

# The Wages of Sin

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

**FOR APPROXIMATELY SIX** thousand years, man has witnessed the dying process brought upon humanity through Father Adam’s disobedience. The penalty for disobedience was death. God’s commandment was plain. “Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest

thereof thou shalt surely die.” (Gen. 2:17) The *Marginal Translation* reads, “dying thou shalt die.” This has been the unhappy lot of the human family ever since.

## THE TIME OF THE END

God has been gracious to man and as the time approaches for the establishment of his kingdom, he has permitted knowledge and learning to increase towards the end of this present evil world. This knowledge has permitted man to wage war against the killers of men through disease. In spite of this blessing, new killers have appeared that are the more difficult to apprehend and fight. In recent time AIDS appeared (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome), and in spite of millions of dollars for research, it is currently ravaging the continent of Africa. Even more recently another new killer has appeared, SARS, (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome). The *U.S. News and World Report* magazine for May 5, 2003 had a feature article entitled “*SARS Hits Home.*” In it everything that is known about this deadly disease to date was published.

In telling of how Toronto, Canada became afflicted and then listed by the World Health Organization as a city not to visit, the article said:

“Residents of Toronto were stunned last Wednesday when the World Health Organization told people to avoid traveling to Toronto because of the risk of SARS, which has spread to 26 countries since it first surfaced in China last fall. That made Canada’s largest city, the engine of one fifth of its economy, the only Western Hemisphere city on an unprecedented

‘do not visit’ list that includes parts of China and Hong Kong, which have had the bulk of the world’s SARS cases. ‘One of the most important means of spreading diseases around the globe is air travel,’ said David Heymann, director of communicable diseases for WHO, noting that travelers appeared to be carrying SARS from Toronto to other countries. ‘We still do not know whether or not we can stop this disease from becoming endemic.’

“Officials at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which earlier in the week had advised Americans to stay out of Toronto hospitals and wash their hands carefully if in town, said that the WHO action went too far. Other public-health experts suggested that WHO had listed Toronto in order to mollify China, which has come under harsh criticism for its reluctance to reveal the extent of SARS infections there. ‘Suffice to say, we didn’t find their scientific arguments convincing,’ says Colin D’Cunha, Ontario’s commissioner of public health.

## **PARIAH CITY**

“But normally phlegmatic Torontonians were rattled to see their town branded, as one local tabloid put it, ‘Pariah City.’ ‘I find it very stressful here now,’ said Judy Cutler, public relations director for the Canadian Association of Retired Persons. ‘I think people are realizing it’s serious.’

“Indeed, the battle is far from won. The deaths continue to mount in Canada, Hong Kong, China, and Singapore, with the death rate now close to six percent. The origins of the disease remains a mystery, and scientists are struggling to devise better methods to halt its spread. There is no treatment or cure. And new research suggests that the novel coronavirus named by WHO as the cause of SARS may not be the only suspect, which could make detection and treatment difficult. ‘It’s a mean virus,’ says Donald Low, head of microbiology at Mount Sinai Hospital in Toronto, who was himself quarantined after being exposed. Yet by week’s end, local health officials were voicing optimism for the first time. The number of SARS cases in Toronto hospitals started to drop last week, suggesting that the city’s herculean effort to protect hospital workers and patients is paying off. Even better, no people have become infected in the general community since April 9. James Young, Ontario’s public security commissioner, said, ‘We’re hoping this is over.’”

## **THE KILLER IN CHINA**

The largest outbreak of this new killer occurred in China, and for some strange reason the news was hidden from the people of China by their government. The article wrote about Beijing as a city masked in fear and distrust, saying:

“It was shaping up to be a mask-free spring. The sandstorms that force Beijing residents to don face masks year after year had skipped their occurrence. Warm weather lured people to parks and restaurants. Many had heard stories about a dangerous new virus, but the official media said only that there was a minor problem in Guangdong province and that it was under control. ‘I considered it all rumors, not fact,’ says Liu Wenhui, a 30-year-old accountant.

“But early last week, rumors became fact, and the masks came out in force. Under intense international pressure, officials declared 346 SARS patients in Beijing itself and all but acknowledged a coverup. By week’s end, the number had more than doubled to 877, bringing China’s total number of cases to 2,601. The national health minister and the city’s mayor—who had just declared the city safe for tourists—were fired. Like a sinner desperate to make up for past misdeeds, the government went conspicuously to work, canceling the national week-long May vacation and closing schools across Beijing for two weeks. Police officers held thousands in strict quarantine in hospitals and apartment blocks. Disinfection crews scoured the city.

“Almost overnight, Beijing’s idyllic spring has given way to a season of panic. Terrified of the virus, millions are staying home. Gridlock on the streets has vanished. Bored waiters outnumber diners at restaurants. For those who do venture out, face masks have become as essential as shoes. The only places that seem busy are supermarkets and pharmacies. Bracing for long weeks in isolation, residents have cleared grocery shelves. ‘I’m stocking up so I don’t have to go out as often,’ said one woman, dragging a 40-pound bag of rice. At one pharmacy, a sign read, ‘We are temporarily out of face masks, disinfectant, and Lysol.’

“The problem is, after early government silence, people still don’t believe they’re getting the full story. ‘This is typical government behavior,’ says a Tsinghua University graduate student named Shen. ‘But the fact they hid information about something that could make people ill, even kill them, this mistake is unforgivable.’ Worried that the situation

is still worse than officials admit, thousands are fleeing the city. ‘We came to Beijing to make more money,’ says Li, a migrant worker waiting for a train home to Sichuan. ‘But there’s no point in making money if you’re going to get sick.’

“Now health officials worry that the virus could follow such workers home to the countryside, where 70 percent of China’s 1.3 billion people live and local hospitals are woefully ill-equipped. Travelers like Li may believe that they are escaping to sanctuary, but their SARS nightmare—and China’s—might just be beginning.”

## **WHAT CAUSES SARS?**

What is causing this new fear of a deadly disease? No one knows the cause for certainty. The article said:

“SARS may not be giving up its secrets as easily as it seemed just a few weeks ago. In mid-April, the World Health Organization confidently announced that a novel human coronavirus was the killer pneumonia’s cause, and there was a global sigh of relief. That sigh may have come too soon.

“Last week, virologists with new scientific findings started backing off the coronavirus hypothesis. If their skepticism is warranted, it has huge implications. If the medical community is indeed working on the wrong virus, it would be producing mounds of faulty diagnostic tests and—even worse—chasing after vaccines that would be worthless.

