

## Abraham, Father of the Faithful

**THE NEWS MEDIA HAD** a release in August 1999 about the Pope's planned visit to the city of Ur to honor Abraham. The trip was not planned until early December, but one of Italy's leading experts on ancient Mesopotamia announced to the media that the Pope was going to the wrong location. The release, printed in "*The Guardian*," said:

"ROME—Pope John Paul's controversial pilgrimage to visit the home of the Jewish patriarch Abraham in Iraq could be taking him to the wrong Ur, according to Giovanni Pettinato, one of Italy's leading experts on ancient Mesopotamia.

"The Pope will be going to the wrong place, because Abraham has nothing to do with the Sumerian city of Ur,' Pettinato told an Italian newspaper. He said the birthplace of Abraham was some 1,250 miles away in what today is Syria.

"The Pope's determination to visit Ur of the Chaldees, traditionally considered the place where God first spoke to Abraham, has brought the Vatican into conflict with the United States and Britain, which fear the visit will be used to bolster Saddam Hussein's regime.

"There are also security implications since Ur, 100 miles northwest of Basran, is in the no-fly zone.

"The trip, expected to take place early in December, forms part of a tour of key sites in the Bible story that John Paul wishes to make to mark the end of the first Christian millennium. Abraham, revered by Jews, Christians and Muslims, is honored for his readiness to sacrifice his son, Isaac, at God's request.

"Pettinato's view is based on recent archeological discoveries, made by a team from Rome's La Sapienza University, in the Syrian city of Ebla. Clay tablets refer to a city called Ur not far from Haran, where Abraham lived.

"It seems the obvious candidate to be the place of origin of Abraham and his family,' Pettinato said. He believes the Biblical tradition placing Abraham in the Iraqi Ur is probably a mistake. The pastoral pursuits of

Abraham's family are difficult to reconcile with the thriving metropolis that became an imperial capital in about 2150 B.C.,' he says."

Several questions could be asked about this news release. One would be: "Is Pettinato correct in saying that the city of Ur in Iraq was not where Abraham dwelled?" Second, "What is so important about Abraham that the Pope wants to honor him?"

The contention created by Pettinato is not new. Several sites have been suggested by others over the years as being the site of Ur, and many of these are a great distance from Ur in Iraq—1,500 miles. The basis for his argument is mentioned on a clay tablet found in Syria of another Ur believed to be in Syria.

Our evaluation of such matters depends upon what has been written in the Bible. Terah and his three sons, Haran, Nahor, and Abram, lived in Ur of the Chaldees. (Gen. 11:28,31) It is called the land of their nativity. Chaldea, or the land of the Chaldees, is believed by historians to be equivalent to southern Iraq of today. When God called Abram to leave Ur to go to the land of Canaan, his nephew, Lot, and his father, Terah—as well as their wives—all accompanied him. They went toward Haran—a city on the Euphrates River, about 1,200 miles north of Ur. It is most likely that Terah, as senior member of the party, directed where they should go. Arriving at Haran in Syria, they dwelled there; how long is not known, except that when Terah died, God again spoke to Abram confirming his promise to him. Abram followed God's command, and went directly to Canaan, which was their goal when they had left Ur.

Another point of argument by Pettinato is that Ur of the Chaldees was too metropolitan for raising cattle and other livestock. When Abram left Ur, no mention is made of his livestock. Upon leaving Haran there is mention. One can conclude that he raised livestock while in Haran because, indeed, the area was conducive for this purpose. The Scriptures confirm this matter when it is written: "Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran."—Gen. 12:5

The Italian expert on Mesopotamia believes that all of Abram's life was pastoral; whereas, when he was in Ur of the Chaldees it likely was not. Based on Biblical evidence, and the research of many competent writers, it does not appear that Pettinato is correct in saying that the Pope

will visit the wrong area when he goes to Iraq in December to honor Abraham.

The second question raised by this proposed visit is: What is so important about Abraham that the Pope wants to honor him? Three major religions already honor Abraham: Jews, Christians, and Muslims. He is a direct ancestor of both Jews and Arabs. His son Isaac is father of the Jews; Ishmael is father of the Arabs. Both natural descendants revere Abraham and in their religion honor his memory.

For Christians, Abraham is considered to be the father of the faithful, because through his seed all the families of the earth will be blessed. God had in mind as that seed the man Jesus Christ, who would provide the ransom needed so very much by all mankind. As it is written, “Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.” (Gal. 3:6-8) Later, the Apostle Paul shows how all footstep followers of Jesus become incorporated into Abraham’s family when he says: “And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”—vs. 29

The knowledge that Bible Students have about the importance of the Abrahamic promise has given them great respect for Abraham. They see his life being used to teach important and necessary lessons to Christians. For example, an allegory is given in Galatians 4:24-31, where Abraham represents God, and Sarah and Hagar—his two wives—representing covenants made by God. The freewoman, Sarah, brought forth the promised seed—Isaac—miraculously. The bondwoman brought forth Ishmael, picturing the nation of Israel under the Law. Again, in giving this allegory, Paul says: “Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.”—vs. 28

Another reason that makes the Abrahamic promise so important is that God made his plan plain through it. Prior to that time God made promises, but their language was veiled. In the Garden of Eden, God said to the serpent (a personification of evil) in the presence of Eve, “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” (Gen. 3:15) From

this small piece of information we are told that one day, born of a woman, would come the One who would crush evil once for all.

More elaboration as to how this was to be done occurred when Abel offered up a lamb as an acceptable sacrifice to God. (Gen. 4:2) Events that occurred in the succeeding years give no evidence of God's plan until Noah came upon the scene. By then, the earth was filled with violence by the hybrid race—seed of angels and men—causing God to plan their destruction with the great Flood. Only Noah, his wife, and three sons and their wives, were carried over into the 'next world' by the ark, to start life anew. But not much more information was added to reveal God's plan. It was not until Abraham was called by God. Then it became plain that God intended to bless all the families of the earth.—Gen. 12:3

God could not have revealed this information in any plainer manner. The wonderful covenant (Gen. 15:18; 17:4-8) given to Abraham promised that one day his seed would be instrumental in blessing all mankind—none excluded! This was indeed good news; and it has remained such to our time. The Old Testament further elaborated this promise through the many writings and experiences of God's people. Finally, the one awaited for so long came as the babe in Bethlehem. The angelic messenger spoke to poor shepherds watching their sheep in the hills of Judea announcing this great event by saying, "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." (Luke 2:10) The seed of Abraham who was to bless all nations had arrived.

Blessings came to Israel when Jesus began his ministry through his healing works. But these were just a sample of greater works to come. Unknown to the natural descendants of Abraham, this promised seed had to die to provide his life as a ransom for all mankind. When Jesus was eventually taken captive by his enemies and crucified, the disciples were crushed. But soon they were revived with the news of his resurrection. Jesus confirmed this miracle by revealing himself to them on a number of occasions. Finally, on the Day of Pentecost, the obedient apostles received the promised Holy Spirit, their spiritual eyes were opened, and all became clear to them.

