

We Will Not Fear

“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.

Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea.”

—Psalm 46:1,2, New International Version

THE PEOPLE OF THE United States of America were startled and shocked by the terrorist hijackers who drove two jet planes into the New York World Trade Center twin towers, and set them on fire, causing them to collapse in less than two hours time. There were almost three thousand fatalities. Following this event on September 11, 2001, several deaths occurred caused by Anthrax virus being mailed to media and senators’ offices. Post Offices handling the mailed virus were contaminated and an undercurrent

of fear started to affect the people of the United States.

On October 22, 2001, the “*Time Magazine*” had as its front cover feature, “*The Fear Factor.*” In explanation of this feature it also listed on the front page:

Anthrax

FBI

Bin Laden’s Videotapes

Bombarded by threats, real and imagined, a nation on edge asks, What’s next?

Letters

Warnings

FEAR FACTOR

We publish here some excerpts from that article:

“We can argue over when the enemy decided to wage war against us—was it the moment the Ottoman Empire fell or when U.S. troops arrived in Saudi Arabia? But we know exactly when we went to war with them: 12:30 p.m. E.T. on Sunday, October 7. Now our pilots are shredding Afghanistan, and the waiting is over, and you didn’t need to be in New York or Washington or Kabul to feel like a soldier—or a target. The clock becomes a time bomb: we were warned that retaliation is now certain; we

wait, move to higher alert; time passes tick, tick; see anything suspicious? And we come to realize that something sinister has been planted in our midst, not just the threat but also the fear of the threat.

“By the time President Bush appeared in prime time to invite the country officially both to buck up and freak out, the war at home was already well under way. Haz-mat teams from coast to coast were being called out two and three times a day to decontaminate buildings because someone worried about powder in a package. The Governor of Tennessee put a \$10,000 bounty on the head of anyone calling in a bomb hoax because the schools were having to be evacuated so often. A pilot returned to the gate because a passenger switched seats too many times. Donald Trump was reported to be shopping for parachutes.

“The President’s dilemma—like the country’s—was plain. We are at war now, called to fight unseen enemies on multiple fronts. Report anything unusual or alarming, Bush said, in the hope that 280 million investigators have a better chance of foiling the next plot. But we are not trained for this, and an unmarked catering truck on a quiet street prompts three different neighbors to call the cops. ‘Be on the lookout for mysterious health symptoms,’ said health czar Tommy Thompson, but who doesn’t have those? We were told last week not to panic but to be prepared; to get on with our lives, even though we barely recognize them now that there are F-16s overhead and National Guardsmen at the train station.

“People who by last week felt they had regained their footing, who found it liberating to get on an airplane and luxurious to go to a football game on a gorgeous fall day, also found that the path out of our private caves is not a straight and steady one. You can feel cold again just by turning on the news. Or opening the mail.

“Once the first cases of anthrax exposure appeared in Florida and the envelope became a potential weapon of mass destruction, we got to see what panic looks like. ... The Nashville, Tenn., haz-mat team was called out five times in 48 hours, all for hoaxes. A woman phoned in a report that her computer keyboard was covered with a powdery substance. The FBI discovered that she had been eating cookies. The State Department was evacuated because somebody spilled some talcum powder.

“That did not seem like sheer hysteria by Friday, when we learned that Tom Brokaw’s assistant at NBC had tested positive for anthrax after opening a threatening letter with powder inside. At that moment the “*New York Times*” was being evacuated after another letter rained powder in the newsroom; this one was addressed to bioterrorism expert Judith Miller. Initial testing showed no sign of anthrax, but the threat still seemed real and cunning. You didn’t need to shoot the messengers; you just needed to scare them to death, because fear is bacterial as well. It can spread in the air and over the wires, infect the marketplace, lay waste to whole industries and leave its victims at home in bed with the covers pulled up. And the worst part was that since there were so many scares, so many hoaxes, we were in some ways doing this to ourselves.

“A thousand false alarms from an anxious nation are an exquisite diversion for those intent on mayhem; the police cannot be everywhere at once, and there is only so much they can do to button down the cities. Overworked cops who had already been on high alert worked even harder as the frightened calls poured in. ‘We are at risk of being overwhelmed,’ says a spokesman for the Kentucky division of emergency management. There are metal detectors at the Liberty Bell; Denver canceled its New Year’s Eve celebrations; Ohio called off a corn-husking festival. In Washington, where lawmakers are quietly terrified that the terrorists mean to finish what they started on September 11, officials closed 40 blocks around the Capitol to trucks and taped plastic over Senate office windows. There are enough gas masks in a room off the House chamber for each member and the floor staff, so members are told, leaving five for people in the press gallery, who number in the hundreds.

“Fear conscripts its own armies, takes its own prisoners. Even people who appear to be calm will privately confess: I won’t go to the mall anymore. I ask for a low floor at the hotel, near a staircase, I throw up every morning before I get on the train. I thought I heard a crop duster in the middle of the night. The strain of these weeks, the psychiatrists say, is especially hard on people who are already on the edge, and so, day by day, people began to snap. Last week it was the man on an American Airlines flight to Chicago who stormed the cockpit screaming, ‘Save the towers! Save the towers!’ A Delta plane made an emergency landing in Shreveport, La., escorted by fighter jets, after a passenger passed a threatening note to a flight attendant. Washington’s Reagan National

Airport finally reopened, but if you so much as get out of your seat to go to the bathroom, you risk having the plane diverted to Dulles.”

OUR LORD’S WORDS

As we read of the fear generated by the events since September 11 in our nation, Bible Students are reminded of our Lord’s words spoken to his disciples in answer to their question: “When shall these things be?” (Luke 21:7) Jesus had commented on the destruction of the Temple where they were at the time, and he mentioned—among other signs—“Men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.”—Luke 21:26

We are living in a time when the ‘powers of heaven’ are to be shaken. Satan, as “the prince of the power of the air,” (Eph. 2:2) continues to rule in the heavens, but soon he is to be displaced completely. God prophesied through the prophet Haggai, “In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come.” (Hag. 2:6,7, *NIV*) As men witness the terror that can be released and contemplate the various evils that can descend upon them, great fear arises. This, in essence, has occurred to our nation.

AMERICA’S ISOLATION

For centuries, ever since the continents of the Americas were discovered by European civilization, the people who settled the land have lived in isolation from the entanglement of the world. For 55 centuries after God created man, the American continents lay dormant. The people that came to live on these continents migrated from the Asiatic continent by crossing the Bering Straits in the far north, and worked their way southward. God had placed man in the region of Mesopotamia and from there man spread to the continents of Asia, Europe, and Africa.

When Christopher Columbus made his courageous journey five centuries ago sponsored by Spain, and discovered the Americas, he claimed the land for his sponsors. Spain, however, was only interested in the wealth they could find in the new land. And it was not until religious persecution caused some Englishmen to start a new life in the new world

that the American continent became colonized, and England had a dominant role in settling the new land.

The English colonists rebelled against the English government and gave birth to the new nation known as the United States of America. They were isolated from the rest of the world by two vast oceans—the Atlantic and the Pacific—and sought to maintain their isolation by enforcing the Monroe Doctrine passed by the new Congress of that nation.

This nation tried to stay out of two major worldwide conflicts, but was not able to succeed. Midway through World War I, and World War II, they entered the conflicts. Their young men died on the battlefields of these wars, but the ravages of war did not touch the elderly, families, and children of the nation. Recent events have emphasized the changing nature of wars and that isolation no longer exists, causing many to fear the use of biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons by terrorists against the people of this nation. Widespread fear has gripped the people as never before.

The turmoil in the world has not ceased since the Divine Right of Royalty ended in 1914. Various symbols have been employed in biblical prophecy to illustrate the events we have been witnessing since that time. The Prophet Haggai uses the illustration of shaking. This reminds us of earthquakes which, by the tremors of the earth, cause the earth to shake and structures to fall. The Apostle Paul quotes Haggai's prophecy (Hag. 2:6,7) speaking for God, "Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made [made by man], that those things which cannot be shaken may remain."—Heb. 12:26,27

Paul identifies what cannot be shaken when he says, "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear." (vs. 28) The kingdom that God will establish upon earth cannot be shaken. It will stand forever. Meanwhile, all of man's structures must be removed to make way for that kingdom. Knowing about this kingdom should inspire us to serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear.

