in due time, a seed would come, through which all the families of the earth would be blessed. (Gen. 12:3; 22:18) Though he was of the lineage of Judah, the tribe through which the seed was promised, David prophetically spoke of a future day when the greater seed of Abraham would come on the scene.

The Apostle Paul spoke of the seed of the Abrahamic Covenant promise with these words, "Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, And to seeds, as referring to many, but rather to one, And to your seed, that is, Christ." (Gal. 3:16, *New American Standard Bible*) It is through this covenant arrangement that David, and all mankind, will eventually say, "This is all my salvation, and all my desire." ■

Solomon's Wise Judgment

Key Verse: *"All Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged; and they feared [revered] the king: for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him, to do judgment."*
—*I Kings 3:28*

Selected Scripture:
I Kings 3:16-28
made thee king."—vs. 11

Almost immediately, Solomon's wisdom was tested. Paraphrasing *I Kings 3:16-22*—Two women approached the king concerning a most serious matter. Both had been living in the same house, and each had given birth to a child just three days apart from the other. Only they and their newborn children lived in the house. The child of the second woman lived only a few days and died during the night. Realizing this, she went to the room of the first woman, who was sleeping. She took the living child from beside the sleeping mother and laid the dead

After the death of David, his son Solomon was anointed king of Israel. Desiring to follow faithfully in his father's steps, Solomon properly sought God's help. He said, "Give me now wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people." (*II Chron. 1:10*) Seeing Solomon's humble condition of heart and his noble desire, God granted his request and gave him great wisdom, saying, "that thou mayest judge my people, over whom I have

child in her arms. When the mother of the living child rose up in the morning, she saw the dead child in her arms, at first thinking it was hers. Almost immediately, however, she realized it was not her child, but that of the other woman. She approached the woman who had taken her living child during the night, but the woman denied that any wrong had been done and claimed that the living child was indeed hers. Thus, both women testified to the king that the living child was theirs, and the dead child belonged to the other.

The great wisdom of Solomon was shown in his response to the two women. He said, “Bring me a sword. And they brought a sword before the king. And the king said, Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one, and half to the other.” (vss. 24,25) On the surface, such a response seems repulsive to the human mind. However, as we will see from the response of the two women, it is clear that Solomon had no intention of carrying out such a cruel deed. In the wisdom he had gained from God, he knew that the truth would come out because of the way he had responded. The woman who was the real mother of the living child could not bear the thought of the king’s proposal to divide the child. She gladly said she would give up the child to the other woman so that it would not be slain. On the other hand, the mother whose child had died, and who had cruelly switched the two children, coldly responded that it would be fine with her if the king divided the living child.—vs. 26

This was all King Solomon needed to hear. He gave the living child to its rightful mother, unharmed. (vs. 27) Our Key Verse indicates that news of Solomon’s wise actions quickly spread throughout Israel. Most importantly, the people recognized it as the wisdom of God. Truly, God’s wisdom in all ages is beyond human comprehension. “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!”—Rom. 11:33 ■

A King Restores

Key Verse: “*So the king appointed unto her a certain officer, saying, Restore all that was hers, and all the fruits of the field since the day that she left the land, even until now.*”
—II Kings 8:6

Selected Scripture:
II Kings 8:1-6

II Kings 8:1,2

At the end of the seven years, the woman returned to Israel, only to find that her house, land, and possessions had been taken over by others in her absence. “She went forth to cry unto the king for her house and for her land.” (vs. 3) Although the king’s name is not stated, it was most likely King Jehoram of Israel. Providentially, at the same time that the woman approached the king, he was in conversation with Gehazi, the servant of Elisha. Gehazi was relating to King Jehoram all of the wonderful miracles Elisha had performed. As Gehazi was telling the king about how Elisha had restored to life the son of a Shunammite woman, she, along with her son, approached the

Our lesson is a continuation of the account found in II Kings 4:8-37, in which the Prophet Elisha restored to life the son of a Shunammite woman. After doing this, Elisha informed the woman that there was going to be a famine in the land of Israel for seven years. He recommended that she take her household and go live elsewhere until the famine was over. She did so, leaving her home in Israel and residing in the land of the Philistines.—

group to plea for her house and land. Excitedly, Gehazi exclaimed, “My lord, O king, this is the woman, and this is her son, whom Elisha restored to life.”—vs. 5

We can only imagine the amazement of all those present—the woman, her son, the servant of Elisha, and the king—as the events that had taken place over many years were unfolded before them all. Elisha was not even present at this meeting, yet it was he who had been involved in all of the experiences that had brought them together before the king. Our Key Verse says that upon hearing all that had happened, King Jehoram appointed a special officer who was to ensure that the woman’s house, land, and possessions were all restored.

Our lesson is more than just a story with a happy ending. It fittingly pictures the blessings of Christ’s coming kingdom here on earth. The earlier restoring of the woman’s son to life points to when the resurrection of all mankind will take place. Jesus spoke of this time, when “all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth.”—John 5:28,29

The famine in the land of Israel for seven years illustrates the fact that man has lived during a famine of truth and righteousness, by and large, since our first parents fell into sin. Just as the woman left Israel to dwell in the land of one of Israel’s enemies, so also man, cast off from the favor of God since sin entered the world, has been forced to dwell under the dominion of the “prince of this world,” Satan. The glorious conclusion to the story, in which the woman’s house, land, and possessions were restored, shows that once the famine of righteousness in this world comes to an end, man will have “that which was lost” restored to him during the time spoken of as the “restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.”—Luke 19:10; Acts 3:21 ■

Jehoshaphat Makes Judicial Reforms

Key Verse: “[He] said to the judges, Take heed what ye do: for ye judge not for man, but for the LORD, who is with you in the judgment.”
—II Chronicles 19:6

