

“Thy Kingdom Come”

***“Thy kingdom
come. Thy will be
done in earth, as it
is in heaven.”***

—Matthew 6:10

JESUS TAUGHT HIS DISCIPLES (and us) to pray for his kingdom to come. In this prayer, as outlined by our Lord in Matthew 6:9-13, he tells us to pray for a kingdom to be established on earth where God’s will is to be done as it is being done in heaven. This, of course, will be in sharp contrast to this present

evil world (Gal. 1:4), still dominating the earthly scene in our time. Christians have been repeating this prayer for centuries without giving much thought, in many cases, to how and when this kingdom will come. The waiting has been so long in time that many years ago some of the early church fathers started to analyze the delay and concluded that the kingdom had come, as represented in the present Christendom, or kingdom of Christianity. Along with this conclusion, many basic teachings of the Bible were altered to make it fit this concept.

THE KINGDOM WITHIN YOU

Christianity, therefore, as it is known by the major portion of the world is a religion that has been adopted by the most prominent nations of the Western world. It teaches that people have immortal souls, and that those people accepting Christianity as a religion will go to heaven. The earthly kingdom became a stopping off place for such en route to heaven. To bolster this concept, the words of Jesus as recorded in Luke 17:21, “The kingdom of God is within you,” are used to show that the goal of Christians is heaven, and is a hope within a person adopting Christianity as a religion. In reality, Jesus said, “God’s Royal Majesty is among you.” (Luke 17:21, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*). He was referring to himself as the king of that kingdom who had come to earth and was among them. The Pharisees had asked him when God’s kingdom should come, and his answer was “The Kingdom of God comes not with outward show; nor shall they say, ‘Behold here! or there!’ for, behold, God’s Royal Majesty is among you.”—Luke 17:20,21, *WED*

On that occasion Jesus certainly could not have meant that the kingdom of God could be within the Pharisees who had asked the question and to whom the answer was directed. Jesus then turned to his disciples and said, “The days will come, when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of man, and ye shall not see it.” (vs. 22) He was telling them that he would leave them, and then for our sake he projected future events of the time intervening to when he would return. Continuing he said, “They shall say to you, See here; or, see there: go not after them, nor follow them.” (vs. 23) This was an allusion to the claims that would be made that the kingdom was in operation. Jesus further explained, “As the lightning [Greek, *astrape*], that lighteneth out of the one part under heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven; so shall also the Son of man be in his day.” (vs. 24) Jesus was referring to the time of his Second Advent when he would shine forth as the Sun of righteousness. (Mal. 4:2) The Greek word *astrape* means ‘bright shining’ and is derived from the Greek word *Aster* which means ‘star.’ As used by Jesus it could refer to the bright shining of the sun as it seems to travel from one part of heaven to the other.

THE DAYS OF THE SON OF MAN

Jesus then explained, “First must he suffer many things [culminating in a cruel death on the cross], and be rejected of this generation.” (Luke 17:25) If the disciples could have understood they would have known that the kingdom would not come in their day, even though the ‘Royal Majesty’ of that kingdom was with them at that time. What followed (vss. 26-29) was the explanation by Jesus that events occurring in the days of Noah, and in the days of Lot, were such that routine matters of life hid from the people’s view an understanding of what was coming. He said that those days, and the lack of comprehension, would be similar to the days when he would return and be present, or, as he stated on that occasion, “Thus shall it be in the day when the Son of man is revealed.” (vs. 30) It is only then that the Royal Majesty of that kingdom will have come to establish his kingdom.

THE NEXT CHRISTENDOM

Today, the concept of Christendom has been retained by Christian nations. Roman Catholics have believed that the millennial kingdom of Christ was fulfilled with the Holy Roman Empire under Charlemagne in

A.D. 800. Protestants have used Luke 17:21 as the scripture to indicate that they can implant the hopes of a Christian to go to heaven. The kingdom of God is thought to be Christendom. With this concept of Christianity a book was recently published entitled, *"The Next Christendom"* by Phillip Jenkins. The book was reviewed in the May 12, 2002 Book Review section of the *New York Times*. It said:

"Mark your calendar. By the year 2050 six nations—Brazil, Mexico, the Philippines, Nigeria, Congo, and the United States—will each have 100 million Christians or more. Sub-Saharan Africa will have long displaced Europe as the leading center of Christianity, while Brazil will count 150 million Catholics and 40 million Protestants. And more than one billion Pentecostals, the poorest of the poor, will be spreading their distinctive brand of Christian supernaturalism.