If Israel had made sharper observations of Abraham's life, they would have realized that God had dramatized this necessary event, using Abraham to represent himself, and Isaac to represent Jesus. God said to

Abraham: “Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of. And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him.”—Gen. 22:2,3

Abraham was 75 years old when he left Haran. (Gen. 12:4) How long he was in Haran after leaving Ur of the Chaldees is not known, but it could have been several years. More than ten years elapsed when Abraham suggested to God that Eliezer of Damascus, who had been born in Abraham’s house and was the steward of his goods, be made the official heir. God made it plain that the heir had to come forth from Abraham’s own loins. When Abraham was 86 years old, Ishmael was born of Hagar, a bondwoman given to him by Sarah. Abraham now had a flesh and blood heir in Ishmael, after fifteen years of waiting. But, God did not accept Ishmael as Abraham’s heir—God wanted Sarah to be the mother. So when Abraham was one hundred years old, Sarah indeed became the mother of Isaac, Abraham’s son. Isaac was truly a miracle child!

The Bible does not give Abraham’s age when he was told to take Isaac up to Mount Moriah, but we estimate it was when Isaac was 18 years old, or older. Some of this reasoning comes from Genesis 22:5,6, where it tells of Abraham taking two young men servants to carry the wood and other supplies to Moriah. When they reached the bottom of the mountain, Abraham told these young men to wait for him and Isaac to return while they went alone further up the mountain. Abraham laid the wood on Isaac to carry the rest of the way, and he would not have been able to do this if he were a mere child.

After waiting more than twenty-five years for his true heir, God now—about 18 years later—asked Abraham to sacrifice this son. We may question what was going through Abraham’s mind as God approached him with this request. In Genesis 22 we note Abraham’s prompt obedience, but nothing else is revealed to us. It is not until the Apostle Paul told of this same incident in Hebrews 11:17-19, where we learn that Abraham had perfect confidence that Isaac would be raised from the dead.

Abel had known that a lamb was an acceptable offering to God. Likewise, young Isaac knew. As he and Abraham went up the mountain, Isaac asked his father, “Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” (Gen. 22:7) Abraham’s answer was prophetic. He said to Isaac: “My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering.” (vs. 8.) Many years later God did, indeed, provide that Lamb, even as John the Baptist announced to all upon seeing Jesus: “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29) Up to Abraham’s day, some knew that a sacrifice was necessary to restore mankind. In the drama that unfolded with Abraham and Isaac, it became known that this sacrifice would be a most beloved son.

When Abraham revealed to Isaac that he was to be sacrificed, Isaac did not try to overpower his aged father, but yielded completely. So also, Jesus submitted to his Father completely. But it was not necessary to slay Isaac to foreshadow Jesus’ death. God stayed Abraham’s hand as he was about to plunge the knife into Isaac. God provided a ram caught in a thicket to be sacrificed instead.

Abraham is worthy of honor. How will the Pope honor him? We must wait to see. We know how God will honor him, because he will be used as an important figure in God’s kingdom. Jesus alluded to this when commenting on the great faith displayed by the Roman Centurion. He said: “Verily I say unto you, I have not seen so great faith, no not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of [controlled by] heaven.”—Matt. 8:10,11

Abraham’s trial of faith ended with his death. The many references that we find of his faith indicate that he was indeed faithful, and has given us an example to emulate. May we be as faithful as Abraham was.

## Thinking about Commitment

**Key Verse:** “*He saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.*”

—*Matthew 4:19*

**Selected Scriptures:**

*Matthew 4:18-22;*

*9:9-12; 10:1-4*

4:18,21) We note that these four did not take a long time to think about committing their lives to become “fishers of men” (Matt. 4:19), but followed Jesus immediately.

Since they were all fishermen, their experience had taught them much concerning the characteristics of fish, and how to catch them. Now they would need to learn about the characteristics of men, and how to ‘fish’ for men. This was apparent when Matthew, a tax collector, was chosen. (Matt. 9:9; Luke 5:27,28) Tax collectors were hated by Jews because they were working for Roman authorities, and Israel felt extreme enmity toward Rome. Neither did Matthew need much time to think about his commitment, but arose and followed Jesus immediately. As a parting gesture to all his friends, he prepared a farewell feast, to which Jesus and his disciples were also invited.—Luke 5:29; Matt. 9:10

When the Pharisees saw Jesus and his disciples eating with Matthew and his friends, they asked the disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” (Matt. 9:11, *New International Version*) Jesus heard this question and replied: “They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.” (vs. 12) He continued, saying, “I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.” (vs. 13) Were the Pharisees righteous? Far from it; they viewed their keeping of the Law as righteous, and looked down upon those who did not keep the Law as they did, calling them ‘sinners.’ The disciples of Jesus now knew that

**THE SELECTION OF THE** twelve apostles of the Lamb was a very important task. Jesus did not attempt it on his own. Although he already had called several disciples, he did not select any as apostles until he had prayed all night to the Father. (Luke 6:12-16) It is interesting to note that the first four disciples he called, who also became apostles—Peter; Andrew, his brother; and James and John, sons of Zebedee—were all fishermen. (Matt.

the sincere, acknowledged, humble sinner was being sought; not the proud, self-esteemed hypocrite.

Those of the disciples who were appointed to be part of the twelve apostles are mentioned in Matthew 10:2-4, Mark 3:14-19, and Luke 6:13-16. Their personal call is not given in each case, as it was of Peter, Andrew, James, John, Matthew and Philip, where the response was immediate. (John 1:43) In John 1:44-49 an incident is mentioned concerning the call of Nathaniel [Bartholomew], which convinced him immediately that Jesus was the Messiah and caused him to become a follower. We know little about the others, except Judas, who betrayed Jesus and was later replaced. We believe, however, that all of them gave an immediate response. Likewise, we should not need much time to decide about our commitment to serve the Lord.

The apostles were sent forth by Jesus to be fishers of men. They were given special powers of healing. (Matt. 10:1) The miracles wrought by the apostles were a sampling of the work to be accomplished during the Millennial Age. ‘

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## Thinking about Prayer

**Key Verse:** *“Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee.”*

—*Matthew 6:6*

**Selected Scripture:**  
*Matthew 6:1-15*

**MANY CHRISTIANS THINK** about prayer, but do not avail themselves of the privilege. Others may not think about it unless they are in a public session where a prayer is given. A true Christian, however, does more than think about prayer. It is his vital breath, and he prays regularly to the Father.

When Jesus died, he made possible a direct access to the Father through the merit of his blood for all who believed in him. Since Israel was in covenant relationship with God, they were able to pray and to be heard; whereas the Gentiles, if they prayed to the God of Israel, their prayers would ascend as a memorial before God, and they would have to wait for an answer. (Acts 10:1-4) This was because the ministry of Jesus upon earth was to the Jews only. (Amos 3:2; Matt. 15:24) Those who were ‘Israelites indeed’ prayed to the Father, but some had incorrect concepts about prayer. Hence, Jesus sought to set them aright.

