

A Pure Language

***“Then I will turn to
the people a pure
language, that they
may all call upon
the name of the
LORD, to serve him
with one consent.”
—Zephaniah 3:9***

ON JULY 3, 2001, THERE appeared in the *U.S. News & World Report* magazine, under a section called *Vital Statistics*, a caption entitled *The Tower of Babel is Tumbling Down-Slowly*. The article said, “There are thousands of languages in the world, but most of them have few speakers compared with the major tongues. Some experts predict that between 50 and 90 percent of the world’s languages will become extinct this century. Languages

need at least 100,000 speakers to survive, a tall order as old cultures wane.”

They then proceeded to present the following statistics:

Number of languages in world: **about 6,800**

Languages that are nearing extinction: **372**

Languages that die out each year: **10**

Percentage of world’s languages spoken by 10,000 or fewer people: **50%**

By 1,000 or fewer: **25%**

Languages with fewer than 10 speakers: **184**

Languages listed with the most speakers in the world were as follows:

<u>Language</u>	<u>Number of Speakers</u>
Chinese(Mandarin)	1.2 billion
English	478 million
Hindi	437 million
Spanish	392 million
Russian	284 million
Arabic	225 million
Portuguese	184 million
French	125 million

The dying languages were listed as follows:

Canada

Han—The influx of outsiders during the Klondike Gold Rush of 1898 led to the language's decline.

Brazil

Katukina—Only one native speaker remains among the 300 or so Katukina left in five villages.

United States

Pawnee—Population was reduced by war and disease in the 1800s. Four speakers survive.

Peru

Taushiro—Few speakers remain. It's one of the only languages without consonant sounds like 'p,' 'b,' or 'm.'

In the May 27, 2003 issue of the *New York Times*, a similar topic appeared under the heading, *Fading Species and Dying Tongues: When the Two Part Ways*. The article said:

“For the past decade, scholars and political activists have been working to get the rest of us worried about the future of the world's 6,000 or so spoken languages. One tool is an analogy: languages with fewer and fewer speakers, they argue, are like species heading for extinction.

ENDANGERED LANGUAGES

“A paper published on May 15 in *Nature* gives the comparison a statistical basis. The analysis, by Prof. William J. Sutherland of the University of East Anglia, notes that when standard measures of species risk are applied to language communities, human tongues come out even more endangered than the animals.”

It is through the use of this analogy that concern has been raised about the extinction of languages. The article continued, saying:

“The metaphor of ‘endangered languages’ is both easy to grasp and appealing to the sense of fair play: fluent speakers of languages like Kasabe, Ona and Eyak are dying off, while their children and grand children increasingly speak languages like English, Chinese, Spanish or Swahili.

“Language preservationists have been using this analogy for years. The often-quoted question posed by Dr. Michael Krauss, an emeritus professor of linguistics at the University of Alaska, for instance, is: ‘Should we mourn the loss of Eyak or Ubykh less than the loss of the panda or the California condor?’

“It is no surprise that linguists and activists promote maintaining spoken languages. Just as the Poultry and Egg Council wants us to eat eggs, linguists want languages to study. I wonder, though, where science ends and politics begins.

“How, really, are the panda and Ubykh equivalent? The panda, once gone, is gone forever. If the information and political will are present, Ubykh can be revived 500 years from now. Hebrew, after all, was brought back from ancient texts into daily use after 2,000 years. Ubykh, a language of Turkey, is a human creation. The panda is not; it is our neighbor, not our invention.”

The article went on to explain the position that preservationists (of languages) have taken to try preserving dying languages. The writer of the article then concluded that preservationists did not have a strong argument for preserving languages and that they should not use the analogy of endangered languages to get support from the public.

THE ORIGIN OF LANGUAGES

The amazing part of the information published in the last two years is that we have as many as 6,000 languages. About 60 years ago it was known that the Bible had been translated into over 800 languages. That was a large number. At that time, it was estimated that 1,200 distinct language communities existed. Even then, it was not known whether dialects were included in the statistics. And it is still not known whether the 6,000 of today count dialects. Therefore, the extinction of a few languages does not make much of a change in the language barrier.

Library research reveals that our learned men have no satisfactory explanation for the existence of the language barrier. A few explanations have been suggested. None have had wide acceptance. None are popular. For the scientific community, the existence of a language barrier is an unknown quantity. Bible Students know that the language barrier is of Divine origin, imposed upon men by God. The events leading to the establishment of this barrier are recorded in Genesis 11:1-9. The time is

after the flood, and as we would expect, the Scriptures tell us, “The whole earth was of one language, and of one speech.” This was a logical condition because all people were descended from Noah and most likely spoke the same language as Adam. As the descendants of Noah multiplied and spread over the land, it appears that they remembered the catastrophic flood and united to avert another such tragedy. However, they forgot the covenant which God made with Noah, namely, that he would never destroy the world with another flood. Their plan seemingly was to build a city for safety, with a tower reaching high into the sky.

Detailed information is lacking, but we know the following:

1. The people had one language and were united. The one language was the basis of their unity.
2. They had a fear of being scattered abroad in the earth.
3. They were building a city and a name for themselves.

LANGUAGE BARRIER ERECTED

What is evident is that God was not considered in their planning. Their own wisdom was being used to accomplish their ends. God knew that the project would do more harm than good. Thus, when he beheld the works of these people, he said, “Behold, the people is one [united], and they have all one language [the basis of unity]; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.” (Gen. 11:6) And so, as recorded in the remaining verses, the Lord confounded their language so that they could not understand one another’s speech. This disorganized the people so completely that they never finished the task they had planned. The very event they feared might happen, did happen—they were scattered abroad on the face of the earth. The place became known as “Babel,” meaning confusion.

Why did God cause this to happen? One answer is that if the world was permitted to continue unhindered on their bent course of action, only more evil would result and the timing of events important to the Divine plan would have been affected. We cannot overlook Satan and the part that he has played in many of the world events. He clearly expressed his desire to be like the most high God. (Isa. 14:14) Satan not only usurped God’s authority upon Earth, but his purpose in gaining possession of mankind was to organize them in a great cooperative effort for

committing evil. It is not to Satan's advantage to have a disorganized mass of subjects. Jesus reasoned very logically concerning this point when being accused of casting out devils by Beelzebub (as recorded in Matthew 12:25,26), "Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself ... shall not stand: And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?" (See also Mark 3:24-26) It appears that one reason for the erection of the language barrier by God was directed against Satan, designed to frustrate his efforts to unite his subjects for greater evil. If God had not employed such controls, the Day of Wrath would have had to come centuries sooner, because conditions in the world would have been intolerable. As they become more intolerable in our day, it is an evidence of the proximity of God's kingdom.

There are other reasons why God had to prolong the time from the 'tower of Babel' to our day to accomplish his will. One was to fill the earth. A more important reason was to permit time for the selection of several classes of faithful people. One such class is the Church.

