

# Christ Is Born

**THE WESTERN WORLD** is excited about entering the new millennium, which is based on calculations involving the birth of Christ. According to events and dates given in the Bible, the birthday of our Lord was October 1st, 2 B.C. We have already passed the 2000 year date since Christ was born.

At the birth of Christ, an angelic announcement to a group of shepherds watching their flocks by night signaled an outstanding step forward in the outworking of the Divine plan of salvation. We read that “the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”—Luke 2:9-14

Previous to this, the expected coming of the Messiah was in the realm of promises, so one of the very important aspects of this message of good news is the fact the Messiah was born that day. The word Gospel means ‘good news,’ and Paul informs us that the Gospel was preached before to Abraham when God promised this ancient friend that through his seed all the families of the earth would be blessed. (Gal. 3:8; Gen. 22:18) Paul identifies Jesus in this connection as the promised “Seed.” (Gal. 3:16) It was good news to Abraham that his progeny would be the channel of blessing to all mankind. However, this was good news which was based merely upon a promise. Later this promise was confirmed by God’s oath, but it was still just a promise.

Later this promise was confirmed to Isaac, and to Jacob, but it was still only a promise. Shortly before his death, when pronouncing blessings upon his twelve sons, Jacob prophesied that out of the loins of Judah there would come one who would be called Shiloh—a peaceful one—and that

unto him would the gathering of the people be. (Gen. 49:9,10) This was another promise of the coming of a Messiah, one to whom the people would be gathered, and through whom they would receive the blessings of peace.

Moses, in his day, clung to these wonderful promises that the God of Israel would send a Great One, a Messiah, to bring deliverance to his people, and a blessing to all mankind. Evidently the mother of Moses, while caring for her child in the court of Pharaoh, told him of the promise to father Abraham, and what it implied, for we read that when he was come to years he “refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of [*Margin*, ‘for’] Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.”—Heb. 11:24-26

Christ is the New Testament name of Messiah, and Moses evidently understood God’s promises to Abraham, Isaac, and to Jacob to mean that he would send a Messiah. He gladly cast in his lot with the people of God to whom these promises had been made. Later, after the Law had been given to Israel at the hand of Moses, he was instructed to say to this people that the Lord would raise up unto them a prophet like unto himself, and that all would be called upon to hear and obey that prophet. (Deut. 18:18,19) In the New Testament this is applied to Jesus during the period of his Second Presence.—Acts 3:22,23

## **MANY PROPHECIES**

Isaiah prophesied that “a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son,” and that his name would be called Immanuel. (Isa. 7:14) Another of Isaiah’s prophecies reads, “Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.”—Isa. 9:6,7

Again Isaiah prophesied concerning the coming Messiah: “There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: and the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of

wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord; And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove [*Margin*, ‘argue’] with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins.”—Isa. 11:1-5

In Daniel 9:25 there is another assurance of the coming of the Messiah. In this prophecy a time measurement is given indicating when he would come. The prophecy reads, “Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks.” At the time Jesus did appear as the Messiah many were in expectation of him, and this expectation might well have been based, in part at least, upon this prophecy recorded by Daniel.—Luke 3:15

In Micah 5:2 there is a prophecy which identifies the place where the promised one would be born. The text reads, “Thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting [*Margin*, Hebrew: ‘the days of eternity’].”

And then in Malachi 4:2 we read, “Unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of Righteousness arise with healing in his wings.”

These and other promises and prophecies relative to the coming Messiah served as a great inspiration to the devout of Israel. The people did not realize that they would not all be fulfilled at once. They failed completely to grasp the meaning of certain prophecies which told of the Messiah’s suffering and death as the Redeemer of Israel and of the world. They did not know that he would be raised from the dead and return to heaven, and revisit mankind at the end of the Gospel Age. They simply had in mind the many assurances of Jehovah that a Messiah would come, that Israel would be exalted, and all the families of the earth blessed.—John 1:47

The ‘Israelites indeed’ were well aware that God had promised to send a Messiah. Many names and titles of this Great One were mentioned in the prophecies. He was to be the ‘Seed.’ He was to be ‘Shiloh.’ He was to be a ‘Prophet’ greater than Moses. He was to be called ‘Immanuel,’ ‘Wonderful,’ ‘Counselor,’ ‘The mighty God,’ ‘The everlasting Father,’ ‘The Prince of Peace.’ The Messiah was also to be a ‘root out of the stem of Jesse,’ and a ‘Branch’ was to grow out of his roots. He was to be the ‘Sun of Righteousness’ with ‘healing in his wings.’

Throughout all the long centuries of Israel’s waiting, the Messianic feature of the Divine plan remained in the realm of promises, but at last the time came for those promises to begin to be translated into reality, so the angel announced, “Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ [*Messiah*] the Lord.” Now these promises began to take on substance—the Messiah was born.

Nine months earlier Mary had been given the assurance that she was to be the mother of the One who would become the great Messiah and Deliverer of Israel and the world: “The angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.”—Luke 1:30-33

In this announcement by the angel we are reminded of Isaiah’s prophecy in which he foretold that the Messiah would sit “upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever.” (Isa. 9:7) The typical kingdom of David had fallen in 606 B.C. Because David was so greatly beloved by Jehovah, he arranged that the future Messianic kingdom should be looked upon as the rebuilt kingdom of this man after God’s own heart. (I Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22) Jesus is the antitypical David, and, through his mother, was an actual descendant of David.

## **HUMBLE CIRCUMSTANCES**

From the announcement made to her by the angel, Gabriel, Mary would know that she was to be the mother of the Promised One, and possibly she wondered why God permitted those circumstances to arise

which led to the birth of Jesus in a stable. However, even a stable must have seemed like a palace to Mary—a king’s palace—since God had permitted her holy child to be born there. But while Jesus’ birthplace was humble, and his mother an unknown person in Israel, his birth was announced by the angels. This was appropriate. The Lord had used angels on many occasions to convey to the ancients his plan to send a Messiah, and now that the time had come to fulfill those promises it was fitting that both the conception and birth of this Great One would also be pronounced by angels.

The birth of Jesus was a turning point in the outworking of the Divine plan, for it meant that God’s plan had moved out of the promise stage, and into the era of performance. True, through his New Testament servants the Lord continued to make promises, but now the central figure of both the Old and New Testament promises had come, and his birth in Bethlehem had been announced by the angels.

The shepherds to whom this announcement was made must have been awed, and at the same time made glad! To them the first thought was to go to Bethlehem and verify what they had heard. We read, “It came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which has come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.”—Luke 2:15,16

The shepherds were thoroughly convinced. We continue reading, “When they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.” (vss. 17,18) The shepherds’ desire to tell as many as they could about the good news which had been given to them was natural and praiseworthy. We should have the same desire today. At this time the Lord’s people are privileged to understand the Divine plan more fully than did the shepherds. The good tidings of the birth of Jesus, and all that it means in connection with the Divine plan as a whole, should impel us to do all we can to tell out this message far and wide, and by every means at our disposal.

