

# Preaching the Gospel

*“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”*  
—*Matthew 28:19,20*

**THESE WORDS OF OUR** Lord Jesus, quoted as a conclusion to his Gospel by Matthew, have been called the ‘great commission’ by Christian missionaries, and used to inspire their evangelistic missions. Recently there appeared in the June 30, 2003 issue of *Time* magazine a feature article entitled, “Missionaries Under Cover,” dealing with recent-time missionary efforts to convert Muslims. A caption under the title of the article said, “Growing numbers of Evangelists are trying to spread Christianity in Muslim lands. But is this what the world needs now?”

## **SHOULD CHRISTIANS CONVERT MUSLIMS?**

The cover of the magazine asked, “Should Christians Convert Muslims?” followed by the comment “A new flock of missionaries have launched a campaign to take the Gospel to Islamic countries. But will they inspire more backlash than belief?”

The article began by telling how a school for Evangelical missionaries in Queens, New York, was using dramatization of a Muslim woman trying to explain Islam, and then revealing herself to be a Christian missionary. She then proceeded to give the class ‘do’s’ and ‘don’t’s’ in approaching Muslims, and made comparisons between Jesus and Mohammed.

The article said, “For 21 months now, Americans have been engaged in a crash course on Islam, its geography and its followers. It is not a subject we were previously interested in, but 9/11 left no choice, and the U.S. military in two countries continues its on-the-job training in sheiks

and ayatollahs, Sunni customs and Shi'ite factionalism. Yet there is one group that has been thinking—passionately—about Muslims for more than a decade. Its army is weaponless, its soldiers often unpaid, its boot camps places like the Queens classroom. It has no actual connection with the U.S. government (except possibly to unintentionally muddy America's image). But in the past few months, its advance forces have been entering the still-smoldering battlefield of Iraq, as intent on molding its people's future as the conventional American troops already in place.

“Not for a century has the idea of evangelizing Islam awakened such fervor in conservative Christians. Touched by Muslims' material and (supposed) spiritual needs, convinced that they are one of the great 'unreached mega peoples' who must hear the Gospel before Christ's eventual return, Evangelicals have been rushing to what has become the latest hot missions field. Figures from the Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Massachusetts, suggest that the number of missionaries to Islamic countries nearly doubled between 1982 and 2001—from more than 15,000 to somewhere in excess of 27,000. Approximately 1 out of every 2 is American, and 1 out of every 3 is Evangelical. Says George Braswell Jr., a missions professor at the Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 'We're having more now than probably ever before go out to people like Muslims.' Sept. 11 appears only to have fueled the impulse.

## **MUSLIM RESTRICTIONS**

“Yet this boom has coincided with mounting restrictions on missionary efforts by the regimes of Islamic-majority countries and with swelling anti-Western militancy. The resulting tensions have sometimes erupted tragically: the past two years have seen the arrest and imprisonment of two American missionaries in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan and the apparently religiously motivated murders of four more in Yemen and Lebanon. The botched bombing last month of a Dutch-German missionary family in Tripoli, Lebanon, suggests the danger is not abating. Says Stan Guthrie, author of the book *Missions in the Third Millennium*: 'People are beginning to count the costs. If you're in the wrong place at the wrong time, you could be killed. Missionaries have always considered the possibility, but now it's a lot more real.'

“Such fears, plus the recent entry of evangelical missionaries into Afghanistan and Iraq on the heels of American troops, have raised other questions. The new arrivals mean well: in addition to the Christian Gospel, which they consider their most precious gift, they have channeled millions of dollars in aid and put in countless hours of charitable work. But some fieldworkers for more liberal Christian organizations claim that some of the more aggressive evangelical tactics can put all religious charities at risk, as when the Taliban, angered by missionary activities two years ago, shut down every Christian aid group in Kabul. Muslim critics accuse missionaries of lying about their identities and their faith to achieve their goals. And as the tensions between Islam and the West continue to boil, some familiar with the Middle East have begun asking whether the missionaries, who love Muslims but despise Islam, are the sort of nonappointed goodwill ambassadors the U.S. really needs in a region dense with the rhetoric of holy war. Says Charles Kimball, a Baptist minister who was director of the National Council of Churches’ Middle East office in the 1980’s: ‘Sincerity isn’t the issue, or commitment to one’s faith. It is just that the region is at a pivotal and volatile juncture, and it is arguably not the time for groups coming in, like someone with a lighted match into a room full of explosives, wearing Jesus on their sleeves.’

## **CONSERVATIVE EVANGELISM**

“Just how large a proportion of Christian religious workers fit that profile? One reason it is difficult to know is that zeal is often tempered after some time spent in-country. Two centuries ago, in a similar burst of enthusiasm, such mainline denominations as the Presbyterians and the Methodists sent thousands of missionaries to the Middle East. Like the current crop, they started eager for conversions. But over time they settled for a more modest agenda that obeyed local antiproselytizing laws and focused on building educational and charitable institutions and providing humanitarian aid. Such groups still constitute the major visible missionary presence in the area, and they enjoy fruitful and respectful, if circumscribed, relationships with local regimes and populations.

“In the past century, as mainline Protestants and the Roman Catholic Church in the U. S. adopted a social Gospel that stressed aiding the poor over preaching to the unenlightened, evangelizing at its purest fell to

Evangelicals. Rare is the conservative Protestant church that doesn't send its teens off on short-term mission trips or play host to a stream of missionaries on home leave, their stories full of exotic places and changed hearts. Although they would never admit it, the returnees are Evangelicalism's paragons, making its philosophy of relentless outreach their lives' work. Says Beth Streeter, a Moraga, California, health-care consultant who left on a short mission trip to Egypt with her husband and two young children shortly after September 11: "When you believe at your core that the love of Jesus Christ really is the best gift to humankind, you want to find ways and places for people to hear that for themselves. Sometimes it drives us places that can be awkward and uncomfortable."

The article went on to detail the experiences of some of the Evangelicals who were assigned to Muslim countries but were careful not to preach on the street corner or hand out literature to someone they didn't know. In general, many of these were tending toward the same missionary style of conservative churches, who learned 200 years ago to downplay preaching and to concentrate on good works for the needy. There were descriptions of violence against missionaries that cost them their lives. Some Evangelicals take employment in a Muslim country and look for opportunities to approach someone they get to know. Although it is too early to tell what some of the more aggressive Evangelicals will do, it is clear that the climate for their reception is not favorable.

## **DOES THE BIBLE TEACH SALVATION?**

Should there be such an effort to convert Muslims and peoples in other countries of other faiths to Christianity? It is true that there is "none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved," referring to the name of Jesus. (Acts 4:12) Salvation can only come through a knowledge and acceptance of Jesus as one's personal Redeemer. Is now the time for everyone to know about Jesus? A knowledge of God's plan as revealed in the Bible gives us the answer as 'no.' The present time, known as the Gospel Age, is a time devoted strictly to the selection of "a people for his [God's] name." (Acts 15:14) This is a class also known as the 'elect' or 'chosen.' Jesus said that "many are called, but few are chosen." (Matt. 22:14) Many would come to know about Jesus (not all people), but only a few would be chosen. Those who would be chosen would be invited to follow Jesus by denying themselves

and taking up their cross to follow him. (Matt. 16:24) Not all Christians are doing this.