THE ORIGINAL LANGUAGE BARRIER

Another kind of language or communication barrier occurred when father Adam disobeyed God. Since the fall of mankind, a great language barrier has existed between God and man affecting communication and understanding. There is only one language spoken by God, and that is one whose ideas and emotions deal with righteousness! The Divine language is a pure language. When mankind through father Adam disobeyed, they stopped speaking God's language. And just as nations of different tongues develop different aims, ambitions, and ways of thinking, so also with mankind. They, too, have developed new aims, ambitions, and ways of thinking. All of this happened because of man's fall. Their speech became confounded and they became aliens and strangers to God, a condition described by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 2:2,12, "In time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air [the devil], the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience. That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world." Notice the use of the word 'aliens.' How can you tell

who is an alien? Answer—As soon as he speaks and his language is different.

Another place where man's condition is described in similar terms is in the Old Testament, Isaiah chapter 6. When the Prophet Isaiah saw a vision of God, his cry was, "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." (vs. 5) The Hebrew word translated 'lips' in this verse is the same word translated in Genesis 11 as 'language.' Isaiah's language was unclean in the sense that he was a fallen human who could not speak with his righteous Creator. In the account, one of the seraphims took a coal from the altar – (this could have been the brazen altar of the tabernacle where atonement day sacrifices were burned) – and touched Isaiah's lips, symbolically portraying a purifying action. "He laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged. Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me." (Isa. 6:7,8) Isaiah then became a man of 'clean lips,' symbolically, because his iniquity had been removed. But how could Isaiah's iniquity be removed without Jesus paying the ransom price? This was a vision intending to portray an event of the Gospel Age.

REMOVAL OF THE LANGUAGE BARRIER

Isaiah represented those who would be selected to speak for God, and the events of this chapter are intended to portray the experiences of the faithful of the Gospel Age. The Lord's people of today (Gospel Age) have become people of clean lips (or a clean language) because their iniquity has been removed through the ransom. All of us, by the grace of God, have been able to speak to God in a pure language because he has taught us his language of righteousness. As the Apostle Paul says, "Ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God."—Ephesians 2:19

When Jesus presented the merit of his sacrifice before the Father's throne, it made possible the sending of the promised Comforter, or Holy Spirit, upon the apostles. We would expect so important an event to be clearly indicated; and it was, by three distinct signs on the day of Pentecost, as the apostles waited in an upper room. One sign was that of

a mighty, rushing wind, which filled the room. “Suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.” (Acts 2:2) God’s invisible power, like a mighty rushing ‘wind,’ was to be employed on behalf of his people.

The second sign was like that of “cloven tongues” of fire over each of the apostles. They had been chosen by God to be his mouthpieces. These two signs indicated that the language barrier between God and the apostles—and all of his elect people, the church, who believed in Christ—had been removed. Now, because of the ransom, they would be able to speak God’s language of righteousness.

The third sign is described in Acts 2:4, “They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” In other words, the apostles began to speak in other languages. This sign meant that for the Church—and only for the Church—the language barrier had been removed. God could not wait until the invention of the printing press nor for the end of the age when knowledge and learning would be increased, and through which events it would be easier to cope with the language barrier. Instead, God removed, in a miraculous manner, all possible hindrance to full cooperation between his people and to the spread of the Gospel. The description of this event is continued in Acts 2:5-8, “There were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?”

NATIONS REPRESENTED ON DAY OF PENTECOST

The account in Acts tells us that those assembled in Jerusalem at Pentecost included representatives from every civilized nation in the world. He names some of these, “Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians.” If this were occurring today, the Scriptures would say that there were Norwegians, Swedes, Poles, Germans, Greeks, Russians,

Chinese, Japanese, naming all the prominent nations of today's world. Continuing, the account says, "We do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God." (vss. 9-11) Each of these heard illiterate and unlearned men (see Acts 4:13) speak in their language; not gibberish or anything unintelligible, but the great and 'wonderful works of God.' Have you ever wondered what these wonderful works of God might be? A sample is given in Peter's marvelous sermon on that day when he tells how Jesus fulfilled prophecies recorded in Psalms 16 and 110 through his resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus was a most wonderful work of God!

Continuing, the account says, "They were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this?" (Acts 2:12) Some, in not comprehending the other languages, other than their own, suggested that the apostles were drunk. Peter responded immediately, saying that they were not drunk and that men were unlikely to be drunk so early in the day. Rather, what they were witnessing was a fulfillment of Joel's remarkable prophecy in Joel 2:28,29. "It shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions: And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit." Although Peter quoted Joel's complete prophecy, only the latter part—the pouring out of his spirit on his servants and handmaidens—was being fulfilled. Before that day came to a close, 3,000 were immersed into the body of Christ. What a remarkable day!

GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

God continued to use the gift of speaking in other languages, or tongues, to establish the early church. But then, just as now, among some there was not a clear understanding as to why God used these remarkable gifts of the Spirit for his people. Paul used three chapters in I Corinthians—12, 13, and 14—to clarify the matter and give helpful reasons which are clearly listed.

It has been God's intention that no barrier should exist between any of his people. Rather, he has desired that they cooperate fully with one another because all members of the body of Christ are to be in harmony. (I Cor. 12) There were to be no differences of any kind, as Paul said in

Galatians 3:28, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.” And also in Colossians 3:11, “Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.”

For us the lesson is also of the need of cooperation. Are there any effects such as have arisen because of language barriers, or have we made differences or raised barriers of our own? Is there Pole or German? Swede or Englishman? Immigrant or native of the land? Young or old? Male or female? Do we understand why God has turned to us a pure language? Do we desire the Truth for a mere head knowledge, or an understanding with the heart? Are we doers, or mere hearers, of the Word? If, in asking ourselves these questions, the answers are in any way unfavorable, let us seek to tear down all barriers toward a fuller cooperation with all of the Lord’s people.

THE HOLY SPIRIT ON ALL FLESH

Although the church has had this wonderful experience of seeing language barriers torn down on their behalf, this has not been the world’s experience, even though they would want this to happen. The world has been kept behind these barriers, and will remain so, until the church is complete.

Among the many prophecies telling of the great Time of Trouble which comes upon the world in the end of this age is Zephaniah 3:8,9. “Wait ye upon me, saith the Lord, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy.” This prophecy is referring to the culmination of the Time of Trouble. But the prophecy continues, “Then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent.”

Note now the great trouble is followed by the turning ‘to the people a pure language.’ It is at that time that Joel’s prophecy will find its complete fulfillment, or when ‘God will pour out his Spirit upon all flesh.’ The removal of language barriers and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit go hand in hand. It will be then, and only then, that all flesh will be

willing to serve God with ‘one consent.’ With the pouring out of his Holy Spirit, God also will remove barriers of every kind, including the language barrier. The obstacles of this present evil world will also be removed. Satan will be bound to “deceive the nations no more.” (Rev. 20:3) And above all, through the ransom benefits, the nations will learn a language they have not known, which is of righteousness—which language they will cherish through all eternity, as they learn to speak with their God. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this!

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Endurance in God's Strength

Key Verse: "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations [trials]; Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience."

—James 1:2,3

*Lesson Scripture:
James 1:1-18*

THE APOSTLE JAMES, known as James the Less, to distinguish him from James, the son of Zebedee, wrote the epistle bearing his name. The other James was put to death by Herod early in the Christian church's experiences. (Acts 12:1,2) James the Less, along with his brother, Judas, sons of Alpheus (also known as Cleopas), were selected by Jesus to be apostles. After Jesus died, James became prominent among the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, serving as a chairman over their proceedings.