GOD IS OUR REFUGE AND STRENGTH

Another picture of the cataclysmic events of our time is given to us in the forty-sixth Psalm. There the mountains are seen falling into restless

seas. The mountains picture the kingdoms of this world, and the seas picture restless humanity. In this picture, the mountains fall into the sea and are pounded to pieces by the waves. They seem to dissolve into the waters. Likewise, the earth—a picture of the present social order upon our planet—is removed, or gives way to the new kingdom. (Ps. 46:2) The psalm interprets its own symbols saying, “The heathen [nations] raged, the kingdoms [mountains] were moved: he uttered his voice, the earth melted [the social order dissolved away].”—vs. 6

If we were to witness literal mountains being carried into raging seas, we would be terrified by the scene. Instead, we are carried as if by eagle wings to a high tower in the midst of this raging torrent. As we read in this psalm, “Yahweh of hosts is with us. A high tower for us is the God of Jacob.” (Ps. 46:7,11, *Rotherham Translation*) This psalm, which was written to be sung in the synagogues of Israel, and dedicated to the Chief Musician for the sons of Korah, has been an inspiration for a well-known hymn from the “*Hymns of Dawn*.” The chorus is sung:

“My strong tower is He!
 To Him will I flee:
 In Him confide, in Him abide;
 My strong tower is He!”

The second verse of this hymn says:

“Wild waves are round me swelling,
 Dark clouds above I see;
 Yet, in my fortress dwelling,
 More safe I cannot be.”

As we view the collapsing of the present social order upon earth, and the destructive forces of the ‘Lord’s great army’ (Joel 2:11), we will not fear because we are safe in our Father’s care, in the knowledge of his plan and of his kingdom to come.

The Apostle John says, “Fear hath torment.” This is so true, and our love for God and his plan should enable us to cast out all fear. (I John 4:18) Whatever happens in the world today, or whatever we can see coming upon the earth in these climactic times, our confidence in God and his plan should carry us forward to seeing the wonderful vision of his glorious kingdom. May the vision of that kingdom enthuse and inspire us to be faithful in fulfilling our consecration vows. Let us heed the words

of our beloved Lord and Master, “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”—Luke 12:32

As our neighbors and friends show evidence of fear, we can help console them with the explanation of how Haggai’s prophecy is being fulfilled. The shaking of heaven (religious concepts and dogmas that cause terrorists to do what damage they do), and the shaking of the earth, are preludes to the “desire of all nations” coming! This is the promised blessing of God’s kingdom, which will be inaugurated when “the marriage of the Lamb” takes place. (Rev. 19:7) It will be then that the Lord[Jehovah] shall “fill this house [temple] with glory.”—Hag. 2:7

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Remaining Loyal

***Key Verse: “Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.”
—Ruth 1:16***

***Selected Scripture:
Ruth 1:1-8, 16, 17***

THE SETTING FOR THE Book of Ruth is during the period of the Judges. A severe drought caused a famine in the land and prompted an Ephratite named Elimelech, living in Bethlehem in Judea, to take his wife Naomi and their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, to the land of Moab to escape the hardship. Moab was not a friendly country, but Elimelech and his family were absorbed into its society. Shortly after their arrival, Elimelech died. His two sons married women of Moab—Orpah and Ruth. After ten years of living in Moab both sons also died leaving three widows.

Naomi heard that the famine was over in Judah, and decided to return to her previous home. Her two daughters-in-law decided to accompany her, which speaks well for Naomi. She must have been a good mother-in-law to her daughters, and they both loved her. Naomi knew, however, that Israel’s society would not easily absorb them and so she advised that they both should return to their former homes in Moab. But both refused to take her advice, and insisted on going with her. Naomi reasoned again with them, stressing that she was too old to be married and have more sons. Even if she was able, would they be willing to wait until they reached maturity? Orpah finally yielded to Naomi’s reasoning and went back to her family. When Naomi called this to the attention of Ruth, she replied in the beautiful words of our Key Verse, “Entreat me not to leave thee, or return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.”—Ruth 1:16

Our focus on these words so often is on the tender love Ruth had for Naomi. We note the last words which can be overlooked, ‘Thy God [will be] my God.’ When Elimelech went to Moab he took the worship of Jehovah with him, and his wife and sons were devout worshippers also. Ruth was impressed with the worship of Jehovah and became a believer in the God of Israel. Later Boaz said to Ruth, “The Lord [Jehovah] recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the Lord God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust.”—Ruth 2:12

Ruth’s loyalty was not only to Naomi, whom she loved, but also to the God of Israel whom she now worshipped. When Naomi saw “that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her.” (Ruth 1:18) They departed together for Bethlehem, and when they reached the city they were greeted by the town residents who were glad to see Naomi again. They said, “Is this Naomi?” (vs. 19) Naomi, whose name means ‘pleasant’, said, “Call me not Naomi, call me Mara [bitter]: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the Lord hath brought me home again empty.” (Ruth 1:20,21) Naomi was thinking of having left with her husband and two sons who had died in Moab. She was wrong, however, in saying that the Lord had brought her back empty, because she had returned with a daughter-in-law that became a most precious jewel in Israel.

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Showing Kindness

Key Verse: *“May the LORD repay you for what you have done.*

May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.”

—Ruth 2:12, New International Version

Selected Scriptures:

***Ruth 2:1, 8-12;
4:13-17***

24:19-22, as well as in Leviticus 23:22. Israel was far in advance of other nations because of such laws of God.

Ruth went out to glean in the fields because it was the time of the barley harvest. She selected a field that belonged to Boaz, a kinsman of Naomi. When Boaz came to the field to see the workers, he noticed Ruth and asked about her. Learning her identity, he spoke to Ruth and gave her special privileges. When she asked why he was so good to her, a foreigner, he replied in the words of our Key Verse, that knowledge of the goodness she had shown to Naomi had preceded her and the people of Bethlehem knew of her loyalty and love. That evening when Naomi asked where she had gleaned, she told her about Boaz, and Naomi looked upon this matter as a good sign, because Boaz was a near kinsman.—Ruth 2:2-22

WHEN NAOMI AND RUTH arrived in Bethlehem they were two widows without any means of support. Naomi owned land, but it had not been farmed in more than ten years. In the western world, laws have been passed to establish welfare programs. Centuries ago Israel had the Law, and it, too, provided for the poor. Their Law said, “When ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the Lord your God.” (Lev. 19:9,10) This is repeated in more detail in Deuteronomy

As Ruth continued to glean in the field of Boaz, Naomi started to lay plans for her welfare. She planned to sell her property and exercise the Levirate law. (Deut. 25:5-10) She gave very special instructions to Ruth as to what she should do to exercise this law, and Ruth followed her instructions faithfully. Boaz was pleased that Ruth had made this approach, but there was a kinsman nearer than he was to Naomi, who had the right of becoming a kinsman redeemer first. When Ruth reported all of this to Naomi, she said to Ruth, “The man will not be in rest, until he have finished the thing this day.”—Ruth 3:18

Naomi knew Boaz well. He immediately went to the gate of the city and found the nearer kinsman who was willing to buy the land Naomi was selling. When he found out that he also had to take Ruth as his wife and raise seed unto Mahlon, her dead husband, he relinquished his right to Boaz, who then vowed to be the kinsman redeemer before the elders. It came to pass that Boaz took Ruth as his wife and they had a son named Obed. Obed was the father of Jesse, who became the father of David. Eventually Jesus, the Messiah of Israel, was born of David’s line.—Luke 3:23-33

When Naomi took the babe, Obed, to her bosom, the women of Bethlehem said, “Blessed be the Lord, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, ... for thy daughter in law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath born him.” (Ruth 4:14,15) Was Naomi happy? Most assuredly! The kindness she had shown to Ruth was returned to her. The kindness of Boaz to Ruth had returned to him and he too was blessed of the Lord, as was Ruth.

