

The Gift of God

***“The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”
—Romans 6:23***

DURING THE TIME OF this present evil world, and the reign of sin and death, mankind has witnessed many tragic, large losses of life. Calamities such as hurricanes, typhoons, earthquakes, floods, the disasters of war, famine, and accidents have caused thousands to die at one time. Many people have reacted to these tragedies in sympathy, giving financial and physical aid, and voiced aloud to God in prayer why these events occurred. As life goes on, many of these incidents tend to be forgotten.

WHY DOES GOD PERMIT EVIL?

In the aftermath of the Twin Towers tragedy in New York City on September 11, the memory of the event does not seem to want to go away. Media articles continue to appear with reference to that event. One such article appeared in a popular Canadian journal, “*McClean’s*,” on December 17, 2001. The title was, “*Death’s Gift to Life*.” It was philosophical in nature, but prompted by trying to answer questions on tragedy and how to cope with it. We publish some excerpts from that article to see how some try to reason concerning such events. The article begins by calling attention to a tragedy in the life of Pierre Trudeau, a well-known and popular, former Canadian Prime Minister when he lost his youngest son in a mountaineering accident caused by an avalanche. We quote:

“In the last two years of his life, Pierre Trudeau suffered a crisis of faith. It was brought on, of course, by the sudden death of the former prime minister’s youngest son. ‘Why him?’ Trudeau would ask. ‘Why didn’t God take me instead? I’ve tried, but I just can’t find a reason.’ Every one of us has felt the same sense of bewilderment whenever we’ve lost a loved one to accident or illness. Many Canadians experienced it at

the time of Trudeau's own death. And North Americans en masse shared it for weeks following the tragic events of September 11.

“Indeed, death in such terrible numbers by so hateful and calculated a method was all the more incomprehensible—a shock made worse by the smashing of the belief that it could never happen here. Reason rarely helps. For one thing, grief is an emotional and physiological reaction. It releases itself in weeping, wailing, shivering, and a profound fatigue, none of which is conducive to rational thought. For another thing, no one on the planet—no pope, no rabbi, no imam, no guru—can explain why this person was taken and that person reprieved.

SEEKING GOD

“Faced with such random cruelty, many people have turned away from God out of despondency or disgust. And who can blame them, particularly when death comes, as it did at the World Trade Center, in God's own name?

“In fact, God barely survived the Age of Reason in the West. Science and the philosophy of materialism proclaimed the omnipotent, omniscient Creator dead. ‘He’ became ‘She.’ ‘She’ dissolved into Nature. It morphed into Spirit. And Spirit is perhaps best exemplified these days by Harry Potter's school headmaster, Professor Dumbledore: wise, benign, yet annoyingly absent when Harry most needs him.”

The writer of the article, Ron Graham, has written books on politics, history, and religion, including a book entitled “*God's Dominion*,” for which he received an award. In this article we note how he decries reason, saying that in such tragedies, ‘reason rarely helps.’ He also mentions how the influential in the Age of Reason brought on the concept of God being dead. But what god were they talking about? Certainly the god of the Dark Ages is dead. And when he says that people have turned away from God, he also says that the perpetrators of the Twin Towers tragedy did it in the name of God.

We are reminded of the Apostle Paul's words in I Corinthians, the eighth chapter, “Though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him. Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge.” (vss. 5-7) How wonderful it is to be

privileged to know the great Supreme Creator of the universe, and that he is our Father (or lifegiver).

SEEKING SOLACE IN CHURCHES

The author's experience with religion has been disappointing. At the time of the September 11 tragedy, he expected many people to seek solace in their churches, and if they should find it he says, "Who's to say they shouldn't?" In another article in this same issue of "*McClean's*," a quick survey made after September 11 indicated an increase in church attendance. The article, however, said, "Houses of worship have already started to witness some backsliding. Immediately after the attacks, people crowded into churches, synagogues, temples and mosques—many for the first time in years. Since then, attendance has been dropping, although not necessarily back to pre-September 11 levels."

Ron Graham, the author of the first cited article, speaks of our own time as an age of uncertainty. In assessing churches as a place where solace can be found he says:

"Unfortunately, most North American churches are in the midst of their own uncertainty. Faced with declining attendance, aging congregations, and the indifference of the young, they are under pressure to transform themselves from places of worship and contemplation into homeless shelters, concert halls, tourist museums, welfare agencies, political forums or religious cabarets.

"Looking at religion in Canada, I found the Roman Catholics obsessed with sexual controversies and authority issues. The Anglicans seemed distracted by native lawsuits and property development. The synagogues were preoccupied with the survival of Israel, the mosques with the plight of the Palestinians, the *gurdwaras* with the creation of Khalistan. I gave up on the United Church after two Easter services. One featured the minister, dressed in a trench coat and holding a microphone, pretending to be a TV reporter covering the Crucifixion live from Calvary. The second starred a white, middle-aged, middle-class woman delivering the poignant Passion story as a rap number."

FACING DEATH

The writer's main focus was on the ability of people to accept death as inevitable. He was particularly impressed with the way some people

facing death spoke on the cell phone from the hijacked aircraft and from the Twin Towers after the towers were struck by the aircraft. The gift that he says death gives to life, (a strange anomaly), is that when people accept the inevitability of death they die with dignity. He sums up his reasoning by saying:

“Yes, death is real, death is near, death is painful. We saw that. But we also saw that human beings have within themselves the capacity to die with a calm mind, a courageous spirit and a loving heart. The truth is, we are blessed with the priceless freedom to make wise use of our period on earth, not to gain some promised afterlife but to leave without cause for repentance or regret.

“It is neither morbid nor depressing, therefore, to be constantly aware that we will die. Such awareness is a marker against which we can keep setting our values. It makes precious the hours, the minutes, perhaps the seconds remaining to us. The world becomes even more beautiful, more wondrous, more fragile as soon as we truly grasp that it—and we—must end.”

‘Death,’ by definition, is the cessation of life. How can it, therefore, give any gift to life? What Ron Graham is observing is the sentence of death upon mankind because of father Adam’s disobedience, as God said to Adam that the penalty for disobedience was “Thou shalt surely die.” (Gen. 2:17) At least he does not believe Satan’s lie which he spoke to Mother Eve, “Ye shall not surely die” (Gen. 3:4), as many sincere people believe when they accept the doctrine of immortality of the soul taught in their churches.

The Apostle Paul correctly says in our theme text, ‘The wages of sin is death.’ Hence, as long as sin predominates in the world, death is inevitable. The Apostle did not stop there, but tells us that the ‘gift of God [the Father and giver of life] is eternal life [not the brief, uncertain span we now have] through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

DEATH IS AN ENEMY

Contrariwise to the picture painted in this article which looks upon the inevitability of death as a giver of gifts, the Bible tells us in no uncertain terms that death is an enemy (I Cor. 15:26), and that the only giver of good and perfect gifts is God. (James 1:17) How grateful we are to know that the first of these precious gifts that came from the Father of lights is

that of his own beloved Son, our Lord Jesus. As the Scriptures plainly tell us, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16) Someone could say, “Jesus came two thousand years ago, and the world of mankind is still dying.” True. But God’s plan is that all mankind should come to a “knowledge of the Truth” and “be saved.” (I Tim. 2:4-6) This part of his plan is almost ready to be set in motion.

