

The DAWN

VOLUME NO. LXXXI, Number 10
(USPS 149-380), October 2013

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First-class postage paid at Rutherford, NJ. Published monthly by The Dawn Bible Students Association, 199 Railroad Avenue, East Rutherford, NJ 07073. \$12.00 a year.

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Israel—Still God's Timepiece in the Middle East

*"Therefore fear
thou not, O my
servant Jacob,
saith the LORD;
neither be
dismayed, O Israel:
for, lo, I will save
thee from afar, and
thy seed from the
land of their
captivity; and
Jacob shall return,
and shall be in
rest, and be quiet,
and none shall
make him afraid."
—Jeremiah 30:10*

TURMOIL IN THE MIDDLE

East is once again dominating the world's news—specifically, unrest in Egypt and Syria. In Egypt, President Mohammed Morsi, who had been in office for only two years, was deposed by a military coup in early July, 2013. Protests, which were directed against him in late June, are now targeting the military leadership that replaced him. Thousands have been killed and injured in these civil uprisings, which have now gone on for over two months. There is much uncertainty as to how and when stability will return, as well as in what direction the new powers of government will lead the country.

In Syria, conditions are even worse. The government of President Bashar Assad, facing an all-out civil war in his country, has been accused, with mounting evidence, of using chemical weapons in an attack on his own people, including women and children, in late August, killing an estimated 1,500 people—a number which could rise further. At this moment, world leaders are weighing the possibilities of an appropriate response to this alleged atrocity.

The turmoil in Egypt, Syria, and other countries in the Middle East perhaps raises questions in the minds of sincere Bible students as to just how these and other related events may fit into the fulfillment of prophecy. Certainly, it is evident that the world has been in a great “time of trouble” for nearly one hundred years, and yet as we see some of these events going on before our eyes, we may at times be unsure of their import or significance in God’s arrangements.

Thankfully, we have the Bible’s assurance that God has all things under his control and supervision. In addition, rather than looking to Middle East nations such as Egypt, Syria, or any others for that matter, as a guide to God’s purposes, the Scriptures clearly show that our eyes should focus primarily just on one nation—Israel. It is Israel which is God’s timepiece, not only in the affairs of the Middle East, but in those of the whole world. Indeed, as the Time of Trouble accomplishes God’s ultimate purpose of overthrowing the present evil order of this world, and ushering in the Messianic kingdom of Christ, the focal point of Bible prophecy is Israel.

PROPHETIC TESTIMONY

In short, the prophecies of the Bible indicate that Israel will eventually be the victim of a powerful attack by nations from the north and other surrounding quarters. It also appears evident that great impetus will be given to the decision of those powers to invade Israel, by a calculation that the nations which had formerly befriended her are not in a position to defend her, or have ceased being friends with her altogether. The prophecies imply that no one will come to her defense, and Israel will stand alone against the invaders.—Ezek. 38:8-13; Jer. 30:14

Looking at the reality of current events through the eyes of Bible prophecy, we conclude that God's hand is at this time directing world affairs in such a way as to shape the balance of power among the nations to eventually bring about the finale of this present Time of Trouble—Armageddon. It is likely that the coming invasion of Israel by the armies of Gog, and the destruction of that army (Ezek. 38:1-7), will be the spark that sets off the final whirlwind of trouble on a global scale. Jesus, prophesying of that time, said that only God's intervention will save the world from such "great tribulation."—Matt. 24:21,22

For centuries, Israel has been the focal point of God's interest in the course of world affairs. Their place in history has been well marked out in the Bible, and from our twenty-first century vantage point we can look back at their past and trace how accurately God's Word has been fulfilled.

Probably no other people have passed through trials so deep, so discouraging, and so enduring as

have the Jews. Their polity was destroyed by the Roman legions in A.D. 70. They were driven from their ancient homeland to scratch a hazardous living in ghettos in hostile lands. They have been persecuted beyond imagination. The simple fact of their existence today as a nation among nations is eloquent, living testimony to the faithfulness of God, and to the trustworthiness of his Word of truth.

ISRAEL BLINDED BY LACK OF FAITH

Strangely enough, the real import of this astonishing fact is almost totally lost, not only upon the world in general, but upon the Jews themselves, who have been the principal actors in this great drama. For this little nation came into being, at long last, against all odds of probability. Almost certainly, any other people, after nearly two thousand years of afflictions such as they suffered, would have been swallowed up and assimilated into the cultures of the countries to which they had been scattered. Nothing but the power and providences of God himself could have accomplished the preservation of their identity as a people.

While the Jews themselves are largely blinded to the fact that even today the great God of the universe is directing their destiny, those whose hearts have been blessed with an understanding of the Heavenly Father's great plan of the ages have their faith strengthened as they watch the unfolding of events in the land of Israel and in the surrounding region of the Middle East.

While Abraham was dwelling in Canaan, God repeated this promise, saying, "Lift up now thine

eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth.” (Gen. 13:14-16) Again, when Abraham was ninety-nine years old, God appeared to him, and once more definitely confirmed the promise. He said, “I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, . . . all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.” (chap. 17:8) On a still later occasion, after Abraham had demonstrated his faith by his willingness to offer his son, Isaac, in sacrifice, God made an additional remarkable promise to Abraham, to the effect that in his (Abraham’s) seed “all the nations of the earth” would be blessed.—chap. 22:18

Thereafter, God went to great lengths to assure the descendants of Abraham of his love and care for them. Over and over again he assured them that they were his people, and he their God. In the third month after he delivered them from bondage in Egypt, when they were about to begin their long journey through the wilderness, he seemed especially anxious to assure them of his love and care for them as his very special people. “Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself,” he told them. “Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.”—Exod. 19:4-6

Even after repeated instances of faithlessness during the forty-years’ journey through the wilderness,

and having arrived at Jordan before going into the promised land, God again spoke to them through Moses. “Thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all the people that are upon the face of the earth.” (Deut. 7:6) A thousand years later, and after numerous additional breaches of their covenant with him, God still loved and cherished them, though he found it necessary to correct them, as a father disciplines unruly children. Through the prophet Amos, he told them, “Hear this word that the LORD hath spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying, You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.”—Amos 3:1,2

“YOUR HOUSE IS LEFT UNTO YOU DESOLATE”

Their final loss as a nation, because of their faithlessness, of their privileged status as a special treasure unto God and as a kingdom of priests, occurred some seven centuries later when, in spite of the many signs that he was indeed the long-promised Messiah—the “seed” of blessing—they rejected Jesus. It was Jesus himself, after the Jews as a whole had made clear their disbelief, who pronounced the words of doom upon their house. He said to them, “Did ye never read in the scriptures, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes? Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the

fruits thereof." Then, as though signifying the sorrows that should later befall them, he added, "And whosoever shall fall on this stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder. And . . . the chief priests and Pharisees . . . perceived that he spake of them."—Matt. 21:42-45

Shortly thereafter, Jesus announced their final national rejection, in these words: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."—Matt. 23:37-39

With what sorrow Jesus must have spoken these words concerning that people who had been his Father's special treasure! Surely the words of Moses must have passed through his mind—"The LORD'S portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. He found him in a desert land, and in the waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings: So the LORD alone did lead him."—Deut. 32:9-12

These words of Moses were not without a hint of the tragedy that, so long hence, was to take place, for he further said, "Of the Rock that begat thee thou art unmindful, and hast forgotten God that formed thee. . . . They have moved me to jealousy with that which is not God; they have provoked me

to anger with their vanities: and I will move them to jealousy with those which are not [now] a people; I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation.”—vss. 18,21

THE “REWARD” OF FAITHLESSNESS

The Apostle Peter later enlarged on this theme, and showed that it is the called ones of the present Gospel Age, both of Jews and Gentiles, who inherit the promises to be God’s special treasure and kingdom of priests. He writes, “Unto you . . . which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. But ye [footstep followers of Jesus during the Gospel Age] are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; . . . Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God.”—I Pet. 2:7-10

Not long after Israel’s final rejection as a nation, Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans, and the Jewish people were scattered among the nations of the world. Over the ensuing centuries the land of Israel itself became subject in turn to Rome, the Moslems, Egypt, the Turks, and finally, in 1920, to Great Britain under a League of Nations’ mandate.

“WHAT IS OUR INIQUITY?”

