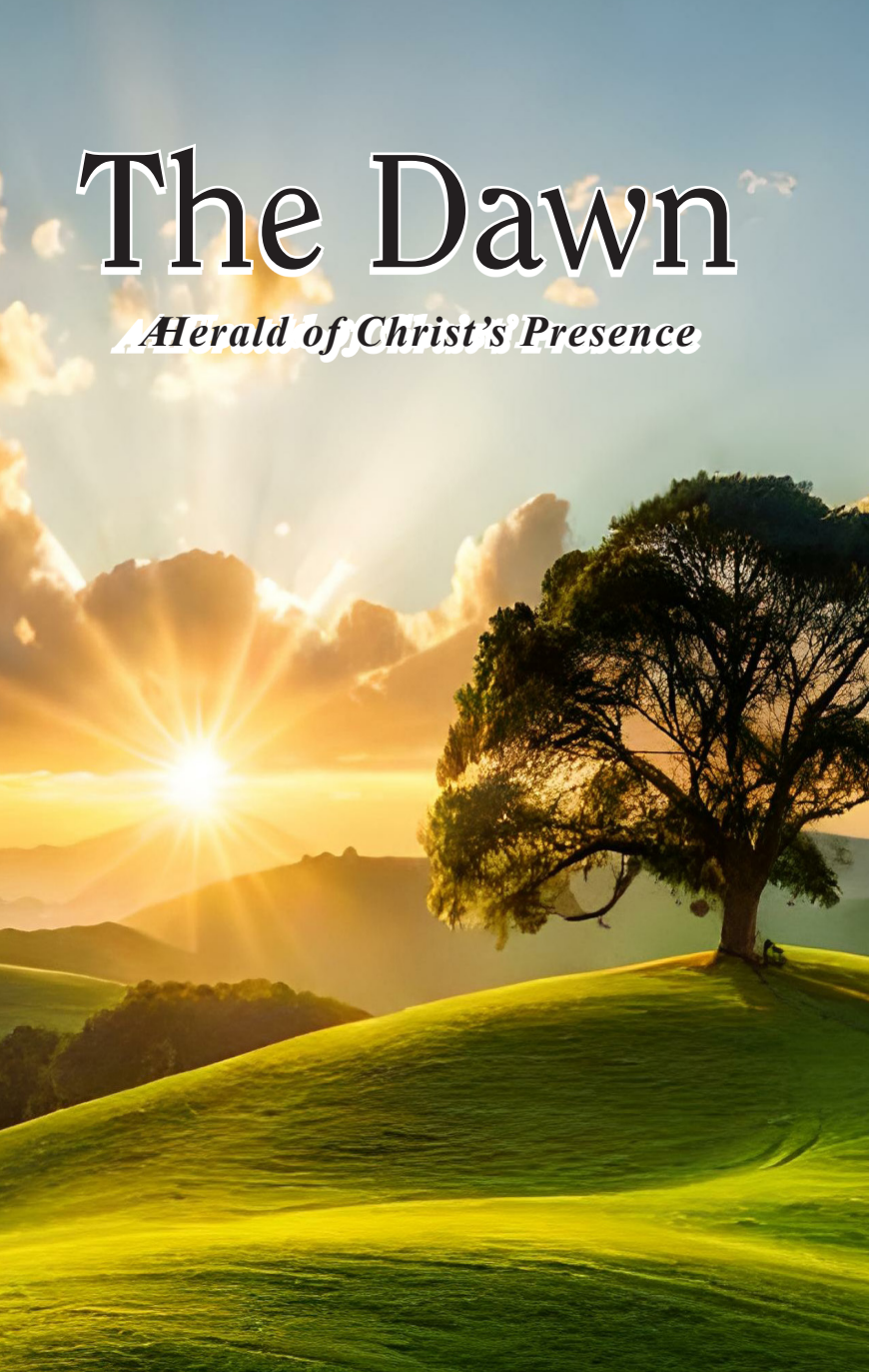


# The Dawn

*Herald of Christ's Presence*



# The DAWN

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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### HIGHLIGHTS OF DAWN

Born of the Spirit 2

### INTERNATIONAL BIBLE STUDIES

The Offerings of Cain and Abel 14

Noah Builds an Altar 16

Abraham Offers His Son Isaac 18

Isaac Calls on the Name of the Lord 20

Jacob Sets Up a Stone Pillar 22

### CHRISTIAN LIFE AND DOCTRINE

Acquiescence to God's Will 24

Simon Peter—Sifted and Converted 37

God's Unseen Messengers 51

Weekly Prayer Meeting Texts 50

**OBITUARIES** 62

**SPEAKERS' APPOINTMENTS** 62

**CONVENTIONS** 63

# Born of the Spirit

*“Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”*

—*John 3:3*

**OUR TITLE, “BORN OF THE Spirit,”** and the phrase “born again,” which appears in our opening verse, have long been used by Christians to describe the present condi-

tion of those who have accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. Many also believe that those who outwardly make this claim are guaranteed a heavenly reward when they die, with little if any possibility of failure, regardless of their life’s conduct at the present time. As critically important as such claims should be, it is surprising that relatively few Christians seek to understand any other details concerning what is meant to be “born of the Spirit,” or “born again.”

The words of our text were addressed by Jesus to Nicodemus, a Pharisee who came to the Master by night for the purpose of learning more about him and his teachings. (John 3:1,2) The words of Jesus in response to Nicodemus call attention to an important feature of God’s plan, which is accomplished by the Holy Spirit, or power, of God. This feature of the divine arrangement is that those who are to live and reign with Christ in his Father’s

kingdom, which is to bless all the families of the earth, must first be “born again” to a new life. Jesus used the invisible power of the wind as an illustration of one of the characteristics of that new life: “So is every one that is born of the Spirit.”—vs. 8

Nicodemus did not understand what Jesus meant by being born of the Spirit. He asked, “How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born?” (vs. 4) Jesus explained, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” (vs. 6) It is doubtful if Nicodemus understood this explanation. It conveys, however, the fact that the thought of birth in connection with the new life that Jesus is discussing is used only in a symbolic sense. It is not, as Nicodemus suggested, a case of entering again into a mother’s womb to be literally born a second time.

Here, as the case so frequently is in the Bible, a figure of speech is used to help us understand a great Truth. The word born, or birth, instantly conjures up in our minds the idea of a new life. Jesus is saying that, through the power of the Holy Spirit, some were to experience a new birth, meaning simply that they were to attain to a new life. This would be a life so unlike the one that is “born of the flesh” that those who are born into it will be both invisible and powerful. Since these are born by the Holy Spirit, or power of God, they become spiritual “sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, ... we shall be like him [Jesus]; for we shall see him as he is.”—I John 3:2

While the birth of the Spirit does not involve the necessity of entering literally into a mother’s womb

to be born again, the metaphor is carried out with considerable detail by the various writers of the New Testament, as they refer to this aspect of the Holy Spirit's work in the hearts and lives of the Lord's consecrated believers. Unfortunately, our English translations of the Bible, in most instances, fail to present clearly what the writers had in mind. This has led to the erroneous view that one can be born of the Spirit while still in the flesh. Out of this error has come the expression, "born-again Christians."

In the English language, we have two words that describe the coming into being of a new life—"begettal" or begotten, and "birth" or born. However, in the Greek language spoken in New Testament times, there is only one word to describe both the begettal and birth. That word is *gennao*. Therefore, when used by Jesus and the apostles, one has to determine by the context whether begettal or birth is referred to, or, in some cases, if the complete process of bringing into existence a new life is meant.

It is the Greek word *gennao* that is used in Matthew 1:1-16 where the genealogy of Jesus is given. "Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren," the record states. The word "begat" is used in this account thirty-nine times, and in every instance it is properly translated by our English word begat. Obviously in this instance begat is the correct translation. How odd it would sound, and how untrue, to say that "Abraham gave birth to Isaac"! This scriptural example points out the fact that in the natural human realm, the male provides the begettal, and the female gives birth. Both are necessary for a new life to begin.

In another example, the Greek word *gennao* is used twice, and is translated both “born” and “begotten” in the same verse. The text reads, “We know that whosoever is born of God [that is, by his Holy Spirit] sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.” (I John 5:18) To be consistent, the translators should have used the word “begotten” in both instances. The only apparent reason for not doing so seems to have been a desire to make the phraseology of the translation less repetitious. We note that the *American Standard Version*, *The Emphatic Diaglott*, *Revised Version*, and *Young’s Literal Translation*, have all translated *gennao* as “begotten,” both times in the foregoing verse.

### **BEGOTTEN NOW—BORN IN THE RESURRECTION**

If we consider the full meaning of the birth metaphor we must conclude that in order to be born one must first be begotten. In other words, when a new life is to be brought into existence there must first be the begetting, then a period of gestation during which the embryo is nourished and developed, and thus prepared for birth at the proper time. Thus is the two-fold work of the Holy Spirit presented to us in the Scriptures. When Jesus said to Nicodemus, “Ye must be born again,” he was speaking of the completed work of the Holy Spirit in giving a new, and higher, life in the resurrection to those who would devote themselves wholly to the doing of God’s will. In the brief lesson to Nicodemus, Jesus did not go into detail to show that before any are born of the Spirit they must first be begotten of the Spirit. However, elsewhere

in the New Testament these details are clearly set forth.

