

The DAWN

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Where Is God in Our Troubled World?

***“Be still, and know
that I am God: I
will be exalted
among the
heathen, I will be
exalted in the
earth.”
—Psalm 46:10***

THE QUESTION OF OUR

title is a most compelling one, especially to those who claim faith in the Bible. As we have recently entered 2017, men and women in high places continue to spend much thought and effort in their attempts to resolve the problems, perplexities, and threats of our present world. In the United States, the people wonder what future events may take place as a consequence of the new incoming presidential administration. Some have hopes of better days ahead, while others have fears that dangerous times lay before us. Only as the coming weeks, months and years pass by, and as national and world events unfold, will we know the realities of how present conditions in our country and abroad will change going forward.

All will likely agree that we live in a troubled country, which is part of a troubled world, full of difficult and confusing problems. Complex immigration issues, threats of terrorism, loss of industries and jobs overseas, escalating racial tensions, deteriorating moral standards, ongoing economic uncertainty, fears of inflation and daily violence of every kind, are but a sampling of the many troubles which plague just the United States. We can now add to that the disturbing matter of cyber-terrorism and “hacking,” even at the highest levels of government. The resulting mixture of dilemmas and challenges is immense, to a point nearly beyond comprehension, much less resolution.

To those who believe in an all-wise God, who created man in his own image, it is certainly fair-minded to ponder the question of what his objectives are in permitting all these troubles to come upon the earth. Truly, the rational mind says there must be some reason for present circumstances, even if we cannot understand what it might be. We suggest, however, that God’s purposes in allowing these can be understood, for the same Scriptures which describe our wise and loving Creator also vividly portray his eternal plans for man’s ultimate good and everlasting blessing.

GOD’S WORD CONCERNING WARS

Looking at the matter of wars and armed conflict—just one of man’s many problems—God has specifically promised to intervene in his “due time” and end this tragedy of man’s history. Among many such prophetic assurances, we will cite two. The psalmist provides these words concerning God’s

purpose: "He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire." (Ps. 46:9) This positive statement of God's future imposed disarmament of man is immediately followed by our opening text, which declares that, as a result of his actions, God will then be "exalted" among mankind.

The second Scripture presents the same assurance, but enlarges upon what God's further purposes are following this disarmament. We quote: "He shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it." (Mic. 4:3,4) The concluding phrase of the prophecy, which states that this promise is from "the mouth of the LORD," gives us a special guarantee. This is because, in Isaiah 55:11, God states to the prophet that the words which "goeth forth out of my mouth: . . . shall not return unto me void, but . . . shall accomplish that which I please, and . . . prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." Hence, when God states that the "mouth of the LORD of hosts" has spoken it, it becomes his special guarantee.

TROUBLE STARTED LONG AGO

Other prophecies of the Bible provide similar assurance of God's plan to end earth's many additional troubles. When thoughtful people read these promises of God's intervention, and his plans to stop

the trouble, they may wonder why he allowed it to start in the first place. Here too, it is only by the Scriptures that we can ascertain why sickness, death, and trouble began, and upon what basis God can stop them. First, we quote the words of Paul: “By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” (Rom. 5:12) This verse describes the original sin of our first parents, Adam and Eve. Because of that disobedience so long ago, we were all condemned to death while we were yet in the loins of Adam.

The account in Genesis informs us that Adam and Eve were created perfect and placed in a garden of perfection in Eden. None of us has ever seen a perfect human being, but we can somewhat visualize what such would be like. Imagine a young man in his early twenties with the well-formed body and supple grace of an athlete. Not only would a perfect man be noble of feature physically, but of even greater significance there would be perfection of intellect. Occasionally, we observe or read of a virtuoso in music, mathematics or some other line of endeavor. Adam had mental capacity beyond all these, and in every field of thought. Eve, his counterpart and helpmate, was equally intelligent.

Adam was told that if he obeyed God he would live, but if he disobeyed, “Thou shalt surely die.” (Gen. 2:17) Although Adam and Eve were perfect in form and substance, and had perfect mental capacity to understand all things, including God’s instruction, the one thing they lacked was experience. This proved to be a matter of vital importance, as they disobeyed God, perhaps not fully realizing the dire consequences of their actions to themselves and to

all their future progeny. Nevertheless, the word of the “mouth of the LORD” was sure, and our first parents were expelled from their garden home to begin the long and painful dying process.—Gen. 3:23,24

THE EARTH CURSED

When our first parents disobeyed, God also said, “Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life.” (vs. 17) The statement that the ground was cursed “for thy sake” at first seems strange. However, when we give it thought we can understand what God meant. We recognize that man in his undone, sinful condition is better off when busy. The fact that he, for nearly the entire time of his existence on earth, has been busy toiling and struggling to provide for himself, is one reason why he has continued to survive, albeit for only a few short years. In addition, the “experience” man sorely lacked in the Garden of Eden, he has been getting in untold measure in the ages since. Thus, it is truly for man’s “sake,” or ultimate benefit, that God permitted these circumstances to come about.

The “curse” upon planet Earth is clearly evident. Nearly every continent has its vast desert regions, dense jungles, uninhabitable climates, and non-arable land. Storms, earthquakes, floods, droughts, wildfires, extreme weather of all kinds, along with pollution of air, land, and water, have all had their part in fulfilling God’s pronouncement of a curse upon the Earth. This, too, is part of the experience man has gone through, and continues to endure, as the result of sin. The “mouth of the LORD” tells us, however, of the time when “there shall be no more curse.”—Rev. 22:3

GOD'S LOVE NOT CAST ASIDE

Although God turned his favor away from the human family because of Adam's disobedience, his love was still operative. This becomes manifest when we read the familiar words of Jesus: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16) When Jesus stated that God loved the world, it meant that he had devised a plan by which man would be released from the sentence of death. God's arrangement for this release is clearly stated by Paul: "Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." (I Cor. 15:21,22) That is, by Christ's death and resurrection, Adam's condemnation was offset in God's sight, and an opportunity to regain life, by obedience, will be provided to all mankind, because all are "in Adam."

In another place, Paul said, "There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all." (I Tim. 2:5,6) The word "ransom" is translated from the Greek word *antilutron*, which could be more properly rendered, "a corresponding price." This definition helps to make the matter clear. The entire race was condemned in one man, Adam, who fell from perfection—"In Adam all die." This was a just sentence of God, and could not be rescinded unless there was another perfect man, a corresponding price, or equivalent, to Adam, to take his place in death. God was prepared to accomplish this by giving "his only begotten Son," who was willing to be the instrument used for his Father's loving

purpose. Thus, God entered this arrangement, and by his power transferred the life of his Son from heaven to Mary's womb.

This transfer of life was necessary because the one who would die in Adam's place had to be a ransom, or corresponding price—that is, a human being, “born of a woman.” (Gal. 4:4, *Revised Version*) It was so essential that this requirement be fulfilled in every detail, that Jesus could not offer himself until he was thirty years of age. The Jewish Law decreed that a male was not counted as a man until he reached the age of thirty. How harmoniously these thoughts are brought together by quoting Galatians 4:4 in its entirety: “When the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law.”

A knowledge of these truths from God's Word gives us the answer to the question previously raised: Why did God allow the world's trouble to begin in the first place? It started because of Adam's disobedience and subsequent condemnation. It will be stopped because Jesus took Adam's place in death. A recognition of this perhaps causes one to ask further—if Jesus provided a ransom price for Adam two thousand years ago, why have men continued to die?

“IN DUE TIME”

The verse quoted earlier from I Timothy 2:6, which speaks of Jesus as a “ransom for all,” continues by saying that this ransom is “to be testified in due time.” This phrase suggests a specific plan to become operative at a particular time, when the benefits of Jesus' death will be provided to all mankind. The reason for the seeming delay in man's receipt of

these benefits is that during the interim God has been selecting from among mankind a class who will reign with Jesus.

In the Bible, this group is described in various ways. They are called “disciples,” the “bride, the Lamb’s wife,” the “body of Christ,” his “joint-heirs,” a “little flock,” the “church,” as well as by other titles. (John 8:31; Rev. 21:9; I Cor. 12:27; Rom. 8:17; Luke 12:32; I Tim. 3:15) These, who walk by faith, and who are tested and tried, are changed to the spirit nature in the “first resurrection,” and share with Christ Jesus in the work of restoring the remainder of mankind during his thousand-year kingdom reign.—Rev. 20:6

Consequently, from these Scriptures we see the plan of God taking form. Many centuries after Adam was condemned, including all of mankind yet unborn in his loins, Jesus was transferred to earth to die in Adam’s place. Subsequent thereto, and until the time to release mankind from death, God has been performing a special work of choosing coworkers for Jesus—namely, his church.

RESTITUTION PROMISED

The return of our Lord at his Second Advent is for the purpose of restoring mankind to life, based upon Jesus’ ransom sacrifice. With his church, they will together assist the willing and obedient to return to the perfection possessed by Adam prior to his fall. This will include the additional benefit of experience with the terrible results of sin—something Adam lacked. Note how plainly the Bible states that Jesus’ return is to restore that which was lost by Adam. We read, “He [God] shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto

you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.”—Acts 3:20,21

The phrase “times of restitution” refers to the kingdom reign of Jesus and his church. Its object is the resurrection of all mankind from the dead, and their return to perfection. The word restitution denotes a restoration of that which was lost. That which was lost through Adam’s disobedience was perfect life, and dominion over a perfect earth. At his First Advent Jesus came as a man to die. At his Second Advent, he comes as a glorious spirit being to bring health, life, and happiness to the willing and obedient of mankind. Thus, we understand that the prophecies which describe the dark troubles of today also promise that afterward will come the restitution blessings.

