

The DAWN

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The Deep Riches of the Knowledge of God

***“O the depth of the
riches both of the
wisdom and
knowledge of God!
how unsearchable
are his judgments,
and his ways past
finding out!”
—Romans 11:33***

A FEW HOURS BEFORE

Jesus was crucified, he said to his Heavenly Father, “This is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” (John 17:3) This makes a proper understanding of God

and Jesus essential to those who are striving to gain life eternal through the provision of the Father in the gift of his beloved Son. Since we cannot actually see God, our knowledge of him depends upon the revelation he has made of himself through his Word. Thus a diligent study of the Scriptures is fundamentally important to all who want to know the true God and desire to be in harmony with him.

Many claim that it is the responsibility of their minister, pastor, or priest to gain Scriptural

understanding, and then to impart what they deem necessary to the people. This, however, is not in harmony with the many declarations of the Bible, which encourage every Christian to “study” and to “search” the Word in order that he might acquire the knowledge of God which is essential in order to be pleasing to him. (II Tim. 2:15; John 5:39; Prov. 2:3-5) There is a tendency also to emphasize merely the blessings which await sinners at the foot of the cross, without encouraging consecrated believers to acquire a deeper knowledge of God which results from a more comprehensive understanding of his plan of salvation.

It is also important to avoid the viewpoint of those who might seek to gain much knowledge, but whose efforts result in merely increased intellectual understanding. If we think of knowledge in its proper light, as the means through which God reveals himself and inspires our devotion to him, it is not possible to give it too important a position in our hearts and lives. Yet, if we do not view knowledge in this way, the search for it could lead us to feel spiritually superior to others. This would make knowledge a matter of the head, rather than of the heart.

The New Testament speaks of the “deep things of God,” “milk,” “strong meat,” and the “mysteries” of God with reference to certain aspects of our knowledge of him. (I Cor. 2:10; Heb. 5:13,14; I Pet. 2:2; Col. 1:26-28; 2:2) These phrases have at times been misinterpreted, even though those who have done so have probably been sincere in their viewpoints. It is important, then, that we examine their meaning in greater detail.

THE SIMPLICITY OF THE GOSPEL

There is no suggestion in the Bible that only those with great intellectual understanding can comprehend the essential truths of God's plan of salvation, nor do the Scriptures say that special spiritual qualities are possessed by some which are beyond the reach of the "rank and file" of the Lord's people. Paul counsels us to maintain "the simplicity that is in Christ," and warns against being "removed . . . unto another gospel." (II Cor. 11:3; Gal. 1:6,7) The fundamental truths of God's plan, as well as the standards of righteousness and spiritual growth associated with them, are the same for all consecrated believers. These are the "deep things of God," and are understandable by all who have been called to run "toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."—Phil. 3:14

We should not discount the importance of any truth which is contained in the Word of God. The great truths of divine love, and of the privilege of our development into the character likeness of God and of Christ, are vitally essential. The types and pictures of the Old Testament, when used to increase the brilliance of God's plan, are exceedingly valuable to our growth in knowledge. Many prophecies also have been put in the Bible for our spiritual edification, as have also various time features related to the plan of salvation. We are to use all these for the strengthening of our faith, and to grow in grace and knowledge. Let none of us become discouraged, however, by the erroneous supposition that there are certain "deep things" of the Word which are beyond our comprehension, and that God intends

these to be understood only by a very few among his people.

In our fellowship with one another we may discover that certain viewpoints and details of truth we present do not seem to be generally grasped and appreciated. In such a case, it would perhaps be wise that we question the propriety of rehearsing all these things to our brethren, since a general lack of understanding of what we say would demonstrate that such points of detail are not essential to being faithful as a child of God. Certainly, we should never conclude that the Lord has favored us with a special understanding of some portion of his Word which is beyond the ability of our brethren to grasp. The great truths mentioned in the Bible as being the “deep things of God”—which in the Greek text means “profound”—are, as a rule, the most straightforward features of God’s plan. This is what we should expect, since God is the author of the wonderful plan of salvation through which he has revealed his love. Such is the “simplicity that is in Christ.”

SHADOW OF THINGS TO COME

Writing about the Tabernacle in the wilderness and the services associated with it, Paul speaks of them as a “shadow” of “heavenly things” and of “good things to come.” (Heb. 8:5; 10:1) In these “shadows,” certain truths of God’s plan are pre-figured, and are clearly marked out as such in the New Testament. When these are understood, they help us to appreciate the beauty and simplicity of the Truth even more than we did before. It is possible, however, to become so absorbed in trying

to ascertain the meaning of all the intricacies of the shadows that one could lose sight of the intended purpose of the “realities” which they picture. Here again, let us not conclude that we must be able to explain the meaning of every detail given concerning the Tabernacle or other Old Testament shadows in order to understand the “deep things of God.”

As consecrated believers, we may be especially drawn to appreciate the time features of God’s plan, or the details of the many prophecies found throughout the Word of God. We may spend much time and exert great effort to understand and explain the significance of the intricate details of these prophecies. While such study of the Word of God is to be commended, there could be an inclination to feel that any who do not fully agree with our findings, or do not share our enthusiasm for prophetic details, lack appreciation of the “strong meat” of the Bible.

MORE THAN JUST LOVE AND DEVOTION

On the other side of the spectrum, some may claim that devotional truths are the “deep things of God” and “strong meat” of the Word. Indeed, “God is love,” and the wonderful provision he has made through Christ inspires us to love him and to devote our lives to his service. (I John 4:8-10) Faith in God and his promises is essential in order to live such a life of devotion, and the Scriptures encourage us to add to our faith various other qualities of character. (II Pet. 1:5-7) These truths of the Bible are indispensable, but not necessarily “deep” if considered only by themselves. An understanding of the fundamental doctrines of God’s plan—creation,

the fall, ransom, resurrection, and restitution, to name a few—is, in fact, what gives us the ability to know the depth of God’s love and devote ourselves fully to him.

Without an understanding of the doctrinal basis of God’s love, and our relationship to him based on these foundation truths, we would find ourselves much like the majority of professed Christians. Most claim belief in Jesus and love for God, but know little or nothing about what Jesus truly accomplished, nor of the basis of God’s love. We might employ many beautiful words in discussing the subject of divine love, yet these would have less Scriptural depth than Jesus’ declaration: “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16) Similarly, no words could convey any deeper sense of our appreciation of God’s love than that expressed by the simple statement, “We love him, because he first loved us.”—I John 4:19

“WHICH PASSETH KNOWLEDGE”

In a beautiful, earnest request invoked on behalf of the brethren at Ephesus, Paul prayed, “That he [God] would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.”—Eph. 3:16-19

There is perhaps no passage in the Bible that gives a more definite suggestion of profound understanding than this one. Paul is not, however, writing about some special truth which is so "deep" that he knew only a few would be able to grasp it, for he speaks of being able to "comprehend" it "with all saints." In other words, that great truth "which passeth knowledge" was, in his opinion, within the mental reach of all God's consecrated people.

The Greek word translated "passeth" in this text has the thought, "beyond the usual." Thus, the point of truth which Paul is writing about is not incomprehensible, but simply beyond usual knowledge, or that which is not generally understood. What is this unusual knowledge Paul had in mind, and which, he says, enables us to appreciate the "breadth, and length, and depth, and height" of the love of Christ? The answer to this comes to light as we consider some of the earlier verses of this chapter.

Beginning with Ephesians 3:3, let us notice the manner in which Paul emphasizes the great depth of understanding with which the Lord had favored him, "that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery." He then indicates his desire that the brethren at Ephesus might "understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ." (vs. 4) Paul explains that this profound understanding of a certain part of God's plan as centered in Christ had not previously been made known, but "is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit," so that it could then be imparted to others.—vs. 5

This vital truth, so profound and deep that a special revelation from the Lord was necessary to

enable Paul and the other apostles to understand it, is stated in the next verse—“That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel.” (vs. 6) To us, this seems to be a simple truth of God’s plan, yet it was treated by Paul as if it were a great mystery, which it surely was in the days of the Early Church.

Throughout the centuries during which God was dealing with his typical people, Israel, his prophets made promises concerning the coming Messiah—Christ—and his kingdom. The entire nation of Israel was given the opportunity to be the Messianic nation, associated with Christ in fulfilling the wonderful promises of worldwide blessings. “You only have I known of all the families of the earth,” the Lord told Israel through the Prophet Amos.—Amos 3:2

With this background of understanding, it must have been very difficult, especially for Jewish believers in the Early Church, to grasp the idea that Gentiles could be “fellowheirs” with them, and members “of the same body” of Christ. To those who became aware of this great mystery, it served as a marvelous revelation of divine love. It showed that the love of God was broad and deep enough to take in even those of the Gentiles—nations who had for centuries been out of favor with God—and make them heirs of the Messianic promises.

