

The Coming Universal Religion

“Then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent.”
—*Zephaniah 3:9*

MAN WAS CREATED IN the image of God, and by nature he desires to worship his Creator. Before man’s fall into sin and death his devotional qualities were in perfect balance with all the other aspects of his being, enabling him to enjoy blessed and rewarding communion with God. One of the immediate results of disobedience to Divine law was the entrance of fear into man’s relationship with the Creator. “I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid,

because I was naked; and I hid myself,” said Adam to the Lord, after partaking of the forbidden fruit.—Gen. 3:10

FEAR OF GOD

Fallen man ever since that tragic experience in Eden has, like Adam, instinctively been afraid of God, seeming to realize his nakedness, shame, and unworthiness of being in the presence of his Maker. This spirit of fear has been a fertile soil in which Satan, the Devil, has sown seeds of confusing errors of worship and practice, which through the ages have germinated and matured into myriads of false and distorted conceptions of deity. Today, despite the enlightenment of the world along many lines, the people are more confused and divided in their religious concepts than ever before.

Fundamental to all false religious beliefs is Satan’s lie to mother Eve when, in contradicting God who had warned that death would be the penalty for sin, he said to her, “Ye shall not surely die.” (Gen. 3:4) The almost universal belief that there is no death stems from this lie which was perpetrated by the one whom Jesus referred to as “a liar, and the father of it”—that is, the father of all lies and errors pertaining to God and the worship of God.—John 8:44

FALSE GODS

One of Satan's favorite methods of deception has been the outright substitution of false gods for the people to worship instead of the true and living God. He has induced the people to worship the sun, the moon, the stars, beasts, and fish. Paul writes, they "changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things."—Rom. 1:23

Early in the Biblical record we find evidence of Satan's work causing the people to worship false gods. Laban, the father of Jacob's wife Rachel, possessed "gods," and was quite perturbed when they were stolen by Rachel at the time Jacob and his family left Padanaram to return to Canaan. (Gen. 31:30-32) Devoted as Rachel was to Jacob, she still cherished the family gods, and thought it necessary to take them along to Canaan. Later, Jacob took this matter in hand and ordered his family to put away the "strange gods" which were among them.—Gen. 35:2

This 'trail of the serpent' appears over and over again among the chosen people of God in ancient times. One of the Ten Commandments was designed to safeguard the Israelites against the Devil's efforts to corrupt their religious worship. "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." (Exod. 20:3) This commandment, however, was only a partial protection to Israel against the encroachments of the Adversary. Even when Moses was in the mountain receiving God's law, the people erected a golden calf and began to worship it.

The worship of false gods did not originate with the descendants of Abraham, but was copied by them. Baal was the supreme male deity of the Canaanitish nations, while Ashtoreth was their supreme female divinity. The sun was evidently a symbol of Baal, and the moon a symbol of Ashtoreth. These were their sun and moon gods. The people also had a fire god named Moloch.

Time and again the worship of these heathen gods was introduced among the Israelites. It prevailed at the time Gideon was raised up by the Lord to deliver the Israelites from their enemies, and one of his first acts was to destroy this false worship within the nation. Later, Samuel had to contend with it. Solomon's fall from Divine favor was due to his yielding to the worship of false gods, being led into it through the influence of his many heathen wives.

THE WORSHIP OF BAAL IN ISRAEL

Upon Solomon's death, when the ten tribes of Israel revolted against the rulership of his son, Rehoboam, the worship of false gods was officially established among them by Jeroboam, whom they acclaimed king. This was one instance of those early times when religion was used for political purposes. Jeroboam, king of the ten tribes of Israel located in the north of Palestine, realized the strong urge the people would have to make their annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem to worship the God of Israel. He feared that as a result of mingling with the two tribes in religious worship they would be weaned away from their loyalty to him; so he set up the worship of Baal at Bethel as a substitute arrangement. It worked, and the ten-tribe kingdom never did return to the worship of the true God.

Even the two-tribe kingdom intermittently adopted the worship of heathen gods as the official religion of the nation. This was true to such an extent that the Prophet Jeremiah wrote, "The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond: it is graven upon the table of their heart, and upon the horns of your altars; Whilst their children remember their altars and their groves by the green trees upon the high hills." (Jer. 17:1,2) The worship of Baal and Ashtoreth was conducted in 'groves' on hilltops dedicated to that purpose.

God made no attempt to change the religious practices of the heathen nations down through the ages. During the Jewish Age his only concern was the protection of his chosen people against the powers of darkness, that they might not be entirely engulfed prior to the coming of the promised Messiah—the "seed" of Abraham which was to bless all the families of the earth.—Gen. 22:18

THE ADVENT OF CHRISTIANITY

Jesus became the 'Light of the world,' and eventually will be that true Light which will enlighten every man who has come, or will come, into the world. (John 1:9) He commissioned his followers, who would be his "ambassadors," to be the "light of the world." (II Cor. 5:20; Matt. 5:14) The Divine purpose through these ambassadors of Christ has not been to convert the whole world to Christ during the present age, but to serve merely as a witness, and that the power of the Gospel might call from the world a "people for his name."—Acts 15:14-17

Meanwhile Satan has fostered and promoted false religions. New versions of heathen darkness have arisen and flourished. Besides, the great mass of professed believers in Christianity have been turned aside from the Truth, and like the Israelites of the past, they have brought into their midst various viewpoints, rites, and practices of other religions. Today, worshipers both in the non-Christian and professed Christian world, are divided into many groups. They all, however, hold Satan's original lie in common—they all believe that 'there is no death.'