The delay in doing so has been the selection of a ‘church class,’ those who will live and reign with Jesus. (Rev. 20:4) This work, described by the Apostle James as selecting a people for God’s name (Acts 15:14), is soon to be completed. These are those who are willing to lay down their lives in death to follow in the footsteps of their master and leader, Jesus Christ. The gift of God was, first, to provide a ransom sacrifice to redeem Adam’s family from death. His further gifts are to give a knowledge of the Truth to every man, woman, and child, so that they can make an intelligent choice and choose good instead of evil, and receive eternal life. As the Apostle Paul said, “the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

ETERNAL LIFE—GOD’S GIFT

How wonderful it will be when all those involved in the large tragic losses of life because of hurricanes, typhoons, earthquakes, floods, wars, and calamities of every type, come back from the grave and no longer face the possibility of death. This will be the case in God’s glorious kingdom which he has planned with his only begotten Son, and those associated with him as rulers, making this a reality. No one is to be excluded. As Paul says, “He [Jesus] must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.”—I Cor. 15:25,26

“All that are in the graves shall hear his [the Son of Man’s] voice, And shall come forth.” (John 5:28,29) This is the gift of God through his Son. What a joy it will be to everyone to know that their enemy, death, has been vanquished! All will be able to join the Apostle Paul in declaring what was prophesied aforehand in Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14, “Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”—I Cor. 15:54,55

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Is There Hope?

***Key Verse: “I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”
—Romans 8:18***

***Selected Scriptures:
Romans 8:18-27,
31-34, 38-39***

IN OUR KEY VERSE, THE Apostle Paul gives assurance to all walking in Jesus’ footsteps, that the sufferings they now encounter are nothing compared to the glory that will soon be revealed when they are with him. Heavenly glory far exceeds any suffering. We are told, “The whole creation groaneth.” (vs. 22) Though they are not aware of it, these are, “Waiting for the adoption, ... redemption” (vs. 23) of the sons of God. Christians also ‘groan,’ that is, (pray) waiting, for their deliverance.

Earlier, the apostle had explained the why of the suffering. He says, “If so be that we suffer with him [Christ], that we may be also glorified together.” (vs. 17) In yet another lesson the apostle had written, “It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him.”—II Tim. 2:11,12

Paul continues, “The creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”—Rom. 8:20,21, *New American Standard Version*

The Christian is, “saved by hope.” (vs. 24) Through the aid of the Holy Spirit (our new, holy mind), which is the Christian’s guide, he receives the help, and finds the hope, to see him through his trials, which Spirit tells him how to pray.—vs. 26

One of the most comforting of scriptures is found in this same chapter. It reads, “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” (vs. 28) The Apostle Peter speaks of these as being “Elect according to the

foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.”—I Pet. 1:2

The Christian is given assurance through all trials as we read, “Since God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*) None can condemn those walking, as best they can, in the footsteps of Jesus. It is Christ who makes intercession for our mistakes, as we read, “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”—I John 2:1

Paul concludes his thoughts on hope by saying, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”—Rom. 8:35-39

We can thank our God that he has given this assurance of hope that we find in Christ. Nothing can separate us from the love of God.

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How Are They to Hear?

Key Verse: “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!”
—Romans 10:14, 15

Selected Scripture:
Romans 10:9-21

IN OUR LAST LESSON THE apostle gave the reasons for the hope that Christians have in Christ. Being aware that our Lord had cast the nation of Israel off from the chief prize held out to them (Matthew 23:37-38), his heart ached for Israel, so he says, “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.” (Rom. 10:1) The apostle was aware that Israel had made a covenant with God, which they had not kept. He knew that Israel had attempted to establish their own righteousness, and had not submitted themselves to God.

Paul knew that Jesus was the end of the law to everyone who believes, (vs. 4) and that the law was simply a “schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.” (Gal. 3:24) Faith plays a very important part in the life of the Christian.—Heb. 11:1,6

In chapter ten of Romans, the apostle reasons that God’s Word must be “in thy mouth” and “in thy heart” and we must believe “that God hath raised him [Jesus] from the dead.” (vs. 8,9) This is the only way one can be saved. The word saved, gives the thought ‘to deliver,’ or ‘protect,’ and also ‘to heal.’ Paul elaborates on the mouth saying, “With the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” (vs. 10) One who refrains himself from speaking of God’s goodness will not be fit for his kingdom. We read, “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God

unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.” (Rom. 1:16) The apostle says in chapter ten, “There is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.”—vs. 12

The question arises, ‘How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed?’ One must first hear, and then follow through on his hearing. Paul quotes from verse 7 in chapter 52 of Isaiah, “How beautiful ... are the feet of him ... that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good.” Not all have heard, but those who do hear have a responsibility to obey the message.

The apostle again quotes from Isaiah 53:1 “Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?” The nation of Israel in covenant relationship with God heard the report, and did not believe, and did not bring forth fruit. The Gentiles were then given the opportunity to become members of the body of Christ. The Apostle Paul asks, “Hath God cast away his people?” (Rom. 11:1) He then supplies the answer, “All Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.” (Rom. 11:26) The opportunity to hear and learn of God will be given to every Israelite through Christ.

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How Are We to Live?

Key Verse: “Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”
—Romans 12:2

Selected Scripture:
Romans 12:1-3,
9-21

IN THIS LESSON THE Apostle Paul addresses Roman Christians who had not yet fully committed themselves to God. The Christian way is described by Paul as “baptized into his [Christ’s] death.” (Rom. 6:3) Our relationship to the world is described by Jesus, “In the world ye shall have tribulation,” (John 16:33) and by James, “Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.” (James 4:4) In making a complete commitment to God, what should our conduct be like? Paul continues and says, “Don’t cherish exaggerated ideas of yourself or your importance, but try to have a sane estimate of your capabilities by the light of the faith that

God has given to you.”—Rom. 12:3, *Phillips Translation*

Humility is important to the Christian. The Apostle Peter says, “Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.”—I Pet. 5:5,6

In describing the transforming work in our lives, the apostle outlines a list of character traits in verses 9 to 21 that must adorn the Christian. It is by these we are to live. Love is first on the list. Love must be without dissimulation. This word means unfeigned, no pretense. (vs. 9, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*) Love must be completely sincere. “Be tenderly affectionate.” “In honor preferring one another.” (vs. 10, *WED*) To be able to put others before ourselves shows a loving character. Be “not

slothful,” (vs. 11) be not slow to do the Lord’s business, rather be zealous, fervent.