Selected Scripture:
II Chronicles 19:4-11

bringing the people “back unto the LORD God of their fathers.”—II Chron. 19:4

The first thing Jehoshaphat did was “set judges in the land throughout all the fenced cities of Judah.” (vs. 5) Just as important, as stated in our Key Verse, he instructed them to take great care that they do not judge according to man, but that they do so “for the LORD,” who was to guide them in judgment. He continued his instruction by reminding them that there should be no “respect of persons” or “taking of gifts,” or bribes, as they rendered judgment. This would be considered “iniquity with the LORD our God.”—vs. 7

There are lessons here for the Lord’s people of today. Although it is not yet time for the general judgment of

Jehoshaphat was one of the few righteous rulers over Israel’s two-tribe kingdom of Judah. In particular, he instituted during his reign a number of reforms concerning justice and judgment. These important matters had fallen into disarray and corruption under the evil reigns of previous kings. He knew that restoring these was critical to his ultimate goal of

man's hearts before the Lord, it is the time for Christians to be judging their own standing before him. The Apostle Paul counsels us to "judge ourselves," making corrections to our life as we do, in order that we "not be judged" severely by our Heavenly Father. (I Cor. 11:31) This "judging" of ourselves involves many things—our decisions along the narrow way, the way we spend our time, how we use our means, the type of character we develop, the way in which we serve the Lord, our attitudes and actions toward our brethren and mankind in general, and all other aspects of our life. As the king instructed the judges of his day, we, in our judging of the things mentioned above, are to seek to do so according to God's will and way, and not man's. We are also to judge matters not looking for the "respect of persons," or for "gifts" of a worldly or fleshly kind that might cause our judgment to stray from God's standard of righteousness.

Jehoshaphat appointed the Levites and priests to a special judgment task, that of rendering justice involving controversies and conflicts among men, as well as specific violations of the Law. This was a particularly sobering assignment since it would involve the administering of punishment in certain cases. Even life and death matters would have to be decided on occasion. Under such circumstances, to render righteous and fair judgment would be vitally important. The king specially counseled these judges to act "in the fear of the LORD, faithfully, and with a perfect heart." (II Chron. 19:9) He also encouraged them, saying, "Deal courageously, and the LORD shall be with the good."—vs. 11

Like these special judges, those of the Lord's people now who are faithful in the current judgment of their own life's affairs will be given a special privilege and great responsibility in the next age. Together with Christ their head, they will "judge the world in righteousness" during the thousand-year judgment day of Christ's kingdom.—Acts 17:31 ■

“Think on These Things”

“Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, ... honest, ... just, ... pure, ... lovely, ... of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”
—*Philippians 4:8*

There is much in the Bible that emphasizes the importance of our thoughts and the necessity to properly examine our thinking. In the Book of Proverbs we are told that as a man “thinketh in his heart, so is he.” (Prov. 23:7) In other words, our character development is greatly influenced by the

thoughts we allow ourselves to dwell upon.

The Scriptures explain that “there is none righteous, no, not one,” because “all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” (Rom. 3:10,23) All of us have inherited imperfection and sin that has been passed down from one generation to another as a result of Adam’s disobedience to God. The Apostle Paul states, “By one man [Adam] sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” (Rom. 5:12) At the present time, our

imperfection affects us not only physically, but also mentally, including our thinking.

The Present Heavenly Call

At the present time there is a “heavenly calling” that God is sending forth. He is inviting individuals to give him their hearts and willingly offer themselves as living sacrifices that are holy, acceptable, and pleasing to God. (Heb. 3:1; Prov. 23:26; Rom. 12:1) They are exhorted, “Do not be conformed to this world, but continually be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you may be able to determine what God’s will is—what is proper, pleasing, and perfect [Greek: complete].”—Rom. 12:2, *International Standard Version*

Realizing we are imperfect and part of the sinful human race, we might wonder if God could accept the offering up of ourselves to him. Paul reassuringly states, “Think about your own calling. Not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is ... insignificant in the world, what is despised, what is nothing, ... so that no one may boast in God’s presence.”—I Cor. 1:26-29, *ISV*

The Lord is not giving out punishments or other judgments upon those who do not hear or respond to the heavenly calling at the present time. These will have an opportunity in the kingdom that will soon come upon the earth, to “learn righteousness.”—Isa. 26:9

Focusing Our Thoughts

God is now working with the prospective members of the “little flock,” those who have answered the heavenly call. He appeals to their heart and

does not force anyone to do his will. The Apostle Paul writes, "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."—Phil. 2:13

An important part of this work, for which each of us is individually responsible, is the proper focusing of our thoughts. The thoughts that we dwell upon must not be ignored, but rather we must learn to discipline and feed our thoughts with the pure and healthful spiritual food found in the Word of God. (Ps. 1:1-3; 119:11-18,103-105) The Lord knows us, not merely by our words and actions, but also by our thoughts. (Ps. 94:11; 139:2) Holy thoughts will lead us to have holy words and righteous behavior that will be pleasing to our Heavenly Father. Additionally, the more we commit our "works unto the LORD," the more our thoughts will be properly established.—Prov. 16:3

Wise King Solomon wrote, "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." (Prov. 4:23) Throughout the Scriptures the heart is used to represent our will, intentions, and motives. These, which govern all our thoughts, words, and actions, must constantly be kept true and centered on God. Although our will is the controlling power within ourselves, it is also subject to influences. If our thoughts become impure, unjust, or unholy, the power of our will become more impaired. Hence, it is important to follow the admonitions of the Scriptures as to the character of the thoughts we allow ourselves to think upon.

God's Word, operating upon our hearts and minds, should lead us to scrutinize our thoughts. Every thought dwelt upon will have an influence upon our words and conduct. Consequently, the

Apostle Paul urges that our thoughts be the special objects of our concern, care, and watchfulness; and the necessity of “bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”—II Cor. 10:5

Importance of a Right Heart

It is most important for us to develop a heart that is pleasing to God. In his Sermon on the Mount Jesus gave a lesson on the importance of developing a good heart. He said, “A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.” (Luke 6:43-45) Our heart, the guiding principle of our mind and thoughts, is representative of our character; and our mouth and words are the outward expressions of that character.