"Across the Southern Hemisphere a new wave of nondemocratic states with theocratic pretensions, some of them openly repressive, will compete for regional dominance. When they are not fighting among themselves, these Christian regimes will unite against their common foe, Islam. In 2050, almost 20 of the 25 largest nations will be predominantly or entirely Christian or Muslim; at least 10 will be the sites of intense conflict.

"Although Christians will continue to outnumber Muslims, Islam may have the upper hand in the third-world wars. The deciding factor may well be the support provided to oil-producing Muslim regimes by the nations of the industrialized North, whose sentimental attachment to Christianity will be outweighed by economic considerations. Extremists in both religions, meanwhile, will continue to guarantee the absence in the South of women's rights, freedom of worship, and other misbegotten ideas of the secular North, even as Asia and Africa develop significant military capacity, perhaps based on chemical or biological weapons. The coming havoc, in short, will make the bloody religious wars of the sixteenth century look like calisthenics."

Instead of Roman Catholics dominating the Christian world, the review states:

"The new world of the South will not conform to the vision of liberation theology or other movements for radical restructuring in developing nations that many European and American liberals still

cherish. As Jenkins remarks, quoting one writer on Brazilian religion, 'the Catholic Church has chosen the poor, but the poor choose the Pentecostals,' and the choice rankles. Indeed, Pentecostalism does seem to be the wave of the Christian future. Born early in the twentieth century, this Spirit-filled movement, emphasizing the power of personal faith, biblical literalism, visions and prophecy, numbers hundreds of millions of souls in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Its ministers are homegrown products, not seminary-trained missionaries. Apocalyptic visions of extrahistorical justice are more than plausible in societies colored by violence and life-threatening diseases like AIDS. Reliance on faith healers and shamans is also healthier than mounting revolution.

"None of this bodes particularly well for Northern Christians. Black missionaries from the Anglican communities of Africa may be inspired to mount huge missionary crusades to re-evangelize the white, affluent 'pagans' of England. And the Catholic Church, faced with huge losses to the people-friendly Pentecostals and new indigenous churches, might soon regret its policy of robbing Africa and Latin America of their already inadequate supplies of priests to serve the relatively priest-rich United States."

A final assessment of the book says:

"What to make of all this? Statistics are the stock in trade of futurists, and Jenkins adopts the somewhat dubious methods of these secular prophets: he ventures to predict the future by extrapolating current social chaos and catastrophes on roughly the same scale as population is projected to increase. In the case of third-world Christianity and Islam, more is worse."

POPULATION GROWTH

This book is a projection of how Christianity and other religions will fare if matters continue as they are headed according to present trends and population growth. Trouble looms on the horizon strictly based on these trends alone. Bible Students know, however, that God will not permit matters to continue as by present trends, and clearly indicates in prophetic writings that changes must occur.

The original mandate given to Father Adam was to multiply and fill the earth. (Gen. 1:28) The King James translators used the word "replenish" which is a wrong translation. The earth was not populated

before. Population started with Adam and Eve. As earth's population grew, concerns started to arise. Prominent among these was the projections made by Thomas Malthus (1798) that poverty and stress would be unavoidable because population was growing by a geometric ratio (rising rapidly) and the means of subsistence by an arithmetic ratio (in a straight line). Worldwide disaster was predicted because factors such as war and disease for slowing population growth would not be enough to do so.

The Industrial Revolution and the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy that in "the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased," (Dan. 12:4) were unforeseen by Malthus. The inventions and increased knowledge have made possible a growth beyond the Malthusian projections. Today, everyone does not benefit from these inventions and selfishness continues to hinder their application. Periodically, scientists look at population growth and predict disaster. In their eyes, the earth is already overfilled. When will the earth be filled? There are signs that it must be at hand.

GOD'S PROGRAM

The Bible message reveals that the first step to be taken toward stabilizing earth's society is the displacement of the old order on earth with a "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." (II Peter 3:13) These are symbolic terms describing new spiritual rulers and a social order to be established upon earth. It is under this new arrangement that God's kingdom comes as we have been taught to pray. We believe that procreation will cease as explained by Jesus in Matt. 22:23-32, because the earth will be filled. Procreation was a special gift from God designed to fill the earth with human beings. Its termination will coincide with the establishment of Christ's kingdom of righteousness on earth.