We read, “Of his [the Heavenly Father’s] own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.” (James 1:18) This is an important text, for not only does it show that a begettal takes place—not bodily—but in the heart and mind of a Christian, but also that it is accomplished by God’s will “with the word of truth.” In I Peter 1:23, we are given this same information. Here we read, “Being born [*gennao*] again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.” Here, *gennao* should more properly be translated “begotten.”—See *ASV, Diaglott, RV, and YLT*

How clearly this sets forth the thought of begettal, for reference is made by Peter to the “seed.” In the natural process of procreation, it is the begettal that is accomplished by the seed, not the birth. Thus the apostle here refers to the beginning, or begetting, of the new life, not to its completion in birth. The seed of begettal, he says, is “the word of God.”

We have learned that every word of God in the Scriptures is Spirit-inspired. The Old Testament prophecies were written by holy men of old as they were “moved by the Holy Spirit.” (II Pet. 1:21) All of Jesus’ teachings are the direct result of the illumination of his mind and heart by the Holy Spirit. The same is true of the apostolic writings. When Jesus referred to the coming of the Holy Spirit he described it as “the Spirit of truth.” (John 15:26; 16:13) It is clear, then, that to be begotten by the Word of Truth means that one is begotten by the Holy Spirit.

This is an important fact, and to grasp it clearly will help to guard us against the notion entertained by many Christians who believe the Holy Spirit enters directly into the life of believers, cleanses them from all sin, and makes it impossible that they should ever fall from grace. It is this erroneous view that leads to the mistaken suggestion, “Once in grace, always in grace.”

James and Peter give us the true thought. It is that through the Word of Truth the beginning of a new life takes place in the mind and heart of a believer. Would not this mean, then, that all who read the Word of God are begotten by the Holy Spirit? Not at all. Let us further consider the metaphor. All conditions must be right for the reception of the seed in order for begetting to take place. So it is in the case of Spirit begetting. Many read the Word of God whose minds and hearts are not receptive to its life-giving truths; and while they may receive some comfort from its pages, and some instruction to help guide them in their daily tasks, they are not begotten to a new life.

## **FULL SURRENDER**

Full surrender to the divine will and to the holy impulses of God’s Word is the condition necessary in order to be truly prepared to receive the begetting power of the Holy Spirit through the Word of Truth. God’s part in this wonderful arrangement, whereby a few are to attain immortal life on the divine plane, was the supplying of his Spirit-inspired Word—the seed, as it were. This aspect of God’s plan is accomplished by the power of his thoughts over the thoughts of the believer. Even with unlimited



power at his command, the Creator will not invade the mind of another, and begin the development of a new mind, without the willing reception of the one involved.

Here is reflected one of the most wonderful characteristics of our Heavenly Father. When the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters in connection with the original creation and preparation of the earth for human habitation, it was an arbitrary exercise of his power, but not so in the begetting of those who are to live and reign with Christ. He exercised his power to fill his Word with his thoughts which express his will concerning these, and assures them that all needed guidance and help will be given them in order to know, and to do, his will. Then he has waited for the individual, whom his providence has brought into contact with his Word, to voluntarily decide whether or not they will yield wholly and completely to his will as the Holy Spirit has expressed it through his Word.

In his precious Word, God has caused to have recorded many wonderful promises of “glory and honour and immortality.” (Rom. 2:7) He has revealed that by these “exceeding great and precious promises,” we can be made “partakers of the divine nature.” (II Pet. 1:4) The Holy Spirit inspired Jesus to say, “I go to prepare a place for you. ... I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.”—John 14:2,3

As we study God’s Word, these promises come to our attention, and we realize how wonderful they are. We also rejoice in the glorious provision God has made for the world of mankind, which Peter describes as “restitution,” or restoration to life on earth. We

are happy for the realization that all God's holy prophets since the world began foretold the "times of restitution of all things," and we look forward to the fulfillment of these earthly promises.—Acts 3:20,21

To attain, however, to the heavenly promises of the Bible, requires surrender and sacrifice. The way that leads to a heavenly spiritual birth is a "narrow," difficult one. (Matt. 7:14) Jesus said, "If any man will come after me [be my disciple], let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." (Matt. 16:24) We also remember Paul's exhortation to present our bodies a "living sacrifice." (Rom. 12:1) These conditions of the heavenly calling seem at first difficult, yet the promises attached to them, if we are faithful, are to live and reign with Christ and with him to bless all the families of the earth.—Rev. 20:4,6; Gen. 12:3; 22:18; Gal. 3:8

To those seeking to be part of God's divine family in heaven, and to bless the remainder of mankind in his coming kingdom, the great plan of God as revealed in his Word continues to increase their appreciation of its divine Architect. His love in giving his Son to be the Redeemer and Savior of the whole world calls forth from these an ever increasing love for him. (John 3:16,17) The love of Christ, in suffering and dying on mankind's behalf, reaches deeper and deeper into their hearts. If we find such noble thoughts in our hearts, and are exercised by them, we will conclude, as Paul did, that we "should not henceforth live unto [ourselves]" but unto Jesus, and unto the loving Heavenly Father who sent him to be the Savior of the world.—II Cor. 5:14,15

Having complied with God's invitation to surrender ourselves to him, to be directed by his Spirit-inspired Word, we know that the promises of the Scriptures to those who meet this condition apply to us. Those inspiring promises of a heavenly home and of the divine nature, instead of being as they were before, something apart from us, viewed merely as an interesting feature of God's plan, now become a life-giving influence in our lives. Through surrender to God, the seed begins at once to generate the hope of a new life. We are begotten of God by "the word of truth."—James 1:18

### **MIRACLE OF THE NEW LIFE**

Just as only God can make a tree, so all life is a miracle in that our finite minds cannot comprehend it. We witness the miracle of a newborn infant and we instinctively realize that actually the parents did not give life to that child. They simply complied with the conditions that God designed thousands of years ago whereby the earth would eventually be filled with his human creatures. (Gen. 1:28) On a much higher level, this is true also with respect to those who are begotten of God by the word of Truth. It is among God's greatest miracles, in which it is our blessed privilege to cooperate.

Some miracles are accomplished almost instantaneously, others over a long period of time. When Jesus called to the dead brother of Martha and Mary, "Lazarus, come forth," and he who was dead "came forth," it was a miracle performed in a short time. (John 11:43,44) The miracle of the Creation as displayed throughout the universe, however, involved long epochs of time for accomplishment. The miracle

of Spirit-begetting and birth is also spread out over a long period of time.

Think of the time consumed in preparing the seed of begettal—that is, the Word of God. God’s Spirit miraculously guided the writing of the Bible. Thousands of years were involved in thus recording the thoughts of God in a manner in which they could enter the human mind and heart, be pondered over and accepted or rejected at the option of the reader. God could directly fill the mind of a person with his thoughts, but how would anyone know that they came from God? Besides, how disconcerting it would be for one to discover that his mind was being filled with forced ideas as a robot would be. How wise are God’s ways! The miracle-working power of God is operative in shaping the circumstances of one’s life in preparation for entrance into the mind of the seed of begettal, but each must accept and act upon these things voluntarily.

It is only when we realize the need of divine help that we are likely to give serious consideration to the Word of God. Our Heavenly Father, in his infinite wisdom and in the tenderness of his love, knows exactly the sort of experiences which will most effectively touch the heart of those whom he desires to call, that the called one might give heed to his Word. This work of preparing for Spirit begettal is miraculous, even as the preparation of the seed of begettal was by the Spirit of God. Every aspect of God’s part in this feature of his plan was, and is, miraculous, just as the birth of every newborn child constitutes a miracle.

In the case of those who have been made receptive by circumstances of life that have been overruled

by God for this purpose and, having studied his Word and voluntarily surrendered their lives fully to the divine will as expressed therein, Spirit begetting is a certainty. All who are thus dealt with by God may claim the promises of glory, honor, and immortality, in the certain knowledge that if they continue faithful to the Lord, they will receive the “crown of life.”—Rev. 2:10

In keeping with the figure of begetting and birth, the Scriptures reveal that as the embryo new life develops, this also is accomplished by the Spirit of God through his Word. Our new spiritual minds feed upon the promises of God. The spiritual growth, if pleasing to God, must be in conformity to the divine image. Thus the Spirit of God promotes growth of the Christian fruitage of peace, joy, long-suffering, and love. (Gal. 5:22,23; II Pet. 1:5-7) Paul gives us a beautiful description of this work of the Holy Spirit, saying, “Be renewed in the spirit of your mind; ... put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.”—Eph. 4:23,24

When the new life is developed to the point where it is ready for birth, our corruptible bodies go into death, and the birth of the new life is accomplished by means of the resurrection. (I Cor. 15:53,54) Here the Spirit, or power, of God is further exercised. Paul speaks of this mighty power that was used to raise Jesus from the dead or, to use the symbol we are discussing, to bring about his birth of the Spirit. He speaks of “the exceeding greatness of his [God’s] power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at

his own right hand in the heavenly places.”—Eph. 1:19,20

In speaking to Nicodemus, Jesus used the wind to help illustrate some of the characteristics of those who are born of the Spirit in the resurrection. (John 3:8) The wind is both invisible and powerful. So will all those be who, having first of all been begotten by the Spirit through the Word of Truth, and who, by feeding upon the Word, continue to develop until they are made ready to be “partakers of the inheritance of the saints.” (Col. 1:12) Divine power will exalt these to heavenly life. They will be given celestial, or heavenly, bodies—incorruptible and immortal.—I Cor. 15:40-44,53-58

Not all of the Adamic race who will be redeemed through the blood of Christ will thus be born again as heavenly beings. Jesus did not say to Nicodemus that it is necessary to be born again in order to live again. What he said was that one had to be born again in order to see the kingdom of God, which is in heaven. (John 3:3; Matt. 4:17) The reference is, therefore, to those who will be associated with Jesus as heavenly rulers in his Father’s long-promised kingdom. In any kingdom, or government, there are the rulers and the subjects. Jesus and his true disciples of the present age will be the rulers in the kingdom of God. These will then be born again. Jesus was the first to experience this great change of life from human to spirit. His disciples—his true church—experience this new birth in the “first resurrection” at the end of the age. (Rev. 20:5,6) Then God’s promises of restitution life, which is restored human life, will flow out from heaven to all the families of the earth.—John 3:14-17; Rev. 21:2-5 ■

# The Offerings of Cain and Abel

**Key Verses:** “*So the LORD said to Cain, Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door.*”  
—*Genesis 4:6,7*  
*New King James Version*

**Selected Scripture:**  
*Genesis 4:1-25*

Cain now had competition for parental affection and attention. This may have been an initial contributor to his jealousy toward Abel.