“Rejoicing in hope.” (vs. 12) This is the hope of living and reigning with Christ. (I Pet. 1:3,4) “Patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer.” (vs. 12) Trials call for prayer, for the succor from our Heavenly Father. Prayer is defined as the lifeline of the Christian. When in trial we have these words of comfort, “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.”—I Cor. 10:13, *Revised Standard Version*

“Distributing to the necessity of saints.” (vs. 13) Those who have given themselves to Christ are not without need, and the needs vary. A comforting word may help. Others may need something of a material way. The apostle said to Timothy, “Be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation.”—I Tim. 6:18,19

“Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not.” (vs. 14) Through any trial one is to overcome the tendencies of the old nature, that of retaliation. “Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.” (vs. 15) Here are two characteristics of a rounded character.

Try always, to “Be of the same mind,” (vs. 16) “Live peaceably with all.”(vs. 18) When the apostle ends his study, he emphasizes the need to love our enemies.

Who Can Judge?

Key Verse: “Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother’s way.”

—Romans 14:13

***Selected Scripture:
Romans 14:1-17***

THIS LESSON IS ON THE subject of judging. In the last verse of the previous chapter, the apostle in giving practical advice for daily living says, “Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.” (Rom. 13:14) The Christian’s goal is to be as much like Christ as is humanly possible. In our Lord we have a grand example of perfection in the flesh, but being imperfect we will never be able to fully live up to this standard. Knowing this we find it is our intentions that must be as perfect as possible.

This lesson deals with how we treat others, especially those who are striving to live as close to Christ as possible. Paul begins with the admonition, “Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations.” (Rom. 14:1) Some were new to the faith, and criticism arose by the more mature over what to eat, and what not to eat. At that time animals were sacrificed to idols. There were so many offerings to pagan gods that only a small portion was sacrificed and the remainder was sold in butcher shops at bargain prices. The question arose should any of the brethren buy and eat such meat.

The apostle in another place says, “Meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse. But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak.”—I Cor. 8:8,9

If we feel at liberty to eat such meat and a brother or neighbor sees differently, then we must refrain from this liberty, lest we cause another to fall. The Apostle Paul explains, “If meat make my brother to offend, I

will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.”—I Cor. 8:13

The point of judging cannot be taken lightly. We read, “Do not judge lest you be judged.” “For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.—Matt. 7:1,2, *New American Standard*

The apostle makes the point that one esteems one day above another while another sees each day alike, but that no one lives to himself, each must be fully persuaded in his mind. We have one master, Jesus Christ. It is Christ who died and was resurrected and who now is Lord of the living and the dead. (Rom. 14:9) Therefore, Paul says, “Why dost thou judge thy brother? ... for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ” (vs. 10), and further admonishes us; Do not “put a stumblingblock” in our brother’s way. (vs. 13) To stumble, gives the thought ‘to trip up.’

The apostle was confident that “nothing [was] unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean.” (vs. 14) Hence he said, “All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient [profitable].—I Cor. 6:12

We must be careful to see that our walk is along the lines of love, “Let not then your good be evil spoken of: For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.”(Rom. 14:16,17) We should never exercise our liberty in Christ in a way that would stumble our brethren.

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Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah and Jonah

IN PART 4 we summarized briefly the principal thoughts set forth by some of the Old Testament prophets—Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. These are customarily referred to as the ‘major prophets’ of the Old Testament, in contrast to other prophets whose writings are much less voluminous. There is still another major prophet, namely, Daniel, and the twelve chapters of the prophecy which bears his name are among the most interesting and informative of the Old Testament.

Daniel was one of the captives of Judah taken to Babylon when the nation was conquered by King Nebuchadnezzar. He was very young at the time, but thoroughly devoted to the God of Israel. By Divine providence he soon gained favor with the king and was exalted to a high position in the Babylonian government. He was greatly used by God as a prophet.

Many who are not especially familiar with the Bible as a whole are at least partially acquainted with some of the incidents recorded in this remarkable book. Most people, for example, have heard the story of Daniel in the lions’ den, even though they may not be familiar with the circumstances which caused the prophet to be placed there. (Dan. 6) Many have heard of the unchangeableness of the laws of the Medes and Persians, but probably few realize what bearing this had on Daniel’s being cast into the lions’ den.

In the second chapter of Daniel’s prophecy we are told about the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar in which he saw a humanlike image, with head of gold, breast and arms of silver, thighs of brass, legs of iron, and feet and toes of iron and clay mixed. In this dream Nebuchadnezzar also saw a “stone” cut out of the “mountain” without hands. This stone smote the image on the feet, causing it to fall. Then the stone grew until it became a great mountain which filled the whole earth.

It was in connection with this dream that Daniel first found special favor with the king, for by Divine help he was able to recall the dream for Nebuchadnezzar, and to interpret it for him. Daniel explained to the king that the gold, silver, brass, and iron of the image represented four “kingdoms,” beginning with Babylon. Historically, the others have proved to be Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome.

The feet and toes of the image, Daniel explained, were of iron and clay mixed. This he interpreted to mean the ultimate weakening of the Roman Empire, with the toes representing its division. Thus the prophecy is seen to be remarkably true to the facts of history as all now are able to see them.

In keeping with one of the great theme songs of the entire Bible, Daniel prophesied that the stone which smote the image, and destroyed it, then grew to be a great mountain which filled the whole earth. This ‘mountain,’ Daniel explained, represented the kingdom of God. The fact that already we have witnessed virtually the complete destruction of the old Roman Empire should give us confidence that the kingdom of God which was to take its place and be the next successive world power is now near at hand.

In the Book of Daniel we are told about the three Hebrew children who were cast into a fiery furnace because they would not bow down and worship an image which the king had set up. In this instance also the king was Nebuchadnezzar.—Dan. 3

In the fifth chapter of Daniel there is recorded the account of a great feast given by Belshazzar, the Chaldean king, during which he saw the “handwriting on the wall.” This writing was those famous words, “Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting”—“*Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin.*”—vss. 24-28

This feast was held in Babylon, capital city of the Babylonian Empire. While it was in progress, King Cyrus of the Medes turned aside the waters of the river Euphrates which ordinarily flowed under the walls of the city. Then, together with his army, he marched through the riverbed into the city, and captured it.

In the Lord’s providence, Daniel became an important figure in the government of the Medes. It was during this time that the Lord gave him a vision in which he saw four great beasts. These were interpreted to

represent four kingdoms, or empires. Thus the same empires are pictured as Nebuchadnezzar saw them, in the gold, silver, brass, and iron of the humanlike image of his dream. What to a heathen king seemed glorious and glamorous, Daniel, the servant of God, saw to be beastly and repelling.

