

The Dawn

Herald of Christ's Presence



The DAWN

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God's Viewpoint of War and Violence

***“He maketh wars
to cease unto the
end of the earth; he
breaketh the bow,
and cutteth the
spear in sunder; he
burneth the
chariot in the fire.”***

—Psalm 46:9

We are now well into the twenty-first century. World conditions are rapidly deteriorating. The people that we have trusted in, the things that we have come to know and enjoy, and have even taken for granted, are disappearing. Many in the world today live

in a constant state of fear. We see firsthand that world tensions are at an all-time high. Conflicts, wars, and acts of terrorism now fill our headlines and news reports. The world is caught up in a frenzy, which has led many to fear for their very existence. A struggle between the supposed powers of good and evil on the earth is underway. There has been a call to arms, which has led to violence being rendered for violence. A great deal of pressure has been put upon individuals to “join the fight” at all cost.

Mankind in general is not looking to God for help, but is relying on its own methods for bringing peace to the world. In this setting we find the child of God faced with many important decisions. What do the Scriptures teach concerning violence, war, and killing? How can the Scriptures be used as a basis for being opposed to war and violence? It is our hope that the ensuing discussion will help the reader with the answers to these important questions.

Old Testament Descriptions of God

God is often described in the Bible using warlike terms—the “anger of the LORD,” and the “wrath of the LORD”—as mentioned in Numbers 11:10,33. The Heavenly Father is like “a consuming fire,” for “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” (Deut. 4:24; Heb. 10:31) “To me belongeth vengeance, and recompence.” (Deut. 32:35) The Lord is “a jealous God,” and “a man of war,” who rises up to judge the nations in his appointed time.—Exod. 20:5; 15:3

Israel’s Men of War

In God’s dealings with the nation of Israel, we see that they were instructed to number themselves by armies. “The LORD spake unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tabernacle of the congregation, ... after they were come out of the land of Egypt, saying, Take ye the sum of all the congregation of the children of Israel, after their families, by the house of their fathers, with the number of their names, every male by their polls; From twenty years old and upward, all that are able to go forth to war in Israel: thou and Aaron shall number them by their armies.”—Num. 1:1-3

The Israelites were often led by men of war in their struggles to gain possession of their promised land. Joshua, the “captain of the host of the LORD,” was instructed by an angel on how to destroy Jericho. (Josh. 5:14; 6:2-5) With the blowing of trumpets, and divine intervention, the walls of the city “fell down flat,” and were “utterly destroyed.”—Josh. 6:20,21

God taught his people how to fight. We are told by David, “Blessed be the LORD my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight: My goodness, and my fortress; my high tower, and my deliverer; my shield, and he in whom I trust; who subdueth my people under me.”—Ps. 144:1,2

God Fights for His People

God fought for his people when they were being pursued by Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and his army of horses and chariots. “When Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians marched after them; and they were sore afraid: and the children of Israel cried out unto the LORD. ... And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace.” (Exod. 14:10-14) The waters of the sea parted by the power of God, and the host of Israel was delivered; the armies of Egypt were destroyed.

Recounting a later experience, “The LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Avenge the children of Israel of the Midianites: ... And Moses spake unto the people, saying, Arm some of yourselves unto the

war, and let them go against the Midianites, ... Of every tribe a thousand, throughout all the tribes of Israel, shall ye send to the war. ... And they slew the kings of Midian.”—Num. 31:1-8

“A Time to Every Purpose”

Another set of scriptures to be considered from the Old Testament is found in Ecclesiastes 3:1,3,8: “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: ... A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; ... A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.” Many people have used these scriptures to justify killing and going to war. However, when we examine this more closely we see that Solomon was writing as a result of his many past experiences and observations. He is making a point from a social perspective. He sees men laboring hard in all manner of endeavors, and he wisely inquires, “What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboureth? I have seen the travail, which God hath given to the sons of men to be exercised in it.”—vss. 9,10

Solomon ends his discussion in the Book of Ecclesiastes with, “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.”—Eccles. 12:13,14

A God of Love

In light of the foregoing, we now pose a legitimate question that many ask: If God is a God of love as the Bible tells us, how can we understand his commands

to the children of Israel, such as to “utterly destroy” their enemies? (I John 4:8,16; Deut. 12:2; 20:17) We must remember that the nation of Israel was God’s covenanted people: “You only have I known of all the families of the earth.”—Amos 3:2

The fact that the children of Israel were God’s chosen people is taught clearly in the Bible. We note these words of the Prophet Jeremiah: “So have I caused to cleave unto me the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah, saith the LORD; that they might be unto me for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory.” I will be the “God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be my people.” (Jer. 13:11; 31:1) Speaking to Jacob, the father of the twelve tribes of Israel, God said, “In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.”—Gen. 28:14

The land of Canaan had been promised to the “seed,” or offspring, of Abraham—that is, Israel—centuries earlier. (Gen. 11:31; 12:5-7) However, other peoples had settled in the land prior to the Israelites arrival as the rightful heirs under the leadership of Joshua. Terrible conditions existed in the promised land of Canaan when Israel came to possess it. The Philistines, Amorites, and others who occupied the land were very corrupt, as they engaged in all forms of idolatrous worship, even offering up human sacrifices in connection with their false gods and religion. (Deut. 18: 9-14) It was because their wickedness and depravity had reached such a level that God, in his wisdom and justice, saw that it would be best to destroy them and to place in the land a people who, under his instructions, would attain to a higher degree of civilization.

Thus, God directed the Israelites to conquer Canaan. It was not something done without his permission and direction. Prior to entering the land of promise, the Lord had established a system of laws with the Israelites. They understood if they disobeyed those laws, they would be punished. One of these laws was, “Thou shalt not kill.” (Exod. 20:13) Israel’s neighbors constantly made war against them, but if Israel would obey God, he would help them. If they disobeyed God, however, he would let their enemies succeed.—Lev. 26:3,6-8,14,17

A Temporary Situation

Later in the Old Testament, God made it clear through the prophets that the present time of evil, hate, war, and poverty was a temporary situation. His plan will ultimately eliminate all warfare, hate, despair, and poverty. This will take place when his kingdom is set up. Through the Prophet Isaiah, God said concerning this time: “They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.” “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain.”—Isa. 2:4; 11:9

New Testament View of War

Let us now consider God’s teachings in the New Testament, in which it soon becomes apparent that a change has taken place. The Heavenly Father is now dealing differently with the nation of Israel, and it all begins with his Son, Jesus. In his pre-human existence, God’s Son is called “the Word [Greek: *logos*]” of God. (John 1:1, *The Emphatic Diaglott*) Later in this same chapter, John writes:

“The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.” (vs. 14) “He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not.” (vss. 10,11) We know that “his own” refers to the nation of Israel. He was rejected by them in fulfillment of the scripture, “He is despised and rejected of men.”—Isa. 53:3

When Pilate asked the Jews, who were gathered at our Lord’s trial, “What shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ? They all say unto him, Let him be crucified.” (Matt. 27:22) As we read at the close of the account, Pilate washed his hands of the matter finding no fault with him. “Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children.”—Matt. 27:25

Throughout Jesus’ ministry, he longed to help Israel. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.” (Luke 13:34,35) Because of this rejection of the only begotten Son of God, Israel failed to obtain what it had long sought. They had desired to obtain continued blessings and prosperity under God’s direction. “What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for ... (According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day.”—Rom. 11:7,8

Examples to Teach Us

We now again mention, using the Scriptures, the purpose of God's Old Testament relationship with Israel. "Brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers [the Israelites] were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; ... Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted."—I Cor. 10:1,6

From this record we have warnings and the opportunity to learn from Israel's failures so that we can do our best to serve God. Natural Israel never was heir unconditionally of any part of the promise made to Abraham: "In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." (Gen. 12:3) When God entered into his covenant with Israel, the understanding was that if they would keep the Law, they would have ever lasting life. This would then allow them to inherit the promise made to Abraham and give them the privilege of blessing "all families of the earth."