## **NOT YET THE MESSIAH**

The birth of Jesus was truly important as an advance step in the plan of God, but actually, as a babe, he was not the Messiah. The word 'Messiah' means 'anointed,' or 'the anointed one.' The significance of the word derives from the custom in Israel of anointing kings and priests to office. The anointing was the official designation to office. It pointed forward to the anointing of the Holy Spirit which came upon Jesus at the time of his baptism, and upon the church at Pentecost.

At the time of Jesus' baptism he heard his Heavenly Father speaking to him from heaven, saying, "Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased." (Luke 3:22) Jesus' birth was announced by the angels, but as a babe he would not know about or appreciate this. At the age of twelve he was found in the Temple with doctors of the Law, endeavoring to learn what he could about his mission. But not until he went to Jordan, when he dedicated himself to the doing of his Father's will, in the public phase of his ministry, did he receive this blessed assurance of his sonship, and learn that his Heavenly Father was well pleased with him. Now he was the Messiah of promise.

This was thirty years after Jesus' birth. Perhaps the shepherds to whom his birth had been announced had died. Certainly many to whom they had conveyed the good news had passed away. Whatever the reason, the fact is that no mention is made of the angelic announcement after Jesus began his ministry. It could well be that the Lord wanted to emphasize that the ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus are the important considerations. True, Jesus' birth was necessary as the means to an end, but the Lord does not want us particularly to adore the babe Jesus, but to take up our cross and follow the anointed Jesus in his steps of suffering and death.

## **GOD'S GIFT**

The promises pertaining to the coming of the Messiah emphasized that he would be one sent by God. This thought is carried over into the New Testament, and in John 3:16 Jesus is referred to as God's 'gift.' "God so loved the world," we read, "that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Paul speaks of Jesus as God's "unspeakable gift." (II Cor. 9:15) Words are wholly inadequate to describe this gracious and costly gift which our Heavenly Father gave to us, and to the whole world of mankind.

And since the first evidence of this gift was manifested in the birth of Jesus, it is appropriate that this feature of the Divine plan should beget in us the desire unselfishly to give for the blessing of others. First of all, when we come to know of God's great gift of love for us, we should willingly give our all to him. He has invited us to give him our hearts, and when we respond to this invitation, it means that everything which we have and are is really surrendered to him, with the understanding that he can use it in whatever way may be pleasing to him. This is consecration. This is presenting our bodies "a living sacrifice" mentioned by the Apostle Paul.—Rom. 12:1

## **A SAVIOR**

When the angel announced to the shepherds that the Messiah was born, he referred to him as a 'Savior.' To the shepherds this possibly meant no more than being saved from the Roman yoke of bondage under which the nation of Israel was living at the time. But to us it means much more. It means that through his death as man's Redeemer, Jesus would provide an opportunity of salvation from death for all mankind. The Heavenly Father knew that in giving his Son for the salvation of mankind it meant giving him up to suffer and to die. What a costly gift this was, and if we are to emulate the Father's love in giving, we must be willing to suffer and to die even as Jesus did.

After the one angel announced the birth of Jesus, "suddenly there was ... a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." (Luke 2:13,14) Surely all who love the Lord, and rejoice in his great plan of salvation, will likewise give glory to God, and praise him for the gift of his Son.

We know that the birth of Jesus will yet lead to peace on earth. True, nearly two thousand years have passed since this glory song of the angels was heard, and still there is no peace on earth. But this does not mean that the Divine plan has failed. It simply means that a further preparatory feature of God's great plan has been in the course of development. This is the calling out from the world of those who are invited to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, suffering and dying with him, that they might live and reign with him. There is every reason now to believe that this work is about complete, which means that soon Messiah's kingdom will bring

peace to the nations, and that Jesus will be recognized by the people of all nations as truly ‘the Prince of Peace.’

Jesus will then serve as peacemaker between God and the estranged human race. There can be no lasting peace between the nations unless the people are at peace with God. Our first parents decided to take a course contrary to God’s law, and brought upon themselves the sentence of death. By heredity their entire progeny has been born in sin and misshapen in iniquity. The whole unbelieving world is thus alienated from God, and under condemnation to death. Jesus gave himself in death as a substitute for Adam and his race, and this opens the way for a return from death, and a reinstatement of the human race into the favor of God. This glorious provision will become effective during the thousand years of the Messianic kingdom, through the arrangement of the New Covenant promised in Jeremiah 31:31-34.

It will be then that Jesus will be ‘The everlasting Father,’ the father, that is, who will give everlasting life to all those who—through belief and obedience—prove worthy of it. And how glorious is this prospect! It will mean the end of sickness and pain and death. How true was the angel’s announcement that the son born to Mary would be a ‘savior’! As we contemplate the birth of Jesus, we should not overlook this glorious outcome of the Divine plan of salvation to be consummated in God’s due time.

### **“GOOD WILL TOWARD MEN”**

In the words of the glory song of the angels they used the expression: ‘good will toward men.’ Many who do not know the plan of God for human salvation think of this as meaning good will ‘among men.’ This viewpoint places a great strain upon their faith because they know that there has been no more good will among men since Jesus was born than there was before. They have thought that God wanted them to convert the world to Christ and his teachings, and thus bring about a state of good will among men. We rejoice to realize that in God’s due time, which will be during the thousand years of the Messianic kingdom, the world will be converted. Then the Lord’s Spirit will be poured out upon all flesh, and under its enlightening influence the people will be led away from selfishness, and will learn to love and serve one another.

An incorrect understanding of this text is revealed in other translations. The *Revised Version* reads, “Peace among men in whom he is well pleased.” Others render it, “Peace among men of good will.” There is no basis in the Greek text for these translations—they are attempts to harmonize the angelic message with what the translators, in their limited understanding of God’s plan, suppose the angels meant.

How beautiful is the text when taken as it properly reads in our *Common Version* translation! It is good will “toward” men, and the reference is to God’s good will as it was even then being expressed by the birth of his Son whom he had sent to be the Redeemer and Savior of mankind. God’s good will was expressed toward men because he loved them. Even though the human race was alienated from God through wicked works, he still loved the people; loved them so much that he gave his Son to serve as Redeemer and Mediator to restore them to life and to harmony with him.

Jesus’ death and resurrection were further evidences of God’s good will toward men. The selection of the ‘little flock’ to share in the kingdom rule with Jesus is also an evidence of God’s good will toward the Adamic race. The return of Christ to establish his kingdom also manifests God’s good will toward the people. God’s good will is expressed in every detail of his loving plan for the blessing of all the families of the earth. In view of this, how appropriate that we join with the angels in singing, “Glory to God in the Highest”!

It was a marvelous experience for the shepherds to be told by angels that the Great One whom the God of Israel had been promising for so long had at last been born. It is even more wonderful to be living now, and to have the assurance that Christ’s second visit to earth is a reality; that he is now present, and will soon establish his kingdom through which peace and health and life will be assured to all people.