Then, the program of bringing back all those who have died will begin. Jesus said, "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment." (John 5:28,29, *Revised Standard Version*) The earth will be comfortably filled when all these in reality come back from the dead.

THE BIBLE MESSAGE

The attraction that Pentecostalism has had to the poor, with its offer of Divine healing and God's blessing, is to be realized. Such will be actually provided as the real benefits of the kingdom. The wonderful examples of healing works that Jesus performed during his earthly ministry will become the rule for everyone as Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled. (Isa. 35:1-10) The elimination of poverty, distress, hunger, malnutrition, and insecurity will be the hallmarks of that kingdom. (Isa. 11:1-9) Many beautiful prophecies concerning that kingdom will be fulfilled. As we look at the title of the book that was just issued, "*The Next Christendom*," we could almost say this could be the title of the Bible, if Christendom only didn't have the association with the present imperfect Christian nations of earth. The Bible's message is all about a kingdom to come.

A prophecy to be fulfilled says, "It shall come to pass in the last days [our time], that the mountain [kingdom] of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains [all the kingdoms of earth], and shall be exalted above the hills [over every other authority on earth]; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain [kingdom] of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion [the new heavens, the new spiritual rulers, the Christ head and body] shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem [the earthly phase of the kingdom under the Ancient Worthies]." (Isa. 2:2,3) The need for different religions will disappear as all people will want to learn the new religion as defined by the law and Word of the Lord.

After centuries of learning the wrong precepts and ways of false religion, this will not come easily. The prophecy continues by saying, "He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people." (vs. 4) They will be quick to learn the right way and all the misguided concepts of false religion will be discarded. The climax to learning the correct religious life to follow comes when the prophet states, "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." (vs. 4) The unlearning of all the false religious doctrines will include unlearning warfare. Wars between Christian nations have been a

blight on the name of Christianity. The Royal Majesty of that kingdom, the Prince of Peace, will make certain that peace will prevail. How eagerly we await the fulfillment of that prayer, “Thy kingdom come.” May we with more fervor and thanksgiving continue to pray for it.

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Facing the End

Key Verse: “The LORD God of their fathers sent to them by his messengers, rising up betimes, and sending; because he had compassion on his people, and on his dwelling place: But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against his people, till there was no remedy.” —II Chronicles 36:15,16

***Selected Scripture:
II Chronicles 36:11-21***

of the heathen; and polluted the house of the Lord which he had hallowed in Jerusalem.” (vs. 14) Their unfaithfulness took the form of the worship of idols, which occurred even in the Temple itself. Meanwhile, God sought to get the people to turn back by sending ‘messengers,’ prophets like Jeremiah and Habakkuk. The people, however, refused to listen. ‘They mocked the messengers of God, and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy.’ (vs. 16) The result of having no remedy for the sins of the nation proved to be destruction.

THIS LESSON IS AN EXAMPLE of the outcome when one rejects God’s Word. When Zedekiah became the last king in Jerusalem, “he did evil in the eyes of the Lord.” (Jer. 52:2) He didn’t humble himself before the Prophet Jeremiah who spoke from the mouth of the Lord. He refused to heed the prophet’s word to surrender to the Babylonians’ invading army. (Jer. 27:1-12) Further, when King Nebuchadnezzar, made him take an oath in God’s name, “he stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart from turning unto the Lord God of Israel.” (II Chron. 36:13) He kept looking for human ways to solve the problem by resisting the Babylonians. As Jeremiah had warned, such opposition was fruitless and against God’s desires.—vss. 6-12

“Moreover all the chief of the priests, and the people, transgressed very much after all the abominations

“He brought upon them [Israel] the king of the Chaldees, who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion upon young man or maiden, old man, or him that stooped for age: he gave them all into his hand.” (vs. 17) The treasures of the house of the Lord were taken to Babylon, and the Temple and Jerusalem were destroyed.—vss. 17-19

This account is also recorded in II Kings, chapters twenty-four and twenty-five in much greater detail, but the Lord’s message warned that if the people were to turn away from God and serve other gods, exile and destruction of the Temple would be the result. Nebuchadnezzar tried controlling Israel as a vassal state when Jehoiakim was king and when his son Jehoiachin reigned after him. Both rebelled and were deposed. We read, “And the king of Babylon made Mattaniah, Jehoiachin’s uncle, king in his stead and changed his name to Zedekiah.” (II Kings 24:17, *Revised Standard Version*) Zedekiah served as a puppet king, but he too rebelled and brought on the destruction described in this lesson.