Heirs of God's Promises

The words of the Apostle Peter, "The promise is unto you, and to your children," are in full harmony with all of the Lord's dealings with Israel, including his covenant with them as the children of his servant Abraham. (Acts 2:39) They still had this hope in Jesus' day, as Paul said, "Unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come." (Acts 26:7) When Israel, as a nation, was proven unworthy of becoming heir of the Abrahamic promises, they were, symbolically speaking, broken off, and the Gentiles were given

the opportunity to be grafted in to take their place. These Gentiles, now as individuals, could become partakers of “the root and fatness of the olive tree”—that is, the Abrahamic promises.—Rom. 11:17

From that time on, only those individuals, Jew or Gentile, who accepted Christ were made “heirs according to the promise,” as members of the spiritual seed of Abraham. (Gal. 3:29) “The stone [Jesus] which the builders [Israel as a nation] rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: ... The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.”—Matt. 21:42,43

Since Israel was not ready to be used in the blessing of other nations, the standing they had under their covenant with God ceased, and the promise of being a “kingdom of priests, and an holy nation” also ceased to be theirs. (Exod. 19:6) It was “given to a nation,”—to spiritual Israel—“a royal priesthood, an holy nation.” (I Pet. 2:9) We are told that this nation is separate and distinct from all others, and is gathered out by God from all peoples of the earth—“a people for his name.”—Acts 15:14

Rejection of Violence and War

Our Lord Jesus Christ is certainly the key to the change in the teachings that are brought out in the New Testament. Jesus rejected the concepts of violence and warfare that had come to be known and accepted in the world. Through his teachings, and by his example, he provided us with a much higher standard. “A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men

know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” (John 13:34,35) This is a higher commandment, a higher law, than was given to the Jews under their covenant with God. The law given by Christ is the law of the Christian’s covenant; it is the law of love. It is given to all those who have entered the school of Christ, and who are hoping to become part of Spiritual Israel. Jesus summed up the commandment of love in this way: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. ... Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”—Matt. 22:37,39

Violence, as a result of sin, is running rampant in the world today. It exists in many forms and involves nearly every culture in some way or another. Satan, the author of sin, goes about the world “as a roaring lion, ... seeking whom he may devour.” (I Pet. 5:8) He is the “god of this world” and “hath blinded the minds of them which believe not.” (II Cor. 4:4) Because of Satan’s influence, violence pervades today’s society.

Today we see violence in the home, among neighbors, in schools, churches, and the workplace, even among strangers, to say nothing of the violent conflict among nations. All of this is contrary to the teachings of Jesus. He rejected violence, and the personal use of force to settle disputes. In John 18:10,11, for example, Jesus corrected Peter for drawing his sword against a servant of the High Priest, which resulted in injury to the servant. He told Peter, “Put up thy sword into the sheath.”

We never again hear of the disciples using force or violence in the service of the Lord. Jesus could

have called into service “twelve legions of angels,” but he did not do so. (Matt. 26:53) He was not willing to use divine power for his personal welfare. Jesus never prayed for deliverance from his troubles, but cheerfully endured them as part of his sacrifice. Followers of Christ should also be doing the same thing. “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.”—Phil. 2:5

New Attitude Toward Enemies

Our Lord also preached concerning a new attitude toward our enemies. “I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.” (Matt. 5:44) We might at first say that this is a high standard to live up to, and we would be correct. This type of love goes well beyond loving your neighbor. It has been said that it is easy to love those who love us. To love our enemies, however, requires a heart condition so full of love that not even an enemy could stir up in our hearts any evil intentions. There would be no room for acts of retribution or hatred.

This does not mean that we approve of evil or injustice, but we are not to take part in it. We are opposed to the oppression of the weak and helpless. The mindset of many in the world today is to justify doing wrong to others in order to save self. We are to “hate the evil, and love the good,” but we are not to recompense evil to others, even our enemies. (Amos 5:15) Let us remember that those who sin and do evil in the sight of God will have their reward.—I Cor. 3:8

Principles of Life

Our Lord Jesus taught principles of living which are characterized by sympathy, meekness, mercy, purity, and peace making. "Blessed are they that mourn: ... Blessed are the meek: ... Blessed are the merciful: ... Blessed are the pure in heart: ... Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God." (Matt. 5:4-9) Our Lord spoke these words in his Sermon on the Mount to instruct his disciples and, in turn, us. He wants us to be sympathetic toward those in difficult circumstances, to practice meekness and self-control, to be merciful to others, to have pure hearts, devoid of anger and malice, and to always be a peacemaker. We will not always be able to do these things perfectly, but we want to have perfect and pure intent. The Lord's people are to be helpful. "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men," and not join in with the sentiments of this warring world.—Gal. 6:10

Purity of heart toward God shows itself in efforts to live peaceably and to promote peace in others. The Apostle Paul wrote, "As much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." (Rom. 12:18) This is especially needful in this time in which we are now living, even if peace is not reciprocated back to us.

The enemies of righteousness love "darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." (John 3:19) The Lord is not looking for these, but for those who are so faithful to the principles of righteousness, that they will exercise them even toward their enemies when persecuted. "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you

falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven.” (Matt. 5:11,12) The Apostle Peter also wrote: “If any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.” (I Pet. 4:16) Our Lord gives us personal assurance when he tells us: “In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”—John 16:33

Responsibilities of Christians

We are to obey man’s laws when they do not conflict with God’s laws. However, when they do conflict, the Christian must be responsible to God’s laws, not man’s. Note the admonitions we are given concerning this. “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. ... Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.” (I Pet. 2:9,11) “We ought to obey God rather than men.”—Acts 5:29

We know that the Heavenly Father holds obedience to his will as a very important matter. We have been shown this by the many lessons we have noted concerning the nation of Israel. An important principle Jesus taught us is this: “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s.” (Matt. 22:21) We are further told: “Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake.” (I Pet. 2:13) “Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; ...

honour to whom honour.” (Rom. 13:7) These principles all apply except when our trained conscience and God’s laws would be violated.

The Heavenly Father is working out everything in this present troubled world according to his plans and purposes. He is looking especially at how we are living up to the teachings that were revealed to us by his dear Son. The fiery storms of the present time “shall try every man’s work of what sort it is.” (I Cor. 3:13) It will reveal the type of character we have developed during our lives. Our faith should be built upon the precious promises of God, which are pictured as “gold, silver, precious stones.” We are not to build improperly with other materials that do not stand up to this test by fire. The Apostle tells us that everything that is built according to human theories, methods, and traditions, pictured as “wood, hay, stubble,” will be destroyed.—vss. 10-15

The Heavenly Father is allowing all nations to deceive themselves into thinking that they can solve all of the world’s problems. We have seen that peace has never been long lasting; new conflicts arise suddenly. These events God has allowed to prepare the world of mankind for his kingdom of everlasting peace, to be ruled by his Son, Christ Jesus, the “Prince of Peace.” (Isa. 9:6,7) “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth,” Jesus taught us to pray.—Matt. 6:10

Concluding Thoughts

In the Old Testament experiences of Israel, God permitted wars to be fought in order to accomplish certain purposes concerning the original promises

which had been given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Most of these conflicts related to the land that had been promised centuries before to the people of Israel, but which had become occupied by heathen and wicked nations. Such wars and conflicts were authorized by God, and not by man nor earthly governments.