Instead of expecting that the world would be converted during the present age to worship and serve the true God, Jesus raised the question as to whether or not there would be any faith on the earth when he returned. (Luke 18:8) Jesus did not question whether or not there would be religious fervor, or the spirit of religious devotion. The "faith" to which he referred was the faith of the true Gospel, which was "preached before ... unto Abraham" (Gal. 3:8) —the glad tidings that God, in his own due time and way, through the promised seed of Abraham would bless all the families of the earth.

Except in the hearts and minds of the Lord's own people, which is but a little flock, that 'faith' does not now exist in the earth. Religiously speaking, the world today is in a greater state of chaos than ever before. Outside of those groups which rigidly hold to their creeds, it has become praiseworthy, from the worldly standpoint, to hold one's religious views so loosely as to constitute no definite belief at all.

THE THREAT OF ATHEISM

The trend in the Christian world has been in the direction of atheism. When communism dominated a large part of the world, they tried to foster atheism, saying, "Religion is the opiate of the people." Since the demise of communism in Russia and other of its satellites, religious interest has increased in those countries. Sporadically there is a revival of religious interest in the Christian world. This is manifested by mounting sales of religious literature, and particularly of Bibles.

Among scientists who have been known to be atheists, there are more who are expressing their belief in a higher power, but they are not willing to accept the Bible as a revelation from that higher power. They are very much as Dr. Einstein, who was once an avowed unbeliever in a higher power and who was quoted as saying in later life:

“My religion consists of an humble admiration of the illimitable superior spirit who reveals himself in the slight details we are able to perceive with our frail and feeble minds. That deeply emotional conviction of the presence of superior reasoning power which is revealed in the incomprehensible universe, forms my conception of God.”

The situation is quite different in the non-Christian world. The phenomenal growth of Islam worldwide has brought with it a desire and fervor of its adherents to convert all the world to Islam. Certain fanatical groups within Islam are responsible for the escalation of terrorism, aimed particularly at the United States as the great Satan. They have been teaching young men at the age of twelve how to become suicide bombers, teaching them that they will go to heaven where they are promised sensual pleasures. This type of teaching has led to recent events such as the destruction of the World Trade Center twin towers in New York. At present the United States of America has declared war on such terrorism.

THE “UNKNOWN GOD”

A general review of religious convictions and practices through the ages, together with religious conditions as we see them in the world today, helps one to understand Paul’s feelings when he stood on Mars’ Hill and preached to the Athenian philosophers. He said, “Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.”—Acts 17:22,23

The Athenians are to be commended for the open manner in which they confessed their belief in a god whom they did not know. Actually, regardless of the many religious distortions Satan has foisted upon the people’s minds in all ages, deep down in their hearts they have longed to know and come under the loving care of a God who has been unknown to them. Most of the millions who have tried to worship the grotesque god of torment have probably often wished for a kindlier god whom they could serve, and the praises of whom they could sound forth to the people. Einstein, and other scientists, may bow in reverence before a god of superior intelligence and power; but, from the material things of the universe alone, cannot visualize him as being motivated by love, although they probably all hope that he is.

So far as we know, among the wooden, stone, and metal idols throughout the non-Christian world today, there is none ascribed to the 'unknown god' as was the case in ancient Athens; but we can be safe in saying that in the hearts of untold millions there is an image of a god whom the people would like to believe exists, a god who is loving and kind, and withal able and willing to take hold of this present evil world (Gal. 1:4) and bring order out of chaos, peace out of turmoil and war, understanding and cooperation out of the bitter strife of words and conflict of ideologies.

It is this unknown god which the people are thinking about when they raise the oft repeated question, "Where is God in the suffering world of today?" None of the non-Christian religions say anything about it. Nor do Christians offer any explanation. But there is that God who, throughout the ages, has been unknown to the people; and, in our text, we have the promise that 'then' he will turn to the people 'a pure language,' which will enable them all to serve him with 'one consent.'

The time identification contained in the word then in this wonderful promise is immediately after the whole symbolic "earth" has been devoured by the "fire of God's jealousy," as prophesied in the preceding verse. It reads, "Wait ye upon me, saith the Lord, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy."—Zeph. 3:8

THE VISION

'Wait ye upon me, saith the Lord.' The God-fearing people of all ages have been encouraged to wait on the Lord. In every generation there have been those who have wondered why God continued to permit evil. To Habakkuk the Lord said, "The vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry." (Hab. 2:3) Paul quotes from this prophecy and applies it to the Second Presence of Christ.—Heb. 10:37

There is, therefore, no mistaking the time of its application. It is at this end of the Gospel Age, in the time of our Lord's Second Presence. The vision 'speaks' giving the Lord's people an understanding of the times in which they are living. Among other things, the meaning of the great "time

of trouble” (Dan. 12:1) now upon the world is the assurance that the waiting time is about over. The time is at hand when the Lord will put down iniquity and exalt righteousness in the earth.

Because the ‘vision’ has spoken, we now see that the nations are already being gathered, that the ‘fire’ of God’s jealousy is already upon them, and that when this aspect of Divine intervention shall have accomplished its purpose, the pure language will be turned to the people. Then the unknown God will be revealed to them, and with hearts rejoicing they will unitedly serve him, their songs of praise filling the earth with his glory.

Paul explained to the Athenians some of the characteristics of the unknown God. He “made the world and all things therein.” He dwells “not in temples made with hands,” Paul said, evidently basing this remark on the fact that towering above him to the right was a magnificent heathen temple of worship. It was a polite way of telling the Athenians that the unknown God did not need such a temple.—Acts 17:24

The unknown God, Paul further explained, “hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: For in him we live, and move, and have our being.”—Acts 17:26-28

Paul further explains that since we are the offspring of God, his Creation, “We ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man’s device.” (vs. 29) How wonderfully Paul thus contrasts the true God with all other gods, and then reveals the quality of mercy possessed by him ‘in whom we live, and move, and have our being.’ “The times of this ignorance God winked at;” he explains. (vs. 30) That is, he will not hold their ignorant worship of false gods against them, and mete out severe punishments.