## **WHY JESUS SPOKE IN PARABLES**

When Jesus began his ministry, he frequently used parables in his teachings. This caused his disciples to ask, “Why speakest thou unto them [the multitudes] in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.” (Matt. 13:10-16) Many might suppose that Jesus was speaking specifically about wicked people being those whose eyes and ears would not be opened. This is not so, because Jesus also said, “I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.”—vs. 17

It is interesting to note that Jesus quoted Isaiah 6:9 to show that the Old Testament prophesied about favor not being extended to many but only to a few. These few would become “joint-heirs with Christ.” (Rom. 8:17) The concept that now is the time to convert the world is so engrained in the various churches that they have accepted a misquotation of the Old Testament to prove their erroneous contention. The Apostle Paul quoted the Old Testament, Isaiah 49:8, when he was encouraging the brethren of Corinth not to receive the grace of God in vain. (II Cor. 6:1,2) The *King James Version*, however, quotes the Isaiah 49:8 prophecy erroneously. Instead of saying “in a day of salvation have I helped thee,” they say “in the day of salvation have I succoured thee.” The emphasis is on the present time—‘the day of salvation’—as the only

acceptable time to learn of Jesus. Whereas, the Old Testament is saying that it is a day of salvation, implying another such day is to follow.

## **THE CHOSEN ONES AND THEIR WORK**

When the Apostle Paul was preaching to the Jews in Antioch of Pisidia, the Jews eventually started to contradict and oppose him so that he and Barnabas said that their message was supposed to be first presented to them. But since they were rejecting it, they would turn to the Gentiles. Paul quotes Isaiah 49:6 to show that the Old Testament prophesied this situation which precedes Isaiah 49:8. Isaiah 49 is a prophecy telling of the experiences and development of the church. In it are found such statements as (referring to Jehovah), “he shall choose thee” (vs. 7), and “I will ... give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages.” (vs. 8) This reference is to the New Covenant being made through the Christ, of which the church as his body will share. Then comes the resurrection of all mankind when in verse 9 it says, “thou mayest say to the prisoners [in death], Go forth; to them that are in darkness [of the grave], Shew yourselves.” Telling of the blessings of God’s kingdom the prophecy reads, “They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places. They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them. And I will make all my mountains a way, and my highways shall be exalted. Behold, these shall come from far: and, lo, these from the north and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim. Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the Lord hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted.”—vss. 9-13

The tenth verse has language identical to that of Revelation 7:16 that tells of the trials being over for the great multitude and they are ushered into the presence of the glorified Lamb—our Lord Jesus. So also will be the experience of mankind raised from the dead. In each situation the church shares with her Lord Jesus in the resurrection work. The eleventh verse reminds us of the highway described in Isaiah 35:8. As all hindrances and obstacles to walk righteously are removed for those traveling on that highway, so also they are removed in this case. All mankind shall participate in these blessings which is what verse twelve

is saying. *Young's Concordance* suggests that the land of Sinim is a land to the far east and is likely China, whose people, because of the language barrier, know the least about Jesus. Verse thirteen animates the mountains, heavens, and earth to have them all join in the gladness that has come to the poor afflicted people of earth.

## **HAS GOD FORGOTTEN ZION?**

The prophecy then changes and goes back to the time when the church, Zion, appeared to be forsaken and forgotten. This appeared to be the case during the church's development, or her militant state, during the Gospel Age. God assures her that she has not been forgotten. He uses the example of a mother with her child. Would she ever forget her child? She might, but he never would forget the church, Zion. As proof, Jehovah says, "I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands; thy walls are continually before me." (Isa. 49:16) Then God says, "Thou shalt soon be built by those by whom thou wert destroyed, and they that made thee desolate shall go forth of thee." (vs. 17, *Septuagint Translation*) The world that opposed her will become involved in the great reconstruction project of God's kingdom, and her enemies will not be there. The prophecy continues, "Lift up thine eyes round about, and look on them all; behold, they are gathered together, and are come to thee. As I live, saith the Lord, thou shalt clothe thyself with them all as with an ornament, and put them on as a bride her attire." (vs. 18, *Septuagint Translation*) As the bride of Christ she inherits all the people of the world as her offspring. As these coming back from the resurrection say that the earth as they knew it wouldn't be big enough to accommodate them, they say "make room for me."—vs. 20, *Septuagint Translation*

Instead of replying, the church looks on in amazement at all returning to earth from the grave and says, "Who has begotten me these? Whereas I was childless, and a widow; but who has brought up these for me? And I was left alone; but whence came these to me? Thus saith the Lord, even the Lord, Behold, I lift up mine hand to the nations, and I will lift up my signal to the islands: and they shall bring thy sons in their bosom, and shall bear thy daughters on their shoulders. And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their princesses thy nurses, they shall bow down to thee on the face of the earth, and shall lick the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord, and they that wait on me shall not be ashamed."

(vss. 21-23, *Septuagint Translation*) The prophecy then tells how all those who caused trouble and problems during the Gospel Age will no longer be around, being destroyed. The final verse says, “Then all mankind will know that I, the Lord [Jehovah], am your Savior, your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob”—vs. 26, *New International Version*

## **A DAY OF SALVATION**

How important it is to know that the prophecy quoted by the Apostle Paul in Antioch of Pisidia, and the one he quoted to the Corinthian brethren, tells of the broad scope in the Lord’s search of a people for his name. It explains that there is a day of salvation for these chosen ones, and how they will be used in making possible another day of salvation for the world of mankind. It makes clear to us that now is the time to find such as will be willing to deny themselves, to take up their cross, and follow Jesus.

Most translators, who are influenced by the concept that now is the only acceptable time and are dedicated to converting the world, who believe that Isaiah 49:8 should be translated ‘the day of salvation’ in II Corinthians 6:2, will still correctly translate Isaiah 49:8 in the Old Testament as ‘a day of salvation,’ except for a few. One is the *New International Version* which is not known for translating word-for-word in Hebrew and Greek but rather concentrates on conveying the correct thought, as they see it. They have also translated Isaiah 49:8 as “the day of salvation.” Reliable translators translate II Corinthians 6:2 and Isaiah 49:8 as “a day of salvation,” among which are the *American Standard Version* and *Rotherham. Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott* translates II Corinthians 6:2 correctly, and the *Septuagint* translates Isaiah 49:8 as “a day of salvation.”

## **EVERY TRIBE, TONGUE, PEOPLE AND NATION**

What about the great commission given by Jesus in Matthew 28:19,20? Doesn’t this say to go to all nations? It does. God did not intend that the church class should be found in a single nation of earth. Rather it would be composed of faithful followers of Christ selected from all the nations of earth. God is not partial. Hence the commission was given by Jesus for his disciples to go everywhere to seek those who would be drawn to

Jesus by the Father. (John 6:44) This has been done faithfully by his people.