By contrast, in the New Testament, those former experiences of Israel had served their purpose as far as God was concerned. This purpose was that the lessons they had learned through these difficult experiences would serve as a “schoolmaster” to bring them to Christ, the Prince of Peace.—Gal. 3:24

Jesus rejected the concepts of violence and war. He taught by example, and through the establishment of a commandment “to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart,” and to “love thy neighbour as thyself.” (Matt. 22:37,39) This new attitude toward our enemies rejects the use of force, violence, and killing. Thus Paul tells us, “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.”—Heb. 12:14

Soon, our opening scripture will be fulfilled: “He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire.” (Ps. 46:9) God’s Word further promises: “Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders; but thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise.” (Isa. 60:18) All those who have been killed as the result of war and other violent acts will be raised from the dead. (John 5:28,29) All people will one day know everlasting peace, and have the opportunity to then live in

harmony on a restored, perfect earth forever. Such a glorious outcome will be the culmination of the restoration of “all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.”—Acts 3:21 ■

Boundless Grace

*Come, thou fount of every blessing,
Tune my heart a song to raise,
Streams of favor, never ceasing,
Call for notes of heartfelt praise,
Teach me some melodious sonnet
Grace to gratitude doth move.
Praise thy grace I glory in it!
Grace so full of matchless love.*

*Not alone hath grace redeemed me,
Bought me with Christ's precious blood,
Sought me out when I, a stranger,
Wandered from the fold of God;
But beyond this great salvation
God hath shown me wondrous grace
Called me with a heavenly calling,
Ever to behold his face.*

*O! to grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be!
Lord, thy goodness, like a fetter,
Binds my grateful heart to thee.
I will tread the way appointed,
Rough and thorny though it be;
In the steps of thine Anointed;
'Tis my privilege, I see.*

—Hymns of Dawn

Jeremiah's Rescue

Key Verse: *"Then the king commanded Ebed-Melech the Ethiopian, saying, Take from here thirty men with you, and lift Jeremiah the prophet out of the dungeon before he dies."*
—**Jeremiah 38:10,**
New King James Version

Selected Scripture:
Jeremiah 38:1-28

Of all God's servants through-out the course of human history, the Prophet Jeremiah stands uniquely prominent among them. Consider the remarkable nature of his call to be a prophet while he was still quite young. Jeremiah wrote of that event, saying, "Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying: Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations. Then said I: Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I cannot speak, for I am a youth. But the LORD said to me: Do

not say, I am a youth, For you shall go to all to whom I send you, And whatever I command you, you shall speak. Do not be afraid of their faces, For I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD."—Jer. 1:4-8, *NKJV*

We can well imagine the life-changing impact upon young Jeremiah. After all, God had spoken directly to him! Further, it was revealed to him that he was known of God before he was formed in the womb. Even more so, it likely amazed Jeremiah that he was sanctified by God before he was born and predestined to be a prophet to all nations. Perhaps Jeremiah staggered at this message. He may well have wondered how God's will would,

or even could, be accomplished. All doubt seems to have been removed when God empowered him. We read, “Then the LORD put forth His hand and touched my mouth, and the LORD said to me: Behold, I have put My words in your mouth. See, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, To root out and to pull down, To destroy and to throw down, To build and to plant.” (vss. 9,10, *NKJV*) Empowered by these extraordinary promises, Jeremiah began his ministry, fearlessly and faithfully declaring the word of God to Israel, Judah, and the nations.

In the days of Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, Jeremiah’s prophecies were rejected by Judah’s leadership. The prophet boldly told Zedekiah and his governors to accept the fact that God was going to bring about the end of their reign. Jerusalem would be destroyed. Their only chance for survival was to accept that Babylon’s invasion and conquering of Jerusalem was God’s punishment for their stiff-necked disobedience. If they acquiesced to the will of God, their lives would be spared. Instead, Zedekiah’s governors insisted that Jeremiah be incarcerated in an abandoned cistern. They said that Jeremiah was weakening the will of the people—an act of treason. The cistern that Jeremiah was lowered into was full of miry clay. (Jer. 38:1-6) We may imagine the internal struggles of faith that he experienced. Was he to die there? Had God abandoned him?

Perhaps Jeremiah reflected on Psalm 40. “I waited patiently for the LORD; And He inclined to me, And heard my cry. He also brought me up out of a horrible pit, Out of the miry clay, And set my feet upon a rock, And established my steps.”—Ps. 40:1,2, *NKJV*

We believe that God continues to deliver his people from “miry clay” situations. Jeremiah’s example of faithfulness and trust continues to inspire the Lord’s people. “God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear.”—Ps. 46:1,2, *NKJV* ■

The Fall of Jerusalem

Key Verse: “*For because of the anger of the LORD this happened in Jerusalem and Judah, that He finally cast them out from His presence. Then Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon.*”
—*II Kings 24:20, New King James Version*

Selected Scriptures:
*II Kings 24:18-20;
25:1-21*

“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” (George Santayana, *The Life of Reason*, 1905) The people of ancient Israel fell prey to this truism. Cycling through reigns of some good kings, but many evil kings, Israel and Judah exhausted the Lord’s mercy and patience toward them. Their past did not inform their present and, as a result, they were condemned. The polity of the Ten-Tribe Kingdom of Israel had been annihilated by Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, approximately 135 years before Zedekiah’s defeat. (II Kings 18:9-12) Rather than learn from history, Zedekiah chose to

defy God’s judgments.

The Prophet Jeremiah clearly marked out the coming judgments and how Judah should properly respond. “Thus says the LORD: He who remains in this city shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence; but he who goes over to the Chaldeans shall live; his life shall be as a prize to him, and he shall live. Thus says the LORD: This city shall surely be given into the hand of the king of Babylon’s army, which shall take it.” (Jer. 38:2,3, *NKJV*) In other words, “Humble yourselves under

God's mighty hand. Surrender to the Chaldeans, accept this divine punishment and you will live. Resist and you will surely die of disease, starvation, or violence." Rejecting humility and embracing hubris, Zedekiah chose the path of defiance. He did not believe or trust in God's power. —II Kings 24:18-20

We may take a lesson from this account and make application of it to our Christian lives. Primarily, obey God. Do not seek "other options" to doing his will. There are none for the Christian. "Be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you."—I Pet. 5:5-7, *NKJV*

Does the will of God seem unpleasant, disagreeable to our earthly desires? Reflect on the message spoken through King Solomon: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor detest His correction; For whom the LORD loves He corrects, Just as a father the son in whom he delights." (Prov. 3:11,12, *NKJV*) The Apostle Paul offers a lovely insight into Solomon's counsel, "Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness."—Heb. 12:9,10, *NKJV*

If King Zedekiah had such understanding as we have obtained, he may have chosen to be in subjection to the Lord and lived. Chastenings from God are generally perceived to be punitive. To some degree that is so. However, the grander lesson and realization is that his chastening is for our benefit. It fosters growth in godliness. God corrects us to help us. Had Judah obeyed they would have lived, despite Jerusalem's destruction. For the Christian, accepting God's chastening is to their profit, that they may be "partakers of His holiness." ■

Ezekiel's Sign

Key Verse: *“Thus Ezekiel is a sign to you; according to all that he has done you shall do; and when this comes, you shall know that I am the Lord GOD.”*
—*Ezekiel 24:24, New King James Version*

Selected Scripture:
Ezekiel 24:15-27

feet; do not cover your lips, and do not eat man's bread of sorrow. So I spoke to the people in the morning, and at evening my wife died; and the next morning I did as I was commanded.”—Ezek. 24:16-18, *NKJV*

What may have enabled Ezekiel to bear this onerous command? We reason that his lifelong devotion to God, marked by obedience and service, had developed deep-seated faith; faith such as Job expressed, “Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.”—Job 13:15, *NKJV*

We recognize that divine wisdom was operating as God transformed Ezekiel's personal tragedy into Israel's national lesson. How were these two events related? They shared one thing, identified as “the desire of your eyes.” For Ezekiel, that was his wife. For Israel, it was Solomon's Temple, the symbol of their national polity.