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Running From God

Key Verse: “Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.”

—Jonah 1:3

*Selected Scriptures:
Jonah 1:1-4, 11-17;
2:1, 10*

JONAH WAS MOST LIKELY a prophet to the ten-tribe, or northern, kingdom of Israel. His book does not prophesy concerning Israel, although he is mentioned in II Kings 14:25 as the prophet used by the Lord to forecast the restoration of land lost for awhile. The Book of Jonah deals with the wicked city of Nineveh whose crimes are described in Nahum, chapter 3. Jonah was asked to go to Nineveh and cry out against it. Instead, he went in the opposite direction boarding a ship sailing to Tarshish. No reason is given for his action, but later we find what motivated him.

Jonah boarded the ship, paid his fare, went down into the lower section, and fell asleep. The Lord caused a great wind and tempest to come upon the sea, and the storm was so violent that the ship was about to be broken up. The

sailors cast some of the cargo overboard and cried unto their gods to save them. The captain of the ship went below deck and found Jonah sleeping. He awakened him and told him to cry unto his God to save them. Then the sailors decided to cast lots and determine who was responsible for this calamity. The lot fell upon Jonah, and he was interrogated thoroughly. They found out that he was a Hebrew and worshipped the God that made heaven and earth. They also learned he was running away from God.

When they asked Jonah what should be done, he told them to cast him into the sea. The sailors were reluctant to do this and tried to bring the

ship to land. The storm grew worse and they were forced to hurl Jonah into the sea. As soon as they had done so, the sea became calm. They had prayed to Jonah's God not to be charged with innocent blood and when the sea calmed, they were converted and offered up sacrifices. Meanwhile, the Lord had appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah and he was in the fish for three days and three nights. Jonah knew now that he could not run away from God.

There has been much speculation as to what type of great fish was appointed by God to swallow Jonah. Two species have been suggested, the whale and the white shark. There are many species of whales, but one in particular has a deep mouth cavity with a lattice of bone-work at the end, which permits fish and crustaceans to enter the digestive system of the whale, but will hold back a large object. The whale depends on airborne oxygen to survive. Jonah's survival was a miracle of God.

From the belly of the whale, Jonah utters a beautiful prayer. It was out of *sheol* (the condition of death) that Jonah recognized finally that salvation is of the Lord. (Jonah 2:9) After the three days and nights, the fish vomited Jonah onto dry land. There are many reasons why this experience befell Jonah, but one was that he was to be a sign. During the ministry of Jesus, Israel sought a sign from Jesus that he was the Messiah, but none was given except the sign of Jonah. (Matt. 12:38-42; 16:1-4; Luke 11:29-32) They missed this sign completely.

We are glad that we have not missed this sign, but see clearly that Messiah had to suffer and die and be in the grave (*sheol, hades*) three days and three nights.

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Showing Mercy

Key Verse: “He prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.”
—Jonah 4:2

Selected Scriptures:
Jonah 3:1-5, 10;
4:1-5, 11

AFTER JONAH WAS vomited onto land by the great fish, the word of the Lord came unto him a second time, telling him to go to Nineveh and to preach unto that city. This time, Jonah went as bidden by the Lord. The city was very large and to walk around its perimeter took three days. It was possibly an eighteen mile by eighteen mile square in area. As Jonah started walking around the city he cried, “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.”—Jonah 3:4

The people of Nineveh worshipped a fish god. Jonah was a sign and his experience with the great fish became well known. Hence, the people of Nineveh believed his message, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth. Their king not only followed suit, but made a proclamation calling upon all the people to turn from their evil ways and from violence. When God saw the

reaction of these people to Jonah’s message, he did not cause the evil to come upon them as he had planned.

This action by God displeased Jonah, and he became very angry. Nineveh was a city of ruthless and cruel people who invaded other nations and showed them no mercy. Jonah prayed to God, and revealed that he had concerns about the Lord’s mercy and forgiveness towards Nineveh and balked at going to Nineveh the first time. The Lord, however, asked Jonah if he had any right to be angry.—Jonah 4:1-4

Jonah did not reply. Instead he went outside of the city and sat in a high place east of the city so that he could observe what was happening. He may have thought that when the Lord saw the true nature of these people, he might still destroy the city.

The weather was hot and dry. The Lord made a vine, or gourd, grow quickly over Jonah to shade his head, and Jonah was glad to have the relief from the scorching sun. The next morning God permitted a worm to chew the vine, causing it to wither and die. At the same time, a scorching east wind brought unbearable heat, so that Jonah wanted to die. God then asked Jonah, “Do you have any right to be angry about the vine?” Jonah had not labored to bring it forth; it came up quickly in one night and perished quickly the next night. It was strictly God’s doing. So also, the Lord pointed out to Jonah, the fate of the people of Nineveh rested strictly with him.

Mercy is a wonderful quality. It belongs to God. The proclamation made by God to Moses concerning himself was, “Yahweh, Yahweh, A God of compassion and favour, Slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness and faithfulness: Keeping lovingkindness to a thousand generations, Forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin, Though he leave not utterly unpunished, Visiting the iniquity of fathers Upon sons, And upon sons’ sons, Unto a third and unto a fourth generation.”—Exod. 34:6,7, *Rotherham Translation*

The contrast between God’s lovingkindness and his punishments are as a thousand generations to three or four generations. A wonderful testimony given by Jesus of his Father said, “Love ye your enemies, ... Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.”—Luke 6:35,36

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Trial, Praise, and Wisdom

IN LAST MONTH'S examination of the books of the Bible, we concluded with the Book of Esther. This is the last one which is devoted largely to history; although, as we saw, even the historical portions of the Bible contain many helpful assurances of God's care for his people, as well as revealing statements pertaining to his plan for human redemption and restoration.

THE BOOK OF JOB

Next is the Book of Job. It contains the story of a wealthy and godly patriarch who stood high in the esteem of his fellowman, and was greatly blessed by God. As the story unfolds, we find Satan accusing Job before God, insisting that this rich man's piety and his loyalty to God was based wholly upon self-interest—that if God's blessings were taken away he would curse God.

The narrative reveals that Satan was permitted an opportunity to try to prove his accusation by bringing calamity upon Job. His flocks and home were destroyed and his children killed. He was stricken with a loathsome disease, and then his wife, thinking that God had withdrawn his favor from her husband, turned against him. But in spite of all this, Job maintained his integrity before God. The question raised by Satan was answered, proving that it is possible to serve God without material reward, and in spite of great loss and severe pain.

With Satan's accusations proved false, three friends of Job visited him—Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. Finally a fourth appeared—Elihu. These first three are sometimes referred to as 'Job's comforters,' although they said little to console him. They endeavored, however, to convince the patriarch that the calamities which had befallen him were proof that he had committed some gross sin for which he was being punished. Job argued with his comforters that this was not true. The eloquence of Job and those who reasoned with him has no parallel in literature for beauty, style, and the clever use of words. While the

discussion is based upon the personal trials of Job, in reality it points up the larger question as to why any of God's intelligent creatures are permitted to suffer; or why evil is permitted.

Job refused to admit that he was guilty of any special sin. Nevertheless, neither he nor his friends succeeded in reaching a definite conclusion as to why so much evil had befallen him. The story relates that then God spoke to Job out of a storm, and set the real facts before him. This part of the book—chapters 38 to 41—is superb in its style. In language of incomparable grandeur God silences Job, making him realize that while he was able to refute the charges of his comforters, he actually was a sinner and stood in need of God's grace.

The lesson learned, Job was restored to health, and again became a rich man. One of his calamities was the loss of his children, but God gave him another family, and at the end he was far richer in every way than he was before Satan asked for the privilege of testing him.

Many Bible students see in this wonderfully interesting narrative a beautiful illustration of the permission of evil as it relates to the experiences of the entire human race. All mankind has suffered because of sin, but in God's providence, and as a result of the loving provision he has made through the Redeemer, Christ Jesus, they are to be restored to health and life. This means that ultimately the human race will be in a much more favorable position than our first parents were before they transgressed God's law.