To the unbelieving world it seems incredible that we are living at the threshold of such a golden age of peace, security, health, and everlasting life. Doubtless many disbelieved the report of the shepherds concerning the birth of the Messiah; and the people today, for the most part, will also ignore our message. But it is our privilege to proclaim the good tidings—and in doing so, to show our joy and enthusiasm for the message of the angels to the shepherds in Bethlehem nearly two thousand years ago.

May this glorious message never become commonplace in our lives!

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# Time of Preparing

*Key Verse: “I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit, and with fire.”*  
—Matthew 3:11

*Selected Scripture:*  
*Matthew 3:1-8, 11-17*

**JOHN THE BAPTIST WAS** the last of the prophets; and, as Jesus declared, “There hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist.” (Matt. 11:11) In Matthew 3:3 we read concerning John, “This is he that was spoken of by the prophet, Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.” At the time of this account, we are told that among the Jews, “the people were in expectation” of the Messiah.—Luke 3:15

John the Baptist’s mission was to arouse the people of Israel to the fact that Messiah had already come, and the inauguration of the long-promised kingdom of God was at hand. John told the people they should begin preparation at once if they desired to share in that kingdom, in harmony with their long-cherished hope. They were to repent from their violations of the Law and turn from sin; and their reformation was to be symbolized by a baptism.

John was faithful in telling his hearers that his work of preaching and baptism was merely preparatory to the greater teachings and the higher baptism Messiah would institute.

In his message, John admonished those who would listen, that “now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.” (Matt. 3:10) This was a figurative way of saying that a testing time, as an individual matter, had come for the Jewish people, and all who did not bear ‘good fruit’ would not be identified with the kingdom.

All those who did not bear the necessary fruitage would be cut off from Divine favor, and cast into the fiery trouble with which the Jewish Age

would end, and their national existence would cease. Calling attention to this matter, the Apostle Paul said that “wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.”—I Thess. 2:16

Continuing in Matthew 3:11 (*Revised Standard Version*), John said, “I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.”

He illustrated the character of Messiah’s work in their nation, comparing it to the winnowing of wheat from chaff. He said that the Messiah will “gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” (vs. 12) In this prophecy, the ‘chaff’ of the nation was cast into the ‘fire’ of trouble, which consumed Israel as a nation in A.D. 70.

John the Baptist understood that he was not fulfilling all the features of the antitypical Elijah. When priests and Levites asked John, “Art thou Elias? ... he saith, I am not.” (John 1:21) But Jesus said, “If ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come.” (Matt. 11:14) He meant that—to those who recognized his message and obeyed it, who became the Lord’s disciples—John fulfilled the work of Elias (Elijah). The antitypical Elijah is composed of Jesus’ followers in the flesh, who also must do a preparatory work in the world—introducing the Messiah of glory at his Second Advent.

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## Time of Testing

**Key Verse:** “*Saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the LORD thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.*”

—**Matthew 4:10**

**Selected Scripture:**  
**Matthew 4:1-14**

**WHEN JESUS, AT 30** years of age, went to John the Baptist at Jordan to be baptized, “the heavens were opened unto him.” (Matt. 3:16) Having received the Holy Spirit, he could now see clearly into the Divine arrangements, and the purposes respecting himself, in a manner not possible before his consecration.

This illumination of our Lord’s mind carried his thoughts to the prophetic Psalm 40:7,8, which reads: “Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.” He was then impelled to go aside into the

wilderness to think and pray, and to study what his course should be as outlined by the Law and the prophets.

For forty days and nights, his intense earnestness made him oblivious to almost everything else. Apparently, he neither ate nor slept until the forty days were ended, and he “was afterward an hungred.” (Matt. 4:2) It was then that Satan appeared, tempting Jesus at his weakest moment due to fasting. Our Lord was not approached with outright lies from the Adversary; but he was assaulted with subtle temptations. Wily foe that he is, Satan brought ‘kindly advice’ to the Redeemer’s mind, which—only on the surface—would cast him as a ‘concerned and helpful friend.’

First Satan suggested to Jesus that, since he had been fasting for a long time, he was doing himself injury, and said: “*If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.*” The Master did not repulse his opponent, but in a kindly manner replied, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” (Matt. 4:3,4, Deut. 8:3) Continuing, Jesus said he would not use the holy power he possessed for his own comfort or benefit in any manner.

The Adversary, foiled in his first attempt, then presented a second subtle temptation to our Lord. “The Devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, *If* thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.”—vss. 5,6

Our Lord was probably not actually taken on a ‘pinnacle of the temple,’ but Satan merely imparted a mental suggestion to Jesus that he demonstrate his holy power before the public. Jesus rebuffed him, however, when he said, “It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.”—vs. 7

A third assault was now attempted by the Devil. We believe this was by mental suggestion like the second temptation. He took Jesus to a high mountain, showing him all the kingdoms of the world and he said, “All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.” (vss. 8,9) Again, our Lord protested with a final dissent, saying, “Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.”—vs. 10

“Then the Devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.”—vs. 11

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# Time of Rejoicing

**Key Verse:** “*She shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins.*”  
—*Matthew 1:21*

**Selected Scripture:**  
*Matthew 1:1-6, 18-25*

**MATTHEW 1:17 SUMMARIZES** the genealogy of Jesus in this way: “All the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations.”

Verse 16 says, “Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ.” By a casual reading of this verse one could construe

that Joseph was Jesus’ father. This text, however, does not say Joseph was the father of our Lord.

The tradition of those days was for a long betrothal; it was during that time that Mary was begotten by God’s Holy Spirit, and she became the mother of Jesus. The Apostle John clarifies the point that God was Jesus’ father when he said, “The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.”—John 1:14

We learned from a previous lesson that there would be a forerunner of Jesus, who would announce his presence. The Prophet Isaiah also foretold that the coming of this one would be as a “voice” crying “in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord.” (Isa. 40:3) John the Baptist was identified as the one who fulfilled this prophecy. It does not, however, relate to Jesus’ birth, but points to John’s work of introducing our Lord at the beginning of his ministry, thirty years later.

Luke records the angel’s announcement to the shepherds concerning the birth of Jesus. “The angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in

swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”—Luke 2:10-14

Matthew records some of the details as to how Jesus was made flesh. (Matt. 1:18-25) Here we learn of the miraculous conception of his mother, Mary, who gave birth to him in Bethlehem. It had been prophetically stated that the name of the anointed of God would be “Emmanuel,” which means, ‘God with us.’ (Matt. 1:23; Isa. 7:14) This, indeed, is properly one of Jesus’ titles, because he was—and will continue to be—God’s representative among mankind.

The name Jesus signifies ‘Savior.’ It is the Greek form of Joshua. How appropriate is this name, and what a cause for rejoicing, when we realize that Jesus came to be the Savior of all mankind, saving them from sin and its penalty, death.

The greater rejoicing will take place when Jesus Christ, as the Divine spirit being, establishes his kingdom on earth. Christ and Messiah mean ‘anointed,’ and Jesus was ‘anointed’ for this task by God’s Holy Spirit. As a babe he could not fulfill many of the promises attributed to Messiah’s coming. Now the time has come for true rejoicing.