Ezekiel's sign is achingly profound. His wife, described by the Lord as “the desire of your eyes,” was going to die suddenly —“with one stroke.” Compounding the feelings of loss and sorrow, the Lord commanded that Ezekiel must not express his grief publicly. “You shall neither mourn nor weep, nor shall your tears run down. Sigh in silence, make no mourning for the dead; bind your turban on your head, and put your sandals on your

The Israelites were apparently curious at the behavior of the prophet. It was odd that he did not mourn his wife, and they knew that Ezekiel's actions often had divine intent and meaning. They enquired about it. The people said to him, "Will you not tell us what these things signify to us, that you behave so?"—Ezek. 24:19, *NKJV*

Ezekiel answered them, "The word of the LORD came to me, saying, Speak to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will profane My sanctuary, your arrogant boast, the desire of your eyes, the delight of your soul; and your sons and daughters whom you left behind shall fall by the sword. And you shall do as I have done; you shall not cover your lips nor eat man's bread of sorrow. Your turbans shall be on your heads and your sandals on your feet; you shall neither mourn nor weep, but you shall pine away in your iniquities and mourn with one another."—vss. 20-23, *NKJV*

The Temple would be destroyed, national polity dissolved, and the people of Israel taken captive or killed. Thus Ezekiel was "a sign," as noted in our Key Verse. The calamity happened, and no amount of grieving would avert it. Israel was taken captive to Babylon. The collective conscience of the people of Israel was afflicted with sorrow, yielding the beautiful poem found in Psalm 137. "By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down, yea, we wept When we remembered Zion. We hung our harps Upon the willows in the midst of it. For there those who carried us away captive asked of us a song, And those who plundered us requested mirth, Saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion! How shall we sing the LORD's song In a foreign land? If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill! If I do not remember you, Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth—If I do not exalt Jerusalem Above my chief joy." (Ps. 137:1-6, *NKJV*) Poignancy springs from Ezekiel's sign. ■

The People Warned

Key Verse: “So you, son of man: I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore you shall hear a word from My mouth and warn them for Me.”
—*Ezekiel 33:7, New King James Version*

Selected Scripture:
Ezekiel 33:7-20

There is a tendency among some to view the book of Ezekiel through the lens of novelty. As a result, books have been written proposing that the prophet chronicled an encounter with visitors from another planet. [This is not the view of this magazine’s Editorial Board] Others are interested in the apocalyptic scenario involving the invading forces identified as “Gog ... of Magog.” (Ezek. 38:2) That horde attacks Israel, precipitating the

battle of Armageddon. Advancing to the final chapters of Ezekiel, we find the promise of a new Temple and hints of coming Millennial glory.

These subjects are of great interest to students of the Bible, but it is well to bear in mind another level of teaching in this fascinating book. That lesson is to be responsible. Be a watchman who is ever vigilant and faithful. Look out for the safety and spiritual prosperity of God’s people. Christians will do well to emulate Ezekiel in this regard. By our actions, let us answer the age old question raised in Genesis 4:9, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” with a resounding “Yes, I am.”

Our Key Verse confirms Ezekiel’s previous commission from the Lord to be a watchman. To this commission God had added: “When I say to the wicked, You shall

surely die, and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul. ... Nevertheless if you warn the righteous man that the righteous should not sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live because he took warning; also you will have delivered your soul.”—Ezek. 3:18-21, *NKJV*

We do not advocate busybodying; rather, shepherding and nurturing. Paul admonished, “Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”—Phil. 2:1-4, *NKJV*

Acting as watchmen, we are mindful of our Scriptural bounds. Jesus Christ is the head of the church. We are merely colaborers with him, seeking to follow his teaching that one who desires to be great in God’s estimation should be a servant. (Matt. 23:11; John 13:14-16) Peter wisely counselled, “Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.”—I Pet. 5:2,3, *NKJV*

God ultimately gave Ezekiel the words and vision to shepherd Israel. Let it be so with us. While exercising vigilance we remember, “Unless the LORD builds the house, They labor in vain who build it; Unless the LORD guards the city, The watchman stays awake in vain.”—Ps. 127:1, *NKJV* ■

Ezekiel's Vision of God's Kingdom

Key Verse: *“Along the bank of the river, on this side and that, will grow all kinds of trees used for food; their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. They will bear fruit every month, because their water flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for medicine.”*
—**Ezekiel 47:12**, *New King James Version*

Selected Scripture:
Ezekiel 47:1-12

Our Key Verse anticipates the glories of the Millennial kingdom—the fulfillment of that for which we have prayed for centuries: “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.” (Matt. 6:10) The channel of blessings in that time are associated with a river which flows from the Temple of God. The Prophet Zechariah identified the unique quality of its waters; they are living waters! “In that day it shall be— That living waters shall flow from Jerusalem, Half of them toward the eastern sea And half of them toward the western sea; In both summer and winter it shall occur. And the LORD shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be The LORD is one, And His name one.”— Zech. 14:8,9, *NKJV*

The Selected Scripture for today's lesson depicts the river's growth. As it first comes from the Temple, Ezekiel notes that one thousand cubits from the water's

source it came up to his ankles. As he progressed another one thousand cubits downstream the waters came to his knees. Yet one thousand more and the waters came to his waist. At four thousand cubits the flood of waters became a river that Ezekiel could not cross. The river was so deep that it would require one to swim in attempting to cross it. This fits well with our understanding that the glorious kingdom of God will gradually, yet inexorably, fill the earth. The results will be impressive. “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD As the waters cover the sea.”—Isa. 11:9, *NKJV*

Ezekiel had a divinely appointed guide during this experience. (Ezek. 40:2-4) His guide had cautioned him to “Look with your eyes and hear with your ears, and fix your mind on everything I show you; for you were brought here so that I might show them to you. Declare to the house of Israel everything you see.” (vs. 4, *NKJV*) The one speaking to Ezekiel asked an interesting question after the vision of the waters. “He said to me, Son of man, have you seen this?” (Ezek. 47:6, *NKJV*) The importance of this vision was made emphatic to the prophet and, subsequently, to us also.

That being accomplished, Ezekiel was brought to the banks of the river. His guide said, using symbolic language, “This water flows toward the eastern regions, goes down into the valley, and enters the sea. When it reaches the sea, its waters are healed. And it shall be that every living thing that moves, wherever the rivers go, will live.” Then are found the words of our Key Verse. (Ezek. 47:8,9,12, *NKJV*) The Revelation given to the Apostle John affirms Ezekiel’s experience. “He showed me a pure river of water of life. ... On either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.” (Rev. 22:1,2, *NKJV*) Ezekiel’s vision continues to inspire us! ■

Be of Good Courage

*“Be of good
courage, and he
shall strengthen
your heart, all ye
that hope in
the LORD.”
—Psalm 31:24*

The Scriptures encourage the Lord's people to be full of faith, hope, confidence, and trust. As we look out into the world we see particular reasons why this should be so. The majority of people in

the world are full of fear, apprehension, distrust, and worry. For this reason they fail to get the best out of life's opportunities. They see the pitfalls of sin and trouble in many different directions, and therefore they have reason to be distrustful, to be fearful.

