

The Dawn

A Herald of Christ's Presence

MARCH 2025



The DAWN

VOLUME No. XCIII, Number 3
(USPS 149-380), March 2025

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Published monthly by The Dawn Bible Students Association, PO Box 521167, Longwood, FL 32752-1167. \$12.00 a year.

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Hated Without a Cause

“This cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause.”
—John 15:25

THE RELIGIOUS WORLD

of Jesus’ day hated him, and finally put him to death. They hated him because his way of life was contrary to theirs. By his example of sacrifice, he condemned their way of selfishness and, by his teachings, he exposed their popular errors while teaching unpopular truths.

The words of our opening text, taken from Psalm 69:4, were spoken by Jesus to his disciples during the closing hours of his earthly ministry. He knew the distress and heartache they would soon suffer, and endeavored to prepare their hearts and minds for the events that soon lay ahead. He did not want them to be stumbled, but to be ready to receive the Holy Spirit at Pentecost and partake of the wonderful privileges of the heavenly calling.—Heb. 3:1

THE WORLD’S SCORN

During Jesus’ ministry, the disciples had been learning that being a follower of the humble and

lowly Jesus did not bring upon them the goodwill of the religious world of their day. There were occasions when the multitudes flocked around their beloved Lord, but often their motive turned out to be whatever material or fleshly benefit they hoped to receive from him. Few were interested to the point of faithfully following him, or being willing to make sacrifices in order to be his disciples.—John 6:26, 27,60,66

When the time arrived for Jesus to be crucified, his disciples no doubt believed that he could somehow escape death and assume his role as the leader and king of Israel. They were acquainted with the words of the Prophet Isaiah who had written concerning the Messiah, “Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end.” (Isa. 9:7) Yet, they did not know that it was first necessary for him to suffer and die for the world before the wonderful prophecies in connection with his kingdom glory could be fulfilled. It was their hope to share with the Master in his glory, which they believed was near at hand.

JESUS MUST DIE

Jesus did not withhold from his disciples the necessity of his soon coming death. From the Scriptural account, we learn, “From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.” (Matt. 16:21) Although Jesus’ statement was clear, his followers must have thought that what he had said had some other meaning.

Jesus knew that his disciples were still viewing their privileges of discipleship from the standpoint of material advantages and of the glory they hoped to attain from being associated with him. He knew also that, after Pentecost, they would be imbued with the Holy Spirit of understanding. Now, though, they were unable to accept the fact that their Lord's death would actually happen.

JESUS' FOLLOWERS HATED

The disciples loved their Master and were convinced that he was the divinely appointed Messiah, but they did not yet comprehend there was to be suffering and death associated with his ministry, prior to glory and honor. Peter later wrote, "Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow."—I Pet. 1:11

In our featured scripture, Jesus acknowledged that he was hated without a cause, and he also explained, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me."—John 15:18-21

The Master also forewarned, "Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered,

every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me. These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”—John 16:32,33

It is well to note that it was not so much the warning of the coming scattering and persecution that was designed to give the disciples peace and good cheer, but rather when it did come they would understand its true meaning. They would then realize that they were having the great privilege of suffering with Jesus. He wanted them to know that he overcame the world, and that they too would be given strength to overcome the world if they continued to be his disciples. With this promised assurance of victory they could rejoice, despite the opposition and persecution of the world. Knowledge that they were suffering with their dear Lord would give them courage to continue faithfully on.

OVERCOMERS

In the example set by Jesus during his own life, ministry, and teachings, it is clear that the Christian life is one of struggle against opposition. A continual warfare is waged in which we are engaged in combat with formidable enemies that would overpower us, unless we were given divine strength to overcome them. Satan, the devil, is the Christian’s great Adversary, and his allies are the world and our own fallen flesh. (I Pet. 5:8; John 17:14,15; Rom. 7:18) Speaking of himself, the Apostle Paul wrote, “I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself

should be disqualified.”—I Cor. 9:27, *English Standard Version*

The term “overcome” is used to describe the Christian’s victory over the devil, over the world, and over our own flesh. Evil is the very foundation of the world of which Satan is the prince. Paul thus admonished, “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.” (Rom. 12:21) John also encourages: “Whatsoever is begotten of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory [Greek: means of success] that hath overcome the world, even our faith.”—I John 5:4, *Revised Version*

GOD IS LOVE

Our Heavenly Father is the author of love and has been its sponsor throughout the ages. Satan, however, is the author of selfishness. These two principles have been at war with each other ever since the fall of man. The people of God—those who have served him faithfully in every age—have been motivated by their love for him. They have been guided by him and his Spirit, while the majority of the rest of mankind have passed through life controlled largely by the principle of selfishness.

Man was created in the image of God, and traces of this image still remain and manifest themselves in deeds of kindness on the part of many. (Gen. 1:27) However, it is not the occasional kind act that constitutes overcoming the world and its spirit. It must be a conversion from the principle of living for oneself to that of living for God and devoting our lives to his service. Because of sin, “self” has been adopted by the human family as a dominating motive of life. It has become so much a way of life

in the world that it is considered normal. Self-interest is the principle that rules this present world, and Satan is the “god of this world.”—II Cor. 4:4

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

The only way in which selfishness can be done away with, and the principle of love established throughout the earth as the guiding principle of life, is through God’s plan of salvation. In Jesus, we have our most comprehensive example of love as a way of life. He not only gave us an example, but enjoined love upon his followers, saying, “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you.”—John 13:34

This spirit of love was neither fully understood nor appreciated by the rich young ruler who was told to sell all he that he had and give to the poor, but then went away sorrowful. (Matt. 19:16-22; Luke 18:18-23) In following the law of self-preservation, he had accumulated worldly goods for himself, and he was not prepared to share them with others. The disciples were perplexed at Jesus’ advice to the rich young man, which seemed to reflect a reckless abandoning of all self-interest.

TRUE DISCIPLESHIP

Peter then said to Jesus: “Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?” (Matt. 19:27) Peter was reminding the Master that as his disciples they had complied with the conditions that he sought to impose upon the rich young ruler. Their all was not as much as his all, but the principle was the same. Having made this sacrifice they naturally wanted to know what

they could expect to get in return. Peter's question reveals that as yet he had not appreciated the real spirit of discipleship. He perhaps hoped that he would receive something in the way of honor and prestige. Instead of being a humble fisherman, he may have desired a prominent position in Messiah's kingdom, to be a ruler, or a great one among men.

Jesus answered: "Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life." (Matt. 19:28,29) We should not have the mistaken idea from this passage that the Lord wishes Christians to sacrifice others. It would be wrong to deprive our families of necessary comforts and provisions. However, after having done this, the surplus is the Lord's.

TAKE UP YOUR CROSS

When Jesus announced to his disciples that he was going to Jerusalem and that he expected to be arrested there and put to death, Peter would not hear of it. "Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee." Jesus' reply to this well-meant advice was: "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. 16:22,23) Peter was attempting to persuade the Master that he should permit self-interest to

influence him, and not go to Jerusalem where he knew his enemies awaited.

Peter was unwittingly promoting the cause of Satan, who always encourages people to consider themselves first. Those of the world, over which Satan is the prince, most often think first of self. It is openly their way of life, and has been since the days of Eden, but it is not God's way. "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. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it."—vss. 24,25

Jesus was even then losing his life sacrificially for the whole world of mankind. Generally speaking, in society today most consider it foolish to think of anyone else but themselves. Jesus, however, was appealing to the mind and heart of Peter and the other disciples by directing their attention to the fact that their lives would be saved in God's way, not by following the worldly principle of "self first."

