

Hell Gives Up Its Dead

*“I am he that liveth,
and was dead; and,
behold, I am alive
forevermore, Amen;
and have the keys of
hell and of death.”
—Revelation 1:18*

DATELINED PALESTINE, April, 33 A.D., nearly two thousand years ago, there occurred the most dramatic news event of all time; but it was then hardly known except by a few followers of Jesus of Nazareth. Their Lord and Master, crucified by his enemies less than three days before, had been raised from the dead by Divine power. And now, once again, we have reached the time of year when this

greatest of all miracles will be commemorated; and for a short time, at least, many will give thought to this manifestation of the mighty power of God.

A GREAT MIRACLE

It was a miracle! This means that one of the great cornerstones of Christian faith and hope rests on a miracle in which the mighty power of the Creator of the universe was exercised to restore life to the One who had voluntarily died for the sins of the people in order that they might have an opportunity to live. The fact that Jesus was raised from the dead gives us confidence that every promise of God will be fulfilled, and that we can study his Word and plan in faith, believing that nothing he has promised is too difficult for Divine power to accomplish.

The world today is filled with chaos and suffering, and the people fear that tomorrow will be even worse. The main reason for this is the inability of human wisdom and power to cope with the problems which have been created by sin and selfishness. Half the world is dreading the aggressive designs of the other half, and the only means of protection known to man is that very pregnable bulwark of weaponry. But the success of God's plan for saving the world from the results of its own sin is guaranteed by Divine power; that power which the Creator demonstrated by raising Jesus Christ from the dead.

In the Apostle Paul's sermon on Mars' Hill, he declares that God has given assurance unto all men by raising Jesus from the dead. (Acts 17:31) It proved that God was well pleased with Jesus' sacrificial ministry, and it also proved that Divine power is abundantly able to bestow the blessings of life provided for by the Master's death. In addition, this miracle proved that, supported by Divine power, the resurrected Christ is fully capable of establishing Divine control in the affairs of men, that the promises of his kingdom are certain of fulfillment. It means that we can confidently believe that in God's due time there will be peace on earth, that nations will beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; for these are among the blessings which have been promised, and we know that his "zeal" will accomplish all his good purposes.—Isa. 9:7

INFALLIBLE PROOFS

Luke informs us that Jesus "shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs." (Acts 1:3) The miracle of the resurrection is therefore well authenticated. Even after the resurrected Jesus ascended up into glory, and appeared no more to his disciples, he spoke to the Apostle John in vision on the Isle of Patmos, and thus furnished another proof that he was alive. Indeed, he emphasized this when in the words of our text he declared, 'I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive forevermore.'

In various ways, millions associate their own hope of life with the miracle of Jesus' resurrection. 'Because he lives, we also shall live,' is a common expression among professing Christians, and it is very true. But just how those redeemed by Jesus shall live, and where, and when, are questions which usually go unanswered. Certainly, not many are accustomed to associating the words of our text with their own hope of life through Christ, yet it is one of the most meaningful statements of the Bible bearing on the subject.

Jesus not only announced to John that he was now alive, but also that he has 'the keys of hell and of death.' Until Jesus was raised from the dead, no one had these 'keys.' The world continued to suffer and to die, and there was nothing that anyone could do about it. "Sin entered into the world, and death by sin." (Rom. 5:12) It was a just penalty, and could not

be set aside, for the unalterable law of God is that “the wages of sin is death.”—Rom. 6:23

So there was no solution to the problem of suffering and death. But after Jesus was raised from the dead it was different, for then he had the ‘keys’—‘keys’ which would unlock the great prison-house of death and hell, and set the captives free. Paul gives us a similar thought to this in Romans 14:9, which reads: “To this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.” To be ‘Lord’ implies having control or power, which is essentially the same thought Jesus symbolized by ‘keys.’

JESUS’ SOUL IN HELL

Jesus associates his death and resurrection with the fact that he now has the ‘keys of hell and of death,’ as though it were by his death that he secured these ‘keys.’ And it was. During the time Jesus was dead he was, in reality, in the Bible hell. This is brought to our attention in Psalm 16:10. This is a prophetic prayer which represents Jesus as expressing his confidence that he would be raised from the dead, saying: “Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.”

To appreciate the full depth of meaning contained in this beautiful expression of faith on the part of the Master, it is essential to take into consideration his use of the word ‘hell,’ both in this prayer and in our text, where Jesus tells us that he now has the ‘keys of hell.’ In the Old Testament, ‘hell’ is a translation of the Hebrew word *sheol*, and in our text it is translated from the Greek word *hades*, which has the same meaning.

This Hebrew word *sheol* is the only one in the Old Testament which is translated ‘hell,’ but the same word is also translated ‘grave’ and ‘pit.’ Since this was the only hell of the Old Testament, it was, therefore, the only hell the ancient servants of God knew about over a period of four thousand years.

THE SLEEP OF DEATH

In reality, *sheol* is simply the condition of death, or the state of the dead. Its meaning is defined in Ecclesiastes 9:10, which reads, “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no

work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave [*sheol*], whither thou goest.” This shows clearly that *sheol* is a condition of complete unconsciousness, which is one reason both the Old and the New Testaments refer to those who have died as being asleep.

In most instances the translators of our *King James Version* of the Bible, because of their own misunderstanding, have translated *sheol* by the word ‘grave’ when the reference is to a righteous person; translating the same word ‘hell’ only when the text in which it appears is concerned with a wicked person. To surface readers of the Bible, this tends to give the impression that the righteous and the wicked go to different places when they die—that the wicked go to ‘hell’ which traditionally—though not Scripturally—is a place of torment, while the righteous go into the grave.

TRADITIONAL VIEWS

Even this, however, is not wholly in keeping with the traditional view, which is that the righteous go to heaven. Probably the translators hoped that the student, when reading a text which revealed a righteous person as going into the grave, would think of it merely as the body finding its resting place in death, since, traditionally, it is the ‘soul’ which goes to heaven.

In Jesus’ wonderful expression of confidence that he would be raised from the dead (Ps. 16:10; Acts 2:27), the translators used the word ‘hell’ to translate the Hebrew word *sheol*. They must have known that the text applied to Jesus, who was “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.” (Heb. 7:26) Why did they do this? Why did they not follow their usual custom and use the word ‘grave,’ when the reference was so clearly to a righteous person?

The answer, we think, is quite obvious. In the text, Jesus declares that his ‘soul’ would not be left in hell. Those who translated our *King James Version Bible* did not believe that Jesus’ soul went into the grave. They did not, in fact, believe that human souls, whether righteous or sinful, go into the grave; so they could not very well translate the text in a manner which would reveal the views of all Christendom to be in error.

Thus they used the word ‘hell,’ even though they must have known that it would cause some to wonder why Jesus went to hell when he died. They were caught in a dilemma, and chose the best solution they could.

After all, traditionally—but not scripturally—those in hell are alive, not dead, so to put Jesus’ soul in hell by their translation would mean that at least it was still alive.