“Scientists point out that Canadian SARS patients are unique, since they trace back to one grandmother and thus should have the same causative pathogen. Virologist Frank Plummer of Winnipeg’s National Microbiology Laboratory reported last week that only 40 percent of Canadian SARS patients have this coronavirus. An earlier study also found coronavirus in only five of nine victims in the first cluster of SARS cases. What’s more, Plummer found that 1 in 15 perfectly healthy Canadians who recently traveled in Asia has the virus. That raises the question whether this newly discovered coronavirus is the killer bug it’s made out to be. It also leads to the speculation that coronavirus could be a coconspirator or merely a fellow traveler with the real (as yet undiscovered) pathogen. ‘We need to go back to the drawing board,’ says Plummer. His instinct tells him that the new coronavirus could be causing

the diarrhea that is seen in some SARS victims, but another agent may be doing the lung damage common to all SARS victims.

“Scientists at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention remain confident. Indeed, the CDC has proposed that the new virus be named the Urbani Sars-associated virus, after WHO scientist Carlo Urbani, who died of SARS while investigating the epidemic. The CDC is also updating its definition of SARS to include a positive lab test for the new coronavirus. CDC officials find Plummer’s data less convincing than unpublished studies from the Netherlands that claim inoculating monkeys with the virus leads to SARS-like systems.”

## **THE SPREAD OF SARS**

Currently the worldwide statistics show the number of cases and deaths to be as follows:

| <b><u>COUNTRY</u></b> | <b><u>CASES</u></b> | <b><u>DEATHS</u></b> |
|-----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| China                 | 2,422               | 110                  |
| HongKong              | 1,488               | 109                  |
| Singapore             | 192                 | 19                   |
| Canada                | 140                 | 5                    |
| Taiwan                | 17                  | 0                    |
| United States         | 37                  | 0                    |
| Brazil                | 2                   | 0                    |
| Great Britain         | 6                   | 0                    |
| Ireland               | 1                   | 0                    |
| France                | 5                   | 0                    |
| Spain                 | 1                   | 0                    |
| Germany               | 7                   | 0                    |
| Sweden                | 1                   | 0                    |
| Switzerland           | 1                   | 0                    |
| Romania               | 1                   | 0                    |
| Italy                 | 4                   | 0                    |
| Bulgaria              | 1                   | 0                    |
| Kuwait                | 1                   | 0                    |

|             |    |   |
|-------------|----|---|
| India       | 1  | 0 |
| Thailand    | 8  | 2 |
| Malaysia    | 5  | 2 |
| Indonesia   | 1  | 0 |
| Vietnam     | 83 | 5 |
| Australia   | 4  | 0 |
| Philippines | 2  | 1 |
| Japan       | 2  | 0 |

These statistics were compiled several weeks ago when the *U.S. News and World Report* was preparing for its May 5, 2003 publication. The situation has worsened as reported in the *New York Times* of May 8, 2003. The Chinese statistics were reported as follows:

| <u>COUNTRY</u> | <u>CASES</u> | <u>DEATHS</u> |
|----------------|--------------|---------------|
| China          | 4,560        | 219           |
| Hong Kong      | 1,654        | 204           |
| Taiwan         | 120          | 13            |

Also the *New York Times* published an article entitled *WHO Doubles Its Estimate of Death Rate from SARS*. The article said:

“Analyzing what it said was more complete data, the World Health Organization said yesterday that the estimated overall death rate from SARS was about 15 percent—double its previous estimate.

“The new rate is still lower than the nearly 20 percent reported Tuesday by researchers who studied the course of the epidemic of severe acute respiratory syndrome in Hong Kong. Those scientists used different statistical techniques.

“Even so, the revised death rate indicates that as new information from the evolving epidemic comes in, SARS is proving much more serious than first thought. Early estimates of the death rate had ranged down to about 2 percent.

“The health agency said its new figures were based on the latest detailed data from Canada, China, Hong Kong, Singapore and Vietnam. The death rates varied by age: more than 50 percent in people 65 and

older; 15 percent in those 45 to 64; 6 percent among those 25 to 44; and 1 percent for those 24 and younger.

“The new mortality rates, like the old ones, are tentative because the epidemic is thought likely to change as more information comes in.

“‘The WHO did not report the higher figures earlier partly because it did not receive the needed data until recent days,’ said Dr. Michael J. Ryan, a medical officer at the agency. He added that the WHO also did not want to ‘panic the world’ by releasing death rates that could turn out to be significant overestimates.”

## **THE MEANING OF SARS**

What does all this mean to us as Bible students? One thing is sure, namely, the sentence of death continues over mankind. The present evil world continues as well. Man’s battle against the deadly diseases in the world depends upon God’s special help and assistance. He cannot win the battle alone. The hope for that assistance lies in the establishment of Christ’s kingdom upon earth. That kingdom alone will remove the fear of mysterious, unknown killers.

The world is not ready to appreciate their Heavenly Father as expressed by David when he wrote the 103rd Psalm. But they eventually must, if they are to receive the benefits of eternal life. David wrote, “Bless the Lord, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies; Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle’s.” (Psalm 103:1-5). We note that David recognized that the Lord alone could heal our diseases and renew our strength. He would do so by forgiving our iniquities. This is the sense of our theme text that ‘the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.’ God’s program is clear. As it is written, “This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth. 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. 2:3-6

## **GOD'S KINGDOM BRINGS HEALING**

We are now approaching the 'due time' for that program to begin. As David said, "The Lord executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed." (Psalm 103:6) These are not only those in literal oppression, but also those oppressed by the Adversary, death, and sin. "He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel. The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever." (vss. 7-9) Soon the wrath of God will be past. "He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear [reverence] him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust."—vss.10-14

How well did David express our Father's mercy and love. How fully aware is God of our fragility. Man's experience upon earth at the present time is well described in verses 15 and 16 as a flower that blooms, fades, and is gone. But this is not to continue. And so David writes, "The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them." Then prophetically David says, "The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all."—vss. 17-19

David then calls upon all the hosts of heaven to "Bless the Lord," and unto us who are so privileged to do so today. Soon all mankind will respond and 'Bless the Lord.' What else could anyone do for such a merciful, loving, and wonderful Creator? How wonderful will it be when all creation will say, "Bless the Lord, O my soul!" Blessed be his Holy Name.—vss. 20-22

# Accepting a Challenging Task

*Key Verse: “I also told them about the gracious hand of my God upon me and what the king had said to me. They replied, “Let us start rebuilding.” So they began this good work.”*

—*Nehemiah 2:18 New International Version*

*Lesson Scripture:  
Nehemiah 1 and 2*

**WHEN THE BABYLONIANS** took the Israelites captive to Babylon, they devastated the city of Jerusalem, destroyed the Temple and the city gates. After the seventy years captivity ended, many returned to Jerusalem by the decree of Cyrus to rebuild the Temple. Nehemiah was of a family taken captive and had a responsible position in the court of Artaxerxes, king of Persia. About eighty years had elapsed since Cyrus had permitted the people of Israel to return to their land and to rebuild the Temple.