The Lord’s followers who are renovating, purifying, and cleansing their hearts are referred to as “them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints,” and to the “fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.” (I Cor. 1:2,9) Having begun the work of transforming our heart to do the will of the Lord, it is crucial to daily examine our every thought, word, and deed.

Forgetting the Things Behind

Earlier in his letter to the Philippian brethren, Paul, speaking of himself, gives us a valuable example to follow, saying, “Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect: but I press on. ... One thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on toward the goal unto

the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 3:12-14, *Revised Version*) Paul tells us to forget the things that are behind, including our former earthly ambitions and hopes. Let us personally apply these statements to ourselves and “be thus minded.”—vs. 15

Jesus likewise gave an important lesson concerning the danger of “looking back” on former things. It was on the occasion when he had said to his disciples, “Follow me.” Several responded with a less than enthusiastic answer, to which Jesus replied, “No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”—Luke 9:59-62

To put one’s “hand to the plow” was an expression that signified the undertaking of a particular work. When someone is literally plowing a field, it is vitally important to not be looking back, otherwise the plowing will quickly end up in disaster. Here Jesus uses the expression of looking back to indicate the danger in desiring or longing for any of the things that his followers had already committed to leave behind in order to follow him.

Before God destroyed the city of Sodom, he sent an angel to inform Lot and his family. The angel said to them, “Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, ... lest thou be consumed.” (Gen. 19:12-17) The next morning, as the sun was rising, the Lord destroyed the city of Sodom, but Lot’s wife disobeyed the message of the angel; she “looked back” and died. (vss. 23-26) Lot and his family were not accused of sharing in the evil practices of the Sodomites. His wife’s fault was that of having looked back. Here the word “looked” is a translation of a

Hebrew word that means to regard with pleasure, favor, or care.

Jesus admonished his followers, “Remember Lot’s wife.” (Luke 17:32) In other words, we are to set our desires and goals upon heavenly things and not upon the things of the earth. Concerning this, Paul wrote, “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.” (Col. 3:2,3) If we are faithful unto death, we “shall be satisfied,” when we awake in the glorious first resurrection. (Ps. 17:15; Rev. 20:6) Therefore, let us not look back on former earthly goals or ambitions, but instead be “reaching forth unto those things which are before,” the heavenly things.—Phil. 3:13

Thoughts Guided by Prayer

The necessity for prayer as a guide to our thoughts is also emphasized by the Apostle Paul. In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.” (Phil. 4:6) Jesus assured us that, “Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.” (John 16:24) We simply desire to give thanks, realizing that we have already received more than what we deserve at the Lord’s hands. Yet the apostle assures us that we may, nonetheless, receive “exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.”—Eph. 3:20

Thus, our requests should be increasingly for grace, wisdom, opportunities for serving the Lord and the brethren, and for assistance in developing our character into the likeness of God’s dear Son. With such thoughts, we can fully trust that the promised “peace of God, which passeth all understanding,

shall guard [our] hearts and ... thoughts in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 4:7, *Revised Version*) The more the “peace of God” dwells in our heart, the more we will be assisted in keeping out of our mind the worry and turmoil of the world. Even when surrounded by difficult conditions, we will have a peace that rests upon God’s superior wisdom and power.

Testing Our Thoughts

With the “peace of God” ruling in our hearts, we must then test all our thoughts. How easy it is to allow our fallen, imperfect, natural mind to assert itself. When this happens, it can quickly allow thoughts of envy, busy bodying, backbiting, malice, strife, pride, or vainglory to enter our minds, absorbing our time and attention. These all need to be continually repelled. Rather, we should invite into our minds righteous and pure thoughts. If these fill our mind, they will effectually bar the way and hinder the reentering of evil thoughts.—Ps. 63:5-7; 143:5

Just as we provide literal food for our physical body to maintain its health, we must give our thoughts spiritual food, to direct our mind in a proper and healthy direction. Such spiritual food is vital for the development of a heart and character that would be pleasing to the Lord.

Is It True?

In our theme text of Philippians 4:8, Paul explains how we should test and judge our thoughts. He begins by stating, “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true.” The first question we should ask ourselves regarding a thought that we may harbor is, “Is this true?” Love for that which is

true lies at the very foundation of a righteous life. If we sympathize with or dwell upon falsehoods or exaggerations, we are to that extent defiling our heart. Conversely, if we have our “loins girt about with truth,” our hearts and minds will be prepared to render acceptable service to God.—Eph. 6:14

The Lord’s people should be so in accord with righteousness that everything that is false or untrue in word, thought, or act would be offensive to us, causing us pain. Truthfulness, then, must be the first test to apply to any matter before we allow ourselves to dwell upon it in our mind. We should not waste our time and attention chasing imaginary matters, errors, fiction, or hearsay. Such is unprofitable and can cause great harm both to others and ourselves.

Having truthful thoughts will apply in a general way to everything in life. It will promote a love for the right and the true, and a heart opposition to all that is adulterated. This principle is especially applicable to our spiritual food—that is, what we believe. Along this line, our first inquiry should be, Is this a belief founded upon the Word of God, or is it to any extent contaminated with “traditions” of men, calculated to “making void the word of God?”—Mark 7:13, *RV*

The psalmist, referring to God, wrote, “Thou desirest truth in the inward parts”—that is, sincerity of heart. (Ps. 51:6) Let us cultivate a love for that which is true, and at any cost. Let us take time to prove, with the Bible, everything we accept as fact. The psalmist also tells us that God’s “truth shall be thy shield and buckler.”—Ps. 91:4

(Continued on page 36)

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(Continued from page 31) **Is It Honest?**

In our theme text, Paul mentions a second test of our thoughts: “Whatsoever things are honest [Greek: venerable or honorable].” We must scrutinize our thoughts as they present themselves and refuse to dwell upon those that are dishonorable for members of the body of Christ to harbor. Things may be true that are not honorable, and their truthfulness must not give them a resting place in our minds if they will not stand this second test. For example, in the daily news, many crimes are reported that are true, oftentimes given with graphic details. However, we should not allow our thoughts to dwell upon and sort through all these details.