THE JUDGMENT DAY

“Now [God] commandeth all men every where to repent,” Paul continues, “Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.” (Acts 17:30,31) The command to repentance has gone out to the

world through the Gospel, and while it has not been limited to any one nation or race, but has been universal in its application to all people, the number thus far who have heard the message in an understandable manner has been very small. As for those who have not heard, God is still ‘winking’ at their ignorance as he continues to prepare for their future blessing.

That blessing will be brought to them through enlightenment. Notice how Paul contrasts the ‘times of this ignorance’ with the fact that God has appointed a future judgment day. Paul knew this to be in harmony with the Divine plan, for the Prophet Isaiah had written, “When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.” (Isa. 26:9) Again we read, “He shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth.” (Ps. 96:13) In the judgment day scene pictured for us in Revelation the “books” are “opened,” a symbol of revealed knowledge and understanding.—Rev. 20:12

Isaiah tells us that the people will learn righteousness in the judgment day and he speaks of other “lords,” or ‘gods,’ which he says have had dominion over us. (Isa. 26:13) These will all be dead then, and through the enlightenment of the judgment day, Satan will be unable to deceive the people concerning them, for he will be bound. (Rev. 20:2) Even the memory of these gods of silver, of stone, of wood, of gold, of fire and torment, the three-headed god, and all the rest of them, will perish from the minds of the people.

Paul explains that this future work of enlightenment and judgment will be in the hands of Jesus, and that God has given assurance to all men in that he hath raised him from the dead. An outline of the qualifications of this future judge of mankind is presented to us by the Prophet Isaiah. He is identified in this prophecy as “a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch” which was to grow out of his “roots.” (Isa. 11:1) Concerning him Isaiah writes:

“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 [reverence] 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 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 [those who willfully oppose earth's new King and Judge]. And righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins."—vss. 2-5

The result of this righteous rulership and judgment of Christ is then symbolically described by Isaiah:

"The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain [kingdom]: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."—vss. 6-9

A PURE LANGUAGE

The earth will then be filled with the 'knowledge of the Lord' because he will have turned to the people a pure language—a language, or message, which will sweep away the refuge of lies, misrepresentations, and distortions which have confused the minds of the fallen and dying race—and will enlighten them concerning the true and living God.

Then they will serve him with 'one consent,' that is, all in the same way. They will not be forced to do so, but they will have learned to love their Creator, because they will have been taught concerning his wisdom, justice, love, and power. They will learn how his love was manifested and his justice satisfied through his beloved Son who "gave himself a ransom for all." (I Tim. 2:6) They will see his wisdom in the permission of evil, and in the loving plan for the recovery of the fallen race. They will see his power manifested in the resurrection.

Paul explains that it is the will of God that all shall be saved and come to a knowledge of the Truth, the basic feature of which is the fact that Jesus gave himself a ransom for all. (I Tim. 2:3-6) A knowledge of this great Truth will be testified to all in God's due time, that due time being the 'day' which as been appointed in which the world is to be judged by the righteous Judge, Christ Jesus.

Concerning that day the Prophet Micah wrote, “The law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.” (Micah 4:2) ‘Zion’ is here used as a symbol of the spiritual phase of Christ’s kingdom. “I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion,” the Lord said. (Ps. 2:6) With him in Mount Zion will be the little flock who have followed him in suffering unto death.—Rev. 14:1

‘Jerusalem,’ as used in Micah’s prophecy, symbolizes the earthly phase of the kingdom—the resurrected Ancient Worthies, who will then be made “princes in all the earth.” (Ps. 45:16) From these pretrained and disciplined earthly representatives of the Divine Christ will go out the words of instruction, that ‘pure language,’ which, before the end of the thousand years of earth’s coming glory, will enlighten all mankind, and thus provide a full opportunity for everyone to turn to the Lord.

We are assured “there shall be no more death.” (Rev. 21:4) The people, raised from the dead, will have been convinced that God told the truth when he said, “Thou shalt surely die.” (Gen. 2:17) They will know then that death is the wages of sin. (Rom. 6:23) But they will rejoice also to learn that by accepting the provision of life made for them through the redemptive work of Christ, and obeying the laws of his kingdom, they may live forever. It will then be true of the obedient that there is no death, not in the sense of the lie perpetrated by Satan, but because the people will have the opportunity of partaking of the trees of life, and the water of life, which will then flow from the throne of God and of the Lamb.—Rev. 22:1-3,17

There will indeed be a worldwide, universal religion then—the true religion. The laws of God will not only be learned, but applied, written in the hearts of the people, the Lord assures us. (Jer. 31:31-34) No one will then need to say to his neighbor, “Know the Lord,” for all shall know him, from the least to the greatest.

Living by the Truth

Key Verse: “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.”

—Galatians 2:16

*Selected Scriptures:
Galatians 1:1, 2, 6-9;
2:15-21*

PAUL BEGINS HIS LETTER identifying himself as an apostle of God. He was the first who had preached the Gospel in this region of Galatia where he had established churches as he preached and taught about Jesus Christ. After his departure from them, false teachers had come in among his converts teaching a perverted Gospel of Christ. They endeavored to persuade these people to be circumcised, requiring them to submit to Jewish laws and practices. Paul’s enemies claimed he had not preached the true Gospel because he didn’t insist that believers follow the Mosaic Law. In an endeavor to correct the errors of these misleading teachers, the apostle met this subject face-to-face in his letter. He wrote, “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some

that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.”—Gal. 1:6-8

Paul declared that the Gospel he preached was not received or taught him by a human being but it came to him by a revelation from Jesus Christ. (vs. 12) He wanted the Galatians to know how much he had changed now that he was in Christ. The apostle acknowledged that in his early days as a devout Jew, before his conversion, he had violently persecuted the church. Without consulting any man he immediately went to Arabia, then back to Damascus. Paul did not go to Jerusalem until three years later, where he met for fifteen days with Peter and James the Less.