There is much in the writings of the New Testament to indicate that this particular truth was considered by the Early Church as one of the very “deep things” of God. To many, it was difficult to understand, and Paul was particularly desirous

that the brethren in Ephesus comprehend it clearly and realize that it had been given as a special revelation to him by the power of the Holy Spirit. This was knowledge which went beyond the usual understanding of both Jews and Gentiles at that time, and yet today it is very simple to those in whose hearts there is no ethnic prejudice. There is no consecrated child of God now who is not able to grasp such a simple fact of God's plan, yet it is stated in the Scriptures as a truth which helps to reveal the "unsearchable riches of Christ."—Eph. 3:8

DEPTH OF RICHES

Closely associated with this doctrine which was so profound to the Early Church, was the further truth that even those natural descendants of Abraham who had rejected the Messiah, and consequently were broken off from the "olive tree" of promise, were ultimately to be restored to divine favor and have an opportunity to gain life. Paul discusses this in great detail in Romans 11:15-32, stating that God considered Israel as being "in unbelief," that he "might have mercy" upon them. He then adds the beautiful words found in our opening text, which speak of "the depth of the riches" of the knowledge of God, and his "unsearchable . . . judgments."—vs. 33

The Greek word translated "depth" in Paul's expression of joy is the same one he used in I Corinthians 2:10 when speaking of the "deep things of God." His reference to God's "unsearchable" judgments is a quotation from Psalm 36. That passage reads, "Thy mercy, O LORD, is in the

heavens; and thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds. Thy righteousness is like the great mountains; thy judgments are a great deep: . . . How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings.”—vss. 5-7

How wonderfully this language assures us of God’s loving-kindness, the abundance of his mercy, and the righteousness of his judgments. These glorious attributes of our God are quite “unsearchable” in so far as our ability to enter fully into their meaning is concerned. However, Paul cites a wonderful example of God’s mercy and righteous judgments, telling us that these loving qualities of our Heavenly Father will be manifested in the ultimate salvation of those who rejected Christ at his First Advent, and that he will exercise his mercy toward all of them.

This is a wonderfully plain truth to those who, at the present time, appreciate and accept God’s plan of the ages, but to many in the Early Church it was very “deep,” and not easy to assimilate. Even today there are many professed Christians who cannot take it, refusing to believe that God’s love is abundant enough to extend the opportunity of salvation to those who die in unbelief.

“HARD TO BE UTTERED”

One of the frequently quoted texts used to give the thought that some of the precious truths of the Bible are simple, while certain others are deeper and more spiritual, is Hebrews 5:12-14. In these verses Paul speaks of “milk” and “strong meat.” He tells the Hebrew brethren that they were not

prepared for “strong meat,” but were “such as have need of milk.”

What truth does Paul refer to here as “strong meat?” This is indicated in verses 10 and 11, where he speaks of the Melchisedec priesthood—that Jesus, as both king and priest, was typified by Melchisedec. “Of whom we have many things to say,” Paul writes, “and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing.” He then explains to the Hebrew brethren that they were not ready for what he wanted to say to them about the Melchisedec priesthood, and that they even needed to have the “first principles of the oracles of God” taught to them again.

The fact that Melchisedec was both a priest and a king, and was pictorial of this combined office as it is fulfilled by Christ, is to us a clearly set-forth truth. (Gen. 14:18-20; Heb. 7:1-17) To the minds of Jewish Christians in the Early Church, however, it presented difficulty—not because the idea was complex or hard to grasp, but because they had been so thoroughly imbued with the thought that everything pertaining to a priesthood began and ended with Aaron. In their religious training, Melchisedec had never been mentioned or considered. It was this that made it “strong meat,” and difficult for them to digest.

In Hebrews 6, Paul, by contrast, mentions what he describes as “principles of the doctrine of Christ.” (vs. 1) According to the meaning of the Greek word translated “principles,” it is the “beginning” or “first” doctrines of Christ. These, Paul explains, are repentance, faith, baptism, laying on of hands [Spirit begetting], the resurrection, and eternal judgment. (vs. 2) All of these, while vitally important in

the Christian life, presented no special difficulty of acceptance by the Jewish mind, because they were not beyond his usual trend of thinking. Actually, doctrines such as baptism, the resurrection, and judgment are no more easily understood than the Melchisedec picture of Christ as both king and priest. However, to the minds of those to whom Paul was writing, these were much easier to assimilate, even as milk is to a child.

A “HARD SAYING”

Speaking in the synagogue at Capernaum, Jesus declared that only those who “eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood,” could attain eternal life. He explained that he was the “bread which came down from heaven,” and said, “My flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.” (John 6:53-59) When his disciples heard these things, they said, “This is an hard saying; who can hear it?” (vs. 60) If we understand God’s plan of redemption as it is centered in Christ, these expressions by the Master are easily understood. It was simply a way of saying that his humanity was to be sacrificed for the sin of the world. Eating his flesh and drinking his blood were merely symbolic of the need for believers—in order to have life—to accept his great sacrifice and humbly yield themselves in obedience to God’s will as revealed through him.

Yet, for those who heard this for the first time, and with no background knowledge of God’s plan to help them understand what the Master meant, the idea of eating his flesh and drinking his blood was a “hard saying.” Jews were, in fact, forbidden to drink blood, and the suggestion that they needed

to do this in order to live was too much for them. (Lev. 3:17; 7:26,27; 17:10,14) Many of them became offended and “walked no more” with Jesus.—John 6:66

MYSTERIES OF THE KINGDOM

The disciples asked Jesus why he spoke to the public in parables. He replied, “Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.” (Matt. 13:10,11) A mystery is only such as long as it is not understood. Jesus’ promise was that his followers would have the mysteries of the kingdom made clear to them. We believe that Jesus has fulfilled this promise to his consecrated people, as the due time has arrived for each of those mysteries to be revealed. He promised that when he returned at the end of the age he would “gird himself” and serve his household with “meat in due season.” (Luke 12:37; Matt. 24:45) Many and rich are the truths which have been thus placed upon the Lord’s table in fulfillment of this promise, yet they are still mysteries to those to whom it has not been given to understand.

At the beginning of the Gospel Age it was the due time to make known the “riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.” (Col. 1:27) At first, it was a “mystery” to Jewish believers that Jesus alone was not the complete Christ, but rather the “head” over a “body” of many members. (vs. 18) However, as aforementioned, a manifestation of divine love, surpassing human knowledge, was seen in the acceptance of Gentiles to be fellow-heirs with Jewish believers in this hope of glory.—Eph. 3:1-9,19

“EYE HATH NOT SEEN”

Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things.” Paul then identifies these as “the deep things of God.” (I Cor. 2:9,10) Part of this passage is taken from Isaiah 64:4, which says that “since the beginning of the world,” man has not understood the things which God has prepared for him. Paul explains, however, these “deep things” pertaining to God’s plan for the blessing of man were now revealed to the followers of Jesus by the Holy Spirit.

While previously it had been true that “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard,” the wonderful truths concerning God’s plan of redemption and salvation through Christ—a plan embracing the use of both Jews and Gentiles as associates with him in the work of deliverance—now it was different. Jesus indicated this when he said, prospectively, to his disciples, “Blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.” (Matt. 13:16) The psalmist wrote, “O LORD, how great are thy works! and thy thoughts are very deep.” (Ps. 92:5) How we rejoice today that these “deep” thoughts of God have been revealed to his people, and that we can understand the “works” of his plan, and by his grace participate therein.

“SINCERE MILK”

The Apostle Peter counseled the brethren of his day: “Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings,

As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious." (I Pet. 2:1-3) Paul had written earlier, "Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children." (I Cor. 14:20) This seems to be the thought that Peter expressed following his admonition to put away "all malice" and other fleshly propensities. "As newborn babes"—free of malice—"desire the sincere milk of the word."

There is much in the first epistle of Peter to indicate that those to whom he wrote were not mere "babes" in Christ, within the meaning usually attached to this expression. In addition to Paul's statement about malice, Peter perhaps recalled Jesus' illustration, when he said, concerning little children, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 19:14) Every disciple of Christ should endeavor to be childlike in simplicity and sincerity. All such will surely desire to feed upon the rich spiritual food of the Bible, which, in keeping with the "newborn babe" illustration, Peter describes as the "sincere milk of the word."

In this text, the Greek word which is translated "sincere" means "unmixed" or "unadulterated." Childlike humility of heart will manifest itself in a desire to feed only upon the unadulterated truth, and avoid the vain imaginations of human reasoning. Thus, it seems that in this text, Peter may well be referring to all the precious doctrines of God's plan as "sincere milk." This is not with the thought of minimizing the depth of the knowledge of God, but to show that those who in childlike humility feed upon "unmixed" truth, and properly assimilate it,

will thereby grow “strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.”—Eph. 6:10

How glad we are that all the Lord’s people to whom he has given “hearing ears” and “seeing eyes,” have the ability to grasp the glorious truths of God’s Word, and that through these truths our Heavenly Father has revealed himself to his people. There are, indeed, varying degrees of understanding and appreciation of the truth among his people, but this is not to be considered unnatural, nor of negative consequence to any. Not one of us will ever, on this side of the veil, acquire a full degree of knowledge. However, we each can, and must, study for the purpose of being “approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”—II Tim. 2:15

What a privilege it is, also, to share the joys of this wonderful knowledge with others of like precious faith. We can all help one another in our study of the Word. Regardless of how long we have been in the way, there are points that we can learn even from those new in the truth, if we maintain a childlike humility before God and among one another. Above all, let us always look to the Lord for his guidance, that we may continue to grow in an ever-increasing knowledge of him who has called us “out of darkness into his marvellous light.”—I Pet. 2:9 ■

*“God giveth to a man that is good in his sight
wisdom, and knowledge, and joy.”
—Ecclesiastes 2:26*

The Day of the Lord

Key Verse: “*Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD’S anger.*”
—**Zephaniah 2:3**

Selected Scripture:
Zephaniah 1:4-6,
14-16; 2:3

living, as I have done.”—Gen. 8:21, *Revised Version*

A key point of our lesson is that disregard of Almighty God cannot be tolerated forever. The Lord, through the prophet, refers to a number of evil practices in which Judah, the two-tribe kingdom of Israel, was engaged, and upon which his judgment was come. First, he said, “I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place,” along with the false priests, whose very “name” would be blotted out. (Zeph. 1:4) God also said he would cut off “them that worship the host of heaven”—that is, those who worshipped the sun, planets, and stars of heaven, rather than God only.—vs. 5

Verse 5 also speaks of the double-minded—these too

IN THIS LESSON FROM

Zephaniah’s prophecy, we clearly see that very strong language is used concerning the destruction of evil doers and their works. These words, however, should not be understood as wholly literal. To do so would contradict the covenant made with Noah when, following the Flood, “the LORD said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man’s sake, for that the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing

would be cut off. Such were those who took an oath to worship the true and living God, but also swore “by Malcham,” or Moloch, the god of the Ammonites. (I Kings 11:5,7; Amos 5:26,27; Acts 7:43) Finally, God condemned “them that are turned back from the LORD; and those that have not sought the LORD, nor enquired for him.” (Zeph. 1:6) These had completely turned away from the Lord and, as demonstrated by their conduct, had proven that deceit was in their hearts.