It is possible for the Lord’s people to fall into this same tragedy today if they were to follow Zedekiah’s example of doing evil in the eyes of the Lord. Let us never experience those dreadful consequences as did Israel. Let us hear God’s call to turn back to him, and quickly respond.

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Hope Born Out of Despair

Key Verse: “It is of the LORD’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.” —Lamentations 3:22,23

Selected Scripture: Lamentations 1:12-16; 3:22-24, 31-33

IN THE SEPTUAGINT VERSION of the Bible, the book of Lamentations is introduced with the words: “It came to pass, after Israel was taken captive, and Jerusalem made desolate, that Jeremias sat weeping, and lamented with this lamentation over Jerusalem.” Each of its five poetic chapters largely laments over the calamities which had come upon Israel when taken captive to Babylon. He recognized that the nation was merely experiencing its just punishment for sins. The prophet maintained his trust in the Lord, recognizing that in him was the only

source of hope. He thus expressed his confidence that deliverance would eventually come to Israel.

The first lament (ch. 1) expresses Jeremiah’s sorrow over the condition of the city of Jerusalem, suffering for its great sin and resultant tragic course of events. At one time the city was a place looked up to, bustling with life, served by surrounding nations. Now, the city is like a widow left alone and rejected. (vs. 1) The suffering has come because of “the multitude of her transgressions.” (vs. 5) Jerusalem has sinned so horribly and she is now despised by those who once honored her. The people search for food and barter for it to keep alive.—vs. 11

Jerusalem, personified, takes up her own lament, asking, “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?” (vs. 12) She says, for all these things I’m weeping and tears run down my cheeks. Her comforter, the one who alone could help her is far away. (vs. 16) She said, the Lord is right, we rebelled and are now deserted by all. I begged my allies for their help, but they betrayed me. I then asked the Lord to punish my enemies as he has punished his own people.—vss. 18-22

The third lamentation begins with the prophet Jeremiah recounting the many ways in which God had brought punishment upon him personally during the terrible experience of national and personal destruction. He says, “I ... [have] seen affliction by the rod of his wrath. ... he turneth his hand against me ... he hath broken my bones. ... Also when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer.” (Lam. 3:1-8) He remembers the hope he still has in the Lord. “Remembering mine affliction and my misery, ... My soul hath them still in remembrance, and is humbled in me. This I recall to my mind, therefore have I hope.” (vss. 19-21) Then Jeremiah was reminded of the prophecy he spoke to Jacob when the Lord said to him, “I am with thee, saith the Lord, to save thee: though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee: but I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished.” (Jer. 30:11) So he writes, “It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness. The Lord is my portion, saith my soul; therefore will I hope in him. The Lord is good unto them that wait for him, to the soul that seeketh him. It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the Lord.”—vss. 22-26

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Transformation Required

Key Verse: “Every living soul belongs to me, the father as well as the son—both alike belong to me. The soul who sins is the one who will die.”

***—Ezekiel 18:4,
New International
Version***

***Selected Scripture:
Ezekiel 18:1-4, 20, 21,
25-32***

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER of Ezekiel relates especially to the time when the Adamic transgression will be offset by the New Covenant. The Prophet Ezekiel said, “The word of the Lord came to me: “What do you people mean by quoting this proverb about the land of Israel: ‘The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge’? As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, you will no longer quote this proverb in Israel. For every living soul belongs to me, the father as well as the son—both alike belong to me. The soul who sins is the one who will die.” (Ezek. 18:1-4, *NIV*) It is evident

that today, the fathers eating ‘sour grapes’ has the children’s teeth ‘set on edge.’ The law of heredity still rules and mankind continues to die because of Adam’s sin. What did he mean, no more occasion to use this proverb? Why did he make such a contrary statement?