To overcome the world means that, as Christians, we stand against the principle of selfishness with which we are surrounded on every hand. We lay down our lives unselfishly in service to God, to the Truth, and to the brethren. (Phil. 3:7,8; I John 3:16) We are not called to be "out of the world," or to live in isolation from the world. (John 17:15) Rather, though we are in the world, we are to remain separate from its principles and standards, and not permit ourselves to be influenced by its selfish spirit. The test upon us is that while we physically live and work in the world, not to be conformed to its general spirit, but continue

endeavoring to lose our lives in the cause of divine love.—Rom. 12:2

BAPTISM UNTO DEATH

A rich blessing awaits Christians each year as they commemorate the memorial of the sacrificial death of our Lord Jesus. Partaking of the symbolic bread and cup represents our appropriating the benefits of his sacrifice. (Matt. 26:26-29) Having thus received the benefits of his ransom sacrifice, we rejoice in the divine grace toward us and remember our privilege also of sacrifice, to “die daily,” as it were, denying ourselves, and laying down our lives in doing God’s will. (I Cor. 15:13) This might include ostracism by the world, expenditure of physical strength, or being injured by those who have slandered us by their words.

Ours is a baptism into Jesus’ death. “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.”—Rom. 6:3-5

We have received a special invitation to follow in the footsteps of our dear Lord and Master. To “follow” him means that our experiences in the world will be similar to his. Jesus explained, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him.” (John 13:16) To those who faithfully follow in the Master’s footsteps, even if they

be “hated without a cause,” the promise is given: “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.”—Rev. 3:21 ■

2025 MEMORIAL SUPPER DATE

The proper time for the annual observance of the Memorial Supper will be after sunset on Friday, April 11, 2025.

Memorial Services in MP3 format are available for listening or download at:

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A Holy Nation

Key Verse: “*Ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.*”
—Exodus 19:6

Selected Scriptures:
Exodus 18:12-27;
19:1-14

THE NATION OF ISRAEL

was founded upon the promises of God and the instructions of his law. While there can be no failure in the plan of God as outlined in his promises, the position of the Israelites in that plan, and the position of all others as well, is conditional upon obedience to the divine will. Our Key Verse point out that the people of Israel would be separated from all other nations.

It was evidently in God's providence that Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, gave the great lawgiver the timely advice contained in the first section of today's lesson. (Exod. 18:12-18) Moses was a hard and tireless worker. He was quite willing to lay down his life for his brethren, but his father-in-law, observing the situation from a disinterested standpoint, could see not only that Moses was wearing himself out unnecessarily by his endeavor to hear and judge in all their petty difficulties, but also that the people themselves were not being served efficiently. The work was simply too much for one person to care for properly.

Jethro was evidently a man of wisdom and of high righteous principles, as is revealed in his advice to Moses. He advised his son-in-law to appoint “able men”—rulers or judges—over various numbers of the Israelites, and admonished that these be men of principle, not selfish or covetous. Jethro realized, as Moses certainly must have known, that those of unrighteous principles would seek their own interests before those of the people over whom they ruled. Any of such character would be a curse to the nation rather than a blessing.—vss. 19-27

These “able men” in Israel served the people under the guidance of Moses. When Moses received the Law from God, with the instruction that it be communicated to the people, he called these elders, or representatives, together. He gave them the details of God’s law, so that they would gain the necessary understanding to first instruct, and then judge, the people properly.

Six hundred thousand Israelite men of adult age left Egypt. (Exod. 12:37) This would mean a total of probably a million and a half, counting women and children. It is not difficult to imagine the problems one individual would encounter in endeavoring, unaided, to instruct such a multitude in the Law of God. There was no printed page, radio, television, cell phones, or internet—none of our modern methods of communication. It is apparent indeed that Moses had a well-organized group of men to whom he could assign the important task of relaying to the people the necessary details of the Law as he had received it from God on Mount Sinai. In response, the people said that they would do all of the things that the Lord had spoken.—Exod. 19:8 ■

God's Sanctuary

Key Verses: *“Let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them. According to all that I shew thee, after the pattern of the tabernacle, and the pattern of all the instruments thereof, even so shall ye make it.”*
—Exodus 25:8,9

Selected Scripture:
Exodus chapters 25-27

THE DIRECTIONS GIVEN

to Moses for the construction of the Tabernacle can be found in Exodus chapters 25-27, and the account of the performance of the work is in chapters 35-40. The Tabernacle proper—Holy and Most Holy compartments—was to be a “sanctuary” according to the Word of God. It was constructed of a series of shittim [acacia] wood planks overlaid with gold, set on end into sockets of silver, and firmly fastened together by bars of the same wood, also covered with gold.—Exod. 26:15-30

Based on the approximate length of one “cubit” being 18 inches, the structure was fifteen feet wide, fifteen feet high, and forty-five feet long, and opened at the front or east end. It was covered by a large white linen cloth, interwoven with figures of cherubim in blue, purple, and scarlet. (vss. 1-3) The open end, or front of the structure, was closed by a curtain of similar material to the covering cloth, and was called the “door,” or first veil. (vss. 36,37) Another cloth of the same material, similarly woven with figures of cherubim, called the “veil,” or second veil, was hung so that it divided the Tabernacle into two compartments.

(vss. 31-33) The first or larger compartment, fifteen feet wide and thirty feet long, was called the "Holy." The second or rear compartment, fifteen feet wide and fifteen feet long, was called the "Most Holy." These two compartments constituted the Tabernacle proper. Additional coverings were erected over the Tabernacle for shelter. One was made of cashmere cloth or goat's hair, another of ram skins dyed red, and the topmost covering of seal skins, which helped to repel water.—vss. 7,14, *American Standard Version*

The Tabernacle which God commanded the people of Israel to construct in the wilderness, along with all their religious services and ceremonies related thereto, was, the Apostle Paul states, a "shadow of good things to come." (Heb. 10:1; 8:5; Col. 2:16,17) These ceremonies which the Israelites were caused to repeat year by year pointed forward to "better sacrifices," centered in Jesus, which would be introduced at the time of his First Advent. (Heb. 9:19-24) These would bring eternal salvation to not only Israel, but to all mankind.—I Tim. 2:5,6

It should be realized how carefully God guided and directed all the details of the construction of the Tabernacle. He took Moses up into the mount and gave him specific instructions concerning every part and the manner in which it should be made. "See, saith he, that thou shall make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount." (Heb. 8:5; Exod. 25:40) All of the details given to the Israelites from God through Moses concerning the building of God's "sanctuary" had to be performed in exact accordance with the divine instructions. The people had to be especially aware of these things so that they would not be careless and come under a severe penalty for any violation.

How thankful we are that all these arrangements pointed forward to Jesus, the "minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man."—Heb. 8:2 ■

The Priesthood Established

Key Verse: *“Thou shalt gird them with girdles, Aaron and his sons, and put the bonnets on them: and the priest’s office shall be theirs for a perpetual statute: and thou shalt consecrate Aaron and his sons.”*
—Exodus 29:9

Selected Scripture:
Exodus 29:1-9, 35-37

MUCH OF THE BOOK OF

Exodus deals with the erection of Israel’s Tabernacle. God commanded that it should be fully constructed by the first day of the religious year, which was approximately twelve months after the Israelites departed from Egypt. He also informed Moses where each of the furnishings should be placed.—Exod. 40:1-8

As a faithful servant of God, Moses carried out the commands he received exactly as he had been directed. (vss. 16-33) The Scriptures inform us that the

visible Tabernacle associated with Israel’s center of worship pictured heavenly realities that pertain to the present Gospel Age church as well as the entire human family in the future.—Heb. 9:23-28; Rev. 21:1-5

Additionally, instructions were given for anointing Aaron and his sons to minister in the priest’s office in connection with the Tabernacle. Included in these instructions were details concerning the consecration ceremony and inauguration of Israel’s priesthood.—Exod. 40:13-15; Lev. chapters 8 and 9

A detailed ceremony was employed, under God's direction, in connection with the installation into office of the priesthood of Israel. Inasmuch as the apostle says that the arrangements with Israel were a "shadow of good things to come," we are justified in drawing lessons from that consecration service that may help us to grasp more fully just what it really means to be a follower of the Master—the greater Melchisedec priest.—Heb. 10:1; 5:5,6

The consecration ceremony of Aaron and his sons lasted for seven days. (Lev. 8:33) The number seven is used in the Bible to represent the whole, or completeness of that to which it applies. The seven days of consecration, therefore, would picture very forcefully the fact that the consecration of Jesus, the greater high priest, and his footstep followers, the underpriests, is something that involves every aspect of life, and continues forever.

