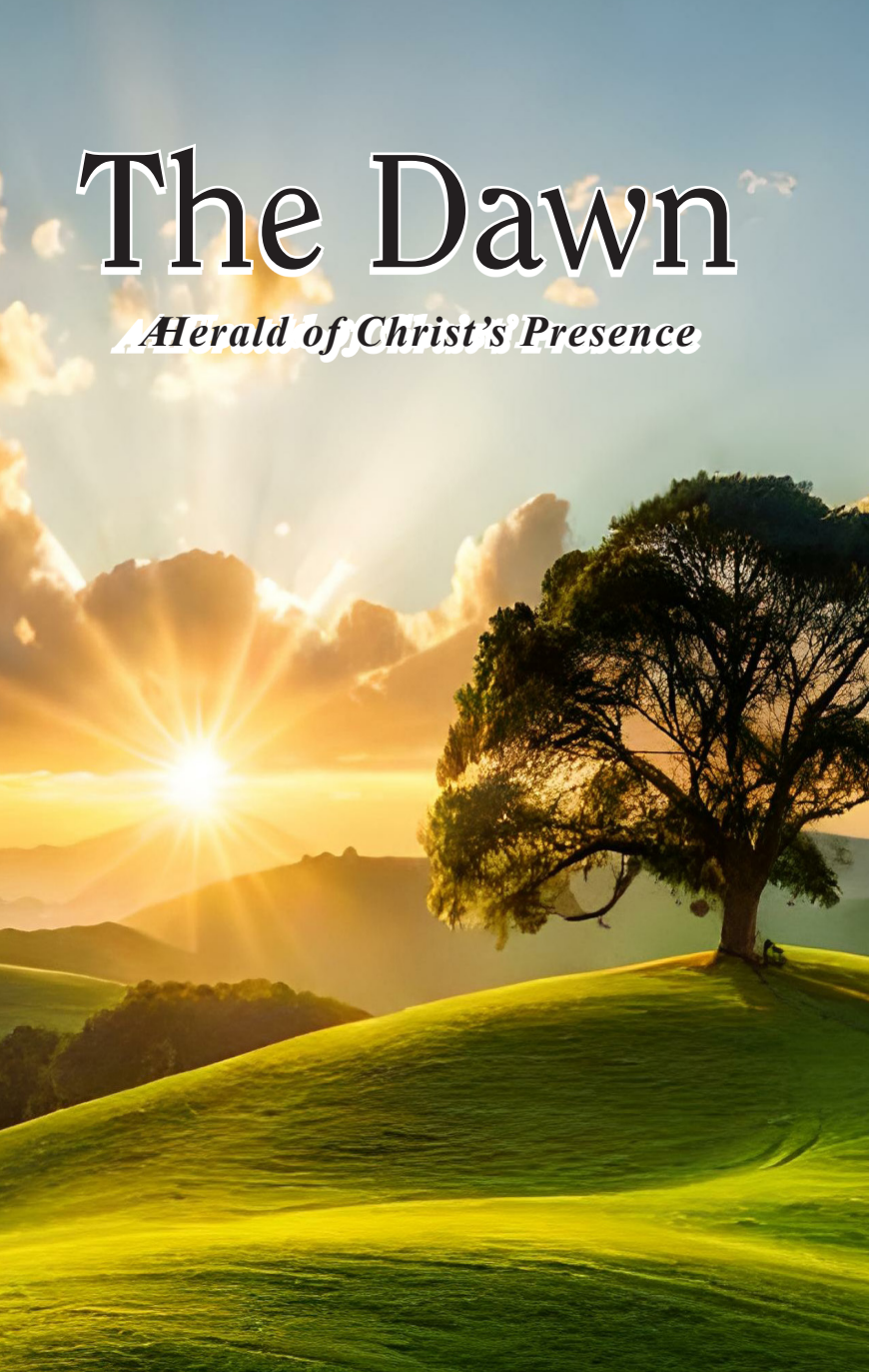


The Dawn

Herald of Christ's Presence



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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HIGHLIGHTS OF DAWN

Restitution—The Bible's Testimony 2

INTERNATIONAL BIBLE STUDIES

Young Jesus in the Temple 18

Lord of the Sabbath 20

Cleansing the Temple 22

Jesus Predicts the Temple's
Destruction 24

CHRISTIAN LIFE AND DOCTRINE

Children of Promise 26

The Red Sea and Beyond 39

Christian Meditation 52

Weekly Prayer Meeting Texts 51

OBITUARIES 38

SPEAKERS' APPOINTMENTS 62

CONVENTIONS 63

Restitution—The Bible's Testimony

“And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution [restoration] of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.”

—Acts 3:20,21

THE TERM “RESTITUTION” means restoration, and the Apostle Peter’s use of this word in our opening text is part of his prophecy of events which would follow the second coming of Christ, indicating that there is to be a period of restoration. This program calls, not for the creation of a new paradise, but for the reestablishment of the paradise which was lost.

Jesus tells us in Luke 19:10 that the Son of man came to “seek and to save that which was lost.” The accomplishment of this divine purpose is centered in Jesus. At his First Advent he “gave himself a ransom,” or corresponding price, in order that the sentence of death imposed upon mankind in Eden could be set aside. (I Tim. 2:5,6) He comes the second time for the purpose of restoring to life those who died as the result of Adam’s transgression.

If we can visualize the perfection and happiness enjoyed by our first parents before they transgressed the divine law, then we can understand, at least partially, the extraordinary changes that are to be effected in the world when the lost paradise, with all of its blessings, is restored by the returned Christ. The Garden of Eden was but a sample of what the whole earth will be like when God's program of restitution, administered by Christ, is complete.

GOD'S FAVOR RETURNS

In the verse prior to our opening text, the apostle says that "times of refreshing" shall come from the "presence of the Lord." This expression, "presence of the Lord," is translated from Greek words meaning "out from the face of the Lord." (*Albert Barnes' Notes on the Bible*) This phrase suggests the thought of God's favor being manifested toward the human race. The complete thought outlined by the apostle therefore is that the second coming of Christ will usher in a period during which he would shine forth his love and kindness upon the human race, and bless them by restoring them to perfection of human life.

The apostle declares that all of God's holy prophets have foretold the coming "times of restitution." David was one of these prophets who had much to say on the subject. In his thirtieth Psalm, verse 5, he mentions it in connection with the thought of God's returning favor. He says: "For his anger endureth but for a moment; in his favour is life; weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." God's anger against his human creation began when our first parents disobeyed his

law. As a result, they were sentenced to death and driven out from their perfect Edenic home. Because their children were imperfect when born, the penalty of death passed on to them and to the whole human race. The entire world has been passing through a nighttime of sorrow and death.—Rom. 5:12; 3:23

While this sentence of death has continued for six thousand years, yet from the standpoint of an eternity of God's favors and blessings, it has been "but for a moment," and for each individual it has been no longer than the few brief years from the cradle to the grave.

This nighttime of God's disfavor is not to continue indefinitely. God will again turn his face toward the human race. His favor was first of all shown in the sending of his Son to be man's Redeemer, and is further demonstrated in sending him the second time to restore the race which he redeemed. David stated, "In his favour is life," which means that when God again smiles upon the human race, sickness and death will end. It means that the long night of sin, sorrow, and death will terminate in a morning of joy.

THE WORK OF REDEMPTION

The coming period of restitution is made possible by the redemptive work of Christ, accomplished at his First Advent. The Prophet Hosea refers to this, when, speaking as a mouthpiece of the Lord he says, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction."—Hos. 13:14

Notice how God's prophet, in the text just quoted, associates the ransom with the destruction of death. The New Testament explains the philosophy of this by showing that Jesus, the Son of God, was sent into the world by the Heavenly Father to be this ransom. He came to die, "the just for the unjust." (I Pet. 3:18) Paul explains that this was all according to the will of God in connection with his purpose to save mankind from death. The apostle says, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time."— I Tim. 2:5,6

The benefits of the redemptive work of Christ are available to the individual only upon the conditions of knowledge and belief, so the apostle assures us that this knowledge will be "testified" to all "in due time." The due time for the world to have the knowledge of Christ's redemption testified to them will be the Messianic kingdom period, which follows the Second Advent of the Master.

ALL OF GOD'S PROPHETS

Peter tells us that the facts concerning the "times of restitution" were testified by the mouth of all God's holy prophets since the world began. An examination of the Old Testament scriptures reveals that this is true. Isaiah was one of these holy prophets. In the 35th chapter of his prophecy, he tells us the blind eyes shall be opened, the deaf ears shall be unstopped, the dumb tongue shall sing, and the lame man shall leap as a deer.

