

Is the Bible True?

IN OCTOBER 1999, an article by this title appeared in the “*U.S. News and World Report*,” which had obtained permission to publish portions of a newly issued book with the same title. The article began as follows:

“The workday was nearly over for the team of archaeologists excavating the ruins of the ancient Israelite city of Dan in upper Galilee. Led by Avraham Biran of Hebrew Union College in Jerusalem, the group had been toiling since early morning, sifting debris in a stone-paved plaza outside what had been the city’s main gate.

FINDING THE DAVID INSCRIPTION

“Now the fierce afternoon sun was turning the stoneworks into a reflective oven. Gila Cook, the team’s surveyor, was about to take a break when something caught her eye—an unusual shadow in a portion of recently exposed wall along the east side of the plaza. Moving closer, she discovered a flattened basalt stone protruding from the ground with what appeared to be Aramaic letters etched into its smooth surface. She called Biran over for a look. As the veteran archaeologist knelt to examine the stone, his eyes widened, “Oh, my Lord!” he exclaimed. “We have an inscription!”

“In an instant, Biran knew that they had stumbled upon a rare treasure. The basalt stone was quickly identified as part of a shattered monument, or stele, from the ninth century B.C., apparently commemorating a military victory of the king of Damascus over two ancient enemies. One foe the fragment identified as the ‘king of Israel.’ The other was ‘the House of David.’”

The reference to David was a historical bombshell. Never before had the familiar name of Judah’s ancient warrior king, a central figure of the Hebrew Bible and, according to Christian Scripture, an ancestor of Jesus, been found in the records of antiquity outside the pages of the Bible. Skeptics had long seized upon that fact to argue that David was a mere legend, invented by Hebrew scribes during, or shortly after, Israel’s Babylonian exile, roughly 500 years before the birth of Christ. Now, at last, there was material evidence: an inscription written not by Hebrew

scribes but by an enemy of the Israelites a little more than a century after David's presumptive lifetime. It seemed to be a clear corroboration of the existence of King David's dynasty and, by implication, of David himself.

OTHER ARCHEOLOGICAL FINDINGS

The article told of other archeological discoveries that shed new light on both Old and New Testaments, corroborating key portions of the stories of Israel's patriarchs, the Exodus, the Davidic monarchy, and the life and times of Jesus. Among the examples given was the fact that Joseph was sold for twenty silver shekels (Gen. 37:28), which matches exactly the going price of slaves in the region during the 19th and 18th centuries B.C. This was affirmed by documents recovered from the region that is now Syria. By the eighth century B.C., the price of slaves according to Assyrian records had risen steadily to 50 or 60 shekels. At the time of the Persian empire, in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C., it reached 90 to 100 shekels.

Skepticism concerning the Bible has been rife in modern times. Higher Critics have assigned incredulity to Biblical records and claimed that certain persons mentioned such as Abraham, Joseph, and David were all imaginary. Hence, tying the Genesis account of 20 shekels as the price of slaves with the period of time when Joseph was young is an important corroboration of the Bible.

There also is another inscription on the Mesha Stele which mentions the house of David, though not as clearly as the inscription found in Dan in 1993. Archeological evidence, likewise, has been found as to the existence of the Philistines and their possible origin. These people appeared to have migrated from the island of Crete, and other islands in the Aegean Sea. Modern archeology has uncovered a wealth of information regarding the Philistines, 'sea people,' which is consistent with Biblical records, confirming that they were not the figment of imagination of some priestly scribes.

THE IMPORTANCE OF DAVID'S EXISTENCE

Why is it necessary to establish that David actually existed? The answer is, because so many prophecies involve David and his offspring. The name, David, appears in the Scriptures 1273 times (either as David or David's). For example, the genealogy of Jesus is given at the

beginning of the Gospel according to Matthew, saying, “The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.” (Matt. 1:1) The Matthew genealogy is that of Joseph, and proceeds through Solomon. Both Joseph and Mary were of the house of David, and Mary’s genealogy is given in Luke 3:23-38 through Nathan, son of David. Since Mary was used by the Father to provide human organism for the Messiah, our Lord Jesus, he could properly be called the Son of David.

When Jesus began his ministry, many in Israel called him “Son of David.” For example two blind men followed him saying, “Son of David, have mercy on us.” (Matt. 9:27) Jesus had just raised Jairus’ daughter from death (Matt. 9:23-26), and his “fame hereof went abroad into all that land.” (vs. 26) When he performed more miracles, again they asked, “Is not this the Son of David?” (Matt. 12:23) Even a Gentile, a woman of Canaan, called him “Son of David.” (Matt. 15:22) The angel who was sent to tell Mary that she would be the mother of Jesus said of him, “He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David.”—Luke 1:32

SON OF DAVID, AND SON OF THE HIGHEST

It is noteworthy that Jesus is referred to as ‘Son of the Highest,’ while also stating that his father was David. This matter came up when Jesus was talking to the Pharisees and asked them, “What think ye of Christ? whose son is he? They say unto him, The Son of David. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call him Lord, saying, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool? If David then call him Lord, how is he his son? And no man was able to answer him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask him any more questions.”—Matt. 22:41-46

Bible students understand that Mary gave birth to Jesus, she being of the house of David; therefore, Jesus, indeed, was the Son of David through Mary’s side of the family. However, his begetting was by God, the Heavenly Father (Jehovah), and this is why he was the Son of the Highest. After laying down his life as a ransom sacrifice, Jesus, in essence, purchased all of the human family of Adam (including David); therefore, David, when resurrected, will call him Lord. Also, after his resurrection Jesus was highly exalted as it is written: “Wherefore God

also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name.”—Phil. 2:9

The link between David and the Messiah included the man Jesus’ birthplace. Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth in Galilee. When it was time for Mary to deliver the child, Caesar Augustus passed a taxation decree, forcing many people to go to their home territory for registration. Even though it was a difficult time for Mary to travel, she and Joseph had to go to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, where Jesus was born.—Luke 2:1-7

The nation of Israel was unaware of this great event, and it was told to none except some poor shepherds watching their flocks at night. The message brought by an angel of the Lord, said to them, “Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2:8-14) These shepherds were used of the Lord to tell others what they had seen. Later, when the three wise men, traveling from the east following a star, went to Herod asking where they might find the King of the Jews so that they could worship him, Herod was troubled. When he sought the advice of the chief priests and scribes they told him unhesitatingly the prophecy in Micah 5:2.

“Thou Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of Judah: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.” (Matt. 2:1-6) Few Israelites were able to put together the events reported by the shepherds with Micah’s prophecy to conclude that the Messiah had been born in the city of David.

DAVID ANOINTED KING

Saul was Israel’s first king, but he fell into disfavor with God, and David was anointed to take his place. The only ones that knew David had been anointed king over Israel were his own immediate family. David did not become a ruling king until after Saul had died. Instead, he became a fugitive fleeing from Saul’s relentless pursuit to kill him. With his small band of loyal followers, David had to remain in hiding during this time. This is an excellent picture of the delay in setting up God’s kingdom under the rightful king until his band of faithful followers is complete.

David was a man of many accomplishments, but he had some glaring faults. These faults and wrongdoings were not hidden from the people

and the Bible record does not gloss over his shortcomings even though David was “a man after his [God’s] own heart.”—I Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22

David’s major sin took place after he reigned as king following Saul’s death, and is recorded in II Samuel, chapters 11 and 12. The account tells in detail of his sin, and the punishment he had to endure because of it after he was fully repentant. Is the Bible true? Most assuredly, because none of the shortcomings of its heroes were ever hidden deliberately. It is important to know that David was a real living person, to substantiate the many promises woven around him and his progeny. Probably the most important is one we call ‘the sure mercies of David,’ a covenant made with David by God.

Reference is made in the 89th Psalm to God’s covenant with David. Verses 2-4 read: “I have said, Mercy shall be built up for ever: thy faithfulness shalt thou establish in the very heavens. I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations.” Verses 28 and 29 read: “My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him. His seed also will I make to endure for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven.”