This tragic outcome should not have been unforeseen by discerning Jews, for God had repeatedly warned them of the terrible consequences of disobedience to their covenant. For example, he had

said to the Prophet Jeremiah, "Behold, I will cause to cease out of this place in your eyes, and in your days, the voice of mirth, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride. And it shall come to pass, when thou shalt shew this people all these words, and they shall say unto thee, Wherefore hath the LORD pronounced all this great evil against us? or what is our iniquity? or what is our sin that we have committed against the LORD our God? Then shalt thou say unto them, Because your fathers have forsaken me, saith the LORD, and have walked after other gods, and have served them, . . . and have forsaken me, and have not kept my law; . . . Therefore will I cast you out of this land into a land that ye know not, neither ye nor your fathers; and there shall ye serve other gods day and night; where I will not shew you favour."—Jer. 16:9-13

SCATTERED AMONG THE NATIONS

Much earlier, when the Israelites were about to cross Jordan into the promised land, Moses recited to them the manifold blessings that should be theirs if they kept their covenant with God. However, he also pointed out to them the pains of disobedience, saying, "It shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee."—Deut. 28:15

Then follows an astounding list of curses, including the statement that they shall "be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth. . . . And thou shalt become an astonishment, a proverb, and a byword,

among all nations whither the LORD shall lead thee. . . . And ye shall be left few in number, whereas ye were as the stars of heaven for multitude; because thou wouldest not obey the voice of the LORD thy God. . . . And the LORD shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other.”—vss. 25,37,62,64

When Jacob went down into Egypt, his entire family totaled just seventy souls. (Deut. 10:22) Some 300 years later, on leaving Egypt, the number of males twenty years old and upward who were “able to go forth to war” amounted to a multitude of over 600,000, not counting the tribe of Levi. (Num. 1:45,46) This would suggest that, including all women and all those males under twenty years of age, the number of Israelites that left Egypt would approximate some 2.5 million people. Truly, God’s promise to Abraham that his seed should be as the stars of heaven and as the sands of the seashore (Gen. 22:17) was abundantly fulfilled in this literal way (Deut. 10:22), even as the Apostle Paul later confirmed. (Heb. 11:12) No wonder Egypt’s king, who “knew not Joseph,” was alarmed at their presence in the land of Goshen.—Exod. 1:7-12

There is no way, of course, to determine how many Jews there were at the time of their rejection of the Messiah and their subsequent scattering into the far nations of the earth. However, we do know that they failed to keep their covenant with God, and it is therefore fair to assume that as a result their numbers were indeed reduced even as Moses had prophesied. We also know that, whereas in their relatively short stay of a few centuries in Egypt their numbers had increased from a mere

seventy people to some 2.5 million, yet in the following 4,400 years from that time to just prior to the Second World War they had grown only to about 16 million in all the world, of which number some 6 million later perished in the Holocaust during that war.

We also know that the curses which were foretold to result from disobedience have fallen heavily upon that sorely oppressed people. It well may be that the sentiments of many Jews are truly reflected in the words of the Jewish milkman in the play, "Fiddler on the Roof," when he wistfully prayed, "Lord, we know we are thy chosen people; but why don't you choose someone else for awhile?"

THE FLICKERING HOPE OF A HOMELAND

Yet through all these agonizing centuries there was ever kept alive in the hearts of many Jews, albeit as a mere flickering flame, the hope of one day returning to the Promised Land. It sustained them in their afflictions; it kept them alive in their ghetto existence. Finally, in 1878, as a consequence of the Berlin Congress of Nations, the way was cleared for the purchase of land in Palestine by Jews. Jewish colonists began to trickle in from Europe to eke out a precarious existence among hostile neighbors.

When World War I began in 1914, it signaled the end of the "times of the Gentiles," during which Israel and its people had been "trodden down" by Gentile nations for over twenty-five centuries—since the time of their last king, Zedekiah. (Luke 21:24) At the end of World War I, Palestine came under control of Great Britain, whose foreign

minister, Lord Balfour, issued the Balfour Declaration, whereby the British government pledged support to the Zionist hope of establishing a national home for the Jews in Palestine.

For those who entertained it, this hope was further strengthened in 1920 when Great Britain acquired Palestine as a mandate from the newly created League of Nations, and Jews in modest numbers found their way to that land. However, when Hitler came into power in Germany in 1933, the frightful persecutions that followed drove greater numbers to seek refuge in Palestine. Those who succeeded in doing so were the fortunate ones, for during the Second World War some 6 million Jews were cruelly massacred, constituting one of the blackest stains to foul the history of so-called human civilization since the world began.

Shortly following the end of World War II, the severe immigration restrictions which had been imposed by Great Britain ended when the United Nations took away their mandate, and opened the way for the partitioning of Palestine. In May of 1948, the Jews proclaimed the establishment of the State of Israel at Tel Aviv. The surrounding Arab nations attacked the newborn country, but eventually Israel was successful in repelling the attackers, and even won some Arab territory. Since that time the Jews and Arabs have fought numerous other wars and have engaged in lesser conflicts, nearly all of which have resulted in a stronger Israel.

Truly, the events of seventy years, leading up to Israel's reestablishment as a nation in 1948, may have appeared remarkable in human eyes, even

perhaps in the eyes of Jews. However, they were not so in the eyes of God, because they were by his permission.

UNCERTAIN FUTURE

Now, some sixty-five years later, world Jewry is watching with uncertainty the outcome of the present civil conflicts in Egypt and Syria, with an eye on the United States to see what, if any, military role this country may take in the region. There is fear that intervention by the United States may result in retaliation against Israel, or that she might be left more vulnerable to future attacks by her enemies, even though she is not involved in the civil conflicts of the Arab nations around her. For in spite of civil unrest and turmoil within Arab countries themselves, many believe that they are still united on one thing: the oft-repeated intention of eventually bringing about Israel's demise.

It is this fear that haunts the hearts of Jews everywhere in the world, even if unadmitted by most. They firmly believe that if such a calamity should be permitted to come about, then no Jew would ever again be safe in any part of the world. Thus it has been that, in the numerous wars and conflicts Israel has experienced since 1948, Jews from around the world have come together in hearty support of her—by demonstrations, by offers to serve Israel in any capacity—even in the army, and by pouring great sums of money into the coffers of that nation in a mighty effort to preserve her national existence. If the nation of Israel were allowed to disappear, they have feared, then their own lives and the lives of their families would once

more, as in the days of their worst persecutions, be in jeopardy. Truly, as one considers the tragic history of this suffering people, one can readily be sympathetic with their dismay.

“THE TIME OF JACOB’S TROUBLE”

That there would come such a time of deep anxiety for the Jewish people following their regathering to their own land is indicated by the prophet Jeremiah. He writes, “Lo, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the LORD: and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it. . . . For thus saith the LORD; We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. Ask ye now, and see whether a man doth travail with child? wherefore do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in travail, and all faces are turned into paleness?” (Jer. 30:3,5,6) It would appear that we are approaching this period described so vividly by the prophet.

What kind of tomorrow, then, may the Jews and the nation of Israel look forward to from this point? The prophets describe a time of great sorrow and suffering to come upon Israel. However, just when all seems hopelessly lost, they will humbly turn their wayward hearts back to God, saying, as Jesus prophesied that they would, “Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.” (Matt. 23:39) Having learned the lessons of their disobedience, God will come to Israel’s aid. Note these words, “Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob’s [Israel’s] trouble; but he [Israel] shall be saved out of it.” (Jer. 30:7) “Then

shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations [that come against Israel], as when he fought in the day of battle.”—Zech. 14:3

“FEAR THOU NOT . . . O ISRAEL!”

After speaking of this time of Jacob’s trouble, and adding that “he shall be saved out of it,” the Prophet Jeremiah offers much hope and encouragement to Israel. “Therefore fear thou not, O my servant Jacob, saith the LORD; neither be dismayed, O Israel: for, lo, I will save thee from afar, and thy seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and shall be in rest, and be quiet, and none shall make him afraid. For I am with thee, saith the LORD, to save thee: though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee: but I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished.”—Jer. 30:10,11

In this way, God will clearly reveal both to Israel and to the rest of the world that he is the one LORD God Almighty, and that his promises are true, and his faithfulness everlasting. Israel will be proof of this fact. Just as they were a “curse among the heathen,” they “shall be a blessing,” a living example to all people of God’s attributes of justice, wisdom, power, and love. (Zech. 8:13) To this, Paul adds, “So all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my [New] covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins. . . . For God hath concluded them all [Jews and Gentiles alike] in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all.”—Rom. 11:26,27,32 ■

WEEKLY PRAYER MEETING TEXTS

OCTOBER 3—"Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them."—Psalm 119:165 (Z. '04-24 Hymn 233)

OCTOBER 10—"Ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him."—Colossians 3:9,10 (Z. '04-25 Hymn 42)

OCTOBER 17—"He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust."—Psalm 91:4 (Z. '04-75 Hymn 361)

OCTOBER 24—"As they led him away, they laid hold upon one Simon, . . . and on him they laid the cross, that he might bear it after Jesus."—Luke 23:26 (Z. '04-155 Hymn 359)

OCTOBER 31—"Because thy lovingkindness [favor] is better than life, my lips shall praise thee."—Psalm 63:3 (Z. '01-246 Hymn 324)

"I will shew thee my faith by my works."