As the result of the far-reaching extent of sin spoken of by the prophet, we note the thoroughness of the foretold destruction. “The great day of the LORD is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the LORD: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, A day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers.”—vss. 14-16

At the same time as such severe desolations are being predicted, God, through the prophet, provides a message of comfort in our Key Verse to those of his people who still sought “righteousness” and “meekness.” These humble and earnest-minded ones, by continuing to seek the Lord, might escape, he says, the severity of the trouble which was to come. “It may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD’S anger.”

This present evil world, pictured in our lesson by Judah, will also soon pass away. God’s faithful people, however, have the assurance of his presence and care. The Lord promises, “I will spare them,” “hide them,” and “keep them secretly.” (Mal. 3:17; Ps. 31:19,20) Thankfully also, the current time of trouble and destruction will give way to God’s kingdom of peace, joy, and safety. The willing and obedient of mankind will be taught of God, and be provided the opportunity to live on a restored, perfect earth forever.—Isa. 35; Jer. 31:31-34; John 6:45 ■

The Consequences of Disobedience

Key Verse:

“Therefore wait ye upon me, saith the LORD, until the day that I rise up to the prey: for my determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour upon them mine indignation, even all my fierce anger: for all the earth shall be devoured with the fire of my jealousy.”
—Zephaniah 3:8

Selected Scripture:
Zephaniah 3:6-9

must be dealt with and eliminated, and men’s hearts must be purged and cleansed. However, the literal earth has done nothing worthy of being consumed and “devoured,” and the Scriptures plainly state that “the earth abideth for ever.” (Eccles. 1:4) The Apostle Peter said that “times of restitution,” or

THIS PORTION OF ZEPHANIAH’S

prophecy speaks not only of the anger of the Lord against Israel, but also against all the other nations around her. A more important picture, however, is in the application of these words to the ending of this present evil world, which is progressing during the time in which we now live. Daniel speaks of this time, saying, “There shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation.”—Dan. 12:1

It is of importance to first note that our Key Verse refers to the symbolic “earth,” and the related judgments to come upon its nations and social order. God’s “fierce anger” burns against all forms of injustice and iniquity. The evil which exists on earth

restoration, would come to earth and its inhabitants following Jesus' return, not burning and destruction. At that time, he continues, "all the kindreds of the earth . . . shall . . . be blessed."—Acts 3:20,21,25

In our lesson, God instructs us, "wait ye upon me." The admonition to wait on God, even in the midst of the present "time of trouble," implies that we must have full confidence in the Heavenly Father's methods, plans and purposes. His times and seasons are best for us, and for the entire world of mankind. Any attempts on our part to "run ahead" of the Lord, or be engaged in work in advance of his set time, are sure to meet with his disapproval.

James tells us, "Be patient therefore, brethren," as we view the events associated with our Lord's Second Presence. (James 5:7,8) We are further warned not to trust in carnal weapons, nor to be in harmony with their use by others. Carnal weapons refer not only to guns, bombs, swords, and spears, but also to anger, malice, hatred, strife, and a combative spirit. The Apostle Paul states, "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God."—II Cor. 10:4,5

God's truth is mighty, and it will pull down all the strongholds of error to accomplish the setting up of his kingdom upon the earth. Everything associated with sin—anger, hatred, pride, selfishness, and every other fallen human tendency—must be destroyed. These are the conditions present in the earth today that will be "devoured with the fire" of God's jealousy. Once this is accomplished, the salvation of the citizens of all nations will come to pass. "Then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent." (Zeph. 3:9) Those who learn God's "pure language" of love, humility, and kindness, will gladly turn their hearts fully back to him, and receive the blessings of everlasting life upon the earth. ■

Assurances and Joy for the Faithful

Key Verse: “Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem.”
—*Zephaniah 3:14*

Selected Scripture:
Zephaniah 3:10-14,20

OUR HEAVENLY FATHER IS

a God of order. According to the Scriptures, in the orderly arrangement of his plan, following the great “time of trouble,” referred to in Daniel 12:1, he will fulfill his promise made to Abraham so many centuries ago. God told him, “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless

those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”—Gen. 12:2,3, *New International Version*

Part of the preparation for this future time of blessing is the regathering of the Jews to their land and their reestablishment as a nation. We have seen these events unfold during the past century, and the Scriptures indicate that further regathering of Jews to Israel is to take place. The Prophet Ezekiel foretells of a time when Israel will seem to “dwell safely” in “unwalled villages.” This, however, will tempt nations from the “north parts” to come and “take a great spoil” and “take a prey” from the people and land of Israel.—Ezek. 38:1-16

There will be partial success for the invaders of Israel, but the power of God will then be manifested: “Then

shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations.” (Zech. 14:1-3; 12:1-9) In their hour of deepest darkness, Israel will recognize their Messiah. “They shall look on him whom they pierced,” and “mourn for him,” who they crucified. God will accept them again into his fellowship and “pour upon” them “the spirit of grace and of supplications.” (John 19:37; Zech. 12:10) In harmony with this, Jeremiah prophesied, saying, “That day is . . . the time of Jacob’s [Israel’s] trouble; but he shall be saved out of it,” and “they shall serve the LORD their God.”—Jer. 30:7,9

Following Israel’s acceptance of their Messiah and God’s victory on their behalf, Christ’s earthly kingdom will be established. Not only Israel, but all mankind, will then have the opportunity to turn their hearts to God. The forces of evil that are in the world through Satan, the author of sin, will be done away with, for he will be bound. (Rev. 20:1-3) There will be a resurrection of the dead, as Jesus promised: “The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth. . . and they that hear [attend to] shall live.” (John 5:28,29,25) Paul adds, “Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” (I Cor. 15:21,22) The thought is that those “that hear,” and are “in Christ,” will come into heart obedience to the righteous laws of the kingdom. All such will “be made alive” and “shall live,” having attained a full resurrection, or restanding, before God. What a blessed opportunity awaits mankind!

Zephaniah’s prophecy closes with a theme of rejoicing and praise. (Zeph. 3:14-20) Our Key Verse says that the “daughter of Zion” shouts. This seems to refer to Israel and the rest of mankind—the earthly children of the kingdom. They are “glad and rejoice for ever” . . . “and the former [troubles] shall not be remembered nor come to mind.”—Isa. 65:17-22 ■

Ignoring God's Plain Truth

Key Verse: "The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse."

—Romans 1:20

***Selected Scripture:
Romans 1:18-23,
28-32***

THE SOVEREIGNTY AND unlimited power of Almighty God concerning all his creation are "clearly seen," as our Key Verse states, in the visible things of nature. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork." "He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them all by their names. Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite." (Ps. 19:1; 147:4,5) God's character attributes of wisdom, lovingkindness, mercy, justice, and power, are also seen by those who understand his plans and purposes. We are told, "God is love," and he "so loved

the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."—I John 4:8; John 3:16

To fully reveal his character, the Heavenly Father, in his wisdom, has allowed the permission of evil so that mankind might learn that "sin" is "exceeding sinful." (Rom. 7:13) Part of the great lesson man is learning with regard to sin is that nothing is hidden from the eyes of

our Creator. All things are open to his vision, and will ultimately be revealed for what they truly are. Jesus said, “Whatever is hidden is meant to be disclosed, and whatever is concealed is meant to be brought out into the open.” (Mark 4:22, *New International Version*) These sobering words are in harmony with other Scriptures which point out that there will be judgment rendered upon nations as well as individuals, with all evil and sin manifest in God’s sight.

