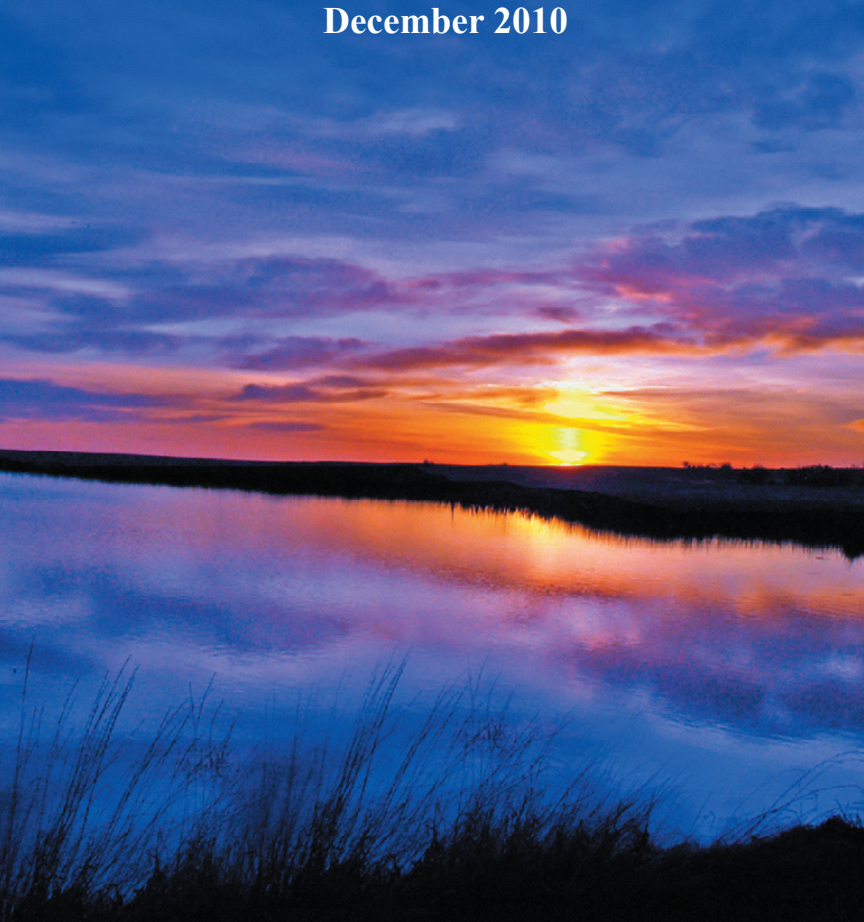


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We Have Seen His Star

“Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.”

Matthew 2:1,2

IN THE GOSPEL OF MAT-thew is found the first information recorded in the New Testament that pertains to the genealogy and birth of Jesus. “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.” (Matt. 1:1) As the world’s future king, the record of his royal lineage through David was thus established. Messiah was also the promised true seed of Abraham, and the covenant arrangement that God made with him to bless all nations of the world at a future time. (Gen. 22:16-18) Our featured scripture relates to the wise men (Magi) who had journeyed from the east to Jerusalem to learn the exact location where they could find the newborn King of the Jews.

Many centuries earlier, Jacob had identified the tribe of Judah from which the Messiah would come. He proclaimed, "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." (Gen. 49:10) The scepter, or right to rule, would come from the tribe of Judah, and of the family of King David. Judah was the strong one, the lion's whelp (Gen. 49:9), and "the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David."—Rev. 5:5

The term 'Shiloh' relates to an epithet that points to the Messiah and means tranquility, or peace. Thus did the Prophet Isaiah identify Jesus as the 'Prince of Peace' in his prophecy concerning him. "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace."—Isa. 9:6

BETHLEHEM

When news of the Magi's visit reached the royal court, King Herod pretended to be interested in where Jesus was born, while secretly planning to have him killed. Matthew records, "When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of Judah: for out of

thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.”—Matt. 2:3-6

We note that the wise men from the east had been led to Jerusalem by observing a particular star, “there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel.” (Num. 24:17) When Herod asked them to join him and the religious leaders of Israel to determine where Messiah was to be born, the combined answer from the group was also established by the Scriptures. They proclaimed what God’s prophet Micah had written centuries before, saying, “Thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting.”—Mic. 5:2

When Herod’s meeting ended, the Magi set out for Bethlehem, and we learn the details in Matthew’s account. “When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.” (Matt. 2:9-11) The wise men did not return to inform Herod the whereabouts of the Christ child.

PROPHETIC FOREGLEAMS

In the Bible’s earliest records written by Moses, is recorded a wonderful prophecy concerning the

future Messiah. It is written, “The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken.” (Deut. 18:15) Moses was a servant of God, and he served to illustrate the grander prophet, our Lord and Savior Christ Jesus. It is further written of him, “I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him.”—vss. 18,19

ESTABLISHED BY GOD’S WORD

The records contained in God’s Holy Word establish Jesus’ lineage through the tribe of Judah and family of David. It is also shown that he is the anti-typical seed of Abraham in whom all nations shall be blessed during his future kingdom. The Scriptures reveal that the baby Jesus would be born in Bethlehem. However, it was not until the angel Gabriel was sent by God in answer to Daniel’s prayer, that any definite time for Messiah’s arrival was indicated.

Servants of God were directed by the Holy Spirit as they wrote, but did not always understand what they were recording. The Apostle Peter confirms that many of the writers of Old Testament prophecies searched diligently to understand the meaning of what they were writing, and the time during which it would be accomplished. (I Pet. 1:10,11) Again, in his second letter, he wrote, “So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you

do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."—II Pet.1:19-21, *New American Standard Bible*

DANIEL SEEKS UNDERSTANDING

The Prophet Jeremiah had written, "Thus saith the LORD, That after seventy years be accomplished at Babylon I will visit you, and perform my good word toward you, in causing you to return to this place." (Jer. 29:10) The Prophet Daniel was a devout and careful student of scripture and had studied Jeremiah's prophecy concerning Israel's release from Babylonian captivity and the seventy-year prophecy.

Daniel was very concerned about the Jewish people and their welfare, and was especially anxious to learn more about the seventy years of which Jeremiah spoke. In his own book of prophecy, Daniel spoke of his interest in Jeremiah, and said, "In the first year of his [Darius'] reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem. And I set my face unto the Lord God, to seek by prayer and supplications, with fasting, and sackcloth, and ashes."—Dan. 9:2,3

In his prayer, Daniel made a detailed petition to the Heavenly Father in which he sought forgiveness for his people, concern on their behalf, and

enlightenment in connection with the seventy-week prophecy. (vss. 3-19) We learn that even before he had finished his prayer, God had sent the angel Gabriel to help him. He wrote, "Whiles I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the LORD my God for the holy mountain of my God; Yea, whiles I was speaking in prayer, even the man [angel] Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation. And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding."—vss. 20-22

THE ANGEL'S MESSAGE

Gabriel began to explain to Daniel the meaning of the seventy-week time period. (vss. 24-27) However, to understand Bible prophecy it is necessary to use one of the keys that has been provided in the Scriptures, and we learn that one day represents one year. "Your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years, and bear your whoredoms, until your carcasses be wasted in the wilderness. After the number of the days in which ye searched the land, even forty days, each day for a year, shall ye bear your iniquities, even forty years, and ye shall know my breach of promise."—Num. 14:33,34