The religious leaders of Israel, the Scribes and Pharisees, loved to pray on street corners and in the synagogues, so that men could see them and note their piety. (Matt. 6:5) This was a bad example to the average Israelite. Jesus told Israel that these were seeking the honor of men, and all they would receive was the honor of men as their reward. The Gentiles worshipped many gods and depended upon repetition to be heard. So Jesus advised not to use such methods, saying, “Use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.”—Matt. 6:7,8

After pointing out poor examples of prayer, Jesus then taught the disciples how to pray, giving them a model prayer known throughout the

Christian world as the Lord's Prayer, and recorded in Matthew 6:9-13. This beautiful prayer contains all the necessary elements for successful communication with the Heavenly Father.

Reverence for God is the beginning of wisdom. (Ps. 111:10) The wise man approaches God in reverence, saying, "Hallowed be thy name." (Matt. 6:9) Uppermost in the minds of all Christians should be the establishment of God's Kingdom (assigned to Christ) for restoring righteousness to earth. How truly wonderful it will be when God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven!

The Christian, when he prays to his Father in heaven, expressing his thanks, should be aware of God's gracious provisions and tender mercies. Since the foes of the New Creation are ever well organized under the evil one, Satan, we as followers of Christ need God's continual help to successfully oppose his schemes. Thus, through Jesus' model prayer we can achieve all the objectives of honoring God, praying for his kingdom, thanking him for his goodness and mercy, and soliciting his assisting grace in every time of need.

What a wonderful privilege is prayer. We can communicate with God at any time and ask for anything—but always according to his will.—I John 5:14

Let us use this privilege frequently, and thus fulfill the admonition, "Pray without ceasing."—I Thess. 5:17

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## Thinking about Wholeness

***Key Verse: “When he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.”***

***—Matthew 9:36***

***Selected Scripture:  
Matthew 9:18-35***

**WHEN CHRISTIANS THINK** about ‘wholeness,’ they are bound to think about Jesus’ ministry upon earth. The brief but marvelous testimony given by Peter, when he visited Cornelius, is that “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy [Spirit] and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him.” (Acts 10:38) It is recorded in Matthew 9:1-8 how a man with palsy was healed. Later, Matthew—a publican—was called to follow Jesus; he provided a farewell dinner for his friends, which led to a question asked by the Pharisees:

“Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?” Jesus replied, “They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.”—Matt. 9:11,12

To be whole is to be complete, with bodily functions performing as they were designed by God. The Pharisees thought of themselves as being whole, but they were not. The sinners knew that they were lacking, and sought help. The ninth chapter of Matthew tells how Jesus encountered a woman who had been suffering from a disease involving her blood, and “the woman was made whole.” (Matt. 9:22) ‘Being made whole’ was equivalent to healing mankind of debilitating diseases. From the series of events in our lesson, we learn that Jesus healed two blind men; cast out a devil from a dumb man so that he was able to speak for the first time; and also raised from the dead a twelve-year-old daughter of Jairus, a ruler of a synagogue.

Jairus had sought Jesus’ help because his daughter was very ill, and nearing death. Jesus consented to visit the house of Jairus, but the crowds thronged about him impeding his pathway. The Luke account of this incident provides more details than do the Matthew and Mark accounts.

The crowd that interfered with Jesus going to Jairus' home also prevented a very sick woman from approaching Jesus directly. Her faith was so strong that she thought touching the hem of his garment would heal her. She was able to do that, and as she did, she was healed. Jesus asked, "Who touched me?" His puzzled disciples remarked among themselves that with all the people thronging about him, pushing and shoving, there was no way to tell who it was who touched Jesus. Jesus, however, knew that someone of great faith had done so, because "virtue [power]" had left him. Luke 8:43-48

Following this delay, messengers arrived from Jairus' house with the news that the young girl had died, and that Jairus should not trouble Jesus further. Jesus went, as originally planned, and upon entering Jairus' house announced that the maid was "not dead, but sleepeth." (Luke 8:52) The mourners laughed him to scorn, but Jesus proceeded to raise her from the dead.—Luke 8:41,42;49-56

Jesus' acts of healing were intended to be samples of the kingdom work, including a resurrection from the dead, and of restoring mankind to wholeness again.

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## Thinking about Jesus' Power

***Key Verse: “He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.”***  
—***Matthew 12:30***

***Selected Scripture:***  
***Matthew 12:22-45***

**THE GREAT POWER** possessed by Jesus was challenged by the leaders of Israel. They found fault with his healing on the sabbath, and claimed that he was using the power of Satan to heal. (Matt. 12:24) In answer to the first accusation, Jesus asked them, “What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out?

How much then is a man better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the sabbath days.” (Matt. 12:11,12) Prior to this, Jesus had mentioned that “the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day.”—vs. 8

One would expect that the great power manifested by Jesus would be associated with God's power, and not be challenged. This was not so. The arguments put forth by Jesus to justify his actions were too difficult for the Pharisees to handle, so they plotted to destroy him. (Matt. 12:14) Jesus knew what was in their minds and withdrew from the specific area. The multitudes continued to follow him, and he continued to heal them, using God's great power. (Matt. 12:15) It also took great power to read the thoughts and hearts of men, such as the Pharisees. This power caused him to say, “He that is not with me is against me.” (Matt. 12:30) Our Lord had begun the selection of his church from among those of natural Israel. The Pharisees were interfering with that work and were endeavoring to scatter the people.

The powerful works of Jesus should have convinced the Pharisees that he was the Messiah. These works of healing were a most impressive sign. Yet, instead of being recognized as such, the Pharisees claimed that the power of Jesus came from the prince of devils—Beelzebub (Satan)—after Jesus had cast out a devil possessing a blind and dumb man, allowing him to speak and see. Jesus knew the thoughts of his accusers, and argued very effectively that Satan casting out Satan would mean his

empire was collapsing. If they could only see that this work was being accomplished by God's Spirit, then they would become candidates for membership in God's kingdom.—Matt. 12:22-30

Jesus showed them that they were opposing the work of the Holy Spirit, and to the extent of their knowledge they would be judged. Unless they changed their lives to be like a 'good tree' bringing forth 'good fruits,' they would be cut off. Some went to Jesus seeking a sign and to be convinced in some spectacular way. Jesus answered: "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas."—Matt. 12:38,39

This 'sign of the Prophet Jonah' should have made a difference to those who sought a sign. But it did not. Jesus was in the heart of the earth for the same amount of time as Jonah was in the belly of the whale. But this sign was also missed by the Pharisees. They were evilminded men. They had paid the Roman soldiers who were guarding Jesus' tomb to say that the disciples had stolen our Lord's body. (Matt. 28:12,13) In such circumstances who can face the power given to Jesus?

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## Thinking about Rewards

**Key Verse:** *“The last shall be first, and the first last.”*

—*Matthew 20:16*

**Selected Scripture:**  
*Matthew 20:1-16*

**THE PARABLE OF THE** vineyard workers given by Jesus in Matthew 20:1-16 is difficult to interpret, and consequently there are several interpretations of it.

The parable is about the kingdom of heaven. The owner of a vineyard was seeking workers for his vineyard, and hired some early in the morning, contracting with them the usual daily wage of a denarius.