As already noted, the priests of Israel were the ones through whom God dispensed his blessings to Israel and directed them in the things which pertained to himself. So the prospective members of the greater Melchisedec priesthood, wholly devoted to God, also are to realize and appreciate God eternal purpose in calling them to this favored position. These will become part of the "royal priesthood," which will administer blessings to all mankind in God's coming kingdom.

"If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, ... what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron? For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law. For he of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood. ... Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life. For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec."—Heb. 7:11-17 ■

A Sweet Savor to God

Key Verse: “His inwards and his legs shall he wash in water: and the priest shall burn all on the altar, to be a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD.” —Leviticus 1:9

Selected Scripture: Leviticus 1:1-17

THE SYMBOLISM SHOWN

by the sense of smell is used in the Scriptures to convey the thought of sacrifice and devotion. In Ephesians 5:2, the apostle says, “Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.” By this language, Paul takes our minds back to the services of Israel’s Tabernacle where, in connection with its ceremonies, incense was burned upon the Golden Altar in the Holy compartment, the odor of

which penetrated beyond the second veil into the Most Holy. The instructions for this act stated that there was to be “perpetual incense before the LORD throughout your generations.”—Exod. 30:1-8

The directives governing the services of the Tabernacle were very exact. On Israel’s Day of Atonement, Aaron, the high priest, took the blood of the sin-offering sacrifices into the Most Holy to sprinkle upon the mercy seat. Prior to doing this, however, it was necessary that incense first be burned at the Golden Altar in order that its smoke and odor penetrate the Most Holy prior to Aaron passing under the veil. If this was not done, he would die as he entered the Most Holy. (Lev. 16:11-14)

The smoke and odor of the burning incense was evidence that the sacrificial work had been properly carried out and was acceptable to God.

Animal sacrifices that were burnt on the Brazen Altar were also considered as a “sweet savour unto the LORD,” as shown in our Key Verse and its context. (Lev. 1:5-9) Meat, or grain, offerings, when burnt upon the altar according to the Lord’s instructions, were similarly deemed a “sweet savour.”—Lev. 2:1-9

The foregoing ceremonies of Israel that were considered a “sweet savor” all pointed in various ways to Jesus’ ministry, obedience, and sacrifice, which ascended to God as a “sweetsmelling savour.” (Eph. 5:2) Consecrated followers of the Master are also invited to sacrifice and to be baptized into Jesus’ death. (Rom. 12:1; 6:3,4) The Christian’s work of sacrifice is directed particularly on behalf of fellow members of the “body of Christ.”—I Cor. 12:12-14,27

In Philippians 4:18, the Apostle Paul, alluding to the evidence of sacrifice on the part of the church at Philippi in sending him a gift while in prison at Rome, refers to it as “an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God.” Here we have the authority of Paul himself for applying the lessons of Israel’s Tabernacle to the church. It shows, furthermore, that God is testing the sincerity of our dedication to him by the wholeheartedness of our sacrifice and service towards one another.

The symbolism of the sense of smell should help enable us to discern between true devotion to God and mere lip service. Where we can detect no “odor” of sacrifice, we may well wonder how deeply the Truth has taken hold of our spiritual life. Our vision of Truth should reveal the privilege of sacrifice and service on behalf of others, and our heart devotion to the Lord should make us quick to lay down our lives that others may be blessed. Thus, the sweet odor of our devotion will be strong.—John 15:13; I John 4:7-11

The Day of Atonement

Key Verses: *“In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, ye shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all: ... For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the LORD.”*
—Leviticus 16:29,30

Selected Scripture:
Leviticus 16:2-9,11-19,27-34

usual “garments of glory and beauty,” but in garments of sacrifice, which were of white linen.—Exod. 28:2-39; Lev. 16:4

Aaron was instructed to procure a bullock and a goat for the atonement sacrifices. The bullock was provided by Aaron himself and was to be slain in the Court of the Tabernacle as a sin-offering for himself and his house. The fat of the bullock was to be burned upon the Brazen Altar. Due to a bullock’s large amount of fat, it must have burned furiously and produced a dense cloud of

TODAY’S LESSON PERTAINS to the services of the Tabernacle that were conducted on Israel’s annual Day of Atonement, as recorded in the 16th chapter of Leviticus. This all important service occurred on the tenth day of the seventh month of the Jewish religious year. It was considered the most solemn occasion of the entire year, the day on which the high priest entered the Most Holy—the innermost compartment of the Tabernacle—to make atonement for the sins of the nation. To conduct the services of this special day, the high priest, Aaron, was not clothed in his

smoke that arose in the sight of those outside.—Lev. 16:3,5,6,25

Aaron was to then fill a censer with burning coals taken from the fire on the Brazen Altar and bring it, together with sweet incense, into the Holy, the first compartment of the Tabernacle. The censer was to be set on top of the Golden Altar and the incense sprinkled upon it to produce a smoke of sweet perfume, which penetrated beyond the second veil into the Most Holy. When this had been performed meticulously, Aaron could safely enter the Most Holy and proceed with the final act of atonement. There he was to sprinkle the blood of the bullock on top of and in front of the mercy seat.—vss. 12-14

Outside of the Tabernacle, beyond the camp surrounding it, there was to be another fire. There the vile parts of the bullock—the skin, the flesh, and the dung—were to be burned. This scene was open to the view of all of the Israelites encamped about the Tabernacle and distinguished it sharply from the other sacrificial rites of the Day of Atonement, which were obscured by the linen curtains surrounding the Tabernacle Court and the enclosed nature of the Holy and Most Holy. Thus was completed the offering of the bullock.—vs. 27

The goat for a sin offering was next offered. It was to be taken from among the people of Israel for this purpose and presented before the Lord at the door of the Tabernacle. The Lord's goat was slain in the Tabernacle Court, and its blood was brought into the Most Holy and sprinkled in the same manner as had been done with the blood of the bullock. Its skin, flesh, and dung were likewise burned outside the camp of Israel.—vss. 15,27

Paul wrote that “all these things happened unto them [the Israelites] for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition.” They were a “shadow of good things to come” and of “better sacrifices,” centered in Jesus.—I Cor. 10:11; Heb. 10:1; 9:23 ■

The Conversion of Saul

*“As he journeyed,
he came near
Damascus: and
suddenly there
shined round
about him a light
from heaven: And
he fell to the earth,
and heard a voice
saying unto him,
Saul, Saul, why
persecutest
thou me?”
—Acts 9:3,4*

THE GOSPEL OF LUKE AND

The Acts of the Apostles were both written by Luke. (Luke 1:3,4; Acts 1:1) It is by his authorship that we learn most of what is now available about the life and early ministry of Saul, whose name was changed to Paul upon beginning his missionary work.—Acts 13:9

We first learn of Saul at the time when Stephen—considered the first Christian martyr—was stoned to death. The account was recorded by Luke, who wrote, “The witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man’s feet, whose name was Saul.” (Acts 7:58,59) This overly zealous Pharisee had willingly participated in young Stephen’s death by guarding the garments of those who were hurling the stones that took his life.