The Scriptures note that Abel kept sheep and Cain was a tiller of the ground. In course of time Cain presented a sacrifice of the fruit of the ground to the Lord. He was the first on that day to offer to the Lord. He may have felt much satisfaction in the preeminence of his offering. Abel then offered the Lord his sacrifice. Abel’s offering was of the firstborn of his flock and its

**ENDEMIC IN FALLEN** humanity, jealousy reared its ugly head from the very beginnings of our race. The great moral drama that unfolds in the account of Cain and Abel is deeply instructive to all. Pondering its lessons fosters and empowers a righteous life. Our Key Verses focus on the crux of the story’s instruction. Cain was the firstborn of Adam and Eve. Doubtless his parents were thrilled and awed at the result of God’s gift of procreation. Soon, however, Adam and Eve had another son, Abel.

fat. The Lord respected both Abel and his offering; Cain and his offering were not. Infuriated by the personal slight and the rejection of his sacrifice, Cain's countenance fell.

Abel's offering was not accepted over Cain's merely because it was an animal sacrifice and not "fruit of the ground." Obviously, grain, oil, and wine were offered in Israel's Tabernacle arrangements and were acceptable to God. Cain and his sacrifice were rejected because Abel was righteous and he was not. Jealousy burned in Cain's heart, leading him to hate his brother. We know that brotherly love is essential to a Godly life, "For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous."—I John 3:11,12, *NKJV*

The cause of the Lord's rejection of Cain is thus made apparent—he "was of the wicked one"! His works were evil. However, the Lord, ever merciful, gave Cain encouragement saying, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it."—Gen. 4:6,7, *NKJV*

All of us would benefit from the Lord's instruction of Cain. Sin lies at the door. It is so close to every one of us, but we must rule over it! We must resist it in every instance of life. As the Apostle's teaching in Hebrews counsels Christian people: "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, ... consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls. You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin."—Heb. 12:1-4, *NKJV* ■



# Noah Builds an Altar

**Key Verse:** *“I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth.”*  
—*Genesis 9:13, New King James Version*

**Selected Scriptures:**  
*Genesis 8:20-22;*  
*9:8-17*

**IN GRATITUDE FOR GOD’S** providential deliverance, Noah built an altar. There he commemorated the new beginning of mankind’s history. The flood had purged the fallen race; only righteous Noah and his family survived. The Lord had seen “that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” (Gen. 6:5, *NKJV*) Only

animals that were known to be Biblically clean were offered by Noah. He wanted everything to be just right going forward. His sacrifice yielded a soothing aroma to God who declared, “I will never again curse the ground for man’s sake, although the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done.”—Gen. 8:21, *NKJV*

We commend Noah for his heart’s desire for a fresh start. Yet we also note God’s estimation of humanity is that “the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth.” Who has not been bullied or bullied others on the playground as a child? Who has not fettered their lips from speaking evil of others? Few, if any.

The rainbow demonstrates God’s knowledge and wisdom that far surpass human comprehension. “Ex nihilo”—out of nothing—is a term often used in theology to

describe the concept that God, out of nothing, created the universe. Paul affirms this: “By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.”—Heb. 11:3, *English Standard Version*

God designed the complexity of the atom, the building block of our universe, and all its variants. We marvel at the depth of thought that went into Creation. Consider water, essential to all life. By adding two hydrogen atoms to one oxygen atom our Creator made a substance that may exist in liquid, gaseous, and solid forms. Ice, the solid form, is lighter than liquid water and therefore floats. The impact of this property, foreknown by God, is that otherwise most of the planet’s water would remain frozen year-round. Water also gathers into clouds which, though weighing millions of pounds, float gracefully over the earth, watering the ground below.

As clouds shed their precious rain, sunlight shines through it. Drops of water refract the light and separate it into its various wavelengths, creating the image of the rainbow and its gorgeous colors. Is this coincidence? Certainly not! It is the well-planned design of God Almighty. “Known to God from eternity are all His works.” (Acts 15:18, *NKJV*) Rainbows are a symbol of hope. Their beauty inspires us. It confirmed to Noah that God would never again bring a flood to destroy the earth. God said, “The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” It is for “perpetual generations.”—Gen. 9:16,12, *NKJV*

This adds another layer of meaning for us. “We, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.” (II Pet. 3:13, *NKJV*) The land in which righteousness dwells is the land we pray for daily, “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”—Matt. 6:10, *NKJV* ■

# Abraham Offers His Son Isaac

**Key Verse:** “*And Abraham called the name of the place, The-LORD-Will-Provide; as it is said to this day, In the Mount of the LORD it shall be provided.*”  
—*Genesis 22:14, New King James Version*

**Selected Scripture:**  
*Genesis 22:1-18*

**OUR KEY VERSE IS TAKEN** from one of the most powerful and often discussed events recorded in the Bible. One can imagine the emotional trauma Abraham and Isaac endured—Abraham on account of God’s command to offer Isaac as a burnt offering, and Isaac’s experience that his father was going to slay him. Many expositions have been written to probe this signal moment in Bible history. Yet the bitter story yielded precious fruitage—confirmation of

the Abrahamic Promise. “Because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son—blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.”—Gen. 22:16-18, *NKJV*

Abraham’s trust in God was supreme. Perhaps he suspected that God would not have him follow through with this demonstration of faith. This is implied in his

message to the men who accompanied him. Seeing the place to which God led him to offer up Isaac, “Abraham said to his young men, Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you.” (Gen. 22:5, *NKJV*) Note that he said “we,” plural, “will come back to you.”

As father and son ascended to the place of sacrifice, “Isaac spoke to Abraham his father and said, ‘My father!’ And he said, ‘Here I am, my son.’ Then he said, ‘Look, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?’ And Abraham said, ‘My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering.’ So the two of them went together.”—Gen. 22:7,8, *NKJV*

Abraham bound Isaac and was in the motion to slay him with the knife when the Lord’s angel stayed his hand. There, close by, trapped by thorns in a thicket, was a ram provided through God’s providence. The offering of a ram in Israel’s Tabernacle signified the Lord’s acceptance of the previously sacrificed lamb or bullock. This suggests that God counted the sacrifice of Isaac as completed and that the ram denoted his acceptance of it.—vss. 9-13

Abraham said, “My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb.” The Lord will provide and, in fact, already has provided. “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.”—John 3:16,17, *NKJV*

Indeed, Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, opening the life-gate for the restoration of the human family. (John 1:29) This is the epitome of the Gospel message, as Apostle Paul noted in the Epistle to the Galatians. “The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, In you all the nations shall be blessed.”—Gal. 3:8, *NKJV* ■

# Isaac Calls on the Name of the Lord

**Key Verse:** “*So he built an altar there and called on the name of the LORD, and he pitched his tent there; and there Isaac’s servants dug a well.*”  
—**Genesis 26:25,**  
*New King James Version*

**Selected Scripture:**  
**Genesis 26:16-33**

## **OUR KEY VERSE FOCUSES**

on the culmination of Isaac’s sojourn in a time of famine. It may have been his thought initially to go down to Egypt where food and water were virtually assured by the Nile River’s steady flow. His father Abraham employed this strategy. (See Genesis 12:10) Isaac, however, was instructed by Jehovah to remain in the Promised Land. God would make an object lesson to demonstrate his ability to sustain his people. The Lord did not

want Isaac to take the easy path. The lesson’s point: even in very difficult situations, God will provide.

Water is essential for surviving famine. Isaac, recalling the wells his father had dug in the land, sought to locate them and renew their precious flow. What had happened to them? The Philistines had plugged them to prevent their use. According to the Scripture record, Isaac “pitched his tent in the Valley of Gerar, and dwelt there. And Isaac dug again the wells of water which they had dug in the days of Abraham his father, for the Philistines had stopped them up after the death of Abraham.

He called them by the names which his father had called them.”—Gen. 26:17,18, *NKJV*; 21:25-31

Respect and honor for the memory of his father’s faith influenced Isaac’s desire to name the wells according to their past designation. This is very much in the spirit of Jeremiah’s message, “Thus says the LORD: Stand in the ways and see, And ask for the old paths, where the good way is, And walk in it; Then you will find rest for your souls.” (Jer. 6:16, *NKJV*) We do well to adhere to the “old paths” in which our fathers walked. Those paths are revealed in the deepest well of water on earth—the Holy Bible, from which springs forth the living water of Truth.