We are not particularly objecting to the word ‘hell’ as a translation of *sheol*, for after all the original meaning of this English word hell was simply a ‘hidden’ or ‘covered’ condition. It was only when the word was given a false meaning by those who did not understand the teaching of the Bible relative to death, that connotations of fire and torment became associated with it. The word ‘grave,’ if we think of it as a place of burial, is not a good translation of *sheol*, which denotes, rather, the *condition* of death.

THE DEATH OF JESUS

Jesus’ ‘soul’ went into the condition of death. The Prophet Isaiah declares that “he hath poured out his soul unto death.” Also that “his soul” would be made an “offering for sin.” (Isa. 53:12,10) The word ‘soul’ as used in the Bible means the ‘living being.’ The thought of Jesus pouring out his soul unto death is simply that he laid down his life. He did this, Isaiah explains, as ‘an offering for sin.’

It was through one man’s disobedience that “sin entered into the world,” Paul explains, “and death by sin.” (Rom. 5:12,19) Thus the entire human race has, in reality, been going into the Bible hell, the great prison-house of death. They are not suffering torture there, but are dead. The Bible represents them as being asleep; first, because they are unconscious, and also because in God’s due time they are to be restored to life by Divine, miracle-working power. The reason for this is that Jesus, by pouring out his own soul unto death, redeemed Adam and his race from death. He took the sinner’s place in death, in *sheol*, *hades*, the Bible hell.

In our text, Jesus confirms this viewpoint, declaring, “I am he that liveth, and *was dead*.” Yes, Jesus was ‘dead’ from the time he cried on the cross, “It is finished,” until God raised him from the dead. He died voluntarily, giving up in death his perfect manhood as a ransom, or corresponding price for the sin-cursed race, and thereby acquired the ‘keys’ [the right or authority to open the locks] of hell and of death.

THE GATES OF HELL

In a very wonderful promise to the Apostle Peter, Jesus referred to ‘hell’—*hades*—as having ‘gates.’ Jesus spoke about building his “church,” and said that the “gates of hell” would not prevail against it. (Matt. 16:18) Paul explains that the church is the “body” of Christ, and that The Christ is not “one member, but many.” (Eph. 1:22,23; I Cor. 12:14,12) The word ‘Christ’ of the New Testament, corresponds with ‘Messiah’ of the Old Testament. What Jesus and Paul meant, therefore, is that the Messianic promises of the Old Testament must await fulfillment until the entire church is complete. And then, as the Master promised, ‘the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.’

God’s promises were that, through the Messiah—which, as we have seen, is to include the church—the world was to receive life. The church, therefore, will share with Jesus in the promised work of blessing all the families of the earth, as originally promised to father Abraham. (Gen. 12:3) Peter explains that this ‘blessing’ includes the resurrection of the dead. He describes it as ‘restitution,’ and asserts that there are to be “times of restitution of all things,” and that this great future time of blessing was promised by the “mouth of all his [God’s] holy prophets since the world began.”—Acts 3:19-21

THE RESURRECTION

This promised blessing is sure to come. While each generation of the sin-cursed race has gone down into the great prison-house of death—the Bible hell—the ‘gates’ of hell will not ‘prevail’ to keep them there; for Jesus, who has the ‘keys’ to those ‘gates,’ will throw them wide open, and will call forth the prisoners to freedom. The members of his own mystical ‘body,’ the church, will be the first ones to return from death through those ‘gates.’ Theirs is referred to as the “first resurrection,” and the explanation given that they shall live and “reign with him [Christ] a thousand years.”—Rev. 20:4,6

The church, raised from death and exalted to glory and power with Jesus, will be associated with him in the thousand-year work of awakening the remainder of the dead—keeping the gates of hell open until all the prisoners of death are set at liberty. We are assured of this in Revelation 20:13, where we read, “The sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them.”

The promises of God assure us that hell will give up its dead! The Creator, who gave life, has promised to restore life; and Jesus ratified these promises by giving himself in death as a ransom for Adam and his condemned and dying offspring. Through the substitutionary death of Jesus, all mankind became ‘the ransomed of the Lord,’ and one of the reassuring promises of God is that “the ransomed of the Lord shall return [from death], and come to Zion [the Messianic kingdom] with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”—Isa. 35:10

THREE GREAT MIRACLES

Thus seen, that greatest of all events in human history, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, was in reality the first of three outstanding miracles in the Divine plan to redeem mankind from the penalty of death and to restore the people to life. The second of these miracles is the resurrection of the footstep followers of Christ, and their exaltation to the Divine nature to live and reign with him during the thousand years of his kingdom. The third will be the awakening of all who are in their graves, that they also may have an opportunity to participate in the blessings purchased by Jesus’ death on Calvary’s cross.—John 5:28,29

Herein, then, is a sure foundation for faith and hope, even though the world today is more afflicted with suffering and death than ever before. In a prophecy concerning our day, Daniel spoke of a “time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation.” (Dan. 12:1) There is every reason to believe that this prophecy is being fulfilled in the present worldwide fear and distress of the people. The outlook would be dark and gloomy but for the fact that associated with this prophecy is assurance of deliverance, not only from the trouble, but also from death.

“At that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” (Dan. 12:1,2) The expression, ‘thy people,’ is a reference to Daniel’s people, who, in reality, are the Lord’s people—those living in this end of the age—spiritual Israelites. They are the first to be ‘delivered,’ and this takes place in the first resurrection.

Then will follow the awakening of those who ‘sleep in the dust of the earth.’ When awakened from death, these will have an opportunity to

accept the provisions of Divine grace through Christ. If they do this, and obey the laws of the kingdom then in force, they will receive everlasting life. If not, they will be, as the Apostle Peter states it, “destroyed from among the people,” hence will continue in contempt in the minds of the righteous.—Acts 3:23

It is a glorious prospect, both for the followers of Jesus, and for mankind in general. The fact that we are already seeing more trouble in the world on the horizon means that these promised blessings of life are very close at hand. Realizing this, our commemoration of Jesus’ resurrection this year should be more meaningful and hope inspiring than ever. What if we are presently surrounded with sorrow and death, so long as joy and life are near; and the guarantee of this is that nearly two thousand years ago, God raised Jesus Christ from the dead!

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From Death to Life

Key Verse: “He saith unto them, Be not affrighted: Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen; he is not here: behold the place where they laid him.”
—Mark 16:6

Selected Scripture:
John 19:16-18, 28-30;
20:11-18

THIS KEY VERSE HAS been taken from the Gospel of Mark. Of the three Gospels, Mark’s is the shortest, although there is a similarity in content, as well as in order, in each of them.

His account of our Lord’s earthly ministry begins with the work of John the Baptist, who was the forerunner of Jesus, and ends with the report concerning the circumstances of the Master’s resurrection. In this passage, Mark proclaims the fact that Jesus had been raised from the dead.

