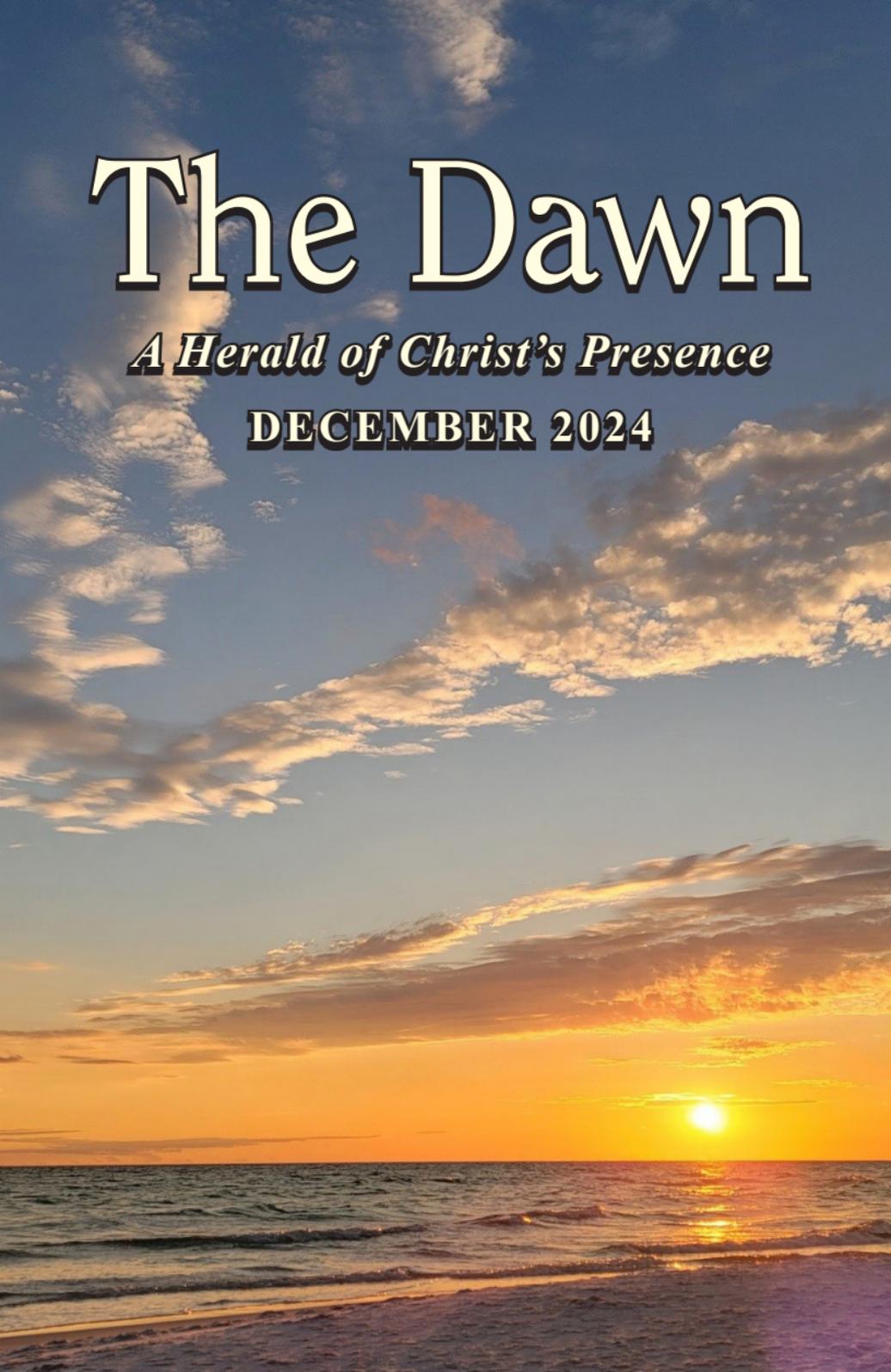
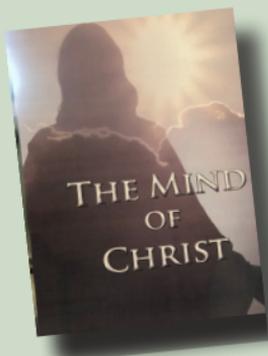


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TABLE OF CONTENTS

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FRANCE: L'Aurore, 39A rue des Bois, 68540 Feldkirch

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GREECE: He Haravgi (The Dawn), PO Box 521167, Longwood, FL 32752-1167 USA

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HIGHLIGHTS OF DAWN

The Great Giver of Gifts 2

INTERNATIONAL BIBLE STUDIES

Jesus' Ancestry 14

God's Promise to David 16

Zacharias' Prophecy 18

The Savior's Birth 20

Faith in the Son of David 22

CHRISTIAN LIFE AND DOCTRINE

A Turning Point in God's Plan 24

Proper Freedom in Christ 38

Established in Faith 52

Weekly Prayer Meeting Texts 37

TALKING THINGS OVER 61

OBITUARIES 13

SPEAKERS' APPOINTMENTS 63

CONVENTIONS 63

The Great Giver of Gifts

*“For God so loved
the world, that he
gave his only
begotten Son, that
whosoever
believeth in him
should not perish,
but have
everlasting life.”*

—*John 3:16*

THIS IS THE SEASON OF the year when a large part of the world commemorates the birth of Jesus. While there is much celebration of the event, and the term Christmas is on the lips of millions, yet the real significance of what is supposed to be the origin of

the joyfulness is often misunderstood, or even unknown. Actually, the 25th of December is not the true anniversary of Jesus' birth—the more nearly correct date likely being in early October—but followers of the Master are always glad for opportunities of praising God for his marvelous gift at any and all times of the year.

The celebration of Christmas, as a holiday, is participated in by millions who do not claim Christianity as their religion. In fact, active faith even in the most basic concepts of Christianity has probably never been at a lower ebb than it is today. According to recent statistics, though regular church

attendance in the United States is currently around only 30%, yet nearly 90% percent of the people will enthusiastically join in the celebration of Christmas. The likely reason is that it affords an opportunity for a brief respite from the dim outlook many have as a result of the large degree of individual, national, and international strife throughout the world.

There is a “good will” spirit associated with Christmas that is wholesome. For this short period in the year, at least, many get the idea that they should try to love their neighbors. During the brief time that this spirit prevails we are given a partial glimpse of what will be possible in the way of human happiness when the true spirit of Christ is controlling the hearts and lives of all each day of every year.

To those who know the realities of God’s plan for mankind, and who know of his love as it is revealed through that plan, this is a good time to be reminded that all the blessings we enjoy, both spiritual and material, represent the bounties of our God, the greatest giver of gifts. (James 1:17) God is love, and one of the principal ways in which he manifests his love is by his gifts. Many of these gifts are bestowed impartially upon both the evil and the good. The sunshine and the rain are among these. (Matt. 5:45) Others of his gifts are reserved for those who have become his people because they have manifested confidence in him and a sincere desire to serve him.

RECOUNTING GOD’S BLESSINGS

The greatest blessings accrue from God’s gifts when they are accepted as being from him, and he

is given the glory. Indeed, the greatest of all his gifts, Christ Jesus, cannot bring a full and permanent blessing except upon the basis of acceptance. The Heavenly Father gave his Son in order that those who believe on him might have everlasting life. In order to be of permanent value, belief and acceptance of this gift are required, either now or in God's coming kingdom.

An appreciation of Jesus, the greatest of all gifts, can be best manifested by a whole-hearted acceptance of him, and by dedication to walk in his steps as well as by his example. It is, in fact, those who are so dedicated that God is specially dealing with at the present time. Indeed, he loves the entire world of mankind, and that love is revealed in his Word through the divine arrangement for enlightening and blessing the people during his promised kingdom soon to be established on the earth. (Matt. 6:10; Rev. 21:1-5) However, at this time true Christians are under God's peculiar care, and upon them he is showering the gifts of his love throughout the year. What rejoicing should be ours as we pause to examine these gifts, and to note how valuable and wonderful they truly are!

In homes throughout the world, loving parents will rejoice over their children as they watch them open gifts and express their joy and appreciation as they discover what the various packages contain. This childlike delight might well represent the humble appreciation we should manifest to our Heavenly Father, as we examine and reexamine his gifts to us. Referring to little children, the Master said, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 19:14) Should not the manner of children in joyful

appreciation of their gifts teach us to manifest our gratitude to God? Should we not show forth the childlike disposition which Jesus commended to those who would be worthy of a place with him in the heavenly kingdom?—Matt. 18:1-4

THE GREATEST GIFT

As alluded to in our opening text, the greatest gift of all is that of God's beloved Son to be the Redeemer of all mankind. (Rom. 8:32; II Cor. 9:15) How much do we appreciate this gift? How are we manifesting our appreciation? Genuine gratitude for gifts is displayed in their proper use. Our appreciation of the Redeemer, therefore, is shown in the manner in which we accept him. A certain degree of thankfulness would be manifested simply by our acknowledgment of the need of a Redeemer, and a mental assent to the fact that Jesus fills that need. However, this is not full acceptance and appreciation of the gift.

In order to fully show our gratitude for God's gift of Jesus, we are invited to give our hearts to the Heavenly Father and learn of his ways. (Prov. 23:26) Such an appropriation of the gift is possible only through a full dedication of ourselves to do God's will. This means that we not only accept Jesus as our Redeemer, but that we look up to him as our guide and our head. (Eph. 5:23; Col. 1:18,19) It means, furthermore, that we are to follow in his footsteps of sacrifice and suffering which lead to death. (Matt. 16:24; Rom. 6:3-8; II Tim. 2:11,12) This is what is required for one to be a true Christian, and only through such an acceptance and use of God's gift of his Son, can we manifest full appreciation for it.