This point is emphasized when Jesus received God's plan to execute it as the slain Lamb of God. The incident is introduced dramatically in chapter five of the Book of Revelation. After showing God sitting on his throne (ch. 4), John saw in God's right hand a book sealed with seven seals representing his plan. No one was found worthy to open the book. So dramatic and real was this scene that John wept much. Then one of the twenty-four elders comes to John and tells him not to weep because "the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book." Then John saw "a Lamb as it had been slain" taking the book to open it.—Rev. 5:5-7

As the drama unfolded further, the four beasts and twenty-four elders fall down before the Lamb and, having harps, sing a new song "saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth." (Rev. 5:9,10) It appears from this translation of the Bible—the *King James Version*—that the four beasts and twenty-four elders have been redeemed by the Lamb and are to reign upon the earth. In Revelation 4 they are shown to be a definite part of God's reign and they do not need redemption by the Lamb. The translation is erroneous. We know that the four beasts represent the attributes of God's character.

Both the *American Standard Version* and *Rotherham* render this passage correctly and replace "us" with "men." The *American Standard Version* says: "And they sing a new song, saying, Worthy art thou to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and didst purchase unto God with thy blood men of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, and madest them to be unto our God a kingdom and priests; and they reign upon the earth."—Rev. 5:9,10

Several points are noteworthy. Jesus as the *Logos* in his prehuman existence was not worthy to open the book. When he was slain as the Lamb of God, he became worthy. Following the ransom, the next most important feature of God's plan is the selection of those who would be associated with Jesus as kings and priests, the church class. These are to

be taken out of every tribe, tongue, people and nation. This was the reason for our Lord's great commission.

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## Called to New Life

***Key Verse: “As he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; Because it is written, be ye holy; for I am holy.”***

***—I Peter 1:15-16***

***Selected Scripture:  
I Peter 1:1 – 2:10***

**THE APOSTLE PAUL** explained to the early church, “Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence [conviction, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*] of things not seen.” (Heb. 11:1) He also directed our attention to the subject of salvation by faith, and assures us, “We are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.”—Rom. 8:24,25

In our lesson, the Apostle Peter says that those called have been chosen “according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.” (I Pet. 1:2) The prophets of old foretold the sufferings of Christ as “a ransom for all” (I Tim. 2:6), and of the grace that has now come to you. Peter also says it is according to God’s abundant mercy that we have been begotten “again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” (I Pet. 1:3) It is now incumbent upon all of those chosen, to gird up the loins of their mind and take courage from this display of God’s love now made known to us. Though we must expect trials, yet we must fortify our mind with the thought that he who has given us his Son Jesus will withhold nothing from us that is good.

Jesus was described as “a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious.” Likewise, those who are called to walk in Jesus’ steps, “As lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.” (I Pet. 2:4,5) Commenting on this hope set before those called to a new life, the apostle said, “Ye are a chosen generation, a royal

priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.” He then adds, “In time past [you] were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.” (vss. 9,10) He urges us to keep away from the evil pleasures of this world; they are not for you, for they fight against our very souls.

How does the church live the new life in Christ, looking forward to God’s glory? Peter answers this question by quoting in I Peter 1:15,16 from Leviticus 11:45: “I am the Lord that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.” Peter continues, “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God.”—vss. 18-21

The apostle then concludes this lesson by telling of the frailty of man and the endurance of God’s Word, which has been preached to us, by which we received this call to a new life.—vss. 24,25

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## Be a Good Example

***Key Verse: “Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.”***  
—*I Peter 2:12*

***Selected Scripture:  
I Peter 2:11 – 5:14***

**CHRISTIANS ARE ALWAYS** to be a good example to the world. That is why the Apostle Peter wrote, “Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts, which wage war against the soul. Keep your behavior excellent among the Gentiles, so that in the thing in which they slander you as evildoers, they may because of your good deeds, as they observe [them], glorify God in the day of visitation.” (I Pet. 2:11,12, *New American Standard*) The early church was composed of many Jews, who, though a chosen race, lived among the Gentiles who spoke against them as evildoers. In turn, Christians opposed pagans and Peter suggests that they conduct themselves honorably so

that they maintain a good name in society. Noah was a good example when he “prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world.” (Heb. 11:7; I Pet. 3:20; II Pet. 2:4,5) Jesus was an example to those angels of Noah’s time that sinned, and by his example preached to them.—I Pet. 3:18-20

Peter continues saying, “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors. ... For such is the will of God that by doing right you may silence the ignorance of foolish men.” (I Pet. 2:13-15, *NAS*) “Even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by

whose stripes ye were healed.” (I Pet. 2:21-24) He also said minister one to another anything by which you can benefit another. (I Pet. 4:10) Regard what you have, and they have not, as a gift bestowed upon you by God for the common good, and as good stewards be ready to impart it as the needs of others require.

How do Christians live according to God’s will and at the same time live in a human world bound by social customs? Peter writes in our Key Verse, conduct yourselves honorably so that ‘they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.’

He concludes by saying, “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you. Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world. But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.”—I Pet. 5:6-11

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## Growing in Faith

*Key Verse:*  
***“According as his  
divine power hath  
given unto us all  
things that pertain  
unto life and  
godliness, through  
the knowledge of him  
that hath called us to  
glory and virtue.”***  
***—II Peter 1:3***

***Selected Scripture:***  
***II Peter 1***

**WHEN SECOND PETER** was written, apparently fundamental apostolic beliefs were questioned, in particular, by the claim of secret knowledge held by a new growing school called the Gnostics. Peter took issue with these false teachings by calling believers to stand fast in the faith of the apostles, and not be overtaken by deceivers. He challenged his readers to claim the promises of God. “According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”—II Pet. 1:3-4

Peter now presents a list of virtues that define Christian living. He says notwithstanding what God hath done for you, in order that ye may not receive the grace of God in vain, “giving all diligence [furnishing all earnestness], add to your faith [that faith in Jesus leading to the whole Gospel] virtue [courage or fortitude by which your faith will be increased]; and to virtue knowledge [true wisdom]; And to knowledge temperance [a proper and limited use of all earthly enjoyments]; and to temperance patience [bearing all trials and difficulties]; and to patience godliness [a deep reverential love of God]; And to godliness brotherly kindness [love of the brotherhood]; and to brotherly kindness charity [agape love].” Peter continues, “If these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”—vss. 5-8

The apostle points to the transfiguration vision on the mount as confirming prophecies of the coming kingdom. He says, “We have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount. We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.” (vss. 16-19) As a newer translation phrases it, “So we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts: knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.”—vss. 19-21, *New King James*

When Paul was confronted with such questions during his ministry he assured his followers, “That I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.” (Rom. 1:12) May the mutual faith of Peter and us show forth in our lives as we apply the principles of his lessons given herein.

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## Being Faithful to Promises

***Key Verse: “Seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless. And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you.”  
—II Peter 3:14-15***

***Selected Scripture:  
II Peter 3***

**“IN THE LAST OF THE** days scoffers will come with scoffing, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his presence? for from the time the fathers fell asleep, all things continue in this way from the beginning of the creation.” (II Pet. 3:3,4, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*) But, prophets had promised the coming of the Messiah, and Jesus was preaching, “The kingdom of God is at hand.” (Mark 1:15)

Our Lord was with his disciples when he told them, “There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.” (Matt. 16:28) This was typically fulfilled six days later when he brought Peter, James, and John up into a high mountain.