Then the landowner saw that there was so much work to be done that he would need more laborers. Using our time scale, we could assume that the first workers started working at 6:00 a.m. At about 9:00 a.m. the landowner went to the marketplace and saw some workers standing idle. He hired them saying, “Whatsoever is right I will give you.” (Matt. 20:4) More workers were hired at noon, and at 3:00 p.m. Finally, at the eleventh hour, 5:00 p.m., more workers were taken to the vineyard with the understanding that they would receive what was fair.

When evening came and the first workers had labored for twelve hours, the landowner told his steward to give the workers their hire, starting with eleventh hour workers first. These received a full day’s pay—a denarius—even though they had only worked one hour instead of twelve hours. This was also done with the other workers hired later in the day. They all received a day’s pay—a denarius—even though some had labored only three hours, six hours, or nine hours. Noting the generosity of the landowner, the first workers who had labored for twelve hours expected to receive an extra amount of pay. Instead, they too, received only a day’s pay of one denarius. This caused them to murmur and say to the landowner that he was unfair.—Matt. 20:5-11

The landowner replied to this murmuring by calling attention to their contract, or willingness to work for a day’s pay. He emphasized that it was lawful (right) to do with his money what he chose.—Matt. 20:12-15

The landowner represents Jehovah—God the Father who owns the vineyard. In Isaiah we read: “The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the

house of Israel.” (Isa. 5:7) The vineyard workers represent those who work for the Lord in any acceptable manner. The different times involved are similar to years of service. What then is the reward of a penny? Many rewards have been suggested. One is the heavenly reward. Another is eternal life. Still another is the privilege of working for God. This reward cannot be one we receive in heaven, because there is no grumbling in heaven. The reward must be something gained on this earth during our service to the Lord.

The gift, or reward, for all God’s workers on earth is the benefit of the ransom merit of Christ. No worker can receive more of the merit than another, regardless of how long they have labored. Nor can any worker receive less of the merit than received by his fellow workers. The ransom is equal to all.

Later, Jesus gave a parable of the marriage supper (Matt. 22:2-14), after which he said, “Many are called, but few are chosen.” It would appear that the calling of Christians is also the theme in Matthew 20:1-16. Of those chosen, faithfulness will determine the final reward—the Divine nature.—II Pet. 1:4

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## “I am Joseph”

### CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

**VERSES 1-15** “Then Joseph could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him; and he cried, Cause every man to go out from me. And there stood no man with him, while Joseph made himself known unto his brethren.

“And he wept aloud: and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard.

“And Joseph said unto his brethren, I am Joseph; doth my father yet live? And his brethren could not answer him; for they were troubled at his presence.

“And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom ye sold into Egypt.

“Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life.

“For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be earing nor harvest.

“And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

“So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.

“Haste ye, and go up to my father, and say unto him, Thus saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt: come down unto me, tarry not.

“And thou shalt dwell in the land of Goshen, and thou shalt be near unto me, thou, and thy children, and thy children’s children, and thy flocks, and thy herds, and all that thou hast:

“And there will I nourish thee; for yet there are five years of famine; lest thou, and thy household, and all that thou hast, come to poverty.

“And, behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that it is my mouth that speaketh unto you.

“And ye shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that ye

have seen; and ye shall haste and bring down my father hither. “And he fell upon his brother Benjamin’s neck, and wept; and Benjamin wept upon his neck. “Moreover he kissed all his brethren, and wept upon them: and after that his brethren talked with him.”

Joseph now knew that his brethren really had experienced a change of heart and that they were truly sorry for the crime they had committed against him many years before. With this knowledge, and realizing that he was about to be reunited with his family, he ‘could not refrain himself before all them that stood by him; and he cried, Cause every man to go out from me.’ Now alone with his brethren, he made himself known to them. We read that he ‘wept aloud,’ or as the Margin states, he ‘gave forth his voice in weeping.’ These, however, were not tears of sorrow, but of joy. Great joy, when it comes as a climax to a long period of trial, often finds expression in weeping.

‘I am Joseph,’ he announced to his brethren, and at once asked, ‘Doth my father yet live?’ Joseph’s brethren were terrified (*Marginal Translation*) when they realized that they were in the presence of their brother whom they had sold to be a slave in Egypt—so disturbed that they could not, for the moment, reply to his inquiry concerning Jacob.

Sensing the situation, and wishing to assure them that he was harboring no ill will, Joseph said to his brethren, ‘Come near to me, I pray you.’ They accepted this invitation, and again Joseph told them who he was, that he was their brother ‘whom ye sold into Egypt.’ Probably Joseph referred to their crime, not to humiliate them, but to let them know that despite it he still loved them and had only kindness in his heart toward them.

This becomes apparent as we study the narrative, for Joseph assures his brethren that it was in the Lord’s providence that he had come to Egypt, God having sent him before them ‘to preserve life.’ Here the reference is not to Egyptian life, but—as he explained, ‘to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.’ The ‘posterity’ to be saved was the promised “seed” (Acts 3:25) of Abraham, that seed through which all the families of the earth were to be blessed. Through this ‘seed’ is to come a great deliverance of all mankind from the bondage of sin and death.

An interesting parallel may be drawn between the experiences of Joseph and his brethren, and Jesus and his brethren of natural Israel. Joseph was sent into the field by his father to seek the welfare of his brethren. They seized him and planned to put him to death, but compromised and sold him as a slave. Later, when they probably believed that he was dead, he revealed himself to them. By now he had become a ruler and savior of life.

Likewise, Jesus was sent into the field—the world—by his Heavenly Father, to seek the welfare of his brethren. Like Joseph, however, he came to his own, but “his own received him not.” (John 1:11) Instead, they put him to death, not by their own hands, but by turning him over to the Roman authorities. Later, Jesus will reveal himself to his brethren of natural Israel as their Ruler and Savior. And, like Joseph, he will be glad to extend mercy to them.

Having proved his friendliness toward his brethren, Joseph at once instructed them to return to Canaan and bring his father and household to Egypt to remain there for the duration of the drought. He wanted his family near to him so the reunion would be complete. It seems that he had been making plans for this from the time he realized that he had found his family, for he announced at once that they were to ‘dwell in the land of Goshen.’ A decision of this importance was unlikely to have been made on the spur of the moment.

‘And after that his brethren talked with him.’ Apparently it took them some time to recover their poise, and it was during this period that Joseph told them of his plans to bring the entire household to Egypt and have them settle in the land of Goshen. Then he embraced and kissed them all. His gracious plans for them and their father, together with this show of affectionate love, doubtless convinced the men that they had nothing to fear, and then they were ready to talk with their long-lost brother.