The Apostle Paul gives us the answer. He said, “As sin entered the world through one man [Adam], and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned— ... the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!”—Rom. 5:12,15, *NIV*

It is evident that this time has not yet come. The children still have their teeth set on edge by reason of the sour grapes of sin which their fathers have eaten; man is still under the law of heredity, and all still die for Adam’s sin and not for individual sin. Christ’s atonement, secured through the merit of his sacrifice on Calvary, will accomplish the

transformation which will bring the restitution blessings of the future thousand-year kingdom to the world of mankind.

Jeremiah furnishes a more detailed account pointing to the future kingdom. “The time is coming,” declares the Lord, “when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,” declares the Lord. “This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the Lord. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, ... For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”—Jer. 31:31-34, *NIV*

Thus will end the law of heredity. No longer will it be possible for children to blame their parents for inheriting fallen and evil ways. Instead, everyone will have God’s law written in their hearts. This is another way of saying that God will give every man a perfect body, capable of living righteously.

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Restoration Complete

Key Verse: “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.”

—Ezekiel 36:26

Selected Scripture:

Ezekiel 36:22-32

WHEN THE PEOPLE OF Israel were living in their own country, they defiled it by their evil deeds. They polluted the land with idols and God exercised his wrath on them, pouring out his fury by scattering them among the nations. (Ezek. 36:16-19) “When they entered unto the heathen, whither they went, they profaned my holy name, when they said to them, These are the people of the Lord, and are gone forth out of his land. But I had pity for mine holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the heathen, whither they went.”—vss. 20,21

Because Israel had disgraced God’s name, he said, even though they didn’t deserve it, his proposal was to take them back home again from their exile to bring honor to his name among the nations. In symbolic words he told them, “Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.—Ezek. 36:25-28

Some time later “the hand of the Lord” carried Ezekiel in the “spirit of the Lord,” and set him “down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones.” (Ezek. 37:1) God questioned the prophet, “Can these bones live?” to which he responded, “O Lord God, thou knowest.” (vs. 3) God commanded Ezekiel to prophesy to the dry bones to come together, and finally, “the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them.” (vs. 8) So Ezekiel

prophesied as God commanded “and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army.”—vs. 10

Again, a message from the Lord came to the prophet instructing him to take a stick and write upon it, “For Judah”; take another stick and write upon it, “For Joseph [Israel].” “Join them one to another into one stick; ... Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, ... and bring them into their own land: And I will make them one nation ... and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, ... Neither shall they defile themselves any more, ... wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them: so shall they be my people, and I will be their God.”—vss. 16-23

We are now seeing the fulfillment of these prophecies step by step. The opportunity to buy and own land in Palestine was made possible in 1878. The Rothschilds bought land and the new Zionist organization offered free land to anyone willing to come back and settle it. This was in fulfillment of Jeremiah 32:43,44. At that time control of this land was by Turkey of the Ottoman Empire. This endured until World War I. The League of Nations then gave a mandate to Great Britain to supervise the land until 1948, when the United Nations divided the land and the nation of Israel was born. No longer are they to be pulled out of this land.—Amos 9:15

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Titus, Philemon, Hebrews

PAUL'S EPISTLE TO Titus, like his two letters to Timothy, was addressed to one of his companions in the ministry and, also like his letters to Timothy, may properly be referred to as a pastoral letter. Its chief theme is designed to instruct Titus in the qualifications and duties of a servant or teacher in the church.

Titus is also referred to by Paul as his “son” in the faith, indicating that it was directly through Paul’s ministry that this young man heard the Gospel and devoted his life to the service of God. To this “son after the common faith,” Paul extended Christian greetings: “Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour.” (ch. 1:4) In verse five of the first chapter, Paul informs Titus that he had left him in Crete to “set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city.” Then he outlines for him the qualifications of those to be appointed, as follows: A bishop (or elder) must “be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly. For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.”—ch. 1:6-9

In this epistle, as in many other places in the New Testament, the real hope of the church is kept before the reader, emphasizing that Christianity is not merely a way of life, or just a moral philosophy, but the great plan of God for the redemption and recovery of a lost world, through the Messiah, the Christ. Christ had already come to redeem the world. He had returned to heaven, but would come again at his Second Advent, and then the glorious plan of God would be consummated. Paul wrote about this saying, “Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. These things speak,

and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.”—ch. 2:13-15

The ‘peculiar people’ referred to here are those who are being called out from the world through the power of the Gospel, and invited to suffer and to die with Jesus, promised that if they are faithful in this they will live and reign with him. This has been the work of the Gospel Age. With this fully accomplished, the ‘good works’ of God, his design to bless all the families of the earth through Christ and his church, will be effected.