After God spoke to Job, and he realized more clearly the meaning of his trials, Job said to him, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee." (Job 42:5) This will be true in the experiences of the human race. Millions have heard about God, but when the lessons are learned from the experience with evil they will 'see,' that is, truly know and appreciate their Creator and loving God. This, the Bible reveals, will be at the close of the thousand-year reign of Christ.

Even while passing through his great suffering, Job expressed full confidence in his God, and in so doing gave us one of the most sublime expressions of trust to be found in the Bible. He said concerning God, "He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold."—Job 23:10

At one stage in his experience Job, although still trusting God, wondered if life under such painful circumstances was really worth living, so he asked God to let him die. In the Lord's providence, Job used language on this occasion which has served to help reveal the state of the dead. He prayed, "O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave, ... until thy wrath be past."—Job 14:13

The Hebrew word here translated 'grave' is *sheol*. This is the only Hebrew word in the Old Testament which is translated 'hell.' Job's use of it in this connection proves that the righteous go to the Bible hell at death, as well as the wicked. It is simply the state of death from which the Lord has promised a resurrection. Job stated his faith in the resurrection saying, "All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands."—vss. 14,15

THE BOOK OF PSALMS

Next in order comes the Book of Psalms, the major portion of which was written by King David. It is sometimes called the songbook of the Bible. Many of these psalms were set to music and used in the ancient Temple services. In fact, some of the psalms are still used in Jewish religious services, and also in Christian churches.

Due to the nature of his writings, David is usually referred to as a psalmist, although in the Bible this title is applied to him only once. The writings of David are frequently quoted in the New Testament, and there he is described as a prophet. The two titles, psalmist and prophet, are quite in keeping with the two outstanding characteristics of the Book of Psalms, for many of the psalms are poetic and devotional in nature, while others contain some of the outstanding prophecies of God's Word.

The second Psalm contains a prophecy telling of Jesus being established as earth's king.

The eighth Psalm refers to the original creation of man in the image of God, and of his being constituted king of earth. It prophesies a 'visit' to earth by a messenger from heaven. The New Testament refers to this, and identifies Jesus as the visitor, and explains that the purpose of his visit is to restore man's original dominion.—vss. 3-8

The sixteenth Psalm is a prophecy concerning the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The prophet personifies Jesus, and expressing his hope in a resurrection, writes, “Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.” (vs. 10) This text is also translated in the *New International Version* of the Bible, “Because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay.” The Hebrew word *sheol* is translated ‘hell’ in the *King James Version* of the Bible and ‘grave’ in the *NIV* and many other translations. This prophecy shows that Jesus went to the grave when he died.

The twenty-third Psalm is the beautiful shepherd psalm in which David, a former shepherd boy, draws from his background of experience in tending sheep, to pen a beautiful and reassuring description of God’s care for his people. “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want,” writes David. Then he enumerates the needs of the people of God as a shepherd sees the needs of his sheep, and expresses confidence that God will supply those needs.

The forty-sixth Psalm is another prophecy of our time, combined with the promise of God’s presence with his people to care for them in this time of the world’s distress and trouble. “God is our refuge and strength,” writes the prophet, “a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.” (vss. 1,2) The word ‘earth’ is here used to symbolize a social order, or what is styled today as civilization.

The seventy-second Psalm is a marvelous prophecy of the kingdom of Christ and the rich blessings of peace and security, which it will assure to all nations. Concerning Jesus, the new king of earth, David wrote in this psalm, “All kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him. For he shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper.”—vss. 11,12

The ninety-first Psalm is a song of assurance that God will care for his people regardless of the strength and cunning of enemies who may seek to injure them. It is couched in beautiful, symbolic language, the opening verses reading, “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust.”—vss. 1,2

The ninety-sixth Psalm is one of thanksgiving to God for the establishment of righteousness and judgment in the earth through the medium of Christ's kingdom. In this psalm we have one of the many assurances given us in the Bible that the future judgment day of the world is not to be a doomsday, but one of rejoicing and deliverance. The last two verses of the psalm read, "Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein: then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice Before the Lord: for he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth: he shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth."

The opening psalm in this songbook declares, "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night."—Ps. 1:1,2

This theme is reiterated in various ways throughout the book, and associated with songs of praise for the marvelous manner in which God blesses those whose delight is in his law. The whole book rings with thanksgiving and glory to God, closing with the grand hallelujah crescendo, "Praise ye the Lord. Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power. Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his excellent greatness. Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: praise him with the psaltery and harp. Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs. Praise him upon the loud cymbals: praise him upon the high sounding cymbals. Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord."—Ps. 150

THE PROVERBS

Next of the Old Testament books is The Proverbs. The greater portion of this book was written by King Solomon. To Solomon is attributed the possession of much wisdom, which he received when very young as a special favor from God, in response to his personal request. This wisdom is well displayed throughout The Proverbs.

There seems to be no special theme running through the book, unless it be the wisdom of obeying God's law, and living a just, honorable, and peaceful life. Many of the proverbs emphasize the importance of wisdom, declaring that it is much more valuable than gold or other riches. Perhaps

the best conception of the contents and style of the book can be had by quoting some of its sayings and admonitions:

“A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels.”—Prov. 1:5

“The Lord giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.”—Prov. 2:6

“Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart.”—Prov. 3:3

“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”—Prov. 3:5,6

“Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.”—Prov. 4:7

“These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.”—Prov. 6:16-19

“The righteous shall never be removed: but the wicked shall not inhabit the earth.”—Prov. 10:30

“There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty.”—Prov. 11:24

“Lying lips are abomination to the Lord: but they that deal truly are his delight.”—Prov. 12:22

“A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.”—Prov. 15:1

“Better is little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble therewith.”—Prov. 15:16

“How much better is it to get wisdom than gold! and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver!”—Prov. 16:16

“Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise: and he that shutteth his lips is esteemed a man of understanding.”—Prov. 17:28

“Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the Lord pondereth the hearts.”—Prov. 21:2

“A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold.”—Prov. 22:1

“If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink.”—Prov. 25:21

“Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth.”—Prov. 26:20

“The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe.”—Prov. 29:25

Chapter 30 was written by “Agur the son of Jakeh,” and chapter 31—the last in the book—lists “king Lemuel” as its author. Agur is an unknown Hebrew sage; nor is the identity of Lemuel very certain; but both are generally accepted as being among the Lord’s inspired writers.

ECCLESIASTES—THE PREACHER

Ecclesiastes means ‘the preacher,’ and this title was probably given to the next book of the Old Testament because of its opening verse, “The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.” David had but the one son who reigned as king in Jerusalem, who was Solomon. Although Solomon’s name is not mentioned in the book, he is evidently its author. During his reign Solomon became very rich, and he surrounded himself with much glory and pomp. God had blessed him with great wisdom, yet he was most unwise in his personal life. He writes much in the Book of Ecclesiastes to indicate that in his latter years he realized the folly of his ways, so seeks to admonish others not to follow his foolish example.

The book is a reminder that despite riches, pleasure, honor, and glory, life is vain without God. Solomon had learned this, and wrote, “In the multitude of dreams and many words there are also divers vanities: but fear thou God.”—Eccles. 5:7

The last chapter opens with an admonition for the young: “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.” (Eccles. 12:1) Then follows a symbolic description of approaching old age, and finally of death, concerning which Solomon writes: “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.”—Eccles. 12:7

The word ‘spirit’ in this text translates a Hebrew word, which simply means the breath of life. In Solomon’s description of death he is telling us that every part of man, both his body and his breath, returns to its original condition, which leaves one who has died exactly as before he was born.

Incidental to his general theme of regret for the wrong course he had taken, Solomon furnishes valuable information concerning the earth and the estate of man. In chapter 1, verse 4, he declares that “the earth abideth for ever.” This is in full keeping with the plan of God, as revealed throughout his entire Word, to restore the human race to live on the earth forever. It refutes the traditional theory, which has come down to us from the Dark Ages, that the earth was to be destroyed by fire at the Second Coming of Christ.