The spirit of forgiveness and mercy manifested by Joseph is a good example for Christians. Unfortunately, we do not always find it so easy to forgive those who have wronged us, but we should seek to attain to this goal of character development. Like Joseph, we are in the Lord’s hands, and he does not permit experiences except as they are for our good. (Rom. 8:28) So, if the injuries inflicted upon us by others are serving a good purpose in preparing us for joint-heirship with Christ

in the kingdom, it should not be difficult to deal mercifully with those through whom the trials reach us. In this respect, our experiences are akin to those of both Joseph and Jesus, who through long periods of trial finally attained to positions of rulership. And so it will be with us if we are faithful, for “if we suffer [with him], we shall also reign with him.”— II Tim. 2:12

**VERSES 16-24** “And the fame thereof was heard in Pharaoh’s house, saying, Joseph’s brethren are come: and it pleased Pharaoh well, and his servants. “And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, Say unto thy brethren, This do ye; lade your beasts, and go, get you unto the land of Canaan; “And take your father and your households, and come unto me: and I will give you the good of the land of Egypt, and ye shall eat of the fat of the land. “Now thou art commanded, this do ye; take you wagons out of the land of Egypt for your little ones, and for your wives, and bring your father, and come. “Also regard not your stuff; for the good of all the land of Egypt is yours. “And the children of Israel did so: and Joseph gave them wagons, according to the commandment of Pharaoh, and gave them provision for the way. “To all of them he gave each man changes of raiment; but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver, and five changes of raiment. “And to his father he sent after this manner; ten asses laden with the good things of Egypt, and ten she asses laden with corn and bread and meat for his father by the way. “So he sent his brethren away, and they departed: and he said unto them, See that ye fall not out by the way.”

The news soon spread that Joseph’s brethren had come to Egypt and the spirit of rejoicing seemed to be general. Pharaoh outdid even Joseph in offering assistance to the family. This was a tribute to Joseph, for it reveals the great confidence the supreme ruler of the land had in this young Hebrew.

Pharaoh ordered ‘wagons’ to be dispatched to Canaan to bring Jacob and his belongings back to Egypt. This is the first time wagons are mentioned in the Bible. They were probably invented in Egypt, and are believed to have had but two wheels. They were seemingly not known in

Canaan at the time. The invention of the wagon wheel was fundamental in the world of mechanics and travel.

**VERSES 25-28** “And they went up out of Egypt, and came into the land of Canaan unto Jacob their father, “And told him, saying, Joseph is yet alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt. And Jacob’s heart fainted, for he believed them not. “And they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said unto them: and when he saw the wagons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived: “And Israel said, It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die.”

Certainly Joseph’s brethren had a joyous report for their father when they got back to Canaan. At first, when they told him that Joseph was alive, his ‘heart fainted, for he believed them not.’ This was not surprising. He had probably been greatly concerned over Benjamin all the time they were gone, and for them to return with such unexpected news was more than he had anticipated.

But they continued to unfold the details of the wonderful news, and these, together with the gifts Joseph had sent and the wagons Pharaoh had dispatched to bring the household back to Egypt, finally convinced Jacob, and he said, ‘It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die.’

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## Oneness with Christ

**ONENESS WITH CHRIST** is somewhat of a mystery, or secret, but is revealed to those who are in the condition of sanctification. Figuratively speaking, those who are in the secret place of the Most High, typified by the holy compartment of the Tabernacle, are in Christ, and can therefore understand and appreciate something of this oneness.

To be introduced into this oneness with Christ, it is necessary to have experienced a justification by faith, and to have entered in at the 'strait gate' of consecration; to have become footstep followers of Jesus along the narrow way of self-denial and self-sacrifice. And having entered this way, it is necessary to continue walking therein unto the end of our earthly course.

### THE BODY OF CHRIST

There are various figures given in the Scriptures to convey to our minds this oneness with Christ. The illustration which is, perhaps, used more than any other, is that which compares 'the Christ' to a human being, of which Jesus is the Head and the church the body. Paul wrote, "Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular." (I Cor. 12:27) Ephesians 4:15 and 5:23 describe Jesus as the Head. Just as the human head is the controlling power of the human body, and all the members of the body serve one another in obedience to the head, so it is with Jesus and the church.

This figure teaches us very convincingly that the true church is a part of 'the Christ.' It also shows that its relationship to our Lord Jesus is a very intimate one, just as intimate as the relationship of the human body to the human head, and reveals that the relationship of its members one to another and to the Head is that of servants.

Just as the various members of the human body serve one another in obedience to the head, so the various members of the true church serve one another in love and obedience to their Head, Christ Jesus. One is our Master, even Christ, and we are to ever remember that our 'Head,' or controlling power, is the Lord Jesus Christ. It is from Ephesians 1:22,23 that we learn that God "gave him to be the Head over all things to the

church, Which is his body.” And in harmony with Colossians 2:19, we should hold firmly the Head, Christ Jesus, “from which all the body by joints and bands [ligaments], having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.”

## THE MIND OF CHRIST

Our identification and oneness with Christ, together with all that this involves, should be our constant theme in life. And as we feed daily upon the inspired Word, we are to lose our natural minds, and get the mind of Christ. We should definitely yearn for Christ to be formed in us, also in all others whom God is still drawing to his beloved Son for that purpose.

To have “Christ” formed in us now is to have a Christlike character distinctly developed, as a result of the begetting power of the truth. Just as a genius expresses himself through his work, whether it be painting, music, or literature, so Jesus desires to express himself through his followers; and we are to let his Spirit work in us. We are to speak as Jesus would speak, and to act as he would act.

Our oneness with Christ will include a drinking of the cup that he drank of, and being baptized with the baptism with which he was baptized. (Matt. 20:22) This will involve our being “dead with Christ” to earthly hopes, aims, and ambitions, and being risen with him by faith to heavenly hopes and ambitions, walking in newness of life, doing our Father’s will. It will also mean hoping and longing for the future glorious heavenly inheritance, with its stupendous kingdom work. It also means to partake so thoroughly of the Holy Spirit that, as intimated in Romans 8:11, our mortal body will, here and now, be alive and active in God’s service, and delighting to do his will.

“If we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.” (Rom. 6:5) If we are faithful, the consummation will be wonderful. We will become partakers of the Divine nature, joint-inheritors with Jesus in glory, outworking a oneness of purpose with our Lord, including the raising of earth’s billions, the bringing of blessings and benefits to all the families of the earth, and establishing the glorious kingdom of God in the earth—a kingdom of life, joy, and peace which shall never pass away.

To all the Lord’s people this side of the veil, there is the exhortation, “Be thou faithful unto death.” (Rev. 2:10) Seeing that we are still in the

flesh, there is the vital necessity here and now for each one of us to maintain and develop our oneness with Christ. “There should be no schism [or, “division,” *Margin*] in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another.”—I Cor. 12:25

We can surely visualize that if the new mind in each of the Lord’s followers could be appealed to, apart from the frailty and weaknesses of the flesh, much harmony and oneness would result. How very sympathetic we should be with each other, “for by one Spirit” all the members of the true church are “baptized into one body.”—I Cor. 12:13

“So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.” (Rom. 12:5) How very comforting to realize this oneness between Jesus and the members of his body. It is with loving solicitude that he marks the progress of his body members as they develop in character likeness to himself.