Some of Nehemiah’s relatives returned from Judah to Persia and he asked of their welfare and the welfare of those who were left behind in the

Babylonian captivity. The news was not good. Marauding bands of other nations found those living in Jerusalem an easy prey for spoiling and stealing their goods. The city’s walls were broken down and its gates destroyed by fire, leaving no defense against enemies. (Neh. 1:1-4) This news saddened Nehemiah greatly, and he could not control his feelings as he served the king as cupbearer the next day. His sad countenance prompted King Artaxerxes to ask Nehemiah what made him so sad.—Neh. 2:2

Nehemiah told the king the news he had heard about the deplorable condition of Jerusalem, the home of his forebears. The king asked, “For what dost thou make request?” (Neh. 2:1-4) Before Nehemiah answered the king he “prayed to the God of heaven.” He then asked the king for permission to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the city walls and gates. The king asked him how long all this would take, and he gave him an estimate.

The king not only gave Nehemiah permission to go, but wrote letters to the governors of the land Trans-Euphrates to give Nehemiah safe conduct, and also to the keeper of the forest to permit him to get timber for the gates. The king also sent a military escort with Nehemiah to insure him a safe journey. The enemies of Israel were not pleased to hear of Nehemiah's commission.—vss. 5-11 (*NIV*)

When Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem he did not tell any of the nobles or priests about his plan. First, he inspected the gates and walls by night and confirmed what had been told him about the ruinous state of the city. Next, he assembled the officials and other important people to tell them of God's blessing upon him and what the King had said about his plan to rebuild Jerusalem. As in the words of our Key Verse, their response was very positive.

The enemies of Israel came when they saw the work started and derided Nehemiah. He told them plainly that they had no share in this project.—vss. 12-20

Two particular lessons may be derived from this account. One is that none of us should attempt undertaking any project without prayer to God. The second is based on the importance of a city of old times with walls. The Scriptures say, "He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls." (Prov. 25:28) If we do not have self-control we are like a city without walls. It is possible for every passion to take control of the person who lacks self-control.

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# Persevering with Faith

***Key Verse: “When all our enemies heard about this, all the surrounding nations were afraid and lost their self-confidence, because they realized that this work had been done with the help of our God.”***

***—Nehemiah 6:16 New International Version***

***Lesson Scripture: Nehemiah 6***

**WHEN NEHEMIAH** presented the task to the people of Judah in Jerusalem of rebuilding the walls and gates, they responded quickly and started to rebuild. Nehemiah’s enemies at first looked at the work and held it in derision. All the tasks for the undertaking were well organized to different groups. Their assignments and work are described in Nehemiah 3.

The people ignored the derisive remarks of their enemies and prayed to God to have this reproach come down on the heads of their enemies and not to forgive their sin. Meanwhile, they kept working as the scripture says, “So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof [to half the height]: for the people had a mind to work.”—Neh. 4:6

As Nehemiah’s enemies saw the work progressing, they planned other ways to disrupt it. They plotted an attack against the workers with weapons, so that by killing them the work would cease. Nehemiah met this threat by prayer and guards. “We prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.” (Neh. 4:9, *NIV*) Nehemiah stationed fighters at the weak, unfinished sections of the wall and strategically guarded such places. The work was resumed, but now half of the workers stood armed and ready to ward off an attack while the other half worked on the wall. Even the workers had weapons handy. By this means the wall was essentially completed, although doors were not set in the gates.

Nehemiah’s enemies then connived to have him come to a village on the plain of Ono for a conciliatory meeting. It is most likely that they plotted to take his life. But Nehemiah sent a message to them, “I am

carrying on a great project and cannot go down. Why should the work stop while I leave it and go down to you?’ Four times they sent me the same message, and each time I gave them the same answer.”—Neh. 6:3,4, *NIV*

Then Sanballat, his principal adversary, sent a fifth message in which he tried to make public an accusation that the wall rebuilding project of Jerusalem was being done because a revolt was planned against Persian authority; also that Nehemiah was about to become their king. Nehemiah sent an immediate disclaimer to this accusation, and he may have sent it as well to Artaxerxes, in the event Sanballat would have sent such an accusation to Persian authorities.

A final attempt was made by Sanballat and Tobiah to have Nehemiah discredited. They bribed a Jewish priest to tell Nehemiah that he should lock himself in the Temple because men were coming by night to kill him. Nehemiah did not follow this suggestion, but said, “He had been hired to intimidate me so that I would commit a sin by doing this, and then they would give me a bad name to discredit me.” (Neh. 6:13, *NIV*) This ploy failed as well, and the wall was completed. In the words of our key text all of the enemies of Israel lost their self-confidence because they realized that this project was completed with the help of God.

Likewise, any project we attempt for the Lord will be successful if we persevere in faith as did Nehemiah.

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# Responding to God's Laws

***Key Verse: "They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read."***

***—Nehemiah 8:8 New International Version***

***Lesson Scripture: Nehemiah 8***

**THE WALLS OF JERUSALEM** were now built. (Neh. 7:1) And as Nehemiah said, "The city was large and spacious, but there were few people in it, and the houses had not yet been rebuilt. So my God put it into my heart to assemble the nobles, the officials and the common people for registration by families." (Neh. 7:4,5, *NIV*) The genealogical records of all the people who had returned to Judah, about 80 years ago, were found and registration of all the families was completed so that "The priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers and the temple servants, along with certain of the people and the rest of the Israelites, settled in their own towns." (vs. 73, *NIV*)

Nehemiah, when sent by Artaxerxes to rebuild Jerusalem, was also appointed governor of the land. He was a good and dedicated administrator and had instituted many reforms while occupied with rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. Now the time had come to reorganize Israel's society.

We read, "When the seventh month came and the Israelites had settled in their towns, all the people assembled as one man in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the Lord had commanded for Israel." (Neh. 8:1, *NIV*) About thirteen years before Nehemiah was commissioned by Artaxerxes to come to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, Ezra, the priest and scribe, had received authorization from Artaxerxes to come to Jerusalem with a company of Levites for service in the Temple. The Temple had been built some years before, following a decree by Cyrus. Ezra had brought gifts from the people of Israel still residing in the Persian empire, along with those from the king, to beautify the Temple.