In the verses of our lesson, Paul says, “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.” (Rom. 1:18,19, *NIV*) In verse 18, Paul speaks of those who “hold” or “suppress” the truth. This practice has been followed throughout the history of the world, beginning with Satan, who suppressed the truth by telling Eve the great lie, “Ye shall not surely die.” (Gen. 3:4) Under the evil influence of the Adversary, mankind in general has followed a similar course, putting “darkness for light, and light for darkness.”—Isa. 5:20

The Bible assures us, however, that the reign of sin and death will soon come to an end. This will be accomplished through God’s plan of salvation, centered in “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29) The psalmist speaks of the time when the Heavenly Father will say, “Be still, and know that I am God.” (Ps. 46:10) At the end of the present “time of trouble” upon the earth, the Lord will command the nations to cease from their futile attempts to save themselves—“be still”—and recognize him as their leader. God will show all of mankind that the only true basis for peace is righteousness, and he will give them the opportunity to gradually learn of his ways. We are assured that his promised kingdom will be glorious, and though “weeping may endure for a night, ... joy cometh in the morning.”—Ps. 30:5 ■

Planted Together

***“If we have been
planted together in
the likeness of his
death, we shall be
also in the
likeness of his
resurrection.”
—Romans 6:5***

OUR OPENING TEXT

serves as a reminder of God’s purpose, that those called to be part of his divine family are to follow in the path laid out by his Son, Christ Jesus. The *New International Version* renders the wording as “united with him” in his death and in his resurrection. The thought of being “united” together as a planting of God calls to mind Jesus’ words, “I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman.” (John 15:1) God is the owner and caretaker of his symbolic vineyard, and Jesus is the vine of his planting. The Heavenly Father not only plants, but also oversees the development and care for the true vine, and to his glory it yields its fruit. This picture denotes the fact that God is the author of the plan of the ages, a focal point of which is the call and development of a special class—“a people for his name.”—Acts 15:14

YE ARE THE BRANCHES

Jesus tells us of our privilege to be part of this planting of God, saying, “I am the vine, ye are the branches. (John 15:5) He also instructs us of the

necessity to “abide” in the vine, and to “bear much fruit.” (vss. 5-8) To abide in the vine—Jesus—means to walk in his footsteps and grow in the likeness of his character. It also signifies the privilege of suffering with him, and being “planted” with him “in the likeness of his death,” so that we might share “in the likeness of his resurrection.” Paul points out later in the Book of Romans that our hope of being “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ,” is conditional, based upon our fulfillment of the requirement, “if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.”—Rom. 8:17

The process of being “planted,” or “united,” together with our Lord begins when we make a full consecration to do the Heavenly Father’s will—giving up our own will to follow in the sacrificial footsteps of the Master. The symbol of water baptism is a beautiful illustration of this matter, showing that we have been “baptized into Jesus Christ,” and “buried with him by baptism into death.” (Rom. 6:3,4) Being accepted by God, we become a “branch,” and begin partaking of the life-giving nutrients supplied by Jesus, the root and stock of the vine, for the purpose of bearing “much fruit.” Being “planted together” in unity with our Lord also extends to the many other branches in the vine—our brethren. The “body of Christ”—one body with many members—is another Scriptural symbol used to show the unity of this arrangement. Indeed, those experiences which touch one “branch” of the vine, or one “member” of the body, are felt by all, and are to be used by all the branches as stepping stones in obtaining the proper growth in character likeness to our Lord and pattern.—I Cor. 12:12-14,18,27; Eph. 4:15,16

Proper growth as branches in the vine, walking “not after the flesh, but after the Spirit,” will lead us to maturity in Christ Jesus. (Rom. 8:1-4) There is no other method whereby we can attain to the new nature and be “planted together” in his resurrection. If, by the grace of our Heavenly Father, we are found faithful unto death in this endeavor, we will have fulfilled in us a further Scriptural symbol. Those in “Zion” who abide faithfully in the vine, under the anointing of the Master, will be called “trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that he might be glorified.”—Isa. 61:3

IMPORTANCE OF TREES

There are many references to trees in the Scriptures. Sometimes they are referred to in a symbolic manner, denoting the wealth and power of leaders among nations. In one such instance, Nebuchadnezzar dreamed of a tree “in the midst of the earth” which was “strong,” and whose height “reached to heaven.” Interpreting his dream, Daniel said that the tree represented Nebuchadnezzar, as king over the Babylonian empire, which at that time was the most extensive and powerful nation on earth. (Dan. 4:10, 11,20-22) We also note these words from the psalmist: “I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree.” (Ps. 37:35) The *New International Version* speaks of this tree as “flourishing . . . in its own soil.” This aptly describes the “soil” of pride and wickedness in which the leaders—or trees—of fallen mankind have been planted by Satan, the “god of this world.”—II Cor. 4:4; Gal. 1:4

Numerous kinds of trees are mentioned in the Scriptures. Trees such as the almond, apple, aloes,

and cedar, are cited in various passages. (Eccles. 12:5; Song of Sol. 2:3; Num. 24:6) “Cedars of Lebanon” were used in the building of Solomon’s temple and his house. (Ps. 104:16; I Kings 5:1-6; 7:1,2) The cedar tree is an evergreen, but also has the special quality of being resistant to insects and other sources of decay. In symbolic language, the psalmist says that “the righteous shall . . . grow like a cedar in Lebanon.” (Ps. 92:12) This is a fitting symbol of everlasting life, which will be given to all who ultimately attain righteousness.

The Heavenly Father told Noah to build an ark out of “gopher wood”—thought to have perhaps been wood of the cypress tree—and gave him the exact specifications as to its construction. (Gen. 6:14-16) Later, God gave instructions to Moses concerning the building of the Tabernacle. One of its most important furnishings was the “ark of the testimony,” or “covenant.” God told Moses to have it built out of “shittim wood,” which was from the acacia tree, and to overlay the wood entirely with “pure gold.” The ark was to then be covered with a “mercy seat,” also of pure gold, at the ends of which were to be formed “two cherubims.” God said concerning this simple wooden ark, with its various coverings of gold: “There I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony, of all things which I will give thee in commandment unto the children of Israel.”—Exod. 25:10-22

In another of God’s instructions to Moses, he provides details of how the “holy anointing oil” was to be made. Aside from the various spices which were to be added, the primary ingredient was olive oil,

pressed from the fruit of the olive tree. (Exod. 30:22-31) This “holy anointing oil,” which was used to sanctify all the furnishings and vessels of the Tabernacle, is symbolic of God’s Holy Spirit. Jesus promised his disciples that when “the Spirit of truth” would come, it would “guide” them “into all truth,” and he prayed that the Truth would have its sanctifying effect upon them. (John 16:13; 17:17,19) In harmony with this, John the Revelator speaks of “two olive trees,” symbolic of the truths contained in the Old and New Testaments, which have been “witnesses” of God’s plan throughout the Gospel Age.—Rev. 11:3,4

We also recall the account of Zacchaeus who, because of his short stature, climbed a sycamore tree so that he might see Jesus. (Luke 19:1-9) His name in Hebrew signifies “pure.” Although he was a despised tax collector, and had evidently not always been honest in his dealings with the people, Zacchaeus showed his purity of heart by confessing his desire to give to the poor and to restore fourfold to anyone from whom he had taken anything unlawfully. Jesus abode at his house as a guest, and blessed him for his righteous desires, saying to him, “This day is salvation come to this house.” What a beautiful lesson we herein observe—that God can take something as ordinary as a tree and, in his providence, use it as a tool in the accomplishment of his righteous purposes.

PARABLE OF THE TREES

Jesus, on a number of occasions, spoke of trees symbolically or in parabolic language. We quote one such instance: “He spake unto them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; When they now shoot

forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. . . . This generation shall not pass away till all be fulfilled.” (Luke 21:29-32) The fig tree is used both in the Old and New Testament to represent the nation of Israel. (Jer. 24; Mark 11:11-21) Here, shortly before his death, the Lord prophesied of his Second Coming, or presence, during which he said the fig tree, and many other trees—or nations—would “shoot forth.”

Evident, indeed, is the fulfillment of this “sign” of our Lord’s presence. It has been during the past century that we have seen the rise of Israel to statehood and their prominence as a nation. We have also witnessed an increase in the total number of sovereign nations from a little more than fifty in 1914 to close to two hundred today—a nearly four-fold increase. How accurately the shooting forth of the “fig tree” and “all the trees” portrays the time in which we are living.

COMMANDMENTS GIVEN

Under the Mosaic law, there were commandments and instructions given to Israel concerning trees, particularly those which provided food. We quote: “When thou shalt besiege a city a long time, in making war against it to take it, thou shalt not destroy the trees thereof, ... for thou mayest eat of them, ... (for the tree of the field is man’s life) ... Only the trees which thou knowest that they be not trees for meat, thou shalt destroy.” (Deut. 20:19,20) In another instruction, we read, “When ye shall come into a land, and shall have planted all manner of trees for food, . . . three years shall [the fruit] be as uncircumcised unto you: . . . In the

fourth year all the fruit thereof shall be holy to praise the LORD . . . And in the fifth year shall ye eat of the fruit thereof.” (Lev. 19:23-25) How practical were these instructions. Certainly it would be reasonable to save trees that were used for food after the conquering of an enemy, and wise to refrain from eating of newly planted fruit-bearing trees until the fifth year, when they would be more mature, and the quality of the fruit much better.