His letter was addressed to Jewish Christians scattered in the world. Exclusive favor was granted to Israel who had the opportunity to accept Jesus as the Messiah. (John 1:11,12) That exclusive favor ended in A.D. 36 with the conversion of Cornelius. (Acts 10) Those who were of the early gathering of Jews in Jerusalem suffered much persecution. In order to survive, they pooled their resources and used a communal arrangement. Some left Jerusalem to return to their own country to escape the persecution.—Acts 11:19

As the Gospel went to the Gentiles, some brethren in the Early Church thought that the new Gentile converts should observe the Law and be circumcised. Paul and Barnabas disagreed and, after a conference was held in Jerusalem (about A.D. 50) with James presiding, they agreed that the Gentiles should only have to observe four items of the Law. (Acts 15:20) Later, Paul wrote that an agreement was reached, that Paul and Barnabas should continue to serve the Gentiles and James, Cephas (Peter), and John would be apostles to the Jewish brethren. We do not know when James wrote his letter, but it is most likely after these events,

because he addressed his letter to the twelve tribes scattered among the Gentiles.

Persecution continued for the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem, as well as those in other parts of the world. The Gentile brethren, too, were persecuted. These words addressed by James to his Jewish brethren were equally applicable to the Gentile Christians. In the words of our Key Verse, James said, ‘count it all joy’ when these trials of faith come upon you of all kind. These trials develop cheerful endurance or patience. The development of the Christian character takes a long time and is best achieved through trouble. This is why Apostle Paul told the brethren that “we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.”—Acts 14:22

James assures us that we will receive much help from God in these trials. We should seek wisdom from him. Our seeking should be accompanied by much faith, for, as Paul reminds us, “without faith it is impossible to please him [God].” (Heb. 11:6) Also, the many trials that come our way should not be confused with temptations that could lead us astray, such as arising from lusts of the flesh. These are used by the Adversary to lead us towards death, and are not those coming from God.

If we succeed in overcoming these temptations we shall receive a “crown of life,” and be a part of the “firstfruits” of creation.—James 1:12,18

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Faith Means Action

***Key Verse: “Be ye doers
of the word, and not
hearers only, deceiving
your own selves.”
—James 1:22***

***Lesson Scriptures:
James 1:19 – 2:26;
5:7-20***

THE APOSTLE JAMES encouraged the development of faith and emphasized that praying to God was to be done in faith. He did not want anyone to interpret the development of faith as passive. On the contrary, he emphasized that faith without works “is dead.” (James 2:17) He used the illustration of brethren being in need of shelter and food, and if these are told to have faith but are not given

shelter, clothing or food they will not be able to receive the spiritual words of comfort. Hence, faith alone is not enough. There must be action to support it.

He emphasized the importance of the ‘royal law’ of love, taken from Leviticus 19:18, “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” This is brought to our attention by reminding us of the typical human failing wherein preferential treatment is given to the rich and well-known, while the poor are shamefully treated. We should not be partial toward anyone, but have equal love for all the brethren.

James calls this law a “royal law” (James 2:8) because it is the law of the King of the universe, namely God the great supreme Creator. It is also a royal law because it belongs to the one designated to be King of Kings and Lord of Lords. (Rev. 19:16) This is the law of God’s kingdom to be established on earth. The citizens of that kingdom are to put this law into practice and become doers of the Word.

The wrong application of God’s Word is likened to hearing the Word and not doing, or acting upon it. Those who look into the perfect law of liberty and patiently remember what they see, or hear God’s Word and put into practice those things they have heard, will be blessed in their doing.

As people hear God's Word they develop a religion. James reminds us that if we think of ourselves as being religious—attenders to God's Word—our religion would be worthless if we failed to control our tongue. He then defines pure religion as being when we look after widows and orphans in their distress, and are kept from being polluted by the world. This is a simple definition of religion, but again it highlights the action that must be taken as we hear God's Word.—James 1:26,27

In each of these lessons of faith in action the example of those in need was used. If we are to please God we must supplement our faith by the action we would expect him to take. We must help those in need and distress.

Towards the end of chapter 5, the Apostle James reviews the lesson of patience and endurance for those enduring trials, and cites the examples and life experiences of faithful men of old, such as Job and Elijah. He then gives advice to those experiencing difficulties in fighting the lust of the flesh and Satan's attacks. He advocates use of prayers for one another. Many have supposed that James was alluding to physical sickness when he asked, "Is any sick among you?" (James 5:14) He was alluding to spiritual sickness because, after using prayer to restore such an one, James also adds, "If he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him." (vs. 15) As he mentions at the conclusion of his letter, those who err from the Truth and are converted through prayers escape death and a multitude of sins.—vss. 19,20

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Living Wisely

***Key Verse: “Who is wise
and understanding
among you? Let him
show it by his good life,
by deeds done in the
humility that comes
from wisdom.”***

***—James 3:13, New
International Version***

***Lesson Scripture:
James 3***

THE APOSTLE JAMES gives good, solid advice for Christian living in his epistle. He starts with the need to accept trials as a necessary part of gaining the crown of life. He reminds us that we will need patience in all of our trials, and that we should seek for wisdom from the giver of every good and perfect gift in full assurance of faith. Now he advises us on how we should live wisely and well by controlling a small, but unruly, member of the body—the tongue.

He uses many effective illustrations on how we can control our bodies by control of the tongue. One is the bit put in the horse’s mouth to enable the rider to steer the body of the horse. Another is the rudder of a large ship which is used to steer the ship. The tongue, if used correctly, can steer us in the right direction. If not controlled by the new mind, it can cause great harm. James reminds us that with the tongue we can praise God, and curse men who are in God’s image. The tongue can be destructive, and James uses the illustration of a spark burning up a large forest.

He says, “The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.” (vs. 6) James is reminding us how destructive the tongue can be. When we use slander, and speak evil of someone, even by insinuations or hints, we destroy character, and this is a good picture of the tongue setting ‘on fire.’ It is interesting to note that James says ‘it [the tongue] is set on fire of hell.’ The word translated hell is not the usual *hades* in the Greek, but rather the word *gehenna*. This is a word associated with second death or

complete destruction. The warning is that such destructive use of the tongue could lead to second death.

In beginning his lesson on the tongue, James says, “Do not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that we shall receive a severer judgment.” (vs. 1, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*) The elders, or teachers of the church, are like the tongues, or spokesmen, of the church. It is important that their knowledge should be imparted with the Spirit of Christ. Hence, these warnings and advice for wise living by the Apostle James apply not only to members of the church, but to its elders as well.

His concluding remarks emphasize that bitter envyings and strife are an expression of wisdom that is “sensual” and “devilish,” that does not come from above—from God. (vss. 14-16) Rather, “the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.” (vs. 17) If our tongues seek to express God’s wisdom, we can be assured that we are living wisely.

In God’s kingdom there will be consistency, as the new body which people will receive will control the tongue. James asks, “Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.” (James 3:11,12) So also shall the words of our Key Verse be applied by all who will live wisely.