After an interval of fourteen years, Paul, accompanied by Barnabas and Titus, visited Jerusalem a second time in response to a revelation from God. In a meeting of the apostles and highly respected leaders of the church, Paul set before them the doctrine he had been preaching. He said, "They saw that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, just as Peter had been to the Jews. For God, who was at work in the ministry of Peter as an apostle to the Jews, was also at work in my ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles. James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews."—Gal. 2:7-9, *New International Version*

Paul became a champion of justification by faith, telling his Jewish brethren, "A man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." (Gal. 2:16) How glad we are that God does not require perfect works from us, but that we can live by faith in his Truth.

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God's Blended Family

Key Verse: *“Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.”*
—*Galatians 3:26*

Selected Scripture:
Galatians 3:6-9,23;
4:7

THE APOSTLE PAUL SAID, “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.” (Gal. 3:6,7) Continuing in verse eight he explains that God declared his purpose when he first preached the Gospel to Abraham. He said, “The scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In

thee shall all nations be blessed.” (Gal. 3:8) What is the Gospel of Christ? Paul answers this question clearly. He tells us that God made this wonderful promise to Abraham concerning a “seed” which was to be the channel of blessing. (Gen. 22:18) Christ was the ‘seed’ he had in mind. That is why he used the expression, ‘Gospel of Christ.’ He presents additional information concerning this seed when he said, “As many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” He then adds, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” (vss. 27-29) When the apostle speaks of those who are ‘all one in Christ Jesus’ he assures us they are intimate associates of our Lord in the work of his coming thousand-year kingdom. This definitely points out that the church of Christ will share with him in the privilege and honor of being God’s channel of blessing to “all the families of the earth.”—Gen. 12:3

Abraham, through his faith in the promises of God, became God’s friend. We do also, and we enjoy his friendship and fellowship. But we become more than friends. We become the “sons of God,” his children. (Rom. 8:14) Observing this, Paul adds, “If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.”—vs. 17

As ‘heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ’ what is to be our mission? Touching upon this subject, soon after Pentecost the Apostle Peter preached, “He [God] shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.”—Acts 3:20,21

Restitution means restoration, or reconstitution. Life was lost through sin and God’s penalty, “Thou shalt surely die,” (Gen. 2:17) fell upon our first parents, Adam and Eve. All their descendants have continued to die, but Paul reassures us, “In the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.”—Eph. 1:10-12

The children of faith in the present Gospel Age include Jew and Gentile, bond and free, male and female, as a blended family in Christ and as Abraham’s seed. Through these, together with their Lord and head, Jesus, the children of faith will be expanded to include all the faithful mankind of the world, a larger blended family.

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The Point of Freedom

Key Verse: “*Ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.*”
—Galatians 5:13

Selected Scripture:
Galatians 5:1-15

PAUL WROTE TO THE Galatians, “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) This verse properly belongs to the previous chapter where he also emphasized freedom from the bondage of Jewish Law.

Now, he counsels his Jewish converts who had fallen back and were attempting to keep works of the Law as prior to their conversion. He tells them, “Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. ... For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.” (vss. 4,6) The apostle had told the Roman church virtually the same thing when he said, “By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight.”—Rom. 3:20

Paul first complimented them for their initial zeal in running well, but also expressed his disappointment, asking, “Who did hinder you [*Marginal Translation: drive you back*] that ye should not obey the truth? This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you. A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.” (Gal. 5:7-9) Apparently false teachers had intermingled the observance of the Jewish rites with the truth Paul had taught them and, like leaven, had spread until the whole mass had become infected with error. Had Paul preached in conformity with Jewish rites this would have saved him from all the persecutions which he had endured. He said, “We preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness.” (I Cor. 1:23) To the Romans he said, “I know that in me ... dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.”—Rom. 7:18

He says, “Brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” (Gal. 5:13,14) They were not to feel that they were so free that they might lawfully give indulgence to the desires of the flesh, but they were to regard themselves as under the law to love one another and thus fulfill the law of freedom.

“If ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another. This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust [desire] of the flesh. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.” (vss. 15-18) If we live under the influence of the Holy Spirit, we need not fear the corrupt propensities of our nature.

As enlightened people of the Lord, we are free from the Law and its penalties. This freedom does not permit us to do as we please without regard for others who may reason differently. We are to be motivated by love, even in the routine matters of eating and drinking, and not “to eat flesh, nor to drink wine” whereby our brother is offended.—Rom. 14:21

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Choices and Consequences

Key Verse: *“This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.”*
—*Galatians 5:16*

Selected Scripture:
Galatians
5:16 – 6:18

THIS LESSON RELATES to whether we live by the Spirit or according to the flesh. The Apostle Paul had said, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.” (Gal. 5:14,15) The real issue is whether we are going to live by our old selfish nature or live by the Spirit. He then counsels us with the Key Verse, “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.”

Paul then explains, “The flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.” (vs. 17) Writing to the Romans concerning this subject Paul said, “That which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.”—Rom. 7:15-19

To illustrate the dangers of falling into indulgence of fleshly sins, Paul provides a long list. He says, “The works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft [*Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*: sorcery], hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, . . . revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”—Gal. 5:19-21

Following this he shows the work of the Spirit in a list of beautiful, virtuous fruits. Describing these, the apostle says, “The fruit of the Spirit

is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.” (vss. 22,23) Let us yield ourselves to our Lord’s influence and show that we are controlled by that Spirit. If the Spirit is the source of our life, let the Spirit also direct our course. Paul’s wise counsel was, “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.”—Gal. 6:7,8

Members of the body of Christ have an obligation to encourage and strengthen one another as they walk together hand in hand along the narrow way. Paul set a splendid example in this regard as he noted, “If a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.”—vss. 1,2

We are advised to consider in our choices to “not be weary in well doing” and “as we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.” (vss. 9,10) The consequence of doing so will be “peace” and “mercy.”—vs. 16

Dawn Bible Students Association

Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi

IN CONTINUING OUR brief examination of the books comprising the Holy Scriptures, this article will examine those written by the last seven of what are known as the Minor Prophets. There are twelve Minor Prophets and in Part 5 we considered the books of Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, and Jonah. This study begins with the Book of Micah.