LIFE—ANOTHER GIFT

Some may say that the greatest of all God's gifts is the gift of life, and in one way of looking at it, that is true. (Ps. 36:7-9) Certainly without life, no other gift of God could be accepted and enjoyed. However, life itself, so far as the human race was concerned, had been forfeited because of sin. (Rom. 3:10,23; 5:12) In order for life to be restored, the gift of the Redeemer was necessary. God is the fountain source of all life, and could bestow it upon his creatures without sacrifice to himself. When man sinned, however, and thus proved unworthy of the life that the Creator had provided, reconciliation for sin was necessary before life could be restored. To make provision for this God gave his Son as a "ransom for all," at great cost to himself, in order that the world might have life restored.—John 1:29; I Tim. 2:5,6; I John 2:1,2

Viewed thus, from the standpoint of the cost of the gift to the giver, we have the most outstanding manifestation of God's love in the giving of his Son. In this greatest of all gifts, we have a reminder of the grand attribute of the divine character which prompted it. "God so loved ... that he gave," is the way our text reads, and what he gave was his only Son, the most precious being of all his creation. If, then, we accept this gift, and do so in the spirit in which it was given, we will want to manifest our appreciation by what we give in return. Truly, nothing short of giving all we have can even begin to show adequate appreciation for such divine love!

THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Another important gift which the Heavenly Father bestows upon true Christians is that of the

Holy Spirit. Jesus tells us about this, saying, “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?” (Luke 11:13) Here Jesus indicates that the gift of the Holy Spirit is withheld until we ask for it. The reason for this is plain. None can receive the gift of the Holy Spirit unless they earnestly desire it and pray for it. It follows, also, that asking merely with the lips would not bring this gift. Such a request must be so genuine that one’s whole being is brought into harmony with it and is prepared to receive it.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God—his mind, his disposition, his holy influence. It is his spirit which manifests the fruitage of “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, [and] temperance.” (Gal. 5:22,23) It is also the spirit of “power, ... and of a sound mind.” (II Tim. 1:7) It is, in short, all those qualities which are exemplified in God, and revealed through his Word. By God’s Holy Spirit, fully dedicated Christians are begotten to a new hope of life. (I Pet. 1:3) By it these are anointed to be ambassadors for Christ, and are sealed unto the day of deliverance. (II Cor. 5:20; Eph. 1:13; 4:30) This same Spirit bears witness with our spirits that we are the children of God.—Rom. 8:16

From this we can see that to ask for the Holy Spirit implies that we want to get rid of our own fallen fleshly spirit. It means then that as a prerequisite to our successful asking for the Holy Spirit, we must renounce self-will and seek to do God’s will to the best of our ability. If we truly desire to be filled with God’s spirit, it means that we want to be like him. If such be the case, we will do all in our

power to be emptied of self and the spirit of selfishness, that we may be filled and controlled with the divine spirit of love.

Such an infilling of the Holy Spirit cannot take place all at once, nor in answer to a single request. As Christians we must continue to pray for the Holy Spirit and prepare ourselves to receive it. The chief burden of all our prayers should be that the Spirit of God may take fuller control of our lives, and we should ever strive to be more completely emptied of self. (Ps. 23:3; 119:105; Prov. 3:5,6) There is nothing that more effectively stands in the way of being filled with the Spirit of God than the spirit of self and self-will. To want our way in everything means that God can have his way in nothing, so far as we are concerned. If we truly want his will done in our lives, then the gates of our hearts should always be open for him to come in and control our thoughts, words, and actions to the greatest extent possible. Thus, the Christian's sincere prayer for the Holy Spirit is a request for God to guide one's life.—Ps. 25:4,5; 86:11,12; Eph. 1:17,18

In order to be filled with the Holy Spirit it is necessary to do more than be emptied of self. Such a preparation alone would leave the way open to be filled with some other spirit. We must not only renounce our own will, but we must accept in its place the will of God. To accept his will, and to be filled with his Spirit, we must make use of the means he has provided. In addition to praying for his Spirit, we must also study his Word of Truth, the Bible. God's written Word is the means by which the Holy Spirit is directed into our hearts and lives and by which we are sanctified—that is, made holy.—John 17:17-19

God's Spirit inspired the writings of the Old Testament. God's Spirit came upon Jesus and inspired his ministry of precept and example. God's Spirit inspired the apostolic messages of the New Testament. In short, the Bible itself is the product of the Spirit of God. (II Pet. 1:21; II Tim. 3:16,17) As we study it and surrender our wills to its sacred influence, we partake of God's Spirit. What a wonderful provision God has made in his Word! How else could we know him, hence desire to be like him, unless he had revealed himself to us through the Scriptures? May we daily become more appreciative of this "boon most sacred from the Lord"—the Word of Truth.—*Hymns of Dawn*

SHOWERS OF BLESSING

In addition to these outstanding gifts, the Heavenly Father is daily showering consecrated Christians with blessings, the extent of which is limited only by their appreciation and preparation for them. He gives joy—the joy of faith, the joy of service, the joy of fellowship, the joy of communion with him. He gives "grace to help in time of need." (Heb. 4:16) He provides divine guidance. He forgives our shortcomings. He gives wisdom and understanding. In short, God supplies all our needs. (Phil. 4:19) If he sees that we need trials, he gives them to us also, but never more than we can bear. (I Cor. 10:13) "No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." (Ps. 84:11) We cannot fully comprehend what it means to dwell under such a canopy of divine love and protection. Neither can we fully appreciate how rich we have been made by the blessings he so bountifully metes out to us day

by day. We are truly recipients of grace divine.—
Eph. 2:4-8

What can Christians do in return for such grace? In our association with each other, we sometimes feel under obligation to bestow a gift where one has been given to us. Is there anything we can give to God that will compensate him for what he has done for us? Surely there is nothing he needs in the way of material wealth. The cattle on a thousand hills are his; yea, the whole universe is his. (Ps. 50:10-12) God does not give solely with the motive of getting something in return. He gives because it is his nature to give. God is love, and because he is love, he gives. (I John 4:8-10; James 1:17) However, he does expect those of his intelligent creation that recognize this divine principle of love to respond in like fashion.

God makes it plain that there is a gift that we can bring to him which he will treasure very highly. It is something that he could not have unless we give it to him. He invites us to present this gift to him, even as we ask him to give us of his Holy Spirit. His invitation is, as quoted earlier in our lesson, “My son, give me thine heart.” (Prov. 23:26) God has the power to create the universe. He is the source of all life, and whole nations to him are but the “small dust of the balance.” (Isa. 40:15) Yet by his own law he will not interfere with our right to choose—our free will. Hence, God cannot have our hearts unless we give them to him.

How God treasures the gift of our hearts when we do give them to him! In the parable of the lost sheep, we are told that there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth. (Luke 15:4-7) This “one

sinner” in the larger lesson of the parable encompasses the entire human race. The lesson reveals the joy in heaven when those who at one time oppose the divine law turn and are obedient to it. What joy that brings to God and all the host of heaven!

To give God our hearts means that we will seek to know and to do his will. It means that the doing of his will thenceforth will be the uppermost ambition of life. If we give God our hearts without reservation, it will mean that no “heart strings” have been left attached to the things of the world or of the flesh, to be pulled at by the desires of the flesh or the influences of the world. In short, when we give God our hearts, we give him all we have. Its value to him is that it is a gift emanating from our innermost motives and affections.—Col. 3:1,2

Let us then, in giving our hearts to God make sure that our heart strings are attached only to him; and let us ask him to pull on those strings that we may be brought ever closer to him. May our hearts be so fully given over to the Lord that we will be glad to be drawn nearer to him, even if it may be by means of severe trials. As we carry out the terms of our walk as Christians, we should find the heavenly things pulling more and more strongly upon our heart strings; while the things of earth should be losing their appeal to us, and their power over us.

If our hearts, our affections, are set on things above, our treasures will be there also. (Matt. 6:19-21) Thus, we will be walking in “newness of life.” (Rom. 6:4) Our hopes, aims, and ambitions all will be new. Our work will be the work of God, and not our own work. Indeed, we will be coworkers with God, for he will be working in us “to will and to do of his

good pleasure,” while we “work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling.”—Phil. 2:12,13

THE CHEERFUL GIVER

There is considerable cheer connected with Christmas giving. Some of it is genuine, and some of it is not. Real joy comes from giving in the proper spirit. “It is more blessed to give than to receive,” the Scriptures tell us. (Acts 20:35) This is especially true in connection with what we give to the Lord and to his service. Giving to the Lord should be done cheerfully, “not grudgingly,” else it cannot be acceptable to him, “for God loveth a cheerful giver.” (II Cor. 9:7) This is true not merely with respect to money matters, but in connection also with all the little sacrifices and giving of service to him and his cause.

If we would be pleasing to the Lord, we must bring our lives more and more into harmony with that attitude which he approves. There should be heartiness, cheerfulness, promptness, and zeal in every service we render. We cannot reluctantly serve the Lord and expect to be pleasing to him. Christians who have learned what a privilege they have of laying down their all on the altar of sacrifice and service, in the assurance that it will be acceptable through Christ to God, should greatly rejoice in that privilege.

If our vision of God as the greatest of all givers is clear, we will permit nothing to stand in the way of our knowing him better and serving him more faithfully. His love—manifested in all his wondrous promises, and revealed in his tender day by day care for us—should be constantly affecting our

hearts and lifting us up to the heights of communion and fellowship with him. Thus, our lives will be filled with blessings; not because we will have no trials, but because we have learned to know that God's will is best for eternal spiritual welfare. (Rom. 8:28) If our hearts are fully and cheerfully given to him, we will be able to trust him in all experiences, knowing that in the end he will bring us forth as gold; and that finally, by his abounding grace, we will be a diadem of glory in his loving hand.—I Pet. 1:7; Isa. 62:3

Happy are we then if this season of giving finds us more than ever appreciative of God's great gift to us of his Son—in fact, of all his gifts to us. Our joy will be increased if our hearts, minds, and actions are being drawn closer and closer to the Lord, and our lives filled and controlled ever more completely by his Spirit. “Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift!”—II Cor. 9:15 ■

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 Eugenia Zawadzka, Miechów, Poland—October 28. Age, 88

Sister Genowefa (Gienia) Goliasz, Kozy Dolne, Poland—October 30. Age, 91

Sister Małgosia Kulczycka, Świdnik, Poland—November 4. Age, 54

Sister Lois Smith, Reynoldsburg, OH—November 2. Age, 93

Jesus' Ancestry

Key Verse: *“The women her neighbours gave it a name, saying, There is a son born to Naomi; and they called his name Obed: he is the father of Jesse, the father of David.”*
—*Ruth 4:17*

Selected Scriptures: *Ruth 4:9-17; Luke 3:23-38*
in Israel were considered outsiders.