Luke further writes, “Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution

against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.”
—Acts 8:1-3

Saul, no doubt, had a special reason for wanting to travel to Damascus. In his misdirected zeal, he was not satisfied to limit his activity against members of the Early Church at Jerusalem, and he sought to pursue some of those who may have escaped. “Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, And desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.”—Acts 9:1,2

A BLINDING LIGHT

While in route to Damascus with his travelling companions, he was suddenly struck blind by a brilliant light from heaven. “And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutes thou me? ... And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?”—Acts 9:3-6

When Saul realized that the one confronting him was the Lord Jesus whom he was opposing, he was greatly frightened and confused. “The men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man. And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no

man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.”—Acts 9:7-9

SAUL MEETS ANANIAS

As a result of this very powerful and humbling experience, Saul had a complete change of heart. He had lost his misdirected zeal, self-confidence, and self-assurance. At the time this incident took place, there was a disciple to whom the Lord had already appeared in a vision, and instructed him to go to Saul. “There was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord. And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, And hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.”—vss. 10-12

The prayers of Saul did not go unheeded. We read further: “Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem: And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name. But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel: For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake.”—vss. 13-16

ISRAEL’S FAVOR ENDING

This episode in the life of Saul occurred about one year before the Jewish people’s exclusive favor was to end. In these words to Ananias, our Lord

gave one of the first direct indications that Gentiles would soon be invited to share in the spiritual body of Christ. Ananias did as he had been instructed. He “went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”—vs. 17

It is of particular note that Ananias greeted the blind Saul with the words, “Brother Saul.” His eyesight was immediately restored, and he was baptized into Christ. (vs. 18) Having been without food for three days and nights, he ate and was strengthened, and stayed with the disciples at Damascus for several more days. Luke then informs us, “Straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.” (vss. 19,20) How remarkable is the fact that those Christians in Damascus, whom he had come to forcibly take back to Jerusalem, where they were likely to be killed, he had now joined in proclaiming the Gospel of Christ!

TAUGHT BY GOD

At the time that Luke wrote this account, he did not give details as to how Saul obtained his very deep understanding of the Scriptures. However, we do learn some of this information from the apostle’s own writings. In his letter to the Galatians, he confirms his appointment as an apostle by Jesus and the Heavenly Father. He wrote, “Paul, an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead).”—Gal. 1:1

The apostle then proceeded to write about his complete conversion from that of obeying and pleasing men and his fervent zeal for Judaism, to that of obeying and pleasing God. He proclaimed, "As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. For ye have heard of my conversation [Greek: behavior or conduct] in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers." —Gal. 1:9-14

He then recalled: "When it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, To reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus."—vss. 15-17

The apostle speaks of God having sent him into Arabia to receive very special knowledge through direct revelations. This was a great honor and privilege, but it did not make him either proud or high-minded, as he later revealed in his letter to the brethren at Corinth. "I am the least of the apostles,

that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.” (I Cor. 15:9) It is likely that one of the reasons why God did not instruct him to go to Jerusalem after leaving Arabia was because of the very strong feelings that had been generated against him, and which continued to prevail there. Some still did not trust him, and might believe that he was secretly trying to entrap them in some way.

A HUMBLE SERVANT

The special calling of Saul of Tarsus and the direct revelations that were given to him by our Lord Jesus and the Heavenly Father are confirmed again in his second letter to the Corinthians. He acknowledged that anyone who had undergone experiences such as he had might have a tendency to boast about them. He answered that possible question by saying, “This boasting will do no good, but I must go on. I will reluctantly tell about visions and revelations from the Lord. I was caught up to the third heaven fourteen years ago. Whether I was in my body or out of my body, I don’t know—only God knows. Yes, only God knows whether I was in my body or outside my body. But I do know that I was caught up to paradise and heard things so astounding that they cannot be expressed in words, things no human is allowed to tell. That experience is worth boasting about, but I’m not going to do it. I will boast only about my weaknesses. If I wanted to boast, I would be no fool in doing so, because I would be telling the truth. But I won’t do it, because I don’t want anyone to give me credit beyond what they can see in my life or

hear in my message, even though I have received such wonderful revelations from God. So to keep me from becoming proud, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from becoming proud.”—II Cor. 12:1-7, *New Living Translation*

SPECIAL REVELATIONS

The scriptural account does not tell us how long Saul was in Arabia receiving these special revelations, but it was perhaps of some length. After this remarkable experience, we learn that he returned to Damascus, and “straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.” The reaction of the unbelieving Jews in Damascus was one of amazement, knowing that Saul had come there before to take the believers in Christ as his prisoners. No one, however, could refute his powerful logic when preaching of the resurrected Lord Jesus.—Acts 9:20-22

Not all who heard him preach appreciated his message, and a plan was undertaken to silence him. “After that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him.” When the brethren learned of their plot, they helped Saul to escape and make his way back to Jerusalem. However, the apostles and disciples at Jerusalem were still afraid of him, thinking that he had entered in among them to spy.—vss. 23-25

SAUL GOES TO JERUSALEM

Most of the brethren at Jerusalem found it difficult to accept Saul as a true brother in Christ. However, there was one particular disciple, whose name was Barnabas, who realized that Saul had been

truly converted to Christ. He saw the great apostle for what he truly was. He had been convinced that Saul's remarkable experiences had come from no other source but the Lord himself. Barnabas knew that the matter with the other brethren at Jerusalem had to be resolved, and he took the opportunity to speak with him. He then took Saul to the apostles and insisted that they learn the truth of the matter firsthand and of the complete change that had occurred in his life.—Acts 9:26,27

Verse 27 states: "Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus." Afterward, the apostles and disciples did accept Saul, and welcomed him to become one of them by entering into their activities and speaking in the name of the Lord Jesus.—vs. 28

HELLENISTS SOUGHT HIS LIFE

As Saul ministered in Jerusalem, his preaching brought him in contact with the Hellenists who also began plotting against him. "He spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him. Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Caesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus."—Acts 9:29,30

The word "Grecians" in the foregoing account means Hellenists, and refers to those Jews who spoke Greek. Saul's logical and persuasive preaching of the Scriptures caused a disturbance among some of them. This was not unusual, because

problems among them had occurred before. Luke records: "In those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration." (Acts 6:1) Now, as had been the case at Damascus, in Jerusalem they also plotted against Saul and sought ways to take his life.

The disciples in Jerusalem learned of the Hellenist's plot to kill Saul, and for his own safety they persuaded him to return to his home in Tarsus, which was a city in Asia Minor in the province of Cilicia. They provided for his safe escort by way of Caesarea, a port city from which he was able to sail to Tarsus. He remained there for a period of time, perhaps two years. Luke wrote, "Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit, were multiplied."—Acts 9:31

GLADLY WAS THE WORD RECEIVED

During this time, the Lord caused a respite from the severe persecution that had been directed against his special people which had existed since the time of Jesus' crucifixion. This was no doubt very beneficial to the members of the Early Church. As a result, the communal arrangement that had been tried for a time became less important and soon ended. (Acts 4:32-35) It is noteworthy that there is no further mention in the Scriptures concerning this type of shared close-living social structure, either continuing or being revived among those of the brethren living at that time.

(Continued on page 36)

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(Continued from page 30) The main interest of Luke, the historian, in writing an account of the Acts of the Apostles, was in connection with the spiritual growth and development of the followers of our Lord. He recorded for us information that large numbers of believers were added to the church at that time. "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls." (Acts 2:41; 4:4) The increase in the numbers of brethren in the church came from all the ranks of Israel and showed how God's blessed High Calling was yet exclusively upon that nation, even as their special favor was rapidly coming to an end.