Just as Nebuchadnezzar's prophetic dream forecast the history of humankind down to the time that the kingdom of God would exercise its authority and power in the earth, so Daniel's prophecy does likewise. The fourth 'beast' of Daniel's vision represents Rome, even as does the iron of the legs, feet, and toes of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. The government which succeeds these in both prophecies is the kingdom of the Lord.—Dan. 2:44; 7:26,27

The last chapter of the Book of Daniel prophesies some of the major developments of our day. Verse four speaks of an increase of knowledge, and forecasts much running 'to and fro.' This seems clearly to be descriptive of the great advance the world has made in education and science during the last two hundred years. This, in turn, has resulted in much, and rapid, travel, implied by the expression, "Many shall run to and fro."—vs. 4

Even more remarkable is the prophecy contained in the first verse of this chapter, where Daniel forecasts a "time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation." Daniel indicates that this 'time of trouble' would result from the standing up of "Michael." This is one of the Biblical titles given to Jesus, and the reference is to the time of his return. His ultimate objective is to exercise his governmental authority in the earth.

Jesus quoted this prophecy and applied it to the time of his Second Presence on the earth. (Matt. 24:21,22) Jesus said that this prophetic time of trouble, or of "tribulation," would be so severe that unless those days were shortened "no flesh" would survive. We are undoubtedly living in the very time when this prophecy is being fulfilled, and even now the wise men of the world are warning us of the possible destruction of the human race through the misuse of nuclear and biological weapons.

Surely Daniel was right when he said that it would be 'a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation!' Nevertheless, we can take courage from Daniel's prophecy, for he mentions the increase

of knowledge, the running to and fro, and the great time of trouble only incidentally, and in order to identify for us the time when we could expect the speedy manifestation of Christ's kingdom, when, he said, that those who "sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake."—ch. 12:2

Thus does this prophet, even as the other writers of the Bible, keep before the reader God's purpose to restore the human race to life during the time of the Messianic kingdom. The fact that Daniel so clearly sets forth this hope of restoration stamps him as one of God's 'holy prophets,' for in the New Testament the Apostle Peter tells us that "the times of restitution of all things" had been spoken "by the mouth of all his [God's] holy prophets since the world began."—Acts 3:19-21

THE BOOK OF HOSEA

There are twelve "minor prophets." Their writings appear as the concluding books of the Old Testament. Hosea was the first of these. His prophecy was written before Daniel's. He was contemporaneous with certain kings of Judah and with Jeroboam, king of Israel. (Hos. 1:1) This places him chronologically after the separation of the ten tribes of Israel from the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin, and prior to the overthrow of the nation and their being taken into captivity.

Hosea's prophecy is almost altogether directed against the sins of the nation—the ten tribes and also the two tribes—and a warning of the dire results the people could expect from their worship of false gods, and their disregard for the laws of Jehovah. This prophet forecast the downfall of the nation, as it was represented both in the ten-tribe and two-tribe kingdoms, and foretold their respective captivities in Assyria and Babylon.

Hosea's prophecy is not wholly one of doom, however, it also promises the 'restitution' of Israel in the "latter days." (Hos. 3:5) In this prophecy, the transgression of Israel against the covenant, into which they had entered with God at Mt. Sinai, is compared with Adam's transgression of God's law in the Garden of Eden. The marginal translation of verse seven in chapter six reads, "They like Adam have transgressed the covenant."

Because of their unfaithfulness, Hosea prophesied that the children of Israel would abide "many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image [pillar, *Marginal Translation*]

and without an ephod, and without teraphim.” (Hos. 3:4) Each of these, in the experience of Israel, was an evidence of God’s blessing upon the nation, and to be without them all was Hosea’s graphic manner of emphasizing that for ‘many days’ God’s favor would be withdrawn from them.

The fifth verse declares that “afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear [reverence] the Lord and his goodness in the latter days.” In the testimony of God’s ‘holy prophets’ pertaining to the great hope of restitution we are assured that there is to be a resurrection of the dead, which means, of course, that King David will himself return from death and once more be associated with his people.

However, there is to be a much larger fulfillment of this prophecy, for David is used in the Bible as a type of Jesus, the Messiah of promise, and the One who is to be the great King over Israel in the ‘latter days.’ Jeremiah says, “Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.”—Jer. 23:5,6

Thus we see that although the major portion of the Book of Hosea is a denunciation of the sins of God’s people Israel, this prophet, like all the others, was used by God to give assurance of an ultimate return of Divine favor. The fulfillment of these promises will mean rich blessings of prosperity and life for Israel under the rulership of the antitypical David. This prophet reminds us, just as all mankind lost life through Adam’s transgression, so in the latter days this larger family, even the human family itself, shall also be restored.

THE BOOK OF JOEL

Joel was the second of the minor prophets. His prophecy was written at approximately 800 B.C. Like a number of the other prophets, Joel calls attention to the sins of Israel, and to the calamitous events which were to come upon the nation as a result. Specifically, he forecast a period when there would be a damaging shortage of water, and a plague of locusts.—Joel 1:3-13

The purpose of Joel's message to Israel was to bring about a repentance of the nation, which in turn would lead to an averting of the calamities which he prophesied. But the nation did not repent, and therefore suffered the judgments of God, and was finally taken into captivity.

Careful students of the Bible, however, discern that Joel's prophecy only incidentally mentions the calamities which were then to come upon the nation of Israel. Quotations from the book by Jesus and Peter in the New Testament, reveal its much larger application to events which were to occur at the beginning and end of the present age.

Speaking on the Day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter quotes from Joel 2:28,29, explaining that the promised pouring out of God's Spirit upon his servants and handmaidens was being fulfilled in the Pentecostal experience.

The disciples asked Jesus what would be the sign of his return and of the end of the age. In his reply, Jesus quoted from Joel 2:30,31 indicating it to be a prophecy which would be fulfilled at the time of his Second Advent. We call attention here to Jesus' application of these verses merely to prove that the prophecy of Joel as a whole has a much wider application than merely to the troubles which were at that time shortly to come upon Israel.

It is in keeping with this broader aspect of the prophecy that we find the third chapter referring to the final return of Israel from her captivity among all nations. (vs. 1) The second verse of this chapter informs us that when the time should come that the Lord would "bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem" he would also "gather all nations." It has been given to the present generation to witness both these events, and also the fact of their simultaneous development, just as Joel prophesied.

In chapter three, verses 9-15, a graphic prophecy of the mad armament race is recorded, and other feverish preparations for war which have been characteristic of our times. But this, the prophet shows, is merely leading up to the time when the "mountains shall drop down new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk." (vs. 18) Comparing this language with that of Isaiah 25:6-9, it becomes clear that Joel, even as the other prophets, is assuring us of the rich blessings of Christ's kingdom which will be enjoyed by the people immediately after the present time of national and international distress.