Solomon must have heard of the theory, even in that ancient time, that man does not really die at all, that when he seems to die he is merely being translated into a spiritual realm—the claim being that man has a ‘spirit’ which is immortal and cannot die—for in chapter 3, verses 19-21, he writes, “That which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. Who knoweth [who can prove that] the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that [it] goeth downward to the earth?”

In chapter 9, verse 10, Solomon furnishes us with a concise definition of the Hebrew word *sheol*, which is the only word in the Old Testament translated ‘hell.’ This same word, however, is in many places translated ‘grave,’ but the meaning is the same. In his use of the word *sheol* Solomon wrote, “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, [*sheol*] whither thou goest.”

In Solomon’s day all writing was done by hand, and on parchment scrolls—a tedious procedure. Reading these scrolls was also difficult and laborious, so ‘the preacher’ concludes his ‘book’ with a summary of his findings, saying, “By these, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his

commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.”—Eccles. 12:12-14

THE SONG OF SOLOMON

This book is the last of Solomon’s writings which appear in the Old Testament. It is sometimes called “Canticles.” The entire book may be styled a drama. Some scholars claim that it is the story of Solomon’s love for, and marriage to, either Pharaoh’s daughter or an Israelitish woman, the “Shulamite.”—Song of Sol. 6:13

We think it is more likely that the Lord directed it to be a general picture of the love of Christ for his church, which ultimately becomes his ‘bride.’ In keeping with this, how beautifully stated is the adoration of the church, when she says concerning Christ that he is “the chiefest among ten thousand,” the one “altogether lovely.”—Song of Sol. 5:10,16

Dawn Bible Students Association

The True and Living God

*“He be not far from
everyone of us.”
—Acts 17:27*

MANY THINK THAT THE most important study of man is man. To become acquainted with God, however, contributes far more to one’s present peace of mind and heart, as well as to a greater assurance of his future

well-being. In the Book of Job—written four thousand years ago, and which is one of the most dramatic poems ever to be expressed in human language—it is stated, “Acquaint now thyself with him [God], and be at peace.”—Job 22:21

Fifteen hundred years later the Prophet Daniel, seeing the division, the tribulations, and persecutions that were to come upon the people of God, before which many would weaken and fall, added, “But the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits.” (Dan. 11:32) Valor in Divine service is contingent upon our knowledge of the God whom we serve.

Some centuries later Jesus declared, “This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou has sent.” (John 17:3) In these words Jesus is not calling our attention to the way in which we may obtain eternal life—although this also would be true—but is emphasizing that the object of eternal life is that we may know God and his beloved Son. This will require eternity, during the endless ages of which we will be continuously measuring the breadth and sounding the depth of the infinite mind and character of God. And man will never be able to comprehend him fully. The Apostle Peter added his testimony, saying, “Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord.” (II Pet. 1:2) Our ‘grace’ and our ‘peace’ are contingent upon our acquaintanceship with God. The psalmist wrote that only the “fool”—that is, one who does not have a knowledge of the Creator, and is unable to exercise faith in him—says in his heart, “There is no God.”—Ps. 53:1

Many people believe that there is a God, although the vast majority of these entertain no definite ideas concerning him and what his designs for

his human creation might be. No matter how far one has fallen from that image of God which was represented in father Adam, in his heart and mind there usually lingers the desire to worship a higher power. Man is essentially a worshipping animal.

All nature bears testimony to the existence of a Supreme Being. In Hebrews 3:4 we read, “He that built all things is God.” Astronomy declares this; chemistry attests it; botany illustrates it; geology proves it; zoology shows it; and the science of physics demonstrates it.

Intelligence is found behind all creation—an intelligent first cause. The fact of the existence of God’s supreme intelligence is seen in the infinite design of this great universe, including our solar system and the planet Earth. It is seen also in organic and inorganic matter, and in the relationship of the two. It is seen in the air we breathe, in the water we drink, and in the food we eat. Man was not created for the air, nor for the food. These, rather, were designed and created for man, long before he was created. And what a loving design this was on the part of an all-wise God and Creator!

Man’s abilities vary, but he owes all to the fact that he was designed and created by an intelligent Creator who endowed him with qualities of mind and heart similar to his own. And who among the followers of Jesus could for a moment doubt the existence of God? Our every experience as Christians testifies to the existence of a personal Deity, whose we are and whom we serve.

The God whom we worship, the God of Divine revelation, the God of the Bible, is presented to us everywhere, and on every page of his Word, as a personal God. He has a personality. The Bible reveals that our Heavenly Father thinks, feels, and wills. The fact that he thinks shows that he has an intellect. The fact that he feels proves that he has sensibilities; and the fact that he wills means that he has character and acts consistently therewith.

As a personal God, he possesses the quality of knowledge, for the Scriptures declare, “The Lord God of gods, he knoweth.” (Josh. 22:22; Ps. 44:21; Acts 15:18) God, whom we worship, has sensibilities. He has pity. He loves. (Ps. 103:13) He exercises his will. Jesus taught us to pray, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done.” (Luke 11:2) Paul speaks of him as working “all things after the counsel of his own will.”—Eph. 1:11

God works, but always according to the counsel of his own will. He has never found it necessary to consult any of his creatures as to what he should do, or how. This is a fact we might well consider, for we are sometimes prone, in our prayers, to advise God what he ought to do. It is fortunate for all his creatures that he has never taken their counsel into consideration.

God has a body. In John 5:37 we read, “Ye have neither heard his voice ... nor seen his shape.” This means simply that although God has a body, man has never seen that body or organism at any time. God is a spirit—a spirit being. In I Corinthians 15:44-49 the Apostle Paul explains that there are spiritual bodies and also natural or human bodies. God is spirit, therefore his organism is spirit, made up of spirit substances.

The Scriptures reveal that originally God alone possessed immortality, which is one of the qualities of the Divine nature, and when Jesus was raised from the dead the Divine nature was bestowed upon him. (I Tim. 1:17; 6:16) A good definition of immortality is the one given by Jesus when he said, “As the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself.”—John 5:26

Eternity has to do with existence. God is said to be the first: “I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God.” (Isa. 44:6) The beloved Son of God, Christ Jesus, was highly exalted to the Divine nature at the time he was raised from the dead by the “glory of the Father.” (Rom. 6:4) This same glorious reward is promised to the faithful footstep followers of the Master. The Creator will continue to remain the Supreme Being in all his great universe. He has said, “My glory will I not give to another.”—Isa. 42:8

THE SELF-SUFFICIENT ONE

The God whom we worship, the God revealed to us in the Bible, in his very nature is self-sufficient. He needs nothing to add to his own personal sufficiency. (Acts 17:25) At times we might presume that God needs something, such as our advice, perhaps, or our assistance. He not only does not need anything from us, but is continually bestowing his gifts upon us. He is the Giver of every good and perfect gift.—James 1:17

God is omnipotent. Omnipotence means almightiness—able, that is, to do anything. Nevertheless he reveals to us that he has placed a limit upon his omnipotence. We are told in Hebrews 6:18 that God cannot lie, and

in II Timothy 2:13 that he cannot deny himself. In James 1:13 we are informed that God is not tempted by evil. He is a holy God, a righteous God, and a God of justice and power. In Job 9:6-9 we read that God is as boundless in the exercise of his power as is the universe itself.

As we have seen, our God is a person, and has all the qualities peculiar to personality. The Bible speaks of the ‘ears’ of God, the ‘eyes’ of God, his ‘mouth,’ and his ‘face.’ We also read of the ‘finger’ of God, as well as his ‘hand,’ his ‘arm,’ and his ‘feet.’ We may not know fully all that is intended by these expressions, but in Psalm 94 we are given at least a hint by the question, “He that planted the ear, shall he not hear?” (Ps. 94:9) How strange it would be if the one who created the ear could not himself hear! Yes, we are assured that God has the sense of hearing—he can hear everything, everywhere, all the time, to the farthest reaches of his great universe.

