

# A Habitation of God

*“In whom ye also  
are builded  
together for an  
habitation of God  
through the  
Spirit.”  
—Ephesians 2:22*

**THE IDEA OF THE CREA-**  
tor’s interest in a house to  
be provided by his human  
creatures may have been first  
suggested in the instructions  
to Moses for the building of  
the Tabernacle in the wilder-

ness. (Exod. 29:43-46) Still earlier, Jacob, fleeing from Esau and in a dream seeing Jehovah looking down from heaven and assuring him of the blessing for which he had risked so much, declared, “Surely the LORD is in this place; ... this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.”—Gen. 28:16,17

Later this idea of the house of God was embodied in the Temple built by Solomon in accord with divine instructions. Both of these buildings, the Tabernacle in the wilderness and the magnificent Temple in Jerusalem, were recognized as inadequate to furnish a real home, or habitation, for Jehovah. Of the Temple, Solomon declared, “Will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven

and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?" (I Kings 8:27) We see then that God did not dwell there as his literal home. Rather, it was, as he declares, a place where he would place his "name," a symbolic representation of himself, and which he designates a "house of sacrifice" wherein prayers might be offered and, if in accord with his instructions and in the proper spirit, forgiveness for sins and God's blessings would be obtained.—II Chron. 7:12-16

In the New Testament we have a clearer idea of God's thoughts with respect to his house. Certain statements of the Old Testament had given an intimation that the Tabernacle and Temple arrangements were merely pictorial, and their true significance quite unrelated to a material building. Such examples are found in Isaiah 57 and Psalm 132. We could know nothing of the physical requirements, if any, of a spirit or divine being's home. It is remarkable and inspiring to know where our Creator places the emphasis for his comfort, joy, happiness, and that which he will call his home. Thus, we can appreciate his specifications, and this would be quite natural with respect to human habitations. We can appraise and appreciate the utility, convenience, and beauty of a fellow man's home because we are of the same human make-up, needs, and grade of intelligence. If the wisdom and power represented in the universe were necessary for our understanding of the home God has designed for himself, it would be impossible for us to comprehend or even to reason about it.

An essential quality for an earthly dwelling to truly become a home is that in it there must exist

harmony, sympathy, understanding and companionship. This is also true of our Creator, “that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.” (Isa. 57:15) Those who aspire to be members of his spiritual family have similarly devoted their lives to acquiring, developing, and practicing all the elements of his own glorious character.

God, through the Prophet Jeremiah, says, “I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.” (Jer. 9:24) Therefore, it will be so with all who are being “builded together for an habitation of God.” In “these things” will be their delight also, not only to know about them as the character of God and to proclaim them to others as illustrated in the Scriptures, but also to delight in the application of them in all their relationships, thus gaining a counterpart of the divine character of their very own, for eternity.

This degree of development in God’s likeness is possible only under conditions of tribulation and trial, where tests of the utmost eternal benefit are permitted. Even of Jesus, we read that it was proper on God’s part, “in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings,” and that he was “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” (Heb. 2:10; Rev. 13:8) Likewise, Christ’s body members, chosen “in him before the foundation of the world,” must share his experience of suffering for righteousness’ sake—presenting their bodies, including their

human hopes, now and in the future, “a living sacrifice.” (Eph. 1:4; Rom. 12:1) Such thereafter are engaged in setting their minds and affections upon “those things which are above,” that which is appropriate to their new spirit-begotten condition.—Col. 3:1,2

Thus, through what are often difficult experiences, we have been learning the elements of God’s character. We are ascertaining right, often by experience with wrong; justice, by suffering injustice and inequity; humility, by experience with pride and vanity; pity and tenderness, by contact with hardness and cruelty. We are learning sympathy for others’ infirmities because we are conscious of our own; and we are developing self-sacrificing love, in contrast to the prevalent selfishness, ambition, and greed in the world which surrounds us.

## **THE TEMPLE OF GOD**

In contrast to the literal places of natural Israel where our Creator placed his name, we find in the New Testament the detailed description of a symbolic home in which he can walk and dwell in spirit. We read, “Ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”—II Cor. 6:16

The full significance of this and similar statements of Jesus and the apostles would be impossible for us to comprehend without divine assistance. With this realization the Apostle Paul prayed for the brethren at Ephesus that “the eyes of your heart having been enlightened, that you may know what is the hope of his invitation, what the glorious

wealth of his inheritance among the saints.”—Eph. 1:18, *The Emphatic Diaglott*

We also, who entertain the same hope, view the wondrous beauty of our calling, and the inspiration it furnishes, “forgetting those things which are behind,” and concentrating thought and effort in “reaching forth unto those things which are before.” (Phil. 3:13) While setting our minds upon these things, as have all our brethren down through the age, we long for the time when all the members of this special class, God’s “inheritance among the saints,” will be gathered with our Lord and be introduced to the Father as members of his household for eternity.