Micah served as a prophet of the Lord during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, all of whom were kings of Judah. This places his writings prior to Judah's captivity in Babylon, for there were no kings, either of Judah or of Israel, subsequent to this captivity. In common with the other prophets, Micah warned the Jewish nation of its sin, and like the other prophets who served prior to their captivity in Babylon, prophesied that this calamity would come upon the nation. Concerning this the Lord, through the prophet, said, "I will surely assemble, O Jacob, all of thee; I will surely gather the remnant of Israel; I will put them together as the sheep of Bozrah."—Mic. 2:12

While all the Old Testament prophets served God in warning his people Israel concerning their sins, admonishing them to obedience, and foretelling the punishments which would come upon them because of their iniquity, more important to us is their united testimony concerning the larger purpose of God, which was to be carried out through the coming Messiah whom the Lord had promised. In this connection it was Micah who, in promising the coming of the Messiah, identified the exact city in Judah in which he would be born. Micah says, "But 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."—ch. 5:2

This Messiah is referred to in chapter four, verse eight, where we read, “Thou, O tower of the flock, the strong hold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion.” The ‘first dominion’ here referred to is the one that was given to Adam and Eve when the Lord said to them that they were to be fruitful and multiply and have dominion over the earth.—Gen. 1:28

That dominion was lost as a result of sin, and the purpose of the Messiah’s coming to earth was to restore it. To do this, he first purchased it by his death, and then, at the conclusion of his thousand-year reign, will give it back to those who then shall have proved worthy to receive it. It is this that is referred to in the statement, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”—Matt. 25:34

Micah and the other prophets point out in their writings that the great work of restoring the sin-cursed and dying race to life and to fellowship with the Creator is made possible by virtue of the sacrificial work of the Redeemer, and will be accomplished by means of the agencies of his kingdom. In chapter 4:1-4 of his book, Micah gives a graphic promise of the setting up of Messiah’s kingdom (likened to a “mountain”) in the earth, and in beautiful, symbolic language describes many of the blessings which it will assure to the people. The end of war, and educational program in the arts and advantages of peace, and economic security, are particularly mentioned. The latter is poetically described as every man sitting under his vine and fig tree. We quote this beautiful promise:

“In the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the Law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig

tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the Lord of hosts hath spoken it.”

NAHUM

The prophecy of Nahum is one of doom against the ancient city of Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. Nahum describes his prophecy as “the burden of Nineveh.” (Nah. 1:1) This ancient city was founded by Nimrod, a notoriously wicked character who lived during the age of the ancient patriarchs. Because of his idolatry and unrighteousness he is an apt symbol of that which is opposed to God. The city which he founded continued in his wicked course of idolatry. In the providence of the Lord, like Sodom and Gomorrah and other wicked cities of the past, Nineveh was finally destroyed, never to rise again.

Nahum’s prophecy of the destruction of Nineveh is designed by the Lord to have a larger application, that is, to the destruction of the entire empire of Satan whom Nimrod quite aptly symbolizes. Nahum 1:5-9, seems too comprehensive to be applied merely to one heathen city.

The statement in verse nine that “affliction shall not rise up the second time” seems much like the Apostle Paul’s promise that Christ shall reign until he has put all enemies under his feet, and that the last enemy to be destroyed is death. (I Cor. 15:25,26) Great have been the afflictions of the human race during the reign of sin and death; but Satan’s great citadel of sin, foreshadowed by Nineveh, is to be destroyed, never to rise again.

Verses three and four of the second chapter of Nahum’s prophecy are believed by many to refer to trains, automobiles, and other means of rapid travel that would make their appearance in this end of the age—in the ‘day’ of God’s ‘preparation.’ We quote, “The chariots shall be with flaming torches in the day of his preparation, and the fir trees shall be terribly shaken. The chariots shall rage in the streets, they shall jostle one against another in the broad ways: they shall seem like torches, they shall run like the lightnings.”

HABAKKUK

The prophecy of Habakkuk is thought to have been written about 630 or 629 BC. The first chapter foreshadows the invasion of Judea by the Chaldeans, and in the second chapter is prophesied the doom of the Chaldeans. This, at least, is the subject matter of the two chapters as it

appears from a surface reading, and doubtless this is what the prophet had in mind when writing this message.

The Apostle Peter explains in the New Testament that these prophets wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit, and knew not the full significance of the subject matter with which they dealt. In addition to forecasting an invasion of the land by the Chaldeans—“That bitter and hasty nation”—in the first chapter, (vs. 6) the prophet also earnestly seeks an explanation from the Lord concerning the permission of evil, and why the righteous have to suffer at the hands of the unrighteous. In this connection Habakkuk speaks to the Lord saying:

“Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?”—Hab. 1:13

Similar questions to this comprise the remainder of chapter one, and then, in chapter two, the Lord answers Habakkuk, saying, “Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.”—vss. 2-4

‘The vision is yet for an appointed time.’ This was the Lord’s way of informing Habakkuk that what he was forecasting as immediately coming upon Israel, and his questions as to why the wicked flourish and the righteous suffer, as he was witnessing at that time, was of minor importance as compared with the larger purpose of God. The understanding of his vision as it pertained to this more comprehensive Divine purpose was for an appointed time, the Lord explained, and then it would be understood.