There are 7 days in one week, thus there are 490 days in 70 weeks. Using the Bible's key, the 490 days points to 490 years that was set apart as a period of favor to the Jewish people. Gabriel spoke the words of God, "Know therefore and understand,

that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times.”—Dan. 9:25

The 490 year time period (70 weeks) began when Israel was released from Babylonian captivity and would culminate with the first advent of ‘Messiah the Prince.’ Further details in Gabriel’s message indicated that Jesus would die in the middle of the last ‘week of years’ and that Israel’s period of favor would end three and a half years later. At that time their house would be left desolate.—Matt.23:38

JOHN’S MINISTRY

An important source of information concerning our Lord’s First Advent concerns the ministry of John the Baptist. During his ministry, he aroused new and widespread interest, not only among the Jews, but also in the Gentile world. “Now while the people were in a state of expectation and all were wondering in their hearts about John, as to whether he might be the Christ, John answered and said to them all, ‘As for me, I baptize you with water; but One is coming who is mightier than I, and I am not fit to untie the thong of His sandals; He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. And His winnowing fork is in His hand to thoroughly clear His threshing floor, and to gather the wheat into His barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.’ So with many other exhortations also he preached the gospel to the people.”—Luke 3:15-18, *NASB*

JOHN NOT THE MESSIAH

Many thought that John was the Messiah, “This is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No. Then said they unto him, Who art thou? that we may give an answer to them that sent us. What sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, Make straight the way of the Lord, as said the prophet Esaias.”—John 1:19-23

THE MAGI VISIT JESUS

The wise men from the east shared in the announcement of the birth of the world’s Savior. They were upright and devout men of faith, and had come with respect and reverence to worship the newborn King of Israel. They had brought gifts of myrrh, frankincense, and gold, and, although the scriptural record does not state how many men there were, it is likely there were three inasmuch as there were three gifts for Jesus.

Neither did the wise men return to Jerusalem to inform Herod the exact location of Jesus’ whereabouts. Instead, they returned to their homeland by another way to foil any attempt for him to follow after them. “Being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.” (Matt. 2:12) In contrast, it is noted that none of the religious leaders of Israel or other Jews had gone to Bethlehem to visit Israel’s newborn king.

The term Magi was used as the name for priests and wise men among the ancient Medes, Persians, and Babylonians. Astrologers were also included among them. Together they formed a group of learned scholars who were versed in various disciplines. These were the natural sciences, medicine, and astrology. It also included those of the occult, such as Chaldeans, sorcerers, and soothsayers. When Nebuchadnezzar called for all of the wise men to interpret his dream, the scriptural record says, "Then came in the magicians, the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers."—Dan. 4:7

It is thought that the wise men who arrived in Jerusalem came from Babylon and the very court of King Nebuchadnezzar. If so, they were perhaps acquainted with the writings of Daniel and his time prophecies relating to the future Messiah. Daniel and his companions Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had been closely associated with the court of Babylon, and no doubt left their influence in the world's first empire. News and information could have been carried from there to many other places.

In Daniel's book, he mentions the Magi on several occasions. Of particular interest, we read, "The king [Nebuchadnezzar] made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon."—Dan. 2:48

As students of astrology, the wise men were interested in reading the events of men and nations in the arrangement of the stars and galaxies. The heavens have been the great book of God, as the

psalmist, David, has written, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.” (Ps. 19:1,2) In any event, the Magi had gained enough information from various sources to observe a particular star which was to indicate the time and place where Messiah was to be born. On their way to Bethlehem, the star guided them again. “When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.”—Matt. 2:9-11

KING HEROD

From secular history, we learn that Herod was the name of a family of political leaders who ruled over the people of Israel, but who were not Jews themselves. The progenitor of the Herods was Antipater, who had been made governor of Idumea. His son Antipas was the father of Herod the Great.

The Scriptures provide little information about Herod, other than to inform us that when the Magi arrived at Jerusalem in search of Israel’s newborn king, the news soon spread to the royal palace and to the king himself. When he heard the news he, as well as the whole city, were troubled. Perhaps he felt a sense of jealousy that anyone else might

possibly share a measure of his royal honors and dignities. This would be unacceptable and would detract from his own sense of importance and influence.

It was also Herod's intention to have Jesus murdered. "Being warned of God in a dream that they [the Magi] should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way. And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him. When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt."—Matt. 2:12-14

Matthew records the tragic events that followed. We read, "And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son. Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently enquired of the wise men. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet saying, In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not."—vss. 15-18; Jer. 31:15

HEROD'S DEATH

"When Herod was dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeareth in a dream to Joseph in Egypt,

Saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and go into the land of Israel: for they are dead which sought the young child's life. And he arose, and took the young child and his mother, and came into the land of Israel. But when he heard that Archelaus did reign in Judaea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee: And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene."—vss. 19-23

THE SHEPHERDS

Joseph and Mary had gone to Bethlehem to pay their taxes, "So it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn."—Luke 2:6,7

Luke records, "There were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger."—vss. 8-12

THE HEAVENLY HOST

They were not prepared for the glory that followed—"And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds."—vss.13-18

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

The brilliant star which had guided the Magi to Jesus was but a foregleam of the greater light which had come into the world. Zechariah had written, "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, Humble, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a donkey." (Zech. 9:9, *NASB*) In fulfillment of this great event, Matthew recorded, "Now this took place that what was spoken through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, 'Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold your King is coming to you, Gentle, and mounted on a donkey, Even on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'"—Matt. 21:4,5, *NASB*

Matthew recalled a prophecy of Isaiah (9:2) in his gospel account—"The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up." (Matt. 4:14-16) Luke spoke of Jesus as "A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel." (Luke 2:32) John wrote, "In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not." (John 1:4,5) "Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth."—I John 2:8

WE HAVE SEEN HIS STAR

"Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him."—Matt. 2:1,2 ■

*A wonderful Savior is Jesus my Lord,
A wonderful Savior to me,
He hideth my soul in the cleft of the rock,
Where rivers of pleasure I see.*

*With numberless blessings each moment
He crowns,
And filled with His fullness divine,
I sing with rejoicing, oh, glory to God
For such a Redeemer as mine!*
—Hymns of Dawn

The Highway for God

Key Verse: *“He giveth power to the faint; and to them that hath no might he increaseth strength.”*
—Isaiah 40:29

Selected Scripture:
Isaiah 40

OUR HEAVENLY FATHER

provides us with many rich blessings through the greatness of his mighty power, as we are reminded in this scripture concerning the greatness of God, “Which doeth great things past finding out; yea, and wonders without number.” (Job 9:10) At the same time, we may inquire as David did, “When I consider the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?” (Ps. 8:3,4) These scriptures point out to us how insignificant we are, and how little mankind is when compared to the vastness and wonder of the universe. Truly, when we realize that the countless stars may each be one solar system, we are amazed and feel our own littleness. This helps us to gain a higher appreciation of the divine character. It will also enable us to increase our faith and have it grow even stronger by meditating upon God’s promises.

