

Our Refuge in the Time of Trouble

*“Come, my people,
enter thou into thy
chambers, and
shut thy doors
about thee: hide
thyself as it were
for a little
moment, until the
indignation be
overpast.”*

—Isaiah 26:20

THE HARVEST PERIOD AT

the close of the Gospel Age during which we are now living is especially marked out in the Scriptures as being a momentous one for the Lord’s consecrated people. It is a time of great trial, of severe testing, but it is also characterized by rich blessings which God

showers upon his own. It is a time when God’s people are fed with abundant “meat in due season,” the purpose of which, Peter later wrote, is to be “established in the truth which is present with you.”—Luke 12:37,42; II Pet. 1:12, *New American Standard Bible*

This period is also the time when the “present evil world” is brought to an end, in preparation for the establishment of a new world order, a “new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” (Gal. 1:4; II Pet. 3:7,10,13) Because this is a tumultuous time, God’s people are surrounded by trouble,

and subjected to the trials and hardships incidental to the breaking down of the systems of this present world. Our text relates particularly to this aspect of the Christian's experience, being in the form of an exhortation concerning our proper course in view of what we see coming upon the world. The advice is that we should seek a place of spiritual refuge and safety to which we can retreat to prevent the intrusion of anything which would be harmful to us as New Creatures.

It is a matter of great importance for all of us to know where we can find a "chamber," a hiding place from the time of trouble which is upon the whole world. Therefore, we pose this question. Does the Lord mean that we should seek some literal retreat, a relatively unknown place away from cities and towns or other possible trouble centers, in the belief that we may thus be able to escape the distress which is upon the world?

Some in the past have misinterpreted this and other Scriptures to mean that the Lord's people should seek a literal place of seclusion. These have found, however, that from the human standpoint they fared no better than those who did not hide themselves in such a literal manner. With the nature of the time of trouble such as it is, reason tells us that one place is relatively as safe as another. Furthermore, if God wishes to protect his people from harm he is able to do it in any place and under any circumstance. "Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save," we are told. (Isa. 59:1) Thus, evidently, our opening text does not refer to literal "chambers" of safety.

IN THE WORLD BUT NOT OF IT

Jesus said concerning his disciples, “they are not of the world.” (John 17:14) Surely he wanted them to be separate from the world in the sense that they would no longer partake of its spirit nor join in its selfish schemes and carnal pleasures. However, he did not want them to become reclusive. He commissioned them, in fact, to mingle among the people, and to go into all the world and preach the glorious message of the “gospel of the kingdom” for a witness.—Matt. 24:14

No one has ever lived a life more separate from the world in the true sense in which we are admonished than Jesus. Yet, he mingled with the world. The religious leaders of his day condemned him for this. They could not understand how Jesus could be holy and at the same time have fellowship with “publicans and sinners.” (Matt. 9:10-13) There have always been those who, not understanding what constitutes true holiness, have supposed it necessary to withdraw from society altogether in order to live near to God. Indeed, this conception of holiness became the basis of the monastic life prominent for many centuries among numerous religions.

The Adversary would like to induce all the Lord’s people to withdraw themselves from an active life of being an example and giving witness to the Truth. Strange though it may seem, there is something about suggestions of this kind which may appear to be appealing to the flesh. Quite pleasing might be the idea of belonging to an exclusive group, and of feeling no responsibility for anyone outside of that small circle. It offers an excuse to measurably take our sacrifice off the altar, or furnishes us a measure

of protection against the slights of the world. Thus, such a temptation may present a pleasant arrangement to think about. However, is it what God wants us to do?

Entering into our chambers does not mean that we should become solitary. This is made clear by various Scriptures which have to do with the time of trouble and the church's relationship to it. One of these is found in the words of Isaiah 35:4, which reads, "Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you." When Jesus foretold of the time of "great tribulation," he explained that one of the effects of it would be to cause men's hearts to fail them for fear. (Matt. 24:21; Luke 21:25,26) Through the prophet the Lord is asking us to comfort those who are fearful, and who have a hearing ear, that while a period of great tribulation and trouble is indeed upon the world, its object is to prepare the way for the new dispensation of the Messianic kingdom. God's "vengeance" is for the purpose of ridding the world of its sinful elements and institutions, so that the people might then be saved and given the opportunity for life. What a wonderful privilege is ours of comforting those who mourn with a blessed message of this kind!