## OUR PURPOSE

Our Lord and Head desires that all the church have a oneness of will with his will. And we can see that this can be obtained only after fully surrendering our own human will. Full consecration is required. We are to be dead respecting our own will, and alive towards the risen Lord Jesus Christ. “For you died, and your life has been hidden with the Anointed one by God.”—Col. 3:3, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*

All who undergo this process are ‘new creatures in Christ Jesus.’ “If any man be in Christ, he is a New Creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” (II Cor. 5:17) It is the Holy Spirit that has begotten us as New Creatures, and in proportion as we allow God to develop and quicken our new mind, in that same proportion will the oneness with Christ and with one another exist. “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” (Eph. 2:10) “There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling.” (Eph. 4:4) The following verse reads: “One Lord, one faith, one baptism,” and verses 11 to 16 (*WED*) beautifully describe the important work of building up the body of the Anointed.

## THE NEED FOR HUMILITY

The Apostle exhorts us to have the same love, being of one accord, of one mind, doing nothing “through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.” (Phil. 2:2,3) There seems to be an implication here that pride is a cause of discord, and that by humility, harmony may be restored. And to enforce this appeal, the apostle sets before the Philippians, and us, the supreme example of humility, of self-abnegation, of sacrifice, and exhorts, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 2:5) The setting is made up of two sections. Philippians 2:6-8 sets forth the humiliation of God’s only begotten Son, and verses 9-11, his high exaltation.

We are made to see the beloved Son of God at the beginning in glory with his Heavenly Father, and at the end in glory. Between is the story of his amazing condescension and sublime sacrifice. The mighty *Logos*, existing in the “form of God” (Phil. 2:6), did not count this a means of high-handed self-enrichment, but ‘emptied’ himself. He divested himself of the insignia of spiritual majesty, and was made in the likeness of man. He who was rich, for our sakes became poor. Jesus said, “I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.” (John 6:38) And at the end of his earthly pilgrimage he gave himself to death, even the death of the cross, none having the power to take his life from him.

“He that shall humble himself,” said Jesus, “shall be exalted.” (Matt. 23:12) In this connection, the disciples of old questioned Jesus as to who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, and in reply a wonderful lesson is recorded. (Matt. 18:2-4, *WED*) Having called a little child, Jesus placed him in the midst of the disciples, and said, “Indeed I say to you, unless you be changed, and become as little children, you will never enter the kingdom of the heavens; Whoever, therefore, may humble himself like this little child, he will be the greatest in the kingdom of the heavens.”

It was also Jesus who said, “Learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart.” (Matt. 11:29) Our joy and privilege has been to learn of him. As we bring our own heart and mind into closer sympathy, likeness, and oneness with him, fully submitting ourselves to the transforming influences of the Spirit of the Lord, we are changed daily more fully, into his glorious likeness. We let the Word of Christ dwell in us richly, and we see in the Divine Word the model for our imitation. (Col. 3:16) In

contemplation of all that is lovely as embodied in him, and of that which is pure, and holy, and beautiful, we are changed, little by little, into the same blessed likeness—"from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."—II Cor. 3:18

## THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION

In doing this, we shall continue to be faithful ambassadors of Jesus Christ, in a most wonderful ministry. In describing this joyful service, we read: "All things are from that God who has reconciled us to himself through Jesus Christ, and has given to us the ministry of the reconciliation; namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting to them their offences; and has deposited with us the Word of the reconciliation. On behalf of Christ, therefore, we are ambassadors; as if God were inviting through us, we entreat, on behalf of Christ,—be you reconciled to God!"—II Cor. 5:18-20, *WED*

God has deposited with us the Word of reconciliation. Our ambassadorship for our Lord and Head continues throughout our earthly course. When we are faithful until death we will pass over into the heavenly phase of the kingdom, and actually become partakers of the Divine nature with our glorified Lord. We will rest from our labors, yet our works will follow with us. (Rev. 14:13) Our union with our Bridegroom will be for eternity!

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## The Blessed People of God

***“Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O LORD, in the light of thy countenance.”  
—Psalm 89:15***

**THE LORD, THROUGHOUT** his Word, has given expression in many ways to the manner in which he would manifest his blessing toward his faithful people. To his typical people, Israel, who had entered into a covenant with him based upon the Law given at Mt. Sinai, the promise was made—conditional upon their faithfulness—“Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field.

Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store. Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out. ... The Lord shall command the blessing upon thee in thy storehouses, and in all that thou settest thine hand unto; and he shall bless thee in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.”—Deut. 28:3-8

In a promise to those who will enter into the earthly blessings of ‘restitution’ (Acts 3:21), following the ‘time of trouble’ (Dan. 12:1), the promise is given, “Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble. The Lord will preserve him, and keep him alive; and he shall be blessed upon the earth.” (Ps. 41:1,2) Again, to the restitution class who bow in obedience to earth’s new King, the promise is, “Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.”—Ps. 2:12

### PROMISES OF BLESSINGS

To the Lord’s people of the present Gospel Age—the footstep followers of the Master—there are also promises of ‘blessing.’ Many of them, in fact, and a consideration of these beatitudes reveals the wonderful manner in which the Lord is bestowing his favor upon us. This should awaken in us a stronger determination than ever to respond to his goodness with our whole heart, and joyfully to lay down our lives in his service.

David wrote: “Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.” (Ps. 32:1,2) This blessed state in which we become assured that our sins are forgiven, and that our iniquity is not imputed unto us means that we have been favored with a knowledge of the plan of God. This plan tells of the condemnation and fall of man, and of the wonderful provision of redemption through Christ. We have responded to this expression of Divine love by consecrating ourselves fully to do the Lord’s will.

Such a consecration is described by Peter as the “answer of a good conscience toward God.” (I Pet. 3:21) It means that our spirit has been without ‘guile,’ that is, sincere, gladly acknowledging our undone condition and our need for the provision of Divine grace through Christ. It is akin to ‘poorness of spirit,’ as mentioned by Jesus; and concerning those who manifest such a spirit when the truth reaches them, the Master said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”—Matt. 5:3

Jesus outlined a number of other blessings which his faithful followers were to enjoy. He said, “Blessed are they that mourn: [in the sense that Jesus mourned—that is, sympathetically for others] for they shall be comforted [because, in their sympathetic help to others, they themselves are the most richly blessed]. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth [that is, together with Jesus, as ministers of reconciliation, it is their privilege to reconcile all mankind to God, restoring the lost dominion to the blessed of the Father on the human plane]. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness [whose spirit is without guile]: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God [through the glorious vision of truth now, and if faithful even unto death, actually, beyond the veil]. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God, [“and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ.” (Rom. 8:17)] Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”—Matt. 5:4-10

## THE LORD'S COUNTENANCE

Perhaps the most comprehensive of all the 'blessings' which the Scriptures confer upon spiritual Israel is the one mentioned in our text; that is, the blessing of walking in the light of the Lord's countenance. This thought is enlarged in a benediction upon fleshly Israel when Moses said to them: "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace."—Num. 6:24-26

This means that those who are thus blessed are the Lord's favored people, those whom he has taken into his confidence, and to whom he has revealed the "mysteries of the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 13:11) Those who are thus privileged to walk in the light of the Lord's countenance "delight in the Law of the Lord," and to them it is their meditation "day and night." These are the ones of whom the psalmist wrote: "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful."—Ps. 1:1,2

'Blessed' indeed were those living in any age of the Divine plan whom the Lord favored with a knowledge of his will and plan for the time in which they lived. Noah was thus blessed with a knowledge of the coming Flood, and when it came he was instructed how to prepare for his own salvation and that of his family. Moses was taken into the Lord's confidence and blessed with a knowledge of the Divine will for Israel at that time. Each of the holy prophets was blessed with the privilege of walking in the light of the Lord's countenance. John the Baptist was the last of these, and was favored with the great honor of being the forerunner of Jesus.