God’s character is made up of wisdom, justice, mercy, love, and power. His wisdom has guided every act, both in heaven and in earth, of his plan of salvation. “The LORD by wisdom hath founded the earth; by understanding hath he established the heavens. By his knowledge the depths are broken up, and the clouds drop down the dew.” (Prov. 3:19,20) God’s justice is another

vital element of his character. "Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne." (Ps. 89:14) Through his love, he provided a way for mankind to be lifted up from their fallen deplorable nature by offering his Son as our Savior. "The scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe." (Gal. 3:22) He uses his mighty power along with his love to provide us with hope, and an appreciation of all that he does for us. "For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." (II Tim. 1:7) These gifts from God add up to a disposition that leads to the development of a reverence for him, and a greater appreciation of his character. Through his mercy we have reverence that helps us develop holiness, joy, peace, fellowship, and courage. In proportion as we obtain this spirit, we gain this power, or spirit of assurance that God is able and willing to work things together for our good. We read, "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

God has promised that nothing can happen to us but what is for our highest welfare. We must realize that all of life's experiences are under divine supervision. This constitutes to the Christian a source of power, and of strength. He called us "out of darkness into his marvelous light." (I Pet. 2:9) With this heavenly calling, he has called us to bring glory and honor to himself, and for the blessing of others.

Through the mercy of God, we have been given the opportunity to approach him, and call him Father. We have been given direct access to his plans and purposes, that through the outworking of the Holy Spirit we, "May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."—Eph. 3:18,19 ■

I Am Your God

Key Verse: *“Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God; I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.”*
—Isaiah 41:10

Selected Scripture:
Isaiah 41:1-42:9

IMAGINE FOR A MOMENT

the magnitude of the statement made by our Heavenly Father in this reference verse, ‘I am thy God.’ He begins this verse with the assurance that we should not fear. We are to have reverence for God, for “The fear (reverence) of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.” (Prov. 9:10) This is a gradual process, as the reverence of the LORD increases while the child of God comes to know his Maker. It leads him to obedience and the realization

that, “Perfect love casteth out fear.”—I John 4:18

The psalmist wrote, “The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works.” (Ps. 145:9) This is a sweeping statement that takes in the furthestmost bounds of the universe, to the humblest as well as the most exalted beings of his creation. The whole creation is in his care. Our God is the only true and living God. He is the great Architect of the divine plan of the ages. He is the grand Ruler of the whole universe, and his wisdom, power, and goodness are more than equal to all of the responsibilities of such a highly exalted office. Since we are told that his tender mercies and his kind providences are over all his works, this gives us faith that his wise purposes will be accomplished. This will

lead to the ultimate design for all of his works, which is the establishment of universal harmony and peace. "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: . . . it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it."—Isa. 55:8-13; I Cor. 15:24,25

Our limited minds as human beings may fail in their efforts to comprehend the mental resources of a being that is able to assume and to bear such responsibility. He is so powerful that, "It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth." (Isa. 40:22) He has a memory that never fails, a judgment that never errs, and an all encompassing wisdom that plans for all eternity without the possibility of failure. He has timed his plans and purposes with precision for ages to come. He knows the end from the beginning.

How fitting are the words from the psalmist, when he wrote in consideration of the grandeur and immensity of God's providence over his works, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it." (Ps. 139:6) Although we cannot fully comprehend all God's mighty works, we can have a deep sense of reverence, love, and adoration for his greatness. "I would seek unto God, and unto God would I commit my cause: Which doeth great things and unsearchable; marvellous things without number." (Job 5:8,9) As we contemplate him, all of nature reflects his praise. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge"—Ps. 19:1

Even though he is such a powerful being, he has seen fit to call us "out of darkness into his marvellous light." (I Pet. 2:9) These verses show the immensity of his creation, and of its harmony and order as all things reflect the glory of the Almighty God. How thankful we should be that he has told us, "I am thy God."—Isa. 41:10 ■

The Mission of the Servant

Key Verse:
***“Righteousness
shall be the girdle
of his loins, and
faithfulness the
girdle of his reins.”***
—Isaiah 11:5

Selected Scripture:
Isaiah 9:1-7; 11:1-9;
Matthew 1:18-25

THE PERSON THAT IS BE-

ing referred to in this lesson as a faithful, diligent servant is our Lord Jesus. In the Greek, the name means Savior and in Syriac it signifies life-giver. The circumstances surrounding Jesus' miraculous birth, and the reason for him being born a perfect human being, is declared in the word, “He shall save his people from their sins.”—Matt. 1:21

The whole world was in expectation of the birth of the Messiah. This is especially evident when we look at the visit of the Magi. “Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.” (Matt. 2:1,2) They had now come to Jerusalem; having traveled a far distance to observe firsthand what they thought was to be the culmination of their beliefs. They explained when they arrived, that they had come to see ‘he that is born King of the Jews, for we have seen his star, . . . and are come to worship him.’ When they met with King Herod, they quoted the words

of the prophet Micah, “Thou Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of Judah: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.”—Matt. 2:6; Mic. 5:2

Concerning Jesus’ birth, and the promise of what the blessed Son of God would accomplish, we read “Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.” (Isa. 9:6) An angel at the time of the birth of Jesus would proclaim, “Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.” (Luke 2:10) These ‘good tidings’ refer to the Gospel, for it is a good message, which assures the deliverance and blessing of the entire world of mankind. In a greater sense, it refers to the promise from the Heavenly Father when all the deaf ears will be unstopped, and blind fearful eyes will be opened. “Then the eyes of the the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. (Isa. 35:5,6) The phrase “good will toward men” (Luke 2:14), is a declaration of what God purposes to do, and it will include the “times of restitution of all things.” This coming time of great blessing was spoken to us by the “mouth of all his holy prophets.” Both of these quotes are from Acts 3:21.

We realize that it was a prophecy of God’s purpose to bring all of this about through the newborn child, Jesus. The steps toward this would include the birth of Jesus, his death on the cross, his resurrection and ascension, and the selection of the church. The Messianic kingdom will complete the prophecy. “There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.”—Isa. 11:1,2 ■

I Will Be With You

Key Verse: *“When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee; when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.”*
—Isaiah 43:2

Selected Scripture:
Isaiah 43

the Land of Midian had taught Moses meekness and distrust of his ability. He realized the magnitude of the undertaking that he had been called to complete and felt his own insufficiency.

When we come to doubt our own worthiness, encouragement will come to every true servant of the Lord who humbly relies upon his promises while striving to faithfully walk in the way. “If God be for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31) Like Moses, we must learn that it is not our work but God’s work; not our power or ability but the divine power working in and through us.

THIS SCRIPTURE MAY RE-

mind us of very similar words that were spoken to Moses by our Heavenly Father. When he was called into service by God to return to Egypt and be the instrument used to deliver the Jews out of bondage, he was encouraged by the words, “I will be with thee.” (Exod. 3:12) Moses was so distrustful of himself that, as we recall from the account, he apologized, pleading his unfitness for service. The LORD assured Moses that he himself would be responsible for the great task that was ahead. The forty years in

God would keep his promise to Moses, and in turn to the Jews, and would deliver them from their bondage and guide them through all of their adversities to the promised land of Canaan. All the people of God who would be useful and used in his service must learn this lesson, as is further stressed, “Without me ye can do nothing” (John 15:5)—that is, separate from me. The divine power that operates through our loving Heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus, through the word of Truth and through the followers of Jesus, can operate in the weakest member of the body of Christ.