Isaac instructed his servants to dig again Abraham’s wells. It was a joyful occasion when the first yielded water. The joy was short lived. The local herdsmen quarreled with Isaac’s servants saying, “The water is ours.” Isaac abandoned it, appropriately calling it Esek, meaning “strife.” His servants dug the next well but the result was the same. The herdsmen of Gerar quarreled with them and, again, Isaac forsook that well, calling it Sitnah, meaning “opposition.” Persistence and faith in God’s promises strengthened Isaac’s resolve, and he continued the task of restoring the wells of his father.—Gen. 26:19-21, *NKJV*

The third newly repaired well also yielded water, and there was no quarrel about the rights to it. Isaac named it Rehoboth, meaning “a broad place.” “So he called its name Rehoboth, because he said, For now the LORD has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land.” (vs. 22, *NKJV*) The rejoicing in this foreshadowed the psalmist’s words, “He also brought me out into a broad place; He delivered me because He delighted in me.” (Ps. 18:19, *NKJV*) Thus Isaac was inspired to call upon the name of the Lord, as his father Abraham had done.

Modern day naysayers would deny God’s people the living water—the Holy Bible. He, as always, provides for us. As Isaac did, we joyfully call upon the name of the Lord, our Deliverer. ■

# Jacob Sets Up a Stone Pillar

**Key Verses:** *“Then Jacob rose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put at his head, set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on top of it. And he called the name of that place Bethel.”*

—**Genesis 28:18,19,**  
*New King James Version*

**Selected Scripture:**  
**Genesis 28:10-22**

The Lord’s will should be done on Jacob’s behalf. Learning of Isaac’s intention to give his blessing to Esau, she initiated the following conversation with Jacob: “Now therefore, my son, obey my voice according to what I command you. Go now to the flock and bring me from there two choice kids of the goats, and I will make savory food from them for your father, such as he loves. Then you shall take it to your father, that he may eat it, and that he may bless you before his death.”—

## **TODAY’S KEY VERSES**

show a positive outcome to a dire situation. Jacob had fled from the presence of his brother Esau. We are told that when Esau found out that his brother had taken Isaac’s blessing, his intent became murderous. He spoke out loud his inner thoughts of revenge. Some in Isaac’s household heard it and reported it. Rebecca, now aware of the situation, advised Jacob to go to her brother Laban in Paddan-Aram and there, perhaps, find a wife.

Rebecca intended that the

Gen. 27:8-10, *NKJV*

Jacob replied to his mother, “Look, Esau my brother is a hairy man, and I am a smooth-skinned man. Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall seem to be a deceiver to him; and I shall bring a curse on myself and not a blessing. But his mother said to him, Let your curse be on me, my son; only obey my voice, and go, get them for me.”—vss. 11-13, *NKJV*

Idle words often bear ill fruitage. Rebekah told Jacob, “Let your curse be on me, my son,” and so it was. She would never see Jacob again.

In his flight from Beersheba, Jacob came to a certain place and, with nightfall approaching, settled in to sleep, and to dream. “He came to a certain place and stayed there all night, because the sun had set. And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep. Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it.”—Gen. 28:11,12, *NKJV*

In his dream, God stood above the ladder and said: “I am the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you.”—vss. 13-15, *NKJV*

Recognizing that God was affirming the great Abrahamic promise to him, Jacob took the stone used for a pillow and set it up as an altar. He anointed it with oil and named the place Bethel, meaning “House of God.” Do we as Christians have an anointed rock upon which all our hopes and dreams are founded? Indeed, we do. It is Jesus the Anointed, the Rock of our faith. ■



# Acquiescence to God's Will

*“That I may know  
him, and the power  
of his resurrection,  
and the fellowship  
of his sufferings,  
being made  
conformable unto  
his death.”*  
—*Philippians 3:10*

**THE CONCEPT OF ACQUI-**  
escence to divine authority  
has the thought of being  
submissive to an accepted  
standard or pattern. It is the  
Heavenly Father's will to  
have a divine family with  
Christ Jesus as its head and  
a “little flock” of individuals

redeemed from amongst mankind, who ultimately will receive glory, honor, and immortality. (Luke 12:32; Rom. 2:7) The specifications of this class are as follows. “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.”—Rom. 8:29

Dedicated followers of Christ have appreciated the scriptural testimony that the path to such a lofty reward involves a process of self-denial, cross bearing, and following in the Master's footsteps. The Apostle Paul in this connection states, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that

ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”—Rom. 12:1,2

## **LOYALTY**

Loyalty is much akin to acquiescence. It describes one’s faithful allegiance to another, as opposed to partial sympathy towards such an individual. Believers cannot fraternize with those of a worldly spirit and remain pleasing to the Heavenly Father. They must be completely submissive to the Lord and the principles of righteousness. Christ Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world.” (John 18:36) This means that true Christians cannot be allied with this “present evil world.” (Gal. 1:4) Furthermore, the forces that oppose us frequently appear as angels of light to deceive. —II Cor. 11:14

“Our citizenship is in heaven,” and it is to assure an abundant entrance into the heavenly kingdom that we are striving. (Phil. 3:20, *Revised Version*) Nothing can be gained by a compromising attitude toward any of the allurements of the great Adversary. Loyalty to the King of kings must be voluntary and complete. We have learned to know our Lord and Savior, and upon the basis of this knowledge we have full confidence in the integrity of his cause. Our loyalty should be complete because we love our King and our Captain, and we are pained at the thought of displeasing him and our Father in heaven.

## **COURAGE**

Courage is also a very essential quality of those who are submissive to God and to his will, but it should not be born of self-confidence. Those who realize their own weaknesses can be courageous if they put their trust in the Heavenly Father and look to him for grace and strength to help in their every time of need. (Heb. 4:16; Prov. 3:5,6) When the Christian looks to God, and to Christ his Captain, and realizes that he is made strong by their strength, then he can indeed be courageous.—Isa. 26:3,4

As good soldiers we must have confidence in the cause for which we are fighting. (II Tim. 2:1,3) Our faith and confidence in the righteousness of the cause which we are serving should be so complete as to call forth all of our powers and abilities in a free will self-sacrificing effort to cooperate with the Captain of our salvation. (Heb. 2:10) As Christian soldiers we should have no mental reservations as to the propriety of that which our leader asks us to do. Our faith in God and in Christ should be so complete that even though we may not always understand just why we are called upon to do certain things, nevertheless we will have full confidence in the fact that we are being guided by heavenly wisdom.—Rom. 8:28

A key to the successful completion of this course is the submission of ourselves to the doing of the Heavenly Father's will. The Holy Spirit's influence, as revealed through the study of God's word, will guide us into all Truth, and when applied faithfully in our lives, will yield a righteous character.—John 16:13

To the extent that, as Christians, we are becoming "transformed" more and more to the will of God,

the sanctifying influence of the “word of truth” will enable us to progress spiritually. (Rom. 12:2; James 1:18; John 17:17) However, sometimes there can be pressures both from within and without to have our behavior or beliefs conform to standards that do not necessarily represent what we understand to be God’s will for us, or what we believe are scriptural teachings on a given matter. We as Christians must individually render an account of our stewardship to God. (Rom. 14:12; I Cor. 4:2) Therefore, we should not be guided necessarily by what others may think, but must make the Truth our own and “prove all things; hold fast that which is good,” as did the noble Bereans of old.—I Thess. 5:21; Acts 17:11

### **PREJUDICE AT ANTIOCH**

In considering influences toward conformity of thought or action within Christian fellowship, or by giving undue regard to how fellow believers might perceive us, a forceful lesson is brought to our minds. In Galatians 2:11-21, Paul recounts an occasion when it was necessary for him to rebuke the Apostle Peter, who was probably considered by many Jewish Christians as the foremost apostle. When Peter first came to Antioch, he freely ate with Christian converts who were Gentiles by birth. Subsequently a group of Jewish Christians came from Jerusalem for a visit. Apparently, they still held to various observances under the Mosaic Law, and when they arrived, Peter ceased to fellowship with the Gentile brethren for fear that news of his conduct would get back to Jerusalem and the Jewish brethren there.

Barnabas and others followed Peter's example. Peter well knew, in connection with the conversion of Cornelius, that God "shows no partiality." (Acts 10:34, *International Standard Version*) Therefore, he erred by refusing to eat with uncircumcised believers, implying that the Mosaic Law afforded a higher level of sanctification than the "righteousness of faith." (Rom. 4:13) Paul, appropriately, faulted Peter for hypocrisy by pointing out that Jewish Christians had a new standing on the basis of faith in the redemptive sacrifice of Christ, and that they were dead to the law. Accordingly, since the law could not justify anyone, Gentiles should not be placed under it.—Gal. 2:14-21

If a Spirit begotten pillar of the church, such as Peter, could wrongfully succumb to the influence of an improper belief held by some of his Jewish brethren, and thus not acquiesce to God's clearly stated will, could we not be vulnerable today to the opinions of others within our fellowship? The individual church, or ecclesia, with whom we may fellowship, is a very special arrangement which our Heavenly Father has provided so that we might be nurtured and developed as we seek to make our calling and election sure. In our mutual studies, we should consider not only the factual content of what we are studying, but also the spirit behind the message.—Rom. 2:28,29; 7:5,6

We read, for example, in I John 3:14, "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death." In all of our interactions with one another, that is surely a scripture to be kept in the forefront of our minds. Yet, because we have this treasure of the New Creature in an earthen

vessel, and because we are eager and zealous to serve the Lord, it is quite apparent that at times we will find that there are opportunities for friction when we may express ourselves differently from another member of the brotherhood. (II Cor. 5:17; 4:7) Let us conscientiously strive to look at one another not from outward appearances according to the flesh, but let us believe and act upon the knowledge that just as God has called us so he has found other jewels who are struggling with their flesh as we are; and we should focus upon those things which bind us together in the spirit of love.—I Sam. 16:7; II Cor. 10:7