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# Time of Worshiping

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

**Selected Scripture:**  
*Matthew 2:1-12*

was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.” (Matt. 2:2,3) No wonder he was troubled—the prospect of a rival king was not to his liking.

Herod immediately called the chief priests and the scribes who were familiar with the Law and the Prophets, inquiring of them in what city it had been foretold that Christ should be born. They answered Herod that the city of Bethlehem, located about six miles south of Jerusalem, was to be the honored place of our Savior’s birth.

We read: “Thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.” (Micah 5:2) Therefore, Herod sent the wise men to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.”—Matt. 2:8

The king feigned an interest in their search with the plan in mind that he might thwart the Divine purpose by destroying the child. Later, when the wise men did not return, Herod realized he had been outwitted by them in this evil plan. So, to protect his throne from a Prophet who some day would depose him, he determined to kill all the children in the city of Bethlehem who were two years old or younger.

**THIS LESSON RELATES** to the wise men of the east—thought to be Persian—and their sighting of a wonderful star which they understood as predicting the birth of a great King. The star led them to Judea, and naturally they went to the palace of King Herod. There they inquired concerning their object, asking: “Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him. When Herod the king had heard these things, he

Meanwhile, after the wise men heard what Herod had to say, they set out “and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.”—Matt. 2:9-11

The wise men who sought the Babe Jesus to worship the new king, and to bestow gifts upon him, symbolize those who—ever since—bring to him the incense of their devotion; and as gifts—their talents and powers. The Apostle Paul describes the great honor and everlasting praise to be bestowed upon this newborn king when his kingdom is established upon earth.

He says, “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him [Jesus], 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 things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”—Phil. 2:9-11

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*Dawn Bible Students Association*

# Joseph Tests His Brethren

## CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

**VERSES 1-4** “And he commanded the steward of his house, saying, Fill the men’s sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put every man’s money in his sack’s mouth.

“And put my cup, the silver cup, in the sack’s mouth of the youngest, and his corn money. And he did according to the word that Joseph had spoken.

“As soon as the morning was light, the men were sent away, they and their asses.

“And when they were gone out of the city, and not yet far off, Joseph said unto his steward, Up, follow after the men; and when thou dost overtake them, say unto them, Wherefore have ye rewarded evil for good?”

Joseph continued to shape circumstances for his brethren which were calculated to remind them of their great sin in selling him into Egypt, and at the same time to ascertain by their conduct if their heart condition and their outlook on life had undergone a change since that time. He wanted to be sure that they had reformed before making himself known to them—not for his own sake, but for theirs. He realized that once they knew who he was, his high position in Egypt might tempt them to make apologies for their own protection even though by chance they were still bitter of heart.

The Hebrew word here translated ‘cup’ indicates that it was the large silver cup from which wine was poured into smaller ones from which guests drank. It was also a divining cup, and customarily used in much the same way as the fortune teller’s crystal ball of today. Apparently this was quite a common practice in Egypt, and perhaps Joseph had his servant speak of the cup as the one in which he divined in order to strengthen their impression that he was a genuine Egyptian, thus insuring that his true identity should remain concealed until he decided the time was ripe to reveal it.

Had Joseph's brethren actually stolen his cup after being treated so royally, the case against them would certainly have condemned them; one which clearly would have been that of returning evil for good. It was a serious charge to enter against them, and we cannot imagine Joseph thus accusing his brethren, except for his knowledge that the situation would clarify itself later.

**VERSES 5-13** "Is not this it in which my lord drinketh, and whereby indeed he divineth? ye have done evil in so doing.

"And he overtook them, and he spake unto them these same words.

"And they said unto him, Wherefore saith my lord these words? God forbid that thy servants should do according to this thing:

"Behold, the money, which we found in our sacks' mouths, we brought again unto thee out of the land of Canaan: how then should we steal out of thy lord's house silver or gold?

"With whomsoever of thy servants it be found, both let him die, and we also will be my lord's bondmen.

"And he said, Now also let it be according unto your words: he with whom it is found shall be my servant; and ye shall be blameless.

"Then they speedily took down every man his sack to the ground, and opened every man his sack.

"And he searched, and began at the eldest, and left at the youngest: and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack.

"Then they rent their clothes, and laded every man his ass, and returned to the city."

When Joseph's servant accused the men of robbery, indicating that one of them had taken Joseph's special divining cup, they vigorously denied the charge, and to prove that the accusation was unwarranted called attention to the fact that even the money which had been put in their sacks on the previous visit had been returned. It certainly seemed to them that this should be proof that they were not robbers.

They were very confident of their position in the matter, and willingly allowed their sacks to be searched, saying that the owner of the sack in which the cup might be found should be put to death. According to the Code of Khammurabi, effective as a law in Egypt at the time, and known to many in Canaan, death was the penalty for robbery. In other words, they were quite willing that the law take its course, for they were sure that the cup would not be found in their sacks.

The expression in verse 7: ‘God forbid that thy servants should do according to this thing,’ is a poor translation. The word ‘God’ is not in the Hebrew text at all. The statement should read, “Far be it from thy servants,” etc.

Great was their surprise when Joseph’s cup was found in Benjamin’s sack. They ‘rent their clothes,’ a symbol of sorrow and utter dejection. But they made no attempt to escape. They loaded their supplies back on their asses and returned to the city and to Joseph.

**VERSES 14-34** “And Judah and his brethren came to Joseph’s house; for he was yet there: and they fell before him on the ground.

“And Joseph said unto them, What deed is this that ye have done? wot ye not that such a man as I can certainly divine?

“And Judah said, What shall we say unto my lord? What shall we speak? or how shall we clear ourselves? God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants: behold, we are my lord’s servants, both we, and he also with whom the cup is found.

“And he said, God forbid that I should do so: but the man in whose hand the cup is found, he shall be my servant; and as for you, get you up in peace unto your father.

“Then Judah came near unto him, and said, Oh my lord, let thy servant, I pray thee, speak a word in my lord’s ears, and let not thine anger burn against thy servant: for thou art even as Pharaoh.

“My lord asked his servants, saying, Have ye a father, or a brother?

“And we said unto my lord, We have a father, an old man, and a child of his old age, a little one; and his brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother, and his father loveth him.

“And thou saidst unto thy servants, Bring him down unto me, that I may set mine eyes upon him.

“And we said unto my lord, The lad cannot leave his father: for if he should leave his father, his father would die.

“And thou saidst unto thy servants, Except your youngest brother come down with you, ye shall see my face no more.

“And it came to pass when we came up unto thy servant, my father, we told him the words of my lord.

“And our father said, Go again, and buy us a little food.

“And we said, We cannot go down: if our youngest brother be with us, then will we go down: for we may not see the man’s face, except our

youngest brother be with us.

“And thy servant my father said unto us, Ye know that my wife bare me two sons:

“And the one went out from me, and I said, Surely he is torn in pieces; and I saw him not since:

“And if ye take this also from me, and mischief befall him, ye shall bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave.

“Now therefore when I come to thy servant my father, and the lad be not with us; seeing that his life is bound up in the lad’s life;

“It shall come to pass, when he seeth that the lad is not with us, that he will die: and thy servants shall bring down the gray hairs of thy servant our father with sorrow to the grave.