Again the psalmist wrote, “He that formed the eye, shall he not see?” (Ps. 94:9) This means that God has the ability to see everything, everywhere, all the time. Of God’s omnipotence in this respect Jesus declared that not a sparrow falls to the ground that the Father does not notice. This is not only a literal statement of fact, but it does emphasize God’s ability to see and be apprised of the smallest things in our lives.

The Bible informs us emphatically that God never did have a beginning; it tells us just as definitely that his works had. It follows, then, that God existed prior to any of his works of Creation, which means that there must have been a time when he was alone. When we contemplate his character, including his self-sufficiency, we are impressed by the fact that God could be just as contented and happy alone as with all the works of Creation surrounding him.

If this were true, however, why did God trouble himself to create the universe? He was not troubled, for we cannot think of God being troubled over anything. He accomplishes the most difficult task as easily as the simplest one. Even this is a misstatement, for we cannot say that anything is either easy or difficult for God to do. He does what he wills to do, and nothing can resist that will.

We might ask what God was doing when he was alone, or what he was doing before he did anything! But here again is a misstatement. We cannot think of God as ever having been idle. With human beings there

is usually much commotion attached to being busy, but this is not necessarily true of God; for many of his mightiest works are accomplished without ostentation and without noise.

The God of the Bible is the great and Supreme Architect of all that exists, or ever will exist. He planned it all according to the counsel of his own will. So, in all that eternity of the past, when he was alone, he might well have been formulating plans and purposes which will require the eternity of the future to accomplish. Our finite minds stagger as we try, even in a small way, to comprehend the God of eternity and his eternal works. We and all the hosts of heaven are but as little children playing with minute grains of sand on the shores of the ocean of eternity, where before our startled imagination spread the boundless purposes of our God, which are fathomless and immeasurable.

GOD IS OMNISCIENT

Omniscience means the knowledge of all things, and God possesses such knowledge. He perceives all things, he remembers all things. We are glad, however, that associated with the memory of all things he has given us the assurance that there are some things he elects to forget. This, too, is a quality of omniscience. Concerning Israel under the New Covenant which he has promised to make with them, God's promise is that their "sin" and "iniquity" he will remember "no more."—Jer. 31:31-34

We are told that all things are naked and revealed before God. (Heb. 4:13) In his perceptive powers he has an aptitude for calculation, order, color, weight, size, form, detail, time, place, harmony, construction, beauty, sublimity, and above all things else, intuition. All that he has ever seen, all that is yet to be seen, God has the ability to remember to all eternity!

Think of the infinite mind that was able to design everything which exists in his great universe—in the spirit world, and in the material world. All are the products of his wisdom and his power, and all designed in keeping with his justice and his love. In the creation of man, God endowed him with similar capacities, limited in scope to his environment, but capable of expansion throughout the ages. When at the end of the Millennial reign of Christ man stands once again before his Creator in perfection, he will be just stepping over the threshold of the opportunities

and possibilities which will continuously unfold throughout the eternity which is before him.

God has the quality of omnipresence—not personally, but because he is able to ‘see’ everything and ‘hear’ everything, everywhere. From this standpoint we are always in the presence of God.

Being a person, God has size. But how large is God? We do not know. How big is bigness? How small is smallness? The atom was at one time thought to be the smallest particle. It is from a Greek word meaning ‘indivisible.’ But now the atom is being divided. Moreover, the atom is now known to be like a little solar system in itself, the particles of which it is made up being so small that the distance between them, it is claimed by some, is relatively greater than the distance between the sun and its planets.

Ferrar Fenton’s translation of Isaiah 43:13 reads, “I existed before time itself.” There was no need for time when God was alone. But with the beginning of Creation a unit of value with respect to duration became essential, and God is an exact timekeeper. He is carrying out his plans according to a definite schedule. We are not fully able to understand that schedule, for he has not revealed it to us in detail. But when God’s time clock strikes, he moves, regardless of who may stand still. It is well to remember this.

In the eighth chapter of Proverbs, Fenton’s Translation quotes the Logos—personified as Wisdom—as saying, “I existed before he [God] had created space.” How wonderful to think that when the great Architect began to put his plans into execution he pushed back the walls of nothingness and created space! Then, out of his infinite wisdom and great power, he sowed space with the constellations of the heavens. God, the Creator, did this!

Solomon, in dedicating the Temple, realized how circumscribed it was to be the meeting place between God whom he worshipped and the people who were to serve him, so he asked the question, “Will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?” (I Kings 8:27) How wonderful that such a God is our Heavenly Father, that he dwells with us as his children, and that we have the assurance that he will give us strength in our every time of need!

GOD'S PLAN REVEALS HIS GLORY

The psalmist wrote, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.” (Ps. 19:1,2) Then in the seventh verse of this psalm David added, “The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.” So, while we are able to comprehend something of the glory of the Creator by noting the grandeur of his creative works, it is when we go to his Word and learn of his munificent designs toward his human creation that we acquire our most intimate knowledge of his glorious characteristics.

God created man in his own image, perfect, and fully able to measure up to the just requirements of his law. It was eminently proper that the Creator should exact absolute obedience on the part of his intelligent creatures. Since they disobeyed their Creator’s law, it was proper and equitable that they be condemned to death.

The Creator does not cease here with the revelation of his glorious character. Through his Divine plan for human recovery from death his love is displayed—“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) Jesus came to redeem man from death. To do this, he poured out his own soul unto death, thus taking the sinner’s place. This not only met the requirements of Divine justice and opened a way of escape for the sin-cursed race, but further manifested the Creator’s justice as well as his love—and the love also of his only begotten Son.

Beyond this, however, the full blaze of God’s glory is finally demonstrated through utilizing his power in the resurrection of the dead. The outstanding demonstration of this has already been given, although as yet recognized and fully believed only by a few. This was the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. The true followers of Jesus, those who have absolute confidence in the Word of the Lord and its testimony concerning the resurrection, have seen this marvelous manifestation of God’s glory. Concerning these Paul wrote:

“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 usward 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.”—Eph. 1:18-20

The Apostle Paul wrote that “Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father,” (Rom. 6:4) meaning that this unprecedented use of Divine power displayed the glory of God, even as all the works of creation ‘declare’ his glory. The glory of God is likewise displayed in the “first resurrection” of the church of Christ (Rev. 20:5,6); and ultimately all mankind will recognize this evidence of the Creator’s glory.

Coming even closer to the hearts of the human race, as evidence of the glory of God, will be the resurrection of all mankind from the sleep of death. Jesus stated to Martha while preparing to awaken her brother Lazarus from death, “Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?”—John 11:40

Habakkuk 2:14, a wonderful prophecy depicting the results of the reign of Christ in the earth, reads, “The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.” The Scriptures clearly reveal that one of the principal objectives of Christ’s reign is the restoration of the dead to life, and it may well be that the accomplishment of this by Divine power will be one of the mighty works of that kingdom which will contribute to filling the earth with God’s glory.

If, as Jesus indicated, the glory of God was revealed in the awakening of the one man Lazarus from death, what shall we say concerning the result of the awakening, not of one alone, but of the whole human family. This will be a demonstration of God’s glory, not in one community alone, but worldwide.

‘All the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God,’ and seeing it, the knowledge of his glory will indeed be ‘ocean deep’ the whole world over. (Ps. 98:3; Luke 3:6) No wonder the Revelator wrote, “Who shall not fear [reverence] thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for [or, when] thy judgments are made manifest.”—Rev. 15:4

Dawn Bible Students Association

Self-denial and Its Reward

“Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”
—*Matthew 16:24*

THESE WORDS OF THE Master were addressed to his disciples on the occasion when Peter attempted to dissuade the Lord from risking his life by appearing in Jerusalem. His enemies were lying in wait to arrest and put him to death. Jesus had said to Peter, “Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.” (Matt. 16:23) To paraphrase this rebuke, Jesus simply told Peter that his

advice not to go to Jerusalem, because of the danger involved, was contrary to his own purpose in coming to the earth. It was a human viewpoint of self-preservation and, under the circumstances, out of harmony with the will of God.