In Hebrews 10:36-38 the Apostle Paul quotes from this prophecy concerning the vision not tarrying, and that the “just shall live by faith.” He applies it to the Second Coming of Christ and to the time of his Second Presence. Both the Old and New Testaments reveal clearly that the main objective of Christ’s Second Coming (*parousia*, presence) is the establishment of his kingdom, and that through this kingdom all evil shall be destroyed.

Thus we see that God gave Habakkuk a marvelous answer to his questions concerning the flourishing of evil. The Chaldeans and the Israelites at the time merely served to make the setting for this very comprehensive prophecy. In the light of the Divine plan as unfolded throughout the Scriptures, it gives assurance to all the Lord's people that the time is coming when the "rebuke" of his people will be taken away "from off all the earth."—Isa. 25:8

It is doubtful if the Prophet Habakkuk understood very clearly this larger meaning of his prophecy. He was, however, inspired to write that "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." (ch. 2:14) He could not envision the manner, or the time, when this would come true, but, being one of the 'just' who 'live by faith,' he put his confidence in God and concluded his wonderful book by writing:

"Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls: Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."—ch. 3:17,18

ZEPHANIAH

Zephaniah's prophecy was written only a short time before the Jewish nation was taken into captivity. Verses 2-5 of the first chapter forecast the overthrow of the nation, and there are other references throughout the book to the same calamity. But, as with the other prophecies of the Old Testament, the Lord uses the setting of events pertaining to his people Israel as a background upon which forecasts of events much more momentous in nature are outlined.

Thus, from telling about the overthrow of Israel when the nation was taken into captivity, the Lord inspired Zephaniah to describe a day of more widespread destruction which he named, "The great day of the Lord." (Zeph. 1:14) In I Thessalonians 5:1-3, the apostle identifies this day of the Lord as being ushered in by the return of Christ. So we know that Zephaniah's prophecy has to do with events related to our time as well as with the Jewish nation in his own day.

Concerning the 'day of the Lord,' Zephaniah wrote, "That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation,

a day of darkness and gloominess.” (vs. 15) It is the events of this day of the Lord which the Prophet Daniel prophesied as being a “time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation,” and which Jesus described in his prophecy as a time of “great tribulation.”—Dan. 12:1; Matt. 24:21,22

The second chapter of Zephaniah forecasts the destruction of Nineveh, and in the third chapter the prophet gives us further information concerning the day of the Lord, closing his prophecy with a promise to the Israelites of their eventual return to the promised land, from among all nations. This is much more than a prophecy of their return from Babylonian captivity, for the promise is, “Thou shalt not see evil any more.” (ch. 3:15) Read also verses 14-20.

To the Prophet Zephaniah and to all the people of God who read his prophecy, and who wonder why God allows evil and suffering of all sorts to continue, and apparently does nothing to hinder the prosperity of evil men and nations, the Lord said:

“Wait ye upon me, ... until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth [symbolic of the present evil social order] shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy. For then will I turn to the people a pure language [message of Truth], that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent.”—ch. 3:8,9

HAGGAI

Haggai was the tenth of the minor prophets, and the first to prophesy after the Jewish nation returned to Judea from their captivity in Babylon. King Cyrus of the Medes had issued a decree authorizing the return of the captives, and granting permission to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. A Jew named Zerubbabel had been made governor over Judea and he began with some enthusiasm the work of rebuilding the Temple.

But about the time the foundation for the Temple was laid, opposition against the project arose, and while Zerubbabel could have gone forward with the work of building, he did not. The prophecy of Haggai is chiefly concerned with this delay, and he chides the people, particularly their leaders, for building fine homes for themselves, but neglecting the house

of the Lord. It was evidently largely as a result of this prophecy that the zeal of Zerubbabel was renewed, resulting in the Temple being finished.

The Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem is used in the Scriptures as a figure of a much grander temple, one “not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” (II Cor. 5:1) This antitypical temple is in reality Christ and his church in glory, the channel of God’s blessings which will flow out to all nations during the thousand-year kingdom period.

In Haggai’s prophecy, comparing Solomon’s Temple with the one which was being built under the direction of Zerubbabel, he declares that “the glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former.” (Hag. 2:9) While this was doubtless true of the Temple built by the returned captives, the statement is also prophetic as a comparison of either, or both, of the typical temples with the glorious spiritual temple. This spiritual temple is being built during the Gospel Age, and every faithful follower of the Lord will be a “living stone.”—I Pet. 2:5, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*

Concerning the antitypical temple, Haggai quotes the Lord as saying, “I will fill this house with glory.” (ch. 2:7) As a preface to these words the Lord declares, “Yet once [more], ... I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come.”—vss. 6,7

In Hebrews 12:26 the Apostle Paul quotes from this passage and applies its fulfillment at the time of Christ’s return and the setting up of his kingdom. We know from this that through Haggai the Lord was prophesying the present shaking of the nations in the great ‘time of trouble’ with which this age is already ending.

The prophecy reads that as a result of this shaking the ‘desire of all nations shall come.’ According to the Hebrew text this does not mean that all the nations of the earth will, in the Lord’s kingdom, have their petty desires and selfish ambitions satisfied. The thought is, rather, that their desire shall be to come to the Lord, and to recognize the authority which will emanate from his spiritual temple. They shall “bring their glory ... into it,” is the way it is expressed in Revelation 21:24.

ZECHARIAH

The Prophet Zechariah was contemporaneous with Haggai, beginning his prophecy only two months later, namely, in the eighth month of the second year of Darius, whereas Haggai began to write his prophecy in the sixth month of the same year. Zechariah's prophecy, like that of his contemporary, helped much to encourage Zerubbabel to complete the job of rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem.