There the disciples witnessed a brilliant, transformed Jesus, accompanied by Moses and Elijah, all enveloped in a vision of the kingdom. But Christ hadn’t returned. This was a confirmation of the kingdom promise, but God’s kingdom hadn’t actually come; in fact nothing much had changed since the creation of the world.

Those who scoff forget God’s power. He created the heavens and the earth and now has promised all power over both to form a “new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” (II Pet. 3:13) “But do not let this one [fact] escape your notice, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient

toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.”—vss. 8-10, *New American Standard*

Fiery destruction of the present heavens and earth with their elements refers to the meltdown of worldly social, political, financial and ecclesiastical systems. “I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. 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. 21:1-5) Thus will all mankind see the marvelous fulfillment of their prayers for God’s kingdom upon earth.—Matt. 6:10

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# God Imparts Wisdom

**IN THIS SERIES** on *God and Creation*, the first part introduced us to God, the great supreme Creator of the Universe. Many of God's characteristics are mentioned in the conversation recorded in the Book of Job, taking place between God and Job. One of the most difficult questions asked Job was, "Who hath put wisdom in the inward parts? or who hath given understanding to the heart?" (Job 38:36) The lower animal creations are governed largely by what we call instinct. From the time of their birth they seem naturally to follow a certain pattern, and while many of them can be trained to obey somewhat the directives of their masters, there is no evidence that they really understand why. Certainly, as implied in the question asked Job, the lower animals do not possess a 'heart' knowledge, or appreciation of their existence, or of their course of action.

## IN GOD'S IMAGE

But with man it is different. He is able to reason, at least to a limited degree, from the known to the unknown. He knows that some things are right, and other things are wrong. He has a conscience which is pricked when he does wrong, and affords contentment and peace of mind when he does right. Man in his folly—that is, the "fool" who says in his heart, "there is no God" (Ps. 14:1)—has advanced many fancy theories concerning the alleged ascent of man from protoplasm to his present state. They have explained what has brought about this and that change in the anatomy of animals, finally leading to the human species; but no one has even attempted to answer the question put to Job, 'Who hath put wisdom in the inward parts' of man, 'or who hath given understanding to the heart?'

There is only one answer to this question. It is God's answer recorded in his own inspired Word for our instruction and encouragement. It is found in the very first chapter of the Bible, verses twenty-seven and twenty-eight. Here we are informed that man is as he is, superior to even the highest form of lower animals, capable of reasoning, of planning, of

inventing, of knowing right from wrong, because he was created in the image of God. When the evolutionists find a reasonable, valid, provable explanation of how this difference between man and his alleged nearest of kin among the brute creation accidentally came about, they will be a little more worthy of being given a serious hearing than at present.

## **ANIMAL INSTINCTS DISPLAY CREATIVE WISDOM**

Throughout chapter thirty-nine of the Book of Job, a number of questions are recorded, the answers to which must also be negative where human wisdom is concerned. These questions pertain to the marvelous instincts displayed by various animals and birds. The chapter begins with these questions, “Knowest thou the time when the wild goats of the rock bring forth? or canst thou mark when the hinds do calve? Canst thou number the months that they fulfil? or knowest thou the time when they bring forth? They bow themselves, they bring forth their young ones, they cast out their sorrows. Their young ones are in good liking, they grow up with corn; they go forth, and return not unto them.”—vss. 1-4

Then the Lord called attention to the different characteristics of other animals, “Who hath sent out the wild ass free? or who hath loosed the bands of the wild ass? Whose house I have made the wilderness, and the barren land his dwellings. He scorneth the multitude of the city, neither regardeth he the crying of the driver. The range of the mountains is his pasture, and he searcheth after every green thing.”—vss. 5-8

Again, “Will the unicorn [wild ox] be willing to serve thee, or abide by thy crib? Canst thou bind the unicorn with his band in the furrow? or will he harrow the valleys after thee? Wilt thou trust him, because his strength is great? or wilt thou leave thy labour to him? Wilt thou believe him, that he will bring home thy seed, and gather it into thy barn?” (vss. 9-12) There is what we speak of as domestic animals, which with little effort can be trained to serve man. But here God called Job’s attention to other varieties, animals which are wild and refuse to submit to human training. The question is who is responsible for these differences?

Neither Job nor we are wise enough to understand the creative processes which brought about this almost endless variety. The poet, Joyce Kilmer, wrote, “Only God can make a tree,” and this fact is even more striking when we consider the thousands of varieties of trees, plants, and flowers, as well as the great variety found in the animal kingdom.

Only a Supreme, Intelligent Creator could produce this endless array of created things, with each one in its own wonderful way displaying the wisdom and power of its Creator. This is the God who, “in the beginning ... created the heaven and the earth.”—Gen. 1:1

As if Job would not yet realize how little he understood of the wisdom and power of the Creator, further questions were asked him. “Gavest thou the goodly wings unto the peacocks? or wings and feathers unto the ostrich?” the Lord inquired. (Job 39:13) All birds have feathers and wings, but how vastly different they are. The peacock is noted for the beauty of its plumage, hence it is used here as a contrasting example. The ostrich, on the other hand, is rather plain in appearance. What made the difference between the two? The fortuitousness of evolution or the wisdom and power of the Creator?

In most cases the birds and lower animals instinctively exercise great care over their young; the birds even watch over the eggs from which their offspring are hatched. If this maternal instinct of the lower creations was the product of evolution, reason tells us that there would be no exceptions, for the same influences would have governed the evolutionary processes of all. But there are exceptions, and in questioning Job, God called attention to one. Referring to the ostrich, the Lord said, “Which leaveth her eggs in the earth, and warmeth them in dust [instead of sitting on them], And forgetteth that the foot may crush them, or that the wild beast may break them. She is hardened against her young ones, as though they were not her’s: her labour is in vain without fear; Because God hath deprived her of wisdom, neither hath he imparted to her understanding. What time she lifteth up herself on high, she scorneth the horse and his rider.”—vss. 14-18

Evolutionists would be at a loss to explain why the mother ostrich takes no interest in her young. God’s explanation alone reveals the reason for this paradox of nature, that explanation being that he ‘hath deprived her of wisdom, neither hath he imparted to her understanding.’ But he did give the ostrich swiftness and strength so that ‘she scorneth the horse and his rider.’ If we remove God from Creation, we would have here another unanswered question.

## **INSTINCT OR ENDOWMENT?**

In the closing verses of chapter thirty-nine, another convincing thought is brought to our attention. Job is asked, “Doth the hawk fly by thy wisdom, and stretch her wings toward the south? Doth the eagle mount up at thy command, and make her nest on high? She dwelleth and abideth on the rock, upon the crag of the rock, and the strong place. From thence she seeketh the prey, and her eyes behold afar off. Her young ones also suck up blood: and where the slain are, there is she.”—vss. 26-30

In calling our attention to the habits of the hawk and the eagle, the Lord reminds us of the numberless peculiarities which exist in the life habits of the animal kingdom. There are the migratory birds which move from north to south, and from south to north, with the changing seasons. There are the swimming birds, and the singing birds; the screech owls and talking parrots; the gorgeously handsome birds, and the drab, colorless birds.