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Humility is Next to Godliness

Key Verse: “*Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.*”
—*James 4:10*

Lesson Scripture:
James 4

THE THREE OPPONENTS of the narrow way to life, for the Christians God is selecting in the Gospel Age as a people for his name (Acts 15:14), are his own flesh, the world, and the Devil. All three are mentioned in chapter four of this epistle, which begins by saying, “What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You want

something but don’t get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God.”—James 4:1,2, *New International Version*

Then, when we decide to go to God, we still don’t get what our selfish desires want, because of being motivated by the lusts of the flesh, and so James says, “When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.” (vs. 3, *NIV*) Thus we see that our own flesh, our selfish desires, are a hindrance to our walk in the narrow way.

Our flesh, in turn, gets influenced by the world and its ambitions and standards. The church is pictured as a “chaste virgin” because she remains unspotted from the world. (II Cor. 11:2) To become involved with the world is likened to committing adultery. James says, “You adulterous people, don’t you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely? But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” (vss. 4-6, *NIV*) The key to overcoming the world’s influence is to be humble. A good definition of humility is not to think too highly of oneself, or too lowly. Rather, it is to have a sober estimate of ourselves, and then God can use us.

The Scriptures properly tell us that “pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.” (Prov. 16:18) This has been proven to be true from time immemorial in man’s existence on earth. At first a haughty spirit causes a downfall. If the lesson is not learned, and pride becomes engrained in a character, it will lead to destruction or second death. The Scriptures also say, “Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honour is humility.” (Prov. 18:12) God cannot give honor unless humility is demonstrated.

The final enemy of the New Creation is the Devil. He is the master mind who seeks to use our own flesh and the world to oppose God’s influence in us. James gives us a very simple solution to handling the Devil by telling us to “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” (vs. 7) Pride is the favorite tool of the Adversary. He seeks to use it on every occasion. The Scriptures say of him, “Thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: ... I will be like the most High.” (Isa. 14:13,14) When we recognize how Satan and pride are so completely associated together, we will seek to resist pride coming into our hearts, and in so doing will resist the Devil. To such, God will indeed give grace.

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God, the Creator

*“In the beginning
God created the
heaven and the
earth.”
—Genesis 1:1*

THROUGHOUT ALL THE centuries the wise and the learned have endeavored to pry into the secrets of Creation and explain how the great universe came into existence—how, out of nothing, there came countless billions of worlds; myriad forms of life—plant and animal—and why so much law and order is displayed in it all. Try as they may, however, human philosophers have not been able to produce an explanation so simple, yet so profound and full of meaning, as that contained in the ten words of our text—‘In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.’

AN INTELLIGENT SUPREME CREATOR

The truthfulness of these words is more universally acknowledged today than ever before. Even the great Professor Einstein, once agnostic, confessed in the later years of his life that his increasing scientific knowledge had led him to the conviction that there is an intelligence displayed throughout the universe which he was glad to acknowledge and honor. Einstein, together with other great scientists, was unable to accept the crude conceptions of God handed down to a credulous world from the Dark Ages; but despite this handicap to belief, they came to see unmistakable evidence of supreme intelligence in what they formerly spoke of merely as the works of nature.

“There is a God—all nature speaks; through earth, and air, and seas, and skies.” (Hymns of Dawn, page 292) ‘All nature’ does testify that there is a God, a supreme and intelligent Creator. The best commentary on this approach to an understanding of the great characteristics of God is the one found in the Book of Job, chapters thirty-eight through forty-one. Job was a servant of God, the God who in ‘the beginning’ created ‘the heaven and the earth.’ Calamity came upon him. He lost almost everything in life which contributes to happiness, including his health. His friends insisted that he was being punished for gross sins which he

had secretly committed. Job denied this, yet was unable to understand why his God was allowing him to suffer.

This controversy between Job and his friends continues through many chapters of the book. Then, as the record states, “The Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said, Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me.” (Job 38:1-3) The long series of questions which God asks Job bring out the many points which, because human wisdom does not know the answer, should help even the most skeptical to realize the truthfulness of David’s words, “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.”—Ps. 14:1

“Where wast thou,” God asked Job, “when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof; When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?” (Job 38:4-7) Job was a wise man, with much experience. He knew that the construction of homes and other buildings required planning. Foundations had to be laid, and securely anchored. Job was accustomed to celebrations when the cornerstone of a new building was laid.

Job knew that everything made by man required planning and skill. Houses and cities—and in our day intricate machinery, television, jet planes, and other modern marvels—do not ‘just happen.’ The earth, the home of all mankind, had been created without Job, or other men, having anything to do with it. He was not present when the foundations were laid. He had no part in the architectural design and measurements. Nevertheless, he knew it existed. This marvelous display of wisdom and design should help us to realize, as doubtless it did Job, that there must have been a Divine Architect and Builder with intelligence and power, far superior to his own.

THE LAWS OF GOD

Then the Lord reminded Job of some of the details connected with the creation of the earth. He asked, “Who shut up the sea with doors, when it brake forth, as if it had issued out of the womb? When I made the cloud the garment thereof, and thick darkness a swaddlingband for it, ... and

set bars and doors, And said, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed?”—vss. 8-11

The marvels of the sea! How seldom we think of the miracle-working power of God in connection with the ebb and flow of the oceans’ tides! The tides, we say, are controlled largely by the gravitational pull of the moon. But what does that mean? What is gravitation? Sir Isaac Newton discovered the laws of gravitation, but who framed the laws and implemented them? There are times when heavy winds locally increase the height of the tides a few feet, and those living near the shore flee for their lives. Seldom do they realize that ordinarily they can dwell safely by the sea only because God has decreed, ‘Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed.’

Next, Job was asked, “Hast thou commanded the morning since thy days; and caused the dayspring to know his place?” (vs. 12) Job, seemingly, was rather a prominent man in his community, one who exercised considerable authority, but he had no control over the rising of the sun. ‘Hast thou commanded the morning since thy days?’ Job knew that from the earliest days of his recollection the sun had risen and set without his having anything to do with it. He realized also that this was true of the generations before him. He knew that man at no time ever had any control over the movements of the sun, the moon, the stars, or the earth. This was far beyond the ability of man. This was the work of God!

“Have the gates of death been opened unto thee,” Job, “or hast thou seen the doors of the shadow of death?” (vs. 17) Men and women of all ages have endeavored to peer beyond death, to know what lies beyond the grave. Apart from the revelation given to us in the Word of God, which assures us of a resurrection of the dead, no one has found the answer. Just as the mystery of Creation is explainable only in the light of the fact that there is a supreme, intelligent Creator, so the desire for life after death becomes a genuine hope only because the One who created life has promised to restore the dead to life. The several biblical accounts of the awakening of various ones from death are therefore proofs of the existence of God, the God who created the heaven and the earth.