GOD, OUR REFUGE

The Scriptures tell us the true sense in which we are shielded from the present storms. It is in the refuge of the Lord and the Truth, and is beautifully stated by the psalmist: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore

will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.”—Ps. 46:1-3

The removal of the symbolic earth, the mountains carried into the midst of the sea, and the roaring of the troubled waters, are all manifestations of conditions accompanying the great time of trouble. The affirmation of the psalmist is that because God is our refuge we will not fear these things. Rather, these circumstances will more fully indicate to us that which constitutes the only true “chamber” of safety for the Christian during this time of distress upon the earth. Such is the protection which God affords to his people who are fully devoted to the doing of his will.

God has promised to care for us, but we must lay claim to his promises by making them our own and by bringing our every thought, word and deed into line with the conditions upon which they are given. In this regard, it is important to remember that God is dealing with us as New Creatures in Christ. (II Cor. 5:17) Thus, our flesh is being sacrificed in divine service. God has not promised physical protection except insofar as it relates to the growth of the New Creature.

If there is a divine purpose to be wrought in us, or by us, which necessitates the safety of our earthly interests, those interests will be protected. This is not for the sake of our flesh, but for the sake of the development of the New Creature. Hence, the only kind of “chambers” into which we can enter spiritually are those whose walls are constructed of God’s

promises, and whose doors are those of faith which shut out the disturbing elements of a chaotic world during this day of trouble.

STREAMS MAKE GLAD

After reminding us that God is our refuge, the psalmist uses additional symbolisms to indicate the manner in which the Lord cares for his people during this troublesome time. He writes: "There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the most High." (Ps. 46:4) The symbolic "streams" here mentioned can be likened to the comparatively small brooks and rivulets that have their origin in the hills and mountains, and which, flowing down the slopes into the valley below, converge to form a river.

We note that it is these "streams," rather than the river itself, which are said to "make glad the city of God." The river is evidently essentially the same as that portrayed in Revelation 22:1,2, where it is shown as flowing from underneath the throne of God and of the Lamb. It is the river of life, pictorial of the glorious provision of life which God has made through Christ and the plan of salvation centered in him.

The "streams" which feed this river would therefore picture the preparatory phases of the plan of salvation, those arrangements of God which lead up to and finally make possible the river of life and its blessings for all mankind. God's promises and his providences manifest in a very marked manner the outworking of his plan. Central to this is God's gift of his beloved Son to die for the world, whose blood ratifies the divine promises, making them operative

on behalf of those whom he has called and is preparing for the future glorious work of the kingdom.

The consecrated footstep followers of Jesus are being prepared for their future work by the influence of the promises of God in their lives, and by his overruling providences in connection with their fulfillment. Obedience to the conditions upon which the promises have been made has also entered into the development of the followers of the Master. When we think of all the promises of God and the conditions attached to them, and also the very effective manner in which he overrules the experiences of his people as he deals with them, it would seem proper to define the entire arrangement as one of the fundamental elements of the divine plan.

This is in harmony with our experiences and observations during the present Harvest period. What has God done for us in order that our hearts and minds might be protected from the evil with which we are surrounded? He has given us of his truth. He has made us acquainted with his plan of salvation. Through these he has given us a vision of his glory. He has provided us with the armor of the Gospel. It is all of these that are well symbolized by the “streams” of the river which now make glad the city of God.

“ENTER THOU INTO THY CHAMBERS”

Our opening text invites us to “enter into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee.” In another place the psalmist speaks of our habitation of refuge and safety as the “secret place of the most High.” (Ps. 91:1) It is, then, a matter of vital importance to know how to enter into this chamber and thus to

be certain that divine protection is overshadowing us. How may we enter God's secret place?

Briefly stated, it is through the door of full consecration to do God's will. That commitment is, of course, based upon our faith in the blood of Christ and upon the divine promises that through him we will be counted as acceptable in God's sight. The expression, full consecration, should be very significant to us. Only as we are wholly dedicated to God can we be assured of a standing in the "secret place," and of abiding "under the shadow of the Almighty."

It is well to examine our consecration from time to time to make sure that it continues to mean a full surrender of our own preferences—our own wills—to do the will of God. This is the only kind of devotion that opens the door for us to enter into God's secret place of protection. Our flesh can be very deceptive; Satan is so subtle; and the world may seem quite alluring. Therefore, we need continually to be on the watch lest some outside influence enter our heart and turn us aside from our determination to know and do only God's will. Hence, the emblematic words of our text, "shut thy doors about thee."