God also commanded Israel against using trees as a setting for idol worship. We read, “Thou shalt not plant thee a grove of any trees near unto the altar of the LORD thy God, which thou shalt make thee. Neither shalt thou set thee up any image; which the LORD thy God hateth.” (Deut. 16:21,22) This had to be said by God because nearly all the heathen nations which surrounded Israel engaged in the practice of planting groves of trees. They would then use the wood as fuel for making graven images and for offering abominable sacrifices in the worship of their false Gods. (Deut. 7:1-5; 12:1-3) Israel, however, did not heed this command, and often copied the practices of their heathen neighbors. “They set them up images and groves in every high hill, and under every green tree: And there they burnt incense in all the high places, as did the heathen.”—II Kings 17:10,11

Hezekiah, one of only a few righteous kings of Israel and Judah, “removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, . . . He trusted in the LORD God of Israel.” (II Kings 18:4,5) How similar these conditions are to our day, when false gods and idols of every description and imagination are “worshipped” by mankind. God’s Word, however,

assures us that all such “wickedness shall be broken as a tree.” (Job 24:20) Everything that stands in the way of God’s plans and purposes being carried out will be shaken and will not stand, “that those things which cannot be shaken may remain: . . . For our God is a consuming fire.”—Heb. 12:26-29

BUILDING THE LORD’S HOUSE

When the Israelites returned to Jerusalem following their Babylonian captivity, it was for the purpose of rebuilding their Temple. However, they at first neglected this work, and were reproved by the Lord. Through the Prophet Haggai, God said, “Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it.” (Hag. 1:7,8) Although they had been gathering wood and other materials, they were using them to build their own houses, rather than the house of the Lord. Meanwhile, the Temple continued to lay waste. (vss. 4,9) After being chided severely by God, the people were finally stirred up to a sense of duty and of the wonderful privilege to serve him, “and they came and did work in the house of the LORD of hosts, their God.”—vs. 14

There is an important lesson here for us. Are we busily engaged in building the spiritual temple of our New Creature, or are we neglecting that effort and building fleshly, temporal dwelling places for the old, fallen nature? We must continually fulfill our vow of consecration, having presented our “bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God,” which is our “reasonable service,” striving not to be “conformed to this world: but . . . transformed by the renewing” of our mind.—Rom. 12:1,2

The building work we are engaged in at the present time is not based upon the use of materials such as literal wood or stone. Paul says we are “built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.” Upon this sure foundation we are being “fitly framed together” under God’s supervision to be “an holy temple in the Lord: . . . builded together for an habitation of God.” (Eph. 2:20-22) Once complete, God will “fill this house with glory,” and “the desire of all nations shall come,” by means of the blessings of the kingdom which will flow to mankind from God’s spiritual temple.—Hag. 2:7

Just as the Israelites were stirred up to work on the house of the Lord, so we receive encouragement and spiritual strength to engage in the building of our Christian character, and to bring forth fruitage. This comes from God, through Christ Jesus, who is “made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption [deliverance].” (I Cor. 1:30) Therefore, we have nothing to glory in, as Paul continues, saying, “He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.”—vs. 31

NOURISHMENT FROM GOD

To be properly “planted together” in the likeness of Christ Jesus requires that we receive spiritual nourishment. This comes to us from feeding on God’s Word, digesting it, and appropriating its principles to our daily life. Failure to feed on and assimilate these things will mean failure to grow, and without growth, we will not be able to produce fruitage. Such a condition would ultimately result in being “cast forth as a branch.” (John 15:6) If,

however, we feed upon and emulate the example that the Master has set for us to the best of our limited ability, by God's grace we will gradually grow in character likeness to him, so that we might become "trees of righteousness" in Zion.

When a young tree is planted, it sends out roots which can travel long distances, often growing through obstacles, to reach its goal of obtaining water and other vital nutrients. This has a twofold benefit. The water and nutrients soaked up by the roots bring vitality and health to the tree, so that it will continue to grow and produce the desired fruitage. At the same time, as the roots grow and spread out over long distances, the strength of the tree is greatly increased, giving it greater ability to withstand storms, wind, and other potentially damaging conditions.

It is to be the same with us. We should diligently seek the vital nutrients found in God's Word of truth, not allowing the obstacles of the fallen flesh or the spirit of the world to hinder us from that work. Our Lord said, "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled." (Matt. 5:6) That is, they will be "filled" with those principles of truth and righteousness necessary in order to "bear much fruit." This reaching out of the roots is reflected in our time spent in personal study and meditation, as well as in our fellowship with the brethren, as we reason together on the Scriptures. What a joy it is to "gather . . . together" with the "saints; . . . those that have made a covenant with [God] by sacrifice."—Ps. 50:5

As we seek the water of life, the roots of our faith become deeper and stronger, enabling us to withstand

the severe trials and testings of the narrow way of sacrifice. Often, this strengthening of our faith comes from meditation on the many precious promises of God's Word, such as these familiar words of the psalmist, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me: . . . thou anointest my head with oil; . . . Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever." (Ps. 23:4-6) We also have the assurance that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." (Rom. 8:28) These, and many other promises, are designed to strengthen our roots of faith to the point where we can have "full assurance" of "hope" and of "faith," and be able to say with Paul, "I have fought a good fight, . . . I have kept the faith."—Heb. 6:11; 10:22; II Tim. 4:7

In another psalm, we read, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: . . . Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand." (Ps. 37:23,24) These words point out the fact that, despite our greatest desires to grow stronger as the planting of the Lord, and to produce the desired fruitage, we will stumble and fall at times. Yet, God does not cast us down, but "upholdeth" us, just as a husbandman does all he can to support and buttress a tree that is weak due to damage from the elements or some other destructive source. Thus, when we see that we have stumbled and are in spiritual distress, we should continue to send out the roots of our faith to draw the necessary encouragement and correction from God's Word.

We also, however, must go directly to the Lord—our husbandman—in prayer, and “come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”—Heb. 4:16

IMPORTANCE OF LIGHT

In order for a tree to grow, it needs sunlight. Throughout the Bible, light is used as another important symbol of truth. The Scriptures tell us that “God is light,” and Jesus reminded his disciples, “I am the light of the world.” (I John 1:5; John 9:5) The Apostle Paul refers to “the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God,” and told the brethren in Ephesus, “Christ shall give thee light.” (II Cor. 4:4; Eph. 5:14) We also have the assurance that the light of God’s favor shines especially to those striving to walk in righteousness. “Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart.”—Ps. 97:11

Because a tree needs light, it will tend to grow upward towards it. If there is not an abundance of light where it is planted, a tree will often bend and turn as it grows until its branches reach an area where there is more light, at which time it grows upward toward it. The only sources of the light of truth, as cited in the foregoing Scriptures, are God, his Son Christ Jesus, and the gospel of Christ found in the Scriptures. All of our spiritual growth must be directed to these sources of light, and, like the trees, we must bend every effort and fully turn our focus to the Lord in order to obtain the greatest abundance of light. Jesus exhorted his disciples, “While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light.” (John 12:36) Thus, to

“believe in the light” provided to us, means that we must reach for it and grow toward it each day of our earthly sojourn.

“God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” (II Cor. 4:6) What a precious gem is here given by Paul! Although it is our desire to bend and grow toward the light of truth, it is God himself who has directed the light to shine so that we can come “out of darkness” and have its beams “shine in our hearts,” and it is God who has given us a knowledge of his glory as manifested in Jesus Christ.

TRIALS AND TESTINGS

An examination of growth rings in trees is often an indicator of the various conditions which have either promoted or hindered growth. Times of drought, fire, or other harsh conditions, in comparison to periods of abundant rain, sunlight, and nutrients will manifest themselves in the relative width of the rings, as well as the nature of their appearance. With us, in addition to the aforementioned obstacles and stumblings, which often come about from our own weaknesses and fleshly propensities, we also experience trials and testings from other sources—sometimes very severe. Like the trees, our growth may appear to be hindered for a time, but we have the assurance that the Lord will not allow any experience to come into our life which is greater than we can bear.—I Cor. 10:13

We also have the promised assurance given by the Apostle Peter, “That the trial of your faith, being

much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.” (I Pet. 1:7) Paul adds that the training we receive through these experiences is not for the present “joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peacable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.” (Heb. 12:11) Indeed, the yielding of the “fruit of righteousness” is the goal before us as the planting of the Lord.

BEARING FRUIT

Fruit-bearing, as noted in the passage just quoted, is the ultimate goal of being “planted together” with Christ. Certain conditions are requisite to our fruit-bearing. First, we must “abide in the vine,”—Christ Jesus—and he must abide in us, through the power and influence of the Holy Spirit. (John 15:4,5; 14:16-18) In addition, “my words,” Jesus said, must also abide in us so that we can properly “ask” for the needed assistance to bring forth much fruit. (chap. 15:7) Of no less importance also is the requirement that, as we bear fruit, we are pruned, that we “may bring forth more fruit.” (vs. 2) Thankfully, this pruning is done by the great husbandman, our all-wise Heavenly Father. He knows exactly the times in which our pruning should take place, and the extent to which we need it. He possesses the perfect skill to do so without harming us as a New Creature. It is, in fact, only God’s pruning, which will result in our bringing forth more fruit.

The Heavenly Father will be glorified more in proportion as our fruitage increases. As we mature and increase in fruitage, it will lead to a “sweetening”

of the various elements of Christian character in our hearts and minds, and to the fullest extent possible, in our words and actions. Jesus said, "Every tree is known by his own fruit. . . . A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; . . . for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh." (Luke 6:44,45) Let us, therefore, seek to develop the ripest of fruitage, as Peter exhorts us: "Add to your faith" the qualities of virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. "If these things be in you," he continues, "and abound, . . . ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. . . . Brethren, give diligence: . . . for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall."—II Pet. 1:5-10 ■

OBITUARIES

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

Sister Mary Gray, Waterbury, CT—April 17. Age, 85

Sister Beverly Williams, St. Augustine, FL—April 21.
Age, 88

Brother Eleos Mundell, Phoenix, AZ—April 22. Age,
80

Sister Lawna Jean Hahn, Woodson Terrace, MO—
May 5. Age, 81

Brother Godwin Adiele, Okapuala Ngwa, Nigeria—
May 7. Age, 74

Sister Edith Harp, Milwaukee, WI—May 14. Age,
94

“So Shall We Ever Be with the Lord”

“The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”
—*I Thessalonians 4:16,17*