PAUL’S LETTER TO PHILEMON

Paul’s letter to Philemon reveals one of the greatest human interest stories to be found anywhere in the Bible. Philemon was one of the Christian brethren in Colosse. He was an owner of slaves which was common in those days. The fact that the apostles seemingly did nothing to correct this evil which had fastened itself upon human society would indicate that they did not understand it to be the Christian’s work, while in the flesh, to reform the world. But Paul loved slaves who were Christians, even as he loved their masters.

One of Philemon’s slaves ran away from him, and went to Rome. This was during Paul’s imprisonment in Rome. This slave, Onesimus, probably had become acquainted with the apostle while he was being entertained at the home of Philemon, and he contacted Paul in Rome. Since Paul was a prisoner, it is obvious that Onesimus elected to see Paul of his own free will. What his motive was, we do not know. However, he must have remembered the apostle favorably, and perhaps also had been impressed by the Gospel which he heard Paul preach in the home of his master.

As a result of getting in touch with Paul in Rome, this slave accepted the Gospel and became a Christian. This presented a problem for Paul, and also for Onesimus and Philemon, his master from whom he had escaped. Paul meets the situation by persuading Onesimus to return to Philemon, and to ask his forgiveness for the wrong done.

To help bring about a genuine and Christlike reconciliation, Paul wrote a letter to Philemon and gave it to Onesimus to deliver when he returned to his former master. It was a difficult situation, but Paul rose nobly to the occasion, manifesting loving tact and consideration for both master

and slave. We do not know what the result was, but we may assume that the reconciliation was complete, and that all rejoiced together in the Lord.

THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

The Book of Hebrews is the last of Paul's letters recorded in the New Testament. While it is addressed to the Hebrew Christians, it seems likely that it was intended for some particular group, or ecclesia of Jewish converts, rather than all Jews who had accepted Christ. The tendency toward lack of full faith and zeal on the part of those to whom the epistle was addressed could hardly be true of all the Jewish converts of Paul's day.

This fact concerning the spiritual condition of those to whom the letter was written reveals Paul's motive in writing the letter, and helps to add greater meaning to many things which he writes. First, we will quote a few texts from the letter which indicate this background of thought:

"We ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip."—ch. 2:1

"Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God."—ch. 3:12

"Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it."—ch. 4:1

"When for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat."—ch. 5:12

"Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised.)"—ch. 10:23

"Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds."—ch. 12:3

"See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven."—ch. 12:25

Since the letter was written to strengthen the faith of Jewish believers, he used language, logic, and scriptures with which they would be particularly familiar. He assures them that the God who spoke to their

fathers through the prophets had now, “in these last days,” spoken unto them through his Son, Christ Jesus.—ch. 1:1,2

Throughout much of the first chapter Paul endeavors to enhance the reader’s appreciation of the high position of authority occupied by the beloved Son of God through whom he now speaks to his people. He mentions the honorable position of the angels in the arrangements of God, and shows that Jesus was highly exalted above these—“anointed ... with the oil of gladness” above his “fellows.” (ch. 1:9) It is because of the high authority vested in Jesus, through whom his Father speaks to us, that we should give ‘more earnest heed’ to the things we have heard.—ch. 2:1

Perhaps the trials and sufferings of the Christian way were weakening the faith and cooling the zeal of the Hebrew Christians. In the second chapter Paul explains that it is God’s purpose to bring “many sons unto glory” (vs. 10), even as he had exalted his beloved Son Jesus to glory. He explains that for Jesus the path to glory was one of suffering, and implies that the same is true of the ‘many sons’ who will be joint-heirs with him in glory.