A similar ceremony was held when the first of those in Babylon had returned and built an altar unto the Lord before the foundation of the Temple was laid. (Ezra 3:1-6) Although work ceased on the Temple for several years, it was resumed and completed and dedicated. Following this dedication, there were sixty years where there is no record of the people in Israel who were being harassed by their unfriendly neighbors.

The ceremony was well organized, and a large, raised wooden platform was built for Ezra to stand on to read the Law. Unlike the first ceremony when the altar was built eighty years before, this time the people were sorted into smaller groups, with priests and Levites assigned to each group to explain the Law to them, with question and answer sessions. As our Key Verse reads, ‘They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read.’ As the people understood, they were smitten in their hearts at the realization of their neglect and failure to keep the Law, and they wept. The people were told, ‘This day is sacred to the Lord your God. Do not mourn or weep.’—Neh. 8:9, *NIV*

They also observed the Feast of Tabernacles, and the people’s response to the Law was gratifying.

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# Renewing Spiritual Commitments

***Key Verse: “In view of all this, we are making a binding agreement, putting it in writing, and our leaders, our Levites and our priests are affixing their seals to it.”***

***—Nehemiah 9:38 New International Version***

***Lesson Scripture: Nehemiah 9:38 – 10:39***

**THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL** who had returned to Judah from Babylonian captivity were trying to make a fresh start in keeping the Law Covenant. They had suffered much at the hands of their enemies as God permitted them to be removed from their land, their temple destroyed, Jerusalem gutted, and the desolation of their land in punishment for their idolatry. Their return to rebuild the Temple by decree of Cyrus, and to rebuild Jerusalem by decree of Artaxerxes, had spanned eighty years. But now, under the leadership of Nehemiah, governor, and Ezra, scribe and priest, they had

become the nation God desired.

When the Law was read to them they wept. After making the day sacred to the Lord, and rejoicing in his goodness, they kept the Feast of Tabernacles. After they had done so on the 24th day of the month, they put on sackcloth and ashes, confessed their sins and the sins of their fathers, had the Law read to them again and completed the day by confessing sins and worshipping God. A complete review of God’s dealings with them was recited to the people, beginning with Abraham and ending with their present situation. (Neh. 9:5-37) Then they signed a covenant with God to keep the Law.—vs. 38

One of the problems Israel constantly had was that of intermarriage with people of heathen lands. This practice often led them into worship of foreign gods, and idolatry. Both Nehemiah and Ezra knew this and made a decided effort to stop intermarriage with foreigners. After their

leaders had sealed the covenant made anew with God, the Scriptures say, “The rest of the people—priests, Levites, gatekeepers, singers, temple servants and all who separated themselves from the neighboring peoples for the sake of the Law of God, together with their wives and all their sons and daughters who are able to understand”—bound themselves to follow the Law of God, and they said, “We promise not to give our daughters in marriage to the peoples around us or take their daughters for our sons.” (Neh. 10:28-30, *NIV*) This was reiterated in Ezra 9:10-15. The people were now dedicating themselves to the keeping of the Law and their vows to do so are listed in Nehemiah 10:31-39. This was not a halfhearted endeavor by the people. Under the proper leadership and examples of Nehemiah and Ezra they were now ready to start anew.

We have such opportunities every day. Whenever, for whatever reason, we have slipped in our devotion to God, we can renew our consecration vows. We can do this as a matter of course every day, as we read *A Vow unto the Lord* and take our *Morning Resolve*. One of the great boons to faithful worship of God is in the advice of the Apostle Paul as he wrote, “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” (Heb. 10:25) As the days grow more evil, the Lord’s people need each other, and to exhort one another, to study more about the plan and character of God and his Son. By these inspirations we renew each day our vow to be faithful.

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# God's Plan of Salvation

## – Jesus is Born

**THE APOSTLE PAUL** describes God's plan of salvation as "the gospel of Christ." "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ:" he wrote, "for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." (Rom. 1:16) The word gospel means 'good news,' so Paul explains that the good news of salvation for a lost world is that God will manifest his saving power through Christ, that great personage who is referred to so many times throughout the Bible.

In Romans 1:1,2 Paul refers to this same good news as the "gospel of God, (Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures.)" These promises are not to be found in orderly array in any one particular chapter or book of the Old Testament. Nevertheless, the Lord used each of his prophets to record one or more of his promises concerning the coming of Christ, the Messiah, and that through him salvation would become available to all mankind.

### **THE SEED OF PROMISE**

In Galatians 3:8, Paul speaks of the "gospel" as having been preached to Abraham, when God said to this faithful patriarch that in him and his seed all the families, or nations, of the earth would be blessed. (Gen. 12:3; 22:18) In Galatians 3:16 Paul informs us that when God made that promise to Abraham, "He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." Thus the apostle identifies the promise made to Abraham as being one of the first pertaining to the coming of a Messiah, a Christ, a Savior, a Deliverer.

That promise was restated to Abraham on a number of occasions, and finally was confirmed by God's oath. This was after Abraham had demonstrated his complete faith in God by proving his willingness to offer his son Isaac as a burnt offering, believing that if he did so, God would raise him from the dead.—Gen. 22:10-18; Heb. 11:17-19

The same promise was reaffirmed to Isaac, and later to his son Jacob. Jacob, in pronouncing his blessing upon each of his twelve sons, said that there would come forth from the loins of Judah One whom he referred to as “Shiloh,” and that unto this ‘Shiloh’ would “the gathering of the people be.” Thus the Messianic hope was kept alive.—Gen. 49:10

## **MOSES AND DAVID TELL OF THE MESSIAH**

The lawgiver, Moses, prophesied that there would come a “Prophet” greater than he, and implied that he would give to all who would heed his words that which they desired at Horeb, which was life. (Deut. 18:18,19) In Acts 3:19-23 the Apostle Peter quotes this prophecy and shows that it will have its fulfillment subsequent to the Second Coming of Christ, and during “the times of restitution of all things.”

David alludes to the coming Deliverer, when he asks, “What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?” (Ps. 8:4) Here he speaks of the coming to earth of the promised Messiah as a visitor representing the Creator. Thus the custom of visiting those in distress is utilized by David to indicate the great love of the Creator toward his human Creation, who, as a result of sin, are suffering and dying.

David refers further to the promised Messiah when, in Psalm 72 he writes, “He shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor. ... In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth. They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him; and his enemies shall lick the dust.”—vss. 4-9

## **THE PROPHETS FORETELL MESSIAH’S COMING**

The Prophet Isaiah wrote much concerning the coming Messiah. In chapter 9, verses 6 and 7, he foretells his birth and explains the purpose of his coming, that it was to establish a “government,” the “increase” of which there would be no end. And then, to assure us that this great objective of the Divine plan through the promised Messiah would not depend upon human effort for accomplishment, the prophet added, “The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.”