THE COVENANT WITH DAVID

The full understanding of this covenant with David is possible only through recognition of the fact that David’s throne was typical of the Messianic kingdom throne, on which Jesus sits as King. However, God’s providences in protecting the typical throne in the hands of David’s natural descendants are remarkable, as will be seen by a study of the Davidic kings down to the overthrow of the last one, Zedekiah, when the nation was taken captive to Babylon in the year 606 B.C.

Then the Prophet Ezekiel wrote concerning Zedekiah: “Thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end, Thus saith the Lord God; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same: exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him.”—Ezek. 21:25-27

Here the typical kingdom of David ceased, but God’s covenant was not broken. Ezekiel did not say merely that the kingdom should be ‘no

more,' for this would have implied a broken covenant. Instead he explained that it would be no more 'until he come whose right it is.' The active operation of the covenant was merely suspended until the rightful King appeared.

That rightful King was Jesus. Yet when he came at his First Advent, it was to provide the ransom sacrifice so necessary for all mankind, but now he has returned to take over his kingdom. However, he awaits the completion of his church—the bride—before he asks the Father to give him the nations for his inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession.

As proof that the Bible is true, the archeological discoveries concerning David will fade into insignificance when the righteous rule of earth begins with David's son, our Lord Jesus. It is then that Paul's prophecy will be fulfilled: "That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."—Phil. 2:10,11

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Claim Your Spiritual Blessings

Key Verse: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.”

—Ephesians 1:3

Selected Scripture: Ephesians 1:1-14

ALL GOD’S INTELLIGENT creatures can be thankful for many blessings. Life itself is a blessing from God. Many are disposed to think of their blessings only in a temporal way. Health, prosperity, influence, family and friends are all considered as blessings of life to enjoy, and such they are when used properly. Paul, in our lesson, however, does not identify these or any other temporal blessing. He, rather, talks in the Key Verse about ‘spiritual blessings,’ those which come directly from God. What are such blessings?

In the verses of the Selected Scripture Paul gives us some of the details concerning these spiritual blessings and how to claim them as our own. In Verse 1 he addresses his words to “the saints ... and to the faithful in Christ Jesus.” This tells us that at the present time these blessings which he details in the ensuing verses are for those who have given themselves fully to God in consecration. Paul continues in verses 4 and 5 by revealing to us the marvelous truth that God determined “before the foundation of the world” that there would be such a class to receive these special blessings, a class of those striving to be holy and embodying within them the grace of love. These he would consider no less than his own children.

In order to have this special relationship with God and receive spiritual blessings requires that we be accepted of him. Of our own selves we cannot meet this qualification. We are all fallen creatures, and sinful to a greater or lesser extent. Verses 6 and 7 of our lesson tell us that our redemption, and hence our acceptance to God, is only through the merit (blood) of Jesus’ ransom sacrifice, “according to the riches of his grace.” Once having put our total faith in this ransom price, and then giving our hearts in unreserved consecration to God, only then can he begin to

shower us with spiritual blessings. These blessings are shown in verses 8 and 9 as centering in wisdom and the understanding of his will. It is only as we grow in this understanding that we are able to count all life's experiences as blessings from the Lord. Only then do we realize and appreciate the importance of the scripture, "All things work together for *good* to them that love God."—Rom. 8:28

Verse 10 of our lesson presents a wonderful truth. In it Paul says that it is not only God's purpose to bring this special class of saints into oneness with him in "heaven," but that his further desire is to bring all mankind, those "which are on earth," into this same unity of spirit and fellowship in due time. Paul corroborates this elsewhere when he says that Jesus "gave himself a ransom for *all*, to be testified in *due time*." (I Tim. 2:6) This knowledge is another important spiritual blessing for us to claim.

Paul concludes this lesson by identifying two more spiritual blessings. First, he says we have "obtained an inheritance." (vs. 11) Second, as a seal or assurance of this inheritance he says that we have received the "Holy Spirit of promise," (vs. 13) to direct the steps of those who, at the present time, have given themselves to him in full consecration to do his will.

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Claim Your New Status

Key Verse: “*Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God.*”
—*Ephesians 2:19*

Selected Scripture:
Ephesians 2:8-22

ONE OF THE BEAUTIFUL results accruing to those who heartily accept the redemption supplied by the blood of Jesus’ ransom sacrifice is that such, upon giving themselves in unreserved consecration to him, enter into a special covenant relationship with God. This covenant arrangement means a new status for those thus entered, a status in which they are no longer alienated from God, but are considered as his sons. As Paul says elsewhere, “If any man be in Christ, he is a New Creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become

new.”—II Cor. 5:17

In the Selected Scripture Paul says (vss. 8-10) that it is only through faith and by the grace of God that this new status is obtained. There are no works we can do to achieve it. He says that “we are *his* workmanship.” Yet, once we attain this condition we have the ability, through Christ Jesus, to render acceptable works. This is a seeming paradox—on the one hand we could do no works at all to attain this new status, but once having entered into covenant relationship with God we can, indeed we must, render acceptable works to him. As the Apostle James says, “Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.”—James 2:17

Paul was talking primarily to Gentiles, and what he says is even more remarkable, considering that these non-Jews were never thought of as having any relationship with God. He says they were “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.” (vs. 12) But with God anything is possible, and the time had come for the blood of Christ to be efficacious to all who had a hearing ear and a heart of faith. Jew or Gentile—there was no difference any longer. Each had the opportunity

to claim their new status through the means and method provided—Christ Jesus.

For the Jews, who had been under the “law of commandments” (vs. 15) for many centuries, this new status meant coming out from that Mosaic arrangement and into Christ. It had been thoroughly proven that only a perfect man could keep these former ordinances and hence reap the promise of eternal life. Only Jesus himself was able to do this. He sacrificed these eternal life rights to provide a way of escape for man, Jew and Gentile, out of the prison house of death and sin. “For through him [Jesus] we both [Jew and Gentile] have access by one Spirit unto the Father.”—Eph. 2:18

In the Key Verse, Paul states that all such who have this new status, regardless of their former condition or background, are part of one group now, “the household of God.” (vs. 19) This symbolic building has as its foundation the “apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.” (vs. 20) Once this building is complete, with every member—every stone—formed and fitted into place, it will be not just a building, but “an holy temple ... an habitation of God.” (vss. 21,22) It will be this temple, the New Jerusalem, which will then bless all the families of the earth in Christ’s kingdom.—Rev. 21:1-7

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Claim Your Ministry

Key Verse: *“Unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.”*
—*Ephesians 4:7*

Selected Scripture:
Ephesians 4:1-16

THERE ARE MANY WAYS we might describe the ministry of the Church at the present time. It is evident, however, that the most important part of this ministry is that work within each member—the work of conforming our character to the likeness of our Lord and Head, Christ Jesus. This is the “vocation” described in our lesson.—vs. 1

In order to begin this vital aspect of our ministry we must of necessity recognize that there is a unity or singleness of purpose which all must possess who have entered into covenant arrangement with God. Paul stresses this by saying that there is only one Spirit, one body, one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, and one baptism that is in order at the present time, even as there is only one God.—Eph. 4:4-6

God recognizes that though his people all come under the oneness and unity described above, yet the abilities and backgrounds of each vary. Such being the case, God is very merciful and gives us each the needed grace, or Divine favor, needed to be successful in this ministry, as long as we remain truly consecrated to the doing of his will in our lives.

The Key Verse says that this grace is given ‘according to the measure of the gift of Christ.’ (vs. 7) This ‘gift’ is specifically referring to the power and influence of God’s Holy Spirit, and it is the varying measures of this gift in each that enables all to achieve, by grace, the goal of a successful ministry.