Isaiah also tells us a "highway" is to be opened up for the people, a way that will lead to holiness,

or perfection. He tells that everything will be very plain on this highway—so plain that the ordinary wayfaring man, though unlearned, will not err. This agrees with other prophetic statements concerning that time, which inform us that then the knowledge of the Lord shall fill the earth as the waters cover the sea.—Isa. 35:5-10; 11:9; Hab. 2:14

The prophet assures us that there shall be no lion on this highway. (Isa. 35:9) Peter tells us of the present time that “the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” (I Pet. 5:8) According to the Apostle John, Satan is to be bound in the very beginning of the restitution period. (Rev. 20:1,2) Thus the prophet was quite correct when he said that no lion shall go up on the highway that leads back to life and paradise.

Isaiah continues his description of the highway of holiness by saying no “ravenous beast shall go up thereon.” The Bible tells us of many different beasts that have afflicted and tormented the people down through the ages. Some of these beasts are referred to by Daniel and the Revelator. They are symbolic of beastly governments of one kind or another that have exploited and oppressed the people. However, before the Messianic kingdom is established, all these “beasts” are to be destroyed; so it will be true that “no ravenous beast shall go up thereon.”—Isa. 35:9

Finally, the prophet tells us that over this highway “the ransomed of the LORD shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.” (vs. 10) Indeed, that was God’s purpose in ransoming the human

race; namely, that they might return from death, and once more enter into the joy of living. It is a joy which will far exceed that of their former experience because they will come to know God. If obedient to the kingdom's righteous laws, they will continue to live, will abide in his favor, and will receive his blessings that "maketh rich."—Prov. 10:22

When viewed from the standpoint of these prophecies, restitution is seen to include resurrection. There are students of the Bible who are willing to admit that the second coming of Christ may result in some partial recovery of the then living generation. However, by doing so they severely limit the scope of restitution, not realizing that if all the families of the earth are to be blessed, and if there are to be "times of restitution of all things," it means that those who have died, as well as the living, must be given an opportunity to be blessed. (Gen. 12:3; 28:14) Thus, when viewed from the standpoint of prophecy, restitution is seen to include resurrection.

Job, another of God's holy prophets, expressed the hope of a resurrection, saying, "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) Thus Job expressed the belief that he would hear the voice of the Lord calling him forth from the tomb. Jesus agrees with this, and makes it more comprehensive by saying, "The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his (the Son of man's) voice, And shall come forth."—John 5:28,29

SODOMITES TO BE RESTORED

Ezekiel was also one of God's holy prophets, and he lays emphasis on the fact that even such wicked people as the Sodomites are to be brought back from the grave during the times of restitution. Chiding the Israelites for their unfaithfulness, yet at the same time reminding them of their hope of a resurrection, Ezekiel says: "When thy sisters, Sodom and her daughters, shall return to their former estate, then thou and thy daughters shall return to your former estate."—Ezek. 16:55

This, of course, does not imply universal salvation for the wicked, irrespective of their obedience to the divine law, but it does mean an opportunity for salvation to all. Jesus said concerning the Sodomites, that it would be more tolerable for them in the Day of Judgment than it would be for the people of certain Jewish cities. (Matt. 10:15; 11:24) The opportunity for everlasting life upon the condition of obedience will be offered to all during the times of restitution. How will it be more favorable for the Sodomites than for many others, such as those who lived in certain Jewish cities?

Because the Jewish nation had been greatly blessed by the Lord, their sin was against greater knowledge than that of the Sodomites. Hence it will require a greater degree of humility on their part to come back into harmony with the Lord's law. Jesus said that if the mighty works that had been done in Capernaum, had been done in Sodom, the Sodomites would have repented. (Matt. 11:21-23) Many great works will be done in Sodom. They will be awakened from the sleep of death and be given an opportunity, under the most favorable circumstances,

to repent and live, and doubtless most of them will be penitent and gladly go up on the “highway” to everlasting life.

CHILDREN TO BE RESURRECTED

Jeremiah, another holy prophet of the Lord, also spoke of restitution. In the 31st chapter of his prophecy we find a promise concerning the resurrection of children. This particular promise has to do specifically with those children who were slaughtered by Herod at the time of Jesus’ birth. It shows, nevertheless, that it is God’s purpose to restore to life all those who have gone down into death as children. How grand it will be for mothers to have their children restored to them, and to have the privilege of raising them just as though they had not died. Jeremiah says: “Thus saith the LORD; a voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping; Rachel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not. Thus saith the LORD; Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the LORD; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy [death]. And there is hope in thine end, saith the LORD, that thy children shall come again to their own border.”—Jer. 31:15-17

The Prophet Daniel also foretold the coming times of restitution, indicating that it follows the great time of trouble with which the present age is now ending. In pronouncing the sentence of death upon our first parents, God said, “Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” (Gen. 3:19) Daniel says that those “that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake.” (Dan. 12:2) This, in reality, means

the setting aside of the Adamic death sentence, and the restoration of those in the sleep of death to life again. What a beautiful way of illustrating the blessed work of restitution!

Another of God's holy prophets was Amos, and speaking for God, he says: "In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old." (Amos 9:11) David's tabernacle was a temporary structure built to house the Ark of the Covenant at the time it was restored to Israel from the hands of their enemies. The Ark of the Covenant was a beautiful symbol of the presence and favor of God. (Exod. 30:6; Num. 17:4) It was wrested from the Israelites for a time, and when it was restored to them, it meant that God's favor was again upon that nation, and this signaled a time for great rejoicing.—I Sam. chapters 4-7; II Sam. 6:1-18; 7:1

The restoration of the tabernacle of David therefore is a symbol indicating that God's favor is to be restored to Israel, after having been withdrawn from them for a long period of time. This is exactly what will happen on behalf of Israel and the whole world during the "times of restitution." This prophecy is quoted in the 15th chapter of Acts, with its fulfillment shown to be following the return of Christ, and that the Gentiles as well as the Jews will then be blessed.

We quote: "James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon [Peter] hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written;

After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.”—Acts 15:13-17

Here we are shown that God’s purpose since the death and resurrection of Jesus has not been to convert the world, but merely to select from among mankind a little company—“a people for his name”—to be associated with the Master in the future kingdom work. Here again the glorious objective of God’s purpose of love is set forth because we are told that after this people for his name is taken out from the Gentiles, then God’s favor will return to the Jews. Then, also, “all the Gentiles” will have an opportunity to “seek after the Lord.”

SAVIORS ON MOUNT ZION

Obadiah was also one of the Lord’s holy prophets, and in the very last verse of his prophecy, he says, “Saviours shall come up on mount Zion to judge the mount of Esau; and the kingdom shall be the LORD’S.” Ordinarily we think of only one Savior, and indeed, Jesus is the world’s Savior. Apart from the shed blood of Jesus there could be no salvation for anyone. Nevertheless, his footstep followers are invited to share with him in the work of bringing salvation to the world. They suffer and die with him in order that they may live and reign with him in his kingdom, and his reign is for the purpose of rescuing the world from death.—Rom. 8:16,17; II Tim. 2:11,12; Rev 20:6

In Revelation 14:1 the identity of these Saviors on mount Zion is revealed. John says, “I looked, and lo, a Lamb stood on mount Zion, and with him an hundred and forty and four thousand, having his Father’s name written in their foreheads.” Now we can see what James meant by a people gathered from among the Gentiles—a people for God’s name. To start with, this glorious opportunity was limited to the Jews. Although as a nation they rejected it, there were individual Jews who understood and embraced the opportunity, but not the required number. As a result, the Lord turned to the Gentiles to make up the full ordained number of “Saviors” that were to be on the symbolic mount Zion with Jesus. They all must bear the Father’s name, since they are all taken into the divine family and thus become the ruling house of God in the new kingdom.

Jesus’ followers who are pictured as Saviors with him on mount Zion during the kingdom period are such not because they have given themselves as ransoms. Indeed, it is not necessary that they do so. However, because of their faithfulness in following Jesus into sacrificial death they are given a share with him in dispensing the blessings promised as a result of his ransom work. When, as the prophet shows, the Saviors stand on mount Zion, it will be the time when the “kingdom shall be the LORD’S.” That will be the time of restitution.

MOUNTAIN OF THE LORD’S HOUSE

Micah, still another of the holy prophets, wrote in chapter 4, verses 1-4, as follows: “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.”