To abide in Christ means to be subject to all the will of our great LORD, and gladly we should submit to all of the experiences that his wisdom would see best to permit for us. The realization that God is with us, and that he is constantly looking for ways to help us in all of life’s experiences should be a constant source of encouragement to us. He has promised, “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” (Heb. 13:5) Each one should carefully watch for the leadings of divine providence and realize that only as he is cooperating with God can he accomplish anything of value.

We, as Moses did, should exercise humility in all things, and be ready to be used for his purposes. We should thank him for being a faithful Father to us, and follow these words, “In all thy ways acknowledge him and he shall direct thy paths.” (Prov. 3:6) Our Heavenly Father assures us that we will have his help and guidance to assist us through any experience that may come our way. “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” (Phil. 4:13) By his grace we have been granted the blessed assurance that, as our God, he will help us to carry out the responsibilities that lie ahead. “Thus saith God the LORD, he that created the heavens, . . . I the LORD have called thee in righteousness, and will hold thine hand, and will keep thee.”—Isa. 42:5,6 ■

The High and Holy Place

“Thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”

—Isaiah 57:15

OUR FINITE HUMAN MINDS

can barely grasp the fact that at one time our Heavenly Father existed all alone in the vast realm of space. This was long before there were any stars or the sun, and before there had been any spiritual or material creation. Neither can we fully comprehend the concept of eternity, and the fact that our loving Heavenly Father had no beginning and will never have an end.

IMMORTALITY

God possesses immortality—the very highest form of all life, and intelligence that exceeds all others. The basic meaning of the word immortality is deathlessness. It is perpetual and self-existent. In Paul’s letter to Timothy, he wrote, “Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise

God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.” (I Tim.1:17) From God comes the source of all life. The psalmist said, “With thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light.” (Ps. 36:9) “LORD, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.”—chap. 90:1,2

From God’s bountiful treasure-house of truth it is recorded, “Abraham planted a grove in Beer-sheba, and called there on the name of the LORD, the everlasting God.” (Gen. 21:33) Further we read, “The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.”—Deut. 33:27

Our loving Heavenly Father is the eternal “I AM” as written in the second book of Moses. “God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.” (Exod. 3:14) We further read, “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.”—Ps. 90:2

THE GIFT OF IMMORTALITY

Our Lord Jesus did not possess immortality before his death and resurrection. He became the first created being to be given immortality, and it was received by him as a reward for his faithfulness even unto death. He had carried out the most important and central feature of his Father’s plan and purpose for the reconciliation of the human family.

This fact is explained in the words of the Apostle Paul, who said, "Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him." (Rom. 6:9) The revelator also recorded the words of God, saying, "When I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell [the grave] and of death."—Rev. 1:17,18

THE MYSTERY OF GOD'S WILL

The wonderful plan and purpose of God includes his desire to have a divine family. This invitation to a select few is a mystery to the worldly-wise. When speaking of this mystery that has been hidden for centuries, the Apostle Paul said, "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: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him."—Eph. 1:8-10

In his letter to the church at Ephesus, the apostle spoke about the eternal purpose and hidden mystery of God. He said, "To make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal

purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.”—Eph. 3:9-11

GOD’S ETERNAL PURPOSE

Our Lord Jesus died for the sins of the entire human family to be testified to all in due time. He is the main character in the Heavenly Father’s eternal purpose for the world’s future reconciliation. “All that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” (Rev. 13:8) The Master also had to be tested as explained by the Apostle Paul. “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.” (Heb. 5:8,9) “But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”—Phil. 2:7-11

THE FAMILY OF GOD

The Heavenly Father desires to have a family on the same divine plane of life as he has. This new family will be immortal beings endowed with the highest of all mental resources, and with whom he can have spiritual fellowship in the most complete

sense. Special emphasis is given concerning the mystery of God, and the fact that the faithful followers of Jesus will be brought together as body members in the divine family. The bride of Christ will thus share in the special and intimate family of God's marvelous and eternal purpose.

The outworking of this ultimate plan will reveal the manifold wisdom of our loving Heavenly Father, and will demonstrate throughout all eternity the beauty and wisdom of his great love and tender care. All beings on all planes of life will come to appreciate the full meaning of his glorious name as once revealed to his servant Moses. It is again recorded, "And the LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth."—Exod. 34:5,6

THE DIVINE SECRET

The calling to the heavenly nature has gone forth to a little flock of Jesus' faithful followers throughout the long centuries of this present Gospel Age. "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." (Luke 12:32) The world of mankind has not heard this call. The Apostle Paul wrote, "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, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory."—I Cor. 2:6,7

The heavenly call continues to be a mystery to the world and to the worldly-wise. "Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written [Isa. 64:4], Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God."—I Cor. 2:8-11

SUBMISSION TO GOD'S WILL

To receive such a high reward, each called one must be thoroughly tested and motivated by supreme heart loyalty to God. To be raised to the divine nature and to the same nature of life as our Heavenly Father, there must be a total submission to God's will in our lives, and a crystallization of our character in righteousness.

Each one must be willing to drink of the cup that our Lord drank and which the Father had given him. This is clearly shown in Jesus' discourse with two of his disciples. We read, "James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto him, saying, Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire. And he said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you? They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory. But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized

with the baptism that I am baptized with? And they said unto him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized: But to sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared.”—Mark 10:35-40

OUR EARTHLY TABERNACLE

Throughout this present Gospel Age, those who have responded to the heavenly calling in Christ Jesus are known as a faith class. They have put their lives in the hands of our loving Heavenly Father and have learned to trust him in all the affairs of their lives and that which leads to a part of the heavenly bride, the church. Paul put this in perspective, when he said, “We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” (II Cor. 5:1) Our human bodies have become a dwelling place for the new mind, the New Creature in Christ begotten by the Holy Spirit of God. “Thy statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.”—Ps. 119:54

The apostle explained, “For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the

earnest of the Spirit. Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith, not by sight).”—II Cor. 5:2-7

A FAITH CLASS

The Scriptures speak of faith on many occasions, and Paul has provided us with an excellent definition. He said, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (Heb. 11:1) He also emphasized the importance of faith in the lives of the consecrated child of God. “But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” (vs. 6) When we study the subject of faith, we learn that it is not only indispensable to establish our relationship with the Heavenly Father, but that he also considers our spiritual growth and faith as being very precious to him.

The Jews had difficulty accepting the fact that no one could keep their old Law Covenant and that no one could expect to receive life under its terms. “Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” (Rom. 3:20) God’s purpose in giving Israel the law was to teach them that they were dead in sin. “But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe. But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by

faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus."—Gal. 3:22-26

The apostle was teaching that we can be justified through faith in Christ Jesus, which is the only way to life. He said, "Now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God."—Rom 3:21-25

The only way to life is through Christ Jesus. Paul clearly stated, "To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also: Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith. Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law."—vss. 26-31

THE VICTORY OF FAITH

"Every one who believes that Jesus is the Anointed One, has been begotten by God; and every one

who loves the begetter, loves the one begotten by him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and practise his commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments; and his commandments are not burdensome; because all that has been begotten by God overcomes the world; and this is that victory which overcomes the world, our faith.”—I John 5:1- 4, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*

TESTING REQUIRED

The great Apostle Paul stated that all of our experiences in the school of Christ are directed by our loving Heavenly Father. We must all learn, as did the two sons of Zebedee, James and John, that we must first drink of the cup of sorrow before we can receive the cup of joy. “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?”—Rom. 8:28-31

Paul’s total faith led him to carry out his covenant of sacrifice in a most remarkable way. He knew that all of his cup-of-sorrow experiences were permitted for his growth and development as a new creature in Christ Jesus. He speaks of some of his trials in his letter to the church at Corinth.