Jesus enjoyed the inspiring light of his Heavenly Father's smile. In prayer to his Father he said, "I knew that thou hearest me always." (John 11:42) What a blessed assurance this was, and we know that Jesus was not only blessed by the light of his Father's countenance, but also strengthened and guided by it. This enabled him to always do the things which pleased his God.

The apostles and other faithful ones in the Early Church likewise walked in the light of the Lord's countenance, and how they rejoiced in thus being blessed! There was no uncertainty in their minds as to their

standing with the Lord. They knew that they had been called “out of darkness” into his “marvellous light.” (I Pet. 2:9) They knew that the Lord had shined into their hearts by the Gospel, and they accepted this as proof that they were the blessed people of God, and that his favor was upon them. The Lord blessed them “with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places.”—Eph. 1:3

### “THE JOYFUL SOUND”

Our text indicates that those who are privileged to walk in the light of the Lord’s countenance know the ‘joyful sound.’ This expression is symbolic of the Bible’s Gospel theme, “the Gospel of Christ,” which is “the power of God unto salvation.” (Rom. 1:16) It is the inspiring message proclaimed by the angels on the night that Jesus was born, and declared to be “good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.”—Luke 2:10

‘The joyful sound’ which is so ‘blessed’ is the ‘truth.’ But these expressions are used by many people who claim to know what they mean, yet they have widely divergent viewpoints. Many profess to know the glad tidings of salvation, yet insist that God will torture the vast majority of the human race eternally in a burning hell. How can these know the ‘joyful’ sound?

Pilate asked Jesus, “What is truth?” (John 18:38) This question was asked in reply to Jesus’ assertion that he had come into the world to be a king, and to bear witness to the truth. Jesus did not answer Pilate’s question directly, knowing that it was not given to Pilate to understand the mysteries of the kingdom—to know the joyful sound. However, when, in his prayer in the ‘upper room’ the night before his crucifixion, Jesus said to his Father on behalf of his disciples, “Sanctify them through thy truth,” he added the explanation, “thy Word is truth.”—John 17:17

The ‘Word’ of God referred to by Jesus was the Old Testament Scriptures—the only written ‘Word’ then in existence. Later it would include the New Testament Scriptures, for these serve to unlock, to reveal, the true meaning of what had been written by God’s holy prophets. In the Word of God, which Jesus declared to be the truth, there are many details concerning prophecies and promises. There are types and symbolisms. In the study of these, earnest students have reached

various and conflicting conclusions. Is it possible to sort out from these conclusions that which we can confidently call the ‘truth’?

To approach the problem from this standpoint would be an endless task, and would lead only to additional confusion. A better plan is to let God be his own interpreter, for we can depend upon him to make the matter plain to those who are walking in the light of his countenance. We do not mean that God will speak to us audibly, or by special visions, or revelations. This is not necessary, for he has spoken to us through his prophets, and in the New Testament has summarized for us the general meaning of the prophetic testimony.

As all know, there is much detail of expression in the New Testament. In the teachings of Jesus we have parables, prophecies, admonitions, promises, and warnings. The same is true of the apostolic teachings. How are we to glean from all these details that which alone constitutes the great Gospel theme of the Bible—the ‘joyful sound’ by which the true people of God are blessed?

Among all the rich and inspiring details of the New Testament, occasional statements can be found which are in the nature of inspired summaries of what God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets. These summations of the prophetic testimony furnish us with a clear understanding and positive conviction of what constitutes ‘truth.’

## THE SUFFERINGS OF CHRIST

One very comprehensive summary of the prophecies given to us by Peter speaks of “your faith,” and declares it to be “salvation.” (I Pet. 1:9-11) But what does this mean? Peter explains that even the prophets inquired about this, that they searched diligently in an effort to discover when the salvation they wrote about would come to the people.

Peter continues to summarize the testimony of the prophets, saying that “it [the Spirit operating in them] testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.” (vs. 11) Peter says that, in the prophetic testimony concerning the sufferings and the glory of Christ, the prophets recognized an assurance of salvation for the church class. The prophets did not discover when this salvation would be attained by the people of God, but in verses 7 and 13 of this chapter, the apostle explains that it was to be “at the revelation of Jesus Christ”—a definite reference to the time of his Second Advent.

What was it, then, according to Peter's inspired explanation, that the prophets wrote about? Their theme, the 'end' of all their messages, was 'salvation,' and in order for salvation to be available Christ must come, suffer, and die as the world's Redeemer, and afterward enter into 'glory.' All the prophets foretold the coming of a great One who would be called Christ. Messiah is the Hebrew word which means the 'anointed of God,' or one whom God would authorize and empower to accomplish his purpose toward his human creation—to bring salvation.

The Old Testament Scriptures contain many promises and allusions to the coming of such an One. He is variously referred to as the "Seed" of the woman (Gen. 3:15); the "Seed" of Abraham (Gen. 22:18); "Shiloh" (Gen. 49:10); a great "Prophet" (Deut. 18:15,18); a "King" (Ps. 2:6); "The Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6); the "Arm" of the Lord (Isa. 51:9; 52:10; 53:1); "Michael" (Dan. 12:1). This promised One would become the Head of a worldwide government.

Peter's summary of the prophetic testimony assures us that all these references, and the many others of similar nature, pointed forward to the coming of Christ. This is fully in keeping with the angelic message when Jesus was born: "Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."—Luke 2:10,11

Throughout the centuries, God had been promising the coming of this 'Savior' who would bring salvation to Israel and to the world, and now he had actually come. Those who later became disciples of Jesus believed that he was the One whom their prophets had promised, and they had confidence that through him they would obtain salvation. To them his wonderful and authoritative teachings and miracles were convincing evidence of his Divine appointment.

There was nothing especially appealing or inspirational in the prophecies which described the sufferings of Christ, so they were overlooked by the disciples. They had only in mind the 'glory' which the prophecies attached to the Messiah; and in becoming followers of Jesus they looked to him to fulfill these promises.

To the disciples, the promises of Messianic glory had to do with the establishment of a kingdom. They believed, and properly so, that the Messiah would be a great King, and in fulfillment of the prophecies,

would free Israel from the yoke of the Gentiles and establish a kingdom which would extend its sphere of influence to embrace the whole earth, giving health and life to all the obedient of mankind. In all this they were right. What they did not understand was that there were other prophecies which first had to be fulfilled which had foretold the sufferings of Christ. Jesus explained to the two disciples after his resurrection, when, beginning with Moses, and by the testimony of all the prophets, he revealed to them that the ‘glory’ promises must await fulfillment until the foretold sufferings of Christ were finished.—Luke 24:25-27

Probably up to this point many professed Christians would agree, but as we continue to follow Peter’s inspired explanation of the prophecies we begin to diverge from the views of practically all of the Christian world. He explains two points which are recognized and appreciated only by those who know ‘the joyful sound.’ One is that the promised salvation which was to come through Christ would not be attained until his revelation at the Second Advent. The other is that the foretold sufferings of Christ were not finished on Calvary, but continued through the experience of his faithful followers as they walk in his footsteps, laying down their lives in the service of their God.