—James 2:18

While the Lord's people of the present age are not to be judged by their works but by their faith, nevertheless, works will be required. By our words we demonstrate our faith, and, thank God, imperfect works can demonstrate to him the loyalty of our intentions, our wills. If our words demonstrate to the Lord the sincerity of our faith, that faith will be acceptable to him and we will be counted perfect and be granted a share in the Kingdom, and all the great and precious things which the Lord has in reservation for those who love him.

—Daily Heavenly Manna, October 13

A Promise of Land

Key Verse: *“In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates.”*
—Genesis 15:18

Selected Scripture:
Genesis 15:7-21

truth.”—Isa. 65:16

Looking further into this oath-bound covenant made by God to Abram, we note from the Scriptures that it was repeated and confirmed to him on numerous occasions. Our lesson focuses on one of the many confirmations of that covenant. Paul calls our attention to the fact that by two unchangeable things—God’s Word and his oath—these covenant promises bring “strong consolation” to those of the household of faith. (Heb. 6:18,19) This “little flock,” like Abram, have fled their former “land” of this present world, and have taken refuge and consolation in the same hopes expressed in God’s covenant promises made to him so many centuries ago.

Indeed, God’s first dealings with Abram are recorded for us concerning the instructions given to him to leave

TO BEGIN OUR LESSON,
we call to mind the importance of covenants and oaths made by God to members of the human family—as in this instance involving Abram. Throughout the Scriptures, the Heavenly Father is shown as a constant source of absolute truth. Consider the words: “He who blesseth himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of truth; and he that sweareth in the earth shall swear by the God of

the land that he was dwelling in—Ur of the Chaldees. (Gen. 11:31) We read about this in Genesis 12:1-3: “Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, . . . unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.” The location of the “land” mentioned in the covenant was not specified until Abram had fully complied with the conditions previously given—to leave his former country and follow the leadings of God. Upon doing this, and entering the land of Canaan, God told Abram that this was the land he would be given.—Gen. 12:4-7; Acts 7:2-6

This covenant of promise was later reaffirmed by God as recorded in these words from Genesis 17:1-4: “The LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, . . . And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. . . . As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations.” Another important event is recorded in verse 5 of this chapter—the changing of Abram’s name by God. “Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram [high father], but thy name shall be Abraham [father of a multitude]; for a father of many nations have I made thee.”

The Apostle Paul mentions these promises, that they “might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all, (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations).” (Rom. 4:16,17) From our study, we see that these promises were to two groups. First, they were to Abraham’s natural seed, the nation of Israel. Second, they were to his spiritual seed, Christ and his faithful followers. When thus fulfilled, at the time of Christ’s Millennial kingdom, “all families of the earth [shall] be blessed.”—Gen. 12:3; Dan. 4:3; James 2:5 ■

A Promise to Sarah

***Key Verse: “Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him.”
—Genesis 21:2***

***Selected Scripture:
Genesis 17:15-17;
18:9-15; 21:1-7***

IN TODAY’S LESSON, WE

see that Sarah indeed gave birth to a promised son. “Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac.” (Gen. 21:3) Prior to this momentous event, when Abraham and Sarah were already well advanced in age, God gave this promise: “I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her,

and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of people shall be of her.” God also told Abraham that her name would be changed: “Thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be.” (chap. 17:15,16) This was fitting since Sarah means princess—that is, a mother of royalty. It was in this sense that Paul spoke allegorically of Sarah, referring to her as “the mother of us all.”—Gal. 4:26

Abraham’s initial reaction to the news concerning the birth of a son in their old age was one of disbelief to the extent that he “fell upon his face, and laughed.” (Gen. 17:17) However, God responded by repeating his promise: “Sarah . . . shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him.”—vs. 19

Sarah, and the promise made by God concerning her,

is mentioned in Hebrews 11:11,12: "Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him [God] faithful who had promised. Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable." We understand from this passage that Abraham, at the age of 100, and his wife Sarah, being 90, and well past child bearing age, received this promised son as if he was "born from the dead." "With men it is impossible, but not with God: for with God all things are possible."—Mark 10:27

Sarah had been barren during her entire marriage to Abraham until the birth of Isaac. This illustrates the fact that God's covenant, originally given to Abraham, was barren for nearly two thousand years, until the time of Jesus, the spiritual seed of promise. God assured Sarah and Abraham, however, of the coming birth of a son through the words of three men who came to visit them at their tent in the plains of Mamre. These men were actually angels, and after asking Abraham, "Where is Sarah thy wife?" proclaimed, "Thy wife shall have a son." Sarah overheard what they said, and being doubtful of their words "laughed within herself." (Gen. 18:1-15) Nevertheless, the promise was affirmed by these angels as being God's Word, and that it would surely come to pass in his due time.

While the events of our lesson had much significance to Abraham and Sarah, they were a picture of greater things. Continuing the allegory spoken of earlier in this lesson, Paul says, "Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband." (Gal. 4:27) God's covenant for the eventual blessing of all mankind was barren for many years, but began to be fulfilled by Jesus through the work of his First Advent.—Luke 2:10-14 ■

A Blessing for Ishmael and Isaac

Key Verse: “*God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called. And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he is thy seed.*”
—Genesis 21:12,13

Selected Scripture:
Genesis 21:12-14,17-21; 26:2-5,12,13

IN OUR LAST LESSON, WE

learned that Sarah gave birth to a promised son, and that his name was Isaac. The name Isaac means “laughter.” This is due in part to the fact that both Abraham and Sarah laughed when they were told the news concerning the coming birth of a son in their advanced age. More importantly, however, it has reference to the laughter and joy that the world of mankind will have in fulfillment of the promise made by God to Abraham through the spiritual seed—Christ. These small details, such as the meaning of a name, serve to show us that God’s plan is being carried out, and that everything is ordered under his control even to the smallest detail.

Years prior to the birth of Isaac, and since Sarah had not been able to bear any children to Abraham, she encouraged him to have children through her handmaid Hagar. However, after hearing the news regarding the coming

birth of a child to Abraham by her maid, Sarah had a change of heart, and despised Hagar, who then fled. An angel of the Lord visited Hagar, and told her to return to Abraham and Sarah. (Gen. 16:1-9) The angel gave her this promise: "The angel of the LORD said unto her, I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude." (vs. 10) Hagar was further told she would have a son, and that his name would be called Ishmael, "because the LORD hath heard thy affliction." (vs. 11) The name Ishmael means "whom God hears."

These events point to another important aspect of our lesson. Although Ishmael was not the promised seed and heir of the promises pertaining thereto, yet as a son of Abraham he was not forgotten. Genesis 17:18 states: "Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before thee!" God responded, telling him that Sarah would bear Isaac, "and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him." (vs. 19) "As for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation."—vs. 20; Gen. 25:12-16

We realize that these events were typical of greater things in the fulfillment of God's plan of salvation. In the type, Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac. (Gen. 25:5) However, he also made ample provision for Ishmael and for his other children which he had by his third wife, Keturah. (vss. 1-4) Isaac, the recipient of Abraham's inheritance and chief blessing, represents Christ and his bride. (Gal. 3:16,29) Ishmael typically represents natural Israel. (Gal. 4:25) In the antitype, God bestows all of his fullness upon Christ, the Messiah, and through him makes provision for blessing natural Israel, and also for blessing all the families of the earth, represented by the many children of Keturah. Thus, all are to be ultimately blessed by the antitypical Isaac. ■

The Blessing Passes to Jacob

Key Verse: *“Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.”*
—Genesis 28:15

Selected Scripture:
Genesis 28:1,10-22

THE EVENTS THAT LEAD UP

to our Key Verse are important to call to mind. Isaac had taken Rebekah to be his wife, and she gave birth to twins—Esau being the firstborn, and Jacob being born after him. (Gen. 25:20-26) Following the custom of the day, Esau was considered to be the heir of his father, Isaac, since he was the firstborn. Later, however, when both boys were grown and now young men, Esau sold his birthright to Jacob “for bread and pottage.” (vss. 27-34) The culmination of these events

ended with Jacob obtaining his father’s blessing, while posing in disguise as Esau, at the urging of his mother Rebekah. Isaac blessed Jacob with the words, “Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee: . . . and blessed be he that blesseth thee.”—chap. 27:29

Esau was so angered by these events that he sought to kill his brother Jacob. However, God overruled in this matter, and Jacob was protected. Esau left his home, and took heathen wives, contrary to the wishes of his parents. Jacob obediently followed these instructions, receiving this further promised blessing: “God Almighty

bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people; And give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger.”—Gen. 28:3,4

Jacob, because of his faith in God’s promises, was now practically an outcast from his home, fleeing through fear of Esau. The narrative continues, relating the experience of Jacob’s dream, which he had as he rested from his journey. In the dream, Jacob saw a ladder set up on the earth, the top of which reached heaven. On the ladder, he saw angels ascending and descending. We then read: “Behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed.” (vs. 13) God then reaffirmed the promise he had made to Abraham, saying, “Thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, . . . and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” (vs. 14) The Abrahamic Covenant promise had now passed to Jacob, and he was content with the loss of the things he had left behind to obtain this great favor from God.