ISRAEL'S FAVOR ENDS

The nation of Israel's special time of favor ended even as it had been foretold centuries earlier by their prophets. Among God's prophets was Amos who wrote: "Hear this word that the LORD hath spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying, You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."—Amos 3:1,2

When Jesus' ministry was drawing to a close, he taught an important lesson concerning Israel, using a fig tree with no fruit on it as an illustration. Matthew records: "When he [Jesus] saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away. And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying,

How soon is the fig tree withered away!”—Matt. 21:19,20

Jesus proclaimed that Israel’s house would be left desolate soon after his crucifixion and earthly ministry had been completed. He said, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.”—Matt. 23:37-39

PAUL’S LABOR NOT IN VAIN

When Saul’s name was changed to Paul as recorded in Acts 13:9, and he began his missionary journeys, this great apostle became very prominent among Jesus’ followers. It is evident that he rose above even some of the original twelve apostles, who are rarely named outside of the apostolic lists. Yet Paul remained humble. He wrote: “By the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”—I Cor. 15:10

Let us remember the extraordinary life of this one—Saul—who did a complete about face when he was enlightened by the Lord, then becoming the great Apostle Paul. May we remember too, and emulate, his constant attitude of humility, meekness, and complete dedication to the Lord’s work placed before him, all accomplished as he himself said, by the “grace which was bestowed upon me.” ■

The Parable of the Sower

*“Hear ye therefore
the parable of
the sower.”*

—*Matthew 13:18*

DURING JESUS’ EARTHLY ministry, he taught the multitudes “many things by parables.” (Mark 4:1,2) A parable

is a fictitious narrative, which teaches a moral or lesson. In a parable the things said are not meant to be taken literally. The expression, “a picture is worth a thousand words,” means that a complex idea or lesson can oftentimes be taught more effectively by using a picture or illustration. A parable is essentially a picture, painted using everyday ideas or habits in life which were in use during the time period in which it was given. Thus, a parable conveys a very vivid lesson, easy for listeners to remember. The parable of the sower is one of the few parables in which Jesus followed with an explanation.—Matt. 13:3-23; Mark 4:3-20; Luke 8:4-15

The parable begins, “Behold, a sower went forth to sow.” (Matt. 13:3) In ancient times, planting was done by throwing out seeds which were carried in a pouch or apron. This was called sowing the seed. Jesus explained that the seed illustrated “the word

of the kingdom,” “the word of God.” (Matt. 13:19; Luke 8:11) Therefore, this parable is about the message of God’s kingdom being proclaimed throughout the land by a sower. Although Jesus did not say who the sower in the parable represented, he expected his disciples to understand that he was the one distributing the word of the kingdom. It is for this reason that earlier it is stated: “From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matt. 4:17) In this parable, we know that the seed is good and the sower is faithful. However, the type of soil which the seed falls upon determines the success or failure of the crop.

In the parable of the sower there are four different types of soil which receive the seed, with four completely different results. “Some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.”—Matt. 13:4-9

SOIL BY THE WAY SIDE

The first type of soil upon which the seed fell was located by, or near, the way side, a road or path, and birds came and “devoured them up.” Jesus explained that the individuals represented by this type of soil had heard the word. However, they “understandeth

it not.” Jesus explained that the wicked one, Satan, “cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts.” (vs. 19; Mark 4:15) Luke’s account adds; “it was trodden down, and the fowls of the air devoured it.”—Luke 8:5

This may represent individuals who hear and like the Gospel message but have a lot of unanswered, and perhaps unasked, questions. Because they do not pursue answers to what they do not understand, the Adversary takes advantage and discourages them from investigating further, either by influencing them that it is beyond the possibility of their comprehension, or by adverse experiences of life which cause further discouragement. In reality, the seed never had a chance to sprout. It merely sat on the surface and the Adversary took away that which was sown in the heart.

STONY GROUND

The second type of soil upon which the seed fell was stony ground which “had not much earth.” The seeds immediately sprung up. However, “when the sun was up, they were scorched; because they had no root,” and they withered away because they lacked moisture. (Matt. 13:5-6; Mark 4:5-6; Luke 8:6) Jesus explained that the individuals represented by this type of soil “heareth the word” and “with joy receiveth it, yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended.”—Matt. 13:20,21

In this parable the sun is a symbol of various kinds of adversities, such as tribulation and persecution, which occur “because of the word.” This type of soil

lacked sufficient moisture and consequently could not sustain the heat when trial came upon it. Moisture is water retained. Water is elsewhere used as a symbol of Truth. (Deut. 32:2; Isa. 55:10-11; John 4:10-14) Perhaps those represented by the stony ground lack a personal love for God's Truth, as found in the Scriptures, and are captivated by the emotion of the moment—perhaps by a sermon, a book, or someone having a charismatic personality.

However, tests arise in the life of each of those drawn to the Lord. Eventually, one has to choose whether to follow and hold to God's doctrines and principles as taught in the Scriptures, or whether to go along with the crowd, accepting traditional manmade doctrines, or the unholy influences of what imperfect society thinks is acceptable and just, and sometimes claims as progressive. Such tests are real and require a firm trust and faith in God in order to gladly hold to godly principles. They may require one at times to be unpopular with others, perhaps even being falsely accused as unloving or unkind by not accepting the world's ways and standards. The Lord's followers should not be surprised when such tests arise. Jesus said: "Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it," but he also promised, "Do not fear, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."—Matt. 7:14; Luke 12:32, *New King James Version*

The Scriptures are filled with encouraging examples of men and women whose faith in God was strong and who were determined to follow God's instructions and principles, even if it meant not following what everyone else was accepting, and

knowing they would have to pay a price for doing this.

For some, the price they paid was life itself, such as John the Baptist, the Apostle James, and of course, Jesus. They all died as a result of their faith in God and steadfast obedience to his will. Others, though tried severely, had their lives spared. We think of the three Hebrew young men who were thrown into the fiery furnace; Daniel, who was cast into a den of lions; Apostle Peter, who was imprisoned; Paul, along with Silas, was likewise put into prison. These all were delivered by God's hand, yet they still endured much in the way of trial and testing because of their faith in God.

These examples point out to us that we should not expect God to deliver us from every trial or experience which he permits us to have. The Lord's providences vary and it is not for us to decide when shall come remarkable deliverances, and when we shall seem to have been left without any outward manifestation of his favor on our behalf.

Therefore, we are not to presume what should be God's providence in respect to ourselves. We should note divine principles and standards, and follow them regardless of the consequences, trusting implicitly in the Lord. Let us resolve, like all of the foregoing examples, that we will worship and serve only the Lord our God, and not seek popularity, admiration, or even the approval of others. "True worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. ... And they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth." (John 4:23,24) Trials, difficulties, and adversities in our lives, rightly

accepted as permitted by the Lord, are blessings in disguise and will result in glory in the life to come. —Rom. 8:16-18; II Cor. 4:16-18

THORNY GROUND

In the parable of the sower the third type of soil upon which the seed fell contained thorns which “sprung up, and choked” the plant so that “it yielded no fruit.” (Matt. 13:7; Mark 4:7) Jesus explained that individuals represented by this type of soil “are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares [Greek: distractions] and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to perfection.”—Luke 8:14

The thorny ground soil well represents those who have good hearts, have heard the message of the kingdom, appreciate it, and rejoice in it, but their priorities are divided. They allow the cares of this life and the love of riches to have such a share of their heart’s affections that the kingdom message does not have the opportunity to bring forth such fruitage as will be pleasing to the Lord.

The thorns in the parable do not necessarily represent sinful things. Very nice people, hospitable and educated, even with a measure of faith, might belong to this class of the parable represented by the thorny ground. The seed sprouts, but so do the thorny weeds. Both grow together for a time, but the weeds flourish and win out, eventually choking the plant.