### **CHRISTIAN LIBERTY**

Humbly submitting to God's will is also of importance regarding the exercise of Christian liberty with regard to those items of Truth which are not supported by a clear "thus saith the Lord." It is not a matter of mere conjecture that each of us should engage in, but if indeed we have a scripture to prove what we have to say, such should suffice. If, in certain cases, there is a thought given that is not in harmony with the way in which we believe it should be expressed, then we should be free to speak to our brethren individually and discuss it in love until such a time as the Heavenly Father designs to clarify the matter for one or the other. In any event, force should not be used to attain exact conformity of thought but, as the Bible declares, "let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind."—Rom. 14:5

From earliest New Testament times, congregations of the Lord's people were established in various locations. The Scriptures give guidelines for the setting up of these groups. (I Tim. 3:1-7; Tit. 1:5-9;

I Pet. 5:1-3) Those who serve, be they elders or deacons, are elected to positions of service by vote of the ecclesia. As such, it places the congregation as a higher authority, and as an indicator of the divine will. Should the judgment of the class with regard to certain policies or practices differ from that of an elder, the elder should submit to the will of the class where it is only a matter of ecclesia preference, as opposed to matters of fundamental doctrine, moral issues, or violations of one's conscience. On the other hand, and in keeping with the responsibility of selecting elders in whom the ecclesia has confidence, the Lord has overruled so that by the vote of the congregation a specific individual was chosen. It, therefore, would be the obligation of the entire group to support and encourage the elder in proportion as they note his striving to know and to do the Lord's will in a faithful manner.

### **A PARTY SPIRIT**

The spirit of rivalry, or party spirit, between fellow members of Christ's body should be avoided. We read in I Corinthians 1:10-13, "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?" Divi-

sions amongst the people of God should be of serious concern, especially if there are pressures exerted to hinder opportunities for fellowship with other Christians that we consider to be Spirit begotten.

There may be, of course, very legitimate reasons why a physical separation among the Lord's people is sometimes necessary. Nevertheless, to the extent that we recognize one another as brethren in the body of Christ, there should be no manifestation of a sectarian spirit. If we create man-made barriers which are not scripturally authorized and believe some brethren are unworthy of our fellowship because of minor differences, then there is a danger of exercising a spirit that is contrary to the doctrine of the unity of the body. Such a spirit would show a marked lack of acquiescence to the will of God in our fellowship.—Ps. 133:1-3; Eph. 4:1-3,15,16; Phil. 2:3

## **IDOLS**

Closely allied with the foregoing is the possibility of creating idols of our leaders in the ministry. Revelation 19:10 reads: "I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said, unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God." It has been suggested that the Apostle John in this context is representing the faithful members of the body of Christ, especially at the time in which we are currently living. Carrying this thought further, we would be admonished not to worship those who may be instrumental in nourishing us with God's Truth. We should appreciate the faithful efforts of all who are engaged in the Lord's service, but we should not place them as idols of worship.—Rom. 1:25



This same thought seems to be found in the words of the Apostle Paul: "Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels [Greek: messengers], intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up in his fleshly mind." (Col. 2:18) The giving of undue homage to those who serve is an improper spirit of which we should be aware, and is out of harmony with God's will for the Christian. We should not promote such an attitude, even though we should recognize and acknowledge all who are faithfully ministering in God's service.

## **SOCIETAL PRESSURES**

Concerning pressures which may come from the world in conformity to its standards, there are many influences that would be pleasing to our flesh, but which may hinder us from acquiescing to God's will. It is for this reason that we read: "Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God." (Col. 3:2,3) Many activities relating to culture, recreation, and hobbies that are not sinful are pleasing to the flesh. An appreciation of Christian liberty reminds us that unlike certain prohibitions which were given to the nation of Israel under the Law Covenant, we do not find many "thou shalt nots" in the New Testament as they relate to the conduct of believers. Thus, we desire to fulfill in our hearts the spirit of the law of love and the law of righteousness as they are indicated in God's will for us.

Although Christian liberty does not allow any of us to make a set of rules for one another, it also

does not mean we are free to do as we please without repercussions. Thus, it is essential that we seek scriptural guidelines to help us determine the degree to which various pursuits either gratify the flesh or are in harmony with the spirit of sacrifice and consecrated living. If, upon individual scrutiny, we find that a particular activity is edifying, ennobling, and glorifies the Heavenly Father, we should participate in it to the greatest extent possible. If, on the other hand, it does not appear to have spiritual value, we may desire to put even such a good thing on the altar of sacrifice.

## **OUR HOMES**

Another area for our consideration in submitting to God's will deals with our dwelling places. Certainly, all of the Lord's people have different circumstances, and the financial resources of which we have been made stewards may vary considerably. It is for each individual to seek God's guidance in this realm, as in every undertaking. We know for a fact, however, in the world great stress is placed upon having a fashionable home, often to the extreme.

Such examples which could be given are likely endless, but we ask the question: "Could the Lord's people also be affected by an extraordinary concern for the appearance and size of their homes?" It is possible to rationalize that we must make extensive changes in our present abode, at the cost of great time and expense, because we want to accommodate fellow Christians in a comfortable manner. No one, of course, is in a position to judge what another brother or sister may be doing along this line. However, we may need to prayerfully commune with the

Father as to whether or not such involvement or activity will detract in any way from the covenant of sacrifice we have made.

## **IN THE WORK PLACE**

With regard to our jobs, some of us may find ourselves in very difficult and trying situations, which bring considerable discomfort to our flesh. Then, an extremely favorable job opportunity may present itself, but it might require working a different schedule or at a distant location, with the ultimate effect being a disruption of our spiritual fellowship. We might have to miss certain meetings now on a regular basis because of new working circumstances. We need to rely upon seeking the Lord's will, and acquiescing to it, when making such decisions one way or the other. Is it not possible that our current difficult condition to which the flesh has been subjected is being permitted because the Lord knows that we need to have some experiences to teach us patience and reliance upon him?

On the other hand, a move could be the Lord's will, as it was when he sent Philip to the desert to witness to the Ethiopian eunuch. (Acts 8:26-38) Each one's experience along this line is, of course, unique to his or her situation. The Scriptures do not set forth hard and fast rules along this line, the exception being that each is to "provide for his own." (I Tim. 5:8) Beyond this, the answers that may apply to each one's individual circumstance can only be found by remaining very close to the Lord.

## **FOUR IMPORTANT STEPS**

Consider these four important steps in acquiescing to God's will in life's experiences.

1. Engage in frequent personal study of God's word. (II Tim. 2:15) Since we are committed to being footstep followers of the Master, it is essential that we find time to regularly search the Scriptures for the purpose of seeking the Father's will and leadings in our lives, and to become familiar with the divine principles that can be applied in our conduct. If God truly is first in our lives, we must arrange our schedules so that we can commune with him and receive the strength which he desires to give us.

2. Support our local ecclesia through regular attendance and participation in fellowship and studies. We are very familiar with the admonition to "forsake not the assembling of ourselves together," and we should appreciate this arrangement as an important means of receiving instruction from the Heavenly Father. (Heb. 10:25) Such association with one another in this setting will facilitate, among other things, the kind of interaction which will allow the contributions of one another to provide for the mutual spiritual strength and edification of all, if we are rightly exercised. We are informed that "every joint supplieth," and as we meet with those of our immediate fellowship and others among the brotherhood as we have opportunity, we will be guarded against the spirit of self-exaltation.—Eph. 4:16

3. Live a life of sacrifice. The greater the degree of our self-denial, the less exposed we will be towards a covetous spirit by which the Adversary seeks to entrap us, and hence the easier it will be for us to acquiesce to God's will. "The lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life," are all

obstacles that can and must be overcome through the influence of the Holy Spirit and obedience to the Heavenly Father by striving to walk even as our Master walked.—I John 2:16

4. Engage in frequent, focused prayer. If in the personal scrutiny of our lives we find that, contrary to God's word, we have erected some idol in our hearts, we can take comfort from such texts as I John 1:9. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Thus we see that it is our privilege to go to the throne of grace for cleansing and assistance with regard to those things we do that are not pleasing to the Lord, especially cases in which we have not submitted to his will. Additionally, if we are very sensitive towards righteousness and pleasing God, even when we are not aware of some indiscretions, the prayer of our hearts will be such as follows: "Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression. Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer."—Ps. 19:13,14

When we consider that we have been called to be part of the divine family, it should cause us to revere God to such an extent that we would do anything to please him, to honor him, and to sanctify his name. Truly, "The reverent fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; A good understanding and a teachable heart are possessed by all those who do the will of the LORD."—Ps. 111:10, *Amplified Bible* ■

# Simon Peter— Sifted and Converted

*“The Lord said,  
Simon, Simon,  
behold, Satan hath  
desired to have  
you, that he may  
sift you as  
wheat: But I have  
prayed for thee,  
that thy faith fail  
not: and when thou  
art converted,  
strengthen thy  
brethren.”*  
—*Luke 22:31,32*

**IT IS CONJECTURAL JUST** how much Simon Peter understood related to the coming suffering and death of his beloved Lord prior to the consummation of the event. It is supposable, however, that following the rebuke by Jesus as recorded in Matthew 16:22,23—the result of Peter’s attempt to advise Jesus against entering Jerusalem to suffer and die at

the hands of the Jewish religious leaders—he had thought upon the matter and had some forebodings of the tragic event coming to pass in the near future.