But why stop with the birds? The same variety exists among the land animals, the trees, the flowers, and the insects. There is only one thing common to them all, which is, that they have life—either animate or inanimate. Unbelieving human wisdom, in its folly, contends that all these myriad forms of plant and animal life just happened to develop as they did; but no one has yet been able to explain how they live. The origin of life is unknown, apart from the explanation given to us in the Scriptures that ‘in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.’

Accepting this fact, as the many otherwise unanswerable questions asked Job impel us to do, then we know the answer to them all, that answer being that the infinite wisdom and almighty power of a personal God and Creator is responsible for awe-inspiring works of Creation which are so marvelously displayed in the heavens, on the earth, and in the sea.

In chapters forty and forty-one, God reminded Job of certain great monsters of the land and of the sea such as “behemoth” [probably the elephant], and “leviathan” [the whale, perhaps, or some other sea monster]. (Job 40:15; 41:1) Job was made to realize that here again are marvels of Creation which he could not explain, and at last he answered the Lord, saying, “I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee.”—chap. 42:2

Thus Job reached the point where he realized that the only answer to all the mysteries of Creation is that they are the work of an intelligent Creator. This was the answer also to the problem of suffering. How could he question the wisdom of the great Creator in permitting him to suffer for a while? Surely the infinite wisdom displayed in all the creative works of God knew what was best for him. Should we not all reach this conclusion, and especially so if we would understand the meaning of our existence, and be inspired with hope in contemplating the eternal destiny which the Creator has designed for his human family?

‘I know that thou canst do every thing,’ said Job to his God. If we know this, then we have a foundation of faith upon which we can build a true knowledge of God and of his all-wise and loving design in man’s creation. If we believe that he can do everything, no explanation of his plans and purposes which he has given in his Word will be disbelieved; no instructions will go unheeded or disobeyed; and no promise he has made, regardless of how far-reaching, or, from the human standpoint, impossible of accomplishment, will be doubted.

The wisdom and power of God are wonderfully displayed in his creative works with which we are surrounded. However, had we no further revelation of God than these, we would have many reasons to wonder about his justice and love. These attributes of the Creator we will find revealed in his written Word as we become acquainted with his great plan of the ages for the recovery of his human Creation from sin and death.

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depraved will, but also to go ‘without the camp’ to the utter disregard and destruction of human hopes and ambitions, bearing the reproaches as Jesus patiently bore them. We are to rejoice in the privilege of presenting our bodies a “living sacrifice.”—Rom. 12:1

## **ABRAHAM AND LOT**

There are some pictures relating to Abraham and Lot recorded in Genesis, the eighteenth and nineteenth chapters, from which we can get illustrations of Christians who overcome in a partial sense, and of those who overcome as Jesus overcame. Those who, on one hand, are successful in obtaining the one hope of their calling to be members of the body of the Anointed, and those who fail to “so run, that ye may obtain.” (I Cor. 9:24) Those who are willing to follow Jesus closely in fulfillment of their consecration vow, are in contrast with those who are unwilling to “fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ.” (Col. 1:24) Likewise, those who “bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar” (Ps. 118:27), are compared with those whose love and zeal are not sufficient to impel them to perform, for the Lord’s sake, the sacrificing they at first agreed to do.

Genesis 18:1-19 describes a scene enacted approximately four thousand years ago. Abraham, then ninety-nine years of age, was camping at Mamre with his family and household, servants and herdsmen. Abraham was resting in the Divine promise, “In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.”—Gen. 12:3

Genesis 19:1-16 deals with Abraham’s nephew, Lot, in Sodom. Lot possessed much less faith and rounded-out character than Abraham. Lot, nevertheless, would be considered by many as a good man, and II Peter 2:7,8 tells us that the course of the Sodomites “vexed his righteous soul.”

## **TEN WORD PICTURES**

### **No. 1. The Scene with Abraham and Lot—Gen. 18:1; 19:1**

Lot was on a low level, in Sodom, amidst the noise and bustle of the world, where he experienced a lack of fellowship with God. Sodom was on the shore of the Salt Sea, later known as the Dead Sea, which is 1,312 feet below the Mediterranean Sea level. This is the place that Lot chose—the low level in Sodom. Abraham enjoyed fellowship with God, and was found actually on the high-level plains of Mamre.

For us to live with Abraham on the elevated plains of Mamre, pictures our fellowship with God, walking with God. It implies a knowledge of the Divine purpose, to be acquainted with the Truth. This brings quietness of heart; assurance for the future. If once we, from our elevated position, see afar off, we should not be overcharged again with earthly things. We are to be rich in faith as was Abraham. Our citizenship is, even now, in heaven, and we are to touch earth as lightly as we can, living on the elevated plains of Mamre.

### **No. 2. The Heavenly Visitors—Gen. 18:2; 19:1**

Abraham lifted up his eyes and, “lo, three men stood by him”; whereas Lot saw but two visitors. Abraham, who was honored with three heavenly visitors, fitly pictures the more than conqueror, living on the elevated plains, in fellowship with God. The vision becomes enlarged. Spiritual perception is increased. Such can say with the Apostle Paul, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” (Eph. 1:3) And such can see Jesus, unmistakably. So, we too may have “the eyes” of our understanding “enlightened.” “Blessed are your eyes, for they see.”—Eph. 1:18; Matt. 13:16

### **No. 3. The Place of Meeting—Gen. 18:1; 19:1**

Abraham was sitting in the door of his tent—a temporary dwelling place. Lot sat in the gate at Sodom—a well-established city. Abraham was in the attitude of readiness to move his tent to do the Lord’s will and sought a city that he could not find. Lot was settled in the city of Sodom. The scene with Abraham illustrates the Apostle Peter’s words in II Peter 1:13,14, to the effect that his fleshly body was a “tabernacle”—a temporary dwelling-place, a tent, to be moved at the Lord’s bidding. This body of ours is simply a tent, a temporary dwelling-place; our permanent house being the spiritual body that God will give us in the glorious first resurrection.

The Apostle Paul speaks about our earthly, temporary house being dissolved, and of our receiving a house “not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” (II Cor. 5:1) Lot seemed to have been earthbound, centered on the low level of Sodom. We are to mind the things of the Spirit. Our affections are “on things above.” (Col. 3:2) We are at the tent door, on

the alert, seeking to know and do God's will, and always ready to move in obedience to the heavenly vision.

#### **No. 4. The Time of Visit—Gen. 18:1; 19:1**

Abraham received the visitors at about noon—"in the heat of the day." Lot was interviewed by them in the evening—at the close of the day. It should not be with us that we fully receive and recognize our Lord and his requirements after the heat of the day. We should not be so inattentive that we fully realize God's will concerning us only at the close of the day, and after much tribulation. If we develop a deep love for the Lord, and are faithful; if our worship is in sincerity, and in Truth; and if we respond to his leading; he will reveal himself to us, here and now. We are then bound to recognize him and his requirements without undue delay, also his leadings on our behalf. We shall then be privileged to find, and clearly recognize, God's hand early, and not late in our experiences. Even like Abraham, during the heat of the day.