Earlier, Jesus had admonished his disciples, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do

not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. ... No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.”—Matt. 6:19-21,24, *New American Standard Bible*

GOOD GROUND

In the parable the fourth type of soil upon which the seed fell was “good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.” (Matt. 13:8) Jesus explained the individuals represented by the good ground are those that “heareth the word, and understandeth it.”—vs. 23

The word translated “understandeth” in the original Greek means to comprehend. Elsewhere in the New Testament, those with this particular type of understanding are described as to “understand with their heart.” (Matt. 13:15; Acts 28:27) Along these lines Paul admonishes: “Be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.” (Eph. 5:17) This suggests that the “good ground” class of individuals understand, or comprehend, that their heart-reliance should be placed upon the Lord, and thus they seek to know and to do the will of the Lord. This requires studying the Word of God, the Scriptures, both individually and collectively, and developing a deep faith in its teachings and promises.

Respecting the Word of God, the good ground class also “keep it.” (Luke 8:15) The Greek word translated “keep” has elsewhere in the New Testament been rendered “hold fast.” Paul repeatedly admonishes us along these lines: “Hold fast that which is good;” “hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the

hope firm unto the end;" and "hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised)."—I Thess. 5:21; Heb. 3:6,14; 10:23

With respect to the Word of God, those of the good ground class not only receive it joyfully, but also "bear fruit with perseverance." (Luke 8:15, *NASB*) Paul writes that God "will render to each person according to his deeds: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life." (Rom. 2:6,7 *NASB*) "And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope."—Rom. 5:3-4, *NASB*

Within this group there are three different levels of fruit-bearing, "some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold." (Matt. 13:8) We suggest that the hundred, sixty, and thirty represent not merely how many Christian works which we may do, but additionally the degree to which we have individually developed each of the fruits of the Holy Spirit, according to our individual capability, "according to what you have, not according to what you do not have."—Gal. 5:22,23; II Cor. 8:12, *International Standard Version*

Previously Jesus said to his disciples, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." (Matt. 7:21) Elsewhere the Apostle Paul states: "This is the will of God, even your sanctification." (I Thess. 4:3) Sanctification means to be made holy, and it is a process which should continue throughout our Christian life, as we strive to be fully developed and faithful unto death. Sanctification should affect our

mind, our eyes, our ears, our tongue, our actions, our all. Paul also states that “the will of God” includes being thankful in everything, in every experience we have, whether joys or sorrows, because “we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”—I Thess. 5:18; Rom. 8:28

The Apostle Peter, defining another aspect of the will of God, writes: “For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.” (I Pet. 2:15,16) Peter also admonishes us: “It is better, if the will of God should so will, that ye suffer for well-doing than for evil-doing.”—I Pet. 3:17, *American Standard Version*

In the parable, if we are of the good ground class, questions we should ask ourselves are: “Am I working on the development in my character of each of the fruits and graces of the Holy Spirit? Am I daily doing the will of God from the heart?” If so, “am I doing these things to the extent of an hundredfold, that is, to 100% of my individual capacity and ability?”

PREPARATION FOR THE KINGDOM

There are seven more parables in chapter thirteen of Matthew, and each of these illustrates a particular lesson concerning the kingdom of heaven. Jesus had begun his preaching, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is at hand.” (Matt. 4:17) In the parable of the sower, sowing the seed illustrates the proclamation of that message. God’s kingdom is not limited to heaven, because there are two phases of the kingdom, a heavenly phase and an earthly phase. Now,

however, is the time of preparation for those who will be of the heavenly phase. Their experiences and growth are shown in these eight parables recorded in Matthew 13, and they are well illustrated as threatened by weeds, leaven, stones, and other elements that can hinder the development of the Lord's followers during the present Gospel Age.

FURTHER LESSONS

Why did Jesus give the parable of the sower? Perhaps it was to answer a question in the minds of his disciples. They may have been discouraged because they had little results from their efforts in preaching the Gospel and announcing the arrival of Messiah. Although there were crowds gathering around Jesus one day, the next day the people would often not be present. (John 6:66,67) It would have been easy to say, "What's the use? So much seed is going to waste. Why bother?" A sower, however, does not think in those terms. He knows that despite all obstacles, some seed will bring forth fruit.

Three out of the four soils brought forth no fruit to maturity. Even all the good soil did not bring forth fruit to the same degree, but those facts did not trouble the sower. He knew eventually, at the time of harvest, he would be rewarded for his efforts. We should remember this lesson if any suggest we stop engaging in public efforts or cease doing general witnessing of the Gospel because we have so little results to show for it. We should not be discouraged when we share God's wonderful Truth with an individual, and there is little or no response to the message. Few, at the time of Jesus' earthly ministry who heard Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom, received it into good

and honest hearts and brought forth fruit. It should be no surprise if our experience today is the same.

There are other lessons for us in this parable. We can ask: "What kind of soil are we? Are we stony ground?" If we are, the sprouted seed will wither away at the first sign of persecution. Hard and stony ground can be rendered suitable for crops only by plowing and removing anything that interferes with growth. Yet even when the soil is properly plowed, weeds continually compete with the seed. Unless we actively and daily remove anything that would seek to replace the Word in our hearts, we could have our growth in Christlikeness stunted and possibly choked.

At the conclusion of this parable Jesus states, "Who hath ears to hear, let him hear." (Matt. 13:9) Jesus used this expression on several occasions when he wanted to emphasize the lesson he had just given. Hearing is important—it is the way we receive the seed. However, hearing is not enough. It must be translated into fruitage, by developing the fruits of the Holy Spirit. We cannot expect that hearing the Truth, and only hearing it, will profit us. The ground that represents our hearts must be well plowed, well watered, and well weeded. First we hear, then we understand, then we grow and bring forth fruit.

Unfruitfulness is not the fault of the seed nor of the sower. Rather, it is the result of carelessness, inattentiveness, or of becoming worldly-minded in the soil of our hearts. Let us rededicate ourselves to the growth of the seed within our hearts, in order that our hands will not be empty at our time of harvest. "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples."—John 15:8 ■

The Promise of Christ's Return

“Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning.”

—Mark 13:35

THE NIGHT BEFORE HE

died, our Lord and Savior gave to his disciples some vitally important information concerning events which would soon take place. He explained that it would be necessary for him to leave them for a while, go to his “Father’s house,” and “prepare a place” for them. (John 14:1,2) He then spoke these most wonderful words of promise: “And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”—vs. 3

EXHORTATION TO WATCH

Our featured Scripture, and the context from which it has been selected, implies that it was then unknown as to when Jesus would return as he had promised. We read: “Of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye

heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is.” (Mark 13:32,33) Those who were looking forward to that time were exhorted to watch for the signs of this event, although its precise time was not stated. Mark’s account implies that it would not be until Christ’s return had already occurred that it would be revealed to the watching ones, who would take heed and be prayerfully alert. Those who were not alert and watching, as our Lord instructed, would know neither the time, nor the events, which would be recognized by those who were watching for the signs of their accomplishment.

The exhortation to “watch” is fully corroborated by other scriptures. In this connection, the Apostle Paul thus encourages us: “Yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.” (I Thess. 5:2-6) Paul’s emphasis concerns the “children of light,” who would be watching and enlightened as a result of the teachings and prophetic statements of Jesus and his faithful apostles.

FAITHFULLY WATCHING

Some Christian people have been offended and stumbled respecting the Master’s teaching concerning his promised Second Coming: [Greek: *parousia*, or presence; see Matt. 24:3, *Young’s Literal Translation*].

This has sometimes resulted because of unreasonable and literal viewpoints concerning the manner and purpose of his invisible presence. We are not at liberty, however, to reject one of the most beautiful and prominent teachings of the Scriptures simply because others may have erred respecting the subject. Some may erroneously bring a certain amount of worldly wisdom upon anything connected with the teachings of Christ's return.