“ARE YE ABLE?”

The disciples who walked with Jesus in Judea gathered from his teachings that they were to share in his ‘glory,’ and became absorbed with this thought. On one occasion, two of them requested that one be granted the honor of sitting at his right hand; and the other of sitting on his left hand in Jesus’ kingdom. Jesus did not say that this was an improper request. He had come to be a king. He would establish a kingdom. If faithful, they were to share the glory of that kingdom with him. But they did not understand that in order to enter into such heights of glory they must first share in his sufferings. ‘Are ye able to drink of my cup?’ he asked, ‘and to be baptized with my death baptism?’—Mark 10:38

Following Peter’s reference to the foretold sufferings of Christ, we find much in his epistle to show that the followers of Christ share in these sufferings, that they are included in the prophetic testimony of Messianic suffering. “For even hereunto were ye called:” he writes, “because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow in his

steps.” (I Pet 2:21) Paul also stresses this point, saying that it is only if we suffer with Christ that we have the witness of the Spirit that we are the children of God.—Rom. 8:17

Soon after the apostles fell asleep in death this great truth began to be set aside and very nearly lost. The glory concept of the Christian way dominated the aspirations and efforts of the Christian churches, and attempts were made to establish the Messianic kingdom by uniting with civil governments. This was a gross departure from the truth as revealed in the Word of truth. Many professed Christians have since recognized the evils which resulted from this unholy alliance of church and state, but have failed to recapture the true viewpoint of the Christian life which was lost as a result of that great apostasy.

With the loss of the great truth that only after the suffering and death of the body members of the Christ will the glory promises of the Bible be fulfilled, came also other errors. One of the most serious was the inherent immortality of the soul. With this error came the additional wrong teaching that at death every person’s eternal destiny was fixed; that the righteous were immediately rewarded with the joys of heaven, while the unrighteous either entered into purgatorial sufferings to prepare them for heaven, or else into an eternity of torture in a fiery hell.

Thus the work of the church became the preaching of salvation from eternal torture, with the belief that this would continue until some indefinite time in the future when the earth would be destroyed and all the wicked then living would be immediately consigned to torture, and the few remaining righteous whisked off to heavenly glory. While many came to realize that the church-state systems of Europe were not Christ’s kingdom, the whole Christian world is still contaminated with the leaven of error which brought those systems into being. They still believe that so far as human society is concerned the only thing the Lord will ever do for its betterment will be done by them, through moral reform efforts, lobbying, etc.

## TO KNOW THE ‘JOYFUL SOUND’!

How good it is to know that the ‘joyful sound’ of God’s Word includes the blessings for all the world of mankind by God’s power. Isaiah describes Jesus as the “Prince of Peace,” and then says, “Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of

David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever.” And he concludes with the emphatic statement, “The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.”—Isa. 9:7

May glory and honor be given to his holy name!

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## Blameless and Harmless

***“Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; Holding forth the Word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.”***  
**—Philippians 2:14-16**

**IN PHILIPPIANS** 2:12 and 13, the Apostle Paul urges the Philippians to work out their own salvation, and assures the brethren that God was cooperating—working in them to will and to do of his good pleasure. To Paul—who was blessed with such a deep insight into all that is required in the Christian life—‘holding forth the Word of life’ for the blessing of others was part of the Divinely provided means of working out one’s own salvation.

The apostle’s sequence of thought is enlightening. First: “Work out your own salvation.” (vs. 12); then: ‘Do all things without murmurings and disputings.’ (vs. 14); in order ‘That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke’ (vs. 15); ‘holding forth the Word of life.’ (vs.

16) To be blameless, harmless, and without rebuke as we hold forth the Word of life, is of vital importance if our efforts are to contribute to the working out of our own salvation.

### ‘BLAMELESS’

To be blameless is to be devoid of any disposition to do evil. We are not to be controlled by anger, malice, hatred, or strife; and are not to seek vainglory. We should be harmless, not merely from God’s standpoint, or so far as the brethren would see, but so far as possible, harmless in the sight of the world before whom we are to reflect the Gospel light.

We should not compromise the truth in order to please the world, nor should there be anything in our conduct or character to which the world

can point as being evil. Our position should be like that of Daniel, of whom it was said by his enemies, “We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God.”—Dan. 6:5

To be blameless in the sight of God is to have our hearts’ intentions always pure, just, loving, and kind. But this does not mean that the world will approve our course in life. Indeed, we should expect to have opposition from the world. If we have the friendship and approval of the world, then we should seriously question our standing before the Lord. Jesus did not please the world, but those of the world who were not prejudiced against him on account of his teaching found no fault with him. Pilate said, “I have found no cause of death in him [Jesus].”—Luke 23:22

Our concern should be that no just cause for blame be given through our wrongdoing. II Corinthians 6:3 speaks of “giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed.” Paul outlines the manner in which this can be done, saying:

“In all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, ... in labours, in watchings, in fastings; by pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by love unfeigned, By the Word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true; As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; As sorrowful, yet alway rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.”—II Cor. 6:4-10

## HOLD FORTH THE TRUTH

In our text, Paul indicates that we are to hold forth the Word of life amidst ‘a crooked and perverse’ people. This means that we should not refrain from bearing witness to the truth simply because the majority of those with whom we come into contact are not Christians. It will not injure us nor mar the purity of the truth to let it shine in a wicked world. It has been well said that a ship is safe in the ocean as long as the ocean is not in the ship. So it is in our ministry of the truth. We should keep ourselves unspotted from the world, and guard well the purity of the

message we proclaim, making sure that it is not mixed with worldly philosophy. Each Christian who does this will be as a beacon in a dark world of sin and sorrow.

We are not to expect that the world will be converted. It was not converted in Paul's day, and will not be until the kingdom is established. It was a perverse and crooked generation to which Paul preached, and every generation since that time has been the same. 'Perverseness' implies unwillingness to be guided by the Lord. 'Crookedness' is not always a way of open wickedness, but like a crooked line which goes in various directions, it implies a doing of both right and wrong. Amid these conditions we are to let our light shine, showing "forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." (I Pet. 2:9) Paul tells the Philippian brethren that if they would continue doing this, he would be able to look back upon his own ministry and feel that he had not labored in vain. This is a strong statement!

If the love of God fills our hearts, we cannot help telling others about the Gospel. Those who erroneously suppose that all who are not now converted must suffer an eternity of torture are often zealous in proclaiming error. We who know the plan and love of God should not be less zealous simply because we know that the world will not be converted until the next age. We are to let our light shine just the same, for out in the darkness there is one here and one there whom the Lord will reach with the message which we proclaim; and rich will be their blessing, and our blessing.

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