By referring to Daniel 2:35-44, it will be seen that the “mountain of the LORD” refers to God’s kingdom. Notice how practical are the restitution blessings that will be dispensed to the world during that kingdom period. The picture in the book of Micah begins with the “last days,” that period just prior to the kingdom’s establishment, during which the old Satanic order of things will be set aside by a great time of trouble. The people, in their distress, will look to the Lord for help and instruction as to what to do—how to extricate themselves from the ruin that has been precipitated by mankind’s selfishness and foolishness.

Then, giving recognition to the new kingdom, they will be taught of the Lord’s ways, which will be ways of peace instead of the ways of war. Economic security will also be one of the features of that new day of the Messianic kingdom. Every man

will “dwell under his vine and under his fig tree.” We are not to understand this too literally, of course, as it is merely a picture of security and happiness in which none shall make afraid. The thought is that in the times of restitution, all will be amply provided for. The provision will be permanent, lasting just as long as the individual continues to obey the laws of God.

A UNIVERSAL RELIGION

Habakkuk was a holy prophet of the Lord, and he tells of that day of restitution, saying that “the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.” (Hab. 2:14) Zephaniah, another of God’s prophets, also tells of the God-given enlightenment which will come to the people at that time. “For 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.”—Zeph. 3:9

The blinding influences of Satan will be dispelled by the light of the knowledge of the glory of God. The pure language—the instruction—which will then be turned to the people, shall, as the prophet says, result in all mankind calling upon the name of the Lord to serve him with one consent—that is, shoulder to shoulder. Thus will the true knowledge of God be restored during those times of restitution.

The Prophet Zechariah, who also spoke for God concerning that glad day of restitution, goes into detail in explaining how the enlightening influences of the kingdom period will affect the people. He says: “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.” (Zech. 14:6,7) The thought here is that of gradual enlightenment. It is easy to see how that will be brought about. The Messianic kingdom will first of all be established with the living generations. When we realize the size of planet Earth, and the myriads of people who live upon it, we can understand why some time will elapse before all will come to know of the new kingdom. It will take time, also, for the people to get rid of their superstitious ideas concerning God, so that they will be able to know him aright.

Then there will be all the billions who have died, who, when raised from the dead, will need to be instructed in the true knowledge of God. They have not learned anything while in the grave. (Eccl. 9:10) Hence as they are brought forth from the tomb they will need to learn about the true God in order to have an opportunity to obey his laws. The work of enlightening the people will go on throughout the entire thousand-year “day” of the kingdom.

That period is referred to as being partly light and partly dark. That is, it will be a time when the people are having their blindness and superstition gradually removed. Until the work is complete, there will still be some symbolic darkness in the world, but in the evening, or close of that glorious day, it will be fully light. By then, the enlightening and healing influences of the “Sun of righteousness” as prophesied by the Prophet Malachi, will have scattered all the mists of darkness, and the knowledge of God’s glory shall then fill the earth.—Mal. 4:2

TANGIBLE BLESSINGS

The result of Christ's Second Advent is to be a glorious one. The blessings to be dispensed through the administration of his kingdom are to be very practical. Upon the testimony of all God's holy prophets who foretold the times of restitution, these blessings are to be: enlightenment concerning the true God and his plan; an end to all the countless superstitious beliefs that have plagued a bewildered world since the days of Eden; freedom from disease of all kinds; release from Adamic death; no more wars; and economic security for all.

All of these very practical and satisfying good things of the Messianic kingdom will not be dispensed unconditionally. The Apostle Peter is very careful to remind us, when telling us of the times of restitution, "it shall be, that every soul that shall not hearken to that prophet," and continues to sin willfully after coming to a knowledge of righteousness, will be cut off in death.—Acts 3:23, *American Standard Version*

God gave Adam and Eve dominion over the earth and the things of the earth. The obedient ones of that future day, which we believe will include the vast majority of mankind, shall have the original dominion restored to them. Thus, again, we have the thought of restitution, the restoration of paradise, worldwide in scope and effect. What a glorious hope this is for the poor, sin-sick and dying world.

Consider the changes that will be brought about as a result of the destruction of disease and death. Think of other changes due to the fact that there shall be no more war. Visualize the results that will come about when the people learn to know and to

love and to sincerely serve the true God. Contemplate what it will mean when love takes the place of selfishness as the motivating principle back of all human activity.

Ponder, too, the changed viewpoint when people will not need to think about and plan for death. Envision an eternity of joy stretching before them instead of a short, hectic existence made up, at best, of only a small portion of happiness, and the rest, disappointment and sorrow. To put in the words of one of God's inspired and holy prophets, think of the time when "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."—Rev. 21:4

While this may look impossible to us, perhaps, because we have never seen anything like it before, nothing of this kind is impossible with God. Life itself seems impossible to us; that is to say, we do not fully understand what life is. Who is wise enough to tell us the philosophy of a heartbeat? Yet God, the Creator, created the heart and the heartbeat, and the same God is abundantly able to restore in the billions of humans the heartbeat that once haltingly pulsed with a measure of life, but finally succumbed to the ravages of death, because God's justice had decreed that no imperfect human creature could continue to live.

This glorious "restitution of all things" is to be accomplished by the Messianic kingdom which is soon to be established. Let us continue to pray for that day, as Jesus taught us: "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."—Matt. 6:10 ■

Young Jesus in the Temple

Key Verse: “*Why were you searching for me? he asked. Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?*”
—**Luke 2:49**, *New International Version*

Selected Scripture:
Luke 2:41-52

WHEN JESUS WAS TWELVE

years old he went with his parents, Mary and Joseph, to Jerusalem to keep the “Festival of the Passover,” also called the feast of unleavened bread. (Luke 2:41,42, *NIV*) This was a requirement under the Jewish Law. “Three times in a year shall all thy males appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose; in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles: and they shall not appear before the LORD empty.” (Deut. 16:16) Mary and Joseph, being of a righteous heart, knew the importance of keeping God’s law to the best of their ability, and so they made this annual journey from Nazareth to Jerusalem, a distance of about sixty miles.

When “the festival was over,” Mary and Joseph began the trip back to their home in Nazareth, together with their relatives and friends. Young Jesus had stayed in Jerusalem, and since so many were traveling together back to Nazareth, Mary and Joseph did not realize he was missing from the group until they had traveled a full day’s journey. They looked among the entire traveling

company and “when they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him,” which likewise required a day’s journey.—Luke 2:43-45, *NIV*

After arriving in Jerusalem, they searched for Jesus all day, without success. This was now the third day that Jesus had been missing from his family. Finally, “after three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.”—vss. 46,47, *NIV*

Mary, although thankful and relieved that her son was found safe and well, said to him, “Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.” (vs. 48, *NIV*) This was a natural and reasonable response from a concerned parent, especially considering Jesus was only twelve years old.

Jesus’ reply, recorded in our Key Verse, was quite astounding. He, in effect, reminded his mother that the Temple in Jerusalem is the first place they should have thought to look for him. Mary had been told by an angel, even before Jesus’ birth, that he was to be “the Son of God,” and that “his kingdom will never end.” (Luke 1:31-35, *NIV*) Therefore, she should have realized that from a very young age Jesus would have a great desire to learn as much as he could about God’s plan, his responsibilities as a Jew born under the Law, and what God’s will was for him. How appropriate it was for her young son to sit at the feet of the teachers in the Temple, soaking up the wealth of information they provided.

Jesus realized, although it was important for him to gain as much knowledge and understanding of God’s plans and purposes as he could at a young age, it was proper for him to be subject to his parents until he reached adulthood. Thus the account states, “Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. ... And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.”—Luke 2:51,52, *NIV* ■

Lord of the Sabbath

Key Verse: “For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”

—**Matthew 12:8,**
New International Version

Selected Scripture:
Matthew 12:1-8

THE FOURTH COMMAND-ment God gave to Israel through Moses states, “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ... On it you shall not do any work.” (Exod. 20:8-11, *NIV*) The Hebrew word “Sabbath” means “to rest.” The Ten Commandments were the basis of the Law

Covenant, compulsory upon every Jew.