Here is another intriguing question: “Where is the way where light dwelleth? and as for darkness, where is the place thereof, That thou shouldest take it to the bound thereof, and that thou shouldest know the

paths to the house thereof? Knowest thou it, because thou wast then born? or because the number of thy days is great?” (vss. 19-21) What is light, what is darkness? The light of day replaces the darkness of night, but where does the one go, when the other takes it place? God asked Job if he knew the dwelling place of light, just where it stayed while its place was occupied by darkness. A foolish question? By no means! With all our modern scientific knowledge, no one has yet been able to give an adequate definition of light, or of darkness. Like electricity, which we know exists, but cannot clearly define, so are light and darkness. But God knows, for he created them. It was God who said, “Let there be light: and there was light.”—Gen. 1:3

The Lord continued to question Job, asking him about a number of things described by unbelievers as the ‘works of nature’—things which, to those who believe in God, are frequently overlooked as proof of his existence. We quote, “Who hath divided a watercourse for the overflowing of waters, or a way for the lightning of thunder; To cause it to rain on the earth, where no man is; on the wilderness, wherein there is no man; To satisfy the desolate and waste ground; and to cause the bud of the tender herb to spring forth? Hath the rain a father? or who hath begotten the drops of dew? Out of whose womb came the ice? and the hoary frost of heaven, who hath gendered it?”—vss. 25-29

The obvious answer to all these questions is that there must be a supreme, intelligent Creator who designed and created water, and who also planned the means by which it would reach the ground and give life to vegetation. Most of us have witnessed with pleasure the revival of plants, or of grass, when water is provided; but do we realize that these are miracles, made possible because all the elements involved were designed and made by God, who in the beginning created the heaven and earth?

How marvelous is the arrangement by which the water created by God reaches the dry places. As we know, it is by the evaporation of the water of oceans and lakes, the moisture ascending to form clouds which are distributed over the land, and which, by changes of temperature in the air currents, are caused to release their refreshing waters in the form of rain and snow. Reaching the earth, the water finds its way back into the oceans and lakes to continue the cycle. Scientific instruments of today tell us

how all this happens, but the real power, or forces, which contribute to make it possible are still unexplainable.

Shifting the focus of his questions from purely mundane things to heavenly bodies, God asked Job, “Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion? Canst thou bring forth Mazzaroth in his season? or canst thou guide Arcturus with his sons? Knowest thou the ordinances of heaven? canst thou set the dominion thereof in the earth?”—vss. 31-33

The implied lesson in these questions is more striking today than it was to Job. Job was a wise man for his time, but astronomical knowledge had not advanced to the degree now enjoyed. Calculations now made possible by powerful telescopes have revealed the minute accuracy of time and distances involved in the movement of the heavenly bodies, giving evidence that they are held in their course, and at constant speeds, by the power and design of a supreme intelligence unexplainable by man.

Without going into detail as to the particular references to Pleiades, Orion, Mazzaroth, and Arcturus, the main point of the lesson is that neither Job nor we can possibly change the course of a single planet, sun, or star. Nor do we understand the governing forces which control ‘the ordinances of heaven,’ nor the manner in which their influences are felt in the earth. But God knows, for he created both the heaven and the earth, and designed their relationship to each other.

Dawn Bible Students Association

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Exceeding Great and Precious Promises

“Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

—II Peter 1:4,11

THESE ARE SUPERLATIVE expressions—‘exceeding great and precious promises,’ and an entrance ‘abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord.’ Then there are others assuring us that God “is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think,” and “is able to make all grace abound” toward us. (Eph. 3:20; II Cor. 9:8) Many similar statements are also frequently recorded in the Scriptures. They are generally in relation to what our Lord and our Heavenly Father will bestow upon those who put their trust in him.

The Apostle Peter’s salutation at the commencement of his letter is, “Grace and peace be multiplied unto you,” who “have obtained like precious faith ... through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.” (II Pet. 1:1,2)

The Apostle Paul also uses similar expressions to strengthen the statements referring to the attainment of glory.

In contrasting our afflictions with the glory to be received, Paul says, “Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”—II Cor. 4:17

We have a wonderful promise of God through the prophet Malachi. “Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not

open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.”—Mal. 3:10

It is like our Heavenly Father to give freely. The measure is pressed down, shaken together, running over. His love has no limit; his grace has no measure; his power no boundary known to men. Out of his infinite riches in Jesus, he giveth and giveth and giveth again. Jesus said to the people, God is full of mercy and compassion, “kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.” (Luke 6:35) He admonished his followers to be the same, “Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.”—Luke 6:36

Peter states that God “hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue.” (II Pet. 1:3) Nothing has been forgotten, or omitted, to complete the call. ‘Whereby [or for which purpose] are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world.’

Many of these promises are conditional. Peter says, If you cultivate the graces of the spirit, you will “neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” If these things be in you and abound, “ye shall never fall.” (II Pet. 1:8,10) And since Jesus said, “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit” (John 15:8), it behooves all his followers to have fruit-bearing as their great objective so that they might have an entrance ‘abundantly into the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.’ And so we wish to reflect on what is really the fruitage our Heavenly Father is looking for in us, and to encourage ourselves in reaching out for that which will glorify and honor him as well as prepare us for an abundant entrance into that heavenly kingdom.

The promises given to us from God and our Lord cover every feature and phase of our spiritual and temporal experiences. It was so with the patriarchs and prophets. We are exhorted to be followers of them who, through faith and patience, inherit the promises given for them.—James 5:10,11

For the comfort and encouragement of the followers of Christ Jesus during the Gospel Age we read, “Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel,

confirmed it by an oath: That ... we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us [in the promises]: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered.”—Heb. 6:17-20

Let us recall a few of the hundreds of these great and precious promises by means of which we become partakers of the Divine nature, changed from human to spiritual, realizing that God himself is the Author of this great change, and is operating within us. “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we [begotten ones] should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.”—James 1:18

The faithful people of old saw many of these afar off, these great promises we are privileged to see in our day, many of them now in course of fulfillment. Like the patriarchs, we should be “persuaded of them,” and embrace them, confessing that we are strangers and pilgrims upon the earth.—Heb. 11:13

To Abraham, God promised, “In blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; ... And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” (Gen. 22:17,18) The apostle, in Galatians, referring to this great promise, reminds us that God said not of “seeds, as of many, but as of one, ... which is Christ.” “If ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”—Gal. 3:16,29

“The Lord will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.”—Ps. 84:11

“They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength.”—Isa. 40:31

“Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee.”—Ps. 55:22

“My God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.”—Phil. 4:19

“Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee.”—Isa. 26:3

Jesus promised, “He that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.”—John 6:35

“I am the living bread ... if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever.”—John 6:51

“Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”—
Rev. 2:10

“Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me. ...
The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me.”—Ps. 138:7,8

“He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy
ways.”—Ps. 91:11

“In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would
have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go ... I will come
again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be
also.”—John 14:2,3

“I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say,
The Lord is my helper.”—Heb. 13:5,6

“What he had promised, he was able also to perform.”—Rom. 4:21

“Having therefore these promises, ... let us cleanse ourselves from all
filthiness, ... perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”—II Cor. 7:1

Why are we so slow to believe these wonderful words of life, joy,
comfort, and peace—these exceeding great and precious promises of
present spiritual inheritance? Be assured, dear brethren, these promises
are not given to excite a vague hope of some future mirage or prospective
phantom, or ever-failing vehicle of anticipation. They are predetermined
promises of God himself to you and to me as his children, that we might
be satisfied in that lifelong urge of soul to become New Creatures in
Christ Jesus. We become a New Creation, not barren nor unfruitful, but
complete and ready for an entrance abundantly into the kingdom, the
heavenly kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

In the first Psalm, the psalmist beautifully illustrates how we can
become complete in Christ. The psalm is a commendation of a godly life
and what can make a man God-fearing, or spiritually minded. It opens
with an expression of admiration for the man who lives a godlike life,
which it proceeds to describe in a simple and engaging manner by telling
what such a man avoids, what he delights in, and what he resembles. The
first verse is how happy, or blessed, “is the man that walketh not ..., nor
standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.”—
Ps. 1:1

By such the laws of nature are revered, and the slightest revelation from the Word of his God he will welcome and obey. In this day of enlightenment he will be so happy to know Christ that he will find in him the spirit and source of all love.