To the woman who was a Samaritan, Jesus said that the hour “now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him.” (John 4:23,24) The thought here is that God seeks intelligent worship, not based upon misconceptions of his character, but upon an accurate knowledge of it. Later, Jesus said to his disciples, “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, ... and we will come unto him, and make our abode [Greek: residence] with him.”—John 14:21,23

This figurative language implies that even here in our present trial state, if we meet the conditions, we can enjoy a genuine oneness with our Lord and the Heavenly Father. As their divine life is richer, fuller, and capable of higher emotions and joys, so will ours be also. Our spiritual joy in this intimate relationship will be “unspeakable and full of glory.”—I Pet. 1:8

## LIVING STONES

God's habitation, centered in his glorious character, is one in which there is room for full fellowship, and in which he can manifest his principles, disposition and power. Grateful indeed should we be that he has arranged matters so that we can share this course of study and development, and that he seeks such earnest disciples. In I Peter 2:4-6, Jesus is compared to a "living stone." As such, he also has the ability and desire to shape and prepare other living stones, his disciples, to be the symbolic materials of which the temple of God is to be built. The Temple built by Solomon illustrated in its construction the development of the members of the spiritual temple during the Gospel Age, and their final assembly in glory. We recall that the stones of which Solomon's Temple was constructed were all shaped and prepared for their respective positions while in the quarry, and were all fully prepared and ready when placed in the Temple walls.—I Kings 6:7

Considering the preparation of the stones for that Temple, we can imagine that some taken from the quarry were found not of the right type, or consistency, and defects came to light that resulted in their being set aside. Some of these stones may have proved too hard and brittle to take the shaping required. We so find it in our consideration of the development of the living stones for the true temple.

Some potential living stones may be disallowed because, if unresponsive to the Lord's instructions and discipline, the rough parts of their character cannot be refined sufficiently. Pride, the great hardener, is warned against as a dangerous snare in many portions of Scripture: "Despise not thou

the chastening of the Lord;” “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall;” “If a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.”—Heb. 12:5; I Cor. 10:12; Gal. 6:3

In contrast, Jesus gave us a perfect example both in his words and his life, and could say, “Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart.” (Matt. 11:29) The Apostle Peter, having learned wisdom from personal contact involving reproof as well as instruction from the Master, exhorts, “All of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.”—I Pet. 5:5

In this and other expressions of the Apostle Peter, we have the blessed assurance that he was of the proper texture as a living stone and had taken to heart the humbling experiences that God had sent into his life. May it likewise be so with us. Let us not fail to throttle pride in ourselves, and if we have taken a wrong course, confess and correct it. If we have been too hard, too stern or too opinionated in our relations with members of our family, with the brethren, or with any others, let us hasten to repent, reform and undo any damage our human mind and conduct may have caused. Paul, also deeply impressed with the importance of meekness and gentleness, followed the example of the Master in his humble course among the brethren at Corinth, and besought them to recall and consider attentively the “meekness and gentleness of Christ.” (II Cor. 10:1) Such qualities are unnatural to the fallen human nature, and hence need the most careful and persistent cultivation.

## FURTHER EXHORTATIONS

Moreover, stones for a permanent structure may be too soft. Living stones may also be excessively soft, and not useable in such a condition. Softness of will or character may be manifested in the fear of loss or suffering, restraining us from faithful obedience to the Lord's instructions. Softness may result in being "conformed to this world" instead of the reverse. (Rom. 12:2) It may be revealed in judging ourselves too tenderly or carelessly; or in not taking a firm stand in opposition to wrong conduct in the daily affairs of life.

Many exhortations are given us along this line. "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." "Be no more children," but "grow up into him in all things." "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life." (Gal. 5:1; Eph. 4:14,15; 6:10; I Tim. 6:12) Paul gives us an inspiring illustration of determination to be faithful to God at all costs, when he said concerning the "bonds and afflictions" that awaited him at Jerusalem, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy."—Acts 20:22-24

In the construction of a building, still other defects may be encountered. We may use as an illustration destructive carpenter ants or termites which attack wooden timbers, eat out the center, and weaken them so that the structure becomes unstable or even collapses. Such destructive forces, secretly working unobserved, *(Continued on page 36)*

*(Continued from page 31)* well illustrate the damage to character resulting from secret faults permitted that are not dealt with honestly and quickly, and which over time may render much injury to our consecrated relationship with God. Let us, rather, echo the sentiments of the psalmist, who prayed, “Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me.”—Ps. 19:12,13

These deflections, though perhaps appearing minor at the outset, would seem to indicate a corresponding neglect of the Word of God, the effect of which would be to leave us unprepared for tests as well as for opportunities to serve the Lord. It would make us the reverse of what was said prophetically of Jesus in Isaiah 11:1-3, that he would be “of quick understanding in the fear of the LORD.”