As incredible as it may seem, the biblical lineage found in Luke 3:23-38 traces Jesus' ancestry back 4 millennia to the first man, Adam. In this is provided a crucial fulfillment of prophecy. Adam's sin brought judgment and death into the world, but a Savior was promised—the “seed” of the woman who would strike the head of the serpent. (Gen. 3:15) Jesus Christ is the “last Adam,” the promised seed, concerning which Paul speaks of, saying, “As by the offence of one [the first Adam] judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one [Jesus, the last Adam] the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.”—I Cor. 15:45; Rom. 5:18

IN OUR MODERN CULTURE many families have little sense of heritage. We may have some family traditions, but most do not even know the names or history of those prior to their grandparents. Modern genealogy research is primarily reserved for hobbyists. In contrast, genealogies were a deeply integral part of Jewish culture at the time of Jesus. Land and other possessions were inherited based on family lines, and those who could not prove their ancestry

In addition to Jesus being the “seed” of Adam, he was also of the seed, or lineage, of David. Paul confirms this when he speaks of “Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh.” (Rom. 1:3) Matthew states that Jesus was a direct descendant of Abraham and David through Joseph, Jesus’ legal father, through the line of David’s son, Solomon. (Matt. 1:1-16) When Solomon was king, he married women from foreign nations who seduced him into worshipping foreign gods against the commands of Jehovah. As a result, Solomon and his successors eventually had the kingdom of Israel taken away. (I Kings 11:6-13; Ezek. 21:25-27) Centuries later, Jesus wept over Israel’s refusal to accept him as their Messiah days before his death and cast them off as a nation.—Matt. 23:37,38; Luke 19:41,42

In contrast with Matthew’s account, Luke traces Jesus’ ancestry from Mary, the daughter of Heli [Joseph being Heli’s son-in-law] back to David through his son Nathan. (Luke 3:23-31) In this regard, the Scriptures are clear in declaring God as Jesus’ true father, not Joseph. Luke describes the angel of the Lord telling Mary of this very fact: “Thou shalt ... bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David. ... The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.”—Luke 1:31,32,35

In today’s Key Verse, Naomi’s neighbors expressed their hopes that her grandson, Obed, would nourish, comfort, and assist her. Obed means serving or servant, which foretells the character that would describe Jesus as the world’s Savior. Let us be comforted by this promise: “We have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.”—I John 4:14

God's Promise to David

Key Verse: *“Thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever.”*
—II Samuel 7:16

Selected Scripture:
II Samuel 7:1-17

THROUGHOUT THE OLD

Testament, God frequently made promises to individuals or groups. Today's Key Verse is God's promise that David's kingly lineage would endure forever. This statement would have expressed a message of hope and assurance to the Israelites in a time of political turmoil and uncertainty.

Bible symbolism also plays a significant role in this verse. The mention of David's "house" and "kingdom" is not merely a reference to physical structures and political power, but more importantly it refers to the preservation of God's people and the establishment of a lasting line of rulership. This serves as a testimony to God's faithfulness and his commitment to uphold his promise made to David. The additional symbol of the "throne" signifies the authority granted to David and his descendants for the establishment of a righteous and just rule.

Today's Selected Scripture passage gives important context and meaning to this promise. Prior to this, we are told of David's desire to build for God a permanent house for the Ark of the Covenant. When David tells the Prophet

Nathan of his desire, Nathan says, “Go, do all that is in thine heart; for the LORD is with thee.” (II Sam. 7:1-3) That very night God made it clear that both David and Nathan were mistaken. Nathan had spoken as a godly man in his private judgment, not in his role of prophet. As well intentioned as he and David might have been, God had never needed nor asked for a magnificent house of cedar.—vss. 4-7

Here is a great lesson for God’s people. There may be things we want to give God but are prevented from doing so. God can do his work without us if he so chooses. Nevertheless, he wants us to have a giving attitude because the mindset of giving to the Lord is good for us. God had no need whatsoever to dwell in a temple, but a temple could be a place where people were reminded of God’s glory and the need to worship and glorify him. Thus he authorized a temple to be built, but it would not be in David’s lifetime.—vss. 10-12

All of these events foreshadow the arrival of Jesus Christ, called the “son of David.” (Matt. 21:9; Luke 1:32; Rom. 1:3) This promise God made to David to establish an everlasting kingdom through his seed is beautifully expressed in *The Message* translation of II Samuel 7:12-16: “God has this message for you: God himself will build you a house! When your life is complete and you’re buried with your ancestors, then I’ll raise up your child, your own flesh and blood, to succeed you, and I’ll firmly establish his rule. He will build a house to honor me, and I will guarantee his kingdom’s rule permanently. ... I’ll never remove my gracious love from him. Your family and your kingdom are permanently secured. I’m keeping my eye on them! And your royal throne will always be there, rock solid.”—II Sam. 7:12-16

These words hold immense significance within the biblical narrative, particularly in its promise of a lasting kingdom for David and his descendants, as it foreshadows the arrival of Jesus Christ. Thus our lesson serves as a powerful testament to God’s faithfulness and his commitment to fulfill his promises to his people. ■

Zacharias' Prophecy

Key Verses: *“Thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins.”*
—*Luke 1:76,77*

Selected Scripture:
Luke 1:57-80

THE WORD OF GOD LAYS out all the important events leading to the birth of Jesus, so that no doubt can exist that Christ came to be the Savior of the world. (I Tim. 2:5,6; I Cor. 15:21,22) Luke traces his lineage in the flesh through his mother, Mary, some four thousand years back to Adam. His genealogy runs directly through Israel's King David and his son, Nathan. Jesus would inherit the Davidic Covenant as the promised future king who would establish an everlasting righteous kingdom.
—II Sam. 7:16

In the opening chapter of the Book of Luke, we are introduced to a righteous husband and wife, Zacharias and Elisabeth. “Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.” (vss. 6,7, *New International Version*) Like the story of Abraham and Sarah who were in a similar situation, God sent an angel to Zacharias to proclaim the coming birth of a special son. Perceiving Zacharias' fear, the angel spoke: “Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elizabeth will bear

you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth.”—vss. 13,14, *New King James Version*

All of this occurred while Zacharias was offering incense in the temple in the course of his priestly duties. However, because he questioned this good news, Zacharias was made mute until the birth of his son. (vss. 18-20) Meanwhile, worshippers had assembled in the court of the temple according to the instructions of the Law waiting for Zacharias to emerge and give God’s blessing. Whether the angel’s conversation with Zacharias was longer, or his amazement made him stay longer in the temple than would normally be the case, the delay had a profound effect on those faithful worshippers. “Meanwhile, the people were waiting for [Zacharias] and wondering why he stayed so long in the temple. When he came out, he could not speak to them. They realized he had seen a vision in the temple, for he kept making signs to them but remained unable to speak.”—vss. 21,22, *NIV*

Being unable to speak after this event was undoubtedly of quite some interest to the Jewish community. Months later, when the child was born and the people said he should be named after his father, Elisabeth declared his name should be John after the angelic instruction. When some pushed harder on the matter, Zacharias asked for a writing tablet and wrote, “His name is John,” and his speech was immediately restored.—vs. 63

What follows is referred to as “Zacharias’ Prophecy” concerning the importance of John to the nation of Israel as the forerunner of Jesus. Zacharias, speaking prophetically of the soon coming of Jesus, declared that God “hath raised up an horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David.” (vs. 69) In Today’s Key Verse he declares his son, John, would be used in preparing the way for the Messiah. Little wonder that later many “mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ, or not.”—Luke 3:15 ■

The Savior's Birth

Key Verse: “For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”
—*Luke 2:11*

Selected Scripture:
Luke 2:1-16

gives more hope and comfort to Christians than the words Jesus spoke to a Pharisee named Nicodemus: “For God so greatly loved and dearly prized the world, that He even gave His One and only begotten Son, so that whoever believes and trusts in Him as Savior shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge and condemn the world, ... but that the world might be saved through Him.”—John 3:16,17, *Amplified Bible*

Centuries earlier, God's love was expressed to Abraham in a promise when he offered up his son Isaac, providing an illustration of God's giving of his Son in sacrifice for the world in due time. (Gen. 22:15-18) The Apostle Paul clarifies God's promise to bless mankind through Abraham's seed. Although the blessing was not possible by the works of the Jewish Law, by “his grace” God “gave it to Abraham through a promise.” (Gal. 3:18, *New International Version*) In the same chapter of Galatians Paul identifies God's only begotten Son as the promised seed, saying, “The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say ‘and to seeds,’ meaning many people, but ‘and to your seed,’ meaning one person, who is Christ.”—vs. 16, *NIV*

Today's Key Verse fulfills another prophecy. Jesus was to be born in Bethlehem, the city of David. (Mic. 5:2) Prior to Jesus' birth, Caesar Augustus had declared that every male should return to their city of heritage to be taxed. "Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem (because he was of the house and lineage of David)."—Luke 2:4

Jesus' birth itself was declared by an angel to shepherds tending their sheep by night: "But the angel said to them, Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people." (Luke 2:10, *NIV*) Then comes the familiar words of our Key Verse. The Prophet Isaiah also has much to say about the birth of the Savior. "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be upon his shoulder, and his name is called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."—Isa. 9:6, *International Standard Version*