Christ Jesus and his Word will be the law of his being, and toward the Word of Christ Jesus his mind and heart will gravitate. In the Lord he will discover his songs of hope, joy, and peace continually. “His delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night.” Such a one comes directly under the care of the great Husbandman. “He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, ... his leaf [or profession] also shall not wither.”—vss. 2,3

Jesus, using the figure of a well of water, reveals similar expressions and observations of the life of such a one. “Out of his belly,” Jesus said, “shall flow rivers of living water.” (John 7:38) To the woman of Samaria Jesus declared, “Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.”—John 4:14

A deep well drains its water not from the surface only. It depends on rain and natural streams. Its resources are mighty oceans. And so this man of Psalm 1 draws his supplies of refreshment and life from his Creator, and with David can say, “All my springs are in thee.”—Ps. 87:7

To the Lord’s dear people today come the words of Paul. “[I] cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers,” he wrote, “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him.” (Eph. 1:16,17) As the mind and heart is filled and fed with the things of God and of Christ Jesus our Lord, being aware also of the blessings of life that will presently flow to all mankind, life in the truest sense finds a swelling, springing up within, which finds expression through the tongue.

All the promises, these great and precious promises and assurances from the Word of God, are productive of faith—strong and enduring faith. Peter continues concerning the promises by which one can be partaker of the Divine nature by saying, “Beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith” other virtues—fortitude, knowledge, temperance (self-control), patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. “For,” he adds, “if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall

neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (II Pet. 1:5-8) And “herein is my Father glorified,” said Jesus, “that ye bear much fruit.”—John 15:8

Faith alone is not sufficient to insure an entrance abundantly into the kingdom. Other virtues need to be secured and maintained to the end. For this reason, how necessary it is to accept the apostle’s word and give all diligence to regulate our conduct of life in furnishing faith with these virtues, by making all our contributions of effort and faith answer to the promises that God has so graciously given to assist us in this objective.

The Bible is full of examples of faith for our benefit. Abraham stands out admirably in this respect. “By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.” (Heb. 11:8) Under hopeless circumstances he hopefully believed. It was as though Abraham said, to sight, ‘Stand back;’ to the laws of nature, ‘Hold your peace;’ and to a misgiving heart, ‘Silence, thou tempter, I still believe God.’ “By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: ... accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.”—Heb. 11:17,19

Having Abraham as our example of faith, let us add to, or intensify, our faith with fortitude. This implies strength of will, the power of resistance, an element of character generally admired. We need it early in our walk of faith, and all along our pilgrim way. It encourages singleness of purpose, firm decisions of acceptance and resistance, whereas “a double minded man is unstable in all his ways.”—James 1:8

Daniel is a great example of fortitude. He proposed in his heart not to defile himself with the king’s meat or wine. (Dan. 1:8) He knew the writing was signed by the king that “whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days,” save of the king; he was to be cast into the den of lions. (Dan. 6:7) Knowing this, Daniel went into his house, and his windows being open, he kneeled three times a day and prayed, and gave thanks before God, as he did aforetime.—vs. 10

Let us have the same spirit of confidence and restfulness—unmoved, unperturbed, strong and faithful—as did Daniel. Let us emulate these stalwarts of faith and fortitude. “Dare to be a Daniel; dare to stand alone;

dare to have a purpose firm; and dare to make it known.” “Take heed, and be quiet; fear not, neither be fainthearted.”—Isa. 7:4

KNOWLEDGE

Peter exhorts us to add to faith, or intensify, our knowledge. Knowledge is always open for growth, and is a gathering of facts. Christian knowledge is knowing God, his Word, his purposes, as they relate to us who have faith in him, and as those recorded purposes relate to the world. To all those who accept the Word of God and the exceeding great and precious promises it means spiritual knowledge, spiritual discernment of what is wise, just, right, true, philosophical, in all the activities of God, especially so in our devotion to God and his Word.—John 7:17; 17:3

The Apostle Paul wrote, “Be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.” (I Cor. 14:20) He prayed for all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, “that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment,” or spiritual understanding, discernment. (Phil. 1:9) Knowledge is most certainly a treasured virtue and should be increased and broadened and diffused for the benefit of others; but knowledge misused or misapplied quickly makes shipwreck of its possessor, and finally leads to disaster.

Solomon was a great example of knowledge; that is, in his early days, at his coronation. Listen to his replies. “O Lord, my God, ... I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in. ... Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people? And the speech pleased the Lord.” (I Kings 3:7-10) Let us maintain this humility and meekness of Solomon.

SELF-CONTROL

Peter says to add to knowledge, or intensify, self-control, or “temperance,” that virtue which keeps one moderate, gentle, properly balanced. Paul says, “Let your moderation [gentleness, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*] be known unto all.” (Phil. 4:5) Be gentle, show meekness to all. (Titus 3:2) “Every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things.” (I Cor. 9:25) Paul says also, “I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection.”—I Cor. 9:27

Peter, in his later years, was a wonderful example and pattern for us, in growth of grace and in the virtue of self-control. Naturally, as a man, he was a strange character in many ways. We bring him to your notice for encouragement and comfort. At first he was impetuous, bold, courageous; he was also fearful, slow to perceive, quick to speak, self-thinking; but he was deeply sincere. All these traits are so noticeable in his earlier life.—Matt. 16:16,22; 18:21; 19:27

But from Pentecost onward, when the Holy Spirit of God took possession of his mind and heart, Peter made rapid strides in temperance, self-control, courage, and firmness, manifesting a soberness of faith worthy to copy. He was then an established saint, becoming a pastor of the church, exhorting to traits of character and qualities of mind, many of which he least exemplified prior to Pentecost.

Note his exhortations, “Be ye holy [saith God]; for I am holy.” (I Pet. 1:16) “Gird up the loins of your mind, be sober.” (I Pet. 1:13) “Decorate the hidden man of the heart with what is incorruptible—a meek and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.” (I Pet. 3:4, *WED*) Let us take heart that Peter was a mirror of ourselves, and he was enabled by the Spirit and grace of God to triumph. His secret of success was sincere devotion and love for his Lord. If we have similar traits of character, we shall triumph also.