The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus are the most important events in all human history. His birth gave hope to the dying human family, and his ministry provided teachings and inspiration to all. But, it was his sacrificial death on the cross that paid the price of father Adam’s disobedience to God’s law, and his resurrection set in motion the forces that will, in due time, release the whole family of Adam from condemnation to sin and death. The Selected Scripture reading has been taken from the Apostle John’s Gospel. He was an eyewitness to many of the great events surrounding our Lord’s ministry, but was selective in the events he chose to include in his Gospel account. He was led by the Holy Spirit as he reported on these things, and repeated little that had been written before.

As the last of our Lord’s living apostles, he explains his main purpose in writing about Jesus. He says: “Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book: But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.”—John 20:30,31

When Jesus died, Mary Magdalene, weeping and overcome with sorrow, had gone to his sepulchre where she saw the two angels dressed in white and sitting one at each end of the place where Jesus' body had been placed. When they spoke to her she revealed her intense grief in not knowing where her Lord was. "When she had thus said, she turned herself back, and saw Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus."—vs. 14

As a spirit being Jesus could come and go 'as the wind,' and materialize in the form of a human being. She did not recognize him because he had not appeared in the same body that he had before. Then, in his tender way, he spoke to Mary and said to her, "Woman, why weepest thou? Whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away." (vs. 15) She recognized him only when he spoke her name. "Jesus saith unto her, Mary. She turned herself, and saith unto him, Rabboni; which is to say, Master." (vs. 16) Jesus instructed her to tell his brethren that he would be ascending to the Father.—vs. 17

The Son of God had come to earth, he had died for the world's sins, and now was resurrected from the dead! Soon he will be known to the entire world by his title, King of kings, and Lord of lords.—Rev. 19:16

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Believing without Seeing

Key Verse: “Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.”
—John 20:29

Selected Scripture:
John 20:19-29

THE APOSTLE THOMAS lacked faith to believe that Jesus had been resurrected from the dead. When our Lord had presented himself, within closed doors, to the other disciples they were glad to know that he had risen from the grave, and was with them once again.

When Thomas learned what had happened he said he would not believe that Jesus had risen unless he could see in his Lord’s hand the evidence of the nails that had pierced them, and to thrust his own hand into the wound in his Master’s side.

Eight days later, Jesus again materialized in human form before his apostles when Thomas was present. As a spirit being Jesus did not have to enter the room by way of the door, but suddenly appeared before them wearing appropriate clothing for the occasion.

As on the previous meeting, Jesus said, “Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, ... Reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God.”—John 20:26-28

Although Thomas had recognized Jesus by the wounds in his hands and side, it took a physical demonstration to convince him of what the other disciples had already seen. In Jesus’ answer to him it is apparent that faith was the lesson that was being stressed. Thomas also failed to believe his brethren. There is a grand blessing associated with faith and trust, and Jesus wanted Thomas to understand that. It would be well for all Christians to heed the Lord’s admonition and instruction concerning the importance of faith and trust.

During the time that Jesus remained on earth before his ascension to the Heavenly Father, he appeared on different occasions for short intervals of time, and in various human forms and dress. He materialized in whatever form best suited his interests for the time. At no time, however, did he reveal himself in his spiritual body for, if he had done so, his disciples would have been unable to look upon his glorious being. Paul addressed the matter of faith in his epistle to the Hebrew brethren. He told them, “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (Heb. 11:1) Paul stressed the importance of faith as the basis for the Christian’s hope. “Without faith it is impossible to please him [God].”—vs. 6

Also the necessary conviction concerning those things that are not readily apparent to our natural senses or understanding is very important. He further emphasized (vs. 6) that without faith it is impossible to please God. The footstep followers of Christ are a faith class, and during the present age they are spoken of as the “household of faith.” (Gal. 6:10) They are those who believe without seeing because they walk “by faith, not by sight.” (II Cor. 5:7) To please God we must study the Scriptures for spiritual strength. We are admonished to “fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called.” (I Tim. 6:12) If faithful we will receive a crown of life.—Rev. 2:10

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Bread that Lasts Forever

Key Verse: “I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

—John 6:51

***Selected Scripture:
John 6:11, 12-14, 26,
27, 35-40, 47-51***

THE FOUR GOSPELS DO not always record the same events, but together they present Jesus’ life and ministry from different perspectives. The Key Verse reveals Jesus’ purpose in leaving his heavenly home, to present his life as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. He said his life was like living bread bringing everlasting life to those who partook of that bread and put their trust in him. They would be sustained eternally by receiving everlasting life.

As the Jewish feast of Passover drew near, Jesus sailed across the Sea of Galilee and proceeded into a mountain with his disciples. He had been engaged in performing many miracles such as healing the sick and afflicted, and he had

settled down for a short time of rest from his exhausting ministry to have some private time with his disciples.

But when he saw the multitudes who had walked many miles to find him, he again turned his attention to them. Jesus took this opportunity to perform one of his most outstanding miracles—the feeding of a great multitude which numbered five thousand. He learned from the Apostle Andrew that a young man was present among them who had brought five barley loaves and two small fish with him. This modest amount of food would hardly feed the multitude of people, but our Lord wanted to teach his disciples a valuable lesson concerning his greater ability to provide life-giving bread for the world of mankind in his future kingdom.

The Master asked the multitude to sit down while he was about to feed them with the five loaves and two fishes, and they found that there was food to spare. “Jesus took the loaves; and when he had given thanks, he

distributed to the disciples, and the disciples to them that were set down; and likewise of the fishes as much as they would. When they were filled, he said unto his disciples, Gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost.” (John 6:11,12) As amazing as this miracle was, it served as a mere demonstration of the greater power our Lord will exercise to bless mankind during his future kingdom. Bread is a blessing from God to sustain life among his earthly creatures, and it has become a symbol of life. The true bread of life, however, was Jesus’ own life which he would give for the world.

The ‘bread’ that he spoke of represented his own fleshly nature, which he was laying down in sacrifice for the sins of the whole human family. That sacrifice would end with his death, and his flesh would symbolize the bread of life for all mankind.

During Christ’s millennial kingdom, the human family will have opportunity to obtain life because of Jesus’ sacrifice on their behalf. They will come to realize the significance of that bread, and appreciate its true value as Israel appreciated the manna which the Lord had provided in the wilderness.

Jesus fulfilled the illustration of the manna, saying, “The bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”—John 6:51

How to Know the Truth

Key Verse: “Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”

—John 8:31, 32

***Selected Scripture:
John 8:12, 21-36;
Revelation 1:14-20;
11:15-19***

JESUS’ WORDS, AS given in the Key Verse, were directed to the Jewish believers in the Early Church. They were privileged to have had a special covenant relationship with God, and were the first to be invited to share as the bride of Christ in his future kingdom.

That covenant relationship which the Jews possessed, however, was in direct proportion to their faith, or lack of it. “If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed,” Jesus said. (John 8:31) Continuing in faith, and striving to know and do the will of God was a test for all those to whom these words were addressed, as well as to all Christian believers throughout the Gospel Age.