#### **No. 5. The Welcome Given to the Guests—Gen. 18:2; 19:1**

Abraham (99 years of age) gave the heavenly visitors a cordial welcome. There was much zeal on his part—"He ran to meet them." Lot seemed somewhat cool, or lukewarm—He "rose up to meet them." We should be on guard lest we develop lukewarmness, which condition could be defined as partly hot and partly cold. We are not to be divided between Christ and the world—not willing to give up heavenly hopes, yet at the same time clinging closely to earthly ambitions. Such have too much conscience to cast off the name of Christ, and yet too much love for the world to take a firm and honest stand entirely on the Lord's side. Our attention must be given to the essentials of Christian life, and not to securing the approval and applause of the world. The conscience, not sensitive and tender before the Lord, will not permit a life to be lived of faith, trust, and love. May we always manifest an energetic and warmhearted zeal towards the Lord, and in his service!

#### **No. 6. The Degree of Respect—Gen. 18:2; 19:1**

Some commentators have described these verses to picture that Lot rose to meet the guests, and standing, bowed his face toward the ground, or simply bowed. But Abraham showed much reverence, and prostrated himself; for when he saw the three visitors he 'ran to meet them,' and then bowed his body to the ground. Here is a picture of reverence; a

willing yielding of respect; the acknowledgement of another's superiority.

Reverential worship is required by God from all his subjects, particularly those who have come to an advanced knowledge of his righteous character. At all times there was a willing yielding of respect on the part of our great Exemplar, the Lord Jesus. His whole life proved those beautiful words of his to be true, "Not my will, but thine be done" (Luke 22:42), and again, "I came... , not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." (John 6:38) Jesus always revered and honored his Father in heaven. "Let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear."—Heb. 12:28

### **No. 7. The Response to the Invitation—Gen. 18:5; 19:2**

Abraham's invitation was immediately accepted, but not so with the invitation offered by Lot. This is quite an apt illustration, because if we live on the low level, in Sodom, it will be difficult for the Lord to fellowship with us. We may often miss the Lord's company, because our conversation and our environment are not right.

How refreshing and stimulating for us to go to our Father's inspired Word! Therein we see Jesus—our heavenly visitor—our true leader and guide. He is Wisdom and Grace, pointing the way to salvation and deliverance. He is the leader of our choice, the most important decision of our life. He is our Savior, and we are to give him our utmost attention. Then it will not be difficult for the Lord to fellowship with us. If we open widely the door of our heart, he will gladly accept the invitation. As illustrated in Abraham's case, he will respond immediately. He will readily come in and join us in rich spiritual feasts.

### **No. 8. The Food Provided—Gen. 18:6-8; 19:3**

The Scriptures describe Abraham providing a calf tender and good cakes, butter, and milk. Such full details show it to have been a goodly meal. Concerning Lot and his preparation, the only description recorded of the meal is unleavened bread. Figuratively speaking, what 'food' can we offer the heavenly guest?

We must give the Lord our love, our obedience, our will—absolute submission to the Divine will as indicated in God's holy Word, a sacrifice of self-will. Our Father would say, "Covenant with me by sacrifice." (Ps. 50:5) Abraham made excellent provision for his visitors. We are to make

the best offer we can. We are to present our “bodies a living sacrifice.” (Rom. 12:1) Ours is to be a complete surrender—“My son, give me thine heart.” (Prov. 23:26) Let us, throughout our earthly pilgrimage—like faithful Abraham—give liberally to our heavenly guest.

### **No. 9. The Visit They Had—Gen. 18:10-19; 19:4**

The record shows that during the heavenly messengers’ visit, themes dearest to Abraham’s heart were mentioned, relating even to God’s oathbound promise to him concerning the blessing of all nations of the earth. The heavenly visitors revealed some important truths to Abraham. But the Scriptures depict that Lot had no such pleasant dialogue. The men of the city made it impossible. The uproar of the world stepped in, and spoiled communion. In the days in which we live, there is plenty of noise and distracting influences around us. Discontentment and selfishness are some of the influences which are accelerating the overthrow of the old order. Faith in the inspired Word is not common in the earth. With us, faith in God must be maintained. We are to live on the high level, above the spirit of the world. There must be godliness and contentment. We must be submissive to God’s will, if we are to have kindred minds. Thus, we, like Abraham, can have sweet fellowship with the Lord, and our hearts will “burn within us” as Jesus speaks to us by the way.—Luke 24:32

### **No. 10. The End of the Visit—Gen. 18:16; 19:16**

Abraham accompanied his visitors as they departed. He valued their company, and from the lengthy conversation which followed, it is possible that he detained his heavenly guests. The attitude of Lot toward his visitors rather suggests that the language of his heart was ‘get out,’ not ‘come out.’ Lot loved the city, and he was literally dragged out of that place.

Abraham had a different experience; he was not influenced by the city. He cherished the Lord’s company, and the Divine promises. Abraham catches the Lord’s spirit. Concerning the Lord’s people today, we note a Colossians text, “If, then, you were raised with the Anointed One, seek the things above, where the Anointed One is sitting at the right hand of God. Mind the things above, not the things on the earth. For you died, and your life has been hidden with the Anointed One by God.”—Col. 3:1-3, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*

We are exhorted to give diligence to make our heavenly “calling and election sure.” (II Pet. 1:10) This involves our pressing along day by day—growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; continuing in his service; developing his Spirit. We are to value the Lord’s company. Abraham accompanied the heavenly visitors as they left, and it is our joy to accompany the Lord Jesus. We are to be those who “follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.”—Rev. 14:4

## **TO RECAPITULATE**

These word pictures remind us that faithful Abraham, living on the high-level plains of Mamre, had close fellowship with God. Let us daily experience an elevated Christian life of communion with our Father in heaven; spiritual perception, ever increasing, as pictured by Abraham’s enlarged vision.

May we live at the tent door, alert, ready to move in obedience to the Lord’s will. Like Abraham, grant that we may be privileged to fully recognize our Lord and his requirements, and receive his blessings even now, even during the heat of the day.

We should at all times be zealous, and also give the highest possible reverence to our heavenly guest—that zeal, and willing yielding of respect so beautifully portrayed in the conduct of Abraham. As a consequence, Jesus will always be a ready and ever-attentive guest.

Let us take care, also, to offer the best we have, because we have covenanted with God, by sacrifice.

We will ever have sweet fellowship with our heavenly guest, our hearts burning within us as he speaks to us by the way.

Let us always enjoy the Lord’s influence, accompanying him, in all his thoughts and leadings.

We can follow his thoughts attentively as he teaches us how, throughout our earthly pilgrimage, to be ‘more than conquerors, through him that loved us.’

Soldiers of Christ arise,  
And put your armor on,  
Strong in the strength which God supplies  
Through his eternal Son.  
Strong in the Lord of hosts,

And in his mighty power;  
Who in the strength of Jesus trusts  
Is “more than conqueror.”

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# The Power of Praise

*“The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; ... to give unto them ... the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.”  
—Isaiah 61:1-3*

**ISAIAH 61:1-3 OUTLINES** the commission of the Holy Spirit. In applying this prophecy to himself, Jesus omitted the expression referring to a declaration of the “day of vengeance.” (vs. 2) He knew that personally he would not then participate in this phase of the prophecy, since the ‘day of vengeance’ would not come upon the world until this end of the age. Another expression in this commission of the Holy

Spirit speaks of giving the ‘garment of praise’ for ‘the spirit of heaviness,’ and this is the privilege of all the Lord’s people as they have opportunities.