Peter could not understand why Jesus, whom he believed to be the Messiah of God, so long looked for, with the authority and power to render himself

invulnerable to attack by mortal man, should allow himself to become a victim of the hate and jealousy of the religious rulers and die at their hands. Self-preservation is the first law of the natural man, and in Peter's thinking there existed no allowance for weakness or servility, especially on the part of kings, of whom he recognized Jesus to be the chief. Rugged and courageous himself, full of initiative, Peter envisioned continued progress toward the subjugation of Israel to the Master's will, and his own position as an associate in the new administration of this greatest of all kings.

No doubt in this frame of mind, he must have been puzzled and troubled by the occasional references Jesus mentioned of his coming suffering and death. Being a natural man, Peter comprehended nothing of the philosophy of the ransom as of yet. To earthly minded Jews of Peter's day it was a stumbling block, and to natural minded Gentiles, foolishness. (I Cor. 1:23) Imagine the contemplations of so ardent and impetuous a person as the Bible discloses Peter to have been, relative to the course he would pursue in the event of any physical violence taken against his beloved Master. Peter knew Jesus to be inoffensive, his words sweet, and loving—one "altogether lovely." (Song of Sol. 5:16; Luke 4:22) He was endowed with wisdom above any other person of his day, hence not one deserving punishment.—Mark 6:2; Luke 2:40,52

Sincere and wholehearted, Peter avowed his devotion to the Lord. (Matt. 26:33,35) To him Jesus was worthy of this from any man. It would be only natural for him to resent any suggestion of insult or offense to the Master, and no doubt he felt called

upon to act as his protector and bodyguard. The fact that he was so close to the Lord, and on all important occasions accompanied him, probably confirmed Peter's belief that he should regard himself as Jesus' special protector.

One can readily see that the Lord's pointed references to the coming tragedy would beget in Peter a determination to be on his guard. Thus when Jesus agreed to the disciples' suggestion of taking weapons of defense to the Mount of Olives, it was Peter who had one of the two swords. (Luke 22:38) His sword, likely a common form of knife used for killing animals, was probably far from the large, keen-edged weapons carried by the Romans. Nevertheless, it was doubtless well sharpened and polished, and with it Peter could imagine excellent usefulness at close range.

### **“YE SHALL BE OFFENDED”**

Peter, as well as the other disciples, must have been shocked at Jesus' assertion that one of the twelve would betray him, and that they all would be offended because of him that night. The record states: “Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended [Greek: stumbled] because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad.”—Matt. 26:31; Zech. 13:7

Peter, with unbounded confidence in the impossibility of any wrongdoing on the Lord's part, and sure of his own fidelity and loyalty to the one whom he considered his best friend on earth, made it definite and plain that although it might be possible for all others to be offended, yet he would remain loyal to the very end. (Matt. 26:33) Alas, how little



did he then realize his own deficiency! However, the Lord knew him better than he knew himself. Perhaps it was the unexpected, sudden turn of events that took Peter by surprise and temporarily overwhelmed him. That their acclaimed Master and the future ruler of the earth should be subjected to such indignity seemed unthinkable, no doubt.

Jesus' understanding was perfect. Peter, without the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, was devoid of the meaning or the necessity of sacrifice, especially of one so close to God. Sufficient it was to impress upon Peter the one basic idea that his Master must die, and intended to die. There was a reason for it, a purpose in it, but his disciples were first to be tested and tried as to their loyalty to him before the reason for these seeming difficulties would be made apparent to them.

Is it not often just so with us as we progress in our quest for the clear light of God's Word and counsel? Perhaps we have not always seen the necessity for maintaining an uncompromising attitude toward the forces of evil and their baneful influence, but as we come to see the righteousness of God as our standard, we become convinced that nothing short of this should be paramount in our lives. Thus we are being led by his grace from one stage to another in the path of life and glory.—II Pet. 3:18

### **LACK OF UNDERSTANDING**

One wonders at Peter's lack of understanding of the imperfect human nature. Being honest and sincere himself, no doubt he regarded others as honest and sincere as well. Therefore it would be

inconceivable to him that anyone professing such high regard for Jesus as to become his follower could ever betray him. However, the Lord knew that Judas was a thief and a traitor. (John 6:64; 13:26,27) No doubt had Peter known it, he would have taken steps to prevent Judas from carrying out his designs to betray and deliver the Lord. Yet, regardless of the distinct hint dropped by Jesus relative to the imminence of the coming tragedy and the part Judas was to play in it, Peter lacked vigilance and was sound asleep at his post at a time when, as a bodyguard and protector, he should have been most watchful.—Matt. 26:40-46

Peter was in for a very sad awakening that momentous night of our Lord's betrayal and arrest. It is possible that even then the arousing of his suspicions of foul play was delayed by Judas' leadership of the crowd. However, the Lord's words and the sight of so great and antagonistic a company armed with "swords and staves," brought to him a realization of the correct state of things. (Matt. 26:55) He saw, with a rising burst of fury, that the war was on. When the servant of the high priest rushed forward and attempted to seize Jesus, thus placing himself in the dangerous position of an enemy, for which Peter was prepared and armed, it was only natural for Peter to resort to violence. The servant lost an ear only, which was a most remarkable piece of good fortune for him. No doubt Peter's intention was to deliver a telling and fatal blow. Certainly the event was divinely overruled.—John 18:10,11; Luke 22:49-51

## **DIVINE POWER AVAILABLE**

Always with his chief object in mind, Jesus then, amid all the excitement, explained to the inflamed Peter, not only the futility, but the inadmissibility of the use of the sword. He also stressed the fact that the entire sequence of events was with his permission and foreknowledge, and that he could obtain help and protection from the angelic hosts. Adding significantly for Peter's future consideration, Jesus explained that this drama was the fulfillment of scripture and therefore must be carried out.—Matt. 26:52-54

Obediently, Peter sheathed his sword. He had come prepared to fight, was in the mood to fight, and in his zeal felt equal to the situation. All he wanted and needed was the Lord's permission, though the record does not indicate that he asked for it. Perhaps the Lord's healing of the servant of the high priest, as well as his rebuke of Peter, lay at the forefront of Peter's mental and spiritual troubles that terrible night and the days to follow. He was no doubt puzzled and most disappointed.

The other apostles had deserted both him and the Lord. Peter, however, laboring under much pressure, was determined to follow Jesus and his apprehenders to the high priest's palace. In this he may have been placing himself in a position where he might, if opportunity presented, lend a hand in helping Jesus to escape. It was here that his most severe test came, and he fell before the pressure of public opinion. Had he so soon forgotten those avowals of fidelity to his Master? He had not forgotten them; his heart was right before God, but his mental process and the weakness of the flesh were not equal to the

occasion. Under the pressure of those trying hours, and without the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit to sustain him, he faltered, and disavowed the Lord who had come to give his life in sacrifice for him and for all people.

The account reads: "Peter followed him at a distance, to the palace of the high priest; and having entered, sat with the attendants to see the result." (Matt. 26:58, *The Emphatic Diaglott*) It is doubtful that Peter even yet understood the gravity of the situation. That the Lord was in a precarious place was obvious to him. His reasoning, however, perhaps included the idea that Jesus could, if he would, use divine power to escape his captors' apparently well-laid plans to do away with him. Peter would then be somewhere close by, ready for any call for help that might come. No call for assistance came from the Master nor from anyone else. No doubt this too was upsetting and trying to the natural disposition of Peter, who ordinarily was a man of action and deeds as well as of words. Now, all he could do was sit and wait.

## **PETER DENIES**

The unfortunate observation of the court maid that Peter was one of Jesus' friends placed him in an awkward position. (Matt. 26:69) Above all it was important to his strategy not to be recognized. To be identified as a personal friend of the prisoner would handicap him in any effort he might make to render aid to the Master. It was not necessarily fear, nor shame of the Lord, that prompted him to deny his relationship to his beloved; but it could have been a natural impulse to preserve whatever

advantage might accrue to him by remaining unknown and ostensibly disinterested.

Without the slightest hesitation and seemingly without a qualm of conscience, he declared that he did not know Jesus. (vs. 70) Although he felt considerably relieved when the maid passed on, he thought it best to make a change of location, perhaps to a less conspicuous spot. Quietly he arose and made his way to the outside porch, standing in the shadows, watching and waiting. He was soon detected, however, and another woman openly accused him of his former fellowship with Jesus. Again Peter denied it. —vss. 71,72

Now the situation was becoming increasingly critical, and fear for his friend was striking at Peter's stout heart. Perhaps by now, under the stress of excitement he recalled the former words of the Lord that he must suffer and die at the hands of the Jewish leaders. Desperately, he cast about in an effort to decide on a course of action. Any attempt to rush the palace single-handedly, if this had been his plan, had by now become obviously futile. How gladly would he have welcomed an opportunity to rush to the assistance of his friend, even to die by his side, for he was sincere in declaring his willingness to do so. Yet now it was as though Peter was bound, shackled and fettered with helplessness.

Then others approached him: "You were one of them," they insisted. Poor, despairing Peter! His efforts having proved unavailing, he saw himself helpless, ineffective as a man of stone such as his name implied, while not a dozen yards away the Messiah of God stood condemned in the midst of his enemies, without a friend or hope of escape.