We read further in Isaiah 61:1, "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." Jesus quoted from this prophecy in the synagogue after his baptism. (Luke 4:18-21) He declared that he was the one who would fulfill these words, and would save the world of mankind from the curse of death placed on Adam and his posterity. Jesus would be the "ransom for all" later declared by Paul. (I Tim. 2:5,6) He would be the one to bring to fruition the words: "For just as all men die by virtue of their descent from Adam, so all such as are in union with Christ will be made to live again." (I Cor. 15:21,22, *Williams New Testament*) What glorious words are thus spoken concerning the Savior of the world, Christ Jesus. ■

Faith in the Son of David

Key Verse: “*Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee.*”
—*Luke 18:42*

Selected Scripture:
Luke 18:35-43

TODAY'S LESSON CENTERS

on faith. “As Jesus approached Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging. When he heard the crowd going by, he asked what was happening. They told him, Jesus of Nazareth is passing by. He called out, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy

on me!”—*Luke 18:35-38, New International Version*

This poor, blind man was a fitting emblem of the world that Christ had come to heal and save. After his baptism Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. (Matt. 4:1-10) Satan's final temptation was an offer to give Jesus power over all the kingdoms of the world if he would bow down and worship him. (vss. 8,9) This was a very real temptation as Satan has been called “the god of this world” by the Apostle Paul and “the prince of this world” by Jesus. (II Cor. 4:4; John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11) With great faith and boldness, Jesus' response was emphatic: “Get out of here, Satan, Jesus told him. For the Scriptures say, You must worship the LORD your God and serve only him.”—*Matt. 4:10, New Living Translation*

Following this great display of faith and trust in God, Jesus began his earthly ministry. “Jesus went throughout

Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.” (Matt. 4:23, *NIV*) Jesus’ fame soon became widespread. Indeed, an angel had told Mary that her son was to be named Jesus, and he would sit on the throne promised to the Son of David. (Luke 1:30-33) Joseph and Mary had presented Jesus as a babe at the temple to be dedicated as their firstborn according to the Law of Moses. (Luke 2:22-24; Exod. 13:2) Simeon, a righteous and devout man, was present through the direction of the Holy Spirit. “It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah.” (Luke 2:26, *NIV*) “Simeon took him [Jesus] in his arms and praised God, saying: Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace. For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of your people Israel.”—vss. 28-32, *NIV*

The narrative about Simeon in the temple is one of inspiration and affirmation that Jesus was the promised savior of the world. Filled with the Holy Spirit, Simeon waited in faith. When the promised Messiah arrived as this young babe, he embraced him fully, and he spoke words proclaiming Jesus as God’s promised salvation for the entire human race.

The poor blind man in today’s lesson shared the same faith in God’s promised Messiah. Hearing the man cry out, Jesus asked him, “What do you want me to do for you?” The man’s answer was simple, “Lord, I want to see.” (Luke 18:40,41) Jesus answered as recorded in today’s Key Verse, “Receive thy sight: thy faith hath saved thee.”

How strong is our faith in the Son of David? Is it as strong as that of this blind man? Or as Simeon’s? Let us recognize Messiah’s power, given by God, to heal and bless, and let us thankfully acknowledge the grace of Christ, “to the glory of God the Father.”—Phil. 2:11 ■

A Turning Point in God's Plan

“Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons.”
—Acts 10:34

RELIGIOUS CONVICTIONS

and emotions are often deep-rooted in the human heart, and well they might be, for they represent our endeavors to worship and serve our God.

Those who hold their religious views halfheartedly and who consider them to be subject to change with each new theory that they may happen to hear and like, are but little, if any, better off than those who are not believers at all. The desire to be established in what one believes is commendable, for only thus is the Christian safe from being blown about by “every wind of doctrine.”
—Eph. 4:14

One should, of course, endeavor to be established in truth, not in error. To be established in truth by means of a careful consideration of the direct testimony of God's Word means that such an individual not only knows what he or she believes, but why. As a result, they are ready always to give a reason for their hope—the only reason which Christians

should ever give, which is the testimony of the Word of God.—I Pet. 3:15

The principles of truth found in God's Holy Word are progressive in the sense that we learn to understand them better over the course of time, but they do not change. Those principles which were true in the past are true today and will be also tomorrow. We may have a better understanding of these things today than in the past, and have even a greater understanding tomorrow than today. However, that is because we have developed, not because the Truth has changed. Moreover, there are due seasons for certain features of God's Word to be understood, and if it is given to us to be living at a time when the plan of God moves forward from one point of development to another, we may be blessed with a greater understanding of those details. Nevertheless, if our increased knowledge is true it will be in harmony with that which we have previously learned and proven by the Scriptures, not contradictory to them.

It was this great blessing which came to the apostles and other Jewish disciples following the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus, when the early Christian church began to be established, starting at Pentecost. Since the death of Jacob, when God began to deal with his twelve sons as the nucleus of the Jewish nation, he had restricted his blessing to this one people. God had said, "You only have I known of all the families of the earth."—Amos 3:2

Jesus, who knew the plan of God and was loyal thereto, confined his ministry to the "lost sheep of the house of Israel," and in sending out his disciples

to represent him, he instructed them not to go “into the way of the Gentiles,” nor to any “city of the Samaritans.” (Matt. 10:5,6; 15:24) This was not because Jesus did not love the Gentiles, nor because no provision had been made in the plan of God for the blessing of the Gentiles. It was simply because he was loyal to God’s plan as it applied at that particular time.

Following his resurrection, and before his ascension, Jesus widened the scope of his commission to the disciples, telling them to go into all the world and preach the Gospel, beginning at Jerusalem. (Matt. 28:19; Luke 24:47; Acts 1:8) Even then, however, the due time for the Gentiles to hear had not fully come, but Jesus knew that if his disciples began their work at Jerusalem, it would be a while before they were able to reach out to the Gentiles. By then, it would be the due time. Probably Jesus also knew that merely this one statement to the disciples concerning the full scope of their work would not be sufficient, by itself, to lead them into the new Truth concerning the Gentiles.

DANIEL’S PROPHECY OF SEVENTY WEEKS

God had set a definite time limit to his exclusive favor to the Jewish nation. This is brought to our attention in Daniel 9:24-27. The total length of time outlined in this prophecy is described as “seventy weeks,” or 490 prophetic days [70 weeks multiplied by 7 days equals 490 prophetic days]. Elsewhere in the Bible is recorded the key to understanding this prophetic time period, that key being a “day for a year.” (Num. 14:34; Ezek. 4:6) In other words, in prophecy one “day” actually represents one literal

year. Therefore, seventy prophetic weeks [490 prophetic days] equates to four hundred and ninety actual years in total. This allotted time was to begin with the issuing of a decree to rebuild the city of Jerusalem, and would reach to “Messiah the Prince.”—Dan. 9:25

More specifically, according to Daniel’s prophecy, the close of the sixty-ninth week would be the time for the appearance of the Messiah, and in the midst, or the center of the seventieth week he would be “cut off” in death, “but not for himself”—that is, not on account of his own sins, but as the Redeemer of the world. The prophet, however, states that the “covenant” would be confirmed with many until the full end of this seventieth week. God had entered into a covenant with the natural descendants of Abraham, and this covenant of exclusive favor was to be continued with a remnant of the Israelites until the end of this seventy weeks’ period.—vss. 26,27

As each of these symbolic weeks was seven actual years in length, and as the Messiah was cut off in death in the midst or center of the seventieth week, it follows that not until three and one-half years after his death would it be the due time for the Gospel message to go to the Gentiles.

In passing, it is well to observe an important point in connection with the beginning of this seventy weeks of favor to the Jews. Apparently God wished to conceal this time measurement to some extent; so in his providence, the decree foretold in Daniel’s prophecy is often overlooked. On this point we suggest a careful reading of the two historical books of Ezra and Nehemiah, which we note were written

during the time of the Jews' captivity to the Persian Empire. In Ezra 1:1-3 is recorded a decree of Persian King Cyrus concerning a rebuilding work in Jerusalem. However, Cyrus' decree applied to the temple only. The rebuilding of the city, mentioned by Daniel, was not started at that time because no decree had been issued giving the Jews authority to do so. Finally, several decades later, the matter was brought to the attention of another Persian king, Artaxerxes. He issued the necessary decree of authority, and the building of the city and the walls got under way.—Neh. 1:3; 2:1-6

The word "Messiah," recorded in Daniel 9:25,26, means "anointed." Jesus' title as Messiah did not begin until he was baptized at the age of 30 and received the anointing of the Holy Spirit. (Matt. 3:13-17) This occurred at the close of the sixty-ninth symbolic week and the beginning of the seventieth. Three and one-half years thereafter, in the midst of the final week of seven years, Jesus died, and another three and one-half years later would denote the full end of God's exclusive favor to the Jews.

CORNELIUS THE DEVOUT

When God's time clock strikes the hour of change, the divine timekeeper sees to it that the called-for change is made. There are never any delays in the plan of God. His ways are unlimited, his methods unique and effective. Consequently, when the proper time came, we find recorded that in a city named Caesarea there lived a devout Gentile named Cornelius. He was a praying man, and unselfish in the giving of alms. He was "a centurion of the band

called the Italian band”—meaning in the Greek, he was a captain over one hundred soldiers. Apparently this was somewhat of an honored position. Cornelius was respected because of it and looked up to also on account of his nobility of character.—Acts 10:1,2

The wonderful story of Cornelius is recorded throughout the 10th chapter of Acts. There we learn that his whole family were likewise God-fearing people. Yet they were not Christians. It requires more than devotion in prayer, and the giving of alms to make one a Christian. A knowledge of Christ, the acceptance of him, and a full consecration to do God’s will as it is outlined in his Word, are the conditions upon which one may become a disciple of Christ. Cornelius did not yet have sufficient knowledge of these things. Until now, God’s due time to favor Gentiles had not yet come. Not until the full end of the seventy prophetic weeks of favor to Israel could Cornelius’ prayers be answered.