THE BOOK OF AMOS

Amos, another of the minor prophets, served Israel during the reign of King Jeroboam II, between 825 and 850 B.C. With the exception of very short periods of time, the course of the nation was almost continuously wicked, and it was this which eventually led to its overthrow, and to the captivity of the people in Assyria and Babylon. It was also because of this that so large a portion of many of the Old Testament prophecies is devoted to warnings of coming punishments.

Through Amos the Lord explains why Israel had to suffer so severely because of her sins. He said, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities. Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:2,3) God had especially selected this nation. He had entered into a covenant with his chosen people, and the only basis upon which they could hope to have him walk with and bless them was faithfulness to that covenant.

Although Amos graphically foretold the results of the coming of God’s judgment upon the nation, he proved himself to be one of the holy prophets by also prophesying their future restoration. He wrote, “In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, ... and I will build it as in the days of old.”—Amos 9:11

In Acts 15:13-17 the Apostle James quotes this prophecy and explains that it was to be fulfilled after the Second Advent of Christ and after a people for the Lord’s name had been called out from the Gentiles during the intervening age. Thus we see that the prophecy of Amos has a much wider application than might at first appear.

While each of these prophecies served to warn Israel of her sins, by the providence of God each one also helps to amplify the great theme of Divine love and mercy as revealed in his plan of restitution. The many books of the Bible are indeed parts of one great whole, revealing to us the many and thrilling details of God’s loving plan of redemption and restoration through Christ.

THE BOOK OF OBADIAH

Obadiah is the fourth of the twelve minor prophets. His short prophecy of only one chapter is unlike the others, in that it is not particularly directed against the sins of Israel, but is a denunciation of the Edomites, the descendants of Esau.

Toward the close of its one chapter, the prophecy begins to call attention to God's purpose to restore Israel. The last verse reads, "Saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the Lord's." The 'saviours' will be Christ and those associated with him who have been faithful in suffering and dying with him.

In Revelation we have a New Testament presentation of these saviors on mount Zion. John wrote, "I looked, and, lo, a Lamb [Jesus] stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads." John further explains, "These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth."—Rev. 14:1,4

THE BOOK OF JONAH

This book is largely in story form. In brief, the story is this: The Lord asked Jonah to go to the city of Nineveh and "cry against it" for, as he explained to Jonah, "their wickedness is come up before me." (Jon. 1:2) Jonah's prophecy was to be one of doom against this wicked city.

However, the prophet was disinclined to obey the Lord's command, and instead of starting on the journey to Nineveh, boarded a ship which was sailing in another direction. A storm arose. The story states, "The Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken."—vs. 4

The sailors became very much alarmed. They were seemingly a superstitious people, and suspected that someone aboard was responsible; and they cast lots to determine who it was. The lot fell upon Jonah. He had told them previously that the purpose of taking the journey in this ship was to get away from his God, and, of course, from obeying God's command to curse Nineveh.

They quickly decided that Jonah's God had brought the storm upon the ship, and that their only safety was to cast the prophet overboard, which they did. Instead of being drowned, however, God had prepared a 'great fish' to swallow Jonah. After three days he was cast upon the shore. After such an experience Jonah was ready to obey the Lord's command to curse the city.

The authenticity of this story is vouched for by no less an authority than Jesus, who at the same time reveals the importance of the Book of Jonah in connection with God's revelation of his plan of restoration. He said that as Jonah was in the belly of the great fish, "so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."—Matt. 12:40

Jonah himself, relating his experience in the interior of the great fish, wrote, "out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou [Jehovah] heardest my voice." (Jon. 2:2) The Hebrew word here translated 'hell' is *sheol*. It is the death state or condition. Symbolically, Jonah was in the death state, for he was as good as dead, and would have died had not the Lord delivered him.

Inasmuch, then, as Jesus referred to Jonah's experience as being illustrative of his own death and resurrection, we may conclude that the Lord designed it to foreshadow the resurrection, not only of Jesus, but of all who have died.

Afterward, when Jonah presented the message of the Lord to the wicked city of Nineveh the people repented, and they were not destroyed. In this we are reminded that although all mankind are now under condemnation to death, and dying, they are to be given an opportunity to repent, and those who do shall live.

Dawn Bible Students Association

Victories of Faith

“Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.”

—Hebrews 11:6

PAUL EXPLAINS THAT “faith is the substance [foundation] of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (Heb. 11:1) If we possessed the things hoped for, and could see the things unseen, we would not need faith. It is because we are surrounded by circumstances and conditions which are adverse to, and hidden from, the view of the glorious things which God has promised, that we need faith—faith to surmount and look beyond them into that spiritual land of promise which is “very far off.”—Isa.

33:17

PERMISSION OF EVIL

Those who are acquainted with the Divine plan know why God has permitted evil to reign for more than six thousand years. They believe that thereby the world of mankind will ultimately learn a valuable lesson regarding the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and its terrible consequences upon the sinner. They realize, however, that the world must yet have an opportunity to experience the favorable conditions of the millennium before they will be able fully to understand and properly appraise the value of the present reign of sin and death.

The permission of evil is also designed to be of inestimable value to the church of this Gospel Age. We must learn our lessons from this experience now, and the only way we can do it is upon the basis of faith. In this time when evil flourishes, when the wicked prosper, and when the proud are called happy, it requires faith to stand for unpopular Truth, and with the unprosperous righteous and the persecuted humble and meek.

Under these circumstances our faith must lay hold upon the promises of God, and believe in his integrity to fulfill them. He has promised us

the Divine nature, “glory and honour and immortality.” (Rom. 2:7) Upon the basis of faith and obedience we must prove ourselves worthy of such high exaltation. Those who walk by faith during this Gospel Age are being formed into a New Creation. We are even now “new creature[s]” in Christ Jesus. (II Cor. 5:17) In the past, all of God’s intelligent creatures were first created and then tested. But with the New Creation it is different. We are being tested before the creative process is complete, because when it is finished all those who qualify will have immortality. They will be death-proof, so they must be proved worthy of such a high creation before they attain it.

It is for this reason that the Lord permits his people to be surrounded with evil and evil influences. It is only their faith in him, and in the rightness of his plan for them and for the world, that gives them the victory over their surroundings. The world, under the leadership of Satan, finds an ally in our fallen flesh; faith in God and in his promises to guide and help, also in the glory he has promised, is absolutely necessary in order to be victorious over this unholy alliance.

THE WORKS OF FAITH

After explaining that ‘faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,’ Paul reminds us of a number of wonderful examples of what faith will accomplish in the lives of the faithful. He draws his illustrations from the experiences of the Old Testament Worthies. This makes them the more meaningful, for those ancient men of God had less knowledge of the Divine plan than we have been given. They were not encouraged to run for so great a prize as that offered during the Gospel Age.