The garment of praise can be spoken of as an adornment of thanksgiving. It is in contrast with this beautiful adornment that the text speaks of the spirit of heaviness. This is an expressive way of describing a state of mind. It is a lack of buoyancy—a fear of something impending, a weight, upon our spirits.

It was this sort of feeling that the psalmist had when he said, “Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me?” (Ps. 42:11) It was the way Elijah felt when he lay down under the juniper tree after his victory at Mount Carmel, and he said, “Lord, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.” (I Kings 19:4) Jacob had the same feeling the night before he was to meet Esau, after their separation of many years. (Gen. 32:7) The two disciples walking to Emmaus experienced a similar sense of frustration over the fact that their Lord, the one whom they believed was the Messiah, had been taken from them and crucified. To the resurrected Jesus they said, “We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel.” (Luke 24:21) Epaphroditus, Job, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel all experienced the spirit of heaviness.

It is a similar sort of feeling that businessmen get today when they see business dwindling and difficulties multiplying. Indeed all mankind to

some extent are afflicted with the spirit of heaviness when they contemplate world conditions with any seriousness. Jesus explained this, saying that men's hearts would fail them for fear as they look ahead to the things which are coming upon the earth. (Luke 21:26) It is that depressed attitude of mind which results from fear of the unknown future.

We all know something of the spirit of heaviness and how it distresses us. It is those who feel this burden of spirit, yet trust in the Lord, that are promised deliverance from it by putting on the garment of praise. In this suggestion from the Lord of an antidote for the spirit of heaviness, he reveals the power of praise.

The Lord's people know much about the power of prayer, and in prayer there are reservoirs of power. James wrote that "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." (James 5:16) Prayer is the means by which our hearts and minds make contact with our God. Prayer is the expression of our soul, spirit, and very being. Paul wrote, "He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit." (Rom. 8:27) Through prayer we claim the promises of God, and they become veritable realities in our lives.

The power of prayer is certainly deep and strong, but the power of praise is also great. In our prayers we sometimes petition God for things which are not in harmony with his will, so our prayers are not answered. But when we praise God, we give evidence that we are in harmony with his will, that we are content with what he appoints, that the assaults of the enemy upon our peace have failed, and that we are in the condition of heart and mind that God can use. Paul wrote that through Christ we should offer "the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to his name."—Heb. 13:15

The spirit of heaviness is like a chain binding us, but the spirit of praise breaks the chain and sets the spirit free. An impressive illustration of this is seen in God's gracious response to Jehoshaphat as recorded in II Chronicles, chapter 20. Jehoshaphat the king, and the people of Judah, were in great straits. The Ammonites and Moabites had, with others, formed a coalition to crush them. The king was afraid, as well he might be. At times it is impossible not to be afraid. We should always remember that "perfect love casteth out fear."—I John 4:18

What did Jehoshaphat do with his fear? We read in the third verse of the chapter that he set himself to seek the Lord. He proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. The people gathered in a great prayer meeting led by the king. In verse six we have the king's prayer. First he acclaimed the glorious characteristics of God—a prayer of praise to Jehovah—“O Lord God of our fathers, art not thou God in heaven? and rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen? and in thine hand is there not power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee?”

Here was an acknowledgment of God's majesty and power—by implication a prayer of praise. In verse seven the prayer continues in an acknowledgment of what God had been to Israel and Judah—“Art not thou our God, who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land, ... and gavest it to the seed of Abraham thy friend for ever?”

Then the king, continuing his prayer, recalled what God had promised on behalf of his people. Having praised God for what he had done for Israel, with thankfulness he anticipated the fulfillment of his promises to continue caring for his own. He said, “If, when evil cometh upon us, as the sword, judgment, or pestilence, or famine, we stand before this house, and in thy presence, ... and cry unto thee in our affliction, then thou wilt hear and help.” (vs. 9) What a beautiful expression of confidence in God's ability and willingness to help!

Then follows the king's plea for the help which Israel so much needed, “O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee.” (vs. 12) Here is an expression of submission and expectation. What a wonderful prayer from a king!

How meaningful the words, ‘Our eyes are upon thee.’ They denote humility before the Lord, a full submission to his will, and an earnest watchfulness to see what he would have us do; thankful for the assurance that he is abundantly able to care for all our needs, and to conquer all our enemies. David wrote, “Unto thee lift I up mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens. Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God”—prompt to obey, ready to serve.—Ps. 123:1,2

We so often hesitate to take our Heavenly Father and Christ Jesus our Lord at their word. Jesus endeavored to encourage in his disciples and in ourselves implicit trust and confidence, faith in the promises. Did not Jesus assure us, “Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you”?(John 16:23) He also said, “If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.”—John 14:14

Sometimes we pray, but the answer does not come. The reason may be that we have not gone far enough. Prayer must include the full committal of oneself to God’s will. It was only when, through their king, the people of Judah acknowledged their need, and turned their eyes to the Lord, that they were assured of victory. Through one of his servants, a Levite, the Lord said unto them, “Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God’s. To morrow go ye down against them: ... Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord with you.”—vss. 15-17

Judah trusted in what God had said, and the people arose early in the morning and went forth to meet the enemy. The king exhorted them to believe their God, and to help strengthen their faith he prepared a band of “singers unto the Lord, ... that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the Lord; for his mercy endureth for ever. And when they began to sing and to praise, the Lord set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab, and mount Seir, ... every one helped to destroy another.”—vss. 21-23

When they began to sing God’s praises, he began to deliver. God had no problem as to how to deliver his people from their enemies. Peter wrote, “The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations,” or trial. (II Pet. 2:9) God was merely teaching the people of Judah to exercise a stronger faith in him, to trust him fully. “Blessed is that man that maketh the Lord his trust.” (Ps. 40:4) When they entered fully into partnership with the Lord in their trouble, and were willing to obey him, trusting him regarding his own part in their deliverance, and did all they could do by praising him for his promises, then deliverance came. His purpose in permitting the trouble was fulfilled.

**PAUL AND SILAS**

The attitude of Paul and Silas in prison in Philippi gives an impressive illustration of the wonderful power of praise. (Acts 16) They were unjustly imprisoned, ill-treated for doing good. Their feet were made fast in the stocks, and their backs were bleeding. What could they do? What they did do was to put on the garment of praise.

We read that “at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God.” (vs 25) The prisoners heard them—prisoners who no doubt were curious about these newcomers. The remark of Paul, “We are all here” (vs. 28), suggests that there were others in the same dungeon with them. No doubt these—criminals, as they probably were—were puzzled because they heard prayers, and heard Paul and Silas sing a duet. It was a song of praise to God, and the prisoners heard it. The jailer also heard it. And God surely heard, and his answer was swift and complete.

Doubtless Satan also heard this song of praise to Jehovah. He may have been congratulating himself on having stopped the work of these two ardent ambassadors of Christ, silencing them from continuing their witness of the resurrection of the one whom he had seen die on the cross. But when he heard them pray, he would not be so sure of final victory. When he heard them sing praises to their God, perhaps it occurred to him that he would be defeated. When these two disciples put on the garment of praise, the earthquake came and delivered them, and the jailer got the Truth; and out of that experience there was added to the church at Philippi.