What blessings were in store, however, for this devout soul when the due time arrived! Cornelius was favored with a vision. An angel appeared to him and explained that his prayers had come up as a memorial before God. Indeed, his prayers had been heard, although not yet answered. (Acts 10:3,4) They were remembered by God, nevertheless, and because they revealed the wholehearted sincerity and devotion of Cornelius, he was being selected as the first Gentile to be accepted into the church of Christ. Not only so, but in connection with his acceptance there was to be such a miraculous weaving of divine providence as to silence forever

all doubts that a great change had occurred—that those previously considered to be mere outcasts were now eligible upon conditions of faith and obedience for joint heirship with the Messiah in his glorious kingdom.

The angel who spoke to Cornelius instructed him to send for Peter. He told Cornelius just where Peter could be found, even naming the home in which he was being entertained. At the time, Peter was in Joppa, living in the home of Simon the Tanner, located by the edge of the sea. This information was given to Cornelius in detail and he was told to send at once for Peter who would instruct him in what to do.—Acts 10:5-8

WHAT GOD HAS CLEANED

Meanwhile God was also preparing Peter. This was too important a matter to be left to chance. All of God's business is too important for that. Nothing in a Christian's life just happens. His providences are not always as outstanding nor as clearly manifested as were his dealings with Cornelius and Peter, but they are just as real. Let us take comfort in this assurance.

Peter had been in Joppa for some time. The Lord had blessed his efforts there. He had been used by God to awaken Dorcas from the sleep of death, and this had brought considerable popularity to the Gospel in that district. We can imagine him in the home of Simon on this particular day. It may have been a day of rest, or of fellowship with the family. Perhaps he had been about the city bearing witness to the Truth and had come back for the evening meal and for the night.—Acts 9:36-43

Whatever the circumstances, Peter was tired, and he went up on the flat roof of the house to pray. He was hungry too, the account tells us. While on the roof praying and waiting for the meal to be prepared, he fell asleep and was given a vision by God—one we are sure Peter never forgot. He saw a basket, formed by holding together four corners of a sheet let down from heaven. This basket was filled with all sorts of reptiles, birds, and other animals, which according to the Jewish law were unclean and not fit to eat.—Acts 10:9-12

As the basket was lowered he heard a voice bidding him to “Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.” Peter said, “Not so, Lord.” His loyalty to the Jewish Law would not permit him to eat that which was unclean, so he refused. However, the Lord insisted, telling him that whatever God had cleansed he was not to consider common or unclean. Three times the sheet was let down and the invitation repeated to partake. Then Peter awakened, and the Spirit said to him that messengers were in front of the house to see him.—vss. 13-20

Peter was now alert. He pondered in his heart what the vision might mean and he carefully watched every providence of God that he might find out. He went down to where the messengers were waiting and learned that they had been sent by the Gentile, Cornelius. They told Peter of the wonderful experience of their master, and that they had come by his request, and by the providence of God, to bring the apostle to Caesarea to explain the Truth to Cornelius.—vss. 21,22

Peter, probably still wondering what all these strange events might mean, but not wishing to stand

in God's way, invited the messengers into the home for the night. Evidently Simon the Tanner had turned the home over to Peter's use, or least a part of it, to serve as a headquarters for the Gospel work, hence the apostle felt free to invite these Gentiles to remain overnight.—Acts 10:23

Great events were in the offing. That, Peter knew! He did not want to trust too much in his own judgment as to what these events might mean, so that evening he contacted certain other believers in Joppa and arranged with six of them to accompany him to Caesarea and to the home of Cornelius. This was a wise procedure. Peter, although one of the apostles, felt his own lack of wisdom and great need of counsel. Too often the Lord's people do not take this humble and wise view of matters. We may be prone to think we are such good students that we do not need the help of others. The most-used servants in the church are those who are willing to learn from others. Peter was humble, and he was wise.—Acts 10:23,24; 11:12

The journey to Caesarea allowed some time during which Peter, no doubt, pondered over the meaning of things. He was not altogether surprised when they reached the home of Cornelius to find a considerable company of Gentiles gathered for a meeting. Cornelius met him with rather more than due respect, falling at his feet in worship. Peter corrected this immediately, explaining to him that he was a mere man just as Cornelius was.—Acts 10:24-26

Entering the home of Cornelius, and realizing that he was in the company of Gentiles, contrary to the Jewish tradition, the full meaning of his vision

now seemed to dawn upon Peter. Now he saw what it was that God was saying to him by insisting that he eat unclean animals. These unclean Gentiles were to be made clean by God's arrangement and accepted into the fellowship of the saints.—vss. 27,28

Perhaps even now Peter was not fully convinced. His fellow-countrymen, the Jews, were God's chosen people. All God's prophets had said so. To them Jesus had ministered exclusively. Upon them only the Holy Spirit had descended at Pentecost. Certainly this was true. Could it also be true that God now had in his plan a place for Gentiles? Peter is to be commended for being cautious. Much was involved, and he wanted to be sure that he was interpreting the Lord's message correctly.

When he put all the facts together—Cornelius' vision, his own vision, the perfect timing of the two, and the Lord's providence in bringing him to Caesarea—it made him quite sure of one thing, which was that God wanted him to preach the Gospel to Cornelius, his household, and the guests which were assembled. This he did, and while he preached the Holy Spirit came upon them as it had come upon the Jewish disciples at Pentecost.—vss. 34-45

Now there could be no doubt. The apostles considered the Holy Spirit's manifestation at Pentecost as an evidence of their acceptance into the spiritual house of sons. Could they deny the meaning of this same evidence now that it had come to the Gentiles? Certainly not! Peter was established in the faith of his fathers, but he was also teachable. Here was an increase in his understanding! It did not deny that God had dealt exclusively with the Jews for a time. That still was true, but now a

change had come. God's plan had taken a step forward. Now believing Gentiles were to enjoy the same blessings of divine favor as believing Jews.

Peter had not only learned something new, but his mind and his heart had been enlarged. "I perceive," he said, "that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." (Acts 10:34,35) Thus was the opening of the narrow way to the Gentiles clearly marked. The door to the High Calling had swung back to let them enter. Of that there could be no mistake.

Later, when the news of what had occurred reached Jerusalem, it became an important topic of discussion among the brethren, and to set the minds of the church at rest, Peter related all that had taken place. The brethren agreed that he had placed the proper construction upon the events, and they were glad to learn that from then onward other Gentiles were accepting the Gospel and receiving the blessing of the Lord.—Acts 11:1-18

LESSONS FOR TODAY

Who can doubt when reading this Scriptural account that God is in charge of all his plans and purposes? Had the matter been left solely to Peter, or to any of the apostles, they perhaps would never have started missionary work among the Gentiles. Jesus of course, had told them this time would come, but Truth is sometimes hard to learn. We are loath to change our viewpoint. We are slow to expand upon our oftentimes very circumscribed spheres of life and perspective. Peter had to be carefully guided into this enlarged service. Blessed

are they who enter into larger fields when, as was the case with Peter, the Lord's providences so clearly indicate his will.

Peter's ministry in Joppa had been richly blessed. It was no doubt in the Lord's providence that he was cared for so comfortably in the home of Simon the Tanner. Perhaps he felt that now he could settle down in this one place and work for God, but God overruled otherwise. The call came and Peter answered. Because he responded, God used him mightily as the work of the Gospel expanded to take in the Gentiles as well as the Jews. Since Peter was worthy of the honor, the promise of Jesus to him concerning the "keys of the kingdom of heaven" was now wholly fulfilled. Peter had used one of the keys at Pentecost, and the other he used in the home of Cornelius, the first Gentile convert.—Matt. 16:17-19

It is well to note the manner in which the work of the Early Church started. Both Jews and Gentiles had definite assurance of their acceptance and of the gift of the Holy Spirit. Is it not reasonable to conclude that the closing of the work of this age will be just as definitely marked? We may not know how this will be accomplished even as the apostles did not know in advance how their work would begin. However, this we do know, that the Truth of the Gospel of Christ is still being preached, one here and one there among Gentiles and Jews are still accepting it, and these are manifesting the evidence of the Holy Spirit's begetting in their lives. Because of this, we know that the door to the High Calling is not yet closed. (Rev. 3:7,8) Those accepting the Word of Truth now and making a full

consecration to the Lord, no matter how few these may be, can be assured by these facts and not permit the imaginings of others to rob them of their confidence and hope.

As the work of early Christians continued to expand into ever enlarging fields, it offered greater opportunities for them to sacrifice their lives in the service of the Truth and the brethren. (Phil. 2:15-18) Perhaps our flesh would like to be convinced that the work is now all over, but let us not yield to this cunning sophistry. As long as there is even one more saint of God to be reached by the message before the work of the present age comes to a close, it is our privilege to spread the Gospel far and wide that one may be found and blessed.—Matt. 24:14; Rom. 10:14-18

Another lesson to be learned from the experiences of Cornelius is that what we believe is essential to the development of our relationship with God. There is no doubt that the Heavenly Father was pleased with the devotional attitude of Cornelius, but the Holy Spirit was not given to him until he accepted the Gospel message. It does make a difference what we believe, and especially so today. God has given us the Truth that we may be sanctified by it. (John 17:17-20) Let us cherish that Truth and not treat it lightly or as something ordinary. Let us treasure it and use it to his glory.

Let us remember, too, that God's providences are overshadowing us, and that no matter what new experiences may rise before us, if we accept them by faith as from the Lord and make the best possible use of them, they will work together for our good. (Rom. 8:28) If we are ever inclined to be discouraged

let us think of Peter and Cornelius—indeed, of all God’s servants of the past. The God who blessed and kept them is keeping us, and will guide us to victory.

May we thus echo the words of the Apostle Paul: “In all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”—vss. 37-39

■

“Finally, all of you should be of one mind.

Sympathize with each other.

Love each other as brothers and sisters.

Be tenderhearted, and keep a humble attitude.”