PATIENCE

Peter again says, add to self-control, or intensify, the virtue of patience. Patience is that grace which enables one to bear affliction and calamity with calmness and cheerful constancy of mind. Patience is the power of endurance. “Tribulation worketh patience.” (Rom. 5:3) “In your patience possess ye your souls.”—Luke 21:19

Joseph was a beautiful example of patience. James says, “Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.”—James 5:10,11

Joseph waited many years from the time he was sold to the Ishmaelites until he received his father at the palace of Pharaoh. The many and distressing experiences which he encountered without complaint, and

with pity and mercy toward his brethren, will stand out as a beacon light to all the earth throughout the world's judgment day. The incidents in Joseph's life indicate he was a lovable boy, a father's boy, with his mother's traits of affection for those whom he loved. It would have been easy and natural for him to pine, languish, and to long for parents, home, and homeland, but he remained patient.

It was undoubtedly in his power to have gained leave from Pharaoh's court to visit home, but there is no record of such a request. He was cruelly and unjustly charged by Potiphar's wife, submitted to wrongful imprisonment, and waited even when his brethren arrived, and he knew them. He remained silent for two years before disclosing that he was their brother. (Gen. 45:6) Finally, in assuring his brethren with respect to their treachery, his reply was, "God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance."—Gen. 45:7

GODLINESS

To patience, Peter exhorts to add godliness. This enables one possessing such a valued virtue to view every experience from the Divine standpoint; to take an exalted position for discernment of every experience; to be seated with Christ in the heavenlies. (Eph. 2:6) How often we find our judgment of men and things changed when so seated. How often have our second thoughts disapproved what our first apprehension of things (upon a sudden provocation) has suggested.

When storms arise in our breast, let us wait for the second, surer report which our judgment shall bring in from the still small voice of reason and conscience. Those possessing godliness are inclined to peace, and opposed to strife. They are dignified, just, majestic. If you are with them long, you are impressed with their influence, and the beauty of their minds. "The Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself."—Ps. 4:3

It was so with David, a man after God's own heart. We read that David behaved himself wisely. (I Sam. 18:5) David's heart smote him for cutting off part of Saul's robe, and he said, "The Lord forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the Lord's anointed." (I Sam. 24:6) David's consideration, love, and keenness of responsibility for his parents is very manifest when he went to the King of Moab and said, "Let my father and my mother ... be with you, till I know what God will do for me. ... and

they dwelt with him [the king] all the while that David was in the hold.” (I Sam. 22:3,4) God was with David in battle, prayer, persecution, and kingship. He was a type of the church, who also are copies at heart of God’s dear Son.

BROTHERLY KINDNESS

We are to add to godliness, or intensify, brotherly kindness. This is a virtue, or characteristic, that possesses an affinity for others of like mind, in spiritual things it is manifest in affinity of fellowship, assembly, equal sonship, care, concern, as shielder and helper. Paul was one of our examples for such a virtue. Paul’s letters are full of brotherliness—his care for all the churches (II Cor. 11:28); his exhortation to others to be kindly affectioned (Rom. 12:10); his desire that brotherly love should continue (Heb. 13:1)—all prove Paul’s faith and fidelity.

GODLY LOVE

And we cover all the virtues with love; that virtue which emanated originally from God. God is love; a love which possesses no other motive than good; a love that is sacrificial, forbearing, merciful, constraining to assist the good, abhorring that which is evil.

Christ Jesus our Lord is our example, copy and pattern. God, our Heavenly Father, is the Creator and the Potter who shapes our lives. “Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.” (II Cor. 8:9) Jesus was prompted by love to do this, as it is written, “The love of Christ, ... passeth knowledge.” (Eph. 3:19) “He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.” (I John 4:16) Of Christ Jesus it is said, “Having loved his own ..., he loved them unto the end.”—John 13:1

These, brethren, are the furnishings of faith. These virtues make one’s faith complete in Christ. Without these virtues or characteristics, hope of joint-heirship with Christ is vague. Paul urges that we reach the stature of a full-grown man in Christ. (Eph. 4:13) Faith in the exceeding great and precious promises requires growth to maturity in Christlikeness in order to be assured of an entrance abundantly into the eternal kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Faith, to be complete, must show its fruit, or works. Faith without works is like an empty house. It is well built on a good foundation, beautifully situated, but for habitation it needs furnishings; and so it is with our faith. Peter assures us if these things—these virtues—be in us and abound, they make us that we shall be neither barren nor unfruitful. These are the virtues of faith that produce fruit; that is, fruitage of character, fruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things [add these qualities, or furnishings to faith—which is the fruit gained by embracing the exceeding great and precious promises], ye shall never fall. For so [or because of which] an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”—II Pet. 1:9,10

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The Marriage of the King's Daughter

*“The king’s daughter
is all glorious within:
her clothing is of
wrought gold. She
shall be brought unto
the king in raiment of
needlework.”
—Psalm 45:13,14*

AS FULLY CONSECRATED children of God, we are living in a solemn time. It is the time of final testing, prior to our induction into the marriage feast as members of the bride of the Son of our Heavenly Father, the King of the universe—if indeed, we shall be counted worthy.

“Behold, the bridegroom!” (Matt. 25:6) He is now present, and by faith we look forward and see the marriage

splendor within the open door, even as the Revelator writes, “The marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.”—Rev. 19:7

A POETIC PICTURE

Our attention is drawn to one of those beautiful figures by which the close and precious relationship between Christ and his elect church is scripturally portrayed. Whether it be the figure of the Captain and his soldiers; the Shepherd and his sheep; the Master and his servants; the Bridegroom and the bride; each illustration of our Lord’s relationship to the true church teaches its own valuable lesson.

The picture of the Bridegroom and bride is very important, as it brings to our mental vision our Lord, the King’s Son, highly exalted to Jehovah’s right hand in the throne, and the church in glory, his queen, to be associated with him in his glorious Millennial Kingdom reign, and for ages to come. The study of these various pictures of heavenly things is intended to lift the minds of the New Creation from earthly hopes, aims, and ambitions, to heavenly things. As it is written, “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”—supremely that is, with all their heart, mind, and being.—I Cor. 2:9

HEAVENLY JOYS

Heavenly joys belong to the King’s Son, the Lamb of God, and “the bride, the Lamb’s wife.” (Rev. 21:9) Those who would enter into this joy unspeakable, must faithfully comply with the conditions laid down in the inspired Word of God, revealed to those who accept the offer, or invitation, to become the bride of Christ. These, as the psalmist directs, must “incline” their ear.—Ps. 45:10

The Gospel Age is set apart in the Divine plan for the calling out and developing, testing and proving of the ‘bride,’ consisting of 144,000 members. (Rev. 14:1) The kingdom is a great prize which the Father bestows upon his beloved Son, and this is to be shared by the glorified church, the bride of Christ.

It is revealed in the Scriptures that God is selecting a bride for his Son, even as illustrated in the case of Abraham choosing a bride for his son Isaac, through his servant Eliezer. Abraham typifies God, the Heavenly Father; Isaac his son, pictures God’s dear Son; Eliezer his servant, the Holy Spirit.