To be a disciple of Christ means to be baptized into Jesus’ death, which includes a life of self-denial and self-sacrifice, even until death. This consecrated walk, or invitation to the high calling in Christ, must also be accompanied with love and devotion to our Lord. Many Jews did not accept this invitation because of their lack of faith, and so it was extended to gentile believers, when Israel’s period of exclusive favor ended.

Jesus said that the truth shall make you free, and when that light of truth is received into good and honest hearts, the child of God is set free from the errors of darkness and superstition. There is a relationship between truth and freedom. The more truth we accept, the more freedom we experience, freedom from bondage to the creeds and dogmas of men.

It is also a freedom from sin and death, as we give our lives over to God. Those who have entered into covenant relationship with the Heavenly Father, and have made a full consecration of their lives to him,

are justified through the marvelous provision of his grace. The child of God then wears the symbolic ‘robe of righteousness’ because of his faith in the precious blood of Jesus. His sins are covered as long as he continues to abide in the love and providences of the Father.

Jesus was in full and complete harmony with his Heavenly Father. He always did those things that were ‘wellpleasing’ to God, and he gave his life by faithfully carrying out his commitment to do the Father’s will, even unto death on the cross. Jesus said to them, “When ye have lifted up the Son of man, then shall ye know that I am he, and that I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things. And he that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him.”—John 8:28,29

Our Lord received his strength and understanding and guidance from the Heavenly Father. He laid down his life willingly as a sacrifice for the fallen human family. When he begins his reign with his bride in the future kingdom, all will come to know him, and will understand the great sacrifice that he made on behalf of the sin-cursed and dying human family.

Then, all mankind will “come unto the knowledge of the truth.”—I Tim. 2:4

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The Generations of Esau

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

VERSES 1-43 “Now these are the generations of Esau, who is Edom.

“Esau took his wives of the daughters of Canaan; Adah the daughter of Elon the Hittite, and Aholibamah the daughter of Anah the daughter of Zibeon the Hivite;

“And Bashemath Ishmael’s daughter, sister of Nebajoth.

“And Adah bare to Esau Eliphaz; and Bashemath bare Reuel;

“And Aholibamah bare Jeush, and Jaalam, and Korah: these are the sons of Esau, which were born unto him in the land of Canaan.

“And Esau took his wives, and his sons, and his daughters, and all the persons of his house, and his cattle, and all his beasts, and all his substance, which he had got in the land of Canaan; and went into the country from the face of his brother Jacob.

“For their riches were more than that they might dwell together; and the land wherein they were strangers could not bear them because of their cattle.

“Thus dwelt Esau in mount Seir: Esau is Edom.

“And these are the generations of Esau the father of the Edomites in mount Seir:

“These are the names of Esau’s sons; Eliphaz the son of Adah the wife of Esau, Reuel the son of Bashemath the wife of Esau.

“And the sons of Eliphaz were Teman, Omar, Zepho, and Gatam, and Kenaz.

“And Timna was concubine to Eliphaz Esau’s son; and she bare to Eliphaz Amalek: these were the sons of Adah Esau’s wife.

“And these are the sons of Reuel; Nahath, and Zerah, Shammah, and Mizzah: these were the sons of Bashemath Esau’s wife.

“And these were the sons of Aholibamah, the daughter of Anah the daughter of Zibeon, Esau’s wife: and she bare to Esau Jeush, and Jaalam, and Korah.

“These were dukes of the sons of Esau: the sons of Eliphaz the firstborn son of Esau; duke Teman, duke Omar, duke Zepho, duke Kenaz,

“Duke Korah, duke Gatam, and duke Amalek; these are the dukes that came of Eliphaz in the land of Edom; these were the sons of Adah.

“And these are the sons of Reuel Esau’s son; duke Nahath, duke Zerah, duke Shammah, duke Mizzah: these are the dukes that came of Reuel in the land of Edom; these are the sons of Bashemath Esau’s wife.

“And these are the sons of Aholibamah Esau’s wife; duke Jeush, duke Jaalam, duke Korah: these were the dukes that came of Aholibamah the daughter of Anah, Esau’s wife.

“These are the sons of Esau, who is Edom, and these are their dukes.

“These are the sons of Sier the Horite, who inhabited the land; Lotan, and Shobal, and Zibeon, and Anah,

“And Dishon, and Ezer, and Dishan: these are the dukes of the Horites, the children of Seir in the land of Edom.

“And the children of Lotan were Hori and Hemam; and Lotan’s sister was Timna.

“And the children of Shobal were these; Alvan, and Manahath, and Ebal, Shepho, and Onam.

“And these are the children of Zibeon; both Ajah, and Anah: this was that Anah that found the mules in the wilderness, as he fed the asses of Zibeon his father.

“And the children of Anah were these; Dishon, and Aholibamah the daughter of Anah.

“And these are the children of Dishon; Hemdan, and Eshban, and Ithran, and Cheran.

“The children of Ezer are these; Bilhan, and Zaavan, and Akan.

“The children of Dishan are these; Uz, and Aran.

“These are the dukes that came of the Horites; duke Lotan, duke Shobal, duke Zibeon, duke Anah,

“Duke Dishon, duke Ezer, duke Dishan: these are the dukes that came of Hori, among their dukes in the land of Seir.

“And these are the kings that reigned in the land of Edom, before there reigned any king over the children of Israel.

“And Bela the son of Beor reigned in Edom: and the name of his city was Dinhabah.

“And Bela died, and Jobab the son of Zerah of Bozrah reigned in his

stead.

“And Jobab died, and Husham of the land of Temani reigned in his stead.

“And Husham died, and Hadad the son of Bedad, who smote Midian in the field of Moab, reigned in his stead: and the name of his city was Avith.

“And Hadad died, and Samlah of Masrekah reigned in his stead.

“And Samlah died, and Saul of Rehoboth by the river reigned in his stead.

“And Saul died, and Baalhanan the son of Achbor reigned in his stead.

“And Baalhanan the son of Achbor died, and Hadar reigned in his stead: and the name of his city was Pau; and his wife’s name was Mehetabel, the daughter of Matred, the daughter of Mezahab.

“And these are the names of the dukes that came of Esau, according to their families, after their places, by their names; duke Timnah, duke Alvah, duke Jetheth,

“Duke Aholibamah, duke Elah, duke Pinon,

“Duke Kenaz, duke Teman, duke Mibzar,

“Duke Magdiel, duke Iram: these be the dukes of Edom, according to their habitations in the land of their possession: he is Esau the father of the Edomites.”

‘These are the generations of Esau, who is Edom.’ Thus are summed up the principal contents of this chapter. Perhaps the most significant point in the chapter is the definite identification of Esau with Edom, and that he settled finally in Seir. Esau is referred to in the New Testament as that “profane person” who sold his birthright. (Heb. 12:16) And the Edomites as a whole seem to be used in Old Testament prophecies as symbolic of those religious people who sold their birthright—their hope of joint-heirship with Jesus as the spiritual seed of Abraham through which all the families of the earth are to be blessed.