How we admire one such as Jesus, who was prepared for every test and opportunity, whether it called for him to be gentle, tender, and meek; or bold, strong, and uncompromising. So may it be with us, his followers and disciples. It is indeed possible for us to reach that degree of development, “conformed to the image of his [God’s] Son,” but only if we are saturated with the Word of God—the “word of Christ” dwelling in us richly and “teaching and admonishing” us.—Rom. 8:29; Col. 3:16

## **TESTS OF SPIRITUAL STRENGTH**

The living stones of which the “holy temple in the Lord” is to be constructed have still further tests. (Eph. 2:21) Even as some materials for earthly structures, these must be tested as to their tensile and their load-bearing strength. Tensile strength

well corresponds to longsuffering and patience. In that wonderful description of the divine character, we are told by the Apostle Paul that love “suffereth long, and is kind,” and in writing to the church at Rome, he assures them that “tribulation worketh patience.” (I Cor. 13:4; Rom. 5:3) With the same thought, James exhorts us to “let patience have her perfect [Greek: complete] work.” (James 1:4) How reasonable that God allows for time and experience in the development and ripening of the fruit of the spirit in each of his children! Thus the apostle again urges, “Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.”—Gal. 6:9

Load-bearing strength is also a requisite in these living stones. This does not mean that any of us individually could bear all the extreme tests which might be applied, for we are assured by the apostle, “God is faithful, who will not permit you to be tried beyond your ability; but with the trial, will also direct the issue, that you may be able to bear it.” (I Cor. 10:13, *Diaglott*) This was Paul’s own experience, when he testified that while in Asia he was “pressed out of measure, above strength,” but that God delivered him though he had “despaired even of life.” He further said that he and his companions “had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead.” (II Cor. 1:8,9) What an inspiring testimony to the unbreakable determination of Paul and his associates to trust fully in God and his providences for them, inasmuch as they had made a consecration even unto death. Hence, we, too, are to look beyond this human life and trust in him that “raiseth the dead.”

In another place, Paul writes that God's purpose concerning the establishment of his promised kingdom is to shake all things in order that the things which can be shaken may be removed. (Heb. 12:26-28) The clear intimation from this passage is that not only is the kingdom we seek one which cannot be shaken, but also that its spiritual ruling class is to be composed of those living stones which likewise cannot be shaken, because they have sought and received the strength sufficient for their every need, and tests which, in his wisdom, the Lord has subjected them to in order to bring their development to completion.

### **FELLOW BRETHREN IN THE HOUSE OF GOD**

“That thou mayest know how to conduct thyself in God's house, which is a congregation of the living God,” wrote Paul to Timothy. (I Tim. 3:15, *Diaglott*) Individual Christians are God's habitation through the Spirit, but he also has at the present time a more comprehensive representation and means of expression in and through the ecclesia or “congregation” arrangement. How important, therefore, is our association with the brethren in “God's house.” Each member is a stone in God's symbolic temple, yet how much profit we may gain from our association with fellow members of this building! Through our fellowship with these other living stones, we will see a demonstration of God's Spirit, and at times, perhaps, greater development in some respects than our own. Let us note their examples of courage, meekness, patience, zeal, humility and love. Recalling another illustration given by Paul—that of the body—let us remember that it is by

“that which every joint supplieth” that the body is being built up in our Master’s likeness. (Eph. 4:15,16) Let us take a builder’s interest in the brethren, as God does, considering one another and provoking each other to love and good works.—Heb. 10:24

In every gathering of the Lord’s people, we find occasion for the exercise of godly character, sharing in the joint endeavors of the brethren to maintain “the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free,” and at the same time, “with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (Gal. 5:1; Eph. 4:2,3) Without doubt, in obeying the exhortation, “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together,” we shall find many of our greatest helps and blessings in the narrow way. At the same time in that blessed fellowship with others of “like precious faith,” we shall experience some of our most searching tests as to our knowledge of, and obedience to, the instructions of the Lord’s Word.—Heb. 10:25; II Pet. 1:1

## **HABITATION SOON TO BE COMPLETE**

Soon, we believe, God’s spiritual habitation will be complete. We could well exhaust language in our efforts to describe the grandeur and glory of that dwelling place of the Almighty. In the 45th Psalm, the head of the divine family of sons is pictured, and with him his bride, the church. The bride is said to be “all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold;” and she is “brought unto the king in raiment of needlework.” (vss. 13,14) The Apostle Paul describes the church as both the “bride” and

also the “body” of Christ—the “fulness” or completion of the Christ class—that “little flock” who are to be God’s heavenly family and enjoy the most intimate communion with him.—Eph. 1:23; 4:13; 5:25-27,29,30; Luke 12:32

We are told in the Book of Revelation that the activity of the completed Christ class for the first thousand years will be as kings, priests, and judges over the world. (Rev. 20:6,12; 5:10) The result will be the reuniting in loyal obedience to God of all his intelligent creation alienated through sin, except those who, with full light, reject the opportunity. One thousand years are only the beginning, however, of the church’s eternal association in the plans of the Creator, who in his perfect wisdom, love, and power will have formulated a program which will be sublime in every respect for the ages of eternity.

The opportunity to become of the immediate family of God is far beyond our ability to fully appreciate or understand. As the apostle says, however, we hope for it, remembering that “the Spirit also helpeth our infirmity. ... And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because it maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. ... For whom he foreknew, he also foreordained to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.”—Rom. 8:25-29, *Revised Version Improved and Corrected* ■