This doctrine is a vital part of the inspiring promise made by our Lord Jesus himself as he was concluding his earthly ministry, and his words should be given a prominent place among the precious jewels of divine Truth. His encouraging words have the power to enhance all of the related promises and blessings that are associated with it. It should not be set aside or hidden, but should be given its true place in the plan of God for the blessing of all who are sincerely and truly his people.

I WILL RECEIVE YOU UNTO MYSELF

The teachings and promises regarding Christ's Second Coming are at the very center of the divine plan for the reconciliation and future blessing of all the families of the earth through the seed of promise. (Gal. 3:8,16,27-29) These promises have been established upon the testimony of the prophets, apostles, and by Christ Jesus himself. Many honest-hearted Christian people have loved and appreciated these teachings. They hold a most prominent place in their hearts, while others may see no real importance to the subject.

The watching of the Lord's people has been for the return of him who redeemed us, and who promised,

“I will come again, and receive you unto myself.” (John 14:3) The word “receive,” as used here by John, means “to take near or alongside of.” It was also used by the Apostle Paul when he wrote to the brethren at Corinth concerning the Gospel that had been received by them. “Brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand.” (I Cor. 15:1) He spoke further about the importance of trusting in his teachings of Scripture saying, “By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory [Greek: hold fast] what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.” Paul also used the word “receive” to support his own faith: “I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures.”—vss. 2,3

BLESSINGS FROM THE PROMISED SEED

The groaning creation has long awaited, though mostly unknowingly, for the glorious future kingdom of righteousness and peace, and for the completion of the promised seed of Abraham. This wonderful promise is one in which our Heavenly Father has been selecting the members of the bride of Christ during this present Gospel Age since the Day of Pentecost. These will be with the Lord Jesus and share his glory as joint-heirs with him in carrying out the marvelous and beneficent provisions for blessing the poor sin-sick world.—Rom. 8:16,17; II Tim. 2:10-12; Rev. 3:21

This promise is sure of fulfillment: “The angel of the LORD called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and

hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.”—Gen. 22:15-18

SHARING HIS GLORY

Watching implies waiting, as well as an expectant hope. We are waiting for that of which the Apostle Paul wrote in his letter to Titus: “Waiting [Greek: with confidence] for the blessed hope and manifestation of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ.” (Titus 2:13, *Young’s Literal Translation*) During the process of testing and proving his footstep followers, the Lord transforms them from the flesh to his own spiritual image and likeness. “We all, ... are changed into the same image from glory to glory.” John further states: “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”—II Cor. 3:18; I John 3:2

Christians who are proven to be faithful unto death will be resurrected as spirit beings. They will be like Jesus, see him as he is, share his glory, and be associated with him in the great work of bringing blessings of life and peace to the whole world of mankind. This present waiting and hoping time is also one of tribulation and trial, not only for the world which lies under the yoke of sin and the blinding influences of Satan, but also for faithful Christians. Of these the apostle writes: “Ourselves also, who have the

firstfruits of the spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for our placement as sons, to wit, the redemption [or deliverance] of our body.”—Rom. 8:23, *Revised Version Improved and Corrected*

Many students of the Bible have come to appreciate the fulfillment of the prophetic signs that indicate we are living at the time of our Lord’s Second Coming and resulting invisible presence. Paul pointed out the importance of understanding the invisible nature of this Day of the Lord. “Yourselves have known thoroughly that the day of the Lord as a thief in the night doth so come.” (I Thess. 5:2, *YLT*) Its dawning cannot be discerned with the natural eye. If the Second Coming of Christ were to be an open and outward manifestation, the world would also know of it as soon as the Lord’s people, those who were instructed to watch and be on the alert for it. In that case, it would not be true that the Day of the Lord comes as a “thief” unawares to the world, because all would know it.

GOD’S WORD—OUR LAMP

We are to watch the signs of the times, and do so in the light of God’s Word. The present age has surely been a nighttime, and the Lord’s people have been waiting for the Master to return as promised. Speaking prophetically of God’s care over his people at this present time, the psalmist wrote: “Since God is in her midst, she will not be shaken. God will help her at the break of dawn.”—Ps. 46:5, *International Standard Version*

The Word of God has been the guiding light for the pathway of faithful Christians, as expressed by David, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.” (Ps. 119:105) The lamp, as it has revealed

Truth, has guided all of the faithful, watchful pilgrims in their journey toward the celestial city—the heavenly Jerusalem. (Heb. 12:22) What a comfort it has been, and how dark and dreary would our pilgrim journey have been without it. As the words of the hymn express, “Looking back, I’ll praise the way Thou hast led me, led me, day by day,” by the light of Truth.

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Those who have taken heed to the landmarks pointed out by God through his prophets of the Old Testament as well as through Jesus and the apostles, realize that we have already come on a much longer journey than was expected by the church when first she started out nearly 2,000 years ago at Pentecost. However, we realize also from these landmarks that we have now approached very near to the end of this period in God’s plan, and to the time when the great blessing, which his people have so long waited and prayed for, is at hand. The watchers have noted God’s testimony through the Prophet Daniel that this “time of the end” would be a period when “many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.”—Dan. 12:4

The alert watchers are not indifferent to the fulfillment of prophecy that is to be seen at the present time. Others may be aware of our changing world, but the child of God discerns the changes not only as facts but also as a clear indication that we are living in the foretold “time of the end,” that is, the end of this “present evil age.” (Gal. 1:4, *ISV*) It is also a time of preparation for the blessings of the kingdom that will soon follow, of which the Prophet Malachi wrote: “Unto you that fear my name shall

the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings.”—Mal. 4:2

INCREASING TROUBLE

Daniel’s prophecy points out that the Lord’s invisible presence brings an increase of conflict and discontent to the world of mankind in general. The result will be as he has prophetically stated: “At that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book.” (Dan. 12:1) “Michael” in Daniel’s prophecy refers to our Lord Jesus, the “archangel,” or chief angel, who would “stand up,” symbolically speaking, at the time of his return.—Jude 1:9; I Thess. 4:16

The faithful watchers, seeking to know whether these things are being fulfilled, recognize the chaos and level of violence that marks our day as a climactic time in the plan of God. They also put their trust in God that they will be “delivered” in this “time of trouble.” The Scriptures distinctly declare that all present human institutions will be shaken and descend into anarchy, confusion, and chaos, in preparation for God’s kingdom of righteousness, peace, and blessing.—Heb. 12:26-28; II Pet. 3:10-13

ALL SHALL PRAISE HIM

The children of God do not lose sight of our Heavenly Father or his providence. They see that the approaching fall of the present world order will be the natural result of pride and selfishness. They also remember and trust that God is in full control

of all things as expressed by the psalmist. “Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.”—Ps. 76:10

The followers of our Lord Jesus look not merely at the outward signs, as seen in the world, but scrutinize carefully the Bible’s prophetic outline of world history. It is because they see the “time of trouble” outlined in the prophecies that they know it is sure to come, and are thus able to discern God’s times and seasons. It was in respect to this that Jesus promised the watchers that the Holy Spirit should guide them into all Truth, as each feature becomes due. “When that one, the spirit of truth, is come, it shall guide you into all the truth: for it shall not speak from itself; but what things soever it shall hear, these shall it speak: and it shall declare unto you the things that are to come.”—John 16:13, *RVIC*

The same record that shows the downfall of all earthly institutions shows also that their fall is so timed in the great plan of God that it will be the very hour in which he will establish his kingdom. It will be placed in the hands of his Son, Christ Jesus, and his elect church, whose exaltation will be for the purpose of blessing all of mankind. The watchers note that our Lord Jesus promised to provide his footstep followers with a comprehensive outline of Truth—“meat in due season”—at the very time of his promised return, in preparation for his long-awaited kingdom.—Matt. 24:45,46; Luke 12:42-44

LIGHT MAKES MANIFEST

In his Gospel, Luke captures the thought of increasing enlightenment as it will be seen by all people in

due time. "No man, when he hath lighted a candle, covereth it with a vessel, or putteth it under a bed; but setteth it on a candlestick, that they which enter in may see the light. For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither any thing hid, that shall not be known and come abroad."—Luke 8:16,17

In harmony with the foregoing words of our Lord, *The Dawn* magazine has used as its subtitle, *A Herald of Christ's Presence*, for nine decades. It has been the great privilege of the publisher to not only point our readers to the evidences of the Lord's invisible presence during this "time of the end," but also to herald far and wide the glorious blessings to soon come to the entire world by means of the establishment of the Messianic kingdom. Indeed, the increasing light of our Lord's presence, having already enlightened and richly blessed the household of faith, will soon, we believe, cast its light upon the sin-sick and dying human creation.