Verse 6 presents an interesting sidelight on the life of Esau and his family. His sons were all born in the land of Canaan, yet together with their father, they all forsook the land. This apparently was because they did not cherish the promises God had made concerning the land—a further ‘despising,’ as it were, of the birthright which he had sold to Jacob for a mess of pottage.

On the other hand, all of Jacob's sons were born outside of Canaan, yet under the influence and leadership of their father, they came into the land and became the inheritors of the promises God had made concerning it. In this way the Lord honors those who have respect to his promises, regardless of where they may be born.

A parallel of these experiences may be seen in God's dealings with the Israelitish nation, and his later blessings upon believing gentiles. The Messianic kingdom promises were all made to the natural seed of Abraham, but because they did not appreciate these promises, and did not qualify to inherit their fulfillment, God turned to the gentiles, and from them has been selecting a people for his name. Thus, gentiles, born outside of the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the promises, become fellow heirs with that small remnant of Israelites who accepted Jesus, while the nation as a whole wandered farther away from God and his promises.

The reason given for Esau and his family moving out of the land which God promised to Abraham is that their riches of cattle were so great that the land could not provide for them and for Jacob's flocks as well. Apparently his riches meant more to him than the promises of God pertaining to the land. And besides, it is quite possible that Divine providences over Jacob had made Esau realize that his sale of the birthright had been ratified by God, and hence he could not claim any share in the promises and might as well move to where he could further increase his riches.

The way of the ungodly leads ever further from God and from his covenants.

Dawn Bible Students Association

The Eternal Purpose

*“Thus saith the high
and lofty One that
inhabiteth eternity,
whose name is Holy;
I dwell in the high
and holy place.”
—Isaiah 57:15*

OUR FRAIL MINDS cannot grasp the full meaning of this scripture. Our God has always existed, and before him is eternity! We realize, but cannot comprehend, that God was once alone. Once there were no stars, or sun, or earth, or moon, or any other being. Yet, by the operation of his Holy Spirit, we know some of the thoughts he had before spiritual or material creation had begun. These thoughts are called his

“eternal purpose.” This special knowledge of the church is mentioned by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 1:8,9: “Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself.”

Paul later identifies the ‘mystery of his will’ as the ‘eternal purpose.’ (Eph. 3:11) To know this ‘eternal purpose’ of God began with Jesus, who, as “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8) had a key part to play in achieving God’s objective. Having “learned ... obedience by the things which he suffered,” God “exalted him, and” gave “him a name which is above every name.” (Heb. 5:8; Phil. 2:9) Jesus was the first being in Creation to be given immortality, the Divine nature, as possessed by his Father. He was the beginning of the Divine family God had in mind to create.

JOINT-HEIRS

The 132nd Psalm pertains to David, and mentions how Jesus as a descendant of David would sit upon David’s throne. From the 12th verse to the 18th, it appears that the psalm concerns the nation of Israel under David as king. It, however, is a picture of those to be selected for God’s Divine family. “Their children shall also sit upon thy throne for evermore.” (Ps. 132:11,12) The thought suggested is not just a ‘king’

(singular) on David's throne, but 'kings' (plural). And this, of course, agrees with the promise that there would be "*joint-heirs*" (Rom. 8:17) with Jesus Christ and that *the Christ* (the anointed) will be "kings and priests."—Rev. 1:6

The illustration, then, is changed, calling this anointed class "*Zion*." (Ps. 132:13) This practice is followed in many other instances. Notable among them is that in Micah 4:2: "The Law shall go forth of Zion [the Christ], and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem [the Ancient Worthies]."

Then, in tender terms, the Heavenly Father speaks of his desire—this desire he had when he was alone. His eternal purpose to have this desire fulfilled brought forth the wonderful plan of the ages which, when completed, will show the "much diversified wisdom of God." (Eph. 3:10, *Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott*) Hear his words to David: "The Lord hath chosen Zion [the Messiah class]; he hath desired [Hebrew, *avah*, 'greatly desired,' *Strong's Concordance*] it for his habitation. This is my rest for ever: here will I dwell; for I have desired it."—Ps. 132:13,14

A DIVINE FAMILY

In this way the Heavenly Father shows that the fulfillment of this desire is to have a family on the Divine plane—immortal beings with whom he can fellowship in the most complete sense. They would have within themselves eternal life, and would be endowed with the mental resources which belong to such exalted beings. They could receive this immortal life because they also would have his disposition, or character.

To receive this character-likeness each one will have to be willing, without any coercing, to pass through harsh and trying experiences allowed by the Father. And while passing through these, each must maintain an attitude of heart loyalty to God, exerting a supreme effort to demonstrate love in every way. God has decreed that all who will eventually have everlasting life must willingly be motivated by the law of love. This would apply to all intelligent beings, on whatever plane of existence they would live. Jesus spoke of this in John 4:23: "The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in Spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him."

THE MYSTERY

In Ephesians 3:9, the Apostle Paul speaks of the “mystery” of God. This word is translated from the Greek word *musterion*, which is defined in *Young’s Concordance* as ‘that which is known to the initiated.’ The thought is borrowed from the secret societies of that faraway day, which were similar to those in our day, such as the Masons. One is initiated into a secret society, then he is told the secrets, including passwords, etc. *Rotherham* translates *musterion* as ‘sacred secret.’

During the Gospel Age, only the true disciples, beginning with Jesus, know God’s ‘sacred secrets.’ Special emphasis is given in the Scriptures to the sacred secret that the Messiah is composed of Jesus and all his faithful disciples—the body members. The Messiah class in glory will become God’s special, intimate family—his eternal purpose.

In Ephesians 3:10,11, the Apostle Paul makes clear that the knowledge of this great truth (which knowledge is needed to bring this truth to fruition) will reveal the much diversified wisdom of God the Father. The full outworking of the plan will indeed reveal the “manifold wisdom” of God. It will demonstrate throughout all eternity the beauty and wisdom of the law of love. It will exhibit the almighty power of the Creator in causing all things to follow his plan of the ages. It will reveal the tender, gentle character of the Eternal Father. All beings throughout all eternity will understand the full meaning of his name as he spoke it to Moses, as recorded in Exodus 34:6: “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.”

But why must this knowledge of a planned Divine family be kept a sacred secret until it is completed? The Apostle Paul, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, makes clear the reason for the development of this Divine family in a secret manner. He writes: “Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: but we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery [sacred secret], even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.”—I Cor. 2:6-8

For one to be raised to the Divine nature there must be complete crystallization of character in righteousness. As before noted, this can

come only by willingly passing through harsh and trying experiences with an attitude of heart loyalty to God, plus exerting a supreme effort to demonstrate love in every way.

How necessary to keep secret this special work of developing the family of God! But much, much more was needed than just secrecy. The almighty power and wisdom of God was needed to select meticulously each experience for this prospective Divine family. Each member has to be willing to 'drink of the cup' that Jesus drank of.