Then he addressed all of his little band of disciples in the words of our text, extending to them an invitation to suffer and die with him, adding, “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.” (Matt. 16:25) To the disciples this philosophy must have sounded very strange indeed. How could one save his life by losing it?

It was strange to them because, in their acceptance of Jesus as the promised Messiah, they had no thought that it would lead to suffering and death. Basing their convictions upon the promises of God, they believed that the Divine purpose through the Messiah was to give health and life. They understood furthermore, that he was destined to establish a powerful government in Judea, one which would free the Jewish nation from its Roman captors. It would extend its sphere of influence until all the world came under its control, and through its righteous administration receive the promised blessings of peace, joy and life.

JESUS TELLS OF HIS DEATH

They were not wrong concerning the ultimate objective of the Messianic purpose, but Jesus had a deeper insight into the Divine will and plan, and knew that what they expected was to be accomplished in a future age. Nor did he leave them entirely uninformed concerning this wider expanse in the Divine plan. Seeing that they erroneously expected the kingdom of the Messiah to be established immediately, he gave them the parable of a “certain nobleman”—speaking of himself—who went into a “far country” to receive a kingdom and then to return. (Luke 19:11,12) This parable was designed to prepare them, at least in part, for the fact that he would be taken away from them.

They learned from the parable that he was going away and returning later to set up his kingdom. We gather this from the questions they asked him on the Mount of Olives. (Matt. 24:3) But the parable did not say that their Master would go away in death, so it was the manner of his leaving them that constituted such a test upon their faith.

True, Jesus had, on various occasions and in different ways, indicated to them that he expected to die. On one occasion he said that he would give his flesh for the life of the world. (John 6:51) Toward the close of his ministry, when “certain Greeks” desired to see him, Jesus said to his disciples, “Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone.” (John 12:20,24) In the upper room on the occasion of the Last Supper, Jesus invited his disciples to partake of the “cup,” which, he said is my “blood of the new testament.” (Matt. 26:27,28) They undoubtedly knew that shed blood meant death.

Still they could not bring themselves to believe that these various sayings meant what they seemed to imply, for, as they viewed the matter, how could he possibly be the Messiah who would rule the whole world if he surrendered to his enemies and allowed them to put him to death? So it was to their consternation and confusion that he actually did this. We who know that God raised Jesus from the dead, cannot fully appreciate the bitterness of their disappointment when finally they realized that their Lord, their Master, their Messiah, was dead upon the cross.

THE JOURNEY TO EMMAUS

As noble men, having great confidence in the promises of God, they sought for the answer. Vaguely they remembered something which Jesus

had said about being raised up in three days. This probably bolstered their faith to some extent. But later, after the three days had passed, two of the disciples, while journeying to Emmaus, were joined by the resurrected Jesus. They had heard reports of his resurrection, but considered them to be “idle tales,” so they were sad.—Luke 24:11

They did not recognize Jesus, and he asked, “What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk, and are sad?” They asked him if he was a stranger in Israel, and did not know the things which had “come to pass there in these days.” He then asked, “What things?”—vss. 13-32

Replying to this question, they related some of the facts concerning the great prophet who had visited Israel, and that the chief priests and rulers had put him to death. “We trusted,” they continued, “that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel.” (vs. 21) Then they added, “to day is the third day since these things were done,” seeming to indicate that they had hoped that he would be raised from the dead on the third day.

True, they also reported to Jesus the fact that certain women had gone early to the tomb on the third day, had found it empty, and that angels had informed them that Jesus had been raised from the dead. But they related this in a manner which indicated their doubts that the report was really true.

Jesus, speaking to them as “fools,” or unlearned ones, and “slow of heart to believe,” also said, “Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory?” (vss. 25,26) Then, beginning with Moses, and from all the prophets, he expounded to them many things which the Old Testament scriptures had foretold concerning the necessity of his suffering and dying, that he might be the Redeemer and Savior of the world.

Doubtless in this discourse he called their attention to the typical lessons found in Israel’s Day of Atonement services in which a bullock and a goat were sacrificed, and their blood taken into the Most Holy and sprinkled upon the mercy seat to effect reconciliation for the people. He probably also reminded them of the sacrifice of the Passover lamb, and how its blood was sprinkled upon the lintels and doorposts of the Israelites’ homes, sparing thus the firstborn from death, and preparing the way for the deliverance of all Israel from Egypt and bondage during the

next morning. He may have quoted from the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah's prophecy, which had foretold the suffering and death of the Messiah, showing that he would be led as a "lamb to the slaughter."

Hearing this wonderful explanation concerning the necessity of Jesus' death, the disciples were given a new vision. They saw, temporarily at least, that the death of Jesus did not mean a failure of the Divine plan, nor did it indicate that Jesus was not the Messiah. In other words, their faith in him, and in the Divine plan centered in him, was restored. Telling of the experience later they said, "Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?"—vs. 32

STRENGTHEN THE BRETHREN

A few days before this, after Peter was determined that his Master should not be put to death by his enemies, and after the last supper, Jesus said to him, "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." (Luke 22:32) It required much instruction, discipline, and finally the revealing power of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost to 'convert' Peter so he could understand and appreciate the necessity of Jesus' death. To him, it seemed wrong that a man who had done no evil, whose only aim in life was to help and bless others, should be put to death.

With the aid of the special instructions of the Lord and the help of the Holy Spirit, Peter did comprehend. Jesus had said to him that he who would lose his life would save it. He could not understand this, but when Jesus was raised from the dead, special instructions were given that Peter should be informed, as though to emphasize to him that while Jesus had voluntarily lost his life, it had now been saved, in that the power of God had raised him from the dead.

In one of Jesus' last appearances to his disciples—on the shores of the Sea of Galilee—he told Peter that when he was young he "girdedst" himself, and went and did as he desired, then added, "But when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldest not." The explanation is given that Jesus said this to Peter to indicate the manner of death he would die in order to "glorify God." Then Jesus added, "Follow me."—John 21:18,19

Peter did not grasp the full import of these words until the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost. He realized that Jesus' statement concerning the time when he would stretch forth his hands and allow another to gird him, meant that he would fully surrender himself to the Divine will, and would be girded for Divine service, a service that would lead to sacrificial death. When one stretches forth his hand it implies surrender, and it is just this that full consecration to the Lord means. It is a surrender to the Lord and to the doing of his will. Tradition has it that Peter died head downward upon a cross. Whether this be true or not, we know that he died a sacrificial death, because he voluntarily surrendered to the will of his God. He permitted himself to be led in the narrow way of sacrifice to follow Jesus as he had been invited to do by the Master.

JOINT SACRIFICERS

Most professed Christians who accept the inspired testimony of the Scriptures readily agree with the fact that Jesus voluntarily suffered and died for the sins of the world, however much their viewpoints might differ regarding the things involved in this work of redemption. But very few seem clearly to realize that the true followers of Jesus are invited likewise to lay down their lives in a voluntary sacrifice which is described by the Apostle Paul as being "planted together in the likeness of his death."—Rom. 6:5-8

This is what Jesus meant when he told his disciples that they should take up their cross and follow him. They were to follow him into death. Paul echoed this thought when he said, "I am crucified with Christ." (Gal. 2:20) Throughout the Scriptures, Jesus is portrayed as the "lamb" of God, the lamb that was slain for the sin of the world. (John 1:29,36) In Revelation 13:8, he is shown as the lamb "slain from the foundation of the world." In Revelation 14:1 he is shown exalted on Mount Sion, and there are "with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads." Verse 4 declares, "These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth."

Jesus died for the sin-cursed and dying race. He died that the way might be prepared for the children of Adam to return to life. Human reason would tell us that since this is so, those who accept the provision of Jesus' shed blood, and obey his laws of righteousness, should have life, should escape from pain and sickness and death. But the Bible

reveals that God has a plan that goes beyond the natural conclusions of human reasoning. True, the Bible reveals that the time will yet come when those who believe in Christ and obey the laws of his kingdom will indeed live; they will be restored to perfection of human life, and will not become sick and die at all. This will be true of all sincere believers during the age to come, the millennium.