In common with all the prophetic writings of the Old Testament, there were circumstances of a local nature, and of immediate concern, with which Zechariah dealt. This makes the book somewhat historical. It is upon this background of reality that the Lord, by his Spirit, caused the prophet to impose forecasts of events which were to occur in connection with the outworking of the Divine plan many long years after he had fallen asleep in death.

God's prophets comprehended clearly the significance of what they wrote concerning circumstances and events which were known to them, but they understood little concerning the distant future events about which they wrote. All of these were related directly or indirectly to God's great plan of salvation through the coming Christ. Peter wrote that the prophets "inquired and searched diligently" to know the meaning of these things. But, as Jesus explained, they did not "see" or understand them.—I Pet. 1:10,11; Matt. 13:17

Such was the case with Zechariah. In addition to what he wrote of conditions, needs, and happenings of his own time, the Holy Spirit also caused him to prophesy, for example, the experience of Jesus when he rode into the city of Jerusalem on an ass. (Zech. 9:9) He also forecast a worldwide scattering of the nation of Israel, and their ultimate return to the promised land; showing that then Judea will be the land capital of the world.—ch. 8:18-23

Chapter twelve, verse ten, forecasts a time when the people will "look upon me whom they have pierced, and ... mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son." Prior to this, however—even as other prophets of the Old Testament foretold—after the Israelites are regathered in their land, and before they recognize Jesus as their Messiah, there will be a gathering of nations against them. It will be in this experience that "the Lord [shall] go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle."—ch. 14:1-3

In this prophecy, the thousand-year day of the Lord is also described—“It shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear, nor dark: But it shall be one day which shall be known to the Lord, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light.”—ch. 14:6,7

The prophecy declares that “the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one.” (ch. 14:9) Zechariah also writes, “It shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain.”—ch. 14:16,17

This, does not refer to a literal traveling to Jerusalem to worship the Lord. The thought is, rather, that all nations will be required to recognize the authority of the Lord as it will then be established in the earth. Life-giving blessings will be withheld from those who do not. Only those who then obey the laws of the Lord’s kingdom will continue to live.

MALACHI

Malachi is the last of the minor prophets, and his prophecy is the concluding book of the Old Testament. It was written shortly after the Jews returned from the Babylonian captivity. Much of the book is utilized in reminding the people of their halfhearted, and often hypocritical, worship of God. Because of their unfaithfulness, God was withholding his blessings from them, and they pretended not to know why this was so. The climax of this presentation of facts is reached in chapter three, verses eight through ten, where we read:

“Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, . . . and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.”

Malachi also was inspired to write concerning events in the distant future from his day. In Malachi 3:1, he forecasts the coming, and work, of John the Baptist as a messenger to prepare “the way before me.” Also,

the coming of Christ to his temple as the “messenger of the covenant”—the Mediator, that is, of the promised New Covenant.—Jer. 31:31-34

In chapter four, verse two, Malachi speaks of the “Sun of righteousness,” which shall arise “with healing in his wings.” This is a beautiful symbolic description of the life-giving blessings which will reach the people during the reign of Christ, the promised Messiah. Associated with him will be those described by Jesus as the “children of the kingdom,” who also are to “shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”—Matt. 13:38,43

In this brief examination of the prophetic books of the Old Testament, the main emphasis has been on the theme song of the Divine plan. These, however, say much more concerning various features of the plan, reassuring us that God’s promises will come true.

Dawn Bible Students Association

Songs in the Night

“SONGS IN THE NIGHT” is a devotional book used by many Christians at the close of the day. These little gems give peace of mind and heart after a day of toil. The title of the book is a scriptural expression found in Job 35:10, “But none saith, Where is God my maker, who giveth songs in the night.” God’s people, by reading the passages for each day in these *“Songs in the Night,”* are granted a glimpse of the goodness of the Heavenly Father. By listening to the voice of their Creator they are enabled to rise above the sin and degradation of the world of mankind.

In the Book of Job, God is pictured as asking Satan, “Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?” (Job 1:8) Satan suggested that Job’s righteousness was because God had placed a hedge around him and made him prosperous. Take away this protection and his prosperity and “he will curse thee.” (vs. 11) God permitted Satan to test Job’s loyalty by having tragedy after tragedy befall him. God knew that Job’s love for him was not based upon the fact that he abounded in temporal provisions. Job loved God because he knew his loving character and righteousness, as the Scriptures declare, “I am God, and there is none like me.”—Isa. 46:9

The experiences that were permitted to fall upon Job would tax the heart of any person! He lost all his sheep, cattle, and camels, and his precious sons and daughters were all killed. (Job 1:13-19) Job himself was afflicted with boils from the crown of his head to the very soles of his feet. (Job 2:7) Though Job was crushed by these hard experiences, he did not understand why God had permitted all these afflictions. In spite of all this distress Job had learned a ‘song in the night.’ He sang a song which was a comforting assurance, even in the midst of the darkest period of his life. “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.”—Job 13:15

There were other songs in the night learned by Job, and he expressed these for us as well. “If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. Thou shalt call, and I

will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands.”—
Job 14:14,15

Job trusted God as expressed in this wonderful verse, “I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth.” (Job 19:25) What a beautiful hope Job had and he was able to express it in song.

Job truly believed that a Redeemer would come and would deliver him from the grave. Even though his flesh would see corruption, he knew that he would awake, and behold the goodness of the Lord. His eyes would see the blessings of the kingdom day, and he would share personally in the blessings of that day, because he would have a resurrection from the dead to life on earth. Job had learned his songs in the night well.