“For thy servant became surety for the lad unto my father, saying, If I bring him not unto thee, then I shall bear the blame to my father for ever.

“Now therefore, I pray thee, let thy servant abide instead of the lad a bondman to my lord; and let the lad go up with his brethren.

“For how shall I go up to my father, and the lad be not with me? lest peradventure I see the evil that shall come on my father.”

Joseph’s brethren must have been greatly chagrined to be brought before him under such circumstances. Joseph, still posing as an Egyptian, and one who could ‘divine,’ that is, discover by magic if necessary, what they had done, asked them if they did not realize how futile it was for them to attempt such a robbery.

Judah’s statement, ‘God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants,’ was a confession of guilt pertaining to their original sin of selling Joseph into Egypt, for they knew they were not really guilty of the robbery as had been charged, although they were unable to explain how Joseph’s cup came to be in Benjamin’s sack. Even though they might have suspected that it had been planted there in the same manner as their money was on the occasion of their first visit to Egypt to buy food, they knew it would be useless to say so under the circumstances.

Joseph also knew that his brethren were not guilty of robbery, and doubtless he understood Judah’s confession of guilt as appertaining to their crime against him, and how pleased he must have been to realize that they were experiencing a genuine change of heart. He continued to hold the advantage in dealing with them, for he knew all the

circumstances and they did not. With a show of generosity, he said, “Far be it from me [the word God is also missing in the Hebrew in this text] to hold anyone except him in whose hand the cup is found.”

He knew that this was just what his brethren did not want, for it would mean that they would have to return to their father without Benjamin, and this, Judah explained, would doubtless cause the death of their father. It would bring his gray hairs down in sorrow to the grave; that is, to *sheol*, the condition of death, or the Bible hell.

Judah acted as spokesman for the others, and related further details concerning their difficulty in getting their father’s consent to bring Benjamin with them. Then he offered to take Benjamin’s place as a bondman in Egypt so his young brother could return with the others to his father. Judah had already made a solemn promise to his father that he would be responsible for the safe return of Benjamin, and this offer he made to Joseph indicates that he was wholly sincere in his surety pledge.

Throughout the entire account of Joseph and his brethren, Judah reveals himself as being more cognizant of their former wrongdoing than the others. It was Judah who suggested that they sell Joseph as a slave rather than kill him. Now he stands out as the one most concerned for the safety of Benjamin. He loved his aged father, and could not bear to see him suffer further, so was willing to give up his own freedom to prevent it.

# Strengthening the Brethren

**WHEN JESUS AND THE TWELVE** were together in the upper room the night before the crucifixion, he said to Simon Peter, “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren.” (Luke 22:31,32) Peter was a firm believer in Jesus. He was convinced that his beloved Master was the foretold Messiah. Hence, when Jesus spoke of his future conversion he did not mean a change from being an unbeliever to being a believer. Rather, the reference was to change a viewpoint which was to take place in Peter’s understanding of the full scope of his Master’s place in the Divine plan, and of the position to be occupied by his disciples.

## OPPOSITION

Peter was a rugged fisherman, and accustomed to carrying out his own plans in life quite as he wished. It was natural for him to assume that the great Messiah of promise would be even more capable of accomplishing what he desired. Consternation filled his heart when Jesus let it be known that he was going to Jerusalem where he expected to be arrested and put to death. To Peter this must have seemed like surrendering to the enemy, so he said to his Master, “Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.”—Matt. 16:22

Jesus replied 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.” (vs. 23) And then, addressing his disciples in general, Jesus added, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.” (vss. 24,25) To the disciples this must have seemed like a strange viewpoint. Peter had advised Jesus not to expose his life to danger, but Jesus explained that in this Peter had expressed a human viewpoint.

The generally accepted human viewpoint is that one must protect his own interests, and the interests of those near and dear to him, at almost

any cost. The idea of deliberately choosing a course that leads to suffering and death is frowned upon by those who are guided by the wisdom of this world. This was the case with Peter. Not only did he endeavor to dissuade Jesus from going to Jerusalem where his enemies were waiting for him, but later even tried to prevent his arrest, going so far as to cut off the ear of the servant of the high priest.

Peter was in this frame of mind that night in the upper room when Jesus said to him. "Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat." (Luke 22:31) Satan was working hard with Peter in an attempt to wrest him away from his Master's leadership. He had found a slight area of difference between them, and was exploiting this point of difference. But Jesus assured Peter of his prayers, and said to him. "When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." (vs. 32) Jesus had confidence that Peter would come through this experience, and would ultimately gain the proper viewpoint.

## **ENLIGHTENED**

Peter was not 'converted' until Pentecost. He received the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, and saw the reason for Jesus' suffering and death. Indeed, in his Pentecostal sermon, Peter called attention to prophecies pertaining to Jesus' death and resurrection. If he had discerned the meaning of these prophecies when he was with Jesus, Peter would not have endeavored to prevent his crucifixion. But now he knew, and without doubt, that his previously wrong viewpoint, and the experiences to which it had led, was a special preparation enabling him to appreciate the truth on the subject more clearly than might otherwise have been possible.

Thus, Peter was well prepared to strengthen the brethren along the line of Christian suffering, and the place it occupies in the outworking of the Divine plan. This comes to light in Peter's first epistle, an epistle that Peter may well have written recalling his Master's admonition to strengthen the brethren. All the Lord's people need strengthening along this line. Suffering is not pleasant, and the flesh will endeavor to avoid it whenever possible, whether it be physical pain, or mental discomfort due to the frown of our neighbors and of the world in general. To face up to suffering and death, when perchance we could choose a more pleasant course, requires faith and courage, a courage which is the outgrowth of

conviction that we are doing that which is well-pleasing to our Heavenly Father.

## **STRENGTHENING BRETHERN**

How did Peter strengthen the brethren? First he emphasized that we are not seeking for earthly blessings, but heavenly. Then he reminds us that we have been begotten again “unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you. [*Marginal Translation*, ‘for us’], Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”— I Pet. 1:3-5

It is in the hope of this inheritance that we have our chief cause for rejoicing, not in the material good things of life which might be ours if we bent our energies to secure them. We “greatly rejoice” because “the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” (I Pet. 1:6,7) Peter emphasized that the Christian’s joys are based not upon the abundance of the things which he may possess in this life, but upon his faith in the heavenly inheritance to which he has been called—that inheritance which will include the joy of being with the Lord Jesus, and the Heavenly Father.

Our redemption and salvation is because Jesus, in keeping with his Father’s will as set forth in the Old Testament, gave his life on our behalf. We are “redeemed ... with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.” (I Pet. 1:18,19) Jesus was, indeed, “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.”—John 1:29

## **TO OFFER SACRIFICE**

In I Peter, second chapter, the converted Peter presents another line of thought which concerned following Jesus. In verse 5 he explains that we are “a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices.” In Old Testament times, the priests of Israel offered animals in sacrifice; but not so with the holy priesthood of the present age. We offer ourselves to be consumed upon the antitypical altar, where our sacrifice is made acceptable through the blood of Christ. We go to him without the camp, “bearing his reproach.” (Heb. 13:10-13) We need only to think of the

burning animals in the type to realize that in the offering of ourselves there will be suffering, and eventually death, into which we voluntarily enter.