In a greater fulfillment of these verses from Genesis 28, they prophetically point to a time of the regathering of fleshly Israel to their land. God has not forsaken his chosen people, just as he had not forsaken Jacob. We rejoice in these words spoken by God through the prophet: “The LORD hath redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of him that was stronger than he. Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the LORD.” (Jer. 31:11,12) Jacob is spoken of by Paul as representing natural Israel. Like Jeremiah, he also says that they will receive all the blessings promised to them at the end of the Gospel Age, when the work of developing spiritual Israel, pictured by Isaac, is complete.—Rom. 11:25-29 ■

Anointed for the Witness of Jesus

“I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.”

—Revelation 20:4

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER

of Revelation follows what is depicted in the preceding chapters as the final overthrow of all that has been associated with Satan and his empire, particularly the false church systems, as represented by the harlot woman. There also is shown the overthrow of the forces instrumental in destroying the false “woman.” Beginning with the twentieth chapter, there is shown another series of events having to do with the establishment of a new

rulership on the earth, and the inauguration of true religion, based upon the knowledge of the true God. The “tabernacle of God” is at last seen to be with men. He deals with them, and they become his people.—Rev. 21:3

In the opening verses of Revelation 20, we have identified those who will reign with Christ in the new kingdom. The marks of identification are very interesting, being summed up under two headings. First, they were “beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God,” as stated in our opening text. In this witness, they are shown not to have been in any way associated with the false, beastly systems that had gone before. They had been witnesses only for Jesus, even unto death. Everything they possessed, even their own lives, they cast aside and accepted Jesus as their only head, and thus they died.

Second, they were “holy.” (vs. 6) The formula for attaining holiness, as suggested by Jesus, is a proper application of the Word of truth. Jesus prayed that his disciples might attain holiness—entire devotion to the cause of God. He said to his Father, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” (John 17:17) As the sanctifying power of the Truth lays hold upon the individuals who make up this class, it brings about a condition of true holiness. As this condition of holiness is gradually attained, these individuals find themselves in the position of being witnesses for Jesus and for the Word of God—that is, co-laborers with God.

THESE QUALIFICATIONS STILL NECESSARY

It is these same qualifications by which we today, as followers of the Master, may hope to be among those who will live and reign with Christ a thousand years. Inasmuch as it is our privilege to be living at the very time when the destructive forces outlined in the preceding chapters of Revelation are tearing

down Satan's rulership over the earth, how very important it is now to give earnest consideration to the conditions upon which we may have a part with Christ in his kingdom. These conditions center in copying the "mind of Christ," and emulating his "witness . . . for the word of God."

Jesus was indeed a faithful witness. He laid down his life bearing witness of his Father and declaring the Word of truth, the Gospel of the kingdom. In doing this, he carried out the commission that had been given to him through the anointing of God's Holy Spirit. This comes to our attention very early in the experiences of the Master, when he was in the synagogue at Nazareth and was given the Old Testament scriptures to read, as was the custom. He turned to Isaiah's prophecy, chapter 61, and upon reading a portion of the first two verses, claimed that this statement was the authority for the ministry upon which he was then embarking. Isaiah's prophecy states: "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD."—Isa. 61:1,2; Luke 4:18,19

Jesus did all of these things because he was commissioned to do so by the anointing of God's Holy Spirit. The footstep followers of the Master are members of his body. This is why the Revelator saw them as those who were beheaded for the witness of Jesus. They had accepted him as their head, in place of their own, and thus had become members of his body. The anointing of the Spirit, therefore,

that came upon the head, is effective for every member of his body. Hence, this royal commission from heaven applies to these, even as it applied to Jesus. This means that if we, as footstep followers of the Master, desire to live up to all of our spiritual privileges, having the same mind as he did, we must also obey this commission of the Spirit.

As we consider the privileges of our anointing to be witnesses for Jesus, it is important that we realize this is not the only work associated with the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit. Thus, busying ourselves in witnessing for the Truth should never be done to the jeopardy of any other aspect of our spiritual interests. Indeed, the spiritual life of the Christian is made up of a number of elements. We are begotten of the Spirit—there is an energy in us, a new hope of life, which the Holy Spirit begets, nourishes, and builds up. The Holy Spirit is said also to seal us. That is to say, the promises of God that are recorded in his Word, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, give us God's assurance of victory. The Holy Spirit is also said to bear witness with our spirit that we are the children of God. Not the least in importance, however, the Holy Spirit of God also anoints us to work and witness for Jesus, and if we neglect this anointing influence we are not living up to all of our spiritual responsibilities and privileges.

Notice again how this witnessing commission begins: "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me." This would mean that if we are not living up to what the anointing signifies, the Spirit of the Lord is not fully "upon" us. To ignore this anointing, or to count it as of secondary importance, or upon the

basis of some fanciful theory which we develop to decide that the commission associated with the anointing of the Spirit no longer is effective or needed in the christian life, means that we are resisting the power of God. Paul likens this to grieving, and possibly quenching, the Holy Spirit of God in our lives.—Eph. 4:30; I Thess. 5:19

The term “anointing” is the Bible illustration by which God tells us that he authorizes and commissions us by his Holy Spirit to go to work for him and his son, Christ Jesus our Lord—to be coworkers with them. Therefore, in bearing witness to the Truth, we are partners with God, Jesus, and even with one another, as we work together forwarding God’s great plan of salvation, by which the whole world is to be reconciled to him in due time.

PREACHING TO THE MEEK

“The LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek.” Notice, we are commissioned to preach good tidings only to the meek. We are not to force the gospel message upon anyone, or attempt to impose it upon the consciences of the people. We are merely to preach good tidings to the meek—that is, to those who are willing to listen. How are we to do this? The Scriptures give us the proper methods. We are to “sow beside all waters.” (Isa. 32:20) We are also informed that in the morning we are to sow the seed and in the evening to withhold not our hands. (Eccles. 11:6) God has made it plain that if we thus proclaim the glad tidings as far and wide as we possibly can, then he will direct the issue as to the number of meek ones who will be reached and blessed thereby. Thus, we are to

proclaim the glad tidings even in the “evening.” We are pretty far into the evening now, but this is no excuse for ceasing to bear witness to the Truth.

Inasmuch as the Lord thus gives us the commission to continue preaching even at the very time when the dark night is settling down upon the world, it evidently means that there are still a few meek ones to be found—one here and one there. We may not know where these are to be found, but if we sow the Truth beside all waters, God will see that it reaches those whom he desires to call—he “giveth the increase.” (I Cor. 3:7) It is for us to be faithful in proclaiming the message by every means possible, to sow the seed in the morning and in the evening, and beside all waters, everywhere, and let God take care of the results. This is God’s command through his Word, and it has a direct application upon our being “beheaded for the witness of Jesus and for the word of God.”

Some may say, what good does it do to bear witness to the Truth? This is not the time for converting the world. True, this is not the time for converting the world, but it is the time to witness to the world, and this witness is to be given to the world whether they hear or whether they forbear. We might just as well ask, what results did Jesus’ witnessing produce? Jesus laid down his life witnessing for the Truth, as he was commissioned to do, but not because he expected immediate results. We are to do the same, because the same royal commission of God likewise applies to us. How blessed it is to be conscious of the fact that we are guided and strengthened by the same instructions of the Holy Spirit as was our Master and Head.

Jesus bore witness to the Truth right down to the very end of his earthly life. When Pilate asked him if he were a king, he replied, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth." (John 18:37) On Calvary's cross, with his last breath almost spent, Jesus preached the wonderful hope of the kingdom. (Luke 23:42,43) Throughout the years of his ministry, he used his strength to perform those remarkable miracles that illustrated the message he was proclaiming.

So we might well ask, what results did Jesus have? Did he convert the Jewish masses? No, he did not. In fact, just five days before his crucifixion he wept over Jerusalem, saying, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate."—Luke 13:34,35

Did Jesus convert Pilate? No, but he witnessed powerfully to him! Did Jesus convert the gainsaying crowd that heaped ridicule upon him as he hung upon the cross? He certainly did not, but he bore witness to them nevertheless. After the Master had said that the hour of darkness had come, still he continued to fulfill the terms of his anointing, even unto death. It was only his death that stopped him from witnessing "for the word of God."