## **PRAISING GOD**

One of the impressive things about Peter and the other disciples is recorded in Acts 2:46,47. Here we are told that they continued “daily with one accord in the temple, ... breaking bread from house to house.” We read that they “did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God.”

On another occasion Peter and his companions were preaching Jesus, and were arrested and beaten. But in Acts 5:41 we read that “they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.” Later Peter wrote, “Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings.”—I Pet. 4:13

One of the things which impressed the people in the city of Jerusalem was that no matter what they did to these men, they still praised God. This made them unconquerable, and rendered all the efforts of the enemy against them powerless. They wore the garment of praise. "Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Sion."—Ps. 65:1

Jesus also wore the garment of praise. "In the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee." (Heb. 2:12) Let us turn our thoughts back to Gethsemane and Calvary. We have stood with reverent awe as we have reflected upon our beloved Lord and Master and the faithfulness with which he carried on his ministry. From one standpoint he was fighting our battles, meeting our foes, and bearing our sorrows.

Indeed, as the prophet foretold, our iniquity was laid upon Jesus. He endured our punishment, he died for us, and we are touched by his every word. He said, "Now is my soul troubled." (John 12:27) "My soul is exceeding sorrowful," he said, yet we have been unable to enter into more than the merest fraction of any real understanding of that sorrow of heart and heaviness of spirit, when all God's billows rolled over him. (Matt. 26:38) But even so, Jesus went to Gethsemane and to Calvary wearing the garment of praise.

Consider again an account that is so familiar that we may easily miss its meaning. It was the night before the crucifixion, in the upper room where the Memorial Supper was instituted. We read that at the close of the supper, "when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives." The margin reads a "psalm." (Matt. 26:30) There is no definite statement as to what psalm, or psalms, Jesus and the disciples sang on that occasion. Authorities say that it was the custom for the Jews, at the beginning of the Passover feast, to sing Psalms 113 and 114. Psalm 113 commences with the word "Hallelujah," meaning, "Praise ye the Lord." Psalm 114 commemorates the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. Before the close of the feast, the Jewish ritual prescribes the singing of Psalms 115 to 118. We will not consider the whole of these psalms, but let us in spirit go to that upper room and listen to some of the words of our Lord as he raises his voice in song. As we listen, let us remember that he was singing, with the cross before his eyes, knowing that it was only a few hours away.

“Ye that fear the Lord, trust in the Lord: he is their help and their shield. The Lord hath been mindful of us: he will bless us; ... We will bless the Lord from this time forth and for evermore. Praise the Lord.” (Ps. 115:11,12,18) “I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications. ... The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell [Hebrew, *sheol*, grave] gat hold upon me: I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I upon the name of the Lord; O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul. ... Return unto thy rest, O my soul; for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee. ... What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me? ... I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, ... I will pay my vows unto the Lord now in the presence of all his people. ... Praise ye the Lord.”—Ps. 116:1,3,4,7,12,17-19

In these psalms we hear repeated the overtones of ‘Praise ye the Lord.’ What a picture this gives us of the Lord going forth into the darkness of Gethsemane and Calvary with a song of praise upon his lips and in his heart—singing and giving thanks unto his Heavenly Father! If Jesus could face the most terrible experience that has ever touched a human soul, and meet it wearing the garment of praise, should we not wear it ourselves, and thus be victorious as we follow in his steps?

If Paul and Silas could wear that same garment of praise, with bleeding backs, and feet fast in the stocks; if the early disciples, after suffering mockings and scourgings and threatenings from the priests and rulers, could go out from their presence rejoicing; if an Old Testament saint, with no knowledge of God’s revelation through Christ which has come to us, could rise to that level of faith and confidence in God that enabled him with all Judah to sing a song of praise while the enemy faced them; why is it that we are sometimes so slow to put on that garment of praise? Why, indeed, do we not wear it continually, and, in the strength it provides be truly victorious in the doing of our Father’s will?

What joy to the heart of God it must be to see a company of his people so in harmony with his will that whatever trials he permits to touch them only make more evident, more vocal, more impressive, their spirit of trust and their spirit of praise! Throughout the Bible, God reveals how much he values the praises of his people.

The voice of praise from the people of God must mean something to the world—at least to individuals in the world. We look out on the world

today with all its chaos, perplexity, unrest, anxiety, and discouragement, and everywhere there is the spirit of fear and heaviness. There is an antidote for this in the song of praise upon the lips of God's people—that song which finds expression and amplification through the Divine kingdom plan for the blessing of all the families of the earth!

Jesus has said to us, “Ye are the light of the world” (Matt. 5:14), and this is what the Truth is as it shines out into a world of darkness, chaos, and confusion. The consecrated people of the Lord who bear this light, who sing this song of praise, are often confronted with the same distressing circumstances as the world, and are perplexed by the same problems, yet they are always thankful to the Lord, and continue their song of praise to him.

What a witness this must be to observing ones in the world. “All thy works shall praise thee, O Lord; and thy saints shall bless thee.” (Ps. 145:10) As the ‘saints’ bless the Lord, giving praise for his goodness and his great kingdom plan to bring peace and joy to all mankind, it must, and does, make some want to know the secret of such a transformed outlook and life. Indeed, in the day of their “visitation” the whole world will praise God.—I Pet. 2:12

What better contribution can we make to the comfort and help of those about us than the spirit of praise? The great thing about it is that often the spirit of praise is contagious. Praise is faith and trust made vocal. To wear the garment of praise helps to give us a true perspective. It gives us the spirit of courage. It keeps us in better health, and makes us easier to live with. It multiples our influence for good. It makes us helpful to others. Above all, it brings joy to the heart of God.

But one may ask, Is it possible to be in the attitude of praise when one does not feel like it? This is a problem! But let us remember that praise is not an effervescent feeling, so that one necessarily wants to sing. Neither is it lightness of spirit, nor a smiling face in sorrow. True praise is a sincere acknowledgment of all the perfections of God in all his ways, and regardless of how his ways may touch us. It involves loving submission and obedience to the will of God. In this connection, think of Jesus in Gethsemane.

Jesus was sorrowful, weighed down “with the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6), yet in his heart he praised God. We praise God for what he is and

what he has promised to do, not for how well we feel, how prosperous we are, or what we are able to accomplish. Nor is praise to God merely the singing of hymns, or repeating the words, “Praise the Lord.” We praise God when we do the best we can to enlighten others with respect to his glorious character, revealed so resplendently through the Divine plan of salvation.

We praise God not for any wisdom of our own that enabled us to see and know him, but for the fact that he opened the eyes of our understanding to see and appreciate the “mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.” (Matt. 13:11) It is not, or should not be, subject to the whims and moods of the every day vicissitudes of life.

We should therefore wear the garment of praise every day, and throughout all the experiences of life as we meet our daily responsibilities, letting it become a witness, a testimony of our trust in the promises of God. We cannot always be singing, but we can reflect the praise of God in our quiet, restful acquiescence to the will of God. We all realize the value and power of prayer. Let us become more acquainted with the power of praise.

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***Dawn Bible Students Association***