TROUBLE—THEN BLESSINGS

Hear the words of God’s holy prophets concerning present troubles: “Nations have roared, Kingdoms have tottered, He hath uttered his voice, Earth melteth. . . . Come! View the doings of [the LORD],—Who hath set desolations in the earth.” (Ps. 46:6-8, *Rotherham Emphasized Bible*) Then comes the “afterward,” citing words previously quoted: “He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire. Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.”—vss. 9,10

Another of God’s prophets similarly speaks first of the trouble: “Therefore wait ye upon me, saith

the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy.” Now notice the afterward: “For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent.”—Zeph. 3:8,9

It is evident that man’s technological advances, which were no doubt designed to better the world, have had the opposite effect. Such “progress,” coupled with selfishness, moral decay, and a general disregard of justice and mercy, has instead resulted in unprecedented trouble, and threatens man’s destruction unless God intervenes. We quote another example of pictorial language describing this troubled time, and the blessings afterward. “The LORD shall go forth as a mighty man, he shall stir up jealousy like a man of war: he shall cry, yea, roar; he shall prevail against his enemies. I have long time holden my peace; I have been still, and refrained myself: now will I cry like a travailing woman; I will destroy and devour at once. I will make waste mountains and hills, and dry up all their herbs; and I will make the rivers islands, and I will dry up the pools.” Now notice the blessings to follow: “I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them.”—Isa. 42:13-16

In another prophecy, God likens the trouble to the shaking of a great earthquake, but again follows

with a kingdom picture. "Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; And I will shake all nations." How beautifully the next phrase describes the kingdom which follows: "And the desire of all nations shall come." (Hag. 2:6,7) What a beautiful thought is given here, that in the restitution kingdom, which comes because Jesus died in Adam's place, the "desire of all nations shall come."

MANKIND'S DESIRES

For most of mankind, their desires are very fundamental and proper. They desire food and nourishment. Millions today are hungry and undernourished. In part, this is due to much of the Earth's land surface being unproductive because "cursed is the ground for thy sake." Isaiah describes prophetically the time of the kingdom, stating that then "the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose . . . for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert. And the parched ground shall become a pool, and the thirsty land springs of water." (Isa. 35:1,6,7) Another prophecy which describes the earthly kingdom and promises that the land will yield abundantly reads: "Let the nations be glad and sing for joy: for thou shalt judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon earth. Let the people praise thee, O God; . . . Then shall the earth yield her increase; and God, even our own God, shall bless us."—Ps. 67:4-6

High among the desires of man is that for health. How few there are who truly feel healthy and strong, and how short is man's life even among these,

especially when we consider that it was God's desire that man live forever. Notice, though, what God has promised to man when the kingdom is established. "The LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; he will save us. . . . The inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity." (Isa. 33:22,24) In the last book of the Bible, as part of the description of the kingdom reign of Christ, we read that "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 are passed away." To specially strengthen our faith that such shall be so, notice the assurance which follows: "And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful."—Rev. 21:4,5

Having food and health is mostly meaningless, however, unless another of man's great desires comes to fruition. Man rightly desires safety, security—peace. When God's kingdom is established in the earth, man's yearning desire for peace will finally be realized, but it will not come because of his own efforts. Instead, the Bible makes clear that it will be safety, security, and peace brought about by the intervention and power of God. This is shown in the prophetic words quoted near the beginning of our lesson, but which bear repeating: "He shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any

more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it.”—Mic. 4:3,4

A recent statistic shows that, in 2015 alone, over 1.6 trillion dollars was spent worldwide on defense, war, and the military. Think of the benefit to mankind if this enterprise and energy were turned to good things. Micah’s prophecy promises this very thing, stating that the resources once used for armament building will be directed to proper avenues of benefit to mankind. The making of swords, spears, guns, knives, bombs, and all other devices of warfare will cease, and be replaced by production of those things which will help provide for man’s blessing and benefit. This is the silver lining to the present worldwide trouble, and is a source of great comfort to those whose faith is in God’s Holy Word.

DEAD RAISED TO LIFE—MAN’S GREATEST DESIRE

The Scriptures indicate that the kingdom of peace and life will not be just for the people living at the time of its establishment. We recall again the Apostle Paul’s statement: “Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” (I Cor. 15:21,22) All who were condemned in Adam shall return from the sleep of death to receive their opportunity for a full resurrection—or re-standing, as the Greek text indicates—to life. The fact of the resurrection is difficult for many to accept, including some who believe in the Bible.

The Apostle is forceful, however, in stressing this doctrine, as noted in verse 13 of the same chapter, and states: “If there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen.” Those who appreciate the power and wisdom of God stagger not at the thought of so great a being remembering and awakening all who have died. If imperfect man can devise hand-held devices capable of storing nearly limitless facts for instant recall, God can surely, at the speed of thought, know the face, form, and character of every being who has ever lived since Adam.

Psalm 147:4,5 states: “He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names. Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite.” Although it is not possible to truly know, some astronomers estimate that there are 10 trillion galaxies in the universe, containing a total of 100 octillion stars—which, in notation, is a 1 followed by 29 zeros. If God created a multitude of stars even approaching such a number, named them, placed them in groups, and ordered their precise pathways, we cannot doubt his wisdom and power to bring back the dead.

The kingdom for which Jesus taught us to pray—“Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth”—shall come. (Matt. 6:10) The “mouth of the LORD of hosts” has promised it, and how we long for its establishment, wherein, according to another of God’s prophets, “They shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”—Jer. 31:34 ■

Oneness in Christ

Key Verse: *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”*

—**Galatians 3:28**,
*New American
Standard Bible*

Selected Scripture:
Galatians 3:26-4:7

Rom. 12:4,5, NASB) These passages of Scripture encourage us to realize the blessed condition we enjoy—sharing a deep spiritual union with Christ and, consequently, oneness with other believers.

“Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Gal. 4:6, NASB) By faith, we enjoy a relationship as sons with our Heavenly Father. We rejoice in his acceptance of us—it is an act of great mercy. We are likewise accepted by Jesus, despite our many flaws and fleshly weaknesses. “The one who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified all have the same Father. That is why Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.”—Heb. 2:11, *International Standard Version*

THE KEY VERSE OF OUR

lesson presents the great truth that we are all one in Christ Jesus. The Apostle Paul further elaborates: “Even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.” “Just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.” (I Cor. 12:12;

“If ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” (Gal. 3:29) The great promise of which we have become heirs is to have a share in the blessing of all the families of the earth. This is the “gospel” message that was preached to Abraham in ancient time. (vs. 8) The entire human family will be blessed in God’s kingdom. If faithful unto death, we will have the privilege of dispensing blessings to all mankind. This wonderful hope should thrill and encourage each of us to remain faithful and maintain our spiritual oneness in Christ.

Despite the scriptural declaration of our oneness, the spirit and practice of sectarianism exists among much of Christianity. This has been true since the days of the Early Church. Paul fought against it, saying, “I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, . . . For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, . . . that there are quarrels among you. . . . Each one of you is saying, ‘I am of Paul,’ and ‘I of Apollos,’ and ‘I of Cephas,’ and ‘I of Christ.’”—I Cor. 1:10-12, *NASB*

Paul’s admonition is powerful, yet throughout the Christian era there has always been division. Some divisions were peaceful, some deadly, but none were authorized by Scripture. What is the remedy for God’s true people? What action should be taken by those who have wholly given themselves to God and his service? What shall the child of God do?

Consecrated believers should follow the principles of God’s Word. Jesus said, “By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:35, *NASB*) These words remind us that engaging in sectarianism and division is “worldly-minded, devoid of the Spirit.” (Jude 19, *NASB*) The oneness of Christ’s disciples, however, is evidence of true Christianity. May we exercise fervent love toward one another—the essence of oneness in Christ. ■

Freedom from Bondage

Key Verse: “Now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?”
—Galatians 4:9

Selected Scripture:
Galatians 4:8-20

WE ARE REMINDED IN our Key Verse of two important things. We have come to know God, and he likewise knows us. It is astonishing that God knows us. He is our Father now, we having been blessed by adoption into his family. Peter knew the importance of this fact, and said, “You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession; . . . you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

(I Pet. 2:9,10, *New American Standard Bible*) To this Paul added, “You are no longer a slave, but a son, and . . . an heir through God.” (Gal. 4:7, *NASB*) Being God’s children we enjoy great freedom, but that liberty requires that we leave behind our slavery to sin, self, and worldliness.

We recall the Israelites, who suffered terribly under bondage in Egypt. “Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery 2 God provided their release, yet, when adversity arose, Israel lamented for their days as slaves. When trapped between Pharaoh’s army and the Red Sea, they wished for the perceived security of Egypt. (Exod. 14:8-12)

Later, when weary of manna, they derided Moses: “We remember the fish we ate in Egypt that cost nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic.” (Num. 11:5, *English Standard Version*) Although they were no longer slaves, they still had a slave mentality. We are in danger also of slipping into that mindset.