—I Peter 3:8, New Living Translation

WEEKLY PRAYER MEETING TEXTS

DECEMBER 5—“Choose you this day whom ye will serve; ... as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”—Joshua 24:15 (Z. ’01-284 Hymn 164)

DECEMBER 12—“For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he.”—Proverbs 23:7 (Z. ’01-325 Hymn 256)

DECEMBER 19—“Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off.”—I Kings 20:11 (Z. ’94-155 Hymn 266)

DECEMBER 26—“Be thou strong and very courageous.”—Joshua 1:7 (Z. ’02-285 Hymn 197)

Proper Freedom in Christ

*“The creature itself
also shall be
delivered from the
bondage of
corruption into the
glorious liberty of
the children
of God.”*

—*Romans 8:21*

IN HIS LETTER TO THE church at Rome, the Apostle Paul confirms that the faithful followers of our Lord Jesus have been delivered from the “bondage of corruption” and are now set free as the “children of God.” This

continues to be a special blessing to Christians who are striving to live after the pattern set forth by their Master, Christ Jesus. The apostle goes on to point out, however, that the world in general is still in bondage to sin and its results. “We know that all the rest of creation has been groaning with pains of childbirth up to the present time.”—vs. 22, *International Standard Version*

CONDITIONS APPLY

From the Scriptures, we learn about liberty and those who enjoy its freedom. God’s Word also speaks about its contrasting principle of bondage, and those who are held in its grasp. Nevertheless,

what many do not realize is that the resulting actions of liberty are not always desirable, nor are they always pleasing to the Lord. Personal liberty cannot be expected without certain conditions or considerations being applied, neither can it have its proper effect when it is not in accord with the Scriptures.

For example, we know that Earth's first parents—Adam and Eve—were permitted to exercise their liberty, but because they failed to obey God's righteous laws that had promised them life, they were condemned and sentenced to death. (Gen. 2:16,17; 3:17-19) Later, while God's chosen people Israel were held as slaves in Egypt, they longed for liberty and to be set free from bondage. In God's due time, we know that he did set them free. However, their freedom did not imply that they had a right to do whatever they pleased, and they were soon brought under the restraints and conditions of the Law Covenant. (Exod. 19:3-8) This proved to be a burden to them because of their inherited sin, which God's law condemned.—Rom. 3:19,20

A JUST LAW

The apostle explains that the Law which was established upon righteousness proved to be a yoke upon the necks of the Jews. "The law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful. For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin."—Rom. 7:12-14

God's law was spiritual because it came from him. It was of divine origin and was perfect, just, and righteous in every way. Paul asked, "Is the law sin?" His reply: "God forbid." Had the Israelites been able to measure up to the Law's standards, they would have enjoyed the promised rights and liberty resulting from their obedience to it. They, however, like Adam and all his posterity, were "sold under sin," and unable to keep God's perfect law.

SERVANTS OF CORRUPTION

The Apostle Peter speaks of some who attempt to distort the doctrine of liberty. "When they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage."—II Pet. 2:18,19

Peter is here pointing out that there is a liberty that is displeasing to God. It is a liberty that appeals to the lusts and desires of the flesh. Those who preach in this manner appeal along the lines of the fallen flesh, and suggest in subtle ways that it is not necessary to be bound by the restraining law of God. The apostle warns about such corruptible teachings.

ALL HAVE GONE ASTRAY

It was necessary for Jesus to die in order that man might be redeemed from death, and that the human family might enjoy liberty under the perfect laws of God. The Prophet Isaiah addressed this when he wrote: "He [Jesus] was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities:

the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.”—Isa. 53:5,6

The prophet speaks of the principle of full liberty to simply do as one pleases, as iniquity. However, in this connection we note that Jesus proved worthy to be man’s Redeemer because he was at all times totally obedient to his Father’s will. During the closing and terribly agonizing days of his earthly ministry, we read, “He came out, and went, as he was wont, to the mount of Olives; and his disciples also followed him. ... And he was withdrawn from them about a stone’s cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, Saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.” (Luke 22:39,41,42) Jesus knew that he must submit himself to the doing of his Father’s will and did not consider himself at liberty to do anything otherwise. This confirms the divine purpose for his coming to earth. “I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.”—John 6:38

FREE IN CHRIST

The liberty of which the Scriptures speak is freedom from the enslaving cords of sin and death. The children of Israel were given opportunity to be free from this condemnation by keeping the terms of the old Law Covenant. They were unable to do this because of sin and inherited weaknesses of the flesh, which resulted in their being brought under the additional bondage of the Law. (Gal. 4:21-25) Within

the Early Church, some taught that believers must still remain under the Law. However, through faith in Christ they had been set free from the condemnation of the Law. Paul made this matter clear, stating: "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage."—Gal. 5:1

This scripture has been improperly used to substantiate the arguments of those who offer the followers of Christ freedom and encourage them to go their own way. They suggest that the ideal state of the Christian is one in which all are free to think, believe, and act as they please. The best defense against such deceptive suggestions is when the followers of Jesus are in tune with the divine will and are glad to give up their own preferences to do the will of God. (Rom. 12:10; Phil. 2:13) Those who are thus devoted to God enjoy true liberty and are set free from bondage.

Such freedom is not completely obtainable in this present life, for the mind of the flesh strives against the mind of the Spirit. (Gal. 5:17) This causes the spiritual mind, at times, to be hampered in carrying out the entire will of God. This limitation is referred to in our featured scripture as the "bondage of corruption." From this bondage every true Christian longs to be delivered in order to be entirely free to serve the Lord—the "glorious liberty of the children of God." It will, in due time, be enjoyed in the fullest sense by those who have humbled themselves under the mighty hand of God and who have learned to love his will, faithfully, even unto death. (I Pet. 5:6; Rev. 2:10) In their resurrection bodies, they will then have the ability to

do the will of the Heavenly Father perfectly, with no cords of imperfection to restrain them.

TRUTH SHALL MAKE YOU FREE

In the scriptural record, we read, “He that sent me is with me: the Father hath not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him. ... Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” (John 8:29,31,32) In the family arrangement, all must to some extent be subject one to another. Each one is free to do as he or she pleases as long as it will contribute to the best interests of all the others. However, absolute freedom without applying certain conditions would prove to be unworkable. This would also be true in any field of human experience or endeavor. How much more is it true in our service to God and his Son, Christ Jesus.

The “truth” that Jesus was talking about in the foregoing passage included freedom to do the will of the Heavenly Father. Jesus was always concerned about the spiritual welfare of those who followed him and so, on behalf of his disciples, he prayed, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.” (John 17:17) During Jesus’ earthly ministry, the “word of truth” was contained in the Hebrew Scriptures of the Old Testament. It was these and his expanding upon them which constituted the “truth” which would make his followers free and which would sanctify them—that is, make them holy.

Jesus recognized certain prophecies and other writings as applying to himself and the purpose of

his earthly ministry. In prophetic words, the psalmist David wrote: "Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required. Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart." (Ps. 40:6-8) The Apostle Paul, recognizing the importance of these words as applicable to Jesus, quoted from David's prophecy in his letter to the Hebrew brethren.—Heb. 10:5-7

SANCTIFYING INFLUENCES

The followers of our Lord have been blessed with the New Testament Scriptures that enlarge and explain that which had been written many centuries earlier. Thus is the Truth made manifest to those who are being called to become members of Christ's "body." (I Cor. 12:12-14) The Truth not only makes us free, but it is also sanctifying. (John 17:17-19) Through the actions of day to day life, God's Word serves to ultimately accomplish the divine will. The Truth separates us from the blinding influence of error and then sets us apart to do the will of God. It liberates us from the bondage of sin, and makes us the bondservants of Jesus Christ. "Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men."—Eph. 6:6,7

The freedom which Jesus offered his followers through the Truth was not a personal liberty to chart their own course in life. Rather, he wanted them to be free from the traditions of men. "Come

unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.” (Matt. 11:28-30) His yoke would be easy and light to bear because they would learn to love it, having been made free from the burdens of false human theories and teachings.

LEARNING OBEDIENCE

When in harmony with the divine will, we are controlled by the Father’s laws and principles. Our obedience is voluntary, and he is dealing with us with the view of our learning to love his will, and to delight in doing it. We have freedom only within the circumscribed limits of the will of God and his Son Jesus. Our Lord Jesus understood this and did not attempt to exercise personal liberty in his service to his Father and of the Truth. As a result of Christ’s obedience, Paul wrote that God had “put all things under his [Christ’s] feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.”—Eph. 1:22,23

At times, the preferences of our fallen flesh may run counter to the will of God. The standards by which the will of God can be properly determined are found in his Word. There may also be experiences associated with the will of God that we find grievous until we learn to recognize and love them. If, in any such experiences, we find ourselves attempting to circumvent the divine requirements, we have not fully learned to appreciate our privilege of being

bondservants of the Lord. We would then be guided by the reasoning of the flesh while believing that we were merely exercising our liberty in Christ Jesus.

PAUL'S WARNING

The proper exercise of love for the brethren in our association with them may present difficulties at times. Through our association with the Lord's people, close friendships may develop which are proper, unless we permit them to influence our judgment or our course of action with respect to the doing of God's will. Paul cautioned the brethren at Ephesus: "I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them."—Acts 20:29,30

Unfortunately, Paul's warning has been proven to be the case on many occasions during the nearly two thousand years since Pentecost. In the church at Ephesus, to whom the above words were spoken, some who began to speak perverse things may have become the special friends of others in the church. This serves as a lesson for all Christians down to our day. We want to keep in touch with our friends and brethren in Christ because we love them, and we do not want to give them up. However, it is possible to injure them, or to be ourselves injured, by a course of action that is contrary to the will of God.

The most effective way to help those who may have erred is, first, to maintain our position based on scripture; and second, by our example of faithfulness, assist others to return to the right course.

The Apostle Paul did not encourage the faithful brethren to go along with those who had erred, as if nothing had happened. If he had, it would have merely encouraged them in their wrongful course. Such behavior would also have been in defiance of the expressed will of God, and as spoken through Paul, his chosen apostle.

The Apostle John further adds these strong words: “Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.”—II John 1:9-11

EXERCISING RESTRAINT

The importance of restraining our personal preferences is a matter that existed in the Early Church, an example being that of eating meat that had been offered to idols. The more developed Christians understood that the meat had not been defiled by being presented in sacrifice to an inanimate god, and they felt at liberty to eat it. No doubt it could be bought at bargain prices, and its use would be an economic advantage to those who were not offended by it. However, this was an excellent opportunity to restrain from exercising this manner of liberty.