We are also to work until the "night cometh, when no man can work." (John 9:4) This does not mean that we are to arbitrarily decide when the night comes, and on this basis conclude that it is time to stop witnessing to the Truth. God's instruction is

to keep on until “no man can work.” Additionally, we are not to be concerned about how much good it will do, or the present results. We are not to expect such rewards for our service this side of the veil. If we are willing to serve the Lord only if he shows us immediate results for our labors, then we do not have the Spirit of Christ. God does not want this kind of service.

THE HOPE OF RESURRECTION

“He hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.” These expressions, while telling us to whom it is our privilege to bear witness, also outline the nature of the message we are to proclaim. As we analyze these statements, they reveal that one of the great fundamentals of the kingdom message is the fact that it holds out a hope of resurrection from the dead.

If we should remove from our message the hope of the resurrection of the dead, we would have no message at all worth talking about. We would have no message of comfort for the church, and nothing wherewith we could bind up the brokenhearted in the world—nothing that would give the hope of “liberty to the captives.” The apostle says that if there is no resurrection of the dead, then our faith is vain, our preaching is vain, and we are found “false witnesses.”—I Cor. 15:13-15

Thus the apostle informs us that the true witnesses of Jesus are those who proclaim the message of the resurrection of the dead. This is true not only concerning our hope, the hope of Christ’s footstep followers, but it is equally true respecting hope

for the world of mankind. Paul outlines the fact that in our suffering with Christ, in our being held “in jeopardy every hour,” it is because we are being baptized with Jesus “for the dead”—that is, for the eventual benefit of the dead world of mankind. (I Cor. 15:29,30) If the dead world is not to be resurrected, then this “death-baptism” of the true witnesses for Jesus is in vain.

Certainly the kingdom message which we are commissioned to preach is one that must, if it has God’s approval, have incorporated in it the hope of restitution, “spoken by the mouth of all his [God’s] holy prophets since the world began.” (Acts 3:21) This restitution—a complete restoration of man to the perfection that was lost in Eden—has as its centerpiece the glorious resurrection hope for the world of mankind. Thus, even if our witness for Jesus produces little or no results as far as gathering those who might accept the present Gospel Age call to sacrifice, we are to rejoice in the fact that many will be comforted by the seeds of hope which we can sow concerning man’s future resurrection prospects.

THE ACCEPTED TIME

Jesus was also anointed to “proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.” Here is that part of the message that has to do with Jesus’ footstep followers of the present time. Jesus began the proclamation of the acceptable year of the Lord. So far as he was concerned it began at the time of his consecration. For his followers it began at Pentecost. While the dark night appears to be close at hand, and certainly much closer when compared to the days of the

Early Church, yet we still enjoy the privilege of proclaiming the acceptable year of the Lord.

Proclaiming the acceptable year of the Lord simply means holding out the hope of the High Calling. This is based upon the fact that during the Gospel Age God accepts the sacrifices of his saints, counting them “holy and acceptable,” because they are offered through Christ, and also because they are offered in the “acceptable year.” Paul says, “Now is the accepted time” for the calling, selection, and development of Christ’s body members.—II Cor. 6:2

Are we still to preach this? Yes—there is nothing in the Scriptures that cancels this part of the commission. Only when this work is completed will the night settle in “when no man can work.” In our study of God’s plan, we have learned to know enough about him to realize that he is a God of order, a God of power, and that he has his entire plan completely in hand. We can note with what definiteness the High Calling was opened up to the Early Church. There was no guesswork about it. This age of sacrifice was begun so definitely that there was no doubt in the minds of the Early Church about it.

Can we suppose that at the end of the age God would withdraw his overruling providence with respect to the message of truth, and permit his zealous people to continue preaching the acceptable year of the Lord after he had closed the door to enter therein? Would he permit any to have engendered in their hearts this hope of winning the prize if there were no such hope? Would God allow himself to be placed in a position where he would need to explain that his people had no right

to preach the High Calling—that he had no place in the body of Christ for those who had thus been inspired by his truth?

Can we imagine God running his affairs like this? Most emphatically—no! The Gospel message pertaining to the acceptable year of the Lord started out definitely, just when God wanted it to. Likewise, when this time comes to an end, and there is no further opportunity for spirit-begetting, we may expect it to stop just as definitely. God will not permit us to preach this acceptable year of the Lord when that door is closed. The very fact that we find dear ones still offering themselves in full consecration to the Lord means that this time has not yet come, and we are to continue proclaim this acceptable year. It is still a part of our commission.

THE DAY OF VENGEANCE

The Master did not quote further from the commission of Isaiah 61:1-3, and wisely so, because the next part did not apply to him while in the flesh. It reads, “To proclaim . . . the day of vengeance of our God.” (vs. 2) This “day of vengeance” was outlined in the prophecies as the period of trouble at this end of the age that brings about the overthrow of Satan’s empire. It was not the due time in Jesus’ day to proclaim it, but we are now living in that day of vengeance. The hand of God is heavy upon the nations, and because it is we see throughout the world exactly what the Master stated would be the condition, namely, that all the tribes of the earth are mourning because of him. (Matt. 24:30) It is these mourning ones that we are to endeavor to comfort with the kingdom message.

To declare the day of vengeance does not at all imply the thought of pronouncing vengeance—"Vengeance is mine, . . . saith the Lord." (Rom. 12:19) Our proclaiming the day of vengeance is simply giving the Bible explanation of the significance of what is taking place in the world—that the time has come for God to rid the world of Satan's corrupt dominion, so that Christ's kingdom of righteousness can be established. It is the hope of this glorious remedy that brings comfort to those who otherwise would be bewildered and mourning. When we see it from this viewpoint, the day of vengeance message is the most blessed, the most encouraging, the most cheering one that God's people ever had the privilege of proclaiming.

MOURNERS IN ZION

There is still another part of the commission, namely, "To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning." (Isa. 61:3) If we apply this to the systems of Christendom, we would all agree that there is plenty of mourning going on there—perhaps more than at any previous time, because these systems are failing. Millions who have had the idea that the church would convert the world, and that civilization was reaching ever higher levels, are losing faith. They are seeking an answer to the unexpected developments in today's world. Today, indeed, orthodoxy means very little, because these disillusioned ones realize it cannot furnish the answer to their problems. The Truth, however, does furnish the answer, and it is our privilege to proclaim it to as many of these mourning ones as we can.

There is even a more vital application of this commission to comfort those who “mourn in Zion,” and that is to the true Zion, the Lord’s true people. It is to these, especially, that we are commissioned to “give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.” (Isa. 61:3) Many of the Lord’s consecrated people are “mourning” in the sense that they are going through severe trials—trials of health, of job, of family, of financial distress, and of other difficulties which burden them greatly. Indeed, we have the promise that the Lord will not allow us to be tested and tried above what we are able to bear—yet, because we are still tabernacled in the flesh, we sometimes “mourn” under these hard experiences. As fellow-brethren, we are commissioned to “appoint” to those so burdened encouraging words of “beauty,” “joy,” and “praise,” that they might be spiritually lifted up from the “ashes,” “mourning,” and “heaviness” of heart which trouble them.

That these dear ones now mourning in Zion are the Lord’s people, is shown in the fact that they are called in this same verse “trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.” Yes, they are the planting of the Lord—a part of the “wheat” class—the remaining members thereof presently being prepared and developed. Surely we cannot conclude that the great majority of those thus “mourning in Zion” will, in the final picture, turn out to be merely tares. Rather, God is permitting these severe tests to come upon his people. By these, he is teaching each of us the lesson of individual obedience and faithfulness to our

consecration vows. He is teaching us to stand with him in our hour of trial.

Some need a helping hand to stand—we should consider it a privilege to extend ours to them in the hour of their trial. Let us not conclude that those who may be mourning in Zion are not the planting of the Lord. It is our privilege to lay down our lives for these because they are our brethren. Indeed, we have a glorious privilege in such experiences to carry out the commandment of Jesus—to love one another as he loved us.

If we are faithful in doing this, and in witnessing the Truth to all as we have opportunity, the Lord will bless us. In such a course of faithfulness to him, we can have the confidence that this is what God's Holy Spirit has commissioned us to do. By obeying this commission in its true spirit, we will be among those who are "beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God," and who will "live and reign with Christ a thousand years." ■

*Bride and Bridegroom, then appearing,
Shall illuminate earth's gloom;
And the nations will be shouting,
"Lo, our King! make room, make room!"
Oh, the times of glad refreshing,
Soon shall bring a sweet release,
Through the glorious reign of blessing,
Through the mighty Prince of Peace!*
—Selected

The Restless Sea

*“There shall be
signs in the sun,
and in the moon,
and in the stars;
and upon the earth
distress of nations,
with perplexity; the
sea and the
waves roaring.”
—Luke 21:25*

THE WORD “SEA” IS USED

in several ways in the Scriptures. The earliest use of this word is in the account of creation: “God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas: and God saw that it was good.”—Gen. 1:9,10

The literal seas or oceans spoken of in the account of creation cover 70% of the earth’s surface. They play a vital role in the fine balance of nature and climate that exists in man’s earthly home. However, for the purposes of our consideration, we will confine our thoughts primarily to the seas and other bodies of water referenced or described in the Bible. As we will note, some of these references are to literal seas, while others are symbolic in nature.