As noted in our Key Verse, the Galatian brethren were returning to “weak and beggarly elements.” Paul defines these qualities in the epistle of Colossians: “If you have died with Christ to the elementary principles of the world, why, as if you were living in the world, do you submit yourself to decrees, such as, ‘Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch!’ . . . in accordance with the commandments and teachings of men? These are matters which have, to be sure, the appearance of wisdom in self-made religion and self-abasement and severe treatment of the body, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence.” (Col. 2:20-23, *NASB*) This means that avoiding handling, tasting, and touching things as the Law commanded has no real value in overcoming carnality.

Ironically, some may find comfort in slavery, while finding the challenges of liberty to be intimidating. God wants us to exercise spiritual judgment in our behavior. Only by doing this will we develop into mature Christians. “I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you. Be not like a horse or a mule, . . . which must be curbed with bit and bridle, or it will not stay near you.” (Ps. 32:8,9 *ESV*) We love the Lord for his instruction and care. It is this understanding which keeps us near to him, not a bit and bridle.

A wise Christian once observed, “The Lord wishes us to learn, not as children, certain fixed rules, but as philosophers the fixed principles which can be applied.” We are not looking for a list of rules to obey, but an understanding of the mind of God to guide our daily lives. May we, by God’s grace, have the strength and courage to properly embrace our freedom from bondage. ■

Liberty in Christ

Key Verse:
*“Brethren, ye have
been called unto
liberty; only use
not liberty for an
occasion to the
flesh, but by love
serve one another.”
—Galatians 5:13*

Selected Scripture:
Galatians 5:1-17

PAUL’S WORDS FOUND IN our Key Verse illustrate the inherent need for restraint in the exercise of Christian liberty. Many mistakenly believe that liberty means the right to exercise unrestrained license—to do whatever their impulses dictate. This is not the case with Christian liberty. It is characterized by the use of discretion in our dealings with others. In particular, our liberty in Christ is not for the purpose of promoting carnality. Properly used, however, liberty is a means of elevating, enlightening, and ennobling our spiritual minds. It is the most profitable when used for the service and blessing of others.

We learn that it is our liberty to give up personal preferences and comforts. We are not obligated to defend these, although our fleshly minds may take great exception to that fact. Our Key Verse declares, “by love serve one another.” Love is the guiding principle behind our use of liberty, and finds its primary focus in devotion to God. After God, it flows out to others. Expressing liberty with these priorities leads to spiritual growth, as well as freedom from selfishness.

Romans 14 speaks of a conflict that arose in the church at Rome over the petty matter of the right to eat meat that had been offered to idols. The conscience of some

brethren could not tolerate partaking of such meat. However, the Apostle Paul observed that those whose faith was strong enough to eat this meat were at liberty to do so. Those brethren realized that an idol was nothing more than a lifeless piece of rock. It could neither add or detract from the value of the meat. However, the strong were cautioned not to act with arrogance toward those of weak conscience, who were troubled by this practice. Those strong in faith may have felt they were at liberty to eat meat offered to idols, but there existed a deeper truth in this situation, even as it does for us today. This greater meaning is the realization that we want to assist others more than self. It is our privilege to give up our rights, our liberties, for the sake of others. As Paul admonished, "If because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died."—Rom. 14:15, *New American Standard Bible*

The Scriptures teach that God's purpose in giving us liberty is not realized in allowing us to eat or drink whatsoever we wish. The exercise of liberty in our daily Christian life is not about trivialities. It is about things that touch eternity. It is about righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. The exercise of godly love for others is a beautiful expression of true Christian liberty. "The whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"—Gal. 5:14, *NASB*

The Apostle Peter taught the beauty of tempering liberty with restraint. "For the Lord's sake submit yourselves to every human authority: whether to the king as supreme, or to governors who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. . . . Live like free people, and do not use your freedom [liberty] as an excuse for doing evil. Instead, be God's servants. Honor everyone." (I Pet. 2:13-17, *International Standard Version*) May we learn, as servants of God, the true meaning of liberty in Christ and practice it in our lives each day. ■

Holy Living by the Spirit

Key Verse: *“The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.”*
—Galatians 5:22,23

Selected Scripture:
Galatians 5:18-6:10

IN TODAY’S LESSON, THE

Apostle Paul urges the necessity of leading godly lives—that is, holy living by the Spirit. By contrast, the works of the flesh are identified: Idolatry, hatred, wrath, strife, envying and drunkenness to name a few. The warning regarding these is grave, “they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” (Gal. 5:19-21) We are reassured, however, that our pursuit of the “fruit of the Spirit” by a life devoted to righteousness and

promoting godly love will receive a great and bountiful harvest, and a blessed reward.

“Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of the faith.”—Gal. 6:7-10

It is relatively easy to say that we are Christ’s and

that we follow his teachings. It is quite another task to live those words. We all desire great closeness to Christ, and to be obedient to our Father in heaven. An evidence of our closeness and obedience is to bring forth spiritual fruit to God's glory. Jesus left us with this reassuring lesson: "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vine-dresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bear more fruit. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples."—John 15:1,2,8, *New American Standard Bible*

Jesus left us a warning regarding those who would outwardly pose as Christians, while at the same time trying to lead the Lord's people astray. However, Jesus also supplied us with a method of identifying them which is quite simple: "Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. . . . So then, you will know them by their fruits."—Matt. 7:15-20, *NASB*

Jesus likened our hearts, if they are pure and godly, to good soil. The Word of God is planted in that soil. Those who hear the word and understand it, bear fruit—"some a hundredfold, some sixty, and some thirty." (Matt. 13:23, *NASB*) The proof of discipleship, the evidence of sonship, and the stamp of authentic Christianity in daily life, is bearing fruit of the Spirit. By this we prove to be Jesus' disciples. It is a great testimony to the power of God's spirit and love when we develop these qualities, even in the midst of great adversity around us. Light shines brightest in the greatest darkness. We pray that spiritual fruit—love, joy, peace, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faith—will be abundantly manifest in all of God's children. By this his name is glorified. ■

Gentiles Invited into the Body of Christ

***“That the Gentiles
should be
fellowheirs, and of
the same body, and
partakers of his
promise in Christ
by the gospel.”
—Ephesians 3:6***

THE FOLLOWERS OF Christ, following his death and resurrection, had multiplied significantly. However, they were composed only of Jews, and there were not enough found to complete the body of Christ. God then

began to call and choose disciples from among the Gentiles. The first recorded Gentile convert was a Roman centurion named Cornelius. We read concerning him: “There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, A devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway.”—Acts 10:1,2

It appears that this centurion was the same individual as mentioned previously in Matthew 8:5-10 and Luke 7:1-9. The Matthew account reads as follows:

“When Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, And saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus saith unto him, I will come and heal him. The centurion answered and said, Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldest come under my roof: but speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. For I am a man under authority, having soldiers under me: and I say to this man, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it. When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.”

Jesus then added, “I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” (vss. 11,12) This prophetic statement made by Jesus indicated that many in Israel would fail to avail themselves of the opportunity to become members of the body of Christ, and that God would turn to the Gentiles to find a people for his name. It was appropriate that Jesus should remark that he had not found such “great faith” in all Israel, in his commendation of the centurion.

CENTURION RESPECTED BY THE JEWS

Luke provides some additional details of this experience in his account. He begins by saying that when Jesus had ended his words to the people, “he entered into Capernaum. And a certain centurion’s servant, who was dear unto him, was sick, and ready to die.

And when he heard of Jesus, he sent unto him the elders of the Jews, beseeching him that he would come and heal his servant.” (Luke 7:1-3) We note how this report indicates that instead of the centurion, a Gentile, directly approaching Jesus, he sent elders of Israel to ask Jesus for this favor of healing his servant.

The ensuing verses tell us why the Jewish elders so promptly complied with the centurion’s request. “When they came to Jesus, they besought him instantly, saying, That he [the centurion] was worthy for whom he should do this: For he loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue. Then Jesus went with them.” (vss. 4-6) The account continues in harmony with that of Matthew, including Jesus’ statement that the centurion had displayed more faith than he had found in all Israel. Luke’s account of this event concludes by informing us that the Jewish elders who had brought Jesus, returned to the centurion’s house, and “found the servant whole that had been sick.”—vs. 10

It is logical that anyone whom God would choose to come into the body of Christ would first have exposure to Jesus’ teachings. We do not know when Cornelius came to Caesarea, which was in Judea, but it was likely prior to the start of Jesus’ ministry. Let us note the providential leadings of God which were shown in the matter. Being displaced from one’s homeland to a faraway place was unlikely at that time, unless the person was in the military service, or in Roman politics. As an officer in the army, Cornelius was evidently assigned responsibility in the region of Judea. While there, he possibly observed the religious worship of Israel, comparing it with his own religion. Perhaps realizing the futility of serving

multiple heathen gods, he accepted the worship of the one true God of Israel. Whether in this way, or some other, God prepared Cornelius and his household for the greatest of all favors—an invitation to run for the mark of the prize of the high calling!