Rather, let our minds be fastened upon the promises that in the kingdom, “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain,” or kingdom, and that “God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.” (Isa. 11:9; Rev. 21:1-5) How much more honorable are these thoughts from God’s Holy Word.

Is It Just?

The third category of thoughts Paul urges us to have is, “Whatsoever things are just,” or equitable. Some thoughts might be true and honest as far as principles are concerned, and yet not be just or equitable to others. For example, someone might tell us something about a third party that is true and even expressed in an honorable manner. Yet it might reflect unjustly, inequitably, against the

third party. If so, we should not dwell upon this thought, nor repeat it to someone else. Instead, we should repel it immediately by applying the injunction, “Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.”—Rom. 13:10

Is It Pure?

The next category of thoughts Paul counsels us to have is, “Whatsoever things are pure”—that is, chaste, clean. Many things might be true or just, but which are not pure in intent. Such thoughts are strictly barred according to this inspired rule.

For example, a thought should be considered impure if there is any selfishness or pride in it, or if there is any envy, jealousy or malice manifested, regardless of it being true, honest, and just. If we allow ourselves to dwell upon such impure thoughts, the more they will dominate our heart and impair our judgment of matters.

In order to determine whether a thought is pure or not, we should measure it against the Word of God and the principles taught therein. It is repeatedly stated in the Scriptures that the wisdom, words, and commandments of God are pure.—Ps. 12:6; 19:8; 119:140; Prov. 30:5; James 3:17

Pure, holy thoughts will produce in us holy words and will greatly assist in developing righteous behavior. On the other hand, if we allow our thoughts to be impure or unholy, the ability to speak and act properly will be weakened. We must endeavor to bring our thoughts into subjection and train them along the lines that will transform us more and more into our Lord’s glorious character likeness.—I Cor. 9:27; Rom. 12:2

Is It Lovely?

Paul continues, "Whatsoever things are lovely." Does that which we think upon promote the god-like quality of love? Our thoughts should give preference to the lovely and loveable, which will lift us up spiritually. The more our thoughts dwell upon the noble lives of individuals recorded in the Bible and the noble efforts of those around us, the more like God we will become. The supreme example of a "lovely" and noble life is that of our Lord Jesus. He is our "beloved, ... chiefest among ten thousand. ... He is altogether lovely." (Song of Sol. 5:10-16) By strictly and completely resting our thoughts upon topics that are "lovely," we will become a closer copy of Jesus.

Is It of Good Report?

Paul continues his testing of our thoughts, saying, "Whatsoever things are of good report." "Good report" means well spoken of, or reputable. In the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, the lives of faithful men and women who lived during the time of the Old Testament are described as being those who obtained a "good report." (Heb. 11:2,39) They were commended, not for having had perfect works, but for their faith in God and his promises, which was demonstrated by their works. The Bible record of their experiences and faith should be a continual source for our thoughts to dwell upon.

A "good report" commends itself to the Gospel message. The Gospel is "good news," "good tidings of great joy." (Luke 2:10) The Prophet Isaiah, speaking prophetically of the Lord's followers during the present Gospel Age, wrote, "O Zion, that bringest

good tidings [Hebrew: to announce glad news].” (Isa. 40:9) The “good tidings” of the kingdom that will soon come for the blessing of all mankind should be an important part of the thoughts we dwell upon and what we share with others.—Matt. 6:10; 24:14

Is There any Virtue or Praise?

Paul concludes our theme text by admonishing us, “If there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” The word “virtue” has the thought of moral goodness or excellence. We should scrutinize our thoughts and only dwell upon those that are virtuous and praiseworthy to God. This implies much more than merely abstaining from untrue, dishonest, unjust, or impure thoughts.

The psalmist describes the one who has developed this virtuous, higher standard as “the one who lives with integrity, who does righteous deeds, and who speaks truth to himself. The one who does not slander with his tongue, who does no evil to his neighbor, and who does not destroy his friend’s reputation. ... who keeps his word even when it hurts and does not change.” (Ps. 15:1-5, *ISV*) The Apostle Peter admonishes that we have been called to “glory and virtue,” and that “giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue.”—II Pet. 1:3,5

Our Standard and Goal

We cannot hope to attain perfect control of our thoughts in this life, but we can make that our standard and constant goal. In proportion as we view this standard and daily strive to measure up to it, in that same proportion we will find ourselves

strengthened in mind, making progress in “bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience [compliance and submission] of Christ.”—II Cor. 10:5

Our subjection to God and to Christ is a willing subjection, inspired by our love, gratitude, confidence, and trust in their superior wisdom. Our chief delight should be in learning and doing the will of God. It is much more than merely following a fixed set of rules, such as “Thou shalt” and “Thou shalt not.” It is striving to see things from God’s standpoint, to personally apply God’s principles, and to love God supremely. (Mark 12:30) Heart loyalty to God requires effort. This should be our first and constant duty.