However, during Jesus’ ministry many religious leaders had become formalistic, adding illogical, man-made restrictions to the commandments which God had given, rather than teaching the real meaning and principles for each of God’s instructions. Jesus reproved this and, referring to the religious leaders, said, “They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people’s shoulders.”—Matt. 23:1-4, *NIV*

An example of this is recorded in our lesson, when the Pharisees accused the Lord’s disciples who, when passing through a wheat field on the Sabbath, had rubbed some grains in their hands and ate them because they were hungry. (Matt. 12:1) The Pharisees construed this as a violation of the Sabbath. Jesus declared they had not disobeyed the Sabbath commandment, stating, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.” (Mark 2:27, *NIV*) He then cited what David had done. In an emergency David had requested for he and his men, some of the shewbread which had been removed

on the Sabbath day from the table in the Tabernacle, which only Jewish priests were allowed to eat. They were not guilty before God.—Matt. 12:3,4; I Sam. 21:1-6; Lev. 24:5-9

Jesus then asserted to the Pharisees his authority to interpret the Law, saying that one “greater than the temple is here.” (Matt. 12:6, *NIV*) As his only begotten son, Jesus was the mouthpiece of God and therefore, the proper teacher to set forth the real significance of the Law to the Jews, including the meaning and principles concerning the Sabbath. (John 12:49,50; 14:10; 17:8) Our Lord pointed out, “If ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless.” (Matt. 12:7; Hos. 6:6) In other words, if the Pharisees had given heed to this, their thoughts would have been more merciful, in line with God’s principles, and this would have hindered them from condemning his disciples, who were not guilty of any violation of the Sabbath day commandment.

Many of Jesus’ miraculous healings during his earthly ministry were done on the Sabbath day. (Mark 1:21-27; 3:1-6; Luke 13:10-17; 14:1-6; John 5:1-17; 9:1-16) This foreshadowed the work of healing which he will do for the world of mankind during the greater Sabbath, the Messianic Age.—Isa. 35:5,6,10

A personal lesson that we can draw from this account is this: being critical or fault-finding indicates a lack of mercy, a lack of love. Do we have the spirit of love which “thinketh no evil,” is not suspicious of evil, does not look for faults in others, and does not attribute to them evil motives? (I Cor. 13:5) Someone once wisely remarked, “Faults are thick where love is thin.” Paul wrote, “Love is the fulfilling of the law.” (Rom. 13:8,10) The possession of love is indicated by having mercy toward friends, brethren, mankind, and even toward our enemies. Let us heed this important lesson from our Lord Jesus, and strive to apply it daily in our lives. ■

Cleansing the Temple

Key Verse: *“To those who sold doves he said, Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father’s house into a market!”*

—**John 2:16**, *New International Version*

Selected Scripture:
John 2:13-22

JESUS WAS BORN “UNDER the law,” and all male Jews were required to appear before the Lord at three feasts each year. (Gal. 4:4; Exod. 23:14-17; Deut. 16:16) This lesson finds Jesus in Jerusalem at the time of the Jewish Passover feast. As one faithfully keeping the Law, Jesus went directly to the Temple, the center of Israel’s religious worship.

“In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money.” (John 2:14) When the Israelites came to Jerusalem to keep these required feasts, certain sacrifices and offerings were made. The original intent of the Law given by God was that each family would provide their own animals and offerings for such occasions. However, the Jewish leaders saw these occasions as opportunities to engage in the “business” of selling these things to the people at the Temple. This eliminated the necessity for the people to make the personal effort to bring animals and other offerings on the long journey to Jerusalem.

When Jesus saw this going on at the Temple, he “made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables,” and said,

“Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father’s house into a market!” (vss. 15,16, *NIV*) Jesus responded strongly to this sinful condition for two reasons. First, he saw the greed of the religious leaders as they had made a business at the Temple, his “Father’s house,” demonstrating a lack of reverence for our Heavenly Father. Secondly, the people had allowed themselves to accept this lack of reverence for the house of God.

Seeing the strong action taken by their Master, Jesus’ disciples “recalled the scripture saying, I am consumed with zeal for thy house.” (vs. 17, *James Moffatt Translation*; Ps. 69:9) Jesus’ “zeal” was directed in righteous indignation against the hypocrisy he saw at the Jews’ Temple, mixing business with the worship of God.

God had instructed the Israelites, through his servant Moses: “What does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear [reverence] the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul,” and to “have reverence for my sanctuary.” (Deut. 10:12; Lev. 19:30, *NIV*) However the nation of Israel, in general, failed to fully reverence the Lord. During Jesus’ earthly ministry he was asked, “Which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” He replied, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”—Matt. 22:36,37, *NIV*

The Apostle Paul explained that Jesus and his church “are the temple of God.” (I Cor. 3:16) When the Lord’s people meet together, such gatherings should be considered as holy assemblies. Therefore, our conversations should build one another up along spiritual lines. The prophet Malachi wrote, “Those who feared the LORD with awe-filled reverence spoke to one another; and the LORD paid attention and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him of those who fear the LORD with an attitude of reverence and respect and who esteem His name.”—Mal. 3:16, *Amplified Bible* ■

Jesus Predicts the Temple's Destruction

Key Verse: “Do you see all these things? he asked. Truly I tell you, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down.”
—**Matthew 24:2,**
New International Version

Selected Scripture:
Matthew 24:1-14

asked Jesus three questions: “Tell us, they said, when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming [Greek: *parousia*, meaning presence] and of the end of the age?” (Matt. 24:3, *NIV*; Mark 13:1-4) Jesus’ response began with a warning, “Watch out that no one deceives you.” This implied that various deceptions, both from individuals as well as from religious institutions and denominations, would arise throughout the ensuing age which would “deceive many.”—Matt. 24:4,5, *NIV*

Then Jesus explained that “the end” of the Christian age would not immediately take place, but that many other events such as “wars and rumors of wars,” as well as “famines and earthquakes in various places” would

AFTER JESUS HAD announced to the multitudes and his disciples “woes” that would come upon the Scribes and Pharisees, he concluded with a pronouncement upon the Jewish nation, “Your house is left unto you desolate.” (Matt. 23:1-38) Then, as they were leaving the Temple, his disciples “came up to him to call his attention to its buildings.”—Matt. 24:1

When the group reached the Mount of Olives the disciples

occur prior to his kingdom being established on the earth. (vss. 6-8, *NIV*) Jesus further warned that because of believing in him, many of his followers would “be persecuted and put to death” and “hated.” He added that many would “turn away from the faith” and “betray and hate each other.”—vss. 9,10, *NIV*

This happened, especially from the 12th to 15th centuries. During the inquisitions which took place throughout Europe, thousands of the Lord’s followers were persecuted, tortured, and violently put to death. Therefore, Jesus spoke these words to warn and strengthen his followers who would suffer this, so that when such persecution happened, they would not think it strange. (Rev. 2:8-10) Jesus also warned that “many false prophets [teachers] will appear and deceive many people.” (Matt. 24:11, *NIV*) Indeed, powerful and popular false religious systems arose, teaching God-dishonoring false doctrines.—I Tim. 4:1-3; Rev. 2:12-15,18-26

Jesus continued, saying, “Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold.” (Matt. 24:12, *NIV*) Along these lines Paul wrote: “There will be terrible times in the last days,” because people will be “lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, ... unholy, without love, ... not lovers of the good, ... lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—having a form of godliness but denying its power.”—II Tim. 3:1-7, *NIV*

This is a test permitted upon each of the Lord’s followers, whether to simply “go along” with the worldly spirit and standards, or to strive in following God’s principles. Jesus encouraged his followers, saying, “The one who stands firm to the end will be saved.” (Matt. 24:13) We need to persevere and “take courage,” in spite of such tribulation, realizing that the end of this time of testing is near. (John 16:33, *New American Standard Bible*) Christ’s kingdom will soon be established throughout the earth and bring “great joy, which shall be to all people.”—Luke 2:10 ■

Children of Promise

*“I will certainly
return unto thee
according to the
time of life; and, lo,
Sarah thy wife
shall have a son.”
—Genesis 18:10*

MANY YEARS AFTER
being called by God out of
the land of Ur, Abraham was
divinely commanded to go
with his son Isaac to the land
of Moriah. God said, “Take
now thy son, thine only son

Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land
of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering
upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee
of.”—Gen. 22:2

After arriving at Moriah, Abraham prepared to
offer his beloved son in sacrifice as testimony to his
great love for God. However, at the crucial moment,
the hand of Abraham was stopped by an angel from
sacrificing Isaac. (vss. 11,12) Speaking for God, the
angel said, “By myself have I sworn, saith the LORD,
for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not
withheld thy son, thine only son: That in blessing I
will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply
thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand
which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall

possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.”—vss. 16-18

NOT THROUGH THE LAW

Later, the Israelites came to understand their unique national status under the Law Covenant instituted by God through Moses at Mount Sinai. It was confirmed that they were the promised seed and, as Abraham’s natural descendants, were the sole inheritors of all that was promised him by God. (Exod. 6:2-8) However, the Apostle Paul explains, “The promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect: Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression. Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all.”—Rom. 4:13-16

THE PROMISED SEED

In the foregoing verses, Paul points out that the foundation of God’s promises of a seed do not rest on the Law of Moses but by the faith of Abraham. The apostle further teaches, “Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise

are counted for the seed. For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sara shall have a son. And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac.”—Rom. 9:6-10

The promised seed that will bless all the families of the earth is not natural Isaac, for he serves only as a picture of a greater spiritual Isaac. The true seed—spiritual Isaac—will consist of both Jew and Gentile. During this present Gospel Age, this spiritual seed is begotten in a new and special manner, like unto that by which natural Isaac was begotten through a specific promise of God.