AN ANGEL APPEARS

The record of Cornelius' conversion is found in Acts, chapter 10. An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a vision, and instructed him to send for Peter, who was in Joppa, at the home of a tanner named Simon. Cornelius complied, sending two of his servants and a devout soldier. (vss. 1-8) About that same time, Peter had a most unusual experience. He had gone to the housetop to pray. He was hungry and would have eaten, but while the meal was being prepared he had a vision. In this vision, what appeared as a "great sheet knit at the four corners," descended from heaven. In it were animals considered unclean according to the Jewish law. A voice said, "Rise, Peter; kill, and eat. But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common."—vss. 9-15

This same message was repeated twice more. As Peter pondered the meaning, the men sent by Cornelius were at the gate and asking whether Peter was lodging there. The Holy Spirit enabled Peter to associate the three instructions of the vision to eat unclean animals, with the three Gentiles who had come on behalf of Cornelius. (Acts 10:16-21) As they explained their mission, the description given to Peter of Cornelius, and the one of the centurion in

Luke 7:5 are remarkably similar. Luke 7:5 says, “He loveth our nation, and he hath built us a synagogue.” Acts 10:22 says, “Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews.” A Roman centurion who would love Israel enough to build them a synagogue would be a most unusual man. Knowledge of his good deeds would be publicized throughout the nation. It is unlikely that there would have been two centurions that matched this unique description.

Peter lodged the visitors overnight, and the next day they all traveled to Caesarea with brethren from Joppa accompanying them. When they arrived at the home of Cornelius, they found a large group of kinsmen and near friends. (vss. 23,24) The “devout” soldier sent on this mission, as well as the presence of these associates, gives us further insight into Cornelius’ life. His devotion to the God of Israel was not secret, and others had been convinced thus to worship him as well. As Cornelius saw Peter coming, he fell at his feet, worshiping him. Peter explained that this was not necessary—he was an ordinary man. (vss. 25,26) He also said, reminding them of a point of Jewish Law of which they were likely aware, “Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean.”—vs. 28

CORNELIUS’ TESTIMONY

Upon Peter’s inquiry as to why he had been sent for, Cornelius rehearsed all that had happened concerning the angel’s appearance to him. (vss. 29-33) Peter exclaimed, “Of a truth I perceive that God is

no respecter of persons,” and began to explain the reason for God’s interest in the Gentiles. (vss. 34-43) He spoke about Jesus—how he went about “doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil.” It is noteworthy that Peter spoke of the teachings of Jesus in a way that implies they were already familiar with them, saying, “The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ: . . . That word, I say, ye know.”—vss. 36,37

As Peter spoke, the Holy Spirit came upon his hearers and they received the gift of speaking in foreign languages. By this sign, none of the Jewish brethren there, as well as Peter, doubted that Gentiles were being called by God. Cornelius and all his household were baptized, and Peter stayed with them for several days. (vss. 44-48) Although the name of Cornelius is remembered as the first Gentile converted to Christianity, it was actually the entire group assembled at his home that had been invited by God to seek the High Calling.

The selection of this first group of Gentiles marked the end of exclusive favor to Israel for the extending of this great honor to be part of the church class. From this point on, there would be “neither Jew nor Greek,” but all would be “one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal. 3:28) The way was now open for Gentiles to come into the body of Christ, and the witness of the Early Church, under the guidance of the Apostles, would begin to expose more Gentiles to the Gospel.

GENTILES’ INTEREST GROWS

Intense persecution had driven many Jewish brethren from Jerusalem to other lands, resulting in a general spreading of the message of truth.

(Acts 8:1,4) At first, those who went to other areas preached the Gospel to “Jews only.” (Acts 11:19) Soon, however, their message came to the attention of Gentiles also, and as their interest in the Gospel increased, some became believers and began associating themselves with the Jewish brethren.

Such was the situation in Antioch, a city three hundred miles north of Jerusalem. We read: “Some of the Lord’s followers had been scattered because of the terrible trouble that started when Stephen was killed. They went as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch, but they told the message only to the Jews. Some of the followers from Cyprus and Cyrene went to Antioch and started telling Gentiles the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord’s power was with them, and many people turned to the Lord and put their faith in him.”—Acts 11:19-21, *Contemporary English Version*

News of this influx of Gentiles into the church at Antioch reached the ears of the apostles in Jerusalem, and they selected Barnabas to go and assess the situation. He was a good choice since he had previous association with Gentiles when he lived in Cyprus, and probably could speak their language well. When he arrived, Barnabas found the entire congregation—Jews and Gentiles alike—rejoicing together in the knowledge of God’s plan and eager to know more. He set about to assist them as much as he could in further study and joint fellowship, for “he was a good man, and full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.” Because of his valuable help, the church in Antioch began to prosper and “much people was added unto the Lord.”—vss. 22-24

BARNABAS SEEKS SAUL

As Barnabas watched this growing interest in the truth by Gentile brethren, his mind no doubt went back to what the Lord had declared about Saul's special ministry to the Gentiles. (Acts 9:15) Convinced that Saul would have a vital interest in what was now going on, Barnabas set out for Tarsus to find him. Saul, whose name God would soon change to Paul, returned with Barnabas to Antioch, and it was there that his ministry as an apostle had its start. This large congregation in Antioch, composed of Jewish and Gentile brethren, was the first of its kind, and it was where the brethren were first called "Christians."—Acts 11:25,26

During that time, a famine came upon that part of the world which, evidently, severely affected the brethren in Jerusalem and Judea, who were already quite poor. When the congregation at Antioch learned of their plight, they took up a collection and sent it by the hands of Barnabas and Paul to help their friends in Jerusalem. (vss. 27-30) This mission also gave Barnabas an opportunity to give a firsthand report of the witness work which was prospering among the Gentiles, and to acquaint them with Saul's significant role in that work. No doubt the gift they together bore helped the Jewish brethren to realize God's hand in these important matters. After completing their mission, the two travelers returned to Antioch, and John Mark, a nephew to Barnabas, accompanied them.—Acts 12:24,25

Barnabas and Saul were selected as "prophets and teachers" in the church at Antioch, along with three other brethren, "Simeon that was called

Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch.” (Acts 13:1) As teachers, they had diverse backgrounds, and came from distant places. Barnabas had lived at one time on the island of Cyprus; Saul came from Tarsus in Asia Minor; Lucius was from Cyrene, a city in northern Africa. It is not known with certainty where Simeon called Niger came from, but it is thought that he perhaps also came from Africa. Manaen was from Jewish royalty, being a foster brother to Herod the tetrarch, and most likely raised in Jerusalem. How fitting it was that in the large congregation of Jewish and Gentile brethren at Antioch, five elders with such different backgrounds were chosen to teach the brethren. Faithfully, these leaders of the Early Church “ministered to the Lord,” as Gentiles began to join with Jews in accepting the invitation to be part of the body of Christ.—vs. 2 ■

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.

Brother William Terry, Ventura, CA—December 12.
Age, 92

Brother Derrick Nadal, Bilsthorpe, England—
December 19.

Sister Marguerite Kamarunus, Akron, OH—
December 22. Age, 92

Sister Marjorie Chastain, Columbus, IN—January
13. Age, 89

A Meditation of Thanksgiving

***“It is a good thing
to give thanks unto
the LORD, and to
sing praises unto
thy name,
O most High.”***

—Psalm 92:1

IN THE OPENING WEEKS

of this New Year, it is quite appropriate that we seek to render our “thanks unto the LORD,” as our theme text declares. Another passage of Scripture we might consider as we begin our lesson declares these sentiments from the psalmist: “Bless our God, O peoples, And sound His praise abroad, Who keeps us in life And does not allow our feet to slip. For You have tried us, O God; You have refined us as silver is refined.”—Ps. 66:8-10, *New American Standard Bible*

“Thanks be to God that His grace has preserved us, ‘kept us from falling,’ through another year:—that so many of us are still of one heart and of one mind in respect to His Word and its service! When we remember that the Adversary is to be permitted to bring ‘strong delusions’ upon the Lord’s people for the very purpose of sifting out all not truly his (II Thess. 2:10-12), it should surely call forth our

thanks to God that the opening of another year finds us still standing fast,—appreciating the Truth, and in full accord with all the divine appointments by which He has kept us from falling.”—*Daily Heavenly Manna*, January 1

The foregoing words well express the sentiments which should be in the hearts of all the Lord’s consecrated people. As we review the year recently ended, and look forward to the days before us, most assuredly we can render our thanksgiving to God for the ways in which he has bountifully dealt with us. We know that God is continually providing all things needful for our growth and development in the narrow way. Thus, we realize that “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.”—James 1:17

GIVE THANKS EVERY DAY

Every day can be one of thanksgiving to us if we have the attitude, “The blessing of the LORD, it maketh rich.” (Prov. 10:22) Our thanks should appropriately include the good and needful things which we enjoy of a more material kind—food, clothing, shelter, family and friends. Indeed, many people in the world have a sense of thankfulness for their temporal blessings, and are able to enjoy, at least in some measure, the happiness afforded by these benefits.