SELF EXAMINATION

Have we made a full consecration to God? Are we endeavoring day by day to pay our vows unto the most High? (Ps. 116:14) Do all our thoughts and words and doings seek to bring glory to God? Are we certain that nothing is being held back, not even the sweetest earthly tie? Are we fully resolved that we will continue to do God's will no matter what the cost may be? Are we wholly committed to saying what he wants us to say; to going where he wants

us to go; to doing what he wants us to do; and to being what he wants us to be?

If this be the attitude of our hearts and minds, and if our knowledge of God's plans and purposes are becoming more precious to us as the days go by, then we may know that we have found the way into the secret chambers of God's love and protection. It is necessary, though, that we continue to "dwell" in this attitude of full consecration, else earthborn clouds will arise to hide us from beholding the face of God beaming upon us with the smile of his favor.

It is not those who merely enter, but those who "dwell" in the secret place who are able to abide under the shadow of the Almighty. Undoubtedly, one of the severest tests of Christian discipleship is that of endurance. How many there may have been who sooner or later lost their "first love" for God's secret place. (Rev. 2:4) Faith is an important element in gaining the victory over the tendency to become "weary in well doing." (Gal. 6:9) An enduring faith in God, in his promises, in his ways, and in his providences, is a key requirement in the carrying out of our consecration vows. Even in the natural affairs of the world, how many are unsuccessful in their endeavors simply because they lack the endurance necessary to bring their plans and efforts to completion.

If every effort we make to serve the Lord should be at once followed by positive, visible results, there would be little need of patient endurance. Continually favorable results would serve as an incentive to keep on sacrificing. However, God in his wisdom has not arranged such an easy course for the Christian. He wants us to put our trust in him, and to

manifest that trust by continued, constant obedience to his will regardless of the sacrifice involved and the apparent lack at times of visible evidence that he is blessing our efforts. Indeed, he wants us to be “faithful unto death” and to wait for the reward until he gives us the “crown of life.”—Rev. 2:10

LET US NOT BE MOVED

Speaking prophetically of the church, the bride of Christ, the psalmist says, “God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved.” (Ps. 46:5; Rev. 21:2,9) As we have already noted, the psalmist tells of the removal of the symbolic earth and of the mountains being carried into the midst of the sea, but his consecrated people “shall not be moved.” It is during the great time of trouble that everything out of harmony with God will be removed. However, if our consecration be wholehearted and sincere, and God blesses us with his grace and strength to serve him acceptably, we will not be moved from the secret chamber of his divine care.—Heb. 12:25-28

“God will ever help her,” the psalmist continues, “at the dawning of her morning.” (*Isaac Leeser Translation*) In addition to protecting from all that would harm us as New Creatures in Christ Jesus, the Heavenly Father has confirmed his help in still another way. He has promised to deliver his church in the “first resurrection” and exalt her to live and reign with Christ. (Rev. 20:4,6) With that prospect in mind, we can surely “lift up” our heads, knowing that our “deliverance is drawing near.”—Luke 21:28, *Weymouth New Testament*

Never before in the history of the world have people been so conscious of their need for protection

and security; and never before have they so feared the lack of these things. In all the turmoil, confusion and suffering incident to the present day of trouble, however, the consecrated people of God have peace and joy. They are not assured protection from physical harm. Indeed, perhaps the best spiritual blessings may come as a result of physical suffering or material loss.

A story is told of a contest between two artists. A prize was offered to the one who could paint the best conception of peace. One painted a beautiful picture of a quiet lake, snuggled away in a protected valley surrounded by hills. There was not the slightest breeze to raise a ripple on the glassy smoothness of the lake's surface. The leaves on the trees by the side of the lake did not stir, and not a blade of grass moved. This was the first artist's conception of peace.

The other artist chose as a background in his portrayal of peace a madly rushing waterfall. It tumbled down over a high ledge of rock, and the water was whipped into a cloud of foam and mist as it dashed upon the boulders beneath. Growing beside the falls, the artist showed a slender tree with one of its slim, swaying branches extending out over the torrent just at the point where the water commenced its headlong dive to the rocks below. On that slender branch sat a bird, singing with all the joyful power it possessed. When the judges saw this picture, they at once exclaimed, "That is peace!"

It is just such a peace that belongs to us. As long as we abide in the secret chambers of God's protecting care, no harm can come to us as New Creatures. Like the little bird, we will continue to sing praises to our God in whose place of safety we have taken refuge. ■