True Christians, however, have come into a special relationship with God, and he with them. He has assured them that he will supervise their affairs, as would not have been their experience had they not come into relationship with him. They are, therefore, to hope and to trust in him. They are to heed the things which he has said, and to take courage in the thought that all of their experiences are under his supervision.—II Cor. 4:15-17

God's people have stepped out from the world and joined the standard of the Lord Jesus Christ—the standard of righteousness, truth, holiness, and opposition to sin. They will be beset by powerful enemies. Against them will be arrayed Satan himself, who will seek to oppose them, as he has opposed all of God's plans. He can make no direct attack upon the Lord, but he can attack his plan and those who believe in him. It is Satan who instigated the riots, the tumults, and the persecutions in the days of Jesus and the apostles, and who subsequently has brought about the oppression of the Lord's people ever since.—II Cor. 2:11; 11:14; II Thess. 2:7-10; I Pet. 5:8,9

Satan has not done these things with his own personal touch, but through his deluded servants. (II Thess. 2:11) He has always opposed righteousness and all those who love righteousness. On this account Christians need to have great courage; for if they allow the Adversary to beat their courage down, he may soon put them out of the battle entirely. A retreating soldier, who has lost courage, is of little use in battle. Instead of losing courage, we are to resign our earthly interests to our Father and trust him that in the present life he will guide us, and will overrule everything for good to those who are "the called according to his purpose."—Rom. 8:28

Besides the Adversary, we have the general spirit of the world to oppose us. The world will often consider us foolish to think that we have any special divine supervision. Such a spirit may silently say to us, "God has made all the worlds, the thousands of angels, and everything in the universe. Do you imagine that he has any special interest in you? If there is a God, he is so great and we so small that

he cannot take any notice of us.” Thus our faith may be beaten down. When we come in contact with worldly people we may find, as it were, a wet blanket thrown on our simple trust, even though they do not say a word to us. We need to have good courage and to hope in the Lord. As Paul expresses it: “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God.”—I Cor. 2:12

Additionally, we have our own fallen flesh. Each of us has in ourselves, in our own body, a most formidable opponent. (Rom. 7:18,25) The Scriptures represent that when we gave ourselves to the Lord and he gave us his Holy Spirit, we there began a transformation process and became embryo New Creatures “in Christ.” (Rom. 12:1,2; II Cor. 5:17) This embryo New Creature, the new mind, will, and character, is developed in our mortal bodies until the moment of resurrection, or spiritual birth, when we shall pass from the earthly to the heavenly condition. “It [the New Creature] is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body.”—I Cor. 15:42-44

Nevertheless, while we are in the flesh, we have all of its fallen tendencies with which to do battle. At the same time, as New Creatures we have disowned these—we have turned our backs upon sin. (Rom. 6:1,2,11,12) We have exchanged the earthly interests and hopes for the heavenly interests and hopes. By our daily experiences the Lord is testing us. We must be ever vigilant to overcome the flesh. It requires a great deal of courage to fight down its tendencies to sin. It requires still more courage that,

while continuously battling the weaknesses and frailties of our flesh, and conquering it in good measure, we should additionally engage in sacrifice and service to the Lord. All of this requires much courage, and of ourselves we are insufficient.—II Cor. 3:5; Phil. 3:3

We are exhorted to put our trust in the Lord, and are assured that we “can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth” us. (Phil. 4:13) His is the only power sufficient for us. It will require all our courage, all our faith and hope—every helpful element that we can put into the fight—in order to bring about final victory. However, the Lord supplies sufficient grace so that we may be overcomers. (II Cor. 12:9; Heb. 4:16) This does not mean that any of us will live a perfect life, or that we will always fully exercise good courage. We may fail from time to time, but our loving Heavenly Father is leading us on, and we will learn valuable lessons from our missteps.

Different Kinds of Courage

Some, having stronger faith and hope, with their minds fully centered on the Lord, have gone forward courageously. This is “good courage” in the sense of it being strong courage, proper courage. We might associate with our text the thought that our “hope in the LORD” is to be backed up and made strong by a good courage, a right kind of courage, a godly courage.

There is also a courage that is born of pride, which would say: “Do not back down. Do not let anybody get ahead of you.” In battle soldiers may vie with one another, having a desire to do something especially conspicuous, which will bring the applause of their leader or fellow soldiers. They need something to inspire *(Continued on page 36)*

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(Continued from page 31) them—a desire for fame perhaps—in order to give them courage to risk losing their own lives, or to take the lives of other human beings. This is the kind of courage that will seemingly help them to gain the victory in their battle, though it be an unworthy motive for inspiring courage.

A courage from right principles, however, based on faith and trust in the Lord, is not one of swagger or boasting, but one that is noble and pleasing to God. It has its source in a realization of what God has promised, that he is watching and desires us to be joint-heirs with his Son in his kingdom. (Rom. 8:17; Rev. 3:21) He is thoroughly testing us to see whether we will prove faithful. This courage must always be to do things in the right way—the Lord’s way.

The Exhortation Applies in All Situations

This exhortation to proper courage affects us in every aspect of life, whether we are in one situation or another. It would apply to someone with a measure of power and influence—that such a one should be courageous enough to do the right thing—that which is understood to be the Lord’s will. Such courage would say to us, “Do your duty, whatever may be the Lord’s will for you. Hope in the Lord, even though your motive will often be misunderstood.” We should have the good courage to stand for what is right, whether our reward be in this life or in that life which is to come. We recall the words of the Lord to Joshua at the beginning of his leadership of Israel: “Be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, ... turn not from it to the right hand or to the left.”—Josh. 1:7

The exhortation to be of good courage is also for the business person who is a Christian. Worldly friends may say, "You will fail in your business. You cannot advertise your business. If you tell the truth, the people will not patronize you; they will go to a place where a host of lies will be told them." If the Christian takes such advice, he or she may do a larger business but will make a failure of the chief affair in life—the development and practicing of a righteous character.

The same applies to all the Lord's consecrated people, regardless of situation or place in this life. Each is to advocate right principles, and not be faint-hearted or fearful to express the Christian character in word and deed. (John 3:21; James 1:22,25) Where there is a principle at stake we should take our stand and say, "My thought is thus and so, and I shall be obliged to maintain my position. I will content myself with doing what I feel is my duty, not wishing to coerce others; but I will be faithful to the principles I have come to believe." Thus even those who would think differently would know that the one speaking to them has a conviction, and was of good courage in expressing it in honesty and sincerity.—Rom. 12:17

Courage Proportionate to Faith

There are trials and difficulties in the life of all the footstep followers of Christ. The right kind of courage finds an opportunity to exercise itself in each of God's children. This is the kind of courage the Lord is looking for, and is such as must be found in overcomers. It is only to these that a place will be granted in the kingdom of heaven. Hence

the lesson of our text is: Be of good courage; for this is the way in which we shall demonstrate our faith in the Lord. Those who hope in him and are loyal to him will be courageous in proportion to their loyalty and their faith.—Matt. 9:29

This kind of courage will stand by us in all circumstances. Our Lord, in addressing his disciples on one occasion said, “You will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake. ... Do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour.” (Matt. 10:18,19, *English Standard Version*) Here the thought seems to be: “Do not be worried if you shall be brought before those in authority.” The Lord’s people, whatever circumstances may arise, will have such faith and trust in God that they will conduct themselves courageously, relying on divine power in all of life’s experiences.

The way in which God will give us a mouth and wisdom may vary according to circumstances. It may be by suggestions from another; perhaps in the hearing of the experience of someone else; or it may be that a text of Scripture that would be especially helpful comes to our mind. The thought is that our trust is fully in the Lord, and that we are not to be fearful.—Heb. 13:6

The Lord addressed the words quoted above to his disciples—unlearned men. For them to be brought before “governors and kings” would naturally cause them much apprehension. What should they say? How could they answer those men—those great, learned men? The disciples were very humble, and they realized their ignorance; but the Lord guided them. Education was much less general

then, compared to today. Today, practically all are educated to some extent. Nevertheless, the assurance of the Lord would still apply to us now, just as it did to his disciples.

If we are in any straits or difficulties, we are to remember that the Scriptures assure us, “The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear [reverence] him, and delivereth them.” (Ps. 34:7) This thought should tend to make us calm and collected in our minds, and should enable us to conduct ourselves courageously, knowing that we are in close relationship with him. Thus can we have full confidence in the Lord. Furthermore, we will realize that we are not wise enough to understand fully just what God’s purposes respecting us may be in each and every experience. We know not, therefore, how the Lord may overrule in this or that matter.