In chapter 52, verse 10, Isaiah refers to Christ as the “holy arm” of the Lord, and prophesies that this ‘arm’ will be made “bare ... in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.” But after presenting this glowing prophecy concerning the glorious triumph of the Divine plan in assuring salvation to ‘all the ends of the earth,’ he raises the question, “Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?”—chap. 53:1

The reason Isaiah asks this question is that in prophetic vision the One whom he first saw as the Arm of the Lord revealed to all the nations, he now sees as a lamb led to the slaughter. “He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,” the prophet writes. (Isa. 53:7) Thus does Isaiah, together with the other Old Testament prophets, not only foretell the glorious triumph of the Divine plan of salvation through Christ, but also the suffering and death of the Redeemer and Savior as an essential prerequisite to the recovery of man from sin and death. The Apostle Peter refers to this testimony of the prophets as descriptive of the “sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.”—I Pet. 1:11

In Micah 4:8, Christ is prophetically referred to as the “tower of the flock,” and the promise given that unto him shall come “the first dominion.” This is the ‘dominion’ over the earth that was given to our first parents, and lost by them through their disobedience to Divine law. (Gen. 1:28; 3:17-24) By virtue of his faithfulness, Jesus inherits the right to this dominion; but according to his Heavenly Father’s plan, he will give it to the restored world of mankind when the due time comes. It is this that is referred to in the parable of the Sheep and the Goats when Jesus says to those represented by the sheep, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.”—Matt. 25:34

The Prophet Micah was also used by the Lord to foretell the birthplace of the Messiah. He wrote, “But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.”—chap. 5:2

In Malachi, the last of the Old Testament books, Christ is referred to as the “messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts.” (chap. 3:1) The ‘covenant’ referred to

here is the one the Lord made with Abraham, by which he assured the patriarch that through his ‘seed’ he would bless all the families of the earth. Malachi refers to this promised seed as the ‘messenger’ of that covenant ‘whom ye delight in.’ The hope of Israel, based upon the covenant God made with Abraham, was indeed the delight of all those who put their trust in God.

## **THE CHRIST IS BORN**

That long series of promises, phrased in so many colorful and reassuring ways, beginning in Genesis and ending in Malachi, finally began to reach fruition, for Christ, the promised One, was born. He had a humble birth. There was no room in the inn, so when he was born he was laid in a manger. But the royal status of the Christ child was attested to by the fact that his birth was announced by an angel, with a mighty host of angels joining in the proclamation that his birth would bring “peace” on earth, and that it was a manifestation of God’s “good will” toward men—the ‘good will’ which had been implied in the many promises of the Messiah’s coming.—Luke 2:10,11,13,14

“Fear not,” the angel reassuringly said to the shepherds, “for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.” From Judges 6:22,23 we discern that the Israelites considered seeing an angel as betokening serious consequences. Perhaps at times it did, but on this occasion it was different. The shepherds had nothing to fear, for the appearance of the angel was to announce ‘good tidings,’ the glorious tidings that the One whom God had been promising for thousands of years had now come—born that night in the city of David.

The appearance of the angel on this occasion did not mean death, as Gideon feared it did in his case. Rather, it meant life—life for the shepherds, Israel, and all nations. It was good tidings to ‘all people,’ for it was the beginning of the fulfillment of God’s promises to bless all the families of the earth. The One who was to redeem and restore man’s lost dominion was now born, just as the Prophet Micah had foretold.

He was born—He whose name was to be called “Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father,” and “The Prince of Peace,” was now lying in a manger in Bethlehem. (Isa. 9:6) The One who was destined in the Divine plan to be the ‘arm of the Lord’ who

would bring salvation ‘to all the ends of the earth,’ had come, and fittingly that mighty host of angels sang, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”—Luke 2:14

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*Dawn Bible Students Association*

# Walking with God

*“Can two walk together, except they be agreed?”*

—*Amos 3:3*

**OUR TEXT WAS** addressed by God to the Jewish nation with which he was in covenant relationship, and it applies in principle to our association with him. Those who are in disagreement cannot successfully walk together. The words walk, walking, walkest, and walked are used in the Scriptures to denote a course of action, a general demeanor of life.

We read, “Enoch walked with God.” (Gen. 5:24) We know little of Enoch except that he prophesied the Lord would come with ten thousand of his saints and would execute judgment. (Jude 14,15) Evidently the Lord gave Enoch some understanding of his plan for human redemption, and he was faithful to the knowledge he enjoyed, this faithfulness constituting his ‘walk with God.’

In Genesis 6:9 we are informed that “Noah walked with God.” We have a little more information concerning Noah. He was faithful to the Lord, and labored zealously to do his will as it was revealed to him. Thus he ‘walked with God’- a walk that involved many long years of toil in building the ark, and of scorn from his fellows as he warned of the coming flood and urged upon them a course of righteousness.

In contrast to these two examples of faithfulness, we read in Leviticus 26:40,41 that the Israelites walked “contrary” to the Lord, and because they did, he walked ‘contrary’ to them. This illustrates the thought of our text, ‘Can two walk together, except they be agreed?’ The obvious and scriptural answer is that they cannot. Thus it is emphasized that to walk with the Lord one must be in harmony with him, desirous of knowing his will, and being fully surrendered to it.

To be sure that we are fully devoted to doing God’s will requires a sincere and deep search of our hearts. We read of those who walked according to the “imagination of their evil heart.” (Jer. 11:8) (*Marginal Translation*, stubbornness of their heart). The Apostle Paul reminds us of

the Lord's provision to cast down, or destroy, these imaginations. We read, "(The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations [*Marginal Translation*, reasonings], and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." (II Cor. 10:4,5) How easy it is to substitute our own reasoning for the clearly expressed will of God as set forth in his Word!

Paul writes of the time when we "walked according to the course of this world," a world which is under the domination of Satan, the "prince of the power of the air." (Eph. 2:2) Peter writes of walking according to our "former lusts," or desires. (I Pet. 1:14) To walk with God, and be in full harmony with all the Divine appointments, there must be a sincere struggle against our own preferences, a continuous resistance of the spirit of the world, and a constant watchfulness lest we be led away from the path of righteousness by the wiles of the Devil.

## **FROM BEHIND**

God has revealed his will through his Word. A beautiful poetic expression says, "Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left." (Isa. 30:21) 'This is the way'—the Lord's way, the way in which he walks—and the way in which we must walk if we desire to walk with him.