A much deeper thanksgiving, however, is in our hearts if we have consecrated our lives in service to the Lord. Our gratitude to God causes us to say concerning our life, “As for me and my house, we

will serve the LORD.” (Josh. 24:15) Recalling this lesson from Joshua, he entreated the people, who had slipped away from serving the true and living God and their covenant with him. Joshua laid before them a choice, “Choose you this day whom ye will serve.” We, who are now in covenant relationship with God, are likewise prone to slip due to our fallen flesh, and must daily make the same choice. We are exhorted in Psalm 2:11, “Worship the LORD with reverence And rejoice with trembling.” (NASB) Viewing our daily lives with such seriousness lends even greater importance to the words of Paul, “In every thing give thanks.”—I Thess. 5:18

In another place, Paul says, “Giving thanks always for all things.” (Eph. 5:20) Here again, the matter of thanksgiving goes far beyond the good things of this fleshly life. The “all things” for which we thank God include the privileges of spiritual enlightenment, and the providences of God in all our experiences. In addition, we are to be thankful for our trials as well as our blessings. Such an attitude of mind shows that we have committed our will to the doing of the Father’s will, and are thankful for the privilege of saying, “as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

Our title suggests a connection between thanksgiving and meditation. The apostle states, “Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all.” (I Tim. 4:15) The word “meditate” in this verse is defined by *Strong’s Concordance* as: to take care of; to revolve in the mind; to concern. The NASB translation says, “Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them.” What

things are we to meditate on, take pains with, and be absorbed in? Our meditation should be centered on God—his wonderful plan, precious promises, and character attributes of wisdom, justice, love, and power. How our meditation on these things makes us thankful!

Our thanksgiving to God is also focused on the great gift of his only begotten Son, and for the promise of eternal life centered in Christ Jesus, our Savior and Redeemer. We thank God, and love him, “because he first loved us.” He has “saved us, and called us with an holy calling.” All of this God has made possible, “For by grace ye are saved through faith; . . . it is the gift of God.” (I John 4:19; II Tim. 1:9; Eph. 2:8) God’s grace, or favor, assures us that he desires only those conditions in our life which will help our progress in the narrow way, and which will best assist us in making our calling and election sure. “No good thing will he withhold.”—Ps. 84:11

Concerning his life, Paul said, “I . . . esteem all things to be a loss, on account of the excellency of the knowledge of the anointed Jesus.” (Phil. 3:8, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*) His reason is given in the last part of the verse, “that I may win Christ.” If we are like Paul, and “press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling,” the things that we suffer now will not be “worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us,” an “exceeding and eternal weight of glory.” (Phil. 3:14; Rom. 8:18; II Cor. 4:17) Such words should strengthen us, as they did Paul, to continue in our Christian walk, even unto death.

OUR HEART'S EARNEST DESIRES

Our thanksgiving to God should instill in our heart certain desires related to the fulfillment of our consecration vows. We, who are walking in the narrow way, have been given much, and of us much is required. (Luke 12:48) One of our chief desires is to be strengthened spiritually by “the faith which was once delivered to the saints,” and to be built up in our “most holy faith.” (Jude 3,20) Closely related is the desire we should have to always dwell under the wings of our Heavenly Father. (Ps. 91:4) To be under his wings implies that our focus is heavenward—upward. This will greatly assist us in being built up in our “most holy faith,” and enable us to more fully “draw near” to God “with a true heart in full assurance of faith.”—Heb. 10:22

Another desire we are to have is zealotry to serve the Lord. As children of the Most High, we should be constantly watching for opportunities to serve him and his people, and do with our might what our hands find to do. (Eccles. 9:10) Jesus said, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God,” to which Paul adds, “Seek those things which are above.” (Matt. 6:33; Col. 3:1) The word “seek” in these verses has the thought of “endeavor” and to “strive after,” showing the importance of work and service in our effort to attain the heavenly “kingdom of God.”

An important desire we should have is to look for the Lord’s providential overruling in our affairs. This means we must submit to his all-wise direction. To do so requires great care to ensure that our will is submissive to his, and, to the greatest extent possible, that our actions are similarly in harmony with those things he would have us do. In thanksgiving,

once again, we can realize the benefits of the covering robe of Christ's righteousness at those times when we fail. (Isa. 61:10) Yet, our heart's desire should always be to submit our entire being as "a living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable unto God," a "reasonable service."—Rom. 12:1

We recall the wonderful examples of those who demonstrated great faith in the Heavenly Father, in particular those Old Testament heroes of faith identified in Hebrews, chapter 11. Herein is another of our desires, that we strive for the same level of faith which they possessed, remembering that the things which took place in ages past "happened . . . for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition." (I Cor. 10:11) With the development of such faith should also come great humility, as we remember these faithful ones of the past, although "having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect."—Heb. 11:39,40

The longing desire of each consecrated heart is to see the Lord, "face to face." (I Cor. 13:12) Although this verse says we presently "see through a glass, darkly"—that is, obscurely or only in part—it is, nevertheless, critical that we "study to shew" ourselves "approved unto God." (II Tim. 2:15) We must study the doctrines of God's Word; study our course of conduct; study to keep the proper spirit of the Lord in our heart; study our vow of consecration and its requirements; study both our strengths and our weak points. Our desire to see the Lord face to face can only be realized if we first have the desire, and put forth the effort, to study these things,

as they pertain to our walk in the narrow way, and learn by them.

SING PRAISES

Our opening text says that it is a “good thing” to render thanks and sing praises to the Lord. It is good in the sense that it is appropriate, reasonable and logical. It is good because a failure to do so would indicate an utter lack of appreciation of God’s goodness. If we truly value what the Lord is doing for us on a daily basis, our thanksgiving will spontaneously go to him. We may even find ourselves prompted to sing aloud to our Heavenly Father in thanksgiving to him. Such is quite appropriate, as David writes, “Serve the LORD with gladness: come before his presence with singing. Know ye that the LORD he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise.”—Ps. 100:2-4

In Psalm 92:2, the verse following our opening text, David speaks of showing forth God’s “loving-kindness in the morning” and his “faithfulness every night.” These words suggest a continual showing forth of praise to our Heavenly Father. It is not something which we do just occasionally, or only when things seem to be going well for us. If our heart has been touched by the loving-kindness of our God we will not be able to refrain from showing forth his praises at all times, and in all proper ways. In another psalm, David equates continual praise to life itself: “Because Your loving-kindness is better than life, My lips will praise You. So I will bless You as long as I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name.”—Ps. 63:3,4, *NASB*

Another way to praise God is stated: "Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving." (Col. 4:2) Note in this verse the connection between prayer and thanksgiving. Every victory of faith is an occasion for a prayer of thanksgiving. Every trial is an occasion for prayer for promised grace from our loving Heavenly Father. Our failures, especially, are occasions for prayers of forgiveness, as well as divine guidance. In all of these circumstances, Paul writes, "Let us . . . come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."—Heb. 4:16

Victories bring an especially needful season for prayer, that we do not become high-minded or puffed up. Rather, we should pray to remain humble and watchful for the next attack of the Adversary, which we know is sure to come. On the contrary, any seeming victory not followed by prayer, is not truly a victory, for it will leave a wide opening for Satan to soon attack again, the result of which is much less likely to be victory on our part.

Psalm 92:3 states that we show praise to God "upon an instrument of ten strings." It is believed that the ancient harp, such as was used by David, had ten strings, and we might properly think of it as representing the Truth, with its many harmonious "strings," as the principal medium by which we praise God. True appreciation of his wonderful plan should be a compelling motivation for our praise to him. As the Apostle Peter reminds us, "Ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light."—I Pet. 2:9

A SONG OF TRUTH

As Truth-enlightened people, we echo the words, “He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God.” (Ps. 40:3) The truth of God’s plan is illustrated in various ways in the Bible. One of these is that of food, or meat. How thankful we are to be living at the time when we believe our Lord has come at his Second Advent, has girded himself, and served his household with “meat in due season.” (Luke 12:37,42) We have the privilege of taking this meat into our mouth, eating it, digesting it, which then produces a “new song” in our mouth of praise to God.

Thanksgiving for the truth of God’s Word is also afforded us by using it as the “armour of light.” (Rom. 13:12) This armor is the means by which we are protected against “the wiles of the devil,” and “all the fiery darts of the wicked.” How greatly we need this protection, especially now as we live in the foretold “evil day” during which Satan is making every effort possible to overthrow our faith and destroy us as New Creatures! —Eph. 6:10-18

Water is also used in the Bible to represent Truth. We are sanctified and cleansed, Paul says, with the “washing of water by the word.” (Eph. 5:26) Water is also a source of refreshment, and quenches the thirst. Jesus said, “Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” (John 4:14) Each of these illustrations helps us to comprehend more fully all that the “new song” of Truth means to us. It nourishes, strengthens, serves as a protecting armor, sanctifies, cleanses, refreshes, and fully quenches our thirst.

HARMONY OF GOD'S PLAN

A song suggests harmony, and by this illustration we are reminded of the wonderful harmony of God's plan. "We have not followed," Peter says, the discordant sounds of "cunningly devised fables," but rather the harmonious "sure word of prophecy, . . . a light that shineth in a dark place." (II Pet. 1:16,19) The harmonious song of Truth fills our hearts with thanksgiving to God for his loving-kindness. Hence, in return, we also sing forth in similar harmony to others—our brethren, and even the world. What a privilege will be ours, if faithful, to sing that "new song before the throne" of our Heavenly Father and his glorified Son.—Rev. 14:3

As we sing forth the harmonious proclamation of Truth to others, we should not be disappointed or surprised that most will not be able to learn it themselves. Only a "little flock" can do this at the present time. (Luke 12:32) Others, however, may be impressed by what they hear, and see something of its beauty and harmony. Yet, they are unable to sing it themselves. By way of example, very few who listen with appreciation to a trained chorus of singers presenting *The Messiah* could sing this anthem of praise as it should be rendered. Nevertheless, they appreciate hearing others sing it, and are fascinated by, and take pleasure in, its melody and harmony.

"Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season." (II Tim. 4:2, *NASB*) With these words, Paul reminds us that our spiritual voices should always be ready, even at times when it may not be personally convenient for us, to give voice to the song of Truth. Surely, as he says in another place, "Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!"—I Cor. 9:16

BLESSINGS TO THE PEOPLE

During the present Gospel Age, only a relative few have been drawn and called of God to consecration and to a covenant by sacrifice. God, however, loves the entire world, and gave his Son a “ransom for all,” not merely for some. (John 3:16; I Tim. 2:5,6) When the work of the present age is complete, the Heavenly Father, through his glorified Son Christ Jesus and his bride, will pour out rich blessings to the rest of mankind. Peter speaks of this time as their “day of visitation,” which will bring a “restitution of all things” back to the perfect conditions enjoyed by our first parents before they sinned. (I Pet. 2:12; Acts 3:20,21) Our privilege now of knowing these future purposes of God toward his human creation should be one of our great sources of thanksgiving.

People are rapidly losing their confidence in man's ability to solve the worldwide problems in the Earth today. The foretold “distress of nations, with perplexity,” is increasing, despite human efforts to establish peace and security. (Luke 21:25) Fears of many kinds grip mankind in nearly every corner of the world, while at the same time nations and governments continue to grow their armies and armaments. Thankfully, this too will soon come to an end. God's righteous kingdom will be set up “in the top of the mountains, . . . and all nations shall flow unto it.” In that kingdom, “nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.”—Isa. 2:2-4

The Prophet Isaiah, foretelling present conditions, said, “Darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people.” (Isa. 60:2) Nevertheless, the time is near when the “Sun of righteousness” will

rise “with healing in his wings,” and the earth “shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.” (Mal. 4:2; Hab. 2:14) Then will be fulfilled the promise given so long ago to the ancient patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that through a promised seed—Christ and his church—“all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”—Gen. 28:14

How appropriate that our witness of these truths should be as a song of praise! It is not something which we engage in because we feel it is merely our duty to do so. Rather, it should come as a spontaneous expression of our love for the Heavenly Father and his plan. “How beautiful,” Paul says, it is to speak “the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!” (Rom. 10:15) Let us remember also that our witness of these things is not just to be at the beginning of a new year, or at other specially designated times of thanksgiving or celebration. We are to daily “sing unto the LORD a new song, and his praise from the end of the earth.”—Isa. 42:10

THE TIME IS SHORT

We do not know how much longer we will have the privilege of publicly singing the new song of the Truth. Therefore, it is of great importance that, while the Lord permits, we continue to bear witness concerning God’s wonderful kingdom by every means available—personal witnessing, the printed page, radio, television, the Internet, and the many other forms of electronic media and communication available today. Paul said, “Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, . . . and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a

price: therefore glorify God in your body.” (I Cor. 6:19,20) Because we do not know what tomorrow may hold for us, let us continually seek to glorify God by telling forth the beautiful message of the kingdom.

In his closing words to Timothy, Paul exhorted him, saying, “The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; . . . And they shall turn away their ears from the truth. . . . But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.” (II Tim. 4:3-5) Although these words had meaning in Paul’s day and throughout the age, they have special significance now, as we draw nearer to the close of the Gospel Age, and the troubles of this present world grow ever deeper. We, like Timothy, are admonished to continue to watch in all things, endure afflictions which may come to us, and make full proof of our ministry. “Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts,” Peter says, “and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and reverence.”—I Pet. 3:15

The dark night of the world’s distress is settling more and more deeply over the earth. Hence, we should not be surprised if our liberty to publicly proclaim the new song is restricted in the future. It is appropriate, then, that we copy the example of Jesus, who said, “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” (John 9:4,5) The Master commissioned us also, as lights, saying, “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works.”—Matt. 5:16

If we are faithful to our vow of consecration, we will have the privilege of being associated with our head, Christ Jesus, in the glorious work of enlightening and blessing the whole world of mankind. Let our meditations of thanksgiving find a firm foundation in the harmonious song of God's Word. "Trust in the LORD, and do good; . . . follow after faithfulness. Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass."—Ps. 37:3-5, *Revised Version* ■



WEEKLY PRAYER MEETING TEXTS

FEBRUARY 2—"For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die."—Romans 8:13 (Z. '95-8 Hymn 109)

FEBRUARY 9—"Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the LORD hath dealt bountifully with thee."—Psalm 116:7 (Z. '95-250 Hymn 104)

FEBRUARY 16—"Through honor and dishonor, through evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; . . . giving no offence in anything, that the ministry be not blamed."—II Corinthians 6:8,3 (Z. '01-314 Hymn 110)

FEBRUARY 23—"I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye."—Psalm 32:8 (Z. '02-251,249 Hymn 242)

The Story of Ruth

*“Whatsoever things
were written
aforetime were
written for our
learning, that we
through patience
and comfort of the
scriptures might
have hope.”
—Romans 15:4*

THE STORY OF RUTH IS

set during the time of the judges, before there were any kings in Israel except Jehovah their God. This period of their history lasted several hundred years. At the particular time in which our lesson begins, “there was a famine in the land.” (Ruth

1:1) God’s covenant with Israel was that if they obeyed he would bless them in basket and store, in rain and bountiful crops, and in freedom from their enemies. If they disobeyed, however, lack of rain and famine would be their portion, and they would become slaves to their enemies. (Deut. 28) Thus, this famine was a chastisement, and was evidently severe enough that it reached even the normally well-watered region around Bethlehem, also known in ancient times as Ephrata. Fittingly, the names Bethlehem and Ephrata mean “house of bread” and “fruitfulness.”

Due to the famine, an Israelite named Elimelech made the decision to take his wife, whose name was Naomi, and their two sons, to sojourn in the

neighboring land of Moab. The sons' names were Mahlon and Chilion. God did not bless this move to Moab, and not long after he and his family arrived there, Elimelech died, leaving his wife, Naomi, and their two sons. (Ruth 1:1-3) Mahlon and Chilion stayed in Moab with their mother. However, in violation of their covenant Law, they married heathen wives—"women of Moab"—named Orpah and Ruth. After only a few years, both sons also died. Naomi was now left in a foreign land, and had lost both her husband and two sons. Her once-promising life had turned to sorrow and bereavement—vss. 4,5

DEEP LOVE SHOWN

Naomi had most likely never been fully in sympathy with their move to Moab. When she heard that God had visited his people and the famine was ended, she turned her face and heart back toward Israel. (vs. 6) Naomi felt that her two daughters-in-law would be sacrificing too much to leave their kindred and friends to go with her to a strange land, sharing her poverty, so she urged them to return to their mother's house. She added, "The LORD deal kindly with you, as ye have . . . with me. The LORD grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband." (vss. 8,9) However, Orpah and Ruth wept and told Naomi that they would go with her back to Israel and share whatever lot came her way. They answered, "Surely we will return with thee to thy people." (vs. 10) This was indeed a scene of deep love and tenderness.

During their few years of married life, Orpah and Ruth had entered an Israelitish family, and no doubt benefited from a godly and wholesome

atmosphere. Marriage and home life are an important mirror of religion and worship. Israel had distinguished itself, not merely by the name of its God, but by its life in the home, and by faithfulness, love, and respect for spouse, children, and parents. These two young women were evidently gratefully attracted to the home life of Israel. They not only had heard the religion of Israel confessed in the land of Moab, but they also had seen it lived at home, and they returned the kind and tender treatment they had received from Naomi with deep, sacrificing love toward her.

Naomi knew that Orpah and Ruth could not hope for a husband or home in Israel, for what her sons had done in marrying foreign wives was against Jewish Law and customs. In Moab, no doubt, the young widows would marry again, and each of them would find protection, safety, and honor in the home of her new husband. They would also be able to raise a family of their own. In this regard, Naomi reminded them that, although the three of them shared much love together, there was little possibility, or practicality, of their waiting for her to have more sons, who they might marry many years in the future when they became grown.—vss. 11-13

DIFFERENT DECISIONS MADE

Though she had deep love for Naomi, Orpah's natural desire for a home was stronger, and she saw there was no hope of a husband or home in Israel. She counted the cost and felt it was too much. "Orpah kissed her mother in law," bidding her farewell. (vs. 14) We wonder if in later years she thought of Ruth and Naomi, or if she heard of God's rich

blessings toward Ruth. Orpah's decision mirrors many in the Gospel Age who delight in the Gospel message. They love righteousness, but count the cost of becoming one of God's people, by consecration, too much.

Ruth's love was deeper. Naomi had made Israel and the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob lovely in her eyes. Ruth, in turn, had perhaps begun to claim the same promises which her mother-in-law had no doubt told her about. She wished to go and live with a people who were as amiable and loving as Naomi and her family. Her God, Ruth must have felt, must be a wonderful God!

Ruth's answer to Naomi is one of the most beautiful expressions of self-sacrificing love found in any literary work: "Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me." (Ruth 1:16,17) When Naomi saw that Ruth was steadfastly minded to go with her, she protested no more. Ruth had made her decision; she was no longer a Moabite, but an Israelite, at heart.