In the apostle's letter, we catch a glimpse of his abundant sacrificial life, "In labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches."—II Cor. 11:23-28

DELIVERED UNTO DEATH

Paul also said, "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. 4:8-11) "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. 17,18

JOINT HEIRS WITH CHRIST

During this present Gospel Age, invitation has been made to those who will share in the marvelous privileges of dwelling with Christ in his future kingdom. This great truth opens to us our hope in becoming part of God's own intimate family. "Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple." (Ps. 65:4) The Apostle Paul put this in proper perspective in his letter to the church at Rome, when he said, "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For 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. 8:16-18

The testimony of God's wonderful Word of Truth will surely come to pass. "He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. What shall we then

say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?”—vss. 27-31

THE LORD’S HOUSE

The Prophet Isaiah spoke about the majestic house of the LORD and when it would be established. “It shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.”—Isa. 2:2,3

IN THE SAME IMAGE

The church’s future heavenly inheritance will be the most wonderful blessing ever given to anyone at any time, and will never be offered again. Let us each say in our heart, as did Paul when writing to the brethren at Philippi, “I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 3:14) Our determination should be to make our calling and election sure, and especially as the days grow more evil. May we also be strengthened by the apostle’s words of encouragement, when he said, “We all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.”—II Cor. 3:18

In our featured scripture (Isa. 57:15), the Prophet Isaiah spoke about the “High and Holy Place.” This describes the divine habitation of our loving

Heavenly Father, and he has extended an invitation to the church to share that glory, honor and immortality when found faithful even unto death.

I SHALL BE SATISFIED

The psalmist David serves to illustrate the faithful class of our Lord's true followers during this present Gospel Age. Thus, his inspiring words capture the very spirit and desire of every truly consecrated heart who is diligently striving to be faithful to their covenant of consecration, and share in the spiritual kingdom.

In one of David's beautiful psalms, we are given a glimpse of that wonderful scene. He said, "Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore." (Ps. 16:11) Again the psalmist wrote, "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness."—Ps. 17:15 ■

*I cannot do without thee;
I cannot stand alone;
I have no strength or goodness,
No wisdom of my own;*

*But thou, beloved Savior,
Art all in all to me,
And weakness will be power,
If leaning hard on thee.*

—Poems of Dawn

Increase Our Faith

“The apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith.”
—*Luke 17:5*

AS THE END OF ANOTHER

year approaches, it is appropriate that we examine the important subject of faith. The word faith appears 247 times in the King James version of the Bible. Perhaps surprisingly, all but two of these occurrences are in the New Testament, and of all the New Testament usages, 216 are after the Day of Pentecost. Only 29 times does the word appear in the gospel accounts, and in the Gospel of John the word faith does not appear at all. It is also interesting to note that nearly half of the New Testament uses of the word faith are in one of three books—Romans, Galatians, and Hebrews. Thus, to gain a greater appreciation of this subject, one may turn to these three epistles of Paul as primary sources of information and understanding concerning faith.

Before turning to the New Testament, however, we wish to look at the Old Testament record. Though faith does not appear at first to be stressed in the Old Testament writings, yet the two references

recorded show the importance God placed on it. The first usage were God's words directed to the nation of Israel, chiding them for their lack of faith. "I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be: for they are a very froward generation, children in whom is no faith." (Deut. 32:20) The other Old Testament reference to faith is in the writings of the prophets. "The just shall live by his faith." (Hab. 2:4) The Apostle Paul comments on both of these scriptures in the New Testament. Although not a direct reference to the Deuteronomy scripture, Paul says that Israel did not attain righteousness "because they sought it not by faith." (Rom. 9:32) The Habakkuk scripture Paul quotes directly three separate times in his writings—Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11, and Hebrews 10:38. We realize, then, that although the vast majority of the scriptural references to faith are in the New Testament, the basis of this important subject was founded much earlier.

KEYS TO UNDERSTANDING FAITH

At the outset of our lesson, we wish to list four key points concerning faith. First, since man's creation, faith has been an absolute requirement for anyone to have a standing with God and to inherit his promises, whether earthly or heavenly. Second, the Mosaic Law did not stress faith, but works—the keeping of commandments and ceremonies. Third, those who were pleasing to God in Old Testament times—the Ancient Worthies—were acceptable to him not because they were able to keep the Law, but because of their faith. Fourth, to God's people living after Pentecost, there is an inseparable link

between faith and spirit begettal at the beginning of the Christian walk, as well as in the daily operation of the Holy Spirit and the progression of faith until the end of that walk. This last point helps us to realize how amazing was the faith of the Ancient Worthies. They did not have the begettal of the Holy Spirit, but yet had great faith.

The key to the faith in the Ancient Worthies was that it was a process, a development, not just a momentary belief. Faith to them became a way of life. It governed their whole outlook on the world they lived in and their place in it. Abraham, for example, looked for a city having real foundations, built by God, having faith that God had a plan for something in the future that would be a better arrangement for him and the rest of the world than the fallen conditions which existed in his day. (Heb. 11:10) Similarly, for the child of God now, the development of faith is also a process. Faith at the time of the begettal of the Holy Spirit is required in a measure, but it is then undeveloped and untested, only at a starting point. The development of faith begins at consecration and spirit begettal, but does not end until death and spirit birth. True faith is not saying we are 'saved' or 'born again,' then forgetting about it, and believing somehow that makes us a Christian. On the contrary, it is faith and its development and progression after spirit begettal which is the key to being a true Christian. As Paul states, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. . . . For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith." (Rom. 1:16,17)

The *New International Version* translates the last part of this verse, “righteousness that is by faith from first to last.” In other words, living by faith and going ‘from faith to faith’ is an ongoing process throughout our life, not merely a momentary belief.

FAITH STILL NECESSARY

The question might be asked, ‘do we still need faith?’ After all, we have more knowledge of God’s plan of salvation now than at any previous time. Many Bible prophecies have been fulfilled or are in process of fulfillment. We have today a seemingly endless supply of Bible helps and related material. Perhaps faith is not as vital today as it once was. Jesus, pointing forward to our day, asked a related question, “When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” (Luke 18:8) Although he did not answer the question directly, Jesus implied by his words that faith would indeed still be needed in our day, and additionally that he would not find it in abundance. This fact, itself, should help us realize the great importance of faith in our time—there is so little of it left in the earth. Although we do see more clearly God’s great plan of salvation than at any other previous time, this should not in any way discount the need for faith. In fact, the more things we see and know, the more we should realize how much we still do not know, or understand fully, and that is where faith comes into the picture.