The 'word' which we hear from behind is the entire Word of God, that precious Word which reveals the Divine plan of salvation and the place we are privileged to occupy therein. Are we in agreement with that plan? Is every detail of it a delight to our hearts? Are we willing to set aside all our own plans and preferences and yield ourselves fully to the accomplishment of that which the Divine plan reveals to be God's will for us?

God is willing to walk with us, but only if we are in agreement with him. Typical Israel was his chosen people. In the verse preceding our text he said to Israel, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth." (Amos 3:2) He had devoted himself wholly to this people, but if this arrangement was to continue, they would have to devote themselves fully

to him, otherwise they could not walk together, for they would not be in agreement.

Throughout the Gospel Age the consecrated followers of the Master are the Lord's chosen people—his “peculiar,” or very special people, as the Greek text indicates. (Titus 2:14) Peter wrote, “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar [*Marginal Translation*, purchased] people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.”—I Pet. 2:9

This precious, and favored, relationship to the Lord is dependent upon our continued agreement with his ways—yea, our delight in all that pleases him. The Lord is freely showering his blessings upon us. In Psalm 36:8 we read, “Thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures.” The thought is that the pleasures of the Lord become our pleasures if we are walking in complete agreement with him.

## **HIS PLEASURES**

All Creation is a pleasure to the Lord—“Thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.” (Rev. 4:11) We joy in the creative works of God because we see manifested in them his infinite wisdom, his mighty power, and his abounding love. Even the sunshine and the rain are evidences of his loving care for his creatures.

Jehovah rejoiced in his Son, who willingly and joyfully obeyed him. To him he said, “Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.” (Luke 3:22) Are we ‘well pleased’ with Jesus? Do we see in him the One who is “altogether lovely”? (Song of Sol. 5:16) Naturally we rejoice that through his death he has provided salvation for both the church and the world; but apart from this, are we well pleased with Jesus because he loved righteousness and hated iniquity?

In Psalm 149:4 we read, “The Lord taketh pleasure in his people.” Are the Lord's people our people, the people with whom we delight to fellowship? Perhaps if we had had the selection of the Lord's people we would have chosen quite a different group, especially those in our community. But God is too wise to err. He saw in each of his chosen ones certain heart qualities which he could use, and which would enable them to make their “calling and election sure.”—II Pet. 1:10

Are we looking for those same qualities in our brethren, and thus finding joy in their fellowship? Or do we see only the weaknesses of their flesh, and, seeing these, half wish, perhaps, that we did not have to be so closely associated with them in the meetings and in the service of the Truth? It is a test of our love for those whom the Lord loves, an opportunity of demonstrating that we are in agreement with him and that we take pleasure in those who are a joy to him.

In the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah we have that very vivid description of the suffering and death of Jesus, who was led as a lamb to the slaughter. In verse ten we are told that it pleased the Lord to “bruise him,” and that he “shall see his seed,” and “the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.” The ‘pleasure of the Lord’ here mentioned is undoubtedly his loving purpose, centered in Jesus the Redeemer, of recovering the world of mankind from sin and death.

We are likely to talk about those things which give us pleasure, and in his Word God has said much about his plan for human restoration. This aspect of the Divine plan is described by the Apostle Peter by the word restitution, and Peter says of the “times of restitution,” that “God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.”—Acts 3:21

The prospect of ‘restitution’ for dying humanity has been such a pleasure to God that he continued to talk about it throughout all those centuries of the past when he was speaking through his holy prophets. Are we ‘drinking’ of this ‘river’ of God’s ‘pleasure’? We are if we are in agreement with God, sufficiently in harmony with him to warrant his walking with us.

This involves more than merely being thankful that God has blessings in store for the world. Do we continue to realize how important this aspect of God’s plan is to him, and that for us to discuss this and related truths pertaining to his provision for the world’s blessing is a pleasure to him, even as it should be for us?

Jesus, in whom the Father was well pleased, rejoiced to discuss the many aspects of the Divine kingdom plan for blessing all mankind. In one of the last parables, a prophetic parable given as one of the signs of his Second Presence, Jesus spoke of the “sheep” class as those to whom it would be said, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom

prepared for you from the foundation of the world”—the restored earthly dominion.—Matt. 25:33,34

The apostles all preached and discussed the purpose of our Lord’s return. “The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death,” wrote Paul. (I Cor. 15:26) There is to be a dispensation of the “fulness of times,” he explained, in which all things will be gathered under Christ, in heaven as well as in earth. (Eph. 1:10) Peter reminds us of God’s promise to create a “new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.”—II Pet. 3:13

The last three chapters of Revelation are devoted almost entirely to emphasizing God’s wonderful provision of life for the world. Hell gives up its dead and the books are opened. “There shall be no more death, ... for the former things are passed away.” There will be a “river of water of life,” flowing from “the throne of God and of the Lamb.” Finally, the “Spirit and the bride say, Come. ... And ... take the water of life freely.”—Rev. 20:12,13; 21:4; 22:1,2,17

Thus we see that from first to last in his Word, God continues to talk about restitution. It is one of his favorite themes. Do we find it a pleasure to join in the conversation as we walk with God? We do if we are in agreement with him, having the same interest in mankind as he displays throughout his Word. This interest is prompted by his love, and if this love fills our hearts they will overflow with enthusiasm over his glorious restitution provision for the world of mankind.

God also takes pleasure in the High Calling of his house of sons. Paul wrote, “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.” (Eph. 1:5) This feature of the Divine plan should also be a pleasure to us, especially if we are running for the “prize of the high calling.” (Phil. 3:14) Our joy therein will be increased as we realize that we are being prepared to live and reign with Christ for the blessing of all the families of the earth.

“Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound,” wrote the psalmist, “they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of thy countenance.” (Ps. 89:15) This is the ‘joyful sound’ of the Truth, present Truth, the glorious harvest message, including the doctrine of restitution. What a blessing it is to know this Truth! That we have been permitted to know these “mysteries of the kingdom” (Matt. 13:11) is evidence of the Lord’s favor, that we are

walking in the light of his countenance. Let us, then, never lose our enthusiasm for any part of the Truth. Let us continue to take pleasure in it as we walk together with the Lord.

To Gaius, one of the early disciples, the Apostle John wrote, “I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth.” (III John 3) To the “elect lady” he wrote, “I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father.” (II John 1,4) To walk in the Truth is to walk with the Lord, and John properly speaks of his rejoicing to know that this was the happy experience of Gaius and the ‘elect lady’ and her children. We cannot truly walk with the Lord without rejoicing!

## **AS HE WALKED**

Again John wrote, “He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he [Christ] walked.” (I John 2:6) Certainly Jesus walked with his Heavenly Father. So closely did he walk with God that he could say, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.” (John 14:9) Jesus said that the words which he spoke were not his but the Father’s, and the works he did were the Father’s works.