In the third chapter Paul reveals that in our association with Jesus we are members of a priesthood of which he is the “Apostle and High Priest.” (vs. 1) One of the chief works of a priest is to offer sacrifice, so by explaining this viewpoint of the Christian life Paul is again reminding the Christian that he must expect to suffer; for in this age God’s priests do not offer animals in sacrifice as they did in the Jewish Age, but instead, offer themselves. (See Rom. 12:1)

In the third chapter Paul again dips into the experiences of natural Israel to get a lesson of warning for those who are members of the Gospel Age ‘house of sons.’ He reminds the reader—and the Jewish believers to whom the letter was first written—that the Israelites failed to enter into rest, but instead continued to wander in the wilderness for forty years, all because of their unbelief.

The fourth chapter enlarges upon this thought of “rest” for the people of God. “We which have believed do enter into rest,” he says. (vs. 3) And then in the tenth verse he writes, “He that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.” Earlier in the chapter Paul speaks of the rest into which God entered, following the

work of Creation, and he explains that now believers are resting in the same way. In other words, God is allowing Christ to accomplish his purposes toward the human race, and we, too, are trusting in the finished work of Christ.

Having introduced Jesus in the opening chapter as the exalted mouthpiece of the Heavenly Father, Paul continues to emphasize the truly high position the beloved Son of God occupies in the Divine plan, and how much, therefore, he should mean to us. In the closing verses of the sixth chapter, he reminds us of the promise God made to Abraham, and of the sealing of that promise by his oath. Then Paul tells us that this hope is centered in the oath-bound covenant with Abraham. We quote:

“When God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an High Priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.”—vss.13-20

The Jews were familiar with the Aaronic order of priesthood, but the idea that Melchisedec, who predated Aaron by many centuries, was a recognized priest of God who foreshadowed Christ, was ‘strong’ meat for the Hebrew Christians. Not strong in the sense of being complex or difficult to understand, but from the standpoint that it put a severe test upon their faith.

Actually it is one of the simplest, and also most beautiful, symbols found in the Bible. Melchisedec, unlike Aaron, was both a priest and a king. The subjects over whom he ruled also brought their sacrifices to him. Thus he was a type of the combined offices of priest and king as they will function in Christ during the thousand years of his reign.

God dealt with the Jewish nation through the Law Covenant which he made with them at Mt. Sinai, Moses serving as mediator. They broke this covenant, and through the Prophet Jeremiah (ch. 31:31-34) God promised to make a “new covenant” with them. In the eighth chapter of Hebrews Paul mentions this New Covenant. He explains that Jesus is its servant, or Mediator.

Paul cites this as evidence that Jesus came to fulfill the promises which God had made to Israel, not to set them aside. In this chapter he does not go into detail concerning the ‘ministry’ of this covenant as he does in II Corinthians, chapter three, where he explains that the followers of Jesus are also “able ministers” of this New Covenant in association with Jesus. This means that the New Covenant is now being made only in the sense that its ‘ministers’ are being chosen from this world and prepared for the great future work of administering the laws of the covenant.

In the ninth chapter Paul uses an illustration that would mean much to a Jewish Christian; namely, the Tabernacle of the wilderness. The services of that Tabernacle, particularly the Day of Atonement service held each year, pointed forward to the sacrificial work of this age. Jesus offered himself once for all, and through the merit of his blood his followers are able to offer themselves in sacrifice, “holy, acceptable unto God.”—Rom. 12:1

The lesson is presented at least partially for the purpose of explaining to these Hebrew Christians why they were suffering—that it was because the age of kingdom glory and covenant glory had not yet begun; that now the ministry of the covenant was one of sacrifice; and that not until the Second Advent will Jesus “appear” to give the salvation promised through the New Covenant and through the kingdom.—ch. 9:28

Throughout the opening verses of chapter ten Paul continues the lesson of type and antitype; and in verse twenty-two he makes his practical application to Christian faith and steadfastness. “Let us draw near” to God, “with a true heart in full assurance of faith,” he writes. “Let us consider one another,” he continues in verse twenty-four, “to provoke unto love and to good works.”

Verses twenty-six and twenty-seven of this tenth chapter are a timely warning to all Christians, and also reveal an important fact of the Divine plan. They read: “If we sin wilfully after that we have received a

knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.”

While this passage indicates the possibility of one losing the favor of God and going into what the Bible calls the ‘second death,’ it distinctly shows that this can happen only to those who first of all have received a knowledge of the Truth. In other words, it is descriptive of willful sin against God, knowing all the circumstances involved.