IN THE VERSE FOLLOWING

our opening text, Paul wrote, “Comfort one another with these words.” (vs. 18) The hope of Christ’s return was indeed very comforting to the brethren in the Early Church. They were in the difficult position of bearing witness to one who could not be seen. Their enemies would taunt them with the fact that their leader had been put to death. To this they could counter that he had been raised from the dead, and that there were many “infallible proofs” of this. (Acts 1:3) However, he was not in their midst, and they realized that this absence would continue until his promised return. Thus, they earnestly looked for his coming, for they knew that when he came again, he would receive them

unto himself, that where he was, there they would be also.—John 14:3

The brethren in the Early Church believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the one whom the Creator had sent to deliver Israel from her yoke of bondage to Rome, and to set up a kingdom which would rule over the people of all nations. Through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, they learned that the Messianic kingdom would not be set up in the earth until he returned. During his First Advent Jesus gave himself in death as “a ransom for all,” and they believed that during his Second Presence would come the “due time” when this great truth of man’s redemption would be “testified,” or made known, to all.—I Tim. 2:3-6

They no doubt had in mind the promise Jesus had made to his disciples while he was still in the flesh, that when he returned he would “gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, . . . and serve them.” (Luke 12:37) They surely recalled also Jesus’ prophecy, that when he would come “in his glory, and all the holy angels [or messengers] with him,” he would “sit upon the throne of his glory,” and all mankind would be judged by him and his associates.—Matt. 25:31,32

According to the prophecies, there were other things to be accomplished during the period of our Lord’s Second Presence. Outstanding among these is what Peter described as the “restitution of all things.” This, he said, would be in fulfillment of the testimony given by all of God’s “holy prophets since the world began.” (Acts 3:20,21) Surely then, the hope in which the brethren of the Early Church rejoiced was very comprehensive. All their expectations

concerning the accomplishments of the Messiah were dependent upon his return. Jesus' death and resurrection would have been in vain, if he would not come again to reward his faithful followers and to bless all the families of the earth through the agencies of his kingdom. Indeed, it was this kingdom in which they believed that, if faithful, they would live and reign with their Master.

THE GLORIFIED JESUS INVISIBLE

When we study the promises and prophecies of the Bible pertaining to Jesus' Second Advent, it is important to realize that they apply not to a human being, consisting of flesh and blood, but to an all-powerful, divine, spirit being. The Scriptures teach that when Jesus was raised from the dead he was no longer human, but the very "image of the invisible God." (Col. 1:15; II Cor. 5:16; I Pet. 3:18) Because of this, the verity of his return and Second Presence is revealed, not by seeing him with the literal eye, but by the fulfillment of signs which are outlined in the prophecies.

It is true that Jesus did appear in the form of a man to his disciples on several occasions following his resurrection, but this does not mean that by nature he was still human. The circumstances of his few brief appearances prove to the contrary. For example, he always appeared in a different looking human body. He would not have looked differently each time if the form in which he appeared had been his glorified, resurrection body. Jesus was present with his disciples for forty days between the time of his resurrection and his ascension. However, only during a very small portion of this time were

they able to see him, and then only when he miraculously appeared to them in a human form. It is this Jesus—able to be present invisibly among humans—whom the Scriptures declare was to return for the purpose of establishing a kingdom of righteousness, and restoring the redeemed race to life on the earth.

As an all-powerful, divine, spirit being, Jesus still possesses the power to appear to humans, as he did to his disciples following his resurrection from the dead. This we do not dispute, but the Scriptures do not indicate that his Second Presence is to be revealed in this manner. The Lord's appearances following his resurrection were evidently intended to establish in the hearts and minds of his disciples the fact that he had been raised from the dead. This truth having been clearly established, we have no reason to expect the repetition of such appearances.

In Romans 1:20, we read concerning God, "The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead." Here is a key which will help us to understand the significance of the prophecies pertaining to the Second Advent of Christ. God is invisible, Paul says, but can be "clearly seen . . . by the things that are made"—his visible creative works. Christ likewise is now invisible to human eyes. Hence at his Second Advent he can be recognized only by visible circumstances and events which transpire. These are identified through the prophetic pages of Scripture as the signs which were to mark his return.

Let us state the matter in another way. We believe in the existence of God, not because we have ever seen him, but because we see his works. Even with our limited abilities, we survey the vast universe, and conclude that a powerful, all-wise Creator must be responsible for what we observe. Similarly, in the Bible we find set forth an impressive array of events which were foretold to take place in the world following the return of the glorified Christ. If, then, we observe that many of these events have already, or are now, taking place, the logical conclusion is that the Second Coming of Christ must already have come to pass, and that we are living in the period of his presence—though he is invisible to the literal eye.

We have another illustration of this principle in the presence and activity of Satan, the Devil. Satan is a living being, but no human has ever seen him. Yet, we have all seen the results of his wicked influence throughout the earth. The Apostle Paul informs us that Satan is “the god of this world,” and “the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.” (II Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2) Jesus refers to Satan as “the prince of this world.” (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11) If we believe the Bible, we must conclude that this powerful, invisible being has, throughout the centuries, exercised great control over the affairs of men.

The Apostle Peter writes concerning the invisible ruler of this present world order, and declares that he goes about “as a roaring lion, ... seeking whom he may devour.” (I Pet. 5:8) This clearly indicates again that Satan’s field of activity is right here on

earth, and among humans. Yet, even those who realize this most fully have never literally seen him or heard him “roar,” nor is Satan actually a lion. The meaning of this language is easily understood, however, by those who consider the methods by which lions seek out their prey.

“AS A THIEF”

The Apostle Paul wrote, “The day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.” (I Thess. 5:2) Here Paul employs the symbol of a “thief.” The “day of the Lord” is, we believe, the time of his Second Presence. Jesus does not return to steal the possessions of others. The symbolism of a thief is used, rather, to illustrate the manner of his coming. A thief enters a building quietly and, if successful, without being observed. Thus the Lord would have us grasp this fundamental fact concerning Christ’s return and Second Presence. So far as the unbelieving world is concerned, it is unknown, because he returns “in the night” of darkness still upon mankind in general.

“But ye, brethren,” Paul continues, “are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.” (vss. 4,5) This harmonizes with Jesus’ own prophecy concerning his return, in which he uses similar pictorial language. He said, “Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye

also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.”—Matt. 24:42-44

Here Jesus’ clear implication is that those who would be watching, while not knowing in advance of the time of his return, would become aware of his presence after it became a reality. It also means that Jesus would be present invisibly, that none but the faithful watchers would know, and that only those who watched the fulfillment of the prophetic signs given concerning “the times and the seasons” would be aware of his return. (I Thess. 5:1) All others, as Paul states, would be “in darkness” so far as this great development in the plan of God was concerned.—vss. 4,5

“WITH A SHOUT”

Thieves do not announce their presence with a shout. Since Jesus comes in the manner of a thief—that is, secretly and invisibly—it is apparent that when Paul wrote in our opening text that Jesus would “descend from heaven with a shout,” he was again using pictorial language. The Greek word here translated “shout” means to incite or urge on. What is the import of this statement? Returning again to I Thessalonians chapter 5, Paul explained that in the day of the Lord the unbelieving world would say, “Peace and safety,” and that then “sudden destruction” would come upon them, “as travail upon a woman with child,” and they would not escape. (vs. 3) Let us keep in mind that the main objective of our Lord’s return is the establishment of the Messianic kingdom. This means that the kingdoms of this present world, which are under Satan’s control, must first be set aside. In this

prophecy we are told that the destruction of the present world order will be as “travail upon a woman with child”—that is, in spasms, with periods of easement between.

The ending of Satan’s present world order, although accompanied by visible violence and destruction, is primarily rooted in the rising up of the people, in which there is a great struggle for rights, freedoms, and liberties—real and imagined. In the Lord’s providence, the great increase of knowledge of the past century and a half, and, in particular, mass communication on a global scale, also unique to this time period, have “incited” and “urged on” a clamoring for equality and rights in every corner of the earth. We can see how this symbolic “shout” has ripped the fabric of the present world, and shaken its very foundations!

Daniel foretold the increase of knowledge which has brought about this rising up of the people. (Dan. 12:4) This increase of knowledge, especially as viewed in its resulting incitement of the people, is one of the evidences that we are presently living in “the day of the Lord.” He is invisible to mankind, but his presence has surely had a profound effect on man’s world.

Hence, we see that a mighty “shout” has attended our Lord’s return, even as Paul predicted. The people have heard it and have taken it up, though they do not realize the Lord is its source. By it the Lord is creating a state of mind in the masses of humanity and in the suffering millions of mankind that will ultimately contribute to the complete overthrow of the present world order. How thankful we are, however, that a new, righteous, order is to

take its place—the kingdom of Christ. Having exhausted all futile human endeavors to gain “peace and safety,” the hearts and minds of the people will then be ready for the blessings of the kingdom, which will begin just beyond the final “travail” and “sudden destruction” of Satan’s order.

“VOICE OF THE ARCHANGEL”

In our text, Paul prophesied that the Lord would also return “with the voice of the archangel.” There is only one archangel mentioned in the Bible, and his name is Michael. (Jude 9) This name is symbolically applied to Jesus at the time of his return and Second Presence. In Daniel 12:1, we read of the time when “Michael” would “stand up,” and when as a result there would be “a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation.” Jesus alludes to this prophecy in Matthew 24:21,22, as part of his response to the disciples’ question concerning the sign of his presence and the end of the age, or world order. (vs. 3) He speaks of it as a time of “great tribulation,” so destructive that if it were not shortened, no flesh would be saved. We are now living in that time, and even the wise of the world understand that the human race is now threatened with destruction. How evident it is that the commanding voice, or authority, of the archangel, Michael—the glorified Messiah—is causing the foundations of man’s world to tremble.

Throughout the history of man there have been wars and revolutions, but in some way the people have at least temporarily resolved their disputes, even if, as in most cases, this has been accomplished by one group yielding to the power of another.