BORDERS SET BY SEAS

The Mediterranean Sea, as it is known today, is referred to by various names in the Bible. In Deuteronomy 11:24, it is called “the uttermost sea.”

These words, spoken to the nation of Israel, were descriptive of the fact that this vast body of water was the “uttermost” western boundary of the land God had given them. It is also called the “great sea,” “hinder sea,” “sea of the Philistines,” and “sea of Joppa.” The Apostle Paul often traveled on this sea.—see Acts 27

Other seas and great water courses, such as lakes and rivers, are used in the Scriptures to set borders. When the land of promise was divided among the tribes of Israel, and a portion given to Judah, seas were used as both the eastern and western borders. We read in Joshua 15:5, “The east border was the salt sea, even unto the end of Jordan. And their border in the north quarter was from the bay of the [salt] sea at the uttermost part of Jordan.” The description continues in verse 12: “The west border was to the great sea, and the coast thereof.”

The “salt sea” mentioned in these verses is the ancient name for the Dead Sea, which is also known as the Sea of Arabah [sea of the plain]. In Genesis 14, we find the account concerning Abram’s deliverance of Lot, who had been taken captive from his home in Sodom. “All these were joined together in the vale of Siddim, which is the salt sea. . . . And they took Lot, Abram’s brother’s son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed.” (vss. 3,12) Abram gathered together an army, went out to battle, and rescued Lot. He then returned all of his goods to him, having triumphed over the combined armies of several kings.—vss. 14-17

This event, in which he demonstrated great faith, was significant in the life of Abram. Immediately

following it, the covenant that God had given him earlier, recorded in Genesis 12:1-4, was confirmed. In Genesis 15:1, we read, “After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.” Continuing in verse 18, “In the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates.” Here again we see that God used bodies of water—in this case rivers—as borders, to mark the extent of the land promised in his covenant with Abram.

LOGOS EXISTED BEFORE THE SEAS

In Proverbs 8:24,25, we have mentioned the pre-human existence of our Lord Jesus. “When there were no depths, I was brought forth; . . . Before the mountains were settled.” Indeed, God’s only begotten Son had seen the Father’s mighty works, marked his wonderful wisdom, and even shared in the creative work himself. He experienced his Father’s love, and had his wonderful plan of the ages revealed to him step by step. Thus, he joyfully cooperated in the work of this plan with his Father, being intimately acquainted with him, and provided knowledge of all of his purposes and arrangements. Speaking of his creative work, we read, “All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.”—John 1:3

We also read in Hebrews 1:1-3: “God . . . Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of

his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.” As heir of all things, Jesus will be the representative of his Father for all eternity.

RAGING WAVES

We know that in the natural realm the seas have waves, which at times rage severely, producing lots of foam. In the Scriptures, this thought is used symbolically to represent the restless, and sometimes, raging and foaming seas of fallen humanity during this “present evil world.” Mankind in this condition is spoken of as “Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame.” (Jude 13) The world of fallen man, like the sea, is never calm, but constantly in motion, resulting in waves and foam of trouble to a greater or lesser extent continuously. In the seas there are tidal ebbs and flows resulting from the pull of the moon; there are currents, and upwellings of water from the cooler depths. This constant motion brings nutrients closer to the surface, and also dislodges material from the sea bottom. Such things remind us of the words of Jesus, prophetic of our day: “There is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known.”—Luke 12:2

At times, the sea seems out of control, as observed during storms, hurricanes, and tsunamis [tidal waves] that have caused massive destruction, leaving costly damage and loss in their wakes. Often the infrastructure of the areas affected is destroyed. Even when the sea has calmed and the waves have

subsided, the destructive effects are long-lasting. Milder effects, such as erosion carrying away the sand, also remain as long-term evidence that the raging waves had been there. Symbolically speaking, the troubled sea of the present social order is likewise causing great destruction among the institutions of mankind, as we see Satan's kingdom being gradually destroyed.

World events and conditions during this present Time of Trouble have demonstrated this to us. Consider the "Arab Spring," the term referring to the wave of uprisings, demonstrations, riots, and civil wars in the Arab world that began in late 2010 and continue even now. The difficulties that arose in Egypt in 2011, for example, began with mere text messages being sent out via cell phones, yet grew to a great wave of social unrest and rebellion, bringing down the leader of the country, only to have the new leader brought down in July of this year. In England, a single event involving police action in 2011 was fanned by violent winds of troubled youths to out-of-control open defiance and acts of violence. Similarly, looking at the financial markets in recent years, there have been massive changes—declines followed by record gains—linked to a great recession, followed by what is termed a gradual recovery. Indeed, the institutions of this world are being tossed to and fro by the raging sea.

SYMBOLIC SEA OF TROUBLE

Although the sea is a symbol of the masses of people in this present evil world who are in a restless and unstable condition, we are assured that when all are brought under the righteous rule of God's

kingdom through the Christ, this sea will cease to be. “I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.” (Rev. 21:1) Then, there will be no more restless masses, no more uprisings, no more wild waves of trouble. Complete law and order, righteous and just, along with loving obedience to God by mankind, will be established, to prevail on the earth forever. The “earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.”—Isa. 11:9

Before these blessings can come about, the present Time of Trouble must have its work completed, and so we continue to see daily the seas and waves roaring, as noted in our theme text, propelled by discontent, hatred, selfishness, and sin. In the next verse, we read concerning this trouble, “Men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.”—Luke 21:26 The kingdoms of this present order will go down, overwhelmed by the symbolic “restless sea.” The great religious systems of this world also, characterized as “Babylon” in the Scriptures, will go down to destruction “like a great millstone, . . . cast . . . into the sea,” never to rise again.—Rev. 18:21

JESUS CALMS THE SEA

We recall the account of Jesus miraculously walking on water toward the ship where his disciples were during a severe storm. As he walked toward the ship, the Lord asked Peter to come to him on the water. In faith, Peter did so, but when the wind came up, he was afraid and began to sink into the

water. Jesus stretched forth his hand and caught Peter, speaking these words to him, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" (Matt. 14:31) When Jesus entered the ship with Peter, "the wind ceased."—vs. 32

The lesson for us in this account is that we, too, will have storms and trials come upon us, as Christ's disciples. These will require great faith to endure, and in some cases, the delivering intervention of the Master. Such has been true from Pentecost until today. The Lord has permitted various storms of life to come to his footstep followers, but he is never far away. At the right moment, he appears to comfort us so that our fear will subside, and seeing the needed development in us, he also calms the storm.

As we grow in our faith and trust in God and his Son, our Redeemer, we then should not fear. The psalmist tells us, "GOD is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear." (Psa. 46:1,2) We also are provided with the familiar but powerful words of the 23rd Psalm: "The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever."

IN THE WORLD BUT NOT OF IT

We all have much in common with the world of mankind. “There is none righteous, no, not one. . . . For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” (Rom. 3:10,23) In addition, we are all prone to the same illnesses and other problems that are in the world today. In many ways, the journey of present life has been through a valley of tears and sorrows. However, if we put our trust in the Heavenly Father and are willing to be led by him, our cup of experience will not just be filled with the sorrows of life that affect all on this earth. It will also be filled with the spiritual joys and sweet blessings of a life guided by his loving hand and wise providences.

Eighty years ago, during a time of great national turmoil, in his first inaugural address, President Franklin Roosevelt said, “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” Just as forcefully, the Scriptures tell us we are not to fear, “though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.” (Psa. 46:2) Yes, the storms rage and the waves roar about us, but the bride of Christ will be guided, completed, and glorified “beyond the veil,” because they have put their faith and trust in the Heavenly Father.—Rev. 2:10

GOD’S MIGHTY POWER

God used the sea to demonstrate his mighty power when delivering the Israelites from the pursuing Egyptians. In the account, found in Exodus 14:8-31, the Israelites had reached the Red Sea and appeared to be trapped, with Pharaoh’s hosts approaching. Just as all hope seemed to be lost,

Moses said to the people, "Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever." (vs. 13) The account continues: "Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided." (vs. 21) After the children of Israel had passed through safely, God once again had Moses stretch forth his hand over the sea. It returned and covered the Egyptians, and "there remained not so much as one of them."—vs. 28

This was a most important event in God's dealings with the Israelites, and is referred to numerous other times in the Scriptures. In Nehemiah 9:10,11, we read, "[Thou] shewedst signs and wonders upon Pharaoh, . . . And thou didst divide the sea before them, . . . and their persecutors thou threwest into the deeps, as a stone into the mighty waters." It is mentioned again by the prophet Isaiah, as well as the psalmist, "Behold, at my rebuke I dry up the sea." "Our fathers understood not thy wonders in Egypt; they remembered not the multitude of thy mercies; but provoked him at the sea, even at the Red sea. Nevertheless he saved them for his name's sake, that he might make his mighty power to be known. He rebuked the Red sea also, and it was dried up: so he led them through the depths, as through the wilderness."—Isa. 50:2; Ps. 106:7-9

These evidences of God's mighty power serve as examples to his people that "with God all things are possible." (Mark 10:27) Through his plan of redemption God will bring blessings to all of the

people of earth. How beautiful are these words: “Art thou not it [he] which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that hath made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over? Therefore the redeemed of the LORD shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head: they shall obtain gladness and joy; and sorrow and mourning shall flee away.”—Isa. 51:10,11

A PICTURE OF THINGS TO COME

Israel’s crossing of the Red Sea was an appropriate picture of the coming resurrection of mankind from the dead in Christ’s Millennial kingdom. When the Israelites were in the midst of the sea, they were also in the bottom of it, and therefore would have been dead under any normal circumstances. However, by the mighty power of God the waters were separated and they passed through on dry ground and were delivered to safety.