David also learned songs in the night, for many of his words contain the glad message of assurances from God. For example he says, “The Lord will command his lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life.” (Ps. 42:8) He also said, “Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.” (Ps. 119:54) Little wonder that God spoke of David as being “a man after his own heart.”—I Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22

This does not mean that David never succumbed to the weakness of the flesh, for he was born in sin and “shapen in iniquity,” (Ps. 51:5) as are all members of the human family. This statement implies that David’s heart was loyal to God, and whenever he sinned he was truly repentant, and turned to God for forgiveness.

David’s life was touched with stormy and trying experiences. When his beloved son, Absalom, turned against him, he was forced to flee for his life, and his throne was temporarily taken from him. Yet his song in the night was, “Thou, O Lord, art a shield for me; my glory, and the lifter up of mine head.”—Ps. 3:3

David also wrote prophetically of the church, the saints who will live and reign with Jesus. He wrote, “Let the saints be joyful in glory: let them sing aloud upon their beds.” (Ps. 149:5) In this psalm, the saints are seen in a condition of perfect rest. They see the glorious character of God. They can praise God with intelligence and understanding. That will be the blessed condition of all who make their calling and election sure.

Meanwhile, the saints who are still on trial are having experiences which are described by the Apostle Paul as “much tribulation” before they can enter the kingdom of God. (Acts 14:22) While enduring tribulations, they too are learning songs in the night and are encouraged by their understanding of God’s plan. The Apostle Paul said, “The eyes of your heart having been enlightened, that you may know what is the hope of his invitation, what the glorious wealth of his inheritance among the saints.”—Eph. 1:18, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*

Their faithful promise and hope, which is like an anchor to their souls, is the reason they can be joyful in all of life’s experiences; and this is the reason they are considered “peculiar” by others. (I Pet. 2:9) They have peace and joy in the midst of turmoil. Outsiders cannot understand how this can be, for they are blind to the glorious Gospel.

We are still living in the dark night of ‘weeping,’ with sickness, sorrow, evil, sin and death. This will continue until the glorious morning of that grand kingdom, “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.” (Ps. 30:5) The Scriptures also say, “The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.” (Rom. 8:22) These are waiting “for the manifestation of the sons of God.” (vs. 19) The whole creation ‘groans’ under the load of sin and sorrow. They see little or no reason to rejoice as bitter experiences come upon them—unemployment, loss of homes, hunger, sickness, pain, sin, and death.

Christ’s followers share in some of these same experiences, but nevertheless they have a reason to be joyful, and hopeful. Having entered into a covenant relationship with the Heavenly Father, and having surrendered their individual wills to the will of the Father, they submit all to his care and supervision. Their spiritual insight has granted them a glimpse of a better day. For the church, they see the glory that lies beyond this present age of suffering—one of living and reigning with Christ. For the world, they see a kingdom without end, in which all the ills that have plagued mankind for the past six thousand years will be abolished, when all that are in their graves shall come forth.

The followers of Christ see beyond the present dark night of weeping, and therefore, can sing a song in the night. In the experiences of Paul and Silas, they were able to sing such a song. The occasion was when Paul and his companions were going from Lydia’s home to a place of worship

outside the city gates. They encountered a slave girl possessed with a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune telling. She followed Paul and those with him, shouting, “These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved.”—Acts 16:17, *New International Version*

This occurred for many days, and it troubled Paul. So he commanded the spirit to leave this slave girl. At the moment the spirit left her, she lost her fortune-telling powers. Her masters, seeing this, seized Paul and Silas and brought them before the magistrates of the city, saying, “These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice. The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten.”—Acts. 16:20-22, *NIV*

Paul and Silas were beaten with many stripes, and cast into prison. It was not a well-lighted, well-kept prison—but a dark dungeon. Their feet were bound in stocks in such a manner that any movement was very painful. Bleeding, and painfully bound in stocks, they did not lament, and blame God. “At midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.” (Acts 16:25) They ‘sang praises unto God’! This was their song in the night, given to God, in the midst of a dark hour of pain.

They did not take joy in the pain they were suffering, but, rather, were grateful for the privilege of suffering in the Lord’s service. They were glad to be counted worthy to share in the Master’s sufferings and cause. They were glad to know him, the perfect, sinless, undefiled One, who had endured such great things, even death upon the cross, because he loved the Heavenly Father and the world of mankind so much.

Though Paul and Silas were miraculously delivered from prison on this occasion, their lives were consumed in the Lord’s service. As followers of Christ, we can appreciate the experiences of God’s people throughout the ages, but we are especially mindful of the difficulties of walking in the narrow way which lead to glory, honor, and immortality. We have learned the joyful ‘song of Moses and the Lamb,’ and sing this song, which is our inspiration in all the experiences of life.

Some experiences may be very painful, yet God deems them needful so that we might fully develop the character that is pleasing to him. Soon

this night of weeping will be over. As poetically expressed, “Only a few more trials, only a few more tears.” Our earthly pilgrimage will soon be over, and we will be at home with the Master, and the Heavenly Father. Then shall we see those dear faces which we have loved so long, but lost awhile, and what will be brought to pass are the prophetic words of Isaiah 14:7, “The whole earth is at rest, and is quiet: they break forth into singing.” Jesus told John, “I make all things new. ... Write: for these words are true and faithful.”—Rev. 21:5

The song we sing during this night of weeping will turn to ‘joy’ in the morning. All will come to know the “old, old story, of Jesus and his love.” It will be perfectly sung in that day, even as we are privileged now to sing our songs in the night. What a blessed people we are to see the depth of God’s plan for the uplifting of mankind, and to have a part in the dispensing of the features of that plan! But only if we are “faithful unto death.”—Rev. 2:10

“It is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High.” (Ps. 92:1) Let us pray that we may never lose sight of this joyful ‘song in the night,’ so that we may be counted worthy to be with those that are with the Lamb on Mount Sion, singing a new song.—Rev. 14:1-3

Dawn Bible Students Association