Jesus testified that he always did the things which were pleasing to his Father. For this reason, he could say to his Father, “I knew that thou hearest me always.” (John 11:42) In walking with God, Jesus was guided by the ‘word’ from behind. ‘It is written,’ was his reason for every step which he took in his walk with God. He then is our perfect Exemplar and Guide, and if we profess to be his, and to be ‘in him,’ we ought to walk as he walked.

The only way we can be in Christ is by being baptized into his death. We are “buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” (Rom. 6:4) Jesus was raised from the dead literally, and exalted to the Divine nature. What a glorious new life he thus entered. This is our hope also, but if our hope is to be realized we must begin now to ‘walk in newness of life.’

We are no longer to walk “after the flesh.” Our human ambitions and desires must be kept under, while we walk “after the Spirit.” (Rom. 8:1,4) “Walk in the Spirit,” Paul explained, “and ye shall not fulfil the lust

[desire] of the flesh.” (Gal. 5:16) We receive God’s Spirit through the Word of Truth. Every instruction of the Word is a leading of the Spirit. The Spirit leads in the way of sacrifice. Actually, it was not the Roman soldiers who led Jesus as a lamb to the slaughter, but the Spirit of God, and it leads us to follow in his steps. This is God’s will for us, and when we walk in this way we are walking with him.

It is glorious to walk with God. Concerning Levi, the head of the priestly tribe of Israel, the Lord said, “My covenant was with him of life and peace; ... The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity.”—Mal. 2:5,6

If we have been baptized into Christ we are members of the antitypical priesthood, and the Lord has entered into a covenant with us. It is a covenant “by sacrifice.” (Ps. 50:5) It is a covenant, therefore, which, if we are faithful to it, will eventually lead to death by way of toil, ignominy, and suffering. Nevertheless, it is a covenant ‘of peace’ because in the consciousness that we are walking with God and that through all of our experiences, regardless of how trying they may be, he is holding us by the hand, we have peace—the “peace of God, which passeth all [human] understanding.”—Phil. 4:7

## **A WALK OF FAITH**

The enjoyment of this peace while we walk with God depends upon our faith. We must “believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” (Heb. 11:6) Thus, as Paul wrote, “We walk by faith, not by sight.” (II Cor. 5:7) We do not see God literally. Our faith must lay hold upon the promises of his presence, and enable us to see in every experience of life the overruling of his providence for our good.

If we have a faith that firmly trusts God, come what may, we can continue to walk with him in peace and joy, and not become weary. Isaiah expressed this thought beautifully, saying, “They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.” (Isa. 40:31) If we are not to faint as we walk, we must remain close to the Lord, walking with him, and in full agreement with every detail of his will, rejoicing in every feature of his glorious plan of salvation.

## **WALKING HUMBLY**

The Prophet Micah wrote, “What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (Mic. 6:8) Paul confirmed this when he wrote, “I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love.”—Eph. 4:1,2

There is an important relationship between walking ‘humbly’ with God and walking ‘worthy of the vocation’ to which we have been called by God. It is a very honorable vocation. We have been called, or invited, into partnership with God, to be coworkers with him, in his great plan of salvation. (II Cor. 6:1) We have also been called to “glory and honour and immortality.” (Rom. 2:7) Through Christ, we have “access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.”—Rom. 5:2

It is surely a High Calling. No wonder we are admonished to walk worthy of it, but to do so we must ‘walk humbly’ with our God. It is important ever to realize that we have not been called to this high position because of any merit of our own. We are “not to think” of ourselves more highly than we “ought to think.” (Rom. 12:3) Our trust, our confidence, is “through Christ to God-ward. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves; ... but our sufficiency is of God.”—II Cor. 3:4,5

As we walk together with God, rejoicing in all his arrangements for us and for all mankind, we can humbly look to him as the One whose grace has given us such a glorious privilege. And the more we realize this, the more earnestly and zealously we will strive to show ourselves approved by him through a prayerful and careful study of his Word, that we may know with precision just what the word from behind is saying to us from day to day as it outlines the way of the Lord in which we are to walk.

## **WALKING TOGETHER**

All of the Lord’s people during the present age are called to walk in the same way. We are walking together. Paul wrote, “Let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.” (Phil. 3:16) There is no question as to what Paul means by the ‘same thing.’ He has just finished explaining what it is, and has emphasized, “This one thing I do.”—Phil. 3:13

The ‘one thing’ mentioned by Paul was “forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before.” In doing this, Paul said, “I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” (vs. 14) This is simply another way of defining the vocation to which we are called. To walk worthy of it, we must give ourselves wholly to it. We cannot expect to walk with the Lord, and have the assurance that he is walking with us if we are half-hearted in the matter, giving only partial attention to him and to the steps we are taking as we walk in this narrow way.

We should not expect that the Lord will outline a special path for each one of us, one perhaps that may be a little more favorable to our flesh, a little more in keeping with our particular likings. No, there is only the one way, and all the consecrated are walking in this way, all minding the same thing. Thus we are not only walking with the Lord, but we are walking with one another, and this, too, is an added joy, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.”—Ps. 133:1

## **IN HIS PRESENCE**

Our walk with God today is a walk of faith. He speaks to us through his Word and through his providence, and we speak to him through prayer—a blessed fellowship. Meanwhile, however, we are inspired with the hope of actually being with him, and in his presence enjoy fullness of joy. Jesus promised, “They shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.”—Rev. 3:4,5

Only the pure—symbolized by white raiment—will have the inestimable honor of being introduced to the Heavenly Father by his beloved Son. That will be after “this corruptible” has put on “incorruption.” (I Cor. 15:53,54) But prior to that there must be a purity of heart, while the imperfections of the flesh are covered by the robe of Christ’s righteousness.

Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.” (Matt. 5:8) Purity of heart leads to faith’s vision of God even now. It is the pure in heart who are privileged to walk with him and enjoy the delights of his fellowship. It is these who, as they walk with the Heavenly

Father, tell him all their sorrows and all their joys. It is to these that, through his Word, he speaks words of comfort, and gives assurance of his delight in them.