“Faith Can Firmly Trust Him”

The early disciples pondered as they thought of the things that Jesus had predicted for himself. With confidence, Peter had said to him, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God!” (Matt. 16:16) They must have thought: How could God allow any harm to come to him? The disciples concluded that these things he had spoken must be just figures of speech, such as when he told them that they must eat his flesh and drink his blood. (John 6:53-56) So now when he said, “the Son of man is ... to be crucified,” they thought it was one of his peculiar sayings that they could not understand.—Matt. 26:2

Hence the disciples were quite disturbed, wondering and astonished, when Jesus was arrested

and taken before the Jewish Sanhedrin, and instead of using his powers and his eloquence, he was silent, and allowed himself to be contradicted and maligned. Then their Master was taken before Pilate. Now, the disciples thought, Jesus surely will not hesitate before the Roman governor! Hence the surprise and astonishment of the disciples again when things turned out so contrary to what they had expected. Yet, such a course on our Lord's part was necessary in the Heavenly Father's plan, not merely for Jesus, that he might suffer and then enter into his glory, but necessary also for the world, because the redemption price, a perfect human life, must be provided as a "ransom for all."—I Tim. 2:5,6; I Cor. 15:22; Rom. 5:18

If in God's wisdom it is best in any way to bruise us and put us to shame, as was done with our Master, we are to be of good courage. He will strengthen our hearts, because we trust in him and have confidence in his overruling of our experiences. We know that he is too wise to err, and that there must be a motive, a reason for the permission, whatever it may be. We know assuredly that the saintly ones are precious in the sight of the Lord, and are as the apple of his eye.—Ps. 17:8

Whatever may be the outcome of any matter to us, we are to accept it as from the Lord, whether we are able to discern the reason for it or not. We are to have faith and hope, even though the way is rough, and though things might seem to be the very reverse of what we expected. "Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart: wait, I say, on the LORD."—Ps. 27:14 ■

The Responsibility of Stewards

*“Let a man so
account of us, as of
the ministers of
Christ, and
stewards of the
mysteries of God.”*
—*I Corinthians 4:1*

In our opening Scripture, the Apostle Paul directs our attention to the important responsibilities that God’s people have when providing the glorious message of the Gospel to others. In this text the word “ministers” is a translation of a Greek word meaning: a subordinate. These ministers are described as being “of Christ,” that is, subservient to Christ. Paul includes a second responsibility the Lord’s people have, using the word “stewards,” which in the Greek text denotes one appointed as servant manager of a household. Paul emphasizes that as stewards, God’s people have a responsibility for “the mysteries of God.”

In the verse following our opening Scripture, Paul adds to the importance of this Christian responsibility, saying, “Moreover it is required in stewards,

that a man be found faithful.” (I Cor. 4:2) While this ministry belonged specially to Jesus and his chosen Apostles, it belongs also to each follower of Christ who has the anointing and commission spoken of in Isaiah 61:1,2, and who thus has the consequent responsibilities of these sacred trusts found in the Bible.

The above verses read, “The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn.”

The consecrated children of God are both “ministers [subordinates] of Christ” and “stewards [servant managers] of the mysteries of God.” They are also stewards of all the talents, abilities, time, and energies that they have dedicated to the divine service. Thus, this stewardship is a very special one. The positive elements of righteous character and the recognized obligations to activity are specially implied in the responsibility of being a Christian steward. By way of example to us, the faithful apostles bore witness not only to the things they heard and saw; but, additionally, to the instructions they received through the Holy Spirit. They were, therefore, faithful stewards of the Lord.

When the apostle emphasizes that the servants of Christ and of God are stewards, it adds a further dimension and meaning to the task which has been set before them. Stewardship suggests a deeper sense of responsibility. Spiritual stewards are thus

considered as servant managers or overseers of divine things. In fact, Christian stewardship pertains to the ministering forth and revealing of long-kept secrets stored in the Scriptures until the due time for “the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began.”—Rom. 16:25

Overseers of the Truth

Being stewards of the secrets of God is more fully explained by Paul in his letter to the church at Ephesus. “If indeed you have heard of the stewardship of God’s grace which was given to me for you; that by revelation there was made known to me the mystery, as I wrote before in brief. By referring to this, when you read you can understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit.”—Eph. 3:2-5, *New American Standard Bible*

Faithfulness in carrying out the duties of an overseer is stressed by Paul in his epistle to the brethren at Corinth. “It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.” (I Cor. 4:2) He then adds: “Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.”—vs. 5

We have all been richly blessed by Paul’s ministry and his revealing to us the wonderful mysteries of God. His responsibility as overseer of these sacred secrets, and the privilege he had to reveal them to the Lord’s people, is suggested in his letter

to the church at Colosse. He testifies, “I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God; Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: ... which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.”—Col. 1:25-27

Mystery of the Ages

The most profound mystery of the ages reveals God’s plan to extend an invitation to consecrated believers of his Word to become a member of the body, or bride, of Christ. (I Cor. 12:12-14,27; II Cor. 11:2; Rev. 21:2,9) This faithful class, developed since the Day of Pentecost, when complete, will share with our Lord in the grand work of uplifting fallen mankind from the penalty of death. (I Cor. 15:21,22; Rev. 21:1-5) In reference to this symbolic bride of Christ, Paul explains, “This mystery is great; but I am speaking with reference to Christ and the church.”—Eph. 5:32, *NASB*

Christian Forbearance

As followers of Christ, our stewardship also includes the development into the character likeness of our Master. One such vital quality we must develop, and which is especially necessary as we go about our daily activities in the troubled world we presently live in, is that of forbearance. Christian forbearance must be tailored after God’s high standard. Like God, our exercise of forbearance toward others does not mean that we condone sins they may commit. We realize, however, as God does, that all of man’s current experience with sin, suffering, and death will one day yield the positive results he

intends. Thus we should properly forbear much in the way of wrong deeds, unkind words, ridicule, and criticism directed toward us. As Paul said, “Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.”—Col. 3:13

Paul also spoke about his life as a Christian and the many trials he endured. “Even to this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace; And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it.”—I Cor. 4:11,12

The Greek word translated “suffer” in the above passage means “forbear.” Paul is saying, “being persecuted, we forbear”—we tolerate, we restrain ourselves from retaliating, we put up with, these trials. Paul could do this because he knew that persecution as well as the hunger, thirst, buffeting, reviling, as well as the other kinds of trials and besetments, were all necessary experiences for him as a steward of God in order to be fully developed as a member of the sympathetic “royal priesthood,” which will teach mankind in Christ’s coming kingdom.—I Pet. 2:9; Rev. 20:6

The apostles bore witness not only by the display of qualities such as forbearance and the other noble Christian attributes, but, additionally, to the instruction which they received through the guiding influence of the Holy Spirit; and so, they were faithful stewards of all that was revealed to them. (Eph. 1:12-14) Thus we learn that the entire body of Christ is called, not to self-complacent ease, but to diligent and enterprising activity in the divine service.

Using Our Talents

Each one who possesses a talent or gift becomes a steward of the same. The Lord will require each steward to give an account—be found faithful—to the trust given them. Faithful stewards of the Lord will be on the lookout for everything that represents the Master's interests, and will be as careful of these as they would be of their own. Indeed, as the scripture states: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."—Rev. 2:10

All must be faithful with what they have been entrusted as their stewardship. Those who are using their talents to the fullest capacity are especially pleasing to the Lord. This emphasizes the need of full, complete loyalty and heart devotion, by a proper and diligent use of our gifts in harmony with the divine purpose and methods. One person might be a good writer; another a good speaker; another good at exhortation; a few may be good at several things. The lesson is that faithfulness is required of all in the use of the specific talents they possess.—Rom. 12:6-8

The Lord will not count us faithful if we make little or no effort to use our talents or abilities. It is important to consider whether our course of service, day by day, is approved of God. Our desire should be to use, fully and promptly, yet as wisely as possible, our time, talents, means, influence—everything put into our hands to use—as the Lord's example and Word directs. (Eccles. 9:10) In doing so, we are to also willingly follow his leading and direction in the use of these things.