Further in the Selected Scripture, Paul indicates that Jesus has provided additional means by which we might be victorious in our ministry, and quotes Psalm 68:18: “When he [Jesus] ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.” (vs. 8) These gifts that Jesus has given to us are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, “For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”—vs. 12

The reason for all these helps is that, if used in accordance with God's will, they will help us to achieve not just a unity of purpose, but additionally a unity of faith and knowledge that would be evidenced in a perfect [complete, mature] man, one who has attained "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."—Eph. 4:13

Continuing, Paul warns us that to claim this ministry and be successful in it means that we must be firm in our beliefs and convictions, not allowing every "wind of doctrine" (vs. 14) to toss us around as children. Satan, our great Adversary, is desirous of doing just this, and will use his most subtle deceptions to attempt to throw our ministry 'off course.'

However, we can thwart Satan's efforts by staying close to those things which we have learned. One of the important ways we do this is "speaking the truth in love" (vs. 15) to one another by assembling together as often as possible. By doing this faithfully we will "grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."—Eph. 4:15,16

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Claim Your Responsibilities

Key Verse: “*Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.*”

—*Ephesians 5:21*

Selected Scripture:
Ephesians 5:1-5, 21-19

THE ABILITY TO undertake and carry out personal responsibility in life is an indication of the level of maturity in a person. To the child of God the importance of this is doubly magnified, because they have both temporal as well as spiritual responsibilities. Those who are mature spiritually have developed, through experience, the ability to properly understand and carry

out God’s will for them, just as the naturally mature are able to meet their responsibilities in the earthly affairs of life. In Ephesians 5, the Apostle Paul deals with both aspects of this subject, and in fact uses the natural to illustrate and corroborate the spiritual.

In verses 1-5 of the Selected Scripture, Paul reminds his hearers that the basis for carrying out all responsibilities, temporal or spiritual, is the character attribute of love. It is love that has, and always will govern the Creator in carrying out his responsibilities as the Author of the plan of salvation for all mankind. Since love is the key to his works, there are certain thoughts and actions of man that are so clearly out of harmony with this basis that no one who practices such things “hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.” (vs. 5) It is not necessary to list these here. Suffice it to say that even in this world such actions are not approved by people of good moral character.

The Key Verse points out that perhaps the single most important responsibility that any of us have is that toward one another. The ability to get along with others, to share the blessings of life with one’s fellowman, to dwell together in peace and harmony, is a noble goal desired by most of God’s intelligent creation. However, through the fall of man into sin, the fruitage of this desire has been conflict, war and a general inability to do the very thing that Paul admonishes, “submitting yourselves one to another.” (vs. 21) Only those who have put their total

trust and reliance in the Lord have been able to carry this out in their natural affairs—and even more importantly—in their spiritual affairs.

Paul likens the natural arrangement of marriage to the relationship between Christ and his church. (vss. 22-25) In marriage, both the husband and the wife have important responsibilities. If one or the other does not carry these out, the marriage will have difficulties—perhaps it will even fail altogether. The same is true in the spiritual realm. Christ, as the head of the church, his body, was given the responsibility of being the “Saviour of the body” (vs. 23), which he fulfilled at Calvary. He also loves the church (vs. 25), sanctifies, and cleanses it. (vs. 26) These are all Jesus’ responsibilities, and he has carried them out perfectly, completely. Our responsibility as the body or church, Paul says, is to “submit yourselves ... as unto the Lord.”—vs. 22

Finally, we are to cooperate and work with our Head in this sanctification process. To carry out these all-important responsibilities means that these words will be fulfilled in us: “That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.”—Eph. 5:27

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Claim the Strength of the Lord

Key Verse: “*Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.*”
—*Ephesians 6:10*

Selected Scripture:
Ephesians 6:10-24

THE LIFE OF A CHILD OF God, though full of blessings and joy, also has much in the way of difficulty, tests and trials. We cannot be successful in this rugged way in our own strength alone. To think that we can would mean certain failure. We can be just as certain, however, that with the strength of the Lord and “the power of his might” (Eph. 6:10), we can come off victorious in our Christian warfare. This is the focus of the Key Verse. We have the mightiest being in the universe—God himself—who desires to work on our behalf. How can we not take advantage of his infinite power and wisdom? It is there for the asking to those who submit themselves humbly to the will of God.

We are reminded in the Selected Scripture that, in addition to the fact that God is our strength, there are other powers, represented chiefly in the Devil himself, that would have us utterly fail. These two opposing parties (God and Satan) and their influences are the sources of much conflict and many battles within the heart, mind, words and actions of every child of God. Truly Paul says, “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”—vs. 12

The battle armor that God has chosen for us to wear in this conflict is not that of a typical soldier. Though Paul mentions such things as armor for the loins and the feet, a breastplate, a shield, a helmet and a sword (vss. 14-17), he makes it clear that these are only symbolic of a much more effective spiritual armor. This spiritual armor is mostly defensive, and consists of loins girded with *truth*, a breastplate of *righteousness*, feet shod with the gospel of *peace*, a shield of *faith*, and a helmet of *salvation*. These five spiritual “weapons” are powerful in the battles of life against

the world, the flesh, and the Devil, because they have their source in God and have been proven effective in their use by Jesus and the Apostles.

The only offensive weapon Paul mentions is a sword— a spiritual sword. He further identifies it as “the Word of God.” (vs. 17) So powerful is this sword, God’s Word, that in another place Paul says, “For the Word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.”— Heb. 4:12

With the six pieces of spiritual armor that God has given us, we are well equipped to “withstand in the evil day.” (Eph. 6:13) But prayer must be made unto God for his assistance in battle as well. As the Apostle says, “Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.” (vs. 18) Prayer is all-important because it helps to keep operative all the armor. Without prayer we lose communication with our Heavenly Father and our Captain, Jesus Christ. With it, we can have the confidence that Paul expressed as he approached every experience of life. With the armor and prayer, Paul was able to say: “That I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the Gospel.”—vs. 19

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Greater than Angels

IN THIS EPISTLE of “deep things,” (I Cor. 2:10) God is speaking through the apostle to those who have become his people. Herein he gives insight into the hidden things, the plans and purposes which he talks over with those who love to dwell in his presence. This is some of the ‘latter rain,’ or ‘table talks’ of him who comes to “sup” with those who, in the Laodicean stage of the church, have heard his “knock” and opened the door. (Rev. 3:20) How gracious and loving is our Creator to have had the Tabernacle and other types enacted so long ago, and then have raised up the Apostle Paul and given him visions and revelations by which he could write the epistle, to enable his people in the latter days to understand what the Lord has been doing, and how, and why!

This is the epistle of ‘better things.’ Paul writes of a “better” spokesman “than the angels” (Heb. 1:4); also of “better things” (Heb. 6:9; 11:40; 12:24); “better promises” (8:6); a “better hope” (7:19); a “better testament” (7:22) or “covenant” (8:6); a better “mediator” (9:12-15); and a better “priesthood” (7:23,24). Upon the altar (13:10), and in the tabernacle (9:11) are offered “better sacrifices” (9:23). It is a better “ministry” (8:6), leading to a “better country” (11:16), even as the fulfillment, the complete work, is better than the blueprints.

CHAPTER ONE

VERSE 1 “God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets.”

Thus did the Lord speak to the fathers through the prophets. More literally, the thought is that the Divine revelations of the past were given in many ways, and by fragments, or morsels—“Here a little, and there a little.” (Isa. 28:10) These were scattered bits or pieces given in visions, types, prophecies, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the progenitors of the Jewish people; and also to Moses, Samuel, David, and all the prophets.

In Hosea 12:10 we read, “I have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes [types], by the ministry of the prophets.” And again, in Amos 3:7 we read, “Surely the Lord God

will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets.”

VERSE 2 “Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed [‘tithemi’, placed, put, set] heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.”

Here the ‘last days’ are the closing days of the Jewish Age, and the opening days of the Gospel Age, but also included are the last days of the Gospel Age. The old methods which God had employed in dealing with his people in the past were no longer to be used. His people were now to be a “New Creation” (II Cor. 5:17, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*), and for these all the messages and partial statements of the past were gathered into a complete whole and revealed through Christ.