However, Daniel said that the trouble resulting from the exercise of authority by the symbolic Michael would be such as “never was” since there was a nation. One of the ways in which the present trouble upon the world is different from all others is in the fact that, due to man’s selfishness, resolutions for the problems in the earth are either impossible to be agreed upon, or when agreements are reached, they are ignored by large segments of the people, and entire nations. We believe the reason for this is that the returned Lord, in ways invisible and unknown to man, is overruling in world affairs in preparation for the establishment of his kingdom. Thus, all humanly constituted authority must be set aside.

“THE TRUMP OF GOD”

The “trump of God” is another meaningful symbol used in our text. In Joel 2:1,2, we read, “Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the LORD cometh, for it is nigh at hand; A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains.” In this prophecy, a trumpet is also associated with the coming of the “day of the LORD.” It symbolizes the proclaiming of a message—in this case a warning of trouble coming upon the earth, a symbolic “day of darkness,” when the “inhabitants of the land tremble.”

The conditions and events described in this prophecy are associated with the return of Christ and his invisible presence during this “day of the LORD.” God’s consecrated people fulfill this prophecy

of trumpet-blowing, at least in part, for it is our privilege to call attention to the testimony of God's Word which explains the meaning of present world events. We believe, in fact, that this "trump of God" will continue to sound throughout the entire period of Christ's presence and kingdom, announcing pertinent events which the Lord will want to have made known.

This symbolic trumpet is styled "the trump of God" because its message pertains, not to what man is accomplishing, but to what God, through his glorified Son, is doing in preparation for the establishment of the Messianic kingdom. It is not a literal trumpet, any more than "the shout" and "the voice of the archangel" are literal sounds. While much has already been accomplished throughout the earth as a result of these three manifestations of divine intervention, only those of the Lord's people who are watching understand the significance of what is taking place.

"DEAD IN CHRIST" FIRST TO RISE

Describing a further work associated with the time of Jesus' return, the Apostle Paul said, "The dead in Christ shall rise first." The faithful followers of the Master throughout the age did not receive their heavenly reward—spoken of by Jesus in John 14:3 as being "received" unto himself—immediately upon their death. In another place, Paul wrote that there was "a crown of righteousness" laid up for him, which the Lord would give him "at that day," and not to him only, he added, "but unto all them also that love his appearing." (II Tim. 4:6-8) Paul was among "the dead in Christ" who were awakened

from death and highly exalted to be with the invisible, glorified Jesus when he returned.

Contrary to the concept that when our Lord returns he gathers up to heaven all the faithful living on the earth—referred to by many as the “rapture”—Paul says that those asleep in death will be his first concern. These shall “rise first,” and those of his followers who are “alive and remain” will not “prevent”—or “precede,” as is the meaning of the Greek word—“them which are asleep.”—I Thess. 4:15

Referring again to our opening text, Paul further explains, “Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” Here is the further use of pictorial language—“clouds” and “air.” Clouds, in the prophecies, denote trouble, and we have already seen that as a result of our Lord’s return there is “a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation.” The faithful followers of Jesus receive their exaltation—being “caught up”—amidst, or during, this trouble. The “air” is a symbol of spiritual power or control, and the saints are exalted for the purpose of living and ultimately reigning with Christ as the spiritual rulers of the kingdom.—Rev. 20:4,6

THEREAFTER

In the phrase, “Then we which are alive and remain,” the Greek word translated “then” means “thereafter.” Consequently, we understand from this passage that after the faithful ones who fell asleep in death throughout the age “rise first” and are with the Lord, those of his consecrated people alive

at the time of his return and subsequent presence would remain for a period. Sometime “thereafter,” Paul says, they would be “caught up,” or exalted, to be together with the previously awakened saints.

The Greek word translated “together,” in the expression “caught up together with,” is the same word also translated “together” in I Thessalonians 5:10, where, in speaking of Christ, Paul says “whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.” Clearly, the thought here is “close association,” which is one of the meanings attached to this Greek word. All the true followers of Jesus will ultimately be together—closely associated—with him by virtue of their exaltation to the divine nature. However, as Paul explains, the saints who have “slept” in death during the Gospel Age prior to the Lord’s return are “first” raised, and afterward those “who are alive and remain.”

In I Corinthians 15:50-52, Paul gives us further information concerning the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus’ faithful followers. “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”

Paul here speaks of a “mystery” concerning the resurrection and exaltation of the body members of Christ. Indeed, the resurrection is always a mystery to our finite minds, but Paul is calling attention to a special mystery, one connected with the time when

the “last trump”—“the trump of God”—would sound, in “the day of the Lord.” He said that all the saints would not sleep in death. Paul is one who did sleep, and so did the saints who died down through the centuries of the Gospel Age. He explains that at the time that “the trumpet shall sound,” those who had previously slept in death would be “raised incorruptible”—“changed” to glorified divine beings.

However, Paul says, for those of the Lord’s followers living subsequent to his return, it would no longer be necessary to sleep in death. This is in harmony with his statement in our text, that those who are “alive and remain”—though they would need to finish their covenant of sacrifice by being faithful unto death—would not need to sleep in death. Rather, at the moment of dying, they would receive their “change” and be “raised incorruptible,” just as those who had experienced their “change” after having slept in death for a period.

In Revelation 14:13, we read, “Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.” This verse says that at a certain time, mentioned as “from henceforth,” those who would “die in the Lord” would receive a special blessing. In harmony with the texts previously considered, we believe this is the blessing of not needing to remain asleep in death. Indeed, there could be no blessing upon these if they still were dead, for the Scriptures clearly state that “the dead know not any thing.”—Eccles. 9:5

The period of time indicated in the context of this special “blessing” is the “harvest,” which Jesus

said would be at “the end” of the age. (Rev. 14:14-17; Matt. 13:39) These “blessed” ones participate in the work associated with the “harvest” while they “remain” in the flesh. When they finish their course in death, and are “changed,” their works “follow them”—that is, accompany them, which is the meaning in the Greek.

The Scriptures do not tell us what specific “works” the risen saints are doing for the Lord during the time since his return. We know they are not reigning with Christ as kings and priests, nor has the “marriage of the lamb” taken place. These phases of our Lord’s presence cannot begin until the “body of Christ” is complete, beyond the veil. (Rev. 7:3,4; 14:1; 19:7; 20:4,6) However, we can be sure that there is plenty of work in which the resurrected, faithful followers of the Master are engaged in as they assist him in preparation for the Messianic kingdom.

“COMFORT ONE ANOTHER”

How clear this precious truth becomes when we consider all the Scriptural testimony bearing on it, and what a blessing it is to be living in this wonderful time in the outworking of the God’s plan! We look forward to the time when, together with all the faithful saints and our Lord, we will share in the great work of the kingdom. What a joy it will be to assist in bringing back from the dead all that are in their graves, uplifting the downtrodden family of Adam, and instructing mankind in the way of truth and righteousness.—John 5:28,29; I Cor. 15:20-26; Micah 4:1,2

At the beginning of this article, we quoted Paul’s encouragement to the brethren of his day, “comfort

one another with these words.” Today, we should similarly “comfort one another.” These words concerning the prospects which lay ahead should encourage all who have an ear to hear and believe the promises of God. They assure us of the glorious progress of events in the plan of God, which lead not only to the “first resurrection” of those who will live and reign with Christ, but also, and soon thereafter, to the general resurrection of all the dead. May we endeavor to be faithful witnesses to this glorious Gospel of the kingdom. “So shall we ever be with the Lord.” ■

WEEKLY PRAYER MEETING TEXTS

JUNE 2—“I am determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”—I Corinthians 2:2 (Z. ’95-116 Hymn 116)

JUNE 9—“In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”—John 16:33 (Z. ’95-207 Hymn 119A)

JUNE 16—“No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.”—Hebrews 12:11 (Z. ’96-44 Hymn 273)

JUNE 23—“He that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.”—Matthew 13:23 (Z. ’96-99 Hymn 134)

JUNE 30—“In the time of harvest, I will say to the reapers, . . . Gather the wheat into my barn.”—Matthew 13:30 (Z. ’00-234 Hymn 232)

Law Righteousness and Faith Righteousness

*“The promise, that
he should be the
heir of the world,
was not to
Abraham, or to his
seed, through the
law, but through
the righteousness
of faith.”
—Romans 4:13*

CONSECRATED BELIEVERS

during this Gospel Age are not developed under a Law Covenant—neither the old Mosaic Law Covenant, nor the promised New Covenant. Nevertheless, these footstep followers of Christ are being measured by God’s divine law standard. As the Apostle Paul

says, “That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.”—Rom. 8:4

The Jews under the Law Covenant were unable to be justified—that is, made righteous—because they could not keep the letter of that law. Additionally, Moses, the mediator of the Law Covenant, had no

merit or grace to contribute to the people which would excuse them from the letter of the law and make the spirit of that law available for their justification.