Even the most devoted ones of the Lord’s people, the most developed in character, will need the merit of Christ’s righteousness imputed to them until they are made perfect in the first resurrection. Only in our minds, in our wills, have the “old things” begun to pass away and “all things are become new.” (II Cor. 5:17) This great change will only be fully accomplished when “this mortal shall have put on immortality,” when this corruptible shall be raised in incorruption—raised in glory, in power, as a divine, spirit being.—I Cor. 15:53,54

Meantime, in order to be counted worthy of “glory and honour and immortality,” we must demonstrate our willingness of mind and our earnest desire to be all that the Lord would have us be. (Rom. 2:7) In no way can this be better demonstrated to the Lord and to ourselves, or proven helpful to others, than by keeping a strict surveillance of all our thoughts. Let this be our daily meditation. ■

Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians and to Timothy

*"We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father."
—I Thessalonians 1:2,3*

Our present lesson will be a brief overview of four of Apostle Paul's epistles, two to the Thessalonian church and two to his beloved Timothy. Although these four letters appear next to each other in Bible order, they were actually written at quite different times during Paul's ministry. According to most scholars, of the fourteen epistles of Paul recorded in the Bible, I Thessalonians was either

the first or second written [some conclude that Galatians was the first], while II Timothy was the last, written shortly before he was put to death at Rome. Therefore, about fifteen years

elapsed between the writing of I Thessalonians and II Timothy.

First Thessalonians

The church of Christ at Thessalonica was faithful in their service to the Lord, and as noted in our opening verses, Paul commended the brethren for this. Verse eight of this opening chapter reveals why Paul specially referred to their “work of faith, and labour of love.” “From you,” he wrote, “sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia [Greece], but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing.”

The Thessalonian brethren were evidently Gentile converts, for Paul speaks of their having “turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.” (I Thess. 1:9) In verse ten he speaks of their waiting for “his Son from heaven, whom he [God] raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.” The “wrath” referred to is the sentence of death that rests upon all mankind because of sin. The consummation of this sentence is reached at death, so Paul refers to it as the wrath “to come.” All believers are delivered from this death, by faith being justified to life through Christ. They die, seemingly, as others, but not actually so, for they lay down their justified lives and die sacrificially as Jesus did, being “planted together in the likeness of his death.” —Rom. 6:5

Unlike many of Paul’s epistles, his letters to the brethren at Thessalonica say nothing of the controversies raised in the Early Church resulting

from the incoming Gentile converts. Evidently the Thessalonian brethren had not been affected by these questions. Aside from words of encouragement along various lines, the principal doctrinal theme of both these letters centers around the church's hope of the Second Coming of Christ.

He mentions this glorious hope in I Thessalonians 1:10, 2:19, and 3:13. Vitally important truths pertaining to the return of Christ are presented in I Thessalonians 4:14-18 and 5:1-5. Paul writes, "The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first." (I Thess. 4:16) These are symbolisms of the Bible, and the reference is not to a literal "shout" that rends the air, nor is the "voice" of the archangel a literal voice. Paul did not mean that Jesus would be blowing a literal trumpet when he returned.

In the last verse of chapter four Paul wrote, "comfort one another with these words." Part of this comfort is found in the opening verses of chapter five. Here the apostle reminds the brethren of certain conditions to come about in future "times and seasons." These would be associated with the Day of the Lord and closely related to the return of Christ spoken of in chapter four.

Paul wrote, "Of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But

ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.”—I Thess. 5:1-6

In this brief review of the epistle, we call attention to the “shout,” the “voice,” and the “trumpet,” that Paul associates with the return of Christ. These symbolic evidences of his coming are discerned, the apostle says, only by the “brethren” who are watching, otherwise the resulting Day of the Lord would not come upon the world as “a thief in the night.”

Thieves do not blow trumpets and shout to announce their presence, but in this lesson we are told of a shout, a voice, and a trumpet that are not heard by the world in general. Their messages, nevertheless, are symbolically heard by the Lord’s people, “children of the day,” who are not asleep, but watching. Thus, Paul wrote, “Ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.”

Second Thessalonians

Paul’s second letter to the brethren at Thessalonica was written in an effort to correct a misunderstanding concerning the Second Coming of Christ that had arisen as a result of his first epistle. Immediately after his opening salutation, he mentions the subject of our Lord’s return and some of its implications. Then in the opening of the second chapter he comes right to the point.

“Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering

together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us [a reference to his first epistle], as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except [until] there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.”—II Thess. 2:1-4

The implications of this statement are clear. In his previous epistle Paul had written that as far as the unbelieving world was concerned, the Day of the Lord would come as a thief in the night; that is, unknown except by those on watch. From this, some in the church at Thessalonica developed the idea that this time had already come, and that they were highly favored to be among those who knew about it.

Paul did not say to these that they were wrong in their understanding of the manner of the Lord's return, or that the Day of the Lord would be unknown to the world. He did not say to them that they were wrong because when the Lord returned there would be a symbolic shout, voice, and sound of a trumpet. The apostle also did not say they were wrong in believing that the Day of the Lord would bring much travail and destruction.

Paul's reply implied that they were correct as to the manner of Christ's return and of the Day of the Lord. His only argument against the claim that he had already returned at that time was that according to the prophecies an important intervening

event must first occur. He described this as a “falling away,” or apostasy from the faith, and the development of a great Antichrist system.

Later in the same chapter he indicated that this “mystery of iniquity” was already working in his day. (II Thess. 2:7) How true that was! Looking back over church history, it is readily discernible that not long after the apostles all fell asleep in death the purity of doctrine and simplicity of practice established among Christians by these inspired servants were soon lost.

A great church system developed, united with civil governments, and designated itself the kingdom of Christ—Christendom. However, it was a counterfeit of the true kingdom that was to be established when Christ returned. In the continuance of his lesson, Paul explained that when Christ did return, the brightness of his presence would bring about the destruction of this “mystery of iniquity.”