Nevertheless the Ancient Worthies did exercise a marvelous faith. “By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.” (Heb. 11:4) Enoch walked with God; Noah preached righteousness and built an ark; Abraham offered up Isaac as a burnt offering [or showed his willingness to do so]; Moses chose to suffer with the people of God rather “than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.” (vs. 25) Joseph stood staunchly for righteousness in the land of Egypt, and Joshua conquered Canaan. Elijah challenged and defeated the priests of Baal, and Daniel stopped the mouths of lions. The three Hebrews risked the flames of the seven-times heated fiery furnace, and Jeremiah endured the horrors of the

dungeon. These men of God had the one thing in common that enabled them to go through these experiences. It was their faith in God and his promises.

Their knowledge of God's promises was the basis for their faith. It was because of his knowledge of God's promises that Abraham "looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." (Heb. 11:10) All the Ancient Worthies enjoyed a similar knowledge of God's purpose, not in all its clarity as we are privileged to understand it today, but clear enough to realize that any temporal advantage they might enjoy could not compare in value to the eternal blessings which God had promised.

This knowledge alone did not give them faith. It was the foundation of their faith only as they were persuaded that God's promises were true, and they could place their heart reliance upon them. By making God's promises their own, they ordered their lives in harmony with them. When, for example, Abraham heard the voice of God calling him to go into an unknown country, he obeyed. Anything short of full obedience would have manifested a proportionate lack of faith.

So it was with all the Ancient Worthies. They did not entangle themselves with the things of this world, nor did they put their trust in man, nor in the false gods of the people with which they were so frequently surrounded. As Paul shows, they walked as 'pilgrims and strangers' in the earth, longing for the kingdom which God had promised. James writes that "faith without works is dead," (James 2:20) and by their works these Worthies of the past demonstrated the great vitality of their faith. It was a faith that did not shrink, no matter how formidable the foes were that pressed against them. It was a faith that did not tremble on the brink of any earthly woe.

IMPORTANCE OF KNOWLEDGE

We, like the Worthies of old, must have knowledge of God and of his plans in order to exercise a living, victorious faith. In Romans 10:14 Paul asks the question, "How shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard?" The Lord wants us to exercise strong faith, a faith that is based upon a verified knowledge, so he has asked us to reason with him—"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord." (Isa. 1:18) Men who are overimpressed with their own importance might ask us to accept

their word without question or investigation, but the great God of the universe invites us to reason with him that we may be satisfied that what he has told us is true. How wonderful is our God!

We reason with God through his Word. “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God,” Paul tells us. (Rom. 10:17) When we study and reason on the Scriptures, God is reasoning with us; that is, he is appealing to our reason upon the basis of the marvelous harmony, beauty, grandeur, and reasonableness of the loving Plan of the Ages which is set forth in his Word. With this firm foundation of knowledge, our faith will be correspondingly strong.

A victorious faith is more than merely to believe in God and in the fact that he has made promises. James tells us the “devils also believe, and tremble.” (James 2:19) Our belief, our faith, if it is to give us victory over the world, the flesh, and the Devil, must enable us to do more than tremble. It must become a personal, vital conviction which leads to obedient activity in doing the will of God.

FAITH IN GOD AND CHRIST

In addition to having faith in the promises of God and in his loving plan which they outline, we should have faith in God himself. By faith, our relationship with our God should ripen into a personal acquaintance in which we appreciate him more and more as our loving Heavenly Father—a Father with whom we can always have sweet fellowship. Our faith should enable us to go to him in our sorrows and pour out the troubles of our heart, with the assurance that he will always be ready to provide us with the “balm” of “Gilead” (Jer. 8:22) to comfort us in our every time of need.

By faith we should be able to see our Lord Jesus as our tender and loving shepherd who is caring for all our needs. Isaiah wrote, “He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom.” (Isa. 40:11) The Lord tenderly cares for us. He may even resort to discipline; but this will not be necessary if faith is wholly obedient to his every call, following him in the paths of righteousness wherever he may lead.

STRENGTHENED BY EXERCISE

Faith grows stronger as we step out on the promises of God and thus put them to the test. This principle is beautifully illustrated in the experience of Israel in crossing the river Jordan into the promised land. The priests, marching ahead of the Israelites, were to touch the waters of the river with their feet, and the promise was that then the water would separate to make a path through which they could cross to the other side.

The priests, full of faith, took this step, and the Lord, fulfilling his promise, caused the water to divide. They put God's promise to the test, and saw it verified. Thus their faith was strengthened. Every faithful child of God should enjoy similar evidences of God's love and of his ability to fulfill all his good promises. And this will be so if we take the steps of obedience as the Lord indicates them to us through his Word.

Our full consecration to the Lord was our first major step of obedience to the faith which was gradually crystallizing in our hearts as our growing knowledge of the Truth revealed that we did not belong to ourselves, but to the Lord. Then followed the evidence of the Lord's acceptance and the begetting of the Holy Spirit. Each new step of faith, as we work out the details of the Lord's will throughout our daily walk in life, is rewarded with additional evidence of the Lord's guiding presence, overruling providences, and his sustaining grace.

THE "WORK OF FAITH"

In I Thessalonians 1:3 the Apostle Paul speaks of the "work of faith." Faith initiates our every activity in the Lord's service. It enables us to understand and appreciate the "deep things of God" (I Cor. 2:10), and to teach them to others to whom the Lord has given hearing ears. Through faith in the truths of the Word, we are able to offer acceptable sacrifice to God; to fight the good fight of faith; to remain dead to self and to the world and to be alive toward God; to be zealous in the service of God; to abound in the graces of the Spirit; to suffer for righteousness' sake; and to thwart the fiery darts of the Adversary. Without faith we could do none of these things acceptably to God.

Faith enables us to do the will of God without questioning his wisdom or considering what the cost to ourselves may be. Faith says, "I'll do what you want me to do, dear Lord; I'll be what you want me to be." Daniel's faith stopped the mouths of lions, and it will enable us to bear witness to

the Truth to an indifferent and hostile world. Thus will our faith, through our works, overcome the world.

THE TRIALS OF FAITH

Peter wrote, “Ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.”—I Pet. 1:6,7

The meaning of Peter’s illustration is apparent. Our faith, and the superstructure of Christian character built upon it, contains certain elements of ‘dross,’ of impurities, so the Lord refines us by trials—trials which are represented by the refiner’s fire. Elsewhere the Scriptures speak of our Lord as the Great Refiner, the purifier of silver and of gold.—Mal. 3:3

It is not literal fire which the Lord uses to refine and strengthen our faith, but ‘fiery’ trials. For the most part they consist of the little vexations of life—losses, disappointments, delays, restraints, being ‘put on the shelf,’ our own faults or the faults of others, failures, hardships, necessities, oppositions from the brethren, physical pain, weariness, sorrow, danger, and persecution. None of the Lord’s people experience all of these, and with most of us none of them is, as a rule, overpoweringly severe. They do hurt, however, and only as our faith can lay hold upon the promise that all things are working together for our good will we be able to endure them and continue our rejoicing in the Lord.