Here is a deep lesson for us. Those who follow Jesus, giving up all their earthly prospects, are very much like Ruth. Such is consecration. To these, however, God is better even than he was to Ruth, to an extent far beyond what we can fully know. It is to these that he says, "Hearken, O daughter, . . . and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy Father's house; So shall the king greatly

desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him.”—Ps. 45:10,11

RETURN TO BETHLEHEM

“So they two went until they came to Bethlehem.” (Ruth 1:19) Naomi’s desire was to be back in her homeland, and she must have rejoiced to have Ruth with her. However, it was, in many ways, a bitter-sweet homecoming. She no longer had a home or friends, only poverty. She had lost her entire family, except for this one daughter-in-law, who was a jewel. Although Naomi’s resources were exhausted, God’s patience and loving-kindness were not. He had already begun to order and arrange for her eventual blessing, because of the faith she had demonstrated by returning to Israel.

The town was stirred at her coming, and they asked, “Is this Naomi?” She answered that they should not call her Naomi, which means “pleasant,” but rather, they should call her Mara, which means “bitterness,” because God had dealt very bitterly with her. (vss. 19,20) She did not, however, try to shift the blame to someone else, but accepted the weight of it herself, saying, “I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty.” (vs. 21) Indeed, it was God who brought her back, even though she did not know the extent to which he was watching over her and Ruth, her only remaining family.

Likewise with us, God’s love is too deep to let us go astray without providing many experiences, warnings and trials, all of which are intended to return us to the right path. God said concerning his people, “I drew them with cords of a man, with

bands of love.” (Hos. 11:4) In his love, God used difficult experiences to bring Naomi back to him. He often does the same with the members of his church—his divine family—whom he greatly loves.

TIME OF BARLEY HARVEST

Naomi and Ruth’s arrival in Bethlehem was at “the beginning of barley harvest.” (Ruth 1:22) The townspeople apparently did not provide them help, perhaps being consumed with their own labors relating to the barley harvest. Ruth, industrious and desiring to help provide for her and Naomi’s needs, volunteered to glean what she could of the barley grain which remained in the corners of nearby fields, where permitted to do so by the owner. (Ruth 2:2) This was no easy task. It would be hard work, with likely meager results. Possibly she would be treated as a beggar, harshly spoken to, if not actually maltreated by rude reapers or hostile owners. She would have to pass the day in the heat and in distress so that, at eventide, weary and hungry, she might bring home a little barley. Ruth’s love for Naomi, however, gave her courage and strength to make light of this. She did not bemoan her lot, but with a willing heart did what she could with what she had.

God had made laws in Israel to provide for the poor and the stranger, because the Israelites had once been strangers in the land of Egypt. One of these laws was that the corners of the fields were not to be reaped, but to be left for the poor and the stranger to glean, that they might have grain. (Lev. 19:9,10; 23:22) Under this arrangement, Ruth had gone forth into the fields, and God directed her

steps. She happened to come to “a part of the field belonging unto Boaz, who was of the kindred of Elimelech,” her father-in-law who had died. Not knowing Boaz, Ruth was unaware of this family connection.—Ruth 2:1,3

While she was gleaning, Boaz came from Bethlehem to look over the harvest field. His greeting to the workers showed a virtuous, godlike character. He said to the laborers, “The LORD be with you,” and they answered, “The LORD bless thee.” (vs. 4) This was not merely a polite greeting, but a sincere wish, as shown by Boaz’ ensuing talk with his servant who was supervising the reapers, and who displayed the same spirit as his master. As Boaz watched the workers, he noticed that one woman who was gleaning in the field looked to be especially hard-working. He asked his servant, “Whose damsel is this?”—vs. 5

Like his master, the overseer made it a point to know his workers, even the poor and needy who gleaned the corners of the fields. He told Boaz that the woman he noticed in the field was “the Moabitish damsel that came back with Naomi,” and that “from morning until now” she had not ceased to glean, resting very little. This praise induced Boaz to speak to Ruth. He asked her to continue gleaning in his field, where he knew she would be safe, because his reapers had been clearly taught proper moral behavior toward those with whom they might come in contact while working. (vss. 6-9) In deep humility, Ruth asked, “Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldst take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?”—vs. 10

BOAZ' RIGHTEOUSNESS AND BENEVOLENCE

Note the righteous and benevolent behavior of Boaz. He did not take advantage of his position to interfere in any way with Ruth's right to glean, nor to wound her self-respect by too much liberality. He was careful in his kindness to respect her, even though she was a stranger. In benevolence, Boaz instructed his reapers to allow her to glean even among the grain which had already been cut and stacked. He even told them to quietly drop a handful now and then so her gleaning would be more fruitful.—Ruth 2:15,16

At the noon hour, Boaz invited Ruth to eat bread with the reapers, and even passed her bits of parched corn, and “she did eat, and was sufficed.” (vs. 14) He also told her he had heard of how much she had done to help Naomi—how she had left her father and mother, and her native land to come to live among a strange people. His next statement was most beautiful. Rather than promising help, he said, “The LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust.” (vs. 12) Boaz realized that Ruth's sacrifice was too noble and costly to expect any human to give it full value. Only God could reach more deeply into the heart and life of such a one to give a complete recompense. Boaz wished that a full reward be given Ruth, for she had come to seek shelter and trust under the protective power of a covenant-keeping God, amid his covenanted people.

These words of Boaz were perhaps the first sunbeams that had broken through the grief and tears of many weeks. Ruth had lived with the sense of

loss of family and home and people. Now she was told about the God of Israel and his grace by an Israelite other than Naomi, and heard the voice of blessing from another of God's people. Truly, she doubtless thought, this must be a great God and a great people. In gratitude, she said, "Let me find favour in thy sight, my lord; for that thou hast comforted me, and for that thou hast spoken friendly unto thine handmaid."—vs 13

RUTH'S UPRIGHTNESS

Ruth's demeanor, shown by her words and actions, demonstrated an upright character, raising her still higher in the esteem of Boaz. Many people in her place would have said that they were not accustomed to such labor, and begin complaining. Ruth was unassuming, and not looking for favors from others. She had youthful energy, and delighted to do what she could for herself and Naomi. Boaz showed her kindness, not out of pity, but because of her excellence.

Ruth went back to gleaning. She did not slack her hand, nor assume to be helped, because the master had favored her. She worked diligently until evening, and even stayed over to thresh the grain. Ruth had gleaned about an ephah of barley, which is about five gallons, dry measure. She even took home to Naomi some of the food she had saved from lunch. (vss. 17,18) Naomi realized that God's hand must be in all this, and that he had guided Ruth to the field of Boaz and taken care of her. Naomi said, "Blessed be he of the LORD, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead." (vs. 20) She advised Ruth to abide in the field of Boaz throughout the harvest, telling her, "It is good, my

daughter, that thou go out with his maidens, that they meet thee not in any other field.” Obediently, Ruth “kept fast by the maidens of Boaz to glean unto the end of barley harvest and of wheat harvest.”—Ruth 2:22,23

PRESERVING THE FAMILY LINE

When the harvest was over, Naomi said to Ruth, “Shall I not seek rest for thee?” (Ruth 3:1) The word “rest” as used here means “a settled spot” or home. What Naomi spoke of was in accord with a provision of the Mosaic Law. If a husband died without children, the nearest male relative would marry his widow. (Deut. 25:5-10) Such an arrangement would provide a continuation of the family line of the husband who had died, and ensure a home and family environment for the widow. This was of particular importance in Israel, in order to preserve their national lineage. A related provision of the Law afforded a means by which property of the deceased could be purchased or “redeemed,” so that it might remain in the family’s possession. (see Lev. 25:24-27) Only a blood relative, or “kinsman,” could redeem anything for a family under this arrangement.

These details point forward to the doctrinal truth that Jesus had to become a human being in the full sense of the word. Indeed, as a human embryo he was nourished in the womb of Mary, and he was born and brought up as other children and young people, and grew to manhood. He was of the lineage of Adam and, in addition, was perfect, as Adam was before he fell into sin. As a “kinsman” of Adam, therefore, Jesus was fully qualified under God’s law to redeem the human race. How wonderfully

God thus opens up to us more clearly the depths of his purposes, and by the study of the Old Testament increases our understanding of the New Testament.

Naomi instructed Ruth to go by night to Boaz after he retired and was asleep. She was to gently clear a place at his feet, and draw over herself a corner of the covering without waking him. (Ruth 3:3,4) Ruth followed these instructions, but as she lay next to Boaz, he awoke and asked, "Who art thou?" She answered, "I am Ruth, thine handmaid: spread therefore thy skirt over thine handmaid; for thou art a near kinsman." (vs. 9) In the Hebrew text, the phrase "thy skirt" means "thy wings," signifying protection, as symbolized by his covering being spread over her. It is the same Hebrew word as used by the psalmist, when speaking of God, he says, "Under his wings shalt thou trust." (Ps. 91:4) By Ruth's actions, she was appealing to Boaz to follow the provisions made in the Law which addressed those matters pertaining to her widowhood.

ALL THREE OF NOBLE CHARACTER

Here again, the nobility of Boaz shines out. He was a man of virtue and honor, an Israelite indeed, before men and before God. He said to Ruth, "Blessed be thou of the LORD, my daughter: for thou hast shewed more kindness in the latter end than at the beginning, inasmuch as thou followedst not young men, whether poor or rich." (Ruth 3:10) In this statement, Boaz spoke of the fact that Ruth had shown more kindness toward Naomi by the action just taken, than at the beginning when she engaged in gleaning work. Indeed, this was a harder thing for Ruth to do than glean, for it was more delicate

and sensitive. To claim this right, even though proper under the Law, would expose her to possible misunderstanding. Yet, her deep love for Naomi and selfless mindset surrounded her action with a glow of purity.