PROMISE AT MAMRE

The promise to Abraham was given in Mamre and is recorded for us: “The LORD appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground.” Continuing, one of the men said, “Where is Sarah thy wife? And he said, Behold, in the tent. And he said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard it in the tent door, which was behind him. Now Abraham and Sarah were old and well stricken in age; and it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women.” “And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac.”—Gen. 18:1,2,9-11; 17:19

Paul proclaims that the miracle and the promise relative to Isaac’s birth thus invalidate the

Israelites' claim of an exclusive right to the promised seed of Abraham. Neither the promise to Abraham and Sarah, nor the child she subsequently delivered, were the products of the Law, but were products of their faith in the power of God. In his epistle to the Hebrew brethren, the apostle emphasizes that Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac signified that the salvation of all mankind is to be accomplished through the vital element of faith alone. He said, "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised."—Heb. 11:8-11

CONSIDER THE PROMISE

As he preached the pure message of faith, Paul was vigorously opposed by Christian converts from Judaism who taught obedience to both Christ and the Law of Moses. Countering this, the apostle alludes to the promise and the miracle that pertains to Sarah and the birth of Isaac, and asks, "Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman

was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise.”—Gal. 4:21-23

Paul then reveals the symbolic significance of Abraham’s wives. “This is allegorically speaking, for these women are two covenants: one proceeding from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother. For it is written, Rejoice, barren woman who does not bear; break forth and shout, you who are not in labor; for more numerous are the children of the desolate than of the one who has a husband.”—vss. 24-27, *New American Standard Bible*

TWO COVENANTS

By naming Hagar, a bondwoman, and alluding to Sarah, a free woman, Paul refers to two of Abraham’s wives. These are figures, or symbols, of two covenants. One covenant enslaves through the flesh and is characterized by literal Jerusalem. The other covenant liberates through the spirit and is characterized by spiritual Jerusalem. Paul says Hagar represents the Law Covenant which binds those under it to ordinances they are incapable of keeping. Sarah, on the other hand, represents a covenant of liberation wherein all under it are free from the demands of those ordinances. The apostle purposely avoids mention of Keturah, Abraham’s third wife. (Gen. 25:1,2) Although a third covenant may be implied by Keturah, it would have broadened the focus of Paul’s subject beyond the two points he is making. First, the Law Covenant

represents Israel's bondage to a standard which kept those under it perpetually condemned. Second, there is another covenant which, during the present Gospel Age, represents the prospect of liberty through Christ from all condemnation.

THE SARAH COVENANT

Paul declared that the covenant pictured by faithful Sarah "is our mother." Therefore, the covenant from which the promised seed will be brought forth can be properly designated the Sarah Covenant, or as it is sometimes stated, the Sarah feature of the Abrahamic Covenant. Since Pentecost, prospective members of the promised seed class are begotten by the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul identifies this spiritual Isaac class, the seed of promise, as consisting of Christ and all those who "belong to" him during the present age. "The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, And to seeds, as referring to many, but rather to one, And to your seed, that is, Christ. ... For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ, ... for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise." —Gal. 3:16,27-29, *NASB*

Those followers of Christ who remain faithful will, with him, constitute the true promised seed—the greater Isaac—which will bless "all the kindreds of the earth." (Acts 3:25) These faithful ones are the saints of God. They are begotten, nurtured, and brought to completion within the figurative womb of the Sarah Covenant, which is also described as a covenant of sacrifice. *(Continued on page 36)*

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(Continued from page 31) “Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice.”—Ps. 50:5

The apostle reminded the Judaizers that the Sarah Covenant of sacrifice had centuries before been pictorially foretold, and although long barren, it would in time bear greater fruitage than the Law Covenant to which the Jews were so zealously and erroneously devoted. Addressing those begotten of the Holy Spirit of God, the apostle directly states his point, saying, “Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.” (Gal. 4:28) Thus, Paul does not refer to the promise given in the land of Moriah—Genesis 22—that pertains to Abraham, but to the promise given in the land of Mamre—Genesis 18—that pertains to Sarah giving birth to Isaac, a child of promise.

BONDWOMAN CAST OUT

In his epistle to the Galatians, Paul continues to counter the teaching of the Judaizers. He speaks of the history of conflict within Abraham’s very household wherein the child of the flesh, Ishmael, persecuted the younger child, Isaac, who had been begotten by the power of God. This resulted in the casting out of the fleshly child and his mother Hagar. The apostle says, “As then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son: for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.”—Gal. 4:29-31; Gen. 21:9,10

A SPECIAL CREATION

Isaac was begotten and born under extraordinary circumstances. He was a special creation of God's power upon Sarah's womb. Paul makes it clear that it is to be likewise with spiritual Isaac. This spiritual class of both Jews and Gentiles, with Christ Jesus as its head, is begotten by the power of God. (Gal. 3:28) A distinctly "new creation" is nurtured and developed within the protective womb of the Sarah Covenant. (II Cor. 5:17, *English Standard Version*) Brought forth in the first resurrection, first the head our Lord Jesus, and then his faithful "body" members, the completed spiritual seed will bless all mankind during Christ's Messianic kingdom reign. (I Cor. 12:12,27; Col. 1:18; Rev. 20:6) Paul states the matter thus, that God has "put all things under his [Jesus'] feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all."—Eph. 1:22,23

THE CHRIST

The greater Isaac class is to be a collective, spiritual seed composed not only of Jews but those from all nations who have the faith of Abraham. These spirit-begotten brethren in Christ are the promised fruit of a symbolic womb—the Sarah Covenant of liberty. It will be within this figurative womb that the Christ, head and body, will be brought forth to bless all the families of the earth with a "New Covenant." (Jer. 31:31-34) This may be well represented by Abraham's third wife Keturah, pointing to a covenant to be mediated among all mankind during the thousand years of the Messianic kingdom.—Heb. 12:24

The “umbrella” Abrahamic Covenant holds forth the promise of blessing all the nations of the earth by that spiritual seed once it is brought forth from the Sarah Covenant feature. Everything that pertained to Isaac as the child of promise was contingent upon Sarah’s belief that it was possible for God to do that which he had promised. Likewise, greater Isaac—the Christ head and body—begotten and conceived during the present Christian age, will be delivered through faith to the everlasting benefit of all.—Eph. 2:6-9; I John 5:4

“Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.” (Rev. 20:6) “This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.”—Heb. 8:10,11

■

The Red Sea and Beyond

*“Moses said unto
the people, Fear ye
not, stand still,
and see the
salvation of the
LORD, which he
will shew to you to
day: for the
Egyptians whom ye
have seen to day, ye
shall see them
again no more
for ever.”
—Exodus 14:13*

AS WE BEGIN OUR LESSON, we see the Israelites on the western shore of the Red Sea, in great desperation, recognizing fully their extremity, for before them lay the Red Sea, and behind them were the pursuing Egyptians. (Exod. 14:5-12) Let it be remembered that it was God who brought them there, for it was at Etham, in the edge of the wilderness, that he turned

them southward to Pihahiroth, as if to increase the barriers before them.—Exod. 13:20; 14:1,2

Surely the shallow crossings to the north of the Red Sea would not have presented so impenetrable a barrier as they met at Pihahiroth. Had God permitted them to follow the easterly course from Etham, however, they might never have realized that their deliverance from Egypt was not the result of their labors, but wholly of God. How often

does God have to lead us into experiences wherein it becomes necessary for us, as with the Israelites at the Red Sea, to “stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord.” All such experiences are permitted of God for the express purpose of strengthening our faith.

So it was with Israel. God separated the waters of the sea, seemingly by natural means, for the account indicates that a strong easterly wind blew all that night, perhaps exposing for the time a sand bar over which they crossed to the farther shore. (Exod. 14:21) The Israelites, beholding the path through the sea, probably also recognized that the waters, temporarily separated, would again return. Remembering how God had dealt with them while in Egypt, and how he had delivered them from the hand of Pharaoh, they were now rightly exercised. They could, and would, demonstrate their faith and appreciation of past favors by believing that this self-same God would bring them to the opposite shore before permitting the waters to return.