The New Covenant, like the old one, will require obedience to the letter of the law of God, and not merely to its spirit. For this reason, we may refer to it as the New “Law” Covenant. The rule of that covenant will be consistent with the old: “The man which doeth those things shall live by them.”—Rom. 10:5

What advantage will accrue under the New Covenant beyond that which the Jews enjoyed under the Mosaic Law Covenant? We answer that the New Covenant will be a “better covenant” because of its superior Mediator—Christ, together with his faithful footstep followers of the present age. This Mediator will have the authority during the Messianic kingdom to instruct, chasten, reward, assist, and uplift all who will be obedient. By the close of this kingdom, all who desire eternal life, and who love righteousness, will have been brought up to full perfection, mentally, morally, and physically. Adam enjoyed this condition, but lost it through sin. Christ redeemed Adam and his race by the sacrifice of himself. Thus, his “blood of sprinkling . . . speaketh better things” to come than was possible under the arrangement in which the “blood of bulls and goats” was shed.—Heb. 8:6; 12:24; 10:4

At the conclusion of the mediatorial work of the kingdom, Christ will deliver “up the kingdom to God, even the Father,” and the world of mankind will be turned over to his jurisdiction. (I Cor. 15:24)

They will be delivered up perfect, as Adam was before he sinned, plus having had the experience received through the reign of evil, and subsequently the reign of righteousness, they will then fully “know good and evil.”—Gen. 3:22

Under the New Covenant arrangement of the Messianic Age, Christ will stand—or mediate—“between God and men,” having the ability to cancel the sins that are past, to take away man’s “stony heart,” and by a restitution process give him a “heart of flesh.” (I Tim. 2:4-6; Ezek. 11:19,20) As part of this process, Christ will instruct and educate mankind to the point where they can, if they will, keep God’s divine law perfectly, both in letter and in spirit. Isaiah prophesied of this time, when “the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.”—Isa. 26:9

God’s purpose for man’s ultimate instruction and blessing under the “better” New Covenant has been lost sight of by most professed Christians. The Scriptures reveal that the object of the present Gospel Age is not the conversion of the world, but the selection and development of a “little flock” to be associated with Christ as the future Mediator of the New Covenant. (Luke 12:32) This Bible truth became obscured not long after the death of the Apostles, and the teaching of a future age for the blessing of Israel and the world was abandoned.

OUR COVENANT IS DIFFERENT

As prospective members of the aforementioned “little flock,” we are under the Abrahamic Covenant. Under this arrangement, we are being developed as part of the Christ, Abraham’s “seed,” which

was typified by Isaac, the seed long-promised to Abraham and Sarah. (Gal. 3:16,29; 4:28) The Abrahamic Covenant had no law provision, and no mediator. It was made with one who believed God, who was reckoned as righteous by his faith, and his demonstration of that faith by obedient works to the extent of his ability. To faithful Abraham, God gave the great promise, "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." (Gen. 22:18) This was the Covenant promise to which was added the "oath for confirmation." It is our "strong consolation" and "anchor of the soul," because we have become united to Christ as his members—members of the spiritual seed of Abraham. (Heb. 6:13-19) It is this "seed" which is to bless Israel and the world by the New Covenant in the Messianic kingdom.

Christ is now accepting us, not under the Law, but "under grace," on the condition of faith and obedience to the extent of our ability. (Rom. 6:14) The righteousness of the Law is counted as fulfilled as we walk after the spirit of the law, because we thus give evidence that if we had perfect ability, we would keep God's law perfectly. In addition, we have entered into a covenant "by sacrifice" as respects our earthly nature, and to be copies of our Redeemer to the extent of our ability—in heart, in will, and so far as possible, in deed.—Ps. 50:5

After our testing, if we are found "faithful unto death," God will accept us fully and grant us a "crown of life" like unto our Redeemer's. (Rev. 2:10) The Christ class, head and body members, will be the spiritual seed of Abraham, the great Mediator,

Priest, King, and Judge of mankind. During the Messianic Age, under the New Covenant, which has already been “made a surety,” Christ shall establish righteousness in the earth, and lift up the willing and obedient of humanity out of sin, degradation, and death, to harmony with God and everlasting life.

Under what Covenant are we presently, as the “little flock,” or “seed” class, justified or made righteous in God’s sight? Our justification, like that of Abraham, is by faith, not by a covenant of laws. Paul wrote, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. . . . Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.”—Rom. 4:3,23-25

In verses 9-13 of this same passage, Paul points out that Abraham was not justified because he kept specific laws, such as circumcision. Rather, he was justified by faith and reckoned righteous before he was given the “sign of circumcision.” Likewise, he was not justified by the Covenant made with him, but the Covenant was made with him because of his faith, and his justification through faith. Therefore, it is also so with all of us who are counted as Abraham’s seed. “Being justified by faith,” we are granted the privilege of becoming “dead with Christ,” as “members of his body”—the spiritual seed of Abraham, whose “circumcision is that of the heart.”—Rom. 5:1,2; 6:8; Eph. 5:30; Gal. 3:29; Rom. 2:29 ■

SPEAKERS' APPOINTMENTS

The speakers listed below are routed through the Pilgrim Department of The Dawn. Their visits are furnished free upon request. Write to: The Dawn Pilgrim Department, East Rutherford, NJ 07073. A visit will be arranged whenever possible.

J. Freer		Orlando, FL	18,19
Delaware Valley, PA	June 12	Belleair, FL	20
Baltimore, MD	13,14	Louisville, AL	21
Salem, SC	15	Gulfport, MS	22
Atlanta, GA	16,17	Waynesboro, MS	23
Jacksonville, FL	18	Huntsville, AL	26

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

E. Blicharz		H. Montague	
Jacksonville, FL	June 12	Vancouver, BC	June 11,12
M. Davis		P. Mora	
Vancouver, BC	June 11,12	Portland, OR	June 17-19
A. Fernets		D. Rice	
Vancouver, BC	June 11,12	Portland, OR	June 17-19
R. Goodman		B. Siwak	
Delaware Valley, PA	June 12	Vancouver, BC	June 11,12
Portland, OR	17-19		

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CONVENTIONS

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VANCOUVER CONVENTION, June 11,12—Aldergrove Kinsmen Community Center, 26770 29th Avenue, Aldergrove, BC, Canada V4W 3B8. Contact B. Smith. Phone: (604) 576-6070 or Email: bas@telus.net

DELAWARE VALLEY CONVENTION, June 12—Sheraton Bucks County Hotel, 400 Oxford Valley Road, Langhorne, PA. Contact R. Griehs. Phone: (267) 456-8889 or Email: rgriehs@gmail.com

PORTLAND CONVENTION, June 17-19—June 17 at BSRC. Remaining days at Shilo Inn Portland Airport, 11707 NE Airport Way, Portland, OR 97220. Contact N. Austin. Phone: (360) 907-4243 or Email: ntaustin@gmail.com

DETROIT/METROPOLITAN DETROIT JOINT CONVENTION, June 26—Pleasant Ridge Community Center, 4 Ridge Road, Pleasant Ridge, MI. Contact G. Zendler. Phone: (248) 399-8843 or Email: ngzendler@wowway.com

PRINCE ALBERT AND SASKATOON CONVENTION, July 1-3—Siwak Farm. Contact A. Siwak, RR1 Stn Mpp, Prince Albert, SK Canada S6V5P8. Phone: (306) 764-7692 or Email: ahsiwak@inet2000.com

VERNON CONVENTION, July 8-10—Schubert Centre, 3505 30th Avenue, Vernon, BC, Canada. Contact T. Fernets. Phone: (250) 558-3055 or Email: afernets@telus.net

BIBLE STUDENTS GENERAL CONVENTION, July 16-21—University of Pittsburgh, 450 Schoolhouse Road, Johnstown, PA. Contact E. Kuenzli. Phone: (407) 670-4189 or Email: ekuenzli@cfl.rr.com

INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION, August 2-7—Orle Gniazdo Conference Center, Szczyrk, Poland. Contact L. Griehs. Phone: (267) 688-8617 or Email: griehs@comcast.net

RED DEER CONVENTION, August 12-14—Pioneer Lodge, 4324 47th Avenue, Red Deer, AB, Canada. Contact J. Neumeier. Phone: (403) 746-5052 or Email: jbnemeier@live.com

JACKSON CONVENTION, September 3,4—FaHoLo Camp and Conference Center, 3000 Mt. Hope Road, Grass Lake, MI 49240. For information, contact B. Davis. Phone: (517) 788-6552 or Email: r2d2lad@comcast.net. For programs, contact V. Lumley. Phone: (517) 782-7252 or Email: raylumley2531@comcast.net

NEW YORK CONVENTION, September 3,4—Double-Tree Hotel Mahwah, 180 Route 17 South, Mahwah, NJ. Contact G. Passios. Phone: (201) 939-3196 or Email: gpassios11@verizon.net

SEATTLE LABOR DAY CONVENTION, September 3-5—Seabeck Conference Center, 13395 Lagoon Drive NW, Seabeck, WA 98380. Contact L. Flinn. Phone: (206) 518-2678 or Email: laurie@flinn.us

HUNTSVILLE CONVENTION, September 10,11—[New Location] Comfort Inn, 4725 University Drive (Hwy. 72), Huntsville, AL 35806. Phone: (256) 562-2525. Mention “Huntsville Bible Students” when making reservations. Contact J. Cothren. Phone: (256) 852-8505 or Email: jimmycothren@att.net

MILWAUKEE CONVENTION, September 24,25—Lake Lodge, 1235 East Howard Avenue, Milwaukee, WI 53207. Contact S. Kuenzli. Phone: (414) 257-2672 or Email: song_of_hope@sbcglobal.net

PITTSBURGH AREA CONVENTION, October 1,2—Sewickley Grange Hall, Route 136, West Newton, PA 15089. Contact G. Balko. Phone (724) 771-0139

AGAWAM CONVENTION, October 2—Agawam Senior Center, 954 Main Street, Agawam, MA. For accommodations, contact M. Wardak. Phone: (413) 789-6198 or Email: mtwardack@verizon.net. For other information, contact A. Gonczewski. Email: aga49@yahoo.com