God's kingdom, under Christ's rulership, will soon be established in righteousness and peace throughout all the earth. As John the Revelator wrote: "Behold, he cometh with the clouds; and every eye shall perceive him." (Rev. 1:7, *RVIC*) This expresses the manner in which our Lord Jesus has returned—with clouds—secretly and invisibly to a very dark world. Christ's kingdom, however, will bring enlightenment to all people—"every eye" shall discern him—and all unrighteousness will be destroyed. Therefore, let us each look forward to this joyous answer to the oft-repeated prayer, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."—Matt. 6:10 ■

General Convention Bulletin

July 19-24, 2025—Johnstown, Pennsylvania

PREPARATIONS ARE well underway for the 2025 General Convention, which will be held at the familiar facilities of the University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown, Pennsylvania, on the dates noted above.

Air conditioned rooms with private bathrooms in the Living-Learning Center (LLC) and family-style air conditioned apartments with private bathrooms (APTS) will be available on campus. A child may sleep on a bedroom floor at no charge if other beds are occupied. We are happy to announce that there will be no price increases from last year for meals and lodging at the convention.

All room and meal costs for children 12 years old or younger will be paid by the convention. In addition, 100% of the room and meal cost of those from ages 13 through 17 will be refunded if the young person attends at least 75% of the studies for his or her age group. This subsidy does not cover meals paid at the door.

In addition to a discourse on the theme text, I Peter 1:22 (*International Standard Version*), the convention program will include a discussion of the topic "Take Heed to Yourself and the Doctrine," taken from I Timothy 4:16. Short talks will be presented on "Our Three Enemies," the world, the flesh, and the Adversary. Two-person dialogues

will also be presented: one on the subject of “Stewardship,” based on I Corinthians 4:2; another will consider “The Jerusalem Conference,” as recorded in Acts chapter 15. A Baptismal service will be held for anyone desiring to give witness to their consecration by water immersion.

A pricing table and registration form is provided immediately following this announcement. We encourage you to register early and also to pass this information along to others in your area. Advance payment is not required. If you pay in advance it will be refunded in full if you determine later that you are unable to attend. We look forward to the prospect of seeing our brethren once again and encourage each of you to start planning now to attend this year’s General Convention. ■

Ages	18 & up	***13-17
Breakfast	\$11.00	\$10.00
Lunch	13.00	12.00
Dinner	16.00	15.00
Total, three meals	\$40.00	\$37.00
Lodging (per night)		
dbl occ (LLC or APTS)	\$45.00	\$40.00
single occ (LLC)	\$80.00	n/a
PKG: 7 nights, 18 meals		
dbl occ (LLC or APTS)	\$445*	\$410*
single occ (LLC)	\$655*	n/a

*If no breakfasts, deduct—\$40

***100% of these costs will be refunded if the young person attends 75% of the studies for his/her age group.

NOTE: A Convention Fee of \$15.00 per person, regardless of age, length of stay, or lodging and meal arrangements, will be added to your invoice to help offset convention expenses unrelated to lodging and meals.

General Convention Registration

330 Jasmine Road—Casselberry, FL 32707

E-mail: ekuenzli@cfl.rr.com (407) 670-4189

	Brkfst	Lunch	Dinner	Bed
Friday, July 18, 2025				
Saturday, 19th				
Sunday, 20th				
Monday, 21st				
Tuesday, 22nd				
Wednesday, 23rd				
Thursday, 24th				

Check for package: 7 nights, all 18 meals ☐
or 7 nights, 12 meals (no breakfasts) ☐

Check: ☐ double occupancy ☐ single occupancy
☐ interested in APTS

Names and ecclesia name (age if under 18)

Address:

*Blest be the tie that binds
Our hearts in Christian love;
The fellowship of kindred minds
Is like to that above.
—Hymns of Dawn*

WEEKLY PRAYER MEETING TEXTS

MARCH 6—"I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound."—Philippians 4:11,12 (Z. '03-10 Hymn 110)

MARCH 13—"As many, therefore, as are perfect, should be of this mind; and if in anything you think differently, God will also reveal this to you; But to what we have attained, let us walk by the same line."—Philippians 3:15-17 (*Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott*) (Z. '01-10 Hymn 312A)

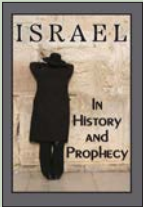
MARCH 20—"If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."—John 8:31,32 (Z. '03-61 Hymn 260)

MARCH 27—"I pray for them ... that they all may be one ... that they may be made perfect in one ... that the world may know that thou hast ... loved them as thou hast loved me."—John 17:9,20-23 (Z. '03-79 Hymn 165)

Bible Study Helps

In this troubled time . . . the nation of Israel is in the spotlight, and many believe we are nearing the time in which God will "gather all nations into the valley of decision" as "they beat their plowshares into swords." Will peace ever come to the Middle East and the world? Read the Bible's promises in the booklet:

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To us the Scriptures clearly teach . . .

THAT THE CHURCH IS “THE TEMPLE” OF THE LIVING GOD

—peculiarly “his workmanship”; that its construction has been in progress throughout the Gospel Age—ever since Christ became the world’s Redeemer and the chief “corner stone” of this temple, through which, when finished, God’s blessings shall come “to all people”, and they find access to him.—I Cor. 3:16,17; Eph. 2:20-22; Gen. 28:14; Gal. 3:29

THAT MEANTIME THE CHISELING, SHAPING AND POLISHING

of consecrated believers in Christ’s atonement for sin progresses, and when the last of these “living stones,” “elect and precious,” shall have been made ready, the great Master Workman will bring all together in the first resurrection; and the temple shall be filled with his glory, and be the meeting place between God and men throughout the Millennium.—Rev. 15:5-8

THAT THE BASIS OF HOPE FOR THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD

lies in the fact that Jesus Christ, by the grace of God, tasted death for every man, “a ransom for all,” and will be “the true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world,” “in due time.”—Heb. 2:9; John 1:9; I Tim. 2:5,6

THAT THE HOPE OF THE CHURCH

is that she may be like her Lord, “see him as he is,” be a “partaker of the divine nature,” and share his glory as his joint-heir.—I John 3:2; John 17:24; Rom. 8:17; II Pet.1:4

THAT THE PRESENT MISSION OF THE CHURCH

is the perfecting of the saints for the future work of service; to develop in herself every grace; to be God’s witness to the world; and to prepare to be the kings and priests in the next age.—Eph. 4:12; Matt. 24:14; Rev. 1:6, 20:6

THAT THE HOPE FOR THE WORLD

lies in the blessings of knowledge and opportunity to be brought to all by Christ’s millennial kingdom—the restitution of all that was lost in Adam, to all the willing and obedient, at the hands of their Redeemer and his glorified church—when all the willfully wicked will be destroyed.—Acts 3:19-23; Isa. 35