Many believers today have no difficulty in accepting the account of the Israelites crossing the Red Sea. Yet, it is interesting to analyze the Scriptural account concerning this incident more carefully than is usually done, and to realize the simple way in which God brought about this marvelous victory for his people. In Exodus 14:21,22 we read, “And the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left.”

From this it is apparent that the water was evidently so shallow at times that a strong wind was enough to keep the ground exposed and dry, thus allowing the Israelites to walk safely across to the other side. Because the text says that the waters were “a wall” unto them on their right hand and on their left, many have been led to the assumption that two high perpendicular walls of water stood erect in a miraculous manner. We do not question God’s ability to have performed such a miracle if it had been needed, but it seems that such is not necessary to an understanding of this account.

The Hebrew word here translated “wall” is *chomah*, and means a “wall of protection,” not necessarily a perpendicular structure of some sort. The same word is used in I Samuel 25:15,16, where we read, “The men were very good unto us: ... they were a wall unto us both by night and day.” In like manner the waters on either side of the exposed ground served as a protection to the Israelites; for had it not been for this water the army and chariots of Pharaoh would have outflanked and surrounded them, thus cutting off their escape.

Being unable to surround the Israelites because of the water on their right and on their left, the only thing left for Pharaoh’s hosts to do was to drive straight through on the same path that the Israelites had taken. “And the Egyptians pursued, and went in after them to the midst of the sea, even all Pharaoh’s horses, his chariots, and his horsemen.” Then the Lord “took off their chariot wheels, that they drave them heavily: ... and the sea returned to his strength [perhaps high tide] when

the morning appeared; ... and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them.”—Exod. 14:23-28

This account is a clear picture of chariots, horsemen, and soldiers caught in soft sand from which they were unable to extricate themselves. The wheels sank down—“they drave them heavily.” In the morning the wind ceased, the tide returned, and the hosts of Pharaoh, immovably stuck in the sand bars, finally sank out of sight. Thus the account is seen to be a plain historic narrative of what took place, and what would be certain to take place under such circumstances.

LOOKING BACK UPON VICTORY

The Israelites were now safely across the Red Sea, and they were permitted to look back, to stand still and see the salvation of God. Having thus exercised faith, and being rewarded with the victory thereof, they did not look back longingly to Egypt. Rather, they rejoiced in their deliverance, looking back only to see the utter destruction of those who attempted to walk unworthily in the path of faith. This victory of faith gave to Israel the assurance that never again would they be troubled by these Egyptians, and so in the full glory of it all, they sang a song of deliverance. With what abandon must they have sung it, and with what exceeding joy. What an incentive for them to journey on, led and guided by the hand of God, to the Canaan of promise!

At least this once, they praised God. They seemed for the moment to have forgotten self. Note the exultation of their song: “I will sing unto the LORD,

for he hath triumphed gloriously. ... The LORD is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him." (Exod. 15:1,2) However, as we shall shortly see, the Israelites soon forgot this glorious God, and thought too much of themselves, resulting in murmurings rather than this hymn of praise. Hence there was a grieved God and a lost Canaan for that generation.—Heb. 3:10,17-19; I Cor. 10:5

There are times when, in the providences of God, we, too, like Israel of old, are brought into tight places; when, humanly speaking, there is no possible way of escape for us. While we may wish to be doing a great deal about it, there is absolutely nothing that we can do. Deliverance from these situations, if it comes at all, must be through God. We must look to him as our strong tower, as the God of our salvation. It is as "Pihahiroth, between Migdol and the sea."

If in obedience to his will we stand still, awaiting his orders to move forward, we shall soon observe, as it were, a seeming suspension of nature's laws, as the waters of the Red Sea parted for Israel at the proper time. When faith opens up thus a way before us, it is for us to walk in that way of faith to our journey's end. Therefore it is essential that we let go of ourselves and permit God to work in us and for us. (Phil. 2:13; Heb. 13:21) Placing ourselves thus completely in the Lord's hands, the victory of faith is soon ours. (I John 5:4) Then we, too, can sing the song of our deliverance.

At times, we may fail to think of God and his mighty works on our behalf, but rather we think of

self and our own interests. These, all too often, come first. Sometimes we may feel sorry for ourselves, and long for past pleasures, though these were and still are but shallow and empty habits of the past that we have renounced for the greater joys of the Spirit. Thus we, like Israel, murmur and repine. It is well for us to note that God, despite this tendency on the part of Israel to forget him, continued in long-suffering kindness to exercise himself on their behalf. Can it be supposed that he does not have the same concern for us, his spirit-begotten children?

As time drew on, at Kadeshbarnea God ceased to strive for Israel. (Deut. 1:19-42) We, too, must be on guard lest, by continued unbelief and unfaithfulness, we be denied the rest that now remains for the people of God. (Heb. 4:8-11) Let us then carefully consider the Apostle Paul's words in Hebrews 3:12, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God."

FORGETTING SELF—REMEMBERING GOD

There are but two ways open to us as Christians. One is forgetting self and remembering God; the other is forgetting God and remembering self. The former is the way of faith and will be rewarded by God. The latter is the course of unbelief and disobedience, and merits his sore displeasure. The song which the Israelites sang on the eastern shore of the Red Sea was a hymn of praise, but it was theirs to sing only because they had forgotten self and remembered God. Let us keep in mind that if we are, in time, to sing the song of final deliverance,

we must every day, and in every way, remember God and forget self, saying, “None of self, and all of thee.”—*Hymns of Dawn*, #224

The account tells us that Moses led the Israelites from the Red Sea into the wilderness of Shur, and into this wilderness they went “three days” journey. (Exod. 15:22) Earlier, when Moses pleaded before Pharaoh for the release of Israel, he explained that they wanted to go “three days’ journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice unto the LORD our God.” (Exod. 3:18; 5:2,3) It is this wilderness of Shur that likely is referred to in the entreaties of Moses to Pharaoh, since this is the first time subsequent to that where the three days’ journey is referenced. It was only after they had reached the farther shore of the Red Sea that they were truly out of the hands of the Egyptians, so we can be reasonably sure that this was the wilderness referred to by Moses before Pharaoh.

We ask, however: Did the Israelites sacrifice unto the Lord, as Moses explained to Pharaoh was their purpose to do? Let us see. Evidently their water supply had run out, and they were thirsty. Concerning this we read, “And they went three days in the wilderness, and found no water. And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter: ... And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink?”—Exod. 15:22-24

What a picture of the frail human heart we have in this account! How soon it can forget God and his mighty works. Instead of dwelling on the mountaintops of faith in the glorious light of God’s countenance, it allows itself to be cast down by the world,

the flesh, or the devil into the dark and dismal valley of the shadow of death. Instead of offering to God the sacrifices of thanksgiving, it murmurs and repines. Where God should be enthroned in the heart, self is enthroned instead. How well, indeed, the psalmist has put it when he declares, "Oh that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! And let them sacrifice the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his works with rejoicing."—Ps. 107:21,22

WE FORGET—GOD DOES NOT

Israel forgot God, and remembered self. Thus did their songs of praise and thanksgiving after crossing the Red Sea give way to the murmurings of the flesh. Nevertheless, God in his graciousness still dealt with them. Was it not he, who, in his providences, had led them to Marah? Could he not have saved them the bitterness of the waters, and the hardness of the way? Certainly yes, but these experiences, to the heart centered upon God, would be but stepping-stones bringing them closer to him.

God had not forgotten his people, but they had forgotten him. Now, with their journey only commenced, they murmured again. Indeed, they were very thirsty and there was no water. Suddenly, arriving at Marah, they see a stream and anticipate refreshment. Instead of praising God for his guidance to the water, they seem to be thinking merely of self, and the satisfaction of their desires.