Paul's Faithfulness

Paul was a faithful steward, ever seeking new and greater opportunities to spend and be spent in the Lord's service. Those who receive the Truth in the love of it will to the best of their ability and judgment show it to others at whatever the cost may be. It is important that all the consecrated may more fully realize themselves as the Lord's stewards, appointed to use beneficially his goods. If, on the other hand, we are unfaithful, can we expect him who knows the heart to entrust to our care the true riches of his glory and kingdom?—Ps. 139:23; Jer. 17:10; Luke 16:11

Parable of the Talents

The parable of the talents illustrates what is necessary to be faithful servants. (Matt. 25:14-30) As we recall the parable, only to his servants did the Lord give the talents. Only his servants had the responsibility of using the talents given them, and only they were reckoned with and held responsible. At the present time, only the consecrated children of God are his servants, but to these, their stewardship includes all the talents that they have dedicated to him. As stewards of God, we have nothing of our own, nothing with which we may do as we please; for, says the Apostle, "What hast thou that thou didst not receive?"—I Cor. 4:7

In endeavoring to view ourselves as God views us it is important to remember that not merely large abilities, large opportunities of time and circumstance, or command of great means, are noted by the Lord. Just as important are the small things; these are not overlooked by him. Let us

keep in mind the Lord's teaching that one who gives even a "cup of cold water" to a fellow disciple "shall in no wise lose his reward." (Matt. 10:42) We recall also that the poor woman's two mites, or coins, were esteemed more highly than the larger offerings of the rich, because she had "cast in all the living that she had." (Luke 21:1-4) When we thus perceive that the Lord is judging according to the thoughts and intents of the heart, the humblest saint can see ample opportunities to exercise faithful stewardship.

Our Body Members

The various members that make up the body of Christ come from different age groups, backgrounds, and experience levels. This calls to mind the statements of the Apostle Paul as found in I Corinthians chapter 12. "Those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary." (vs. 22) How true this is! In this illustration, the larger proportion of Christ's body members are often such; and yet their place in the body is just as necessary as those of the more notable members. "If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole body were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body?"—vss. 17-19

What a blessed thought to all those who recognize themselves as members of the body of Christ, that they each have a place and responsibility in the body to which God himself has wisely appointed them. It may now seem to be a humble place, but it

is nevertheless an important, a necessary place. Faithfulness in filling that place as a dedicated steward approved of God will result, by and by, in exaltation to kingdom glory.—Matt. 25:21

Faithful stewards in the Lord's vineyard continue to strive daily to work quietly and lovingly, doing with their might what their hands, heads, and hearts find to do to the honor of him whose name they bear. (Eccles. 9:10) How we should praise God and our dear Lord Jesus for all the wonderful grace they bestow upon us, and for the teaching, training, and discipline that is provided us as we desire to be faithful stewards of what has been given to us by divine providence.

Stewards of Our Character

Faithful stewardship also means committing to a way of life guided by Jesus' teachings and example. This involves both personal transformation and actively sharing the message of the Gospel with those around us. (Rom. 12:2; I Cor. 9:16) We must study the teachings of Jesus, observe his actions throughout his life, and seek to understand his ways. Following Jesus requires a commitment to live according to his commandments and perfect example. This we must do even when it requires sacrifice, suffering for righteousness' sake, or denying ourselves comfort and personal preferences. (I Pet. 2:5; Matt. 5:10-12; 16:24) It also requires having an active prayer life, reading and studying the Scriptures, and spending time in God's presence to deepen our understanding of his abiding love and will for us.

Witnesses of the Gospel

“This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end [of this age] come.” (Matt. 24:14) In the coming age of the Messianic kingdom, the fruitage of this witness will appear. The same testimony also serves the further ordained purpose of gathering out of the world those individuals, scattered here and there, to be associated with Christ in the great work of the kingdom, that of restoring all things and blessing “all the families of the earth.” —Matt. 6:10; Acts 3:20,21; Gen. 22:18; 12:3

In the case of our Lord Jesus, he was not only “holy, harmless undefiled and separate from sinners,” but he also gave witness of the Gospel by going about “doing good” to all those with whom he came in contact. —Heb. 7:26; Acts 10:38

A steward, therefore, is not a person of merely a harmless character, or one who is content to carefully keep to himself the talents that have been entrusted to his care, so that the Lord may find his goods just as he left them. Rather, faithful stewards are those who make a diligent, daily effort to use their one, or many, talents in the Master’s service. Thus, at the time of reckoning, the Lord will not just find his goods as he left them, but see a valuable increase, giving evidence of the zeal of Christ, and of faithfulness as ministers and stewards of the mysteries of God.—I Cor. 4:1,2 ■

*To be the salt of the earth,
we must sprinkle it out of our shakers,
by giving a witness.
—Deep Waters and a Bubbling Brook*

The Spirit of Thanksgiving

“Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.”
—*Psalm 100:4,5*

his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name.”

The spirit of thanksgiving is that which encourages us to appreciate all that God has done on our behalf. As his children, we thank him for giving us an understanding of his plans and purposes. We realize our own unworthiness of the countless blessings that he has bestowed upon us. “God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners,

A day of thanksgiving, such as is designated in the United States each November, is a time to remember our loving Heavenly Father to whom we owe our very existence, and who continues to provide for our daily needs. For this, we turn our attention to the wonderful words and spirit of the psalmist in our featured scripture: “Enter into

Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.”—Rom. 5:8-10

God’s Goodness Manifest

The Apostle Peter explained that our Lord Jesus was God’s wonderful gift to the sin-sick and dying human creation. “For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit.” (I Pet. 3:18, *New American Standard Bible*) God continually provides for mankind, yet as a whole they do not understand his character, authority, or the eternal plans for his human creation.

The Creator has given his human family many rich gifts that we may enjoy in our everyday lives. However, as Christians, this realization appeals not only to our physical and mental faculties, but we also learn to appreciate the abundant spiritual blessings that God has given to us in his Holy Scriptures. In proportion as we study his wonderful word of Truth and seek to attain understanding, so also does the Holy Spirit more richly abound in us as we strive to “walk in newness of life.” (Rom. 6:4) Thus does the child of God grow in the spirit of love, appreciation, and thanksgiving.

Every Good Gift

As we develop a more meaningful spiritual relationship with God, we grow in grace and knowledge. (II Pet. 3:18) However, we also realize our

insufficiency and dependence upon his love, mercy, and grace. (Eph. 2:4-6) Only after we have been for a considerable length of time in the Christian way can we comprehend the full force of the apostle's words, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures."—James 1:17,18

It is important that we go often to our Father in prayer and supplication as his child. (Col. 4:2; I Thess. 5:17) We may do so with the knowledge that he delights to give us his blessings. By his leading hand he has promised to guide us along the various steps of our Christian walk. His marvelous love and grace toward us is thus manifest: "For in him we live, and move, and have our being."—Acts 17:28

Those whose minds have been enlightened to the wonderful works of God see his riches of grace more each day and have many causes for thankfulness that others may not have. They have come into a very close and precious relationship with the Lord and know that all things are overruled for their spiritual welfare by a loving God. This is in accordance with the words of the psalmist, who wrote, "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty."—Ps. 91:1

In Everything Give Thanks

The Apostle Paul admonished, "In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you." (I Thess. 5:18) Those who

have given their lives in consecration to God and the doing of his will, and who have accepted our Lord Jesus as their Head, consider every day as a time for giving thanks. (Ps. 42:8; 92:1,2) Thus the child of God rejoices with gratitude and thankfulness in serving our loving Heavenly Father daily and in every situation of life.