With passion Peter gave way to his despair, even to the extent of cursing and shouting back at his accusers, "I do not know the man!"—Matt. 26:73,74

## **THE COCK CROWS**

We have here the marvelous understanding of the perfect man, Jesus. How did he know that Peter would deny him, yet later prove such a bulwark to the Early Church? It is certain that he knew Peter would be at the palace; and who can doubt that he knew his faithful apostle desired to be there in his Master's time of need? That Peter would be recognized Jesus could also be certain; and that Peter's natural disposition would lead to his denial he was also able to understand. Imperfect Peter could not, of course, trace the steps leading to his denial of the Lord. However, the Lord's perfect mind traced them, so much that he had even warned Peter in advance that he would deny him three times.

It was the early morning crowing of a common barnyard fowl that abruptly brought Peter back to mental equilibrium. We can be sure that the great Jehovah overruled in the interest of Peter's mental state. As his passions subsided, his reason returned. With clearer vision he grasped that Jesus had traced it all, had foreseen the effort he would make, would know of his mental reactions, and consequent failures, and had forewarned him of them. It was only with the foretold crowing of a fowl that Peter awoke to the true situation with its resultant remorse. Yet, it was this comprehension that steadied him during the days to follow.—vss. 74,75

## **JESUS' DEATH NECESSARY**

One thing was now becoming plain: it was necessary that Jesus should die, even though Peter found himself unable to understand why. The Lord had foreknown it, and had foretold it. It was for this reason that Peter's efforts had proved unavailing from the beginning. He had tried, but had accomplished nothing. Willing, but powerless, he had presented himself in a last desperate effort to save the Savior of men. He had acted without understanding, and his efforts had involved him in the extremity of having denied his Lord.

The following three days were difficult ones for Peter and the rest of the apostles. What could they do now that their leader and deliverer had been so humiliatingly killed? We can readily understand how they must have felt at this sudden, and to them, unexpected turn of events. Perhaps as they all talked the matter over, the words of the Lord returned to them, and they measurably realized that as it was written, so it was necessary, known and ordered of God, that the apparently awful tragedy should take place. (Matt. 16:21; 17:22,23; 20:17-19; 26:2) However, as Peter contemplated the masterful Jesus humbly and meekly submitting to the violent subjugation of his rights, even to the point of allowing himself to be led "as a lamb to the slaughter," he was filled with confusion and great disappointment. —Isa. 53:7

Peter had believed Jesus to be the conqueror and king of the world. Jesus, to be sure, had been gentle and friendly; but Peter knew that he possessed miraculous power, not only to heal all manner of disease, but even to direct the elements and the

laws which ordinarily controlled those elements. He had seen with his own eyes this power exercised on more than one occasion. Peter was not by any means willing to attribute to his Master either cowardice or lack of courage, but he was painfully aware that Jesus had not stood up for himself and assert his rights. Peter probably felt deeply perplexed as he thought upon these things.

How much of those three days Peter spent with the other disciples we do not know, but he was with some of them on the first day of the week when the women returned from the sepulcher bringing an excited account of strange occurrences. From that day forward the fact of the Lord's resurrection was thoroughly verified and established. (Matt. 28:1-10; John 20:1-20) To say that Peter was overjoyed at the resurrection of Jesus would be to state it mildly. However, there seemed to be a difference in the resurrected Jesus and the one with whom he had enjoyed such blissful fellowship before the dismal days beginning three days previous. Though he knew the Lord to be the same Jesus, and still loved him, Peter seemed to have lost some of his former self-confidence and that intense zeal for the cause to which he had been called and chosen by the Master.

## **RETURN TO FISHING**

As the days passed, Peter and a number of the other disciples evidently decided to return to their former occupation, the fishing business. Little had been seen or heard from their Lord for some time. Breezes blew in from the sea laden with the refreshing smell of water and vegetation, perhaps stirring



up past memories and old impulses. Not knowing what other course of action to take, Peter turned to his boat and to his fishing.—John 21:1-3

This set the stage for a very convincing miracle which led up to the friendly dialog between Peter and his Master, which finally broke down the last barrier existing between them. It was a friendly little gathering by the campfire on the seashore that morning. The fire had warmed them, the food had refreshed them, and the majestic presence of the risen Lord had filled them with peace and quiet joy. (vss. 4-14) This quiet, peaceful setting was the occasion for another of those same heart-to-heart talks which they had enjoyed with Jesus so many times in the past. At the conclusion of this interesting incident the Lord once more directed his attention to Peter, and once more desired to confirm the faith and love of this zealous disciple; for had not Satan sought to sift him as wheat?—Luke 22:31,32

Jesus, the understanding one, realized the besetting sin and weakness of this otherwise strong character. As steel is tempered in the fiery furnace, so Peter had been severely tried. He needed yet to be tempered before he was qualified for his apostolic mission, so Jesus besought him with the question, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?"—John 21:15

Peter's answer was in the affirmative: "Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee," but it seemed to lack the apostle's former depth of devotion to his Master. After a while the Lord again spoke to Peter, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" This must have caused Peter considerable distress of heart. Indeed, he loved the Lord, had always loved the

Lord, and said so, but Jesus had still questioned him a second time.—John 21:16

The Master's commission to feed his lambs and feed his sheep must have constituted a source of hope to Peter. It implied future service for the Lord, and fellowship with those whom the Lord regarded as his own. This in itself proved a softening influence. The Lord again approached Peter a third time: "Simon, son of Jonas," Jesus asked the third and final time, "Lovest thou me?"—vs. 17

Peter was grieved—godly sorrow had mellowed the soul. (II Cor. 7:10) His heart was now in a proper receptive attitude. No doubt the Master's asking the question three times reminded Peter of his three denials. If Peter had this in mind, it must have brought home his mistakes and the realization of his absolute dependence upon divine grace and help in every time of trial, with less and less dependence upon self and the arm of flesh. All pride and chagrin faded away. Self-will and opposition to his Lord and to his plan gave way forever to love and complete self-denial. Probably tears filled his eyes. Smiling through them he finally affirmed with enthusiasm, "Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee." As if to assure Peter that he did indeed know that his heart was true, and that there was yet a great work for him to do, Jesus again replied, "Feed my sheep."

## **EPILOGUE**

By the Lord's grace and with his help, Peter's sifting "as wheat" was accomplished. It resulted in his being used greatly in the establishment and growth of the Early Church, first for Jewish believers on

the Day of Pentecost, and later for Gentiles through his ministry to Cornelius and his household. (Acts 2:1-4,14-36; 10:1-45) Still later, this beloved apostle wrote two noteworthy epistles to both Jewish and Gentile “strangers scattered” throughout various parts of Asia.—I Pet. 1:1

The many lessons Peter had learned during his time of sifting served him well. He exhorted and admonished the brethren, and us today, along many of the same lines—faith, humility, response to trial, and the development of the graces of the spirit. In his final recorded words, he left us both a warning and encouragement: “Beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.”—II Pet. 3:17,18 ■

## WEEKLY PRAYER MEETING TEXTS

**JUNE 5**—“In thee, O LORD, do I put my trust.”—Psalm 31:1 (Z. '95-157 Hymn 263)

**JUNE 12**—“This one thing I do.”—Philippians 3:13 (Z. '95-250 Hymn 177)

**JUNE 19**—“Light [Truth] is sown for the righteous, and gladness [the joys of the Truth] for the upright in heart.”—Psalm 97:11 (Z. '96-55 Hymn 238)

**JUNE 26**—“Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus.”—Hebrews 3:1 (Z. '96-208 Hymn 201)

# God's Unseen Messengers

*“Ye are come unto  
mount Sion, and  
unto the city of  
the living God,  
the heavenly  
Jerusalem, and to  
an innumerable  
company of angels.”*

—*Hebrews 12:22*

ing and faith-strengthening.

Not all references to angels in the Scriptures are to spirit beings. The Hebrew and Greek words which have been translated as “angel” simply mean “messenger.” Although it most often refers to spirit beings that God used to communicate a message or perform a function, it may also apply to another human being that was used to deliver a message from God.—Josh. 6:25; Hag. 1:13; Luke 7:24,27; 9:52

Our attention here, however, is upon the holy angels of God—his invisible spirit beings, or unseen messengers—which the Bible tells us are the primary agencies by which our Heavenly Father fulfills his will in respect to overruling the affairs of mankind.

**THE WORD ANGEL, IN ITS** various forms, appears in the Bible more than three hundred times, and yet we sometimes feel that we know very little about them. However, a careful study of this subject can be very reward-

They have also been given a special charge over his chosen people—the heirs of salvation. “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?”—Heb. 1:14

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF ANGELS**

There are many things we do not know about angels, but there are some important things that we do know. We know that angels were created with free will, as mortal beings, and in the image of God. They had the freedom to choose between serving God or rebelling against him. Some of them chose a course of evil and became messengers of Satan instead of God. The Bible foretells their ultimate destruction, along with Satan. How many these will be, we do not know.—Matt. 25:41; II Pet. 2:4; Jude 1:6

Job 38:7 speaks of a time in the distant past when there was no rebellion in the angelic realm: “When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.” These holy angels are more than just messengers, or servants of God; they are his “sons” and have access to God’s presence at all times.