Prior to the millennium, during the present age, another feature of the Divine plan is being accomplished. God, in his wisdom, knew that it would be good to have representatives of the human race associated with Jesus in the great future work of restoration. He designed that those who would be chosen to this high position in his plan should be tested severely as to their heart-harmony with his great and loving redemptive program, so he is giving them the opportunity of demonstrating their love and loyalty to him, and their love for the human race, by their willingness to suffer and die sacrificially as Jesus did.

SELF-DENIAL

First, as stated by Jesus, these are invited to deny self. During the Lenten season each year, millions practice what they term self-denial, and no doubt they receive a certain blessing from their little sacrifices. They deny themselves pleasures, or delicacies, or other things of which they are especially fond. Self-discipline along any line is a good character builder, and in principle should not be condemned.

But this is not what Jesus meant when he invited his disciples to deny themselves. He meant that they should deny themselves completely—not merely to forego the privilege of eating candy, or of refraining from some other enjoyment especially appealing to them—but to deny themselves the right to govern their own way of life, and, instead, by giving up their own wills, to accept the will of God through Christ.

Jesus expressed the opposite to this attitude when he told Peter that when he was young he girded himself and ‘walkest whither thou wouldest.’ This describes the self-assertive, the self-determined life. This we are invited to give up, to deny, and instead to surrender ourselves to another, even to the Lord—not for a day, not for forty days during Lent, not for a year, but for life—that we might be planted together in the likeness of his death. It is this thought that Jesus expressed in his invitation that we take up our cross and follow him. Those in Jesus’ day

who literally carried a cross, no longer had control over their own lives. They were in the hands of the Roman law, and were on their way to death.

THE PROPHETIC TESTIMONY

Evidently Peter wrote his first epistle in obedience to his Master's commission to 'strengthen the brethren' in their voluntary suffering and death. In the opening chapter of this epistle, he lays the scriptural foundation for this doctrine by asserting that the prophets had foretold "the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow."—I Pet. 1:11

This, of course, is in full harmony with Jesus' discourse to the two disciples on the way to Emmaus. But Peter carries the thought further than Jesus did on that occasion, for throughout the epistle he makes it clear that the followers of Jesus partake with him in the sufferings of the Christ which the prophets had foretold, and that they will also—those who are faithful—partake with him in the promised glory to follow. Note a few of his statements in this connection:

"If, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps."—I Pet. 2:20,21

"It is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing. For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit."—I Pet. 3:17,18

"If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf."—I Pet. 4:16

The word 'also' in the statement, 'For Christ also hath once suffered for sins,' indicates that from the Divine standpoint Christian suffering is also for sin. The explanation is in the further assertion, 'that he might bring us to God.' Paul explains that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself; that is, bringing the world to God. Then Paul adds that the Lord has given us the "word of reconciliation," and thus has made us ambassadors for Christ.—II Cor. 5:19

Those who follow Christ are invited to participate with him in the work of reconciliation, of bringing the world to God. They do this by their faithful use of the 'word of reconciliation' now, thus proving worthy of

association with him in his future glory, when, through the Divine Christ, the knowledge of the Lord will fill the whole earth “as the waters cover the sea.”—Isa. 11:9

Thus those who deny self and die with Jesus are reckoned by the Lord as dying for sin because they lay down their lives reconciling the sinful world to God. Paul expresses a similar thought when, after saying that we are “planted together in the likeness of his death,” he explains what that likeness is, saying, “For in that he [Christ] died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.”—Rom. 6:5,10,11

Jesus did not die ‘unto sin’ as a sinner under condemnation to death, but as a sin offering. ‘Likewise,’ admonishes Paul, ‘reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin.’ Jesus died that he might bring the world to God and we are invited to share in this work of reconciling the world so when sacrificing our lives in this great purpose Paul authorizes us to reckon it as an offering for sin.

The world of mankind is sin-sick and dying, and Jehovah, the great Physician, purposes to heal the sick and to restore life to all the willing and obedient. Before this can be done, the Divine penalty of death must be set aside by the Redeemer. This was, and is, the work of Jesus. He is the corresponding price, the substitute, the “propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.”—I John 2:2

Thinking of Jesus as the Chief Physician who came into personal contact with the dying patient, we might say that he is the one who removes the malignant cancer of sin and thereby makes possible the recovery of the patient. But, as in a great hospital, the underphysicians and the nurses and other attendants help to nurse the patient back to health after the cancer is removed; so we are invited to share in the work of reconciling the world to God, and restoring the sin-sick and dying to health and life.

That is why Paul says we are to reckon our dying with Jesus as being unto sin. It does not add to the purchase price by which the world is ransomed from death, but, in the Divine plan, is necessary in the actual restoration of the ransomed world. It is God’s design to make provision for the blood of Christ to cleanse us in his sight from all unrighteousness,

and thus make us acceptable as sacrifices. Hence, Paul invites us to present our bodies a “living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”—Rom. 12:1

THE TWO SPRINKLINGS

The blood of the bullock and the blood of the goat on Israel’s typical Day of Atonement pointed forward to the blood of Christ. In the type, the blood of the bullock was first carried into the Most Holy and sprinkled on the mercy seat. This seems clearly to point forward to the time when Jesus ascended to the heavenly courts, and as the apostle says, appeared “in the presence of God for us.”—Heb. 9:24

Jesus’ blood is sufficient to be a propitiation, not only for our sins, but also for the sins of the whole world, even though when first sprinkled it was only for ‘us.’ This suggests that the blood of Christ has been utilized through the present age to make acceptable the sacrifice of the church, which is represented by the slaying of the goat on Israel’s typical Day of Atonement. In Hebrews 13:10-13 Paul shows clearly that the followers of Jesus were typified in that service.

Natural things do not represent spiritual truths in every detail. There is nothing in the type to indicate that the blood of the goat was actually the same blood as that which flowed through the veins of the bullock, but antitypically that is the lesson. Blood is symbolic of life, and we, as members of the fallen and dying race, have no life of our own—no life, that is, which is not under condemnation, no life that we could offer to God in sacrifice. However, through faith in Christ we receive his life, and this is what makes it possible to offer ourselves in sacrifice to God.

Paul wrote, “The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God.” (Gal. 2:20) We have no life outside of Christ. So, in the type, it is as though the blood of the bullock was given to the goat as a basis for life that could be offered in sacrifice. Hence, when the blood of that typical goat was taken into the Most Holy for sin, it pictured a second sprinkling of the blood of Christ, not for us, but this time—antitypically— for the whole world.

Hebrews 9:24-28 sums up this thought well. Here the apostle emphasizes that Christ offered himself but once. Then he explains that he entered into “heaven itself” to “appear” in the presence of God for us. In the twenty-eighth verse he adds that unto those who look for him, Christ

shall “appear” the second time without sin—that is, not as a sin-offering in the sense of having again offered himself personally in sacrifice.

The Greek word translated ‘look’ in the expression, “them that look for him,” is the same one which is rendered ‘waiteth’ in the text which says that the “creature,” or creation, “waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.” (Rom. 8:19) The ‘sons of God’ are, of course, Christ and his church, those who deny themselves and follow him. These will be with him when the glory of the kingdom is manifested and then the whole creation, waiting in pain and sorrow until now, will receive the blessings purchased for them by the blood of Christ.

What marvelous grace, that in return for self-denial and faithfulness in dying with Christ, we may have the signal honor of being associated with him in that glorious future work of extending human salvation to all mankind! We are not worthy in our own merit, nor could we be faithful in our own strength. But just as the Heavenly Father in Isaiah 42:6 promised to hold the hand of his beloved Son Jesus to give him strength, so in Isaiah 49:8 he has promised to “preserve” us. We can surely depend upon this promise and thus attain the great objective for which our denial of self, and our sacrifice unto death, is designed.

Dawn Bible Students Association