Paul says that through Christ God has spoken unto “us.” (Heb. 1:2) Here the emphasis is that God was speaking to the same Jewish people as in the past. If an angel had come to them with a message, they would have listened. One greater than angels came with the Gospel message, and the vast majority of Israel received him not. The Lord then turned to the Gentiles, giving them the opportunity to become a part of the ‘us’ class. Now the oracles of God belong to all believers.—Rom. 2:6-10; 3:2; 9:4,5

God now speaks through his Son! What loving condescension is here shown. All God’s works speak volumes about him, but in his Son we have the most complete revelation. In him is a revelation of the brightness of God’s glory—literally an ‘off-flash,’ as if in a burst of brilliance he had brought the *Logos* into being. Every glorious beauty of the Creator’s character shines forth through his Son—his humility, meekness, loving-kindness, patience, endurance, self-denial—all those endearing qualities which draw us to him and delight our hearts; also the four cardinal attributes of his character—his wisdom, justice, love and power.

Paul writes concerning Jesus that “all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen.” (II Cor. 1:20) In him and through him will be the completion and fulfillment of all the Father’s gracious promises and purposes. This wonderful Son was trained in the ways of his Father throughout all the eons since the time of his creation. He was brought up under the Father’s care and instruction. (Prov. 8:30) He was there when

all the angels were created, including Lucifer, for he did the work of Creation.—John 1:3; I Cor. 8:6; Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:16; Heb. 1:2

‘Made the worlds’ can have the meaning “on account of whom the Father created the worlds,” or arranged the various ages in his great Divine plan, those ages in and through which he will accomplish all his good purposes.

VERSE 3 “Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.”

Here the Greek word for ‘express image’ is *charakter*, meaning ‘the impression as of a stamp or die, or seal.’ This refers to Jesus’ condition since his resurrection, when he was raised up to the Divine nature. “For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell.” (Col. 1:19) He is, therefore, “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature.” (vs. 15) He is before all things, being the firstborn from the dead (at his resurrection), that in all things he might have the preeminence. “In him dwells all the fullness of the Deity bodily.” (Col. 2:9, *WED*) What strong expressions are these! and how complete! By these we know that the Father has placed all things in the hands of his Son, that all the Son’s acts, words, thoughts, are just like those of the Father. As Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Only in the throne will I be greater than thou.”—Gen. 41:40

How could two such beings exist separately and yet be one in thought, plan and will? We remember that all through the ages of the past our Lord Jesus, as the agent of the Father, had watched him, studied him, and found supreme delight in the Father’s ways of wisdom and beauty. As stated in Proverbs 8:30, which applies to the *Logos*, he was as one brought up by Jehovah, trained and educated in his presence. When Lucifer endeavored to carry out his selfish ambition, Jesus was there and saw the rebellion. He also witnessed the disobedience and fall of man. When the angels fell and sinned, Jesus was there, and noted that abiding close to the Father, obeying him and practicing his ways, brought happiness and security and long life. Jesus loved righteousness and hated iniquity and disobedience.

‘Upholding all things by the word of his power,’ means sustaining (from *phero*—‘to bear or carry’), as the provider of food and energy and

life, distributing to each and all as needed. (Ps. 104:10-24) What a deep assurance that this great Provider will supply all our needs! ‘All things’ here refers to the whole universe, and to all the creatures in it. The ‘word of his power’ is a reference to the authority of his utterance, the authority given to him by his Father. The expression also includes Jesus’ actual power or energy by which he is now able to accomplish the work of Jehovah. “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth,” said Jesus subsequent to his resurrection.—Matt. 28:18

“When he had by himself purged our sins,” or as the *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott* translates it, “made a purification for sins.” How clearly this shows that it was Jesus who was offered to effect the purification, the beginning of the great work of eradicating sin from the earth. The word ‘purification’ is from a Greek word meaning ‘a washing off, or cleansing, as of filth or dirt,’ and such is the character of sin as viewed by God. This is a reference to the typical purification of sins by the offerings and washings of the Law arrangements, as fulfilled antitypically through Christ. The use of the adverb ‘when’ shows that the purification must first be accomplished before the blessing could come, and that the offering for sin by Jesus must be made before he could be glorified.

“Sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.” Jesus, having placed the merit of his sacrifice in the hands of Justice, ‘Sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,’ enabling him to effect the salvation and deliverance of mankind. This was at the ‘right hand of God,’ the exalted position promised to him as ruler with his Father—“Even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.” (Rev. 3:21) Again, “Sit thou at my right hand [the place of supreme favor and authority with the Father], until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” (Ps. 110:1) The expression, ‘Majesty on high,’ denotes the height of greatness, and such is the throne of God—the highest position of honor and trust.

VERSE 4 “Being made so much better [Greek, ‘more powerful’] than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.”

Lucifer had sought this high position, endeavoring to exalt himself “above the stars of God.” (Isa. 14:13) Jesus gained the position by

obedience and self-denial. Through this training, he realized how great are the responsibilities, and how much care, patience, and love must be exercised in carrying out the Heavenly Father's plans. The Son of God, before he came to earth, occupied a very high position in the Divine plan, but after his work of redemption he was still more highly exalted, being now the Head of the 'New Creation,' and above all angels. To prove this the apostle quotes several passages from the Old Testament:

VERSE 5 "For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?"

This is a sweeping statement, showing that while all the angels are sons of God, none had the honor of being directly created, as had the *Logos*. Paul here quoted scriptures to prove that such statements in Psalm 2:7 and II Samuel 7:14—familiar to every Jew—could have reference to only One, and that was the anointed Son of God.—Ps. 89:20-27

In the phrase, 'This day have I begotten thee,' 'begotten' is the Hebrew word *yala*, meaning 'born' or 'delivered.' Apparently it does not refer to Jesus' original begetting, or creation, but to his deliverance from death to the Divine nature at his resurrection.

VERSE 6 "And again, when he bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him." Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott reads: "And when again he shall introduce the Firstborn into the habitable."

This was Paul's crowning proof of Jesus' superiority, particularly that portion of the prophecy which refers to Jesus' Second Advent, when the proclamation is made that all, even the angels, shall worship him. All things are to be "subdued" unto him." (I Cor. 15:24-28) It was prophesied in Psalm 97:7, "Worship him, all ye gods [mighty ones, referring to angels]."

VERSE 7 "And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire."

The fact that Jesus was exalted above the angels bespeaks eloquently the height of his glory, for as Paul quotes Psalm 104:4, he shows that they occupied a very high position in God's arrangements. To them has been given the great honor and privilege of being God's special messengers, or agents. Thus did they serve Daniel, Moses, Abraham, and the prophets;

and thus are they commissioned to serve us, who are heirs of “salvation.”—vs. 14

VERSE 8 “But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.”

This is a quotation from Psalm 45:6 concerning Jesus. How great was the reward of being the trusted and chosen agent to dispense the favors and blessings of God to his creatures! Ultimately this will earn their undying love, loyalty, and gratitude. None is so fit and suitable and able as Jesus for this exalted position. He earned it fairly by self-abnegation, and by perfect trust in and love for his Heavenly Father.—Rev. 5:9,12,13

The expression ‘for ever and ever,’ is, according to *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*, “for the ages.” This will begin with the Millennial Age, which will be the best of all ages up to that time. But it will lead to still greater ages to come. In one sense, when all things are subdued under the Son, and he hands the kingdom over to the Father, to whom he himself will be subject, the kingdom will have accomplished its work of restoration and deliverance. That age is called the time of “regeneration” (Matt. 19:28), the “dispensation of the fulness of times.” (Eph. 1:10) But in a larger sense, the kingdom of Christ will never end, because that which he establishes will continue throughout eternity. (Dan. 2:44; 7:18; Isa. 9:6,7) When the Messianic kingdom work is complete, there will be other works and other ages in which Jesus will share the throne of his Father.

The ‘sceptre’ is Jesus’ authority or right to rule. It is a sceptre of righteousness—that is, a sceptre granted to Jesus because of his righteousness and because the Heavenly Father knew he would exercise it in harmony with righteousness.