For example, Abraham saw and knew certain things even in his day. He knew that God could perform miracles, such as the birth of a son when

he and Sarah were beyond childbearing years. Abraham also knew that God could deliver from the dead, as evidenced by his intervention in the sacrifice of Isaac. These things Abraham saw and appreciated with his literal eyes. Beyond this, though, he saw with the eye of faith a time in the future when, through a seed, all families of the earth would be blessed. He did not know how or when it would come about, but had faith that it would come to pass. We today also see many things, but not all is fully known yet. We see the time of trouble going on about us, but many of the details of the portions yet future we do not know. We see and appreciate the fact that the numbers of the body of Christ on this side of the veil are diminishing, but we do not know the day or the hour that the last member will enter into glory. These, and other things, we see partially, but have faith that they all will be brought to completion according to God's arrangement.

It is safe to say that we will need more faith as we prepare to enter 2011 than Abraham needed in his day, more than the Early Church needed, more than the saints who lived at the beginning of the harvest needed, and more than we ourselves needed in the year past. A full measure and development of faith, according to the circumstances and experiences of the Lord's people living at each point in time, is needed in order to be found fully pleasing to God.

TWO PARTS OF FAITH— SUBSTANCE AND EVIDENCE

Some elements of the Christian's development are not specifically defined in the Scriptures, but

faith is. Paul gives us its definition, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” (Heb. 11:1) We notice here that faith is not the ‘things hoped for,’ nor is it the ‘things not seen.’ It is, rather, the ‘substance’ and ‘evidence’ of these things. That which we hope for is the fulfillment of God’s plan, not only for his church, but in due time for the entire world. Faith, Paul says, is the substance of what we hope for. The word substance here means ‘a setting under, support.’ The support, or substance, of our hope is the Word of God, the Bible. It is this foundation of truth which provides us the substance of our hope. Paul speaks of it this way, “Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil.”—Heb. 6:19

The second aspect of faith, according to Paul, is the evidence of things not seen. Those things which we do not see, generally speaking, are those which lie in the future, whether it be tomorrow, next week, next year, or many years hence. In all of these cases, we do not know the specific experiences in our life which will come to pass. The word evidence signifies ‘a proof or proving.’ The proof of what lies in the future, as it relates to faith, is shown by God’s performance in the past. In other words, we can look back on our experiences and on those of mankind in general and see that God has performed flawlessly up to this very moment and has executed every minute detail of his plan perfectly. Herein lies the proof that assures us concerning those things ahead of us which we do not see. Because of the evidence of God’s past performance, that which we can see, we now have faith in

the future execution of his plan, that which we cannot fully see.

The two aspects of faith—substance and evidence—can also be viewed in connection with God's performance. The substance part of faith we might refer to as 'the faith'—the truth of God's plan and its fulfillment. The evidence aspect of faith we could refer to as 'our faith'—the experiences of life that have been, are now, and will be in the future, overruled in conjunction with God's arrangements for each one of his people, knowing that he will perfectly execute in all things in the future, just as he has in the past. Two types of experiences help us develop this two-part faith structure. First, we have learning experiences. These help us develop the substance aspect of faith. Such experiences might include things like personal study, attending various meetings and conventions, personal meditation and prayer, and fellowship with the brethren. The evidence aspect of faith might be said to be developed by application experiences. These would include experiences such as dealing with the world, the job, going through various trials and testings, our responses to these experiences, how we respond to the world's experiences, and how we deal with the uncertainties of life. Through both learning and application experiences our faith must grow, develop, and increase as we walk in the narrow way.

INCREASING OUR FAITH

In our scripture text at the beginning of this lesson, the disciples made a request that Jesus increase their faith. He did not grant this request, nor did he even give a definitive response, but rather

stated what increased faith could accomplish. “If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you.” (Luke 17:6) A similar statement is recorded in Matthew’s gospel, “If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.” (Matt. 17:20) In both these statements we notice that increased faith has to do with the accomplishment of things not possible to a human being—illustrated by such things as moving a tree or a mountain simply by speaking to them. To further emphasize these seemingly impossible feats, he likens such faith to a mustard seed, the smallest of all seeds. (Mark 4:31) Jesus, in fact, is stating that if we have faith represented by something even as small as a grain of mustard seed, humanly impossible things could be done.

Increasing our faith, then, has to do with knowing and having confidence that God can do things not possible by human power, whether directly related to us, or to the fulfillment of his plan in general. Jesus did not grant this request to the disciples because he knew that such increases in faith would come about through experience, and over a period of time, not by a miracle on his part or any immediate action he could take. Increased faith came to the disciples—and comes to us also—by knowing more about God, his plan, his truth, the substance of our hopes, and by appreciating more and more his leading, the evidence we have to meet the future unseen experiences of life.

LITTLE FAITH AND GREAT FAITH

If faith is to increase, it must mean that we sometimes do not possess it as fully as we should. This was also true of our Lord's disciples at his first advent. On four separate occasions Jesus told them they were "of little faith." (Matt. 6:26-30; 8:25-26; 14:28-32; 16:5-10) Space does not permit elaboration in detail of these scriptures, except to summarize the problems which inhibited the disciples' faith. In these accounts, faith was lacking due to:

1. Anxiety over current and future temporal needs, including those which may not even come to pass.

2. Fear during the storms of life which come upon God's children from time to time.

3. Inability to maintain trust and confidence in those experiences which are completely beyond fleshly control.

4. Fleshly reasoning, in particular the forgetting of how the Lord has guided past experiences.

The solutions to these examples of the disciples' lack of faith are: replacing anxiety over temporal things with the seeking of spiritual things; remembering that the Lord controls the storms of life which come upon us and will make them calm not a moment later than he sees it best for our spiritual development; developing continuance and constancy in our experiences, realizing that the Lord will never leave us nor forsake us; and calling to mind the evidence we have of God's perfect performance in all the past experiences of our life. All of these remedies will increase our faith.

The Scriptures contain many wonderful examples of faith. Most notable is the account in Hebrews

11 of the many faithful ones of old. These not only had faith, but their faith increased as their life progressed, even unto death. “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” (Heb. 11:13) We too, must die in faith, knowing that only then will we, if faithful, receive our promised inheritance. We are also pilgrims and strangers on the earth, and our citizenship is in heaven. We have given up earthly claims and privileges and seek a “better country.”—Heb. 11:16

GOALS FOR THE NEW YEAR

As we close out 2010 and enter into a new year, it is imperative that we remember the great importance of progressing and increasing in our faith structure. To that end, let us make the following resolves for 2011:

1. Be active for the Lord, the Truth, and the brethren. Work hard in all these areas, knowing that an active Christian life is one of the keys to increased faith.

2. Keep the focus of our meditation on the Word of God and those helps which we have during the harvest of this present Gospel Age. The study of God’s Word can never have any other impact than to increase the substance of our faith structure.

3. Do not get caught up in or be anxious about the world’s myriad problems, nor their solution. Only Christ’s kingdom will do this. If the world’s problems seem to take us away from the Word of God, or the peace of God, then perhaps it is time to

turn off the television or radio, get away from the constant bombardment of news via electronic media, and stay away from those things written by man's human reasoning which propose unworkable solutions. Remember that God has all things under his control and we need not worry.