On certain occasions, the rule of love must supersede liberty. Paul realized that if he ate meat that had been offered to idols, some who believed it was not proper to do so might be weakened by his exercise of liberty. He explains, “Through thy

knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ. Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.”—I Cor. 8:11-13

A MEANINGFUL LESSON

The law of God calls for sacrificing self-interests, especially on behalf of our brethren. This serves as a restraining cord that limits the exercise of our own personal liberty. It will be found to apply in many situations with which we may be confronted from time to time. Even where there is no specific command of scripture to explain the will of God in a particular circumstance, this principle shows us the proper course to take. Our words, actions, and attitude may affect our brethren, particularly the ones who may be only recently walking in the narrow way, and who are not yet well grounded in the faith. The general welfare of our brethren should include control of what we do, and what we say.

The false idea that Christian liberty allows us freedom to do anything that we want is something to be guarded against. As members of the body of Christ, we are not free to say or do those things that may stumble or injure another member. Our liberty must especially be restrained to meet the viewpoint of those who are babes in Christ. (I Pet. 2:2) Our flesh may at times rebel against such restraint, but, as we learn to love God’s will, we will rejoice in the privilege of humbly setting aside our own liberties and preferences that others might be blessed.—Phil. 2:3; I Pet. 5:5

EVERY THOUGHT

Vigilance is necessary to not misuse our liberty which is in Christ. “Though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations [Greek: reasoning], and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”—II Cor. 10:3-5

This lesson should impress upon our hearts and minds the folly of believing that as followers of Christ Jesus we are no longer subject to certain restraints and restrictions. To be truly free is to become so oriented to the will of God that its every detail is a delight to our hearts. The Apostle Paul has pointed out that, so far as the mind of the flesh is concerned, we have no liberty; for our every thought is to be brought “into captivity” to the will of God. As bondservants of Christ, we are to have no plans of our own that will in any way run counter to the will of God.

BUILDING ON FAITH

We are given further instructions concerning our development as Christians by the Apostle Peter, who wrote, “Beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity [love].”—II Pet. 1:5-7

We are free to do good unto all men as we have opportunity, and especially unto the “household of

faith.” (Gal. 6:10) We are encouraged to let our light shine forth that others may have an opportunity to be blessed by the Truth. (Matt. 5:16) We are at liberty to study for the purpose of showing ourselves “approved unto God,” and to “earnestly contend for [Greek: struggle for] the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” (II Tim. 2:15; Jude 1:3) We have freedom to send forth the “gospel of the kingdom” and the wonderful promises of salvation to all who may have a hearing ear.—Matt. 24:14

LIMITATIONS

We do not have the freedom to walk after the flesh, nor to speak or act in any way that may even remotely be injurious to our brethren or to others. We cannot render evil for evil, or reviling for reviling. Neither are we free to do as we please according to the preferences of our fallen flesh.—Rom. 8:1,4; Tit. 3:2; I Pet. 3:9

When we learn to love the will of our loving Heavenly Father, the only limitation or restraint that we may find burdensome would be the hampering of the imperfections of the flesh. These imperfections alone would prevent us from rendering our total and absolute obedience to our Heavenly Father and our dear Lord Jesus in response to the wonderful blessings that we have received. Because of these fleshly cords of bondage, we often groan while we strive to keep our sacrifice on the altar until it is fully consumed.—Rom. 8:23

In the resurrection, we will be delivered fully into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. At that time, we will be able to render the perfect and absolute obedience which we are striving to do at the

present time. For now, we are entering the closing days of 2024 and anticipating the beginning of a new year in Christ. May the wonderful hope that we have set before us spur us on each day of the incoming year to greater faithfulness, love, and zeal as servants of our dear Lord and Master. ■

We Are Sowing

*We are sowing, ever sowing,
Something good or something ill,
In the lives of those around us,
We are planting what we will.*

*Not a word for God falls fruitless,
Not a thought for Him decays;
Every fragrant precious blossom,
Will be found in future days.*

*When the very hand that sowed them,
Shall have gone with Him to be;
Still the record of their sowing,
Will be seen eternally.*

*Grant then, Lord of all the harvest,
That the seeds we daily sow,
May refresh the hearts of others,
Spreading blessings as they grow.*

*May each thought and word and action,
Bring the fruit of Christian love:
To be found in coming ages,
In thy garner house above.*

*Treasured there in thine own keeping,
To thine own eternal praise,
Happy ending to our sowing—
Endless joys of fruitful days.*

—selection from Comforted of God

Established in Faith

*“As ye have
therefore received
Christ Jesus the
Lord, so walk ye in
him: Rooted and
built up in him,
and stablished in
the faith, as ye
have been taught,
abounding
therein with
thanksgiving.”
—Colossians 2:6,7*

THE TRUE CHILD OF GOD

is instructed in these words of the Apostle Paul that they, as followers of the Master, should be “rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith.” This Scriptural admonition, if wisely received in the hearts of consecrated Christians, will be of special encouragement to his people now living during the time of

the “harvest” at the “end of the age.”—Matt. 13:39, *The Emphatic Diaglott*

This condition of steadfastness is one in which the consecrated child of God is anchored, a hope that “we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil.” (Heb. 6:19) Paul also encourages: “Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised).” (Heb. 10:23) The Scriptures present to us a broad spiritual balance.

They reveal the necessity of true Christian progress, while at the same time emphasizing the importance of being rooted and grounded in the faith: “That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.”—Eph. 4:14

In our opening text, the apostle is addressing those who have accepted Jesus Christ as their Redeemer, and who, through full consecration to do the Heavenly Father’s will, have been accepted as prospective members of the body of Christ. These understand that it is the divine will that through our Lord Jesus—as Head of the church, and his body members—his kingdom will soon be established upon the earth. (Col. 1:18-20) Through that kingdom, he will deliver mankind from the power of sin and death. All those who are in Christ Jesus have received him with this calling and understanding. This is the message which God has sent through his Word and constitutes “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”—Jude 1:3

It is these dedicated Christians to whom Paul admonishes that they continue in the faith, not combining earthly philosophy or understanding with this heavenly message. Having received Christ Jesus, and having been accepted as members of his body, they are to realize the ultimate Truth that in him “are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” (Col. 2:3) Furthermore, they are to understand that in him “the fulness of God’s nature dwells embodied, and in Him you are made complete, and He is the Lord of all princes and rulers.”—vss. 9,10, *Weymouth New Testament*

Having recognized and accepted Jesus as their Master and Teacher, Christians are admonished to continue to make progress in being rooted and grounded in him. They thus place themselves in a position to partake more and more of his wonderful Spirit of Truth, realizing that any other course of action would serve to confuse and confound the heavenly message in their minds and hearts.

THE ROOTS OF FAITH

In contrast to the picture of a follower of Christ Jesus as a member of his body, the apostle in our opening text uses the illustration of a tree, the root of which goes ever more downward, and the trunk, together with its branches, which reach ever upward to provide beauty, shade, and fruitage to the owner. In this beautiful illustration, which has been taken from our natural surroundings, the Christian life and its relationship to Christ Jesus are seen as the roots of faith that push down deep into the knowledge of God's plan. At the same time, the branches of character grow higher and stronger, developing and maturing the rich fruits of the Holy Spirit of God.—John 15:5-8

While the Christian is growing up in character likeness to our Redeemer, and the roots of his faith are reaching down into the deep things of the Word of God, he is becoming more established and settled in the knowledge and Spirit of Christ. Paul teaches: "God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of

God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.”
—I Cor. 2:10-12

A tree that is well rooted in the earth is able to withstand the violent winds and storms that may come upon it, and so it is with Christians whose faith has been properly established. They should be so fixed and firmly established in the promises of God, and so filled with the spirit of those promises, that no “wind of doctrine” can overturn their faith or shake their confidence in the divine will concerning them. (Eph. 4:14) The apostle cautions against a contrary spirit, and to be alert toward those who would otherwise lead the Lord’s people astray. “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears.” (II Tim. 4:3) It is not a sign of spiritual health and growth for one to be ever looking around for something new and different. Let us not be of those who Paul speaks of as “ever learning,” but “never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.”—II Tim. 3:7

When we first learned about God’s plan and our blessings associated therewith, it was proper that we should be on the alert. We wanted to find the best possible explanation of God and his ultimate design and purpose concerning the human family, and to know his plan of reconciliation and restitution for the sin-sick and dying world. When we were gradually favored by God with a true and better understanding of his glorious plans and purposes, we saw revealed in them the length, breadth, height,

and depth of divine love and the wondrous harmony of the Scriptures. (Eph. 3:17-19) In our hearts we knew, and rightfully so, that it was the answer to all our questions, even as the psalmist proclaimed, "He satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry soul with goodness."—Ps. 107:9

After God had thus shined into our hearts through the precious Word of Truth, and in responding properly to this evidence of his grace, we went on to the next step and presented ourselves in full consecration—dedication—to do his will. (Rom. 12:1) Upon the acceptance of our consecration by God, we were assured that as a result of our actions we would be counted as prospective members of the body of Christ. (I Cor. 12:27) We also trusted that our spiritual vision would be enlarged and enriched through the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit.—John 14:16,17,26

The plan of God as revealed in his Word furnishes an abundant source for research and study in spiritual things. Let us therefore be more diligent in searching the Scriptures for our information and guidance. (Acts 17:10,11; II Tim. 3:15-17) There is virtually no limit to the glorious truths and promises found in the Bible, and it is by this means alone that we may become grounded in the true faith. Such looking into the Word of Truth will help establish us in our understanding of God's plans and purposes and in the maintaining of a clear vision of his will for us in that plan. Our spirit should be one of deepest gratitude and thankfulness that we have been granted this glorious divine revelation. It will be by thus following in the Lord's way that we will find true joy and will be able to

make progress that is authorized and encouraged in the Word of God.—I Thess. 2:12,13

The Scriptures embrace all of the necessary teachings relative to Christ and his work as well as our own relationship to him as members of his body. We should familiarize ourselves with the many important features of this Gospel of Christ. This glorious faith which was “once delivered unto the saints” is firmly founded in the Word of God. (Jude 1:3) No matter how searching and scrutinizing our study may be, it will cause the message to shine out more beautifully and to convince us more than ever how truly wonderful it is in every aspect.