VERSE 9 “Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.”

This verse is a quotation from Psalm 45:7. Jesus did not merely practice righteousness, he loved the right way. He also hated iniquity (*Greek*, lawlessness). God’s ways when followed mean self-restraint, self-control, but the true children of God delight to be governed by his laws. In them they find the fullest and most enjoyable expression of all their faculties and powers.

Where God rules in the mind and heart there is liberty. That is what Jesus meant when he said, “Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:32)—free from the twisting, morbid, paralyzing influence of disobedience and selfishness. Such freedom gives opportunity for the glorious expansion of every faculty and power of mind and body. Paul speaks of it as “the glorious liberty of the children of God.”—Rom. 8:21

‘*Therefore.*’ It was because Jesus thus loved the law of God and found delight in its every demand upon his being, that he could be trusted with ‘all power’ and be given full authority over both men and angels; so he was ‘anointed’ by God with the ‘oil of gladness’ above his ‘fellows.’ Thus was he set apart and prepared in every particular to do a great work, a work that carries much responsibility.

The ‘oil of gladness’—that is the Holy Spirit—was pictured by the holy anointing oil of the Tabernacle and the Temple, the oil that was used to anoint the prophets, priests and kings. How wonderfully the effect of his anointing was described by the prophet, when he wrote:

“The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord; And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord: ... and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth.”—Isa. 11:2-4

The apostle associates the thought of ‘gladness’ with the anointing which Jesus received, and in the Greek the thought is of supreme happiness and rejoicing. Such could not help but be the result of having been so highly honored by Jehovah, the Heavenly Father, not because he was exalted above his ‘fellows,’ but because he was considered worthy to be exalted to such degree.

As noted, Jesus was exalted above every other being in the universe except his Father—hence, above the angels. Jesus was also exalted above the fellow members of his mystical body; for he is the Head over the church in all things. But, up to this point in the epistle, the church has not been introduced into the discussion. The main argument thus far seems

to be to prove that Jesus has been highly exalted above all other spirit beings.

VERSE 10 “And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands.”

Here Jesus is referred to as Lord. ‘The beginning’ here mentioned seems to be a reference to the beginning of God’s dealings with man—that is, when he was created and given a home “eastward in Eden.” (Gen. 2:8) Evidently this passage refers not to the literal heavens and earth, but to the rules and regulations for human society as was given to Adam in the Garden of Eden. This arrangement between man and his Creator was one of perfection and peace, of sweet fellowship in beauty of thought, word, and deed. Through these arrangements, doorways of ever deeper delights could open as Adam continued to heed and obey the instructions given to him.

The foundations of human society were also laid there—that is, of family and fraternal relationships. They were on the basis of justice and love, foundations upon which the human race could have built a social structure as wholesome and sweet as that of heaven; and the people could have delighted in the unfolding wonders with which their Creator had filled the earth.

But Solomon said, “This only have I found, that God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions.” (Eccles. 7:29) Selfishness and sin crept in; suggestions from the father of lies, the prince of darkness, twisted and distorted every one of those gracious arrangements which the Lord had instituted, until all that is now left is a pitiful mockery of what might have been.

VERSES 11,12 “They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.”

The literal earth “abideth forever.” (Eccles. 1:4) God “created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited.” (Isa. 45:18) The symbolic heavens and earth which came into being at the time of man’s creation perished in a certain sense at the time of the Flood, and subsequent to the Flood have been controlled largely by Satan, the prince of this “present evil world.”—Gal. 1:4

But with the establishment of the “new heaven and a new earth,” (Rev. 21:1, *WED*; II Pet. 3:7) these present heavens and earth will be completely destroyed. They shall perish because they are unfit for the glorious things of the future; being full of unspeakable iniquity, they have no place in the pure and holy arrangements of the coming kingdom of Christ. Paul describes the corruption of human society—“the foundation of the earth”—in Hebrews 1:10. The illustration of a worn garment suggests that originally, when first created, these symbolic heavens and earth were useful, but now are only fit to be discarded and destroyed.

‘But thou remainest.’ The *Logos*—now the exalted Son of God—has been continuously and consistently righteous throughout the ages, so there is no need that he be set aside as Jehovah’s honored servant. Jesus is the “Alpha and Omega” (Rev. 1:8, 3:14) the direct creation of God, which indicates he is the first and the last. Regardless of how many other changes may be made in the Divine arrangements, Jesus will ever remain the one closest to his Heavenly Father in trust, in honor, and in authority.

Verses 10-12 are a quotation of Psalm 102:24-28. This psalm is suggested as being a prayer by Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. The answer by God to that prayer is recorded in Psalm 102:24 (middle of verse) to 28. Jesus was assured by the Father that the present evil order that was clamoring for his life would perish and be discarded as waste material, but he would receive immortality.

VERSES 13,14 “But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool? Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?”

Here the reference is unmistakably to angelic beings—those mysterious and powerful beings of a superior order to man, long known to the Hebrews as direct agents of God. To none of these had God ever extended the astounding invitation to sit at his right hand, but it had been addressed prophetically to his Son. (Ps. 110:1) Thus the Son’s superiority to all other servants of God becomes obvious, and the Apostle Paul proves that Jesus indeed is the greatest being of all next to the Father, and was prophesied to be such.

However, the angels have a high and honorable service to perform. They are ‘ministering spirits,’ rendering special service to the ‘heirs of

salvation,’ “those being about to inherit salvation.” (*WED*) Again we see a reference to the ‘fellows’ of verse 9—those who are to share the inheritance and exalted office of the Son, and who are so important in the Divine plan that the holy angels are sent forth to serve them.

There will always be ministering angels—or persons in attendance—to aid and serve wherever the Almighty directs, but their chief mission now is to help in the present great work of developing the church. Glorious, wonderful, and beautiful spirit beings are these, who during the kingdom will earn the loving attachment, respect, and admiration of the entire race of mankind. Thus all God’s created beings will be knit together in mutual love and service.

In this arrangement, Jesus will be the greatest of all!

Dawn Bible Students Association

The Consecrated Life

***“Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”
—Matthew 6:33***

PUTTING FIRST THINGS first is generally recognized as being a sound principle to follow. To be successful in business, it is essential that the primary needs of the business be given preference over personal likes and conveniences. The same is true in every walk of life—in the home, in social life,

and in relationships between employer and employee.

‘Seeking’ the kingdom of God is a full-time, all-absorbing occupation for every consecrated believer in Christ. It is not seeking the kingdom from the standpoint of endeavoring to be worthy of enjoying the blessings of the kingdom when those blessings begin to flow out to the people. It refers, rather, to a determined effort to be worthy of joint-heirship with Jesus, to reign with him as kings and priests in that promised ‘government.’ Only a few will attain to such a high position. These are addressed by Jesus as a “little flock.” (Luke 12:32) This glorious ‘prize of the High Calling of God’ will be a ‘gift’ in the sense that there is nothing any of us could do to really earn such a royal position. On the other hand, the Lord does offer us the opportunity to demonstrate our love and loyalty to him through the faithful devotion of our all to his cause, even life itself.

It seems like a simple test of worthiness, but when we endeavor actually to carry out these terms of discipleship they are found to be very exacting. Probably the high cost of the consecrated life has had much to do with making the ‘little flock’ so ‘little.’

COUNTING THE COST

The Lord does not wish anyone to enter upon the consecrated life blindly, for he invites those who are considering it to sit down and count “the cost.” (Luke 14:28) This appraisal is not made with the view of satisfying ourselves that what we will gain will be of far greater value than what we give up. Those who, through the influence of the truth,

reach this point of decision in their lives, have already been convinced that the heavenly reward is of far greater value than the blessings of restitution for the world of mankind. What they need to 'count' or 'consider' is whether or not they will be able faithfully to meet all the obligations which the terms of their consecration will place upon them.