In II Thessalonians 2:8 the real import of the text is concealed by a faulty translation of the Greek word *parousia*. In the text it is translated “coming.” Its real meaning is “presence.” (See *The Emphatic Diaglott*; *Rotherham Emphasized Bible*; *Young’s Literal Translation*.) Thus Paul in verse eight is speaking of the “brightness” of the Lord’s presence. In his great prophecy, Jesus had said that his return and resulting presence [Greek: *parousia*] would be as a bright shining that would extend from the east even unto the west.—Matt. 24:27

In these prophetic words of Jesus, we see that his return and subsequent presence would be accompanied by a great increase of knowledge

throughout the earth symbolized, he says, by light. It is this increase of knowledge along all lines, and particularly as it pertains to the Truth of God's Word, which reveals to the watchers that the Day of the Lord is here.

Going further than this, the increase of knowledge and the breaking down of superstitions and long-held Dark Age teachings are some of the chief contributing causes of the disintegration of the systems of Christendom. As the light of Truth resulting from this Day of the Lord continues to penetrate into the recesses of human thought, religious systems built upon foundations of error and superstition will crumble.

First Epistle to Timothy

Unlike most of Paul's writings, his epistles to Timothy were not written to a congregation, but to an individual brother in Christ, affectionately referred to by the apostle as "Timothy, my own son in the faith." (I Tim. 1:2) Paul's two letters to Timothy are sometimes referred to as "pastoral epistles," because they contain much in the way of instruction to one who is a servant in the church.

In I Timothy 1:3,4, Timothy is exhorted to "charge some that they teach no other doctrine, Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith." In chapter two, verse twelve, Paul writes, "I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man." The first thirteen verses of the third chapter present the qualification for bishops [elders] and deacons.

Chapter four, verse six, states, "If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained." In verse fourteen we read, "Neglect not the gift that is in thee," and in the sixteenth verse, "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee."

"Rebuke not an elder," Paul writes in chapter five, verse one, and in the seventeenth verse he says, "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine." Additional instructions concerning teachers in the church are found in chapter six, verse five, where Paul warns against "perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself."

In addition to pastoral instructions, a beautiful outline of God's plan of redemption and restoration of mankind is given us by Paul in this epistle, as well as other important truths. I Timothy 2:3-6 read: "This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time."

It should be noted that in this passage Paul speaks of being "saved" first, and then coming to a "knowledge of the truth." Salvation, in the sense that this term is usually employed in the Bible, can

be attained only through belief in Christ, and a knowledge of Christ is essential to believe on him. “How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?”—Rom. 10:14

We note another important fact from Paul’s statement that salvation is first necessary in order to come to a knowledge of the Truth. For this to happen, there must be an awakening from the sleep of death. This is necessary that mankind may learn about Christ, for most have died in total ignorance of him, and among those who have claimed to know him, very few have understood his true place in God’s plan.

After Paul speaks of all coming to a knowledge of the Truth, he outlines one of the fundamental doctrines of the Bible. It is the fact that the “man Christ Jesus ... gave himself a ransom for all.” This great Truth, he declares, will be testified, or made known, “in due time.” The due time for the world in general to learn the great teaching of the ransom is when they will be saved—that is, awakened from death—during the thousand years of Christ’s reign.—Rev. 20:4; I Cor. 15:25,26

Second Timothy

Timothy was held in high esteem by the Apostle Paul, and in this second letter, even as in the first, he addresses him as his son. To this “dearly beloved son” his opening salutation is, “Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day.”—II Tim. 1:2,3

Much in the second letter, even as in the first, pertains to the ministry of the Truth. In verses six and seven of the first chapter Paul wrote, "I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands. For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind."

"Hold fast the form of sound words," Paul admonishes. (vs. 13) In chapter two, the second verse, we read, "The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also."

Then, in verses fourteen to sixteen of this same chapter, the apostle states the following: "Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers. Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness."

Paul later gives these wholesome instructions to teachers in the church: "Foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes. And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth."—II Tim. 2:23-25

Paul emphasized to Timothy that the Word of God should always be the basis of instruction, that

he need not go outside of the Scriptures to find needed Truth. He wrote, "Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work."—II Tim. 3:16,17, *Revised Version*

In the last chapter of II Timothy, Paul says with respect to teaching: "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry."—II Tim. 4:2-5

Paul wrote this epistle during his imprisonment at Rome, after he had been condemned to die. Much in the epistle reflects this background. His final pastoral instruction to Timothy, quoted above, may have been prompted in part, at least, by the imminence of his own death. In it he endeavors to cover every essential point. "Preach ... be instant ... reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine; ... watch thou in all things, ... do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry."

Immediately after these all-embracing instructions, Paul writes: "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up

for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”—I Tim. 4:6-8

Realizing that he would no longer be able to serve, Paul was concerned that Timothy be fully instructed to continue in the same faithful course he had begun. It is well to note that Paul did not expect to go immediately to heaven when he was put to death. He said, instead, “There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness,” a crown that he expected to receive, not when he died, but at “that day;” that is, the day of Christ’s appearing, when all the church would be rewarded.

Throughout the course of his faithful ministry Paul endured much weariness, ignominy, and suffering. Now he had reached the end of the way, and he was confident that the Lord would continue to give him strength for whatever might come. He had no regrets. He knew that the final outcome would be glorious, “It is a faithful saying,” he wrote, “If we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him.”—II Tim. 2:11,12

Paul looked forward to the privilege of reigning with Christ during the thousand years of his kingdom. He recognized that true Christianity implied more than to suffer and to die. He knew that in God’s due time righteousness would triumph, and that joy and life would be made available for all mankind.—Ps. 30:5; Rev. 21:3-5 ■

A Faithful and True Witness

“To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.”

—John 18:37

There are many standpoints

from which we may view the life of Jesus. From each of them we observe essential qualities of character that we as Christians must endeavor to emulate if we would be pleasing to our Heavenly Father. The Apostle Paul

writes of growing up into Jesus “in all things.” (Eph. 4:15) If we are to do this it is necessary to consider every phase of the Master’s life of faithfulness, not merely that we may become familiar with his superb qualities, but also that in coming to know him we may seek, with all the energy we possess, to be like him.