To procure honor and love in Israel for her mother-in-law, and to save the name of her dead husband from extinction in Israel, Ruth did what only a chaste, virtuous woman, inspired by the obedience of love, would dare to do, and what polluted minds of the impure can never understand. Only the most noble minded would be willing to risk the world's approval and expose herself to the possibility of appearing as a sinner, in order to do what was right under the Law for her deceased husband and her mother-in-law. Naomi, too, exhibited these same noble qualities, trusting God implicitly, in advising Ruth as she did.

Boaz' response to Ruth was that, although he was a near kinsman to her, "there is a kinsman nearer than I." (Ruth 3:12) He promised her, however, saying that if the nearer kinsman would not do his part, "then will I do the part of a kinsman to thee." (vs. 13) She continued to lay at his feet until morning. Before she left to return to Naomi, Boaz filled her cloak with six measures of barley. The fact that it was six measures might have provided a hint to Naomi that, in any event, Ruth would obtain a resting place, or home, by means of a near kinsman. (vss. 14-18) Six can be thought of as a symbol of labor and service, followed by seven, a time of rest. Men were to work six days, and rest on the seventh. (Exod. 20:8-11) Thus Boaz was indirectly sending Naomi a message that their period of difficult labor was past, and a time of rest was near at hand.

NEARER KINSMAN REFUSES

That morning, Boaz gathered ten men of the elders of the city to act as witnesses and judges of the proceedings which were about to take place. When the nearer relative approached, Boaz laid the matter before him. At first the nearer kinsman said he would redeem the land for Naomi. However, when Boaz called his attention to the Law—that he must also marry Ruth, “to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance”—he said he could not do so, for fear of damaging his own inheritance. (Ruth 4:1-6) Evidently the nearer relative feared to marry Ruth, because she was a Moabitess, and knowing what had happened to Mahlon and Chilion. Ruth, however, had become an Israelite in faith and had left behind Moab, and had joined the covenant people of God.

Boaz knew this, but did not press the matter. The other relative took off his shoe and gave it to Boaz. (vss. 7,8) In Scripture, the shoe, or sandal, is sometimes a symbol of motion and wandering, but also of rest and possession. For example, in Deuteronomy 11:24, the reference evidently is to possession—as something one could tread on as the rightful owner. Thus, when this relative handed over his shoe to Boaz, it symbolized that he thus surrendered to Boaz all rights and claims to possession. Had he done his part, he would have set his shoe on Naomi’s inheritance and thus claimed it as redeemed. Ruth was the heiress of Mahlon, and must go with the possession.

Boaz was now free to redeem the land, being the next nearest kinsman, and to marry Ruth. (vss. 9-12) Note the beautiful words with which the narrative

concludes: “So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the LORD gave her conception, and she bare a son. And the women said unto Naomi, Blessed be the LORD, which hath not left thee this day without a kinsman, that his name may be famous in Israel. And he shall be unto thee a restorer of thy life, and a nourisher of thine old age: for thy daughter in law, which loveth thee, which is better to thee than seven sons, hath born him.”—Ruth 4:13-15

PICTURE OF REDEMPTION IN CHRIST

The procedure of redemption found in the story of Ruth illustrates the work that Jesus performed in redeeming Adam’s race. As there was no other redeemer, God furnished one in the person of his beloved Son. (Isa. 63:5; John 3:16) In this arrangement, Jesus was to be blood-related to Adam—a human being. He was the “seed” of the woman who would redeem mankind and bruise the serpent’s head. (Gen. 3:15) The life spark of our Lord Jesus was transferred by divine power into the womb of Mary, in the form of a conceived human embryo. In due time Jesus was born as a healthy, perfect human baby. He did not inherit the death sentence, because God was his father, not Joseph. (Luke 1:35; Gal. 4:4) When Jesus was of full age according to the Jewish Law—thirty years old—he offered himself as a ransom for all, and carried out that work with his death on the cross. (Luke 3:21-23; I Tim. 2:5,6; John 19:30) With this ransom price he bought back—redeemed—Adam and all his children, as well as Adam’s inheritance, the earth.—I Cor. 15:21,22; Rom. 3:23-25; Isa. 66:22; II Pet. 3:13

Jesus will also marry a bride—one who was a “daughter” of Adam. This contract is witnessed and testified to by the elders, the ancient fathers and prophets. Jesus planted his “shoe” upon the inheritance. As the Redeemer, he walked up and down over the possession for three and one-half years. Our Lord and his bride, as spirit beings in the resurrection, will not need the earthly inheritance, so it will be returned to the children of Adam.

Ruth pictures this bride, those who come into the family of God by a full consecration of their all, leaving behind all earthly hopes, aims and ambitions. These are taken into the family of God, and if faithful, become the bride of Christ, and receive a heavenly inheritance. Ruth gave up her home, and God gave her a far richer one. She gave up a husband and children, and God gave her a prince in Israel, and made her the mother of kings, for she was the ancestor of David and of Jesus, the “King of kings.” She gave up her people, and God gave her a place among his covenant people. Finally, she gave up her native land and country, and God gave her the inheritance of Naomi, and a share with Boaz in his rich estate. Thus, God also deals with his church. With Paul, we can say, “He which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also, . . . and shall present us with you. . . . For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”—II Cor. 4:14-17 ■

SPEAKERS' APPOINTMENTS

The speakers listed below are invited by individual classes, or their services have been arranged by their home classes:

M. Balko

Atlanta, GA February 12

O. B. Elbert

Sacramento, CA February 17-19

R. Goodman

Jacksonville, FL February 12
Sacramento, CA 17-19

R. Gorecki

Sacramento, CA February 17-19

L. Griehs

Sacramento, CA February 17-19

P. Mora

Sacramento, CA February 17-19

R. Niemczyk

Sacramento, CA February 17-19

D. Rawson

Sacramento, CA February 17-19

T. Ruggirello

Sacramento, CA February 17-19

R. Sconyers

Atlanta, GA February 12

2017 MEMORIAL SUPPER DATE

The proper time for the annual observance of the Memorial Supper will be after sunset on Sunday, April 9, 2017.

A complete Memorial Service is available for isolated brethren, or for any who wish to have it.

The audio cassette tape, CD, or DVD can be purchased for \$6.00. All are also available free on loan, from:

Dawn Recorded Lecture Service
199 Railroad Avenue
East Rutherford, NJ 07073

Please place your order by April 1, if possible.

CONVENTIONS

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

SACRAMENTO CONVENTION, February 17-19—

Holiday Inn Express, 2224 Auburn Boulevard, Sacramento, CA 95821. Contact K. Freer, 8012 Vintage Way, Fair Oaks, CA 95628. Phone: (916) 879-4657 or Email: winnerwear@aol.com

FLORIDA CONVENTION, March 4-6—

Holiday Inn Orlando International, 5750 T. G. Lee Boulevard, Orlando, FL 32822. For room reservations, call the hotel. Phone: (407) 851-6400. Specify "Florida Bible Students" to guarantee special convention rate. Deadline for special rate is February 25, 2017. For other information, contact M. Balko. Phone: (407) 339-7580 or Email: mbalko@cfl.rr.com

DETROIT CONVENTION, April 1,2—

Quality Inn of Troy, 2537 Rochester Court, Troy, MI 48083. Contact P. Nemesh. Phone: (248) 649-6588 or Email: nemeshfp@aol.com

ALBUQUERQUE CONVENTION, April 14-16—

Sheraton Albuquerque Airport Hotel, 2910 Yale Boulevard SE, Albuquerque, NM 87106. Contact S. Thomassen. Phone: (505) 268-8170 or Email: srbt@juno.com

METRO DETROIT CONVENTION, May 6,7—

Brighton Community Center, 555 Brighton Street, Brighton, MI 48114. Contact J. Kienast. Phone: (248) 496-5611 or Email: jenkienast@gmail.com

LOS ANGELES CONVENTION, May 27,28—

Burbank Auditorium, 406 Irving Drive, Burbank, CA 91504. For room reservations (subsidized rate of \$55/night ending April 23), contact N. Nekora. Phone: (310) 454-5248 or Email: npnekora@aol.com. Other information, contact T.

Parkinson. Phone: (818) 288-2765 or Email: ti77park@gmail.com. Please place LABible in subject line of the email.

DELAWARE VALLEY CONVENTION, June 4—Sheraton Bucks County Hotel, 400 Oxford Valley Road, Langhorne, PA. Contact R. Griehs. Phone: (267) 456-8889 or Email: rgriehs@gmail.com

BIBLE STUDENTS GENERAL CONVENTION, July 15-20—University of Pittsburgh, 450 Schoolhouse Road, Johnstown, PA. Contact E. Kuenzli, 330 Jasmine Road, Casselberry, FL 32707. Phone: (407) 670-4189 or Email: ekuenzli@cfl.rr.com

*Take time to be holy, speak oft with thy Lord;
Abide in him always, and feed on his Word.
Make friends of God's children;
help those who are weak;
Forgetting in nothing his blessing to seek.
—Hymns of Dawn*

The Dawn Magazine

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