When the mother of James and John, Zebedee's sons, went to Jesus requesting places of honor in his kingdom, Jesus said to her sons: "Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" Both answered, "We are able." (Matt. 20:20-23) Jesus then said that indeed they would receive these same tests he had received, but only the Father could appoint positions of honor.

THE TESTING OF THE APOSTLE PAUL

The Apostle Paul so clearly stated that we with whom the Father is dealing, we who possess the 'sacred secrets,' shall all have selected experiences directed by God. Our Father will also provide us 'cups' of sorrow, and shall we not drink them uncomplainingly? Note how confidently the apostle states this truth: "*We know* that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." (Rom. 8:28) The apostle's complete faith in this caused him to demonstrate loyalty to God in a most sublime way.

In II Corinthians 11:25-28 he notes briefly some of the persecutions he had received. Among them he lists beatings with rods by the Jews and also the gentiles. He recalls being stoned nearly to death, and he lists perils by shipwreck, by heathen, by robbers, among false brethren, and much weariness and painfulness. He experienced hunger and thirst, often lack of food. But he knew that all the 'cup of sorrow' experiences were selected for his good, for his development. Hence he could remember them, and because of the framework in which they were viewed, he could and did minimize their severity: "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." (Rom. 8:18) And again: "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight

of glory; [we can do this, Paul continues, because] we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.”—II Cor. 4:17,18

ALL THINGS WORK FOR GOOD

Note again how the apostle emphasizes *why* ‘all things work together for good ... to them who are the called according to his purpose.’ He states in the next verse (Rom. 8:29), “For [or, ‘because’] whom he did foreknow [the church class], he did predestinate [predetermine] to be [ultimately, by faithful obedience] conformed to the image of his Son.” None could be finally chosen to live and reign with Christ unless their characters had been crystallized in righteousness. Those who receive the Divine nature, or life, are so eternally dedicated to the law of love that defection would be impossible.

How wonderful and meaningful to us is that phrase in Romans 8:28, “to them who are the called according to his purpose.” The testimony of God’s Word is that this class, which is to be his family, is drawn by the Heavenly Father. Jesus said, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.” (John 6:44) Also, in Psalm 65:4 we read, “Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts.”

We who have been drawn to the Lord and respond in consecration become increasingly aware of the sacred secrets. The great truth opens to us that the called and spirit-begotten of this age shall, if faithful, become a part of God’s own intimate Divine family. But to receive all the necessary development to be “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ” we [must] “suffer with him.” (Rom. 8:17) Our glorious Heavenly Father will carefully select each experience we are to encounter. It will be chosen with Divine wisdom to suit our particular individual needs. Hence we shall accept it as ‘a cup from the Father,’ and as “our light affliction, which is but for a moment.”—II Cor. 4:17

The full acceptance of this truth concerning God’s overruling providence means we shall not become bitter, nor have self-pity, nor tend to complain about our lot in life. Rather, let us each say, “As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.”—Ps. 17:15

The Rest of Faith

“Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”
 —*Matthew 11:28-30*

THIS INVITATION BY JESUS extended to all who are ‘heavy laden,’ was addressed in the first instance to the people of Israel, being the closing remarks of a short sermon in which he exposed the pride and hypocrisy of the religious rulers. He gave a brief explanation of John the Baptist’s ministry, saying that to those who could accept him and his message, he fulfilled the prophecy of Malachi concerning a coming Elijah who would perform a work of reformation in Israel. (vs. 14) But not many were thus affected by John’s ministry, so Israel as a whole, held tight under the rulership of the scribes and Pharisees, remained unconverted.

Jesus likened the Israelites to children sitting in the markets, “calling unto their fellows, And saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented. For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil. The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.” (Matt. 11:16-19) Under the direction of their rulers, the Israelites were not prepared to accept any teachings or leadership which were not in harmony with their humanly conceived traditions. They were prepared to find fault with and reject anything their leaders did not approve.

Jesus knew that this was true of the nation as a whole. At the same time, however, he realized that there was a remnant of the people who were sincerely looking for help; a minority who were not satisfied with their rulers, and who were more or less crushed under the burdensome load which had been thrust upon them, a load which Jesus referred to on

another occasion and told the lawyers they were not willing to touch it even with a finger to make it lighter.—Luke 11:46

The Pharisees manufactured an excuse to prejudice the people against John the Baptist. Simply because he was extremely temperate in his eating, they said he had ‘a devil.’ But when it was observed that Jesus followed the usual eating habits of his time, they said he was ‘gluttonous, and a winebibber.’ This was their worldly-wise and prudent method of preventing the people from giving serious attention to Jesus’ teachings. The Master recognized their sham, and in prayer to his Father said, “I thank thee, ... because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.”—Matt. 11:25

It was to these ‘babes’ that Jesus especially addressed the words of our text: ‘Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden.’ These ‘babes,’ sincere of heart, longing to be released from the burden of the Law, and the still heavier weight of human traditions as well as the hypocritical rulership of the Pharisees, must have rejoiced when they heard this invitation, although at the time they could but partially comprehend its meaning. Not until the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost did the church begin to understand the full depth of meaning contained in these wonderful words of the Master.

THE BURDEN OF SIN

It is only those who ‘labor and are heavy laden’ that are seeking relief from their load. The Law which was given to Israel at the hand of Moses, while a perfect expression of God’s righteous requirements was, nevertheless, burdensome to the Israelites, for it was beyond their ability to keep. Had they been able to keep the Law it would have given them life, but they failed, so were in bondage to it. Besides, the religious rulers of Israel had heaped additional burdens upon the people. And this entire load was the result of sin. They were the servants of sin, and being led into death.

The whole world of mankind is likewise weighted down with sin. It is true, nevertheless, that any person who is sincere of heart, and honestly endeavoring to live a righteous life, realizes how imperfection hinders him from attaining the goal which he seeks. He is ‘heavy laden’ and realizes that he cannot be wholly pleasing to his God while laboring

under this load of sin. To these also Jesus says, in his invitation, ‘Come unto me, ... and I will give you rest.’

A REFRESHING REST

The Greek word translated ‘rest’ in Jesus’ promise, ‘I will give you rest,’ means, by implication, to refresh; and what a refreshing experience it is for all—whether Jews or gentiles—who, wearied with their endless yet futile struggle against sin and its degrading influence in their lives, recognize in Jesus the great sinbearer, that there was laid upon him the “iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6), freeing us from that burden insofar as its legal claims against us are concerned. This does not mean a release from the responsibility of doing the best we can to struggle against the weight of Adamic imperfection. The Lord expects us to do this. Our rest of heart and mind is in the assurance that if we do the best we can, our imperfect efforts will be acceptable to our Heavenly Father through the merit of our beloved Redeemer.

In Hebrews 4:10, the Apostle Paul speaks of a “rest” into which we have the privilege of entering, a rest of faith in Christ. He explains that those who enter into this rest cease from their own works, “as God did from his.” God ceased from his work pertaining to his human creation in the sense of assigning it to Jesus and having full confidence in the willingness and ability of his Son to accomplish it. We, too, put our trust in Jesus, knowing that through him every provision has been made whereby we can serve the Divine cause acceptably.