At times, the pleasant things of life can also prove to be trials of our faith. Indeed, when our experiences are pleasing to the flesh it is easy to lose sight of the Lord, and of our need to exercise faith in him and in his promises. If to render a service to the Lord means to give up the ease and comforts which we might otherwise enjoy, our faith is tested. Jesus indicated the principle involved here when he said, “How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!” (Mark 10:23) Not many of the Lord’s people today have financial riches, but we may have riches of health and other assets which a strong faith will prompt us to devote more fully to the Lord.

If our faith is strong, we will see in every experience and situation of life a challenge to obedience. We will also realize that every trial and

every joy which the Lord permits is especially designed for our greatest good. Do we really believe that no weapon that is formed against us can prosper, and that no joy of the flesh can lure us away from our God, if we lean upon him and trust him for his promised grace? If so, then we have a victorious faith.

ENDURING TRIALS

Jesus said, “Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation.” (Mark 14:38) While these words were addressed to his immediate disciples during those trying hours in Gethsemane, they are a fitting admonition to us also. We are to be watchful. The enemies of the New Creature are ever on the alert to ensnare us in the meshes of pride, ambition, earthly honor, ease, and worldly pleasure. The flesh falls easy victim to the blandishments of Satan and the world. How well the poet expressed it:

“My soul be on thy guard;
Ten thousand foes arise;
The hosts of sin are pressing hard
To draw thee from the prize.”

It is here that faith will give us victory—a faith, that is, which, fully trusting in the promises of God, will also make us alert to his directives, his warnings, his principles of righteousness, and fully trustful of his assured help in every time of need. In this, the ‘work of faith,’ will be our diligent study of the Word, and its zealous application, to every detail of our consecrated lives.

As Jesus said, we are also to pray. Prayer keeps open the vital lines of communication with our Heavenly Father, he who has promised that no good thing will he withhold from those who walk uprightly. Jesus said that our Father would surely give the Holy Spirit to those who asked him. By the Holy Spirit he enlightens and strengthens us. Filled with his Spirit, we have the assurance that greater is he who is for us than all who are against us. Faith assures us of this and thus gives us victory in our trials, of whatever nature they may be. Thus our perplexities are transformed into the “peace of God, which passeth all understanding.”—Phil. 4:7

As faith endures trial, giving assurance that every painful circumstance is essential to our being transformed into the Lord’s image, the soul is mellowed to a loving submission to whatever Divine providence may permit. As our faith grows stronger, we can finally and calmly say, “I can

do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” (Phil. 4:13) This is not self-assurance, for when we look to self we tremble. But when, by faith, we look to the Lord, believing that not one of his good promises will ever fail, we are strong, and we can say, “Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”—I Cor. 15:57

Each new victory of faith draws us nearer to the Lord and results in a greater determination to know and to do his will. By experience we learn that with each step of obedience the Lord’s grace sustains, and his wisdom guides. We may not always know just why certain experiences are permitted, but faith enables us to rest in his will, knowing that he gives his very best to those who leave the choice with him. The victory of faith enables us to know that it is better to ‘walk in the dark with him than to go alone in the light.’

Victories of faith will increase our strength to resist the attacks of our enemies: the world, the flesh, and the Devil. The Lord has provided us with a wonderful armor of protection, but we do not know its full value until, by faith, and in obedience to the Captain of our salvation, we become active combatants in the Christian warfare. As we fight the good fight of faith, and learn the value of the armor of Truth which the Lord has provided, we become ever stronger in the Lord and in the power of his might. We learn that greater is he who is for us than all they who be against us.

Victories of faith result in increased growth in Christian character. Peter admonishes us to add to our faith virtue, knowledge, fortitude, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. Faith is the foundation of all these graces. When faith is weak, character is unstable, but a strong and ever increasing faith results in the abounding of “these things,” which in turn will lead to an abundant entrance “into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”—II Pet. 1:4-11

Apart from faith, trials often lead, not to mellowness of character, but to irritability of disposition. The disappointed heart becomes resentful and rebellious. But full conviction of faith by which we are assured of the intrinsic value of all our trials, transforms every stinging, burning experience of life into a mellowing providence of God designed to help produce in us the ripened “fruit” of “goodness and righteousness and truth.”—Eph. 5:9

When by faith we see our joys and sorrows as the providence of God, rather than the mere ‘happenstances’ of life, a trying experience with a neighbor or with a brother does not embitter us against them. Instead, we see each such experience as an opportunity to thank the Lord for permitting further “light affliction[s],” which by faith we know are working out in us “a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” (II Cor. 4:17) Thus each “fiery trial,” (I Pet. 4:12) regardless of who or what might be the immediate cause, instead of being a stumbling stone, is a stepping stone to higher planes of grace and Truth.

When Jesus was in Gethsemane and knew that his enemies were about to seize and crucify him, he did not think of this bitter cup as one which they had poured for him. Instead, to him, as he said to Peter, it was the cup which the Father had given him. (John 18:11) So it should be with us, and will be, in proportion to our faith in the promises and the providence of God.

Faith is essential in every aspect of the Christian life. Our study of the Bible would be meaningless without faith. In the Bible are all the treasures of Divine wisdom so essential for our instruction in righteousness and our guidance in the narrow way. We need this wisdom, and James tells us that if we ask God for it, he will give it to us, “liberally,” but only if we “ask in faith, nothing wavering.” (James 1:5,6) Without faith, how meaningless indeed would be our prayers!

Faith is the basis of our fellowship with the brethren. Our activity in the Lord’s vineyard is the “work of faith.” (I Thess. 1:3) The Christian warfare is the “good fight of faith,” (I Tim. 6:12) and the victory over the world and all our other enemies is the victory of faith. Our journey in the narrow way is the walk of faith.

“The just shall live by his faith,” wrote the Prophet Habakkuk. (ch. 2:4) Our life as New Creatures depends upon an abiding and growing faith in God, in his promises, and in every loving provision he has made for us—faith in the atoning blood of Christ, faith in the work of the Holy Spirit, faith in the “ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation.”—Heb. 1:14

The more we experience the blessings resulting from these loving provisions of our Heavenly Father, the stronger becomes our faith, and the greater will be our trust in him. Thus, as we take each step of

obedience, our prayer for increased faith will be answered by the revealing manner in which our God proves to us that there hath not failed, nor can fail, one word of all his good promises!