When Peter endeavored to prevent the crucifixion of Jesus, he thought of Jesus as an earthly king, not as a priest to offer sacrifice—and certainly not the sacrifice of himself. He hoped to be with Jesus in the kingdom, to share his rulership, but he did not expect to suffer and die in order to attain this high position of glory. But, when he had been enlightened by the Holy Spirit, he then had a clear vision of this aspect of the Divine plan. Then he could strengthen the brethren to endure their suffering. He wrote: “This is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but 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 [*Margin*, ‘for you’], leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself [*Margin*, ‘his cause’] to him that judgeth righteously.”—I Pet. 2:19-23

All the Lord’s people need to be strengthened in order to take patiently the suffering that is inflicted upon them unjustly. This was the position of Jesus. He spent his life going about doing good. He never harmed anyone, and yet his enemies reviled him and put him to death. This is the example which we are invited to emulate. This is the course laid down for us—to follow in the footsteps of the Master. This is what it means truly to be one of his disciples.

There are many Christian churches which teach that a child of God will be blessed with material gain. A common view claims that success in business, securing the best employment, enjoying good health, and having many friends in the social world, are evidences of God’s favor. But this was not Jesus’ viewpoint, nor the viewpoint of the apostles, and those in the Early Church who followed their teachings. Instead, suffering for well-doing—taking it patiently without any disposition to fight back—results in God’s favor. Our association with the brethren should be as described by Peter: “Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous

[*Greek*, ‘humble’]: Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.”—I Pet. 3:8,9

## **SUFFERING FOR CHRIST**

Since we are ‘in the world’ but not ‘of the world,’ we find ourselves surrounded by coolness and opposition. It is most fitting, therefore, that all who are walking in this narrow way together should be of one mind, and have compassion one for the other. Due to our fleshly imperfections misunderstandings will occur, but those who are laying down their lives doing good, and are not returning evil for evil, will surely want to be guided by this same Christian principle in their dealings one with another. These will realize that having their own way is not nearly so important as endeavoring to be all of one mind, and sympathetic toward all.

Peter continues to strengthen the brethren by reminding them that God will not permit them to be harmed as New Creatures if they keep on following the right path of sacrifice. He wrote: “Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? But and if ye suffer for righteousness’ sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled.”—I Pet. 3:13,14

We see that Jesus was never harmed as a New Creature. True, he was reviled; his enemies spat upon him, and placed a crown of thorns upon his head. They nailed him to a cross, and let him hang there until he died. They inflicted much suffering upon the Master, but they did not harm him as a New Creature, for his suffering and death was his way to glory, honor, and immortality. It is the same way with us. Suffering inflicted upon us by our enemies can harm us only if we permit such experiences to embitter our hearts so that we will begin rendering evil for evil. This might result in temporary satisfaction to the flesh, but, if continued, will lead to the loss of our inheritance with Jesus in the heavenly phase of his kingdom.

Continuing his message of encouragement, Peter wrote, “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) Prior to Peter’s conversion, he surely would not have admitted that it is better to suffer for well-doing than for evil

doing. He knew that Jesus' entire life was one of well-doing, and he rebelled at the thought that such a man would be made to suffer and to die.

But now Peter knew the purpose of his Master's suffering and death, and he knew that we, his followers, have the privilege of suffering and dying with him. And to know why we suffer, and to be assured that this is the will of God for us, is surely a great source of strength in facing our experiences. As Peter said: "For as much then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind."—I Pet. 4:1

## **NOT STRANGE**

Continuing to strengthen the brethren, Peter wrote, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." (I Pet. 4:12,13) To Peter, before Pentecost, it was very 'strange' indeed that fiery trials should come upon Jesus, leading to his crucifixion. But since he had learned that this was God's plan for him, and it had been foretold by the prophets, he realized it was not strange. Nor should we think it strange when fiery trials come into our lives, for, as Peter explains, we are partakers of Christ's sufferings. And, if we partake of his sufferings, and endure courageously and faithfully to the end of the narrow way of suffering, we will share in his glory.

How strengthening it should be to our faith to realize that the trials which come to us as a result of faithfulness to the Lord, to the truth, and to the brethren, are not due to our Heavenly Father's lack of interest, but because he is supervising our experiences to prepare us for joint-heirship with his beloved Son in the kingdom! The human mind is prone to say, 'How strange that this great trial has come into my life!' But Peter says that we should not reason in this manner, but rather, rejoice, inasmuch as we are partakers of Christ's sufferings.

It requires faith to take this viewpoint—a faith that is based on an understanding of the reason that the narrow way is so difficult. True, we do not always understand in detail just why certain experiences are permitted to come into our lives, but we know the plan of God in arranging for us to suffer with Christ, and the details we can leave in his

hands. If the way of the cross seems hard, we have the assurance of Divine grace to help in our every time of need, and our faith should enable us to say that we would rather walk in the dark with God than go alone in the light.

## **FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS' SAKE**

Not all suffering is acceptable to God. Sometimes our trials may be due to our own imperfections, which cause us to say and do things that are contrary to the will of God. Peter calls our attention to this, saying, "Let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf."—I Pet.4:15,16

From the Lord's standpoint we could become murderers through the assassination of a person's character by evil speaking. By misrepresentation we could 'steal' another's good name and reputation. Those who do these things, frequently find themselves embroiled in trials and difficulties, but they cannot properly rejoice in such experiences on the grounds that they are the sufferings of Christ. These are sufferings which result from wrongdoing, and are a cause for shame on the part of those who experience them. Only those who suffer for righteousness' sake can be assured of the Lord's approval, and look forward to receiving their inheritance with Jesus in the kingdom of heaven.

## **GOD CARES**

While the way of the cross is a difficult one, its joys far outweigh its sorrows. These joys are largely in the assurance of our loving Heavenly Father's love and care. Peter wrote, "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world."—I Pet. 5:6-9

We are to humble ourselves before the Lord and to accept without question the experiences which he permits. The One who cares for us is never weary; his eye is watchful for our every need; and his ear is ever

open to our cry. Our Heavenly Father is abundantly able to do for us more than we can possibly ask or think, and will do so, if we continue humbly to look up to him in thankfulness for all the blessings which his love provides—even for our trials. These latter also are blessings in disguise, because they have a part in preparing us for glory. We are thankful that Peter was faithful to the commission Jesus gave to him to strengthen the brethren by giving them the assurance that Christian suffering is God’s will for them, and an evidence of Divine favor! “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”—Rev. 2:10

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# Spiritual Alertness

*“Wherefore let him  
that thinketh he  
standeth take heed lest  
he fall.”  
—I Corinthians 10:12*

**THOSE WHO HAVE ACCEPTED** the call to take up their cross and follow the Master, enjoy a position of special favor with the Heavenly Father. There is a very special requirement which Paul describes in our text as taking ‘heed.’ To ‘take heed’

means to give attention, to observe carefully, to watch, to be vigilant. It means to ‘stop, look, and listen,’ in our spiritual affairs, and our need for taking heed is that we may not ‘fall,’ or lose our standing before our Heavenly Father.