In Paul’s reference to Christian ‘rest’ he uses a Greek word which conveys the thought of a ‘resting place,’ or an ‘abode’ of rest. It suggests the idea of permanency, and not merely a temporary resting experience of refreshing. We are indeed greatly refreshed by accepting Jesus’ invitation, ‘Come unto me,’ and then, if by faith we continue to lean upon him and upon the Divine promises which are made ‘yea and amen’ through the merit of his shed blood, this first refreshing experience settles down into a continuous life of peace and satisfaction which results from being ‘at home’ with the Lord.

This rest, however, does not mean freedom from trials. Neither does it imply inactivity, nor a ceasing from laboring in the Lord’s vineyard and the experiencing of all the difficulties and hardships associated with these “good works” for which all of God’s purified people are zealous. (Titus

2:14) Certainly the Apostle Paul had entered into this rest, but he wrote to the church at Corinth saying, “When we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears.”—II Cor. 7:5

Our ‘rest,’ then, does not come from having all trouble and cause for worry removed, but from the assurance that the Lord will be with us and strengthen us in our every time of need. The Lord allowed Paul to be ‘troubled on every side,’ but did not leave him comfortless, for in the next verse he writes, “Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus.”—vs. 6

The Lord has unlimited ways by which he comforts and strengthens his people in their troubles, and it is important to watch carefully his providences on our behalf and thus be in a position to obtain the greatest possible blessing from them. Paul saw in the coming of Titus a manifestation of God’s love and care. Let us be on the alert to recognize the ‘Titus’ he may send to comfort us in our times of need. It may indeed be a brother or sister who, with that good “word spoken in due season,” (Proverbs 15:23) helps to lift a burden from our hearts, or to comfort us in a great trial. Or it may be some refreshing and encouraging experience which the Lord permits us to enjoy—some evidence, perhaps, that he is blessing our labors in his vineyard.

HIS GRACE SUFFICIENT

No true child of God ever feels satisfied with what he is able to accomplish in the Lord’s service. We are all handicapped by imperfections of one sort or another. Our time and strength are limited, and while we sing, “O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer’s praise” (*Hymns of Dawn*, #199), we are painfully conscious of the fact that the one tongue we do have is exceedingly faulty; it is a lisping, “stammering ... tongue” (Isa. 28:11), which fails to declare the glory of the Lord as we so earnestly long to do.

All the other parts of our fallen human bodies are likewise imperfect. We may sing that we would like to have our feet “swift on errands, Lord, for thee” (*Hymns of Dawn*, #277), yet they often stumble. Our hands, also, fail to respond to the desires of our hearts as we would like when we endeavor to put them to work for the Lord. But what great rest of soul there is in the realization that the Lord is looking upon our hearts, and

that in his merciful kindness he “remembereth that we are dust” (Ps. 103:14); that is, members of the sin-cursed and dying race, so does not expect our bodies to serve him perfectly.

In one of the Apostle Paul’s experiences, we have a good example of the Lord’s viewpoint in this respect. At the time of his conversion, he was blinded by the dazzling brightness of that “light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun.” (Acts 26:13) And although a few days later when visited by Ananias, Paul received a partial restoration of his sight, apparently he had poor vision for the remainder of his life. Naturally this was a great handicap, especially in his studies and writing. He refers to it as a “thorn in the flesh” (II Cor. 12:7-10), and he prayed earnestly to the Lord that it might be removed. He believed that he could serve the Lord much better if his eyesight were fully restored.

The Lord’s answer to Paul’s prayer, and the apostle’s humble submission to the Divine will should be of great encouragement to us. The Lord said to him, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” (vs. 9) Paul’s reaction to these reassuring words of the Lord should serve to guide and comfort us when we feel the limitations imposed upon us by our imperfections. He wrote, “Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”—vs. 9

HIS YOKE

The wonderful ‘rest’ in Christ can be understood and appreciated better when considered in association with his invitation to take upon ourselves another ‘yoke’: “Take my yoke upon you.” (Matt. 11:29,30) To be made free from sin and imperfection does not imply a life of idleness. Nor does it mean a carefree, aimless sort of existence. We come out from the bondage of sin that we might become servants of righteousness by taking his ‘yoke’ upon us. And it is in this yoke that we find our abiding rest.

It is through Christ’s ‘yoke’ that we become united with him. He shares the load, bearing all of it that exceeds our own strength and ability. This is the thought suggested by Paul when he said that because of his infirmities the ‘power of Christ’ would rest upon him. Paul would like to have done more and better work in the Lord’s service. He believed that this would be possible if his eyesight were restored. But since this was

not the Lord's will, and since he was assured that the Lord's grace would be sufficient for him, he not only could 'rest,' but also 'glory' in his infirmities, because the power of Christ could thus be more fully demonstrated.

“LEARN OF ME”

Jesus' invitation, 'Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me,' suggests that it is only by being yoked together with him that we can really discover that he is indeed 'meek and lowly of heart.' Furthermore, it is these qualities of his character which make his yoke easy and his burden light.

The scribes and Pharisees were arrogant and domineering. They were overconfident about their positions of authority, and had instituted harsh, repressive measures in an effort to maintain their lordship. This meant that their 'yoke' was heavy and burdensome, yet they refused to lift as much as a little finger to help those who were struggling under its load.

But how different it was with Jesus! He was 'meek' and 'lowly.' He had sympathy for the people, and was always ready to extend mercy to erring ones who recognized their sins and sought forgiveness. In spite of the "contradiction of sinners," (Heb. 12:3) Jesus maintained his lowly attitude of heart, and was composed before his enemies. The joy that was set before him of being with his Father in his throne gave him strength to endure unjust humiliation and disgrace in the eyes of his fellow Israelites. So he was glad to humble himself under the mighty hand of God, knowing that God, in his own time and way, would exalt him.

Now we are yoked together with this meek and lowly one. We are weak, but he is strong. He knows our every imperfection, our every limitation, and will allow just that portion of the load to fall upon us which we are able to bear. The remainder he will carry himself, and in the spirit of true understanding and sympathy. Jesus knows our every weakness and adjusts our load according to our ability to bear. In this way his yoke is 'easy' and his burden is 'light.'

THE NARROW WAY

This does not mean that the Christian way, according to the flesh, is an easy one. Rather, it is "strait" (Matt. 7:14), difficult. When we think of Paul's experiences, for example, we realize that he did not have a life of

ease. Nor was the burden of Christ's work which he bore a light one. As a matter of fact, from the standpoint of the flesh, Paul was evidently crushed under the weight of the burden which was given him to bear. Nevertheless, Paul viewed his load as a New Creature in Christ Jesus, so he could and did refer to his burden as a "light affliction," which was but temporary—"for a moment"—and expressed his confidence that it was working out for him "a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."—II Cor. 4:17

Despite the fact that Paul was troubled on every hand, he enjoyed that 'rest' which Jesus promised to all those who go to him in sincerity and humility, who learn of him, and take his yoke. And it is important for all who are yoked together with Christ to be guided by his example of meekness and lowliness. Our agreement to take his yoke implies humble submission to his will. If we are not 'meek' and 'lowly' we will find the yoke very burdensome, and at times, perhaps, almost overwhelming.