Dawn Bible Students Association

An Evangelist

***“Do the work of
an evangelist.”
—II Timothy 4:5***

THIS EXHORTATION IS recorded in II Timothy 4:5, and the Greek word translated evangelist actually means, ‘one who announces good tidings.’ The Apostle Paul said, “Be thou sober in all things; suffer bad treatment [as a good soldier of Christ Jesus]; perform an evangelist’s work; fully accomplish thy service.”—II Tim. 4:5, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*

This commission to preach the good tidings is mentioned by the Prophet Isaiah when prophesying of the coming Messiah. “The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he might be glorified.”—Isa. 61:1-3

The commission of the Holy Spirit to Messiah (Anointed) was prophetically announced long in advance of the arrival of Jesus. The body members of the Messiah, who have received the same anointing through him, have also received this commission to preach the Gospel (good tidings). If the disciple of Christ properly appreciates the privilege of being a messenger of God, an ambassador for God, it would be a sorrowful experience indeed for him if he could not proclaim the good tidings.

“WOE IS UNTO ME”

The Apostle Paul said, “Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach [tell, or announce] not the gospel.” (I Cor. 9:16) ‘Woe’ is a word not often used today. It was a common word in the Old English.

According to the Greek word translated woe, the better rendering would be ‘sorrow.’ In effect the apostle is saying, “I should be very unhappy if I could not preach the Gospel; indeed, it would be a cause of great distress to me. In view of my former course of persecuting the Christians, and the Lord’s great mercy to me, it would mean a loss of his favor and blessing should I refrain from proclaiming his message.” So it should be of great distress to all those today to whom the Lord has graciously granted the illumination of his Truth, if the opportunity of preaching this glorious Gospel were taken from them.

DIVINE MERCIES

Concerning our Heavenly Father’s gracious tender mercies toward us, the psalmist has defined some of these, saying, “He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings.” (Ps. 40:2) If we can truly apply these words heartily to ourselves, what a cause it is for thankfulness!

When we look about us, we see the whole world lying in the Wicked One, without God, and having no real hope, merely vague impressions. When we look back on our lives, we see how the Lord has delivered us from the horrible pit of condemnation and sin. We rejoice that he has had mercy upon us and delivered us, and established our feet of faith upon the rock, Christ Jesus and his redemptive work. Well may we give thanks, and tell his mercies abroad!

We also see the happy experience that fixed our choice upon our Savior, and our God. That was the time from which our goings were ‘established’ and our course was no longer wavering, fluctuating. It was there that we obtained a fixed purpose in life. As we have grown in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, there has been an ever-increasing determination not to be blown about by all the varying winds of philosophy and human speculation.

Praise God for what he already has done for us! As the psalmist proceeds to say, we each realize that “He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God.” (Ps. 40:3) The new song is not one of doubt or of fear, nor concerning anguish of sinners; but a song of God’s justice and mercy and love—reasonable and harmonious in its every phrase and modulation.

New life has been brought to us, new pleasures, as well as new aspirations and hopes. We can never thank the Lord enough for the blessings which we have already received at his hands for all the things which he has already done for us. And we joyfully proclaim this glorious ‘good news’ to others as we have opportunity.

Respecting this wondrous service, there are some who have thought that there is no way to preach except by a public discourse in a congregation. But this is not the Bible thought of preaching. Jesus talked to the people by the seaside, and along the way. He sat upon the edge of the well and preached the message of salvation. He preached to his disciples in the mountain. He journeyed with them and talked. And so with us—whatever means or time we may have for the preaching (or announcing) of the ‘good tidings,’ we should use.

Today there is radio, television, and the internet that can be used to offer booklets on God’s plan. While the new means for proclaiming the Gospel are wonderful, we can, individually, also have the joy of announcing these good tidings in our daily walk of life, as we meet the butcher, the baker, and the grocer; also our neighbors and friends. It may be done in conversation, or by handing out suitable literature which is available today in abundance.

Our Lord Jesus especially identified the Gospel with the kingdom; therefore we are to preach the good tidings of the kingdom. This has been God’s method for gathering the church; also for giving a witness to the world. Other important features are clearly taught in the Scriptures.

Some can preach in several ways. Others can preach in nearly every way; but some in very few ways. Most of us can announce the good tidings in some way. So we are very grateful to our Heavenly Father that we have so many helps in our day—radio, television, internet, and free literature. We very greatly appreciate all these and are seeking to make good use of them to the blessing of others, as well as for our own upbuilding.

Shall I, for fear of feeble man,
Refrain from showing God’s great plan?
Under a cover hide my light,
While thousands grope in cheerless night?

This path I therefore humbly tread
In footprints of our living Head,
In hope rejoicing as I go
In Him who leads and loves me so.

Dawn Bible Students Association

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He Giveth Quietness

***“When he giveth
quietness, who then
can make trouble?”***

—Job 34:29

WHO BUT HE, THE “God of all comfort,” can give quietness in the midst of tumults which rise upon the soul like sudden storms upon the sea? (II Cor. 1:3) Like ocean mariners in peril, we cry unto him, and he bringeth us to the desired haven of quietness

and peace in God.

What is the cry which brings this answer of peace? It is not a prayer that all occasion for disturbance shall be removed, for it is not always the Divine will to bring peace to the human spirit in that way; it is not always the best way. But there is a cry which never fails to bring the quietness in which none can ‘make trouble.’ It is a prayer for sweet, trustful, loving acquiescence in the will of God.

May	thy	will,	not	mine,	be	done;
May	thy	will	and	mine	be	one;
Peace	I	crave,	and	it	must	be,

Lord, in being one with thee.

What is it that disturbs my spirit? Is it anxiety about my work, my finances, my reputation, my friends? Suppose that my Father in heaven should hear my prayer and remove every apparent cause for unrest in regard to one, or all, of these matters today? That would not give settled peace, for in a life so full of uncertainties as this, new occasions of anxiety would probably arise tomorrow.

If I say, “Lord, let each one of these matters which concern my peace of mind so closely be under thy control: order all entirely according to thy will, for thou art my Father and my Friend: thy will is that thy children should have the very best in all things: and thou knowest what is best for me,” what a place of rest is that! How the sense of heavy responsibility rolls off. How the distracting care is shifted from the heart too weak to bear it, to the strong shoulder upon which the government of all things rightfully and easily rest.

If this experience of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price, is not realized at once, we must not be discouraged. It is not only of a great price as to value, but it often costs a great price to gain it.

It follows successive battles often repeated, self-surrender, and multiplied trials in which the unfailing care and love of God have been clearly manifested. We were watching the sea waves under the northeast wind, how disturbed and dark they were! Suddenly, with a fierceness which seemed cruel, the rain fell in torrents, and the unresisting waters grew perfectly calm as under an overwhelming surprise. When the storm had passed, the setting sun shone gloriously, and the quieted waters were beautiful in colors of rose and gold.

Nature has its spiritual correspondencies. Surprise comes upon surprise, suddenly, overwhelmingly. The spirit which once tossed restlessly in chafing winds of lesser trials sinks in sweet submission under heavier grief. We learn that even in the storm God was, and at last his conscious love, his abiding presence, his unvarying peace—the beauty of godlikeness—glorify the character and life.

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