A further part of this picture lies in the fact that the host of the Egyptians was destroyed. This was also done by the power of God when he caused the waters to return as they pursued the Israelites. Just as all the willing and obedient of mankind will be delivered through the kingdom processes, all enemies of God will be destroyed—those that continue to pursue the destruction of his Word, his plan, and his people. These will include Satan and his host, as well as any of mankind who willingly cooperate with them after being given an understanding of God’s plan and glorious character. Also, in advance of the final destruction of God’s enemies at the end of the kingdom, the evil systems—

political, social, economic, and religious—of Satan’s present dominion are being overthrown in the great Time of Trouble, which will culminate in Armageddon.

Throughout his evil dominion over the earth, the Adversary has brought storms and whirlwinds of temptation, opposition, and persecution against both God’s faithful followers as well as mankind in general. God has permitted this so that all of humanity will learn to appreciate his great love in sending his Son, our great Savior Christ Jesus, to be man’s Redeemer. Indeed, through the giving of his life as a ransom, he has brought about the means whereby the present storms will soon cease, making way for the sunshine and calm to follow. “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.”—Ps. 30:5

We read in Psalm 65:5-7, “By terrible things in righteousness wilt thou answer us, O God of our salvation; who art the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of them that are afar off upon the sea: Which by his strength setteth fast the mountains; being girded with power: Which stilleth the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the people.” This psalm of encouragement to the children of Israel points forward to all those who will ultimately become God’s people. This will include all of mankind, who, in Christ’s kingdom, will be brought back from death to live eternally, if obedient, on the restored, perfect earth—a true promised land, “flowing with milk and honey.”—Exod. 3:8

These words from the psalmist also apply to spiritual Israel, those who in this present Gospel

Age have made a covenant of sacrifice and have complete faith and trust in their Heavenly Father and his Son, Christ Jesus. These are shown in the Scriptures as those who “overcome” the storms of this present evil world, even while living in the midst of them. (John 16:33; Rev. 3:21) Those striving to be of this “little flock” must have their feet firmly placed upon the solid rock of Jesus, and the solid ground of his character likeness, in order to be able to withstand the present storms and troubled seas.

NO MORE SEA

As previously quoted, Revelation 21:1 promises a time when there shall be “no more sea.” The sea which John speaks of as being “no more” is, as already pointed out, a symbolic one, representing the restless people of earth, unstable as a result of the present evil order under Satan’s dominion. In Christ’s kingdom, there will be no more need of this symbolic sea, for the present order and kingdoms of earth will have been overwhelmed by it. The “sea” will have accomplished its purpose in God’s arrangement. Thus, we see that the physical earth and seas will not be destroyed. We are assured of this by the Scriptural statement: “The earth abideth for ever.”—Eccles. 1:4

In the subsequent verses of Revelation 21, we are given a picture of the spiritual ruling powers of the new heaven and new earth. These powers will be vested in Christ and his glorified bride. They will rule over the earth, and supervise the restoration and reconstruction of man and society based on righteousness, justice, and love. All of the present

evil institutions of earth will be gone. The Christ, head and body, will also be the Mediator between God and man during this restoration period. Once fully restored and tested, righteous man will stand before God, perfect and complete, as Adam did in the Garden of Eden before he sinned. Mankind, however, will then have the invaluable benefit of his prior experience with sin and its resulting storms and raging consequences. Never again will he have a desire to return to such conditions.

“I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them [forever], and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things [including the restless sea] are passed away.”—Rev. 21:2-4 ■

OBITUARIES

The following brethren have recently finished their Christian course. We wish to express our sincere sympathy to their family and friends in the loss of these dear ones.

Sister Jean Krystek, Valparaiso, IN—September 16. Age, 88

Sister Josephine Marzewski, Detroit, MI—September 19. Age, 88

Going On to Perfection

“Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.”
—Hebrews 6:1,2

THIS ADMONITION OF THE

apostle to “go on to perfection,” like many other passages in the Bible, has been greatly misunderstood and oftentimes misused. Such misinterpretation is due largely to the very same thing that leads many sincere students of God’s Word to misconstrue other passages—namely, a failure to take into consideration the context. The great doctrinal and practical truths of the Bible usually are set forth in

a narrative of logical order or sequence, rather than appearing as a collection of unrelated verses. If we fail to take this fact into consideration we are almost certain to form wrong conclusions as to the meaning of isolated texts, not read in connection with the divine revelation. This is particularly true

with respect to the passage now under consideration.

When we truly discern what the apostle is talking about in this passage, we will find that he is emphasizing the importance of being established in the faith, rather than encouraging us to restlessly seek after new theories or new experiences. Additionally, the “perfection” to which he refers is that desirable quality of Christian character which enables us to resist the influences of the devil, the world, and even our own flesh—which have the tendency of unsettling our mind and put us in an attitude in which we are easily “carried about with every wind of doctrine.”—Eph. 4:14

“HOLD THE BEGINNING OF OUR CONFIDENCE”

Apparently these Christian Hebrews, for some reason, were showing a tendency to be unstable, to vacillate between being faithful to God and to his truth on the one hand, and yielding to the influences of the world, the flesh, and the devil on the other. Early in the epistle the apostle urges, “Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.” (Heb. 2:1) Surely Paul would not thus urge us to give heed to the glorious doctrines of Christ, and a little later in the same epistle advise—as some seem to think he did—that we stop talking about these doctrines, and “go on to perfection” by some other route.

In Hebrews 3:13,14, the Apostle Paul continues: “Exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if

we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end.” Surely Paul would not here urge the importance of that first confidence or enthusiasm which we had for the Truth originally, setting it forth as the actual basis upon which we may hope to be made partakers of Christ, and then, three chapters further on imply that we should leave or abandon that condition and go on to some unknown, visionary, or mystical state of heart and mind, mis-called “perfection.”

Then, in chapter 10:23,24 we read, “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised.)” Here again we have the admonition to be steadfast, not to waver, not to be discontent and dissatisfied because we are not continually having new and thrilling experiences and finding “new light.” It is the very opposite to the theories that are so often erroneously based on the apostle’s words in the 6th chapter, relative to going on to perfection.

“CALL TO REMEMBRANCE THE FORMER DAYS”

In Hebrews 10:32, Paul holds up an ideal example of Christian experience to these unsettled Hebrew brethren, saying, “Call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions.” Compare this text with chapter 6, verses 10 and 11, which read, “God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister. And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end.” There is no mistaking the meaning of these words.

It is evident that these Hebrews had been enthusiastic in the beginning of their Christian experience, but for some reason they had become slack. If they could get back to that “first love,” and continue steadfastly in it, that would be the ideal thing—it would be the “perfection” of Christian experience which the apostle was advocating. For this reason he urges them, in the 10th chapter, to “call to remembrance the former days.” This was a very practical way of impressing upon them the importance of the “first love” in their Christian life.

The entire 11th chapter of this remarkable epistle to the Hebrews is devoted to a consideration of faith. Paul discusses the kind of faith that enables its possessor to hold steadfastly and unwaveringly to the promises of God—the Messianic promises—and to be enthusiastic about the glorious Gospel of Christ to the very end of his life. The patriarchs and prophets of old are held up by the apostle as wonderful examples of faith in God’s promises. Then, in the beginning of the 12th chapter, Jesus, the crowning example of faith, is lifted up before us. This is done, not to encourage us to pursue an illusive bubble of speculative human philosophy—a chase which leads nowhere, and which usually leaves one in a labyrinth of confusion and doubt—but to help us see the importance of taking greater heed to the things which we have heard, and to encourage us to greater faithfulness in laying down our lives in God’s service, even as did our beloved Redeemer.