Jesus' disciples believed that he had been sent by God to be the King and Christ of promise. They expected that he would set up a government in Judea that would extend its sphere of influence to the whole world. They were doubtless greatly inspired by all his wonderful teachings pertaining to the kingdom, although they failed to understand much that he said. However, they did grasp the idea, and rightly so, that he was offering them the opportunity to share the glory of his kingdom with him.

This is why they disputed among themselves as to which of them would be greatest in the kingdom. It was for this reason, also, that two of the disciples made the request to sit, one on Jesus' right hand and the other on his left hand in the kingdom. On no occasion did Jesus discourage his disciples from entertaining the hope of sharing in the glories of his kingdom. Rather, he encouraged them in this hope, assuring them that it was the "Father's good pleasure" (Luke 12:32) that they should be joint-heirs with him.

DRINKING THE CUP

But Jesus did explain to his disciples, and to us, that to secure such a high position of honor in the Divine arrangement would be very costly. "Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of," he asked them, "and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" (Matt. 20:22) Those to whom this question was first asked replied, "We are able." (vs. 22) Thousands since have given the same answer, and have undertaken to carry out the conditions, but many have fallen by the wayside, having become "weary in well doing."—Gal. 6:9; II Thess. 3:13

Let us take a look at that 'cup' of which the Master spoke. It is, of course, a symbolic cup, being suggestive of the sum total of his experiences in doing the Father's will. It was a 'cup' which his Father had poured for him, a way of life from Jordan to the cross which was not planned by him, but by his Father.—John 18:11

Jesus had relatives and friends. He loved his parents and brethren. From the natural standpoint, he would have preferred a course in life

which would have taken these into account and permitted him to enjoy their fellowship and friendship. But he could not follow his natural inclinations. He had come to do his Father's will, and to drink the 'cup' which the Father had poured for him. To be faithful to this purpose resulted in the severance of many earthly ties, the giving up of the security of a home and family and becoming literally a pilgrim and a stranger in the earth. "The foxes have holes," the Master said, "... but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head."—Matt. 8:20; Luke 9:58

Had Jesus used his pleasing personality and the miracle-working power which had been given to him, merely to appeal to the public, he soon could have become the most popular person in all Israel. Influenced by these qualities, many did follow him for a time. But Jesus also was given a message to proclaim. He exposed popular error, and was an unflinching advocate of unpopular truth. He was able to read the hearts of his enemies, and knew that they were hypocrites, and told them so.

This evoked their bitter animosity, and finally cost him his life. But it was all a part of the cup which the Father had poured out for him; so he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.—Phil. 2:8

Are we able to drink of this cup?

We say so to God when we make our consecration, and we mean it—but how well are we doing with the undertaking? Perhaps we can measure the degree of our success by making a check as to whether or not, in keeping with our text, we are seeking 'first' the kingdom of God. We cannot drink from the Master's cup and at the same time be sampling other cups. Doing the will of God was the first consideration of Jesus' life, and it must be first with us, or else we are not living up to the terms of our consecration. Paul expressed the thought, saying, "This one thing I do."—Phil. 3:13

"GIVE NO THOUGHT"

When we make a consecration to do the Lord's will, we begin to set our affections on things above, which means that earthly things should lose their attraction for us. (Col. 3:1-10) But herein lies the principal struggle of the entire Christian life. It is one in which we come to grips with realities, and are called upon to deal with them upon the basis of faith and the true spirit of sacrifice. In it we frequently are torn between

the desire for material things, and the assurances given to us by the promises of God. The strength which will overcome in this struggle is our faith.

Jesus brought this into a very practical area of understanding by admonishing us to “take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on.” (Matt. 6:25) This is what we are *not* to do. Instead, we are to ‘seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.’

It is all a matter of what we make the first consideration of life. In elaborating the lesson, Jesus said that the ‘Gentiles’ seek after food, raiment, and other material things of life, meaning that the unconsecrated make these their first, or primary, consideration. This is natural and proper for them. They want to feel secure for tomorrow, and, if possible, for the day after tomorrow.

In these ‘last days,’ the problem of living has become so complex that in many countries the government has stepped into the picture, and through a cooperative arrangement provides for “Social Security,” “Unemployment Insurance,” and other measures calculated to give the Gentiles the assurance that they will continue to eat and to be clothed.

The consecrated benefit from these arrangements, even though food, clothing, and housing are to them merely secondary considerations. We realize that we need to eat, that our bodies have to be clothed and sheltered. These needs are very real, and affect us so vitally that it becomes a severe test of our faith to rise above them and to seek ‘first’ the kingdom of God. In our Morning Resolve we say, “My earliest thought I desire shall be, What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits?” This is the proper attitude for those who are seeking first the kingdom of God, but often we find that our earliest thoughts are concerned with the secondary matters of life, that we are ‘taking thought’ for these just as the Gentiles do.

“HE CARETH FOR YOU”

When Jesus said that we should take no ‘thought’ for our life, he used a Greek word which means ‘anxious thought’ or, as we would say, ‘to worry.’ It is essentially the same word as used by the Apostle Peter, and translated, ‘care,’ when he wrote, “Casting all your care upon him; for he

careth for you.” (I Pet. 5:7) Paul used the same word when he wrote, “Be not anxious about anything; but in everything let your petitions be made known to God, by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving.”—Phil. 4:6, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*

A farmer must sow if he expects to reap. In all walks of life it is essential to give some consideration today to what our needs will be tomorrow. If one is consecrated, he need not give *anxious* thought or be worried, for he can cast all his care upon the Lord. Worry cripples the mind and paralyzes action. If we concern ourselves too much with what we shall eat and wherewithal we shall be clothed, our real objective in life will be set aside, made secondary, or perhaps neglected almost entirely.

Paul assures us that if we are not anxious about anything and are thankful for the blessings provided by the Lord, then the “peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 4:7) With this peace of God ruling in our hearts we are in a position to concentrate our thoughts on the things pertaining to the kingdom. So, logically, Paul admonishes us to “think on these things.”—Phil. 4:8

There is no mistaking the end result in Christian thought and action of casting all our care upon the Lord, and therefore not being worried about the material needs of life. Paul climaxed his admonition along this line by writing, “Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.”—Phil. 4:9

How plainly stated! If we want the ‘God of peace’ to rule in our hearts, giving us the peace which passeth all human understanding, there are ‘things’ for us to ‘do’—the ‘things’ which we have ‘learned,’ and ‘received,’ and ‘heard,’ and ‘seen’ exemplified in the life of Paul.

THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST

This is merely another way of saying that we should follow the example of Christ. We have many noble examples of those who followed Christ, and Paul is one of them. He knew that according to the flesh, it was not an easy way; but instead, it was a way of sacrifice, of weariness, of suffering. But Paul wanted to ‘know’ Jesus in the sense of having a

fellowship or partnership in his suffering. This was the ‘one thing’ which dominated his thinking, his planning, and his action.

Not all in the Early Church were of this persuasion. There were nominal believers then, even as now. Paul tells us about this, saying, “Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an example. (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.)”—Phil. 3:17-19

We are not to suppose from this description that the ones Paul refers to were morally corrupt. It is just that he uses very strong language to emphasize that they were not walking in the way of sacrifice, that they were not seeking ‘first’ the kingdom of God. They were ‘minding earthly things,’ and to such an extent that what they ate had become as a god, demanding all their attention. They were giving too much thought to their material needs, so much that the ‘first’ things of life had just about been crowded out entirely. They had forgotten that their citizenship was supposed to be ‘in heaven,’ and that their main objective in life was to set their affections on things above.

In the case of those whom Paul thus describes, we may assume that they were failing to ‘seek first the kingdom of God.’ They had become believers in name only. They may still have enjoyed the truth to some extent. If there was any time left after they had made adequate provision for their earthly needs, they would probably go occasionally to the meetings. They had not denied the Lord, although their course in life was in opposition to the principle of sacrifice represented in the “cross of Christ.”—Gal. 6:12

The danger to us is not so much that of going to this full extreme of giving anxious thought to the material needs of life, but of compromising between this extreme course of unfaithfulness and making our spiritual interests absolutely ‘first.’ Not to compromise is a costly procedure. That is why Jesus asked the disciples, “Are ye able?” Only by Divine grace and strength are any of us able to walk in such a ‘narrow way.’