The psalmist wrote, “A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee.” (Ps. 91:7) This assurance indicates that those who do not fall are those that dwell “in the secret place of the most High,” and have made his truth their “shield and buckler.”—vss. 1,4

The Scriptures outline our position of favor before the Lord from various standpoints, all of them vitally important. Philippians 4:1 reads, “My brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved.” To ‘stand fast in the Lord’ means to be trusting in the merit of his shed blood; and, through full consecration and immersion of our wills into God’s will, to be counted as members of the anointed company of which Christ is the Head.

This is a blessed standing! It requires humility in recognizing our need of the saving grace of God through the shed blood of his beloved Son. It calls for the unqualified devotion of our wills to the doing of the Divine will. To take heed in maintaining this standing means a daily searching of our hearts.

## IN THE FAITH

To maintain our standing in the Lord calls for vigilance, as the Apostle Paul wrote, “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be

strong.” (I Cor. 16:13) The faith in which we are to stand is “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” (Jude 3) This is the faith which was first of all delivered to Abraham, and then to Isaac and Jacob, and to all the prophets. (Gal. 3:8) The central theme of this faith is the Messianic hope of a future kingdom to ‘bless’ all nations, and God’s High Calling to the Christian to be a “joint-heir” with Christ in that kingdom.—Gal. 3:16,27-29; Phil. 3:14; Rom. 8:17

Paul indicates that it will require strength to stand in the faith. ‘Quit you like men, be strong,’ he says. It has always required courage to stand in the pure faith of the Gospel. This is manifested by the rapid ‘falling away’ that occurred after the apostles fell asleep in death. It was not long before the pure doctrines of the truth were corrupted, and those who were seeking comfort were fed on pagan philosophy and oriental mysticism. We should always remember that if we want to dwell close to the Lord in our spirit of fellowship we must be enthusiastic about his plan, and spend our energy where he is working. This is possible only if we “stand fast in the faith which was once delivered to the saints.”—Jude 3

## **IN LIBERTY**

To stand in the Lord also means to stand in the liberty of Christ. Paul wrote, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.” (Gal. 5:1) Here the contrast is between liberty in Christ and bondage to the Law. But the principle of liberty in Christ extends beyond freedom from the Law. To stand in the liberty of Christ means to have liberty to do everything that Christ would have us do. If we find ourselves in restraint to the will of man, and thereby held back from saying and doing the things which we know to be pleasing to God and to Christ, then we are not wholly standing fast in the liberty of Christ.

## **IN ONE SPIRIT**

The Apostle Paul says: “Only let your conversation be as it becometh the Gospel of Christ: that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel.” (Phil. 1:27) There is a remarkable blending of important Christian principles set forth in these words. The apostle urges that we stand fast in one spirit, not by

compromising the truth, but by striving together in its defense. The ‘one spirit’ in which we are to ‘stand fast’ is the spirit of the truth. To ‘stand fast’ requires courage and the strength of the Lord. We must be “strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.”—Eph. 6:10

## **DANGER SIGNALS**

There are various danger signals by which we must take heed and be forewarned of an impending fall. One of these is the spirit of pride. “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall,” the Holy Spirit testifies. (Prov. 16:18) How easy it is for the spirit of pride to enter into our hearts, causing us to be haughty and self-important! The spirit of humility engenders meekness, gentleness, teachableness, patience, and forbearance. How important it is that we do not think of ourselves “more highly than he [we] ought to think.”—Rom. 12:3

Another danger signal is indifference toward the truth. The truth is God’s voice speaking to his people; and if we are to maintain our standing before him we listen and should be attentive to his voice. Our standing before the Lord depends upon our obedience to his truth, for it is by the truth that we are “sanctified.”—John 17:17

The spirit of bitterness and hatred is another danger signal which should be readily discerned by those who are properly taking heed. These unholy manifestations of evil are the very opposite of the spirit of love, which is the Spirit of God. To permit their entrance into our hearts, and to harbor them, will sooner or later result in the complete fall of the New Creature, the complete loss of our standing in Christ Jesus. Let us take heed in this respect by rooting out quickly and diligently, through prayer, every thought of bitterness from our hearts, and seek to be filled with, and controlled by, the spirit of love.

Nor should we permit the spirit of the world to take control of our hearts and lives. The spirit of the world is the spirit of self-seeking, of the ambition to shine before others, of vainglory. (Gal. 5:26; Phil. 2:3) It is the spirit of selfishness, which is of the Devil. Let us endeavor to be so filled with the Spirit of the Lord, and so occupied with the things of the Spirit, that there will be no time or place for the spirit of the world to gain even the slightest entrance into our lives.

## **HOW NOT TO FALL**

The Apostle Peter gives us an excellent formula by which we may keep from falling. He reminds us of the precious promises upon which our hope for the Divine nature is based, and indicates that these promises are the groundwork of our faith. Then he admonishes us to add to our faith virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly-kindness, and love. “If these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. ... If ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”—II Pet. 1:4-11

When the Bible speaks of the Lord’s people falling from Divine favor, it means more than mere stumbling. No one is free from making mistakes because of fleshly imperfections. But if our hearts are pure, God will watch over us, and his everlasting arms will be under us. As Solomon wrote, “A just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again.”—Prov. 24:16

## **HOW WE HEAR**

Jesus said that we should “take heed ... how ye hear.” (Luke 8:18) Do we hear the message as one which has brought responsibility? Do we recognize that we are to be doers of the Word, as well as hearers, and are to be sanctified by the truth? (John 17:17) We are in the school of Christ to learn and apply the truth in our lives so that we may be equipped to serve as ‘ambassadors for Christ’ now; and through faithfulness to the Divine will, be found worthy to serve in the future work of the kingdom as joint-heirs with Christ.—II Cor. 5:20; Rom. 8:17

If we hear the truth with appreciation, our love for it will be demonstrated by the amount of energy we exert to defend and promote it. Has our hearing of the truth been so inspiring that we are willing to die “for the witness of Jesus, and for the Word of God”? (Rev. 20:4) Each day should find us busily engaged in using the truth to Divine glory. Failing in this proper appreciation of the truth, we become more or less subject to the deceptive influences of the Adversary by which he is endeavoring to bring about our fall from Divine favor.

## **“THAT NO MAN DECEIVE YOU”**

Deception is a method frequently used by Satan to lead God’s people into his various snares and pitfalls, and he usually practices his deceptions through human agencies. Jesus said, “Take heed that no man deceive you.” (Matt. 24:4) This particular warning has to do with the truths pertaining to our Lord’s Second Presence, and the end of the age. Certainly many of the Lord’s professed followers have been deceived along these lines. And Jesus reminds us that, if it were possible, the very elect would be deceived. But evidently this does not become possible because they are the faithful ones who ‘take heed.’