In this study of the life of Jesus we will concern ourselves particularly with the statement he made to Pilate found in our opening text. Here he affirmed that one of the purposes of his birth was that he might “bear witness unto the truth.” The context of this assertion clearly indicates that the

great Truth he referred to was his own kingship, and of necessity, the entire plan of God of which he was the central figure. In other words, it was the kingdom message of Truth of which Jesus was speaking. His words further indicate that all who would desire to follow in his footsteps would be attracted by the kingdom teaching. By devoting their lives to the divine cause, as Jesus did, they would become joint-heirs with him in his kingdom. —Rom. 8:17

“As he is, so are we in this world,” wrote John. (I John 4:17) One of the ways that we become like the Master is in our association with him in the kingdom arrangements. Millions throughout the age have been called Christians. All of these have known something of Jesus, and to whatever extent his life has influenced their lives they have been made better men and women. How few, though, have recognized in him the future King of earth, and of these how few have been so inspired by the prospect of reigning with him that they have been willing to devote their entire lives to the kingdom cause.

“To this end was I born,” said the Master. He was the King of promise, the one through whom the Father’s plan to bless all nations will be accomplished. (Gal. 3:8,16) It was to this great Truth that Jesus bore witness. This was the great light that shone in the darkness. (II Cor. 4:6) In essence it was the fact that the great Creator, in sending his Son into the world to die as man’s Redeemer and to reign as King in due time, had passed over all of the failed human plans to establish righteousness in the earth. It was to be through the risen and glorified Christ that God would bring to an

end this present evil world and establish a “new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.”—Gal. 1:4; II Pet. 3:12,13

For this great Truth Jesus died, not merely because he cherished it in his heart, but because he proclaimed it from the housetops. His entire life was governed by it. It caused him to refuse the devil’s offer of all the kingdoms of this world, for he knew that it was not the Father’s plan that he should reign through these kingdoms, but that ultimately he would bring them to an end. (Matt. 4:8-10; John 18:36) He knew, furthermore, that eventually he would receive a worldwide kingdom, not from the devil, but from his Father.—Ps. 2:6-8

“What Is Truth?”

When Jesus told Pilate that he had come into the world to bear witness to the Truth, Pilate asked, “What is truth?” Jesus did not honor this Roman ruler with an answer, but in his earlier prayer to God on behalf of his followers he said, “Thy word is truth.” (John 17:17) What is the Word of God but the outline of the Father’s kingdom plan through Christ to exalt his church and to redeem and restore the human race to life. It was the theme of all God’s holy prophets. (Luke 24:25-27; Acts 3:18-25) All of the Master’s teachings were concerned directly or indirectly with it, and it is the background of the apostolic writings. The book of Revelation would be but a relating of woes resulting from the misrule of ungodly institutions were it not for its glorious theme—that the Lamb was slain, then exalted to Mount Zion, and that a hundred and forty-four thousand are to be exalted

with him, and together they will live and reign for a thousand years for the blessing of the people.—Rev. 5:6,12; 14:1; 20:4,6; 21:1-5

It is through the Gospel of the kingdom message that we are sanctified or set apart to divine service. When we present our bodies a living sacrifice and endeavor not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, it is the belief in the kingdom Truth that activates the transforming work. (Rom. 12:1,2) We cannot yield to the influence of this Truth and at the same time be conformed to this present world. God's will is to bring an end to this present order and bless the people through Christ and his church, who by God's authority, will reign as kings and priests in a new world.—Rev. 1:5,6; 20:6

Dying for the Truth

When Jesus said to Pilate that he came to bear witness to the Truth, the phrase “bear witness” is derived from a Greek word meaning “martyr.” A martyr is one who dies as a testimony of his or her belief. This is what actually occurred in the case of Jesus. The condition of our being privileged to reign with him is our willingness to die for the same thing that caused his death, which was faithfulness in bearing witness to the Truth. It may not be our privilege to die as dramatically as Jesus died, but we must be willing to do so. We demonstrate our willingness by using up our strength and means in bearing witness to the Truth. No matter how faithful we may be in emulating Jesus in other ways—all of which are equally important—if we do not bear witness to the Truth as he did,

we will not be counted worthy to live and reign with him.

The repository of divine Truth has been the hearts of the humble followers of the Master, the “children of the kingdom.” (Matt. 13:38) Those faithful few have seen the vision of God’s plan for a new world. They have dared to tell the people that all human plans will fail, that nothing but God’s kingdom will solve the problems of a fear-filled world. They have not had the help of the world in telling this story, but to the contrary, have been handicapped by the world’s opposition.—John 15:18-20

It was the same with Jesus. “Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him?” the people asked. (John 7:48) They soon realized that their recognized leaders frowned upon the Master and his teachings, so much so that they desired to kill him. While “the common people heard him gladly,” only a few really believed—one here, one there—and these, by divine appointment, became the means through which the kingdom message was imparted to others. (Mark 12:37) Thus it has been throughout the age since Pentecost. The kingdom message has been as a light in a dark place. (II Pet. 1:19) It has not enlightened the world in general, but it has served as a beacon light to point individuals to Christ and to show them the way by which they might enter into and enjoy the blessings of the kingdom of heaven.