Every experience of life, whether it is one of joy or sorrow, is an occasion for thankfulness. It means being keen to have the Lord's will cost us something, knowing that in giving ourselves to the divine service, the greater our eternal joy will be. The deepest shades of sorrow may yield the richest fruitage of peace and joy in the Lord. (Ps. 34:18) Sorrow and trial may elicit a greater degree of thankfulness than may be true with more pleasant experiences. Indeed, we may more greatly appreciate God's grace in our spiritual life than if we had not undergone such an experience. Our trial has caused us to depend more upon the Lord, and this has resulted in our living closer to him, being ever conscious that "our sufficiency is of God."—II Cor. 3:5

A Thankful Heart

We are inspired by the zeal and determination shown by the Apostle Paul, when he wrote, "I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."—Rom. 8:38,39

Many of God's servants of the past were those who endured great hardship, but their hearts were

filled with humility and thankfulness. This was especially true in the life of the great Apostle Paul. He proclaimed, "We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh."—II Cor. 4:7-11

Few of the Lord's people have suffered more for the Gospel than Paul, but there is no indication of complaint in his writings, which form a major part of the New Testament Scriptures. Further on in the chapter quoted above, he explained, "Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal."—vss. 14-18

The apostle readily accepted his commission in the service of the Lord. However, this service brought him almost continuous suffering and trial, oftentimes

nearly costing him his life. Yet he did not waver in his commitment, and continued serving the Truth and the brethren with his heart filled with devotion to God. He had the assurance that these “light afflictions,” which he said were only for a moment in time, were preparing him for an abundant entrance into Christ’s glorious kingdom to which he had been invited to have a special part.—II Pet. 1:10,11

Untiring Zeal

Because of his untiring zeal in preaching the Gospel and assisting the Lord’s people to greater faithfulness, the Apostle Paul was taken prisoner to Rome. While in bondage, he wrote an epistle that has been a source of blessing and encouragement to all the Lord’s consecrated people. He said these comforting words: “To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints, For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel; Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth.”—Col. 1:2-6

We note that the apostle’s letter was addressed specifically “to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse.” This reflects the apostle’s sincere desire for their spiritual growth and development in Christ Jesus, and that they

may be built up in the faith. Paul was concerned for the spiritual well-being of these brethren although he had never met them personally. He had learned of them through the ministry of “Epaphras our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ; Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit. For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God.”—Col. 1:7-10

Paul hardly mentioned in his letter the fact that he was living in a Roman prison and, no doubt, enduring trying circumstances at the time. Even in a casual reference, he mentioned it in perspective with the spiritual life of his brethren. He wrote, “Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving; Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds.” (Col. 4:2,3) Again, in closing his letter he said, “Remember my bonds. Grace be with you. Amen.”—vs. 18

Abounding with Thanksgiving

After their having been thoroughly established in the faith, he brought the Colossian brethren’s attention to the importance of giving thanks to the Lord for all of the blessings they had received. In his letter, he reminded them, “Though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the stedfastness of your faith in Christ. As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: Rooted

and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.”—Col. 2:5-7

Paul used a tree as an example to frame his inspiring thoughts. The rooting process goes on without any outward manifestation. Yet, a tree that is well rooted cannot be easily uprooted because of its powerful grip upon the soil that has nourished it. Thus the apostle warns us in another place, “That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.”—Eph. 4:14

In the life of the consecrated Christian, the roots of faith reach ever deeper into the wonderful knowledge of God and his ultimate purpose concerning the development of the Christ class during this present age, and the future recovery of the entire human family from their sin-sick and dying state under the administration of Christ’s kingdom. As the tree develops, so does the mature Christian’s character grow stronger and more visible. In time, it will be manifest by the wonderful fruitage “unto holiness.”—Rom. 6:22

A Sure Foundation

Faithful Christians who are privileged to be living during the present time have received abundant mercies from our loving Heavenly Father. He has revealed more fully to these the mysteries of the Scriptures that were kept hidden for centuries, and the Lord’s people have been lifted up and established on a blessed and firm foundation in Christ. (Col. 1:26,27) David expressed a similar appreciation and thanks to God, when he wrote, “I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me,

and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings.”—Ps. 40:1,2

Our “Goings” Established

The psalmist said that his prayer had been answered and that he had experienced new hope and understanding in his life. He also said that God “established my goings.” What a wonderful thought, because we, too, can say that our “goings”—steps or path—have been established and that we have experienced a newness of life and purpose. Our Lord is the firm foundation upon which each of us has our standing. We have been raised out of the horrible and miry pit of clay, which represents sin, destruction, and death, and our feet are now placed upon the solid rock of Christ.—Matt. 7:24,25; 16:16-18; I Cor. 10:4

In his beautiful psalm, David further said, “He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the Lord. Blessed is that man that maketh the Lord his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies.” (Ps. 40:3,4) The Lord has also given us a new song to sing. It is centered in the wonderful promises of God as revealed in the Holy Scriptures.

A New Song

Our firm foundation features the hope of our heavenly calling in Christ Jesus, and the establishment of Christ’s kingdom of righteousness under which all the families of the earth are to be blessed. (Heb. 3:1; Gen. 22:18; Gal. 3:8) John the Revelator wrote concerning this new song, “I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father’s

name written in their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: And they sung as it were a new song before the throne.”—Rev. 14:1-3

The Apostle Paul experienced this wonderful change in his spiritual life and ministry. He proclaimed, “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”—Phil. 3:13,14

Our Blessed Hope

When we learn the true meaning of the song which our loving Heavenly Father has given us to sing, we have much for which we may praise and thank him. If we are abounding therein with thanksgiving, it means that God has taken us into his tender confidence and has revealed some of the hidden treasures of the Bible concerning his ultimate plan and purpose for his human creation. Through his Word, we catch a glimpse of his marvelous glory, and see more clearly his abounding love, infinite wisdom, unlimited power, and unswerving justice.

The new song in our mouths grows distinctly more melodious and harmonious as we have opportunity to sing it aloud to others. It becomes more precious as our love for God and his beloved Son is fully established in our hearts and lives. From the words of the Prophet Isaiah, we read, “Thy watchmen

shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing: for they shall see eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion. Break forth into joy, sing together. ... The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.”—Isa. 52:8-10

Lifting Up Our Voices

We believe that we are now living in the closing days of this “present evil world.” (Gal. 1:4) As conditions around us continue to grow more desperate and violent, let us take advantage of the great privilege of lifting up our voices in proclaiming the long-promised kingdom of Christ soon to be established over the whole earth. Individually and collectively, let us hold forth the Word of life and proclaim with joy the glorious “gospel of the kingdom” to a sin-sick and dying human family that yet awaits its grand establishment here upon the earth.—Matt. 24:14

Let us each day give our heartfelt praise and abounding thanksgiving to our loving Heavenly Father for all of his benefits and blessings to us. “Make a joyful noise unto the LORD, all ye lands. Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing. Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations.”—Ps. 100:1-5 ■

WEEKLY PRAYER MEETING TEXTS

NOVEMBER 6—"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."—Romans 12:1 (Z. '00-170 Hymn 42)

NOVEMBER 13—"Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of."—Matthew 6:8 (Z. '04-90 Hymn 284)

NOVEMBER 20—"If ye do these things, ye shall never fall."—II Peter 1:10 (Z. '97-148 Hymn 130)

NOVEMBER 27—"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance."—Ephesians 6:18 (Z. '01-80 Hymn 241)

OBITUARIES

The following brethren have recently finished their Christian course. We wish to express our sincere sympathy to their family and friends in the loss of these dear ones.

Sister Ruth Miller, Phoenixville, PA—August 26. Age, 98

Sister Bogusława Gałka-Pogoda, Chrzanów, Poland
—October 10. Age, 67

Sister Renata Hojnca, Chorzów, Poland—October 16. Age, 80