4. Do continue to watch, remembering that there is a difference between watching and being caught up and anxious about things going on in the world. A watcher in the watchtower is 'above the fray,' not fighting in the battles of this world, but watching to see God's power as it is used to defeat his enemies. Watch to see the unfolding and fulfillment of prophecy. This will also increase our faith.

5. Be happy and rejoice. Be positive about your life in the Lord, be positive about your fellow brethren, be positive and firm in the Truth, and be positive about the glorious outcome of God's plan. View all of life's experiences through the prism of God's great plan of salvation, and the result will be increased faith.

Faith must guide us to our last breath. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." (Rev. 2:10) For any of us, this might be today, tomorrow, next month, next year, or many years from now. Regardless, however, of our life's remaining days, faith will always be necessary. With developed and increased faith, it does not matter how long or how short our life may be, nor what happens along the way, because we will be fully equipped, spiritually, to be victorious. "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith."—I John 5:4

“You must never forget those past days when you had received the light and went through such a great and painful struggle. It was partly because everyone’s eye was on you as you endured harsh words and hard experiences, partly because you threw in your lot with those who suffered much the same. You sympathised with those who were put in prison and you were cheerful when your own goods were confiscated, for you knew that you had a much more solid and lasting treasure in Heaven. Don’t throw away your trust now—it carries with it a rich reward in the world to come. Patient endurance is what you need if, after doing God’s will, you are to receive what he has promised. ‘For yet a little while, and he who is coming shall come and shall not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, my soul has no pleasure in him’. Surely we are not going to be men who cower back, . . . but men who maintain [increase] their faith until the salvation of their souls is complete!”—Heb. 10:32-39, *J. B. Phillips* ■

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 Lori (Balko) Cyktor, West Newton, PA—August 18. Age, 51

Seeking the Kingdom of God

“Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”
—Matthew 6:33

WHEN JESUS BEGAN HIS earthly ministry he taught his followers many important truths that would prepare them for their new walk in faith. For example, he had just taught them how to pray to the Heavenly Father in an

acceptable manner. He explained, “Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.” (Matt. 6:6) The Master then proceeded to present his disciples a model prayer that has become the basis for all other prayers, known as “The Lord’s Prayer.”

Many centuries earlier, the psalmist David revealed the true sentiments of his heart, when he wrote, “One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.”

(Ps. 27:4) Later, the Apostle Paul encouraged the Lord's special people, "To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life."—Rom. 2:7

SEEKING THOSE THINGS ABOVE

In his letter to the Colossian brethren, the apostle encouraged them to seek the spiritual blessings which are above. "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence [desire], and covetousness, which is idolatry."—Col. 3:1-5

STRIVING DILIGENTLY

Our featured scripture is essentially a culmination of Jesus' 'Sermon on the Mount' which began in the previous chapter of Matthew's gospel. The Master's lessons draw special attention and importance to how we may faithfully strive to receive a position in God's future kingdom, and to the proper development of a Christian character that is based on righteous principles.

Jesus used the words 'seek' and 'first' together to emphasize the initial and primary aim of our walk in newness of life, and as New Creatures in Christ Jesus. The word seek suggests giving thoughtful diligence and heartfelt effort when striving toward a certain goal. Our Lord used the

same word again to put further perspective on this important lesson. He said, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."—Matt. 7:7,8

To seek the kingdom of God indicates a strong and deep commitment on the part of every consecrated child of God. It shows a determined effort to make ourselves ready so that we may share with our Lord Jesus, to reign with him in his future kingdom. Only a few will attain to such a high position. Jesus spoke of this class of Christians as a 'little flock.' "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."—Luke 12:32

The glorious prize of the High Calling of God in Christ Jesus will be a supreme gift for all who will demonstrate their love and loyalty to him through the faithful devotion of their all to his cause, and are found faithful to their covenant of sacrifice. The actual everyday carrying out of our commitment, and the terms of our discipleship are very exacting—being faithful to our covenant of sacrifice even unto death.—Rev. 2:10

A NEW WAY OF LIFE

The Lord does not expect us to enter upon the new way of life for the New Creature in Christ Jesus without first sitting down to count the cost. Jesus made this very clear, when he told his followers, "Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first,

and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.”—Luke 14:27-30

CROSS-BEARING

The Master spoke of bearing our cross, which suggests endurance in facing our trials and difficulties in our consecrated walk. Cross-bearing is a continuing commitment, and no one can hope to have a share in the glory of joint-heirship with the Christ without being faithful. Cross-bearing consists in our willingness to stand up for the Truth at any cost, and to uphold the principles of righteousness.

Our commitment to God should not be made with the view of simply satisfying ourselves with the hope that what we may gain will be of far greater value than what we give up. Those who have given their heart to our loving Heavenly Father have reached a point of decision in their lives that assures them that the heavenly reward will be given to them for their faithfulness.

COUNTING THE COST

When counting the cost of our consecrated walk, we cannot foresee all of the various trials or difficulties that we may be required to experience, or the full meaning and significance of the sacrificial life ahead. The trials, temptations, and testing of our commitment will be realized more particularly after our consecration, and not before.

Consecration is a serious matter, and to be a faithful disciple of our Lord we need to embark upon a new way of life, even unto death.—Rev. 2:10

The main consideration for those who respond to the heavenly calling and wish to give their life to God, is whether they can faithfully meet all of the obligations and terms of their consecration that will be placed upon them. To count the cost is to put aside all earthly hopes, ambitions, and desires of the flesh.

This matter was addressed by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the church at Philippi. He wrote, "What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death."—Phil. 3:7-10

THE NARROW WAY

Jesus emphasized the difficulties of the narrow way of sacrifice by comparing it to a lesson that was understood by those living in his day. He spoke of the gate that enclosed an ancient city that was kept closed and locked during nighttime as a protection for those living within. More particularly he drew attention to a smaller gate within the larger one that could be opened to allow passage into the city. It was called the 'needle's eye' because a camel could only pass through the

gate after its burden had been removed and was then led through the gate on its knees.

The Master had been pointing out that it was very difficult for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God. We read, "Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions. Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 19:21-23) This served as an important illustration because the rich man had more earthly treasures and interests to give up, and it was necessary that he unburden himself by giving all that he possessed to the Lord.

Jesus continued his lesson, saying, "Again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible. Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore? And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my

name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life."—vss. 24-29

The unburdening of the camel and the necessity for it to drop to its knees to pass into the city, illustrated the rich man who must unburden himself of earthly interests and treasures, and to thus humble himself before God. Had the rich man's heart been more pleasing to our loving Heavenly Father, he would have lead him and shown him a way to use his riches in an acceptable manner that would lead him to greater faithfulness. God knows how to overrule all things for the good of his people and to those who desire to know and serve him. "He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. And 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. 8:27,28

The trials and difficulties of the narrow way are shaping, fitting, and preparing us for a share with our Lord Jesus in his future kingdom of righteousness that will be established over all the earth. Let us rejoice at all times and under all circumstances in this wonderful prospect, and learn to watch for the Lord's leading.