FOLLOW PAUL

Paul said that we should ‘do’ what he had done—to follow his example. Let us notice what he actually did. When first he realized that

Jesus was the Christ of promise, he inquired, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?” (Acts 9:6) Here is the true spirit of consecration. Obedience to this spirit led Paul to devote his entire life to the great mission of proclaiming the Gospel of Christ and serving the brethren of Christ, not merely under pleasant circumstances, nor when no inconvenience to the flesh was involved.

Paul’s seeking ‘first’ the kingdom of God took him among enemies in Jerusalem, where he was mobbed and almost killed. It took him on weary journeys by land and by sea. It led to bitter persecution, imprisonment, stripes, hunger, and other hardships. It finally resulted in his death in a Roman prison, just as Jesus’ faithfulness led to his death on the cross. Now we can understand what Paul meant when he wrote that we are to ‘do’ what we ‘see’ in him. It was surely true of Paul that he took no ‘thought’ for his life. As Peter admonishes, Paul cast all his care upon the Lord. For this reason he was ‘not anxious about anything’ but always thankful for whatever material things the Lord provided for him.

He did not, of course, expect that his food and clothing would drop down to him from the sky. On occasions he worked at his trade of tentmaking in order to secure his material needs. But ever and always he was seeking ‘first’ those things which pertained to his spiritual life, and to the righteousness of the kingdom of God.

When Paul admonished, ‘Be not anxious about anything’ he did not imply that the Lord always makes abundant provision for our material needs, for later in the chapter he wrote concerning himself, “I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”—Phil. 4:12,13

How often, perhaps, we have read these words, and have gotten from them merely the thought of Paul’s own hardships, and his wonderful spirit of resignation to the Lord’s will. But they should mean more to us than this, for they are related to his admonition to ‘do’ what we ‘see’ in him.

PROVIDING FOR OUR NEEDS

Let us remember that Paul did not at times go hungry because he was a poor manager of his material affairs, or because there was a depression

in the land and he was among the unemployed and had no unemployment insurance. Rather, it was because he had followed the leadings of the Lord in a course of sacrifice which relegated material needs into a position of such relative unimportance that at times he was temporarily without food.

Paul is not advocating the idea that in order to be a faithful Christian one must deliberately forsake all thought of providing the necessities of life with the certain knowledge that the result will be to suffer want and hunger. He said, "I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry." (Phil. 4:12) According to the Greek text, a better translation would be, "I am initiated into what it means to be full and to be hungry."

To Paul this was all in the Lord's providence, and he valued the lessons he had learned. He had plied his trade of tentmaking when opportunity offered. But when the call came to make another pilgrim journey, he accepted it as from the Lord, and did not worry because he had no surplus funds laid aside for the proverbial 'rainy day.'

It should be remembered, of course, that Paul, so far as we know, had no family obligations to consider. He needed only to think of himself so far as material needs were concerned. For this reason he was justified in giving even less consideration to food and raiment than those who have family responsibilities. It was pleasing to God for Paul to take a course which left him hungry on occasion, but none of us has the right to expect others to go hungry on account of our own lack of interest in material things. This would be sacrificing them, instead of ourselves.

Paul's reference to those "whose god is their belly" (Phil. 3:19), and his own course of faithfulness, to the point where he did not always have ample food, highlight the two positions. Paul's position was, in principle, the ideal one. Seeking the kingdom actually was the first consideration of his life. Not many, perhaps, have been in a position to abandon their interest in material things so completely as Paul, but his example is the ideal to keep in mind.

Jesus said that no man can serve both God and mammon. Those who consider what they eat and wear so important that they take first place in their lives are servants of mammon. This is their first consideration. Our first consideration should be to do the will of God. He knows that we need food and clothing and shelter, and will provide these without the

necessity of our taking them to heart so seriously that we will neglect the main objective of our consecrated life.

LARGER BARNES

Jesus' instruction to his disciples not to take anxious thought concerning tomorrow's needs is also recorded in Luke 12:22. His advice begins with the meaningful word, "Therefore." This indicates that the preceding thoughts have a close bearing on what follows. Looking back, we find that Jesus had just related the parable of the man whose land yielded more bountifully than he had expected. His barns were filled. Thinking the matter over, he decided that he would tear down his barns and build larger ones. He concluded that in this way he could attain economic security and would not need to be at all concerned about his future needs. But then he died—"This night thy soul shall be required of thee."—vs. 20

Then come the instructions, "Therefore, ... Take no thought for your life." (vs. 22) In other words, 'Do not take the sort of thought this man did,' which was an anxious, selfish thought. It never occurred to him that the Lord had blessed his land in order that he might have a surplus which he could use to benefit others. Instead, he used this abundance as if the Lord had provided it solely for his own personal security. This was wrong.

MAKING A LIVING

The problems of the Lord's people today are not unlike they were at the beginning of the age. The vast majority of us are faced with the necessity of 'making a living.' Regardless of how we do this, proper attention must be given to it. If employed by another, whether an individual or a corporation, we should render faithful service. If we are conducting our own business, proper attention must be given to it in order that it might return to us that which we need.

Earning a living these days is not simple, no matter how it is done, and it would be very easy to give so much anxious thought to it that our main goal in life would be neglected. There is no set rule laid down in the Bible as to how much time or effort we should devote to material needs, and how much of our time and effort should be given directly to the Lord.

This is a matter each consecrated follower of the Master must determine according to their circumstances.

Where our lesson does draw the line sharply is with respect to the manner in which we approach our necessary avocation and the need to keep it secondary—yes, even incidental—to seeking “first the kingdom of God.” (Matt. 6:33) Even our work in the office, the factory, the home, or in our own business, should be done as unto the Lord. It is the Lord’s will that we take care of our own, and we may properly consider whatever means of livelihood we have as being by his providence. The Lord has his own way of taking care of the sparrows; and so he also has of adding necessary material needs to those who ‘seek first the kingdom of God.’

The consecrated life is a serious one, yet joyful, for we are not alone.

An eye that never sleeps watches over us.

An arm that is strong and tireless bears us up and gives us strength to continue.

Let us, then, cast all our care upon him, and press on in the way of sacrifice until we hear his “Well done.”—Matt. 25:21

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The Blessed Hope

THE GREAT HOPE AND INSPIRATION of the Early Church was the return of their Lord, and the establishment of his kingdom. It was to them a “blessed hope.” (Titus 2:13) They were not then interested in reforming world society, for they knew that this present social order must come to an end during Christ’s return. In its place a new social order would be established, even the long-promised Messianic kingdom.

To win a place as reigning kings with Jesus in that kingdom, they gladly sacrificed all present advantages, even life itself, counting everything as loss and dross as compared with the “eternal weight of glory.” (II Cor. 4:17) This would be revealed in and through them if faithful in following in the footsteps of their Master, even unto death.

They also were inspired with a heavenly hope. They sought for “glory and honour and immortality, eternal life.” (Rom. 2:7) They understood that the “great salvation” (Heb. 2:3) which began to be spoken by their Lord involved not only to be rescued from the Adamic condemnation to death, but exaltation to the Divine nature, the “crown of life.” (II Pet. 1:4; Rev. 2:10) But they did not expect to enter into this reward at the moment of death. Paul said that a “crown of righteousness” was “laid up” for him, which he would receive at “that day,” that is, the day of the Lord. This was to be the time when the Lord returned to gather his church to himself and to establish his kingdom for the blessing of the world. “And not to me only,” Paul adds, “but unto all them also that love his appearing.”—II Tim. 4:8

There are still a few small Christian groups which, in a vague sort of way, have in mind this hope that is centered in the return of our Lord. With them it is as though this were something which would occur when the Lord decided that nothing further would be accomplished by trying to convert the world; so Christ comes to destroy the earth, and thus bring to an end God’s dealings with his human creation. To them, this will be the end of ‘time’ and the beginning of ‘eternity’—an eternity of bliss for the saints, and of torture for all others.