The Apostle Paul also reminds us of the importance of taking heed lest we be deceived. We quote: “Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.” (Eph. 5:6) ‘Vain words’ are those not in harmony with the plan and will of God, especially those words which appeal to human vanity. Flattery is one of Satan’s chief methods of deceit; and if we are properly taking heed we will be especially alert when we hear the voice of flattery appealing to us to turn to the right hand or to the left.

The warning, ‘Let no man deceive you,’ reminds us of another apostolic warning. To the elders at Ephesus Paul said, “Of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.” (Acts 20:30) The deception of human leadership is a most subtle deception. There is the constant temptation for elders and teachers to become leaders of a little flock all their own. And there is also the willingness on the part of so many of the Lord’s people to be led into byways of special interpretations. It is difficult to follow only the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.

In this respect, elders need specially to take heed, for their responsibility is great. To the elders at Ephesus, and to the elders today, Paul says, “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” (Acts 20:28) The proper ‘taking heed’ on the part of the elders means that they will ‘feed the church of God.’ This is a privilege and they are not to lord it over God’s heritage, nor to assume a headship of their own in the Church.

The Church should take heed of what they are fed. We should not shift our individual responsibilities onto the elders. How much sorrow could be avoided at times, if all the brethren in the church would take heed as a group to prevent ambitious brethren from becoming leaders.

Taking heed on the part of the brethren implies an insistence that everything we accept as truth be well supported by a ‘thus saith the Lord.’ Fanciful theories and high-sounding reasoning should not be permitted to carry weight in the minds and hearts of the people of God. Any idea that cannot be supported by the Scriptures has no sanctifying influence in our lives, and may lead us away from our appreciation of the glorious fundamental doctrines of the Word of God.

## **GOD’S BUILDING**

Paul says, “We are labourers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is.”—I Cor. 3:9-13

The manner in which a Christian builds for the future, as a coworker with God, is clearly outlined. First there must be the foundation of the ransom. Upon this must be built the superstructure of faith and character. And if we take heed how we build as coworkers with God rather than of our own choosing, our building will be able to survive the fiery trials which ‘shall try every man’s work of what sort it is.’

## **DEPARTING FROM GOD**

Hebrews 3:12 reads: “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.” The context refers to the unbelief of the Israelites in the wilderness, when they forgot so quickly the many miracles which God had wrought on their behalf. Their disposition to turn away from him to the worship of other gods showed lack of appreciation for the living God.

Just what is our own attitude? Have God's blessings which came to us through our knowledge of the truth become commonplace? Do we still keenly appreciate the miracle of his grace as it has abounded toward us through Christ Jesus? Or have we permitted the trials of the way to mar God's loving watch care over us? Do we still hear the voice of God speaking to us, or are we listening to other voices? Are we seeking a way less narrow and paths more pleasing to our flesh? Are we taking heed that we do not depart from the living God and the secrets of his Divine plan?

## **THE MINISTRY**

“Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it.” (Col. 4:17) There is a danger of our neglecting to be ministers, or servants, of the truth. And how easy it is to fall away from our steadfastness along this line! Satan is always active in his endeavor to draw us away from the ministry. If we are properly taking heed we will recognize Satan's cunning devices, his misleading sophistries, and not be affected by them.

Jesus, our Exemplar, came into the world to serve, to be a minister in the great work of reconciling a lost world to God. Our calling is to cooperate with him in this ministry. Thus, no matter how faithful we may be in meeting all the other requirements of the truth, if we neglect the ministry we shall fall short of the very purpose of our calling. Let us, then, indeed take heed unto the ministry, that we ‘fulfil it.’

In ‘taking heed unto the ministry’ we have an important responsibility. Paul wrote, “Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed.” (II Cor. 6:3) Much of II Corinthians 6th chapter is a timely, heart-searching admonition, pointing out details concerning the things to which we should take heed if we are not to bring reproach upon the ministry. Separateness from temples of idols is another prerequisite which Paul mentions. There are hideous creed idols now enshrined in the various temples of Christianity. The pageantry of outward show in these temples is alluring to the devotional instincts of some of the Lord's people. These temples promote a god of pride, instead of a god of humility; a god of disaster, instead of a god of peace; a god of material wealth, instead of a god of spiritual blessings. Our God bids us to “come out from among them, ... and touch not the unclean thing,” with the promise that he will receive” us.—II Cor. 6:17; Isa.52:11; Rev.18:4

Continuing the quotation from Isaiah 52:11, Isaiah says, “Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord.” These ‘vessels’ contain the pure water of the Lord’s truth. And how vital it is that these vessels be kept clean in order that those who drink therefrom may be truly refreshed with the living waters of the Word of God and the glorious knowledge that “God is love.” (I John 4:8) Only as we minister the pure truth of the Divine plan can we hope to have God’s blessing upon our ministry.

“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.” (I Tim. 4:16) In this admonition to Timothy we have a summary of all that is involved in our taking heed lest we fall. It means to take heed to ourselves in every way, and to take heed to the doctrines of the truth. To take heed to ourselves, and to the doctrines; and to continue in them means to understand and believe the doctrines, to defend, and to be guided by them in our own Christian conduct and ministry.

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***Dawn Bible Students Association***

# A Shelter for God's People

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

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

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

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

While thankful for whatever shelter we may enjoy along natural lines, we realize that the special needs of the Christian are spiritual ones, and that the Lord’s people especially need shelter as New Creatures in Christ Jesus. This is doubtless what the psalmist had in mind when, reviewing past experiences, he said, “Thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy.”—Ps. 61:3

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

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

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

### **OTHER REFUGE HAVE I NONE; HANGS MY HELPLESS SOUL ON THEE.**

Another typical shelter was that provided for Elijah in the cleft of the rock at Horeb. The account tells us that after being awakened and provided with some special food by the messenger of Jehovah, Elijah went in the strength of that meat for forty days until he reached the mount of God. (I Kings 19:7,8) The true church, as the antitype of Elijah, reached the antitypical mount of God by the close of the times of the Gentiles, A.D. 1914. When Michael stood up he began the work of overturning the old order of things of this present evil world as the General of Jehovah.—Dan. 12:1; Rev. 11:17,18

The three stages of this great time of trouble seem to be pictured by the three exhibitions witnessed by Elijah while sheltering in the cave (I Kings 19:9-14): the strong winds breaking in pieces the rocks; the earthquake; the fire; followed by the still, small voice. In the antitype we see how the winds of war have been followed by the symbolical earthquake—the great social revolution; this phase of the tribulation was

helped forward by a second world war, even more destructive than the first. This, according to Bible prophecy, leads on to a period of general lawlessness (fire) which completes the destruction of the present order of things in church and state; to be followed by the ‘still small voice’ of truth, eventually to be heard clearly by all during the thousand years of Messiah’s kingdom.

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

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

May past experiences of God’s faithfulness and care for his own give us strong consolation and good hope for future days; for he is the same, he changes not. (Mal. 3:6) Our Redeemer, too, is similarly unchangeable, as we are exhorted to remember: “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.”—Heb. 13:7,8

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