PLIGHT OF THOSE WHO “FALL AWAY”

Having thus traced, briefly, this theme as detailed in Paul’s epistle to the Hebrews—steadfastness in

Christian faith, hope, and service—let us now note how clearly this thought is set forth in the very chapter from which our text is taken. After urging us to go on to perfection, the apostle continues, “For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance.” Compare the latter part of this passage with the expression in verse 1: “not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works.”

There can be no misunderstanding the meaning of the apostle’s general argument here set forth, which is that of the importance of being established in the faith and in the service of God. So strongly does he present his argument, he indicates that if we are not thus established it would imply the “foundation of repentance from dead works” previously laid and designed to be a permanent, not temporary, part of our life, cannot be “renewed again.” Indeed, that foundation was designed to remain with us for our entire consecrated walk, and is the continual and unchanging basis of our service to God.

Later in this chapter, Paul proceeds to remind them of the sure foundation for faith and hope which the Heavenly Father has provided. He says that this glorious hope is centered in that all-comprehensive promise made to Abraham—the promise which was bound both by God’s Word and his oath. “Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his

counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil.”—Heb. 6:17-19

How evident it is that what Paul is setting forth as the ideal state for the Christian is that of being “anchored” to the sure promises of God—even those promises that have to do with his oath-bound covenant to bless all the families of the earth through the seed of Abraham. This fact becomes even more apparent when we trace the apostle’s argument in connection with his use of the word “perfection,” as used in our theme text. To fully appreciate this, however, it is necessary to remember that this epistle was written to and for the special benefit of Hebrew converts to Christianity. This is not to say that Jews and Gentiles, as Christians, have any different standing before God, nor that they constitute different companies or classes as New Creatures. However, the apostle shows how the Gospel message can be applied to meet the peculiar problems of Jews, as well as all other groups who come under its sacred influence.

SHADOW VERSUS SUBSTANCE

While Gentile Christians can and should apply all the helpful admonitions of this epistle to themselves also, and be spiritually strengthened thereby, yet we can see that the wise apostle addressed these Hebrew Christians in particular, and applied the promises of the Gospel to their own peculiar

problems. These Jews had been accustomed to serving God upon the basis of the Law Covenant, but Paul would have them realize that those arrangements were merely typical—a “shadow” of something better to come later. He says, “The law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year.”—Heb. 10:1-3

Many Hebrew Christians had not yet fully grasped the fact that the Law Covenant was now of no effect, and that it was no longer necessary for them to continue “laying the foundation of repentance from dead works” of the Law over and over again, as they had done in the past. They had not fully grasped—had perhaps forgotten, or else lacked faith to believe—that while “every priest [of the Law Covenant arrangement] standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins,” yet now Christ, by his one offering, “hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.”—vss. 11,14

As a further confirmation of this same fact, Paul adds, “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (chap. 9:14) The doctrinal difficulties of these Hebrew Christians are apparent. While evidently they had laid hold

upon the Gospel of Christ with enthusiasm at the beginning, yet through lack of an abiding faith, or perhaps of a full understanding of the real efficacy of the shed blood of Christ, they had begun to slip back into their old habits of Jewish thought and formalism, relying again on yearly ceremonies. They were trying to mingle the typical ceremonies of the Mosaic Law with their faith and service toward God through Christ—not realizing that Jesus, as the antitype, had put an end to the type, “nailing it to his cross.”—Col. 2:14

ONLY ONE FOUNDATION OF REPENTANCE

For this reason, Paul argues the matter out for them in detail, pointing out the fact that all the wonderful lessons taught typically by the Law and by the services of the Tabernacle—going back even to the time of Melchisedec—are fulfilled in and through Christ, and in those who are invited to be “partakers” with him in the “heavenly calling.” (Heb. 3:1) Even the New Covenant arrangements of the next age, Paul shows, are dependent upon the one sacrifice of this antitypical High Priest. Now if these Hebrews could but exercise full faith in Christ and in his shed blood, and could lay hold properly upon the promises of joint-heirship with him in the kingdom, they would not be continuing to lay again the foundation of repentance from dead works as had been their custom under the Mosaic Law.

Paul does not say that it is not necessary to lay a proper foundation of repentance in the first place, nor that it is unnecessary to remain on that foundation. Rather, inasmuch as the true foundation of repentance on the part of the Christian, whether

he be Jew or Gentile, is based upon the abiding efficacy of the blood of Christ, it remains secure and dependable as the only proper basis upon which we can draw nigh unto God and serve him acceptably.

As Christians, are we going on to perfection within the true meaning of the apostle's words? Are we becoming more and more rooted and grounded in the faith, in the great truths of God's plan, the Gospel of Christ? Are we becoming more deeply conscious of the fact that the blood of Christ actually cleanses us from all sin, and that because of this we can, at all times, come boldly to the throne of heavenly grace, there to obtain mercy, and find grace to help in every time of need?

Is the Truth, every precious feature of it, becoming daily a greater reality to us? Is our faith firmly fastened to the anchor which is our heavenly hope? Will that faith continue to hold, enabling us ever to remain enthusiastic about God and his promises? Are we just as enthusiastic—just as zealous, and even more so—as when we were first enlightened? If so, then we can rejoice that this admonition of the apostle is being realized more and more in our daily Christian lives—that we are actually going on to perfection in God's appointed way. ■

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San Luis Obispo, CA
October 26,27

G. Balko

Orlando, FL October 26,27

M. Balko

Pittsburgh, PA October 5,6

D. Christiansen

San Luis Obispo, CA
October 26,27

R. Goodman

Atlanta, GA October 20

L. Griehs

Grand Rapids, MI
October 12,13

S. Jeuck

Jacksonville, FL October 13

T. Krupa

Detroit, MI October 20

E. Kuenzli

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PITTSBURGH AREA CONVENTION, October 5,6—Sewickley Grange Hall, Route 136, West Newton, PA 15089. Contact G. Balko. Phone: (724) 771-0139

GRAND RAPIDS CONVENTION, October 12,13—Kenowa Hills Middle School, 3950 Hendershot Avenue NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49544. Contact J. Houlmont. Phone: (231) 972-4259 or E-mail: ljhoulmont@charter.net

DETROIT/DETROIT METRO JOINT MEETING, October 20—Pleasant Ridge Community Center, 4 Ridge Road, Pleasant Ridge, MI. Phone: (248) 542-7322 Contact P. Nemesh. Phone: (248) 649-6588

ORLANDO CONVENTION, October 26,27—South Seminole Masonic Lodge, 122 Triplet Lake Drive, Casselberry, FL 32707. Contact J. Kuenzli. Phone: (407) 831-2098 or E-mail: jkuenzli@cfl.rr.com

SAN LUIS OBISPO CONVENTION, October 26,27—Masonic Hall, 859 Marsh Street, San Luis Obispo, CA. Contact M. Allard, 637 Shamrock Lane, Pismo Beach, CA 93449. Phone: (805) 773-2962 or E-mail: medlallard@juno.com

NEW HAVEN CONVENTION, November 3—Westwoods Italian-American Club, 85 Chase Lane, West Haven, CT. Contact A. Suraci, 171 Johnson Road, Hamden, CT 06518. Phone: (203) 248-3793 or E-mail: annasuraci@comcast.net

SAN DIEGO CONVENTION, November 29-December 1—Alliant University, 10455 Pomerado Road, San Diego, CA 92131. For accommodations at Alliant University, contact B. Bach, PO Box 323, Alpine, CA 91903-0323. Phone: (619) 445-4879 or E-mail: bbach1@cox.net. Other information, contact R. Rice, 13084 Treecrest Street, Poway,

CA 92064. Phone: (858) 486-0381 or E-mail: rice@gmx.com

IBADAN END OF YEAR THANKSGIVING CONVENTION, December 7—Place of fellowship. Contact C. O. Egbu, #2 Darlington Street, Mokola Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. Phone: 2348033339949 or 2348082146621 or E-mail: egbucaje@gmail.com or egbucajetan1@yahoo.com

GREATER NEW LONDON PRE-MEMORIAL CONVENTION, March 30—East Lyme Community Center, 37 Society Road, East Lyme, CT. Contact V. Grillo. Phone: (860) 823-7099 or E-mail: millennialview@sbcglobal.net

*How wise are God's commands!
How sure his precepts are!
We cast our burdens on the Lord,
And trust his constant care.*

*Beneath his watchful eye
His saints securely dwell;
The hand which bears all nature up
Doth guard his children well.*

*Why should this anxious load
Press down thy weary mind?
Haste to thy heav'nly Father's throne,
And sweet refreshment find.*

*His goodness stands approved,
Unchanged from day to day.
We'll drop our burdens at his feet,
And bear a song away.*

—Hymns of Dawn