If in faith and by faith, the Israelites had been mindful of the Canaan of God's promise, the hardships to the flesh would have seemed but light afflictions, which they might then the more easily

have borne. The waters they found at Marah were bitter, and lacking faith, they murmured, seemingly against Moses. However, it was really against God. God heard, and in his loving kindness and tender mercy, blessed them with refreshment. He showed Moses “a tree, which when he had cast into the waters, the waters were made sweet.”—Exod. 15:25

Often God has to bring us to some bitter waters—that is, hard, trying experiences. At such times we should remember God, and when we do, we shall find that even these difficulties have been sweetened for us by all the gracious provisions he has made through Jesus. His promises, which lay before us the purpose of these experiences, sweeten the bitter waters for us. As we sing, “Simply to the cross I cling,” the stream of life which often flows with bitter waters is sweetened by the contemplation that we are daily and hourly brought closer to our eternal inheritance—God’s Canaan rest.—Heb. 4:9,11

IMPORTANCE OF APPRECIATION

It is well to note that not a word is said on this occasion concerning Israel offering to the gracious God the sacrifices of thanksgiving. It seems that they simply drank the sweetened water, taking all of his grace for granted as a matter of fact. This is a lesson for all the people of God. We, too, like Israel of old, may fail to appreciate God’s kindnesses to us as we should. We may take these blessings as if it were his duty to bestow them upon us. We may be forgetful of God; or at least, we are not as thankful as we ought to be. Nor are we to assume that because God has graciously responded to all our murmurings, he will continue so to do if we presume too

much upon his grace. All our trials, and all our experiences, coming to us as the true spiritual Israel of God, are permitted by him for the purpose of fitting and preparing us for the “inheritance of the saints in light.” (Col. 1:12) Therefore, let us ever offer God the acceptable sacrifice of praise, even in our wilderness wanderings.—Heb. 13:15

The next place to which God led the Israelites was Elim, “where were twelve wells of water, and threescore and ten palm trees: and they encamped there by the waters.” (Exod. 15:27) Here we find no mention of murmuring, but we also find no praise and thanksgiving to God offered, despite the fact that all of their needs were being supplied.

Let us never get the idea that if everything should go well with us, and all of our needs were supplied, we would necessarily lead more acceptable lives before God. Experience teaches us quite to the contrary. Many years ago a noted professor told the story of a roommate during his college days who wished to improve his intellectual life by concentrated study at night. He procured a large, comfortable chair, slippers, and a lounging jacket. An adjustable rack was fastened to the side of the chair to keep books at the proper angle for the eyes. A special lamp was installed, together with eyeshade, pencils, paper, and even a revolving bookcase. The professor’s roommate would come home in the evening, take off his coat, put on his jacket, take off his shoes, put on his slippers, sit comfortably in his chair, adjust his eyeshade, and then fall asleep!

With us also, we may at times need uncomfortable experiences to rouse us out of our lethargy. God gave Israel the hardness of the journey so they would

have a greater desire for the land of promise, the land flowing with milk and honey. This undoubtedly is the thought of Moses' words in Deuteronomy 32:10-12: "He found him [Israel] in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: So the LORD alone did lead him."

STIRRING UP THE NEST

Indeed, those little eaglets in that nest way up in the distant crag of yonder mountain, far above the point where any human being can reach them, feel so safely sheltered within the comfort of their nest. The comfort is so satisfying, and since the mother eagle brings them their food, why should they ever leave the comfort of that nest? The mother, though, instinctively knows that those eaglets will never learn to fly that way; so she stirs up the nest, to drive them out. Perhaps the mother eagle finds little sharp twigs or thorns of some kind and sticks them into the sides of the nest to make it uncomfortable for the little eaglets. We can imagine how those young eaglets would finally get up on the edge of the nest, still seeking comfort, when suddenly the mother would flutter her wings, and over the edge of the nest they would go as if falling into a bottomless pit. The eaglets make an effort to fly, and this is just what the mother wants. She then spreads her wings, probably gets underneath them to bear them safely back to rest. Only thus do they learn to fly. In this way God dealt with the children

of Israel in their wilderness wanderings, and likewise does he deal with us.

It is true, God does grant us many moments of peace, rest, and tranquility, even before we reach our Canaan beyond. Surely we do have our Elims. Nevertheless, let us not forget the purpose of these is not that we shall, at such times, complacently idle away our time. Rather, we are to refresh ourselves and build up that spiritual reserve which is to enable us the better to withstand the rigors of the desert wilderness over which we still must travel.

Let us, at such times, show our God how we really do appreciate his loving kindness and tender mercies by praising him with the song of our lives—the song of faith and obedience to his will. When the time comes for us to leave these blessed places of calm, and to strike out into the howling wilderness, let us be willing to leave Elim behind and enter into the hardships of the way, in full assurance of the fact that it is God who leads us. Let us forget self and remember God. Then shall we have the peace that surpasseth all human understanding, even in the midst of trials and difficulties, for “great peace have they that love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.”—Phil. 4:7; Ps. 119:165

“Have you come to the Red Sea place in your life,
Where, in spite of all you can do,
There is no way out, there is no way back,
There is no other way but through?

Then wait on the Lord, with a trust serene,
Till the night of your fear is gone;
He will send the winds, He will heap the floods,
When He says to your soul, Go on!

And His hand shall lead you through, clear
through,
Ere the watery walls roll down;
No wave can touch you, no foe can smite,
No mightiest sea can drown.

The tossing billows may rear their crests,
Their foam at your feet may break.
But over their bed you shall walk dry-shod
In the path that your Lord shall make.” ■

*Then Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are
weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you
rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you,
because I am humble and gentle at heart,
and you will find rest for your souls.”*
—Matt. 11:28,29 *New Living Translation*

WEEKLY PRAYER MEETING TEXTS

JULY 3—“I have set the LORD always before me:
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.”
—Psalm 16:8 (Z. '99-6 Hymn 109)

JULY 10—“All bare him witness, and wondered at the
gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth.”—
Luke 4:22 (Z. '99-53 Hymn 264)

JULY 17—“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose
mind is stayed on thee.”—Isaiah 26:3 (Z. '99-95 Hymn
263)

JULY 24—“The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous
man availeth much.”—James 5:16 (Z. '00-268 Hymn
274)

JULY 31—“Every man’s work shall be made manifest:
for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed
by fire.”—I Corinthians 3:13 (Z. '99-171 Hymn 183)

Christian Meditation

*“My meditation of
him shall be sweet:
I will be glad in
the LORD.”
—Psalm 104:34*

THERE CAN BE NOTHING more soul-satisfying to Christians than to realize that their chief delight is in calling to their own mind, and

to the attention of others, the goodness of the Lord; and in being assured that his lovingkindness is still over all their ways. Throughout the psalm from which our text is taken, David recounts many evidences of the Lord’s love and power in caring for his earthly creation. Then he assures us that the “glory of the LORD shall endure for ever.” (vs. 31) David, with his poetical mind, was fond of entering into these reveries of thought concerning the goodness of God, and in giving glory to him for all the blessings of life.

David’s meditations were not of the idle, unprofitable kind. As he thought upon the Lord he drew practical lessons from the evidences of divine love that came to his mind. He notes, for example, that the “high hills are a refuge for the wild goats; and the rocks for the conies [small rabbit-like animals].”

(vs. 18) While the psalmist rejoices in the fact that some consideration is given for the wild goats and the conies, he is reminded that a still more wonderful provision is made for himself, and for all who intelligently and whole-heartedly give their devotion to the Creator.

In Psalm 121:1,2 we read, “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth.” This passage as it stands is more or less contradictory, in that it first of all suggests that our help comes from the hills, and then states that it comes from the Lord. It has been suggested that the first verse should really be stated in the question form, and thus it is rendered by numerous translations. One example is the *New Living Translation*, which reads: “I look up to the mountains—does my help come from there?” The answer then is, “My help comes from the LORD!” This arrangement seems to be more in keeping with what the beloved David had in mind. The literal hills and rocks have been a refuge for the “wild goats” and “conies.” The symbolic hills and rocky places—the various kingdoms of the earth, large and small—may be considered a place of safety by those who are not the Lord’s true sheep. However, says the psalmist, “My help comes from the LORD.”

In this we have revealed a closeness of fellowship and trust which is possible only to those who have truly come to know the Heavenly Father. Many are able to trust in God and to rejoice in his care over them, so long as they can see some visible manifestation of his lovingkindness. However, those who have great faith are able to reach out

beyond the material evidences of divine love, and to rejoice in the Lord himself. David had come to know that while all the earthly wonders with which he was surrounded gave evidence of the handiwork of divine power, yet he had also learned that back of all created things was the Creator. It is of his glorious Creator that David declares in our opening text, "My meditation of him shall be sweet."

HOW WE KNOW GOD

To really know God so fully that our "meditation of him shall be sweet," is one of the superlative attainments of the Christian life. How do we attain such an intimate, soul-satisfying knowledge of the Creator? What is it that we must learn about God in order to have the very thought of him bring delight to our hearts? A very informative statement on this point is given us by the Heavenly Father, who says, "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD."—Jer. 9:23,24

Billions of earth's inhabitants have professed to believe in God, but few indeed have learned to know him as one who takes delight in exercising "lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth." How does the follower of Christ learn to know God after this manner? David learned much about God by studying his marvelous creative works. The Christian likewise can find much in the

book of nature that tells of his lovingkindness: “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.”—Ps. 19:1,2

David, however, was not satisfied merely with the revelation of God which came to him through the study of the natural realm. There was a still deeper knowledge which concerned the psalmist. After eloquently portraying the glory of the Creator as seen in his creative works, David continues, “The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them is great reward.”—vss. 7-11

The “law of the LORD;” the “testimony of the LORD;” the “commandment of the LORD;” and the “statutes of the LORD” were to David what God’s plan is to the Christian at the present time. In these David found revealed the divine will for him, and to the extent then due, the plan of God for the blessing of the people in general. By the full surrender of himself to God, thus coming wholly under the influence of his law, his testimony, his statutes, and his commandments, David came face to face with the Heavenly Father in a manner which his study of nature had neither approximated nor comprehended.