“AFTERWARD”

Those who are walking in the light of the Lord’s countenance have come to see that the work of God through his church in this age is but preparatory to a still greater work of salvation. Paul asserts that “as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” He then explains that the first to be made alive through the Redeemer is “Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are [or become] Christ’s at his coming [during his *parousia*, presence].”—I Cor. 15:22,23

It is this ‘afterward’ of blessing for all mankind that has been so completely lost. No other fact of the Divine plan is more firmly established in the Word of God. In this connection we have another summary of the prophetic testimony presented to us by Peter. It is recorded in Acts 3:19-21. In this passage the apostle tells us about Christ’s Second Coming, and the purpose of his return, saying that then there will be “times of restitution of all things,” and adds, “which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.”

ALL HOLY PROPHETS

By the mouth of all the prophets has come this blessed hope, and it is recognized by those who have walked in the light of God’s countenance. It really is God’s voice, and the great theme song of his love. It is to accomplish this great purpose of God that the serpent’s “head” is to be “bruise[d]” by the “Seed” of the “woman.” (Gen. 3:14,15) It is the fulfillment of this Divine purpose toward the human race that is involved in God’s promise to bless all the families of the earth through the “Seed” of Abraham.—Gen. 12:3; Gal. 3:16,29

The Spirit of God moved the Prophet Isaiah to write that all the blind eyes would be opened, that all the deaf ears would be unstopped, and that the lame man would leap as an hart. (Isa. 35:5,6) Tears would be wiped from all faces, and death would be swallowed up in victory. (Isa. 25:8) Obadiah also wrote that “saviours shall come up on Mount Zion; ... and the kingdom shall be the Lord’s.”—Obad. 21

Many promises of blessing for mankind are recorded in the Old Testament, and they are all beautiful, harmonious, and understandable. The Apostle Peter’s statement in Acts 3:21 states that they were pointing forward to the “times of restitution of all things.” This great blessing of restitution is the objective of our Lord’s return. How many are there in

the world today who know this fundamental truth of the Divine plan? This is the joyful sound of coming salvation for the lost race—not an opportunity to escape torture—but to be restored to perfection of life as human beings, and to be privileged to live here on the earth forever.

“TIMES OF REFRESHING”

The Scriptures associate the joys resulting from the fulfillment of prophecy with the return of our Lord. “Times of refreshing shall come from the presence [Greek ‘*prosopon*’—‘out from the face of’] of the Lord,” says Peter, for “he shall send Jesus Christ.” (Acts 3:19-21) The object of the return of Christ is to fulfill God’s promise of restitution. The return of Divine favor is first to the church—which favor started at Pentecost and proceeds to our day and later—when the church is complete—to the world of mankind. The Creator will no longer keep his back turned upon the human race, but will refresh the people by the light of his countenance in the order indicated.

In the outworking of the Divine plan, all the great dispensational changes are duly announced to the people concerned. It was so when the time came to destroy the world with the Flood. Noah was then the instrument used to make the proclamation, although none but his own family believed the report. John the Baptist announced the presence of Christ to Israel in his day, but the message was not heeded except by the few. The apostles and others in the Early Church were particularly equipped with knowledge to enable them to proclaim the purpose of God pertaining to the Gospel Age, which was then beginning.

We are now approaching the end of the Gospel Age. A new age is about to open, even the age when restitution blessings will flow out to the people. This will also begin that promised world to come “wherein dwelleth righteousness.” (II Pet. 3:13) In the Divine plan, it is the time for another proclamation to be made—a testimony concerning the end of the present social order and the glorious blessings of restitution to follow. And the Lord has chosen the last members of the body of Christ to make this timely and necessary proclamation.

How can they do this unless first of all they are made acquainted with the truth concerning God’s plan? The Lord tells us how this is accomplished. It is directly related to the return of our Lord, that ‘blessed hope’ of the Early Church. Before he went away, Jesus explained to his

disciples that his followers would not be informed in advance concerning the time of his return. They would need to ‘watch’ in order to know of his Second Presence.

MEAT IN DUE SEASON

“Blessed are those servants,” said Jesus, “whom the Lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.” (Luke 12:37) This is a remarkable promise! Our Lord would also serve them with ‘meat in due season’ through an appointed faithful servant.—Matt. 24:45

‘Meat’ is one of the symbols the Scriptures use to picture the truth of the Divine plan. The Master’s promise means that his true people at this end of the age would enjoy a special serving of the truth—that they would be given ‘meat in due season.’ Such people in the world today who have come to know the Divine plan of the ages and the kingdom of God which will provide blessings of restitution for mankind, are proclaiming this message all over the world.

The world at large knows little or nothing about it as yet. Neither did the world in Noah’s day really believe that a flood was coming. Neither did the Israelitish world in Jesus’ day believe the testimony of John the Baptist, nor later, of Jesus and his disciples. The proof of the fulfillment of Jesus’ promise to serve ‘meat in due season’ is not how many would believe the truth, but that those of the family of God would thereby learn about God’s plan and would be walking in the light of his countenance.

The implications are staggering! The facts, however, are definitely stated in the scriptural testimony that all the holy prophets foretold the times of restitution which were to follow the return of Christ. Certainly this is one of the principal themes in the Word of truth. But who knows about it? Look where we will among the great and small religious groups of the world, and it rarely can be found. Those who are enlightened with present truth, those saying that Christ is soon to become the king of the world, are among these blessed ones.

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Many churches teach that Christianity is a way of life, and if the world could be induced to accept Christ’s teachings instead of modern day

philosophies, there would be peace and good will among nations. Truly, Jesus' way of life is certainly far better than even the best of our humanly conceived ideologies. But those who espouse this cause are looking to man to accomplish this, and man, as the Scriptures clearly show, will utterly fail, no matter how good his intentions might be.

One of the time prophecies recorded in Daniel speaks of the blessedness of those who would be living at the time when knowledge would be increased, and when the prophecies concerning the 'time of the end' of this present evil world would be fulfilled. (Dan. 12:12) It is the 'blessed' privilege of those found watching when the Lord returned.—
Luke 12:37

It is this 'blessedness' which we are enjoying now. It is a joy which results from recognizing God's hand in the affairs of men, and of knowing that such a wonderful time of blessing is near for all mankind. This knowledge gives us peace of heart and mind, while others are plagued with fear as they look ahead to the "things ... coming upon the earth." (Luke 21:26) It is a blessedness which comes from the knowledge of the opportunity of suffering with Christ now, that we may reign with him later. And this is blessedness indeed, for with it is the knowledge that not only are we to be blessed, but that there is to be an 'afterward' of blessing for all the families of the earth.

Therefore, the blessedness we enjoy is the assurance that we are walking "in the light of thy [his] countenance" (Ps. 89:15), and that we are being specially favored by God. How wonderfully 'blessed' it is to know this! It is not presumption to acknowledge this fact, for it is the testimony to us of God's Spirit, through his Word of truth, by the mouth of all his holy prophets. Assurances of future blessings are to be found throughout the New Testament, not only for the true church, but also for the world.

PROCLAIM TO OTHERS

Let us rejoice that we have been counted among God's 'blessed' people, and endeavor day by day to measure up to the responsibility our knowledge of God's truth has placed upon us. It is not ours merely to enjoy for ourselves. By it we have been made bearers of the testimony of kingdom blessings to the world. We are the "ambassadors for Christ," and the Lord is looking to us to be faithful.—II Cor. 5:20

If we continue to tell the joyful sound of God's plan, our appreciation of it will increase, and our joys will also increase. Our continued appreciation of the truth depends on our faithful use of it for the blessing of others. God has highly favored us. We are walking in the light of his countenance. May we ever seek to keep ourselves in his love by obedience to every requirement of the truth in our personal relationship with the Lord.

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