If we are not 'meek' and 'lowly' we will want to go our own way rather than to follow the leadings of the Master. To the extent that we do, we will be working against Christ instead of with him. Thus, instead of lightening our burdens, the weight of Divine providence will be against us in order that we might be brought back into full submission and cooperation as yokefellows with Christ. And it is a singular thing that trials which are borne in humility and submission to the Divine will are 'light,' while possibly the same experiences, if permitted as discipline, could be very burdensome.

Paul wore Christ's yoke in the spirit of true meekness. He did not attempt to guide himself, but humbly placed himself under subjection to Christ, and walked together with him in humble obedience. Sometimes the road led to prison and the stock; at other times to public beatings and stonings which left him near death. He encountered perils of the sea and perils of the land. Tiring labor and painful toil also often were his lot. Yet it was all as an 'easy yoke,' and a burden that was 'light,' for Christ was with him in the yoke. Thus Paul had peace and rest and joy, even while he suffered and died.

A REST OF MIND

Many of the Lord's people can testify that they, like Paul, have enjoyed a sweet and blessed rest, even in the midst of poverty, sickness,

persecution, and when surrounded on every hand by enemies of Christ. Certainly it is not a rest of body, but of the mind and heart. One of the prophets wrote, “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee.”—Isa. 26:3

None can know the blessedness of this rest until it is experienced, and none can experience it except by taking the Master’s yoke, and learning of him—learning what an understanding and gracious partner he is; how sympathetically he bears every burden which is too great for us; and in every time of trial comforts us with the assurance that his grace will be sufficient for all our needs.

The world is feverishly seeking rest and happiness in many and various ways, but not finding it. Some are seeking after wealth, thinking that therein is the secret of contentment and rest. Others try to forget their burdens by burying themselves in worldly—and oftentimes sinful—pleasures, only to find their efforts futile and that their cup of pleasure turns to bitterness and disappointment.

We are in the world, but not of it, and by being yoked with Christ we find a rest that is genuine and abiding. And the ‘fulness’ (Rom. 15:29) of this rest will be attained only if we seek it in a meek and quiet spirit. Jesus himself enjoyed peace and rest of heart and mind because he meekly and quietly yielded his all to the doing of his Father’s will. If in any degree we fail along this line our rest will not be complete, and the burden we are called upon to bear will seem heavy.

Let us, then, cultivate the graces of meekness and patient submission to the will of God. To do this we will need to have confidence in his love and care; and to realize that in his infinite wisdom he knows what is best for us. This will not be easy for the flesh, but as New Creatures (II Cor. 5:17) our joy will increase, and, in looking back and noting the blessings which have accrued from walking with the Lord, we will be able to praise the way he has led us day by day.

THE PROPER MOTIVE

Another important secret of true rest in being yoked with Christ is to have the proper motive, which is love. To whatever extent we view our experiences from a selfish standpoint, we will fail just that much in attaining the full rest for which we labor. Love “beareth all things,” Paul wrote. (I Cor. 13:7) If love prompted our consecration to the Lord, and in

love we are laying down our lives as Jesus did, trials and abuses which may be heaped upon us will be seen in their true perspective—as pertaining only to our fleshly interests—and thus, as New Creatures we will be able to endure them.

Most of our trials—the burdensome experiences of life—result from the loss of something: our health, our reputation, our friends, our money, or something else considered by the flesh to be valuable and important. But our consecration calls for giving up all of these, and we should be concerned only with walking faithfully as true yokefellow with Christ. Their loss, therefore, should indeed be looked upon as a ‘light affliction,’ insignificant when compared with the joys and blessings which come to us day-by-day as a result of taking the Master’s yoke and learning of him.

Truly, from whatever proper standpoint we consider it, his yoke is ‘easy’ and his burden is ‘light.’ There is no other ‘way’ that is so rich in meaning, and so satisfying in daily experience as the Christian way—the way of servitude with Christ. But even after taking his yoke by yielding our wills to him, our complete rest and joy will be realized only by maintaining a humble submission to him, strengthened in this by a full confidence that his way is best, and that eventually it will lead to an eternity of rest beyond the veil.

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“So Much the More”

*“Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, ... but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”
—Hebrews 10:25*

AFTER THE LONG period of the Dark Ages, the Reformation of Luther’s day, among other things, ushered in an era of Bible study for the people of God set free from the bondage of tradition. This study of God’s Word, though hampered by creeds of the Reformers, continued to increase as one denomination after another rose up and called attention to truths long overlooked: justification, election, free grace, baptism, the second

coming, and resurrection. This progress, plus the general increase of knowledge prophesied for the “time of the end” (Dan. 12:4), prepared the way for the return to the knowledge held by the apostles and the Early Church.

When Jesus returned he girded himself and began to serve the faithful watchers with “meat in due season” (Luke 12:42,43)—the very richest of provisions by his grace. The result was still more intensive study of the Word, participated in by groups, large and small, of his people.

STUDY MEETINGS

In Hebrews the Apostle Paul urged the Lord’s people not to forsake assembling. Such an exhortation as this has hardly been necessary to the majority of those blessed with the light of present truth. Their hungering and thirsting after righteousness, coupled with specially favorable facilities for coming to an accurate knowledge of the truth have been two powerful inducements to assemble. Concerning this Jesus said, “Wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together.”—Matt. 24:28

At the end of the Gospel Age, the increased knowledge has led to many inventions, which are useful, but can tend to distract us from personal study as well as congregational studies. The rapid pace set by our society

with many ‘running to and fro’ has called for careful budgeting of our time. The apostle’s exhortation in Hebrews 10:25 is timely when he says, “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” By heeding the apostle’s advice we are able to resist the temptations of the world and the Adversary in the form of distractions to our walk with Christ.

The purpose of our gathering is not only to learn more about God’s plan and character, but also to exhort one another. In so doing we provide genuine support to brethren fighting battles every day against the world, the flesh, and the Devil. We are to do this ‘so much the more’ as we see events occurring which will bring an end to this present evil world, and usher in the day of Christ’s kingdom. We need one another’s sympathy, encouragement and help.

To illustrate: The runners in a mile race, having to go around the track eight times, would receive encouragement from the onlookers during the first lap. But, as the race nears its end, the encouragement and cheering of the runners would increase, until at the last lap every possible urge would be given to those with any hope of winning.

So, in the heavenly race, let us exhort and encourage one another more and more as the end is neared. This can be done when we meet together for the study of the truth. Let the exhortation be truly sincere, helpful, manifesting a true interest in our brother’s welfare, upbuilding in the faith, warning against snares and stumbling stones—’so much the more, as ye see the day drawing on.’

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