Thus we walk and talk together with our God, and it is this walk of faith and joy which eventually will culminate in our being presented to him by Jesus. The hope of entering into the Father's actual presence as a Divine being was one of the joys set before Jesus which enabled him to endure the cross, and despise the shame. (Heb. 12:2) This prospective joy will enable us also to continue on zealously in the way of sacrifice, until, being faithful unto death, we receive the crown of life. Walking with God, we have the same assurance Jesus did, and like Jesus, we can say to him, "Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."—Ps. 16:11

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*Dawn Bible Students Association*

# Our Assembling Together

*“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together.”*

*—Hebrews 10:25*

**THE ARRANGEMENT OF** meeting together, with the accompanying rich blessings, are by no means confined to large classes, because as Jesus declared, “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of

them.” (Matt. 18:20) It is a matter of much sincere heart gratitude and rejoicing, to know that the ‘twos and threes,’ as well as the large ecclesias, are meeting together regularly with the Lord around the inspired Word—not only to praise and worship, but also to learn more and more about him and his holy will.

These assemblies, small as well as large, are having a growing realization that each member of the ecclesia has been given to the class with a view to the building up of the body of the Anointed—each member assisting the others, supplying by Divine grace that encouragement and help “which every joint supplieth.”—Eph. 4:16

In addition to the local gatherings week by week, some of these ecclesias, small and large, are very happy to send out announcements and invitations to other dear ones living within a wide radius, to fellowship with them at their meeting place whenever visiting speakers are scheduled to serve. The number attending the usual local meetings is thereby sometimes doubled or tripled, for whole-day, or part-day Sunday united gatherings (at special annual united assemblies a very much increased number usually fellowships together), light refreshments being served during the intervals between meetings. Whether the friends gathered together are many or few, the marked evidences of the Lord’s rich blessings are very precious experiences.

The return to summer time, when lighter evenings and approaching warmer weather encourages one to travel a long distance, brethren in various parts of the country look forward with joyful anticipation to more and more united gatherings, or conventions, being held than are possible during the winter months. Looking back over past seasons, it is very

encouraging to note that such conventions and united efforts have been increasing in number. Not only have there been spiritual uplift and blessing while at these meetings, but when, in after days, recalling the fragrant and very abundant blessings associated with such fellowship, the mind and heart are encouraged and stimulated as there is a pondering over all the Lord's blessings and benefits, and the rich spiritual food provided.

Again and again comes the glad and grateful realization that the Lord continues to lavish his grace upon us so richly. At these united assemblies, it is an experience which makes the heart rejoice, to meet the different brethren whose enthusiasm, love, and zeal have prompted and energized them to undertake long journeys that they might participate in these blessed 'assemblings together.'

Some of these visiting brethren are, in their home district, somewhat isolated, with little or no opportunity to have fellowship in the Truth; others may meet weekly in very small classes and there is much rejoicing because of the blessings received at these united meetings. In addition to discourse meetings, there are ample opportunities to testify to each other and before the Lord, concerning the continued goodness and grace of the Heavenly Father. Prayer and praise also have their rightful place, and there is usually a discussion on the Manna Text for the day.

The visitors from a distance are overjoyed; indeed it is difficult to gauge who are most joyous and grateful for the spiritual blessings received—the visitors or those who so gladly welcomed them at their meeting place. It was some time ago that a local class arranged to have a small convention as a kind of trial. This venture of faith, which worked by love, was richly blessed by the Lord, and, as a result, similar united gatherings are being held repeatedly, particularly during the summer.

Visualize, also, various other small classes up and down the country where, quite apart from any annual convention efforts, the friends, few in number, arrange to have several of these united meetings in their usual local meeting places. Here, again, love and zeal energize the faith of the brethren. In the spirit of affectionate service and sacrifice, warm invitations to attend Sunday meetings, either for the whole day or part of the day, are extended to dear friends living far and near. In the same spirit of love there is a ready and glad response and attendance. All are blessed

abundantly; and again there are marked evidences of their grateful rejoicing in the Lord, also their love and loyalty to him and to the glorious Truth which is becoming more and more precious to them with the passing of the days.

Many of these united assemblies could be described in some detail, but it would be impossible to express adequately all the faith, love, joy, gratitude, and zeal manifested at these gatherings. Suffice it to say that here are brethren giving evidence that they are steadfast soldiers of Jesus Christ, holding high the banner of Truth. They are not only giving diligence to make their own heavenly calling and election sure, but are also seeking and seizing every opportunity to assist others to do the same. Here are living testimonies that they are shining as lights in the world, holding forth the Word of life!

Where sincere efforts are made to comply with the exhortation, ‘Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together,’ and thus to meet with an earnest desire (whether it be in the home class, or visiting others) to worship and praise our Father in heaven; to be richly blessed through his holy Word; to grow in the knowledge of his will; to be strengthened by the Holy Spirit; and to be more developed in Christlikeness; then how can one leave the assembly without receiving a blessing, and without having been made a blessing to others?

All who attend can indeed encourage and assist to strengthen one another spiritually. How? By gladly and gratefully manifesting the Master’s spirit, by mingling our prayers and our praises together; by testifying to the Lord’s continued grace and goodness; and by reminding one another of our Father’s great eternal purpose in Christ Jesus.

It is God’s will for us, in this connection, that “we should bear each other in mind, for an incitement of love and good works; not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is a custom with some; but exhorting to it, and so much the more as you see the day drawing near.”—Heb. 10:24,25, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*

It is true that sometimes isolated brethren, whose only fellowship is through the printed page and the telephone, are often amongst the most staunch, devoted and self-sacrificing of the Lord’s people; but we should not from this infer that the blessings come from their isolation, but rather, since separation is unavoidable on their part, we may reasonably suppose

that our Lord makes up to them, in his own presence and blessing, that which they lack of fellowship with other members of the church. But if one had opportunity for assembling with others for worship of the Lord, and for the study of his Word, and neglected to avail himself of his privilege, we need not expect that for his benefit the Lord would work special miracles of grace. The Lord's miracles may be expected only in times of emergency to make up for natural deficiency.

The Apostle Paul in Hebrews intimates that as 'the day' draws near there will be the more need for the observance of this instruction respecting the fellowship and communion of God's children with one another. And experience confirms this. The day in which we live, which we see the dawning of that special day referred to, has brought with it new activities in mind and body. There is a great pressure and rush to keep abreast of the times, and a correspondingly greater danger to the Lord's people of being choked with the cares of this life, or with the deceitfulness of riches. We need counteracting influences to offset this increasing pressure of the world and its affairs around us. The admonition of Hebrews 10:25 should be heeded by the Lord's people by communing one with the other and with the Lord, and exhorting and encouraging one another to steadfastness along the lines of instruction laid down in his Word.

It is as we see the day, the glorious Millennial Day, drawing on, that we are to be the more diligent in assembling ourselves together; the more earnest in exhortation and provoking one another to love and to good works; building up ourselves and others in the most holy faith; and assisting one another by the Lord's grace and strength to continue faithful; to be conquerors, yea, "more than conquerors through him that loved us."—Rom. 8:37

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***Dawn Bible Students Association***