Jesus has indicated that no man cometh unto the Son except the Father draw, or invite, him. (John 6:44) This he does through the Holy Spirit operating in connection with the Holy Scriptures. Through his holy influence we have been espoused “to one husband,” that we may be presented “a chaste virgin to Christ.” (II Cor. 11:2) Therefore, we must have respect unto this espousal, or engagement, and maintain our purity, if we would finally be presented to the glorious Bridegroom, and be associated with him in his great kingdom reign.

THE JEWISH WEDDING CUSTOM

The act of espousal, or betrothal, under the established Jewish custom was celebrated by a feast, at which the bridegroom placed a ring on the finger of the bride-elect. A ring is a symbol of faithfulness. Being endless, and being placed on the finger, indicated that the contract was a binding one, and could not be violated without grave consequences to the offending person. Faithfulness must be maintained.

When the Heavenly Father calls, or invites, us to fully consecrate ourselves, we become espoused to his Son. A contract is entered into, God sealing it by the Holy Spirit. This signifies his acceptance of us as the prospective bride of his dear Son, binding us to be faithful to our covenant even “unto death.”—Rev. 2:10

Under the Jewish custom an interval elapsed, usually about a year, between the betrothal and the marriage. During this period the bride would embroider her robe, make herself ready, typifying how the espoused bride of the Lamb must build the necessary character, develop the required fruitage of the Holy Spirit, work out, figuratively speaking, the various fruits on her wedding garment.

During this period, the Jewish bride-elect continued to live at the house of her father, as does the espoused bride of Christ, all communications being carried on through a friend of the bridegroom, picturing the Holy Spirit. The bride-elect was even then regarded as the wife of her future husband, so that faithfulness was demanded.

The essence of the whole arrangement, however, consisted in the final removal of the bride-elect from her father’s house to the home of the bridegroom’s father. Here is an illustration of how the espoused bride of Christ will be taken from her father’s house—the Adamic house, or earthly, temporary abiding place—to the home of her bridegroom’s Father, the heavenly, spiritual abode.

In effect our heavenly Bridegroom has said, “I go and prepare a place for you,” my beloved espoused bride, and after I have done this, I will return to your father’s house for you and take you with me to the mansion which I have been engaged in preparing for you while you have been making yourself ready—embroidering your wedding garment with the rich fruitage of the Spirit.—John 14:3

The distinctive feature of the bride’s attire was the robe furnished, which covered her entire person. This robe was of white linen, representative of purity, righteousness, and was embroidered with gold thread, symbolic of the Divine nature. It was covered, also, with exquisite perfume—“All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia.” (Ps. 45:8) The bride was further adorned with jewels, “as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels”—the “new Jerusalem, ... prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”—Isa. 61:10; Rev. 21:2

THE KING'S GRACIOUS ARRANGEMENT

The Scriptures reveal to us the requirements whereby we might enter into this exceeding great honor of becoming the bride-elect of the only begotten Son of the King of the universe. At the onset it is made clear that our own righteousness is but “filthy rags.” (Isa. 64:6) These in no sense would commend us to the King and make us presentable before the presence of his glory, and acceptable as the prospective bride of his dear Son.

Therefore, he devised a way whereby he could “be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” (Rom. 3:26) For these he has prepared, or arranged, for a covering of their imperfections. God is of pure eyes and cannot behold, or look upon, iniquity or imperfection with any degree of allowance. Therefore, he has graciously “clothed” these with the “garments of salvation” (Isa. 61:10), covering them with a “robe of righteousness.” The merit of Jesus’ precious sacrifice is imputed to them. And by reason of our wholehearted acceptance and belief in this merit, and in Jesus as our Lord and Redeemer, we have righteousness imputed to us, thus making us acceptable. Even as stated by the Apostle Paul, “Not having mine own righteousness ... but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.”—Phil. 3:9

THE GLORY OF CHRIST'S KINGDOM

The whole picture is beautifully elaborated in Psalm 45. The inspired writer first describes the grandeur and majesty of the heavenly Bridegroom. In his earthly life he was fairer than the children of men, and Divine grace poured from his lips. Because he loved righteousness and had regard for Truth and meekness, the Heavenly Father highly exalted him above all others, giving him a name above every name.—Eph. 1:21

Some of the features of this picture are future; for at present the church is not the queen, not actually the bride of the King’s Son in glorious garments. During her earthly pilgrimage she is the ‘espoused’ virgin in an earthen tabernacle. But soon, if faithful, she shall have a glorious body—in the first resurrection—and then, the bride will be all-glorious within and without, clothed with the Divine nature, immortality, as shown by her standing in the “gold of Ophir.”—Ps. 45:9

“Hearken, O daughter, and consider” (vs. 10), because I, Jehovah, have chosen you to be the bride of my dear Son. Was ever a proposal of marriage stated in a more delicate and beautiful phrase? ‘Hearken, ... and consider’ that I have very specially set my favor and affection and my love upon you. It is my “good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32), to make you joint-heir with my Son; therefore, I have chosen you to be his bride.

If you appreciate this invitation, this High Calling, “and incline thine ear,” and forget “thy father’s house” (Ps. 45:10)—Adam’s house—placing the Bridegroom first in your thoughts as you cleave to him, “so shall the king greatly desire thy beauty” of character.—vs. 11

In the present time many voices are calling to the espoused ones—home, pleasure, wealth, art, music, popularity, false doctrines—all these lend their influence toward worldliness. Our great Adversary works with subtlety to draw us away from the prize, cooperating with the earthly influences. But as the espoused one listens, she hears the voice of her Bridegroom, “If ye love me, keep my commandments.” “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.” “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne.”—John 14:15; Rev. 2:10; 3:21

While the world invites us to be absorbed with its attractions and hopes, the Lord says hearken, and consider, that the things of the present life at the very most are transitory.

Mankind in general do not hearken, and being more or less absorbed with the cares of this life and the deceitfulness of riches, they do not please the Lord. But those who eventually will constitute the bride in glory, do hearken and consider, and are guided by the counsel from on high. And they press with vigor along the narrow way of sacrifice which, by Divine grace, leads to glory, honor, and immortality.

BROUGHT UNTO THE KING

As a New Creation the bride will, in due time, be clothed with the Divine nature. ‘She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework’—in the simple white robe of the Lord’s own furnishing, the ‘robe of righteousness,’ upon which she will have wrought, with much carefulness, the beautiful adornments of the Christian graces. And great will be the rejoicing in heaven and in earth at her abundant entrance into

the King's palace; truly a heavenly "inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away."—I Pet. 1:4

Of necessity, the bride of Christ, the Lamb's wife, must be completed and glorified before the words of Revelation 22:17 can have fulfillment, "The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely."

In another place the Revelator gives a description of the Lamb's wife in beautiful symbolic language, "Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife. And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal."—Rev. 21:9-11

The whole of Revelation 21 gives a wonderful, extensive, symbolic picture of the bride, the Lamb's wife, the holy Jerusalem, and "the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it." (vs. 22) Through this glorious, spiritual, invisible 'temple' city—through this "new heaven" (vs. 1)—God's long prayed for kingdom in the earth will be established; earth's dead billions will be raised, and with the living ones will be given a full and fair opportunity to conform to the kingdom requirements, thereby attaining life everlasting on the human plane. Then, and for all eternity, "there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain."—Rev. 21:4

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