To be thus established in faith, we should know what our Lord taught, and why he taught it. We should learn how to connect the different aspects of God’s plan into one harmonious whole. In this way, we will become thoroughly furnished, not only in knowledge, but in the manner in which that knowledge is to be a guide in our lives. Step by step we learn to apply the words of the Apostle Paul: “Study and do your best to present yourself to God approved, a workman tested by trial who has no reason to be ashamed, accurately handling and skillfully teaching the word of truth.” (II Tim. 2:15, *Amplified Bible*) It is in the personal application of the Word of God that its real importance becomes most apparent.

FIRMLY ESTABLISHED

Mature Christians can be confident in their understanding of the fundamentals of Truth because they know, through a regular study of God’s Word, that the teachings of Christ to which they have subscribed are firmly established therein. Knowing this, they

realize also that the responsibility for them is not theirs, but the Lord's. Being confident of the divine will for themselves, and of God's plan to bless all the families of the earth in due time, they are willing to give all of their attention to serving and pleasing the Lord. They are thus assured of his guidance and direction.

To boldly stand for the teachings of the Bible and to present them to others does not mean that we are judging and condemning those who may not have the same understanding that we do in spiritual matters. We should, of course, be sure of our own position and not adopt a compromising policy described by the Apostle James as being "double minded" and therefore "unstable" in all our ways. —James 1:8

If we are firmly established in the faith once delivered unto the saints, and have partaken of the spirit of that glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ, we are in a more responsible position to exercise tolerance toward others who may not be as certain of their Christian beliefs. The assurance of our standing in the Truth and of our relationship with the Lord should thus produce in us an amiable and understanding attitude toward those who may not be so richly blessed.

Let us, therefore, seek to avoid all snares and pitfalls that may be set for us by the Adversary in these days of final testing upon the consecrated people of God. (I Pet. 5:8,9) We are now living at a time during these closing years of the Gospel Age when faith in God and in his Word is being ignored or challenged on many fronts. Yet it is also a time when the truly consecrated and enlightened children of

God have much to strengthen their faith in the wonderful promises of his Word. It is a time to lift up our heads in confidence and full assurance of faith, rejoicing in the vision of Truth with which our Lord has favored his people. Indeed, we are living in a most momentous time in the history of the world.—Luke 21:28; Heb. 10:22

In order for the Lord's people to hold up the banner of Truth against a worldly spirit, they will need to be more and more emptied of self, and filled with the Spirit of God and his spirit of love. (Eph. 5:18-20) We become filled with the Spirit of God by continued, energetic, and careful study of his Word. It is important that we then apply its principles in our daily lives. In so doing, we will find that it is the spirit of a sound mind which will give us a sense of balance in relation not only to a proper appreciation and understanding of the Scriptures, but also of all our experiences as Christ's followers.—II Tim. 1:7

Being firmly established in the faith and fully convinced of all its many implications insofar as our relationship to the Heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus is concerned, we will vow to tolerate no deflection on our own part from the course of true fidelity to the divine will and purpose. While granting no liberties to ourselves outside of the clear expression of God's will for us, we should, nevertheless, grant full liberty of thought and conscience to others, by leaving them in the Lord's hands. Let us patiently and carefully watch for opportunities to do all in our power to assist and bless others, doing good unto all, "especially unto them who are of the household of faith."—Gal. 6:10

We know that God's plan of reconciliation and recovery from the penalty of sin and death that remains over all mankind will come to a glorious climax in due time. In this wonderful realization, we trust and praise our loving Heavenly Father. The Prophet Isaiah, looking forward to that grand time, wrote: "It shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation."—Isa. 25:9

FAITH

*To follow where an unseen Captain leads,
To heed commands unheard by mortal ear,
To battle with a known, yet unseen foe—*

Ah! This is faith.

*To choose the right when others think you wrong,
To stand for Truth while Error laughs in scorn,
To tread the lonely way unto the end—*

Yes! This takes faith.

*To wear a smile where you receive but frowns,
To kiss the hand that wounds your poor heart so,
And pray for those who fain your life would take—*

Ah! This is faith.

*To fix your eyes on that within the veil,
Your heart's devotion set on things above,
To wait with patience till God calls you home—*

Faith's victory won!

—Gertrude W. Seibert

“I Wish I Knew What To Do!”

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SPEAKERS' APPOINTMENTS

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

M. Kerry

Chicago, IL December 28,29

J. Parkinson

Chicago, IL December 28,29

CONVENTIONS

These conventions are listed by request of classes who sponsor them. So your convention can be placed in these columns in time, make your request in writing three months before the date of the convention to Dawn Magazine, PO Box 521167, Longwood, FL 32752-1167

IBADAN THANKSGIVING CONVENTION, December 7,8—IN PERSON ONLY—Ibadan Place of Fellowship, Coca Cola Mokola, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. Contact C. O. Egbu. Phone: +2348033339949 or Email: egbucaje@gmail.com

CHICAGO CONVENTION, December 28,29—IN PERSON AND BROADCAST ONLINE—Doubletree by Hilton, 3003 Corporate West Drive, Lisle, IL 60532. Contact T. Blackwell. Email: secretary@chicagobible.org, or contact M. Neiman. Phone: (630) 740-0900

PHOENIX CONVENTION, January 18,19—IN PERSON AND BROADCAST ONLINE—Fountain Hills Community Center, 13001 N. La Montana Drive, Fountain Hills, AZ 85268. Contact A. Mengos. Phone: (480) 390-3767 or Email: samengos@yahoo.com

AUSTRALIAN GENERAL CONVENTION, January 24-26—BROADCAST ONLINE ONLY—Contact R. Charlton. Phone: WhatsApp +61429172606 or Email: randscharlton@bigpond.com

SACRAMENTO CONVENTION, February 14-16—IN PERSON AND BROADCAST ONLINE—Holiday

Inn Express, 2224 Auburn Boulevard, Sacramento, CA 95821. Phone: (916)923-1100. Contact K. Freer. Phone: (916) 879-4657 or Email: winnerwear@aol.com

FLORIDA CONVENTION, March 1-3—IN PERSON AND BROADCAST ONLINE—Winter Park Masonic Lodge, 1495 Grand Road, Winter Park, FL 32792. Contact J. Benson. Phone: (860) 884-8168 or Email: jonathanandjewel@gmail.com

HIGHLAND PARK CONVENTION, March 15—BROADCAST ONLINE ONLY—Contact by Email: highlandparkbiblechurchny@gmail.com

ALBUQUERQUE CONVENTION, April 18-20—IN PERSON AND BROADCAST ONLINE—Sheraton Albuquerque Airport Hotel, 2910 Yale Boulevard SE, Albuquerque, NM 87106. Contact S. Thomassen. Phone: (505) 400-0416 or Email: srbt@juno.com

METROPOLITAN DETROIT CONVENTION, May 3,4—IN PERSON AND BROADCAST ONLINE—Milford Senior Center, 1050 Atlantic Street, Milford, MI 48381. Contact N. Hummel. Email: psa343nj@yahoo.com

Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.

—John 16:24

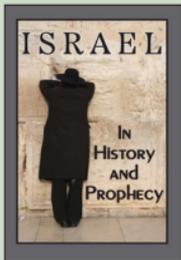
Not until we have taken the Lord into our daily life as our living, personal companion and confidential friend and counselor and comforter and guide, as well as our Redeemer and Lord, can we fully learn of Him those precious lessons which give to His disciples a joy which the world can neither give nor take away. May this intimate communion and fellowship with Christ impart to us each more and more of His own spirit, so that the world may take knowledge of us, as they have of others (Acts 4:13), that we have been with Jesus. R1789

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To us the Scriptures clearly teach . . .

THAT THE CHURCH IS “THE TEMPLE” OF THE LIVING GOD

—peculiarly “his workmanship”; that its construction has been in progress throughout the Gospel Age—ever since Christ became the world’s Redeemer and the chief “corner stone” of this temple, through which, when finished, God’s blessings shall come “to all people”, and they find access to him.—I Cor. 3:16,17; Eph. 2:20-22; Gen. 28:14; Gal. 3:29

THAT MEANTIME THE CHISELING, SHAPING AND POLISHING

of consecrated believers in Christ’s atonement for sin progresses, and when the last of these “living stones,” “elect and precious,” shall have been made ready, the great Master Workman will bring all together in the first resurrection; and the temple shall be filled with his glory, and be the meeting place between God and men throughout the Millennium.—Rev. 15:5-8

THAT THE BASIS OF HOPE FOR THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD

lies in the fact that Jesus Christ, by the grace of God, tasted death for every man, “a ransom for all,” and will be “the true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world,” “in due time.”—Heb. 2:9; John 1:9; I Tim. 2:5,6

THAT THE HOPE OF THE CHURCH

is that she may be like her Lord, “see him as he is,” be a “partaker of the divine nature,” and share his glory as his joint-heir.—I John 3:2; John 17:24; Rom. 8:17; II Pet.1:4

THAT THE PRESENT MISSION OF THE CHURCH

is the perfecting of the saints for the future work of service; to develop in herself every grace; to be God’s witness to the world; and to prepare to be the kings and priests in the next age.—Eph. 4:12; Matt. 24:14; Rev. 1:6, 20:6

THAT THE HOPE FOR THE WORLD

lies in the blessings of knowledge and opportunity to be brought to all by Christ’s millennial kingdom—the restitution of all that was lost in Adam, to all the willing and obedient, at the hands of their Redeemer and his glorified church—when all the willfully wicked will be destroyed.—Acts 3:19-23; Isa. 35