The Marvelous Light of Truth

It is through the witness of the Truth, given first by Jesus and continued by his consecrated followers

from generation to generation throughout the Gospel Age, that each and all of the prospective joint-heirs of the kingdom are separated from the world. God has called them "out of darkness into his marvellous light." The apostle explains that the purpose of this calling is to show forth the "praises of him who hath called" us. In order that we may do this effectively, we have been made a "chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people." (I Pet. 2:9) Through this arrangement, the knowledge of God's glory will eventually be caused to fill the earth as the waters cover the sea.—Hab. 2:14

In the great economy of God's plan this witnessing for the Truth is the means both for calling his people and testing them. It tested Jesus and demonstrated his loyalty to the Heavenly Father, a demonstration of faithfulness that called for endurance against Satan's attacks all along the line. At the beginning of his faithful ministry, Satan endeavored to lure him away from his fidelity to God. (Matt. 4:1-11) Failing in this, he began his attack against Jesus with the result that this "faithful and true witness" was despised, rejected, stricken, smitten, afflicted, wounded, bruised, chastised, betrayed, condemned, and finally crucified.—Isa. 53:3-5; Matt. 20:18

Darkness Hateth the Light

It is well to remember that animosity toward Jesus was due to his faithfulness in bearing witness to the Truth. It was because he proclaimed unpopular Truth and exposed popular error. He was not persecuted because he was kind and gracious,

sympathetic, and loving. These qualities were elements of his perfection, and we should strive to copy them in our own daily lives and thus become more and more like him. (Rom. 8:29; II Cor. 3:18) It was his faithful testimony of the Truth, however, that incurred the opposition of Satan and Satan's world.

Because he let his light shine, Jesus was oppressed, but he bore it patiently. He was despised, but he did not seek to avoid oppression by compromising the Truth. He was rejected by men, but he rejoiced in the assurance of acceptance by God. He was betrayed, but he had the grace to refer to his betrayer as a "comrade." (Matt. 26:50, *Young's Literal Translation*) He was condemned, but he did not endeavor to justify himself. He was reviled, but he "reviled not again." (I Pet. 2:23) He was scourged, but he bore it patiently. He was mocked, but he displayed only pity and love toward those who derided him. He was wounded, but he accepted it as his Father's will, knowing that it was "for our transgressions." (Isa. 53:5) He was "bruised," and while the people thought he was "smitten of God," he triumphed in the experience, knowing that through it he was learning and demonstrating obedience to God by his faithfulness in bearing witness to the Truth.—Heb. 5:8

Only in his Heavenly Father did Jesus find that all-sufficient source of fellowship and comfort required to sustain him amidst the most trying hours of his strivings against the darkness and sin of Satan's world. Finally, he was crucified, put to death, even the cruel, ignominious death of the

cross. (Phil. 2:8) Above his head was displayed the information that he was “King of the Jews.” (John 19:19) Although intended to be derisive, it was true. He was the king of the Jews, and of the Gentiles as well—the King whom God had selected to rule over and bless all nations.—Ps. 72:8-11; Isa. 9:6,7

Still the people did not believe. Some cried out, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself.” (Luke 23:35) How little did they realize that by Jesus’ refusal to save himself, he was providing salvation for them, and for all the families of the earth. Indeed, Jesus was a faithful and true witness, and he was now being honored with the privilege of dying for his persecutors and all mankind. Could we have a better demonstration of divine love for the human race—a love demonstrated both by the Father and the Son?

On the morning of the third day, this faithful witness of the Truth was raised from the dead by the mighty power of God. The Apostle Paul later wrote, “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, ... And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”—Phil. 2:9-11

As Jesus was that “faithful and true witness,” so we should rejoice the more each day that it is our privilege to do as he did. If this be our happy portion, and if we are “faithful unto death,” we will be among those who live and reign “with Christ a thousand years.”—Rev. 2:10; 20:4 ■

WEEKLY PRAYER MEETING TEXTS

NOVEMBER 5—“Having an high priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.”—Hebrews 10:21,22 (Z. '00-170 Hymn 321)

NOVEMBER 12—“Be not faithless, but believing.”—John 20:27 (Z. '04-89 Hymn 263)

NOVEMBER 19—“Let us watch and be sober.”—I Thessalonians 5:6 (Z. '02-239 Hymn 272)

NOVEMBER 26—“And the LORD said unto Moses, What is that in thine hand?”—Exodus 4:2 (Z. '94-143, '01-348 Hymn 191)

OBITUARIES

The following brethren have recently finished their Christian course. We wish to express our sincere sympathy to their family and friends in the loss of these dear ones.

Sister Stella Baryla, Chicago, IL—September 17.
Age, 94

Brother Czesław Pogorzelski, Świdnik, Poland—
October 2. Age, 85

***The LORD is my rock, and my fortress,
and my deliverer.
2 Samuel 22:2***

*This is a blessed assurance applicable to all
the Lord's people, and it is amply verified to all those
who delight themselves in the Lord,
who meditate upon His goodness and render to Him
the praise that is due His holy name.*

*“The Lord is my rock
(upon which I may safely build my hopes),
and my fortress (in which I may safely hide),
and my deliverer (in every time of trouble).”
—Exceeding Great and Precious Promises—*

Simply Trusting

*Simply trusting ev'ry day,
Trusting through a stormy way;
Even when my store is small
Trusting Jesus, that is all.*

*Brightly doth his spirit shine
Into this poor heart of mine;
While he leads I cannot fall;
Trusting Jesus, that is all.*

*Singing, if my way is clear;
Praying, if the path is drear;
If in danger, for him call;
Trusting Jesus, that is all.*

*Trusting as the moments fly,
Trusting as the days go by;
Trusting him whate'er befall,
Trusting Jesus, that is all.*

—Hymns of Dawn—

Almost There

*Children of the Lord draw near,
Hear his orders-loud and clear;
There is a grand work to be done,
Down here, beneath the righteous sun.*

*Like John the Baptist we must be,
Now that we at last are free;
Free to tell the message out,
It shall be a mighty shout.*

*The time remaining is now short,
It's time to give the last report;
With fire and zeal let's labour hard,
Inside the Master's grand vineyard.*

*Come faithful brothers one and all,
Let all obey this final call;
Be joyful in the work we do,
Though the workers are so few.*

*Though opposition will arise,
Let's look ahead upon the prize;
So come dear brothers, let us share
Time does show-we're almost there.*

—Selected