JESUS' CUP

Perhaps the seriousness of consecration had not been wisely considered by some, and may have been one of the reasons why Jesus' disciples disputed among themselves as to which of them would be greatest in his future kingdom. The scriptural record provides information that two of his disciples

even made a request that one might sit on Jesus' right hand and the other on his left hand in his future kingdom.—Mark 10:37

Jesus did not discourage his disciples from entertaining the hope of sharing in the glories of his future kingdom, but he did explain that they would need to drink of his cup of experience and share in his baptism unto death. (vss. 38,39) He then told them, "To sit on my right hand and on my left hand is not mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared." (vs. 40) Thus did Jesus make clear the fact that all rewards are given to his faithful followers by the Heavenly Father, and in accordance with their degree of faith and obedience.

The cup of which Jesus spoke was symbolic, and suggested the sum total of all our experiences in walking in the narrow way and seeking the Father's will. It was the cup which the Heavenly Father had poured for Jesus to drink from the time of his baptism at the River Jordan, until he was led to Calvary's cross to give his life for the world.

Jesus loved his earthly parents, the disciples, and others who followed him. From the fleshly standpoint, he could have preferred a course in life which would have taken these into account and permitted him to enjoy their fellowship. However, he could not follow his natural inclinations. He had come to do his Father's will, and to drink of the cup which the Father had poured for him. To be faithful to this purpose it was necessary for him to sever all earthly ties. Jesus said, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head."—Matt. 8:20

Jesus could have used his inspiring personality and the miracle-working power which had been given to him, to appeal to the public and he could have become the most popular person in the world at that time. However, he understood the task he was given to perform and the message he was to proclaim. He exposed popular error, and was an unflinching advocate of unpopular truth. He was able to read the hearts of his enemies, and knew that they were hypocrites. This evoked their bitter animosity which finally cost him his life. It was all part of the 'cup' which the Father had poured for him.

When speaking of Jesus, Paul pointed out that he, "Made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."—Phil. 2:7-11

OUR CUP

When we make a consecration to do the Father's will, we are also given a cup from which to drink. We can measure the degree of our success in partaking of the cup by considering whether we are truly seeking 'first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.' Doing the will of God was Jesus' first consideration, and it must also be first with

us. He thus advises us, “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?—Matt. 6:24,25

Paul said, “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) The Apostle again wrote, “Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”—chap. 4:6,7

SEEKING FIRST THE KINGDOM

With the peace of God ruling in our hearts and minds, we may concentrate all of our thoughts and efforts on the wonderful promises pertaining to the future kingdom of our featured scripture. (Matt. 6:33) Thus let us heed the apostle’s encouraging words, “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.”—Phil. 4:8 ■

WEEKLY PRAYER MEETING TEXTS

DECEMBER 2—“And now, why tarriest thou? Arise and be baptized.”—Acts 22:16 (Z. '01-186 Hymn 14)

DECEMBER 9—“Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.”—James 1:12 (Z. '98-41 Hymn 301)

DECEMBER 16—“How long halt ye between two opinions? If the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, follow him.”—I Kings 18:21 (Z. '02-42 Hymn 306A)

DECEMBER 23—“A word in season, how good it is! A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.”—Proverbs 15:23; 25:11 (Z. '02-381,382 Hymn 275)

DECEMBER 30—“Thou crownest the year with Thy goodness.”—Psalm 65:11 (Z. '00-365 Hymn 89)

“By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.”
—Hebrews 13:15

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CONVENTIONS

These conventions are listed by request of classes who sponsor them. So your convention can be placed in these columns in time, make your request in writing three months before the date of the convention to Dawn Magazine, 199 Railroad Avenue, East Rutherford, NJ 07073.

AUSTRALIA GENERAL CONVENTION, January 22-25—Wilkin Baptist Camp, 57 Noble Street, Anglesea, VIC 3230, Australia. Contact R. Charlton, randscharlton@bigpond.com

SOUTHWEST CONVENTION, February 26,27—Boys & Girls Club of Scottsdale, 8250 E. Rose Lane, Scottsdale, AZ (same location as previous convention). Room reservations, contact G. Nicolosi. Phone: (602) 821-5599. Other information, contact C. Humphreys. Phone: (480) 226-9076

FLORIDA CONVENTION, March 5-7—Magnuson Grand Hotel (same site as last year, hotel name changed), 230 West State Road 436, Altamonte Springs, FL 32714. Room reservations, call (407) 862-4455, and specify “Florida Bible Students” for special rate, until February 20, 2011. Other information, contact, M. Balko. Phone: (407) 339-7580

GREATER NEW LONDON PRE-MEMORIAL CONVENTION, April 3—Bayview Lodge, 32 Society Road, Niantic, CT. Contact V. Grillo, 154 Case Street, Norwich, CT 06360. Phone: (860) 823-7099

BIBLE STUDENTS GENERAL CONVENTION, June 25-30—University of Pittsburgh at Johnstown, Johnstown, PA. Contact M. Nekora, 1425 Lachman Lane, Pacific Palisades, CA 90272. Phone: (310) 454-5248

God's Perfect Gift

O little Child of Bethlehem!

O Child of Royal birth!

More than ever we need Thee now—

Would all men knew Thy worth!

Thou of a virgin-maid was born,

As thus it was foretold;

God's Word never in void returns

But performs what long He told.

Yearly celebrate men of good will,

Your lowly stable birth,

The angel's message of 'great joy'

Will yet encircle earth.

No longer little Babe are you,

Thy mission, far from loss,

And now You're Saviour of the world

Since dying on the cross.

No other soul could man redeem

To offset Adam's sin.

God made you flesh—You're Heaven's Gift

That all hearts you might win.

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To us the Scriptures clearly teach:

THAT THE CHURCH IS “THE TEMPLE” OF THE LIVING GOD —peculiarly “his workmanship;” that its construction has been in progress throughout the Gospel Age—ever since Christ became the world’s Redeemer and the chief “corner stone” of this temple, through which, when finished, God’s blessings shall come “to all people,” and they find access to him.—I Cor. 3:16,17; Eph. 2:20-22; Gen. 28:14; Gal. 3:29

THAT MEANTIME THE CHISELING, SHAPING, AND POLISHING of the consecrated believers in Christ’s atonement for sin progresses, and when the last of these “living stones,” “elect and precious,” shall have been made ready, the great Master Workman will bring all together in the first resurrection; and the temple shall be filled with his glory, and be the meeting place between God and men throughout the Millennium.—Rev. 15:5-8

THAT THE BASIS OF HOPE FOR THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD lies in the fact that Jesus Christ, by the grace of God “tasted death for every man,” “a ransom for all,” and will be “the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world,” “in due time.”—Heb. 2:9; John 1:9; I Tim. 2:5,6

THAT THE HOPE OF THE CHURCH is that she may be like her Lord, “see him as he is,” be a “partaker of the divine nature,” and share his glory as his joint-heir.—I John 3:2; John 17:24; Rom. 8:17; II Pet. 1:4

THAT THE PRESENT MISSION OF THE CHURCH is the perfecting of the saints for the future work of service; to develop in herself every grace; to be God’s witness to the world; and to prepare to be the kings and priests in the next age.—Eph. 4:12; Matt. 24:14; Rev. 1:6, 20:6

THAT THE HOPE FOR THE WORLD lies in the blessings of knowledge and opportunity to be brought to all by Christ’s millennial kingdom—the restitution of all that was lost in Adam, to all the willing and obedient, at the hands of their Redeemer and his glorified church—when all the willfully wicked will be destroyed.—Acts 3:19-23; Isa. 35