WISDOM FROM ABOVE

David found that the written Word of God was capable of “making wise the simple.” At one time he might have been one of those described in the passage quoted from Jeremiah’s prophecy whose wisdom was foolishness in God’s sight—a wisdom in which there was no cause for rejoicing. Now, however, he was truly wise. The “wisdom from above” had come into his heart, being conveyed there by the law, statutes, testimony, and commandments of the Lord.—James 3:17

This heavenly wisdom, the possession of which truly makes wise, is a wisdom that is based on the great fact of knowing God. Just as David found that the full depth of such a knowledge was obtainable only through God’s revealed will to him, so Christians also will find that God is now revealing himself to them through the Truth of his divine plan and purpose. A moment’s reflection will show why this is so. It is true that Christians and others also are able to some extent to visualize God’s love and glory and power by looking up into the heavens at night and by studying the works of nature that are about us on every hand. Yet this vision of creative glory is offset to a large extent by the apparent miscarriage of divine love that is everywhere in evidence about us.

We can see God’s glory in the stars, but what is there in a deathbed scene, with all its attendant suffering and heartaches, to call forth praise to the Creator? Degradation, misery, and poverty stalk up and down in the earth. Disease and death are gradually taking possession of our bodies. These facts would tend to drive us away from the very thought of God were it not for his written Word, in which he reveals his

plans and purposes. Thus it is only through such an understanding that we can truly know God.

God's plan reveals his wisdom in the permission of evil. It shows his love—transcending, self-sacrificing love—in the gift of his beloved Son as the Redeemer, thus making possible mankind's ultimate deliverance from sin and death. (John 3:16,17) It reveals divine power as from age to age we note the unalterable, onward march of his purposes which ultimately will accomplish the deliverance of a lost race, during the "times of restitution" soon to come.—Acts 3:20,21

When we know the truths contained in God's Word, we see his majesty everywhere in evidence. If we did not know these things, the statement that God takes delight to "exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth," if fully analyzed, would seem like a hollow mockery. The understanding of God's Word of Truth changes our entire vision of the Heavenly Father, and through it we are able to see and know him as he really is. Because of this, our meditations of him are truly sweet and inspiring, as the words of the hymn express:

"The heavens declare Thy glory, Lord
Through all the realms of boundless space.
The soaring mind may roam abroad,
And there Thy power and wisdom trace.

But not alone do worlds of light,
And earth display Thy grand designs;
'Tis when our eyes behold Thy Word
We read Thy name in fairest lines."

Hymns of Dawn #283, "The Glory of the Lord"

WISDOM FROM ABOVE

When we speak of the "Truth" we mean more than a mere theoretic knowledge of certain features of God's plan. Our knowledge, of course, begins with a mental grasp of the various doctrines of the divine arrangement, and this forms a basis of our knowledge of God. However, unless we go beyond a mere mental appreciation of these teachings, we will never truly know God, and we will never reach that point in spiritual development in which we will find sweetness in our meditations of him.

The primary purpose of the doctrines of God's plan is that in and through them the Christian may learn what the divine will concerning him is. It is a doctrine of Truth that if we expect to live with Christ in the future, we must now be dead with him. (II Tim. 2:11) This fact is valueless in our lives, however, unless we see to it that we are dead with Christ. (Rom. 6:8; Col. 3:3) To be dead with Christ means the full surrender of our wills to God. It is only as we actually yield our all to him, accepting his will as our daily rule in life, that we are in a position to learn of him. Furthermore, it is when we begin to experience the proof of his promises and purposes in our lives, through our obedience to the Truth, that we begin to know him with an understanding obtainable only by such experience.

"If we suffer, we shall also reign with him," is another fundamental of God's plan. (II Tim. 2:12) With this great fact before his mind the Christian is able to interpret sufferings in the light of divine love. Hence each hardship of the way will be a stepping-stone to higher attainments in the knowledge of God. When the trials come it will be remembered

that Jesus learned what it is to be obedient in suffering. (Heb. 5:8) We can rejoice that the Heavenly Father is dealing with the Christian in the same way he dealt with his well-beloved and only begotten Son. The followers of Christ will remember also, that “whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth [Greek: train or educate].” (Heb. 12:6) Such experiences are not necessarily in the nature of punishments for wrongdoing, but intended as training for future glory with Jesus in the Messianic kingdom. Knowing this, the Christian will see, even in suffering, further evidence of the love of God. Thus daily, by experience based upon a knowledge of the Truth, the child of God learns to know him more and more intimately.

Divine promises of “grace to help in time of need” are also found to be verified in the lives of those wholly devoted to the doing of the will of God. (Heb. 4:16) Thus we learn to trust him fully, even where we cannot trace him. When unexpected experiences loom up before us, we remember the promise that “all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” (Rom. 8:28) Hence, we accept these new circumstances as a part of his will for us; and we find, sooner or later, that each new scene he sends us, as the words of the hymn express, comes as a “sweet and glad surprise.” It may be neither glad nor sweet so far as the flesh is concerned. Indeed, it may be the very opposite. The Christian realizes, through the understanding of the Word of Truth, that the flesh is on the altar of sacrifice; and therefore knows better than to expect that the fire necessary to consume the sacrifice will be pleasant.

EXULTANT VICTORY

Thus it is that many of the experiences the Lord in his divine providence permits to come to us are hard to bear, seeming at times almost to crush us. Yet, if we know the Truth, and his promises are verified in us because we have fully accepted them by faith, then our determination will be to continue to yield joyfully to him. With the prophet we will exclaim with confidence, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him!" (Job 13:15) Indeed, we will more than merely trust him. We will rejoice in him, because in his daily dealing with us we will be learning to read the marvelous letters of his love.

Though all our friends may turn against us because of the Truth; though ridicule and persecutions may arise; though the day may be dark and the night long; if God's Word means as much to us as it is capable of meaning, the Heavenly Father will become to us an ever-increasing source of joy and delight. Even if our experiences are such as to portend the actual death of the flesh, we will rejoice in the thought as expressed by the poet when he wrote, "The worst they can do beloved is to change your cross for a crown." Then we will thank God for the experiences his love sends to us which assure us of the final gaining of the "crown of life."—Rev. 2:10

It is not alone in the clouds that the Heavenly Father reveals himself to his children. Those whose desires are fully surrendered to the will of God will find that in the outworking of the divine arrangements for them there are many exceedingly pleasant experiences to be enjoyed. Jesus promised to give his joy to his followers, and his true followers have had that joy.—John 15:11; 16:24; I John 1:3,4

Jesus' joy and delight consisted of doing his Father's will. (Ps. 40:7,8; Heb. 10:7-9) It was a joy to him to heal the sick, to raise the dead, to proclaim the Father's love. Through all of these experiences Jesus saw the benevolent hand of the Almighty. By faith he could look down the corridor of the ages and see all the sick restored to health, all the dead raised to life, all the hungry fed. Thus the "joy that was set before him" in his Father's plan enabled him to interpret even his sufferings in the light of God's love, resulting in a continuous, abounding joy. (Heb. 12:2) It was because God was with him in all of his experiences that Jesus' joy was made full.

Thus it will be with faithful Christians. Not only will they accept their trials as of divine appointment, but will rejoice in every part of the divine will for them. They will rejoice in the promises of future glory. They will be glad for the sweet experiences of telling others of divine love. They will rejoice always!—Phil. 4:4

Their fellowship with the brethren will still further enhance their appreciation of God. In short, they will seek more and more to interpret every experience of life in the light of divine love. Thus God will be their daily meditation, and in the very presence of God will they continue to walk in the narrow way.

David did not understand the Truth as Christ's followers of today are privileged to know it, yet he had tasted the sweetness of at least a limited knowledge of his Creator. How much more then, should we, to whom God has revealed the length and breadth and height and depth of his love, rejoice in the God of our salvation! (Eph. 3:17-19; Mic. 7:7) May it be our blessed portion to be able through faith to turn our every experience in the direction of a better knowledge of God. ■