We believe that God’s only begotten Son, Jesus, was the Father’s only direct creation, the “beginning and the end.” (Rev. 22:13) All other life, including Lucifer and all of the angels, was created by the Son during the time of his pre-human existence, using the power vested in him by the Father. The Apostle Paul tells us that Jesus was the “firstborn of every creature: By him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him.”—Col. 1:15,16

## **ACTIVITIES OF THE HOLY ANGELS**

We learn a lot about the angels when we notice in the Bible the many accounts of their activities as they carry out the purposes of God in the earth as his messengers. It is our understanding that in nearly every instance the holy angels represented God in his dealings with ancient Israel and all of the prophets in the Old Testament. For instance, when God spoke to Moses out of the burning bush, it might first appear to be a conversation directly between God and Moses, but Exodus 3:2 declares that it was an angel of the Lord that spoke to Moses on God's behalf. Later, when Moses received the tables of the Law in the holy mount and all the instructions concerning that Law and the Tabernacle arrangement, the Old Testament account states that it was God who talked to Moses. However, in Galatians 3:19, the apostle declares that the Law was "ordained [Greek: arranged thoroughly] by angels in the hand of a mediator [Moses]." The apostle also refers to this in Hebrews 2:2, "The word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward."

Genesis chapter 32 tells of Jacob wrestling with a man—a materialized angel—all night long, and Jacob would not let him go until he had received a blessing. (vss. 24-26) Then in verse 30, the account says, "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved." We believe that these angels were in the position of representing God so completely that they could speak and act as God himself. If this is true, it is very important that these holy angels be perfect and thus able to reflect in their own characters the exact image of God in every way.

We see God's mighty power demonstrated through the angels. It took only one angel to smite all of the firstborn of Egypt, and this same angel led the children of Israel out of Egypt. (Exod. 14:19) On another occasion, seventy thousand rebellious Israelites were slain by a single angel.—II Sam. 24:15,16

## **THE ANGELS' MINISTRY TO JESUS**

Angels ministered to Jesus during his earthly walk. (Matt. 4:11) Near the close of his life, in the Garden of Gethsemane, as Peter was trying to protect him with the sword that he had, Jesus told Peter to put the sword away, saying, "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matt. 26:53) If it had been God's will for the angels to save our Lord at that time, one angel would have been enough. Jesus, though, continued by saying if the angels were to save him, "How then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?"—vs. 54

What a great temptation it perhaps was for God's holy angels to reach down, as it were, and protect Jesus on that occasion. They knew, however, that it was the Father's will for him to be tried, persecuted, and finally crucified on the cross. Thus these holy messengers faithfully carried out the Father's will and did not intervene.

The holy angels also have emotional qualities such as we of humankind have—they sing beautifully together and praise God when there is some great event to celebrate, such as occurred at the birth of Jesus. (Luke 2:13,14) They also experience great joy when they observe a sinner repent and turn to the Lord.—Luke 15:7

## **INVISIBLE MESSENGERS TO THE CHURCH**

These same angels who have been fully dedicated to the service of God as his invisible messengers down through the ages have a very special and peculiar mission during this present Gospel Age. Every one of the Lord's little ones, all those who are in covenant relationship with God, have become the special charge of the holy angels. "He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone." (Ps. 91:11,12) All of the Lord's people should rejoice at this text of Scripture! These holy angels are the eyes of God, observing everything that is going on in the lives of the consecrated.

These angels are also spoken of as the eyes of the Lord in the earth. We read in II Chronicles 16:9, "The LORD's eyes keep on roaming throughout the earth, looking for those whose hearts completely belong to him, so that he may strongly support them." (*International Standard Version*) This text should not give us the thought that it is necessary for God to personally behold every individual act of his people. The eyes referred to are God's influence, his power of knowing, whatever the means. Whether his power is exercised and his will executed through angels, other forces or agencies, or by himself personally, it makes no difference, because it all is at his direction and overruling.

## **MINISTERING SPIRITS**

We understand that each of the Lord's people, in proportion as he or she is one of God's true children, has one or more ministering spirits, or angels, who have special charge of their affairs. These angels



care for us, supervise our affairs, and are God's agencies or channels of his divine power over us as to his will and providential care. There are two key thoughts that we should have in mind as we consider this ministry of the holy angels. First, they abide with us continually, and we are their special charge. This is shown in Psalm 34:7, which reads, "The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear [reverence] him, and delivereth them." The word "encampeth" in this verse means literally, "to pitch a tent."

Secondly, these ministering spirits have instant access to the Father at all times in connection with his supervision of our affairs. This is indicated by the words in Matthew 18:10 spoken by Jesus: "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That ... their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." We should remember that these holy angels share our Heavenly Father's concern for our spiritual well-being, and as directed of God, and his will, they do not err in their overruling of the affairs of his people.

Another point to be kept in mind in respect to the ministry of the holy angels is that, notwithstanding their ministry to us, we still "walk by faith, not by sight." (II Cor. 5:7) Therefore, it is God's will that the angels' ministry in the lives of his people be accomplished in what appears to us as natural processes, rather than direct miracles. Additionally, the overruling of the angels in our lives is always accomplished in a way that will not interfere with our own free will. If we are determined to follow our own will in a given matter, and do not seek God's guidance and overruling, then the angels will

probably not interfere, and perhaps we will learn a difficult lesson from the experience as a result. However, if God's will is our chief concern in every aspect of our lives, then his holy messengers are ready to help us in every way, so that as New Creatures we may prosper and be spiritually blessed.

## **GUARDIAN ANGELS**

Our "guardian angels," the term often used to describe God's ministering spirits, do many things on our behalf. Sometimes they are used to give us strength to endure our experiences. It may not be God's will for us to be immediately delivered from a trial, but he will always give us strength to go through it. Deliverance will come in the proper time and way in our trials, and sometimes angels are used to accomplish this.

We remember how Paul was delivered from death on various occasions in order that the Gospel might be preached in other places. (Acts 14:19,20; 16:16-40) Earlier, as recorded in Acts 5:17-20, is an account of the priests and leaders of the people taking all of the apostles and putting them in a common prison. The account says, "The angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life." That was how they got in prison in the first place, and yet God, through the angel, told them to go out and do the same things again! This is an important lesson for us. The angel of the Lord will, at times, deliver us also from our trials, but not so we can take it easy and be more comfortable in this life. Rather, deliverance will be in order that we might continue the work of sacrificing

the flesh and its interests, laying down our lives for our brethren, and preaching the Gospel to others.

Our guardian angels also protect us from unnecessary evil; they lift us up, lest we dash our “foot against a stone.” (Ps. 91:12) We can think of this as the little unseen things that the holy angels do for us daily. We cannot know how many times the angel of the Lord has protected us and kept us from harm. The burden of our prayers should be that of thanksgiving to God for his daily tender mercies and care over us through his angels. Prayer is important in these little things. It is encouraging when we hear the followers of the Lord recount the many seemingly insignificant leadings of God in their daily experiences that have been the result of prayer and supplication. Our guardian angels respond to these prayers so long as they are inspired by proper motives and in harmony with God’s will.

All of the truly consecrated should be able to testify to the goodness of the Lord in these small matters from day to day that sometimes almost seem miraculous. Let us be sure our motives are right, and then seek God’s help and blessing in these little experiences of our daily lives. These holy, guardian angels are carefully watching every aspect of our lives; we are never alone. They represent the Father’s presence with us daily and hourly.

### **THE PSALMIST’S TESTIMONY**

The Psalmist David describes this close, daily, and hourly watch-care of our Heavenly Father. We quote in full the 139th Psalm:

“O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising,

thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether. Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell [Hebrew: the grave], behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee. For thou hast possessed my reins: thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well. My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee. Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God: depart from me therefore, ye bloody men. For they

Speak against thee wickedly, and thine enemies take thy name in vain. Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies. Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

## **HEAVENLY MANNA PROVIDED**

A very important ministration of the angels is that of assisting in supplying our needs, both temporal and spiritual. God has promised to supply all our needs, and we should thank him daily for his temporal provisions. (Phil. 4:19) More important, though, are our spiritual needs. He daily supplies us with manna—bread—from heaven. In the 6th chapter of John, Jesus said he was that bread from heaven, and the words he speaks are “spirit and life.” (vss. 32-35,63) We remember that the manna provided for Israel in the wilderness which they gathered daily was prepared by the angels. (Exodus chapter 16) This is recalled to us in Psalm 78:23-25, which states that the Israelites did eat “angels’ food.” Our guardian angels are very interested in our spiritual well-being. They have arranged the affairs of God’s people so that many have opportunities to study, to fellowship, to learn from one another, to attend meetings and conventions, to partake of this spiritual food. Some of the Lord’s people are isolated and may not have all of these privileges. However, if it is through no fault of their own, we believe that God especially protects them, cares for them, and makes up to them

in other ways that their spiritual life may prosper. This too, perhaps, is another means by which God's holy angels minister to his people.

## **THE PROSPECT BEFORE US**

The wonderful fellowship we enjoy when gathered together with others of the household of faith is but a foretaste of that grand gathering that awaits us if we are faithful to our covenant with God. Such is the sentiment of our theme text, "Ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels." What joy awaits us when, if faithful, we come unto the city of the living God and see our Heavenly Father and our dear Lord Jesus face to face, and then meet this innumerable company of angels that were so directly involved in our lives during our earthly walk! Perhaps we will have an opportunity to meet those angels who have specially ministered unto us now, and to share fellowship and shed the tears of joy together as we talk about some of our experiences in the Christian way. What a joy it will be to join together with these holy messengers in the greatness and the goodness of our loving God.

We should now be making plans to attend that "general assembly" in the heavenlies. (Heb. 12:23) We do this by our determination to do God's will daily to the best of our ability, and giving all diligence to make our "calling and election sure." (II Pet. 1:10) We have the mighty power of God working on our behalf, and his great love and compassion, all being ministered to us through his holy angels. Let us, therefore, press onward each day and not "neglect so great salvation."—Heb. 2:3 ■