The statement in verse thirty-one, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God,” is not a threat of eternal torture; it is merely a reminder that those who sin willfully after coming into Christ no longer can claim the covering of his robe of righteousness. Therefore, they have nothing to protect them against the sentence of death which is the wages of sin. None of humanity can stand before God and meet the requirements of his perfect law in their own righteousness.

The last five verses of this tenth chapter encourage a patient waiting on the Lord, and emphasize again that the glorious fruition of Christian hope is at the return of Christ. Paul said that it would be only a “little while” from his day until Christ did come. This expresses God’s viewpoint of time. With him a thousand years are as one day, “and as a watch in the night” when it is past.—Ps. 90:4

The entire eleventh chapter is devoted to a lesson on faith in which Paul cites the faithfulness of many Old Testament characters, and their fidelity to God and to his promises. It is one of the most magnificent chapters of the Bible. In the opening of the twelfth chapter he refers to the characters he has presented to the reader in the eleventh chapter, and speaks of them as a “cloud of witnesses” with which the Christian is “compassed about.”

Paul then cites the greatest of all examples of faithfulness, even Jesus, the “author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” He then admonishes us to “consider” Jesus. The Greek word here translated ‘consider’ more literally means, ‘make a comparison with.’—vss. 2,3

Paul wanted the Hebrew Christians to whom he wrote this letter to realize that regardless of the extent to which they had suffered as a result

of their stand for Christ, they had not endured nearly as much as their Leader had. “Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin,” he reminded them.—vs. 4

In this chapter Paul also explains that some of their suffering may have been in the nature of chastenings from the Lord. But this, he explained, they should accept as an evidence of Divine love, “for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth.”—vs. 6

He speaks of Esau, who sold his birthright for a mess of pottage, and admonishes us to keep “looking diligently” lest we be like that “profane person.”—vss. 15,16

Beginning with verse eighteen, and on to the end of this twelfth chapter, Paul uses another very powerful method of exhortation; namely, presenting to the reader some of the glorious things in prospect for those who cannot be shaken away from their faith and their faithfulness. To do this, he refers once more to the type—to the time when the Law was given on Mt. Sinai.

Paul likens what happened back there to what will occur in connection with the inauguration of the New Covenant. The shaking mountain, the fire, the trumpets at that time, were symbolic of a worldwide social upheaval which occurs in conjunction with the inauguration of the New Covenant and the establishment of the kingdom.

According to the Greek text, Paul said that we are ‘approaching unto’ this antitypical scene. That was true of the Early Church, and it has been true of the brethren all down through the age—the “little while” of waiting of which Paul speaks. (ch. 10:37) It is still true of all who have not yet made their calling and election sure.

Paul speaks of the antitypical mountain to which we are approaching as “mount Sion,” and he says that we are also approaching unto “the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.”—vss. 22-24

This is a glorious prospect, and should stimulate all the Lord’s people to greater faithfulness in their service to God. Paul sums the matter up in

verse twenty-eight, saying, “Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.”

One of the important lessons set forth in the closing chapter of this epistle, which in the first instance was written to Hebrew Christians, is found in verses ten to thirteen. In these verses the apostle reminds us of the typical Day of Atonement service in which a bullock and a goat were sacrificed, their blood sprinkled upon the mercy seat in the Most Holy of the Tabernacle, for sin, and their bodies burned without the camp of Israel.

Paul indicates clearly that the followers of Jesus participate antitypically in those sacrifices. It is clear that the bullock in that typical ceremony pointed forward to Jesus, and that the goat was typical of his followers, those who would be members of his body, his church. Just as Jesus suffered and died outside of the “camp” (ch. 13:11), that is, because he was rejected by the world and cast off, so it is our privilege to suffer in the same way. Paul says, “Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.”—vs. 13

Thus did the apostle, in the concluding chapter of his letter, point out to these Hebrews that their suffering was no cause for discouragement, but rather the reverse, for it indicated that they were having the privilege of suffering with Christ, the Captain of their salvation; that they were being prepared for glory in the same manner that he was, and that this was God’s will for them. It is likewise God’s will for all who have taken up their cross to follow the Master.

Dawn Bible Students Association

“Always for All Things”

***“Giving thanks
always for all things
unto God and the
Father in the name of
our Lord Jesus
Christ.”
—Ephesians 5:20***

DAVID WROTE THAT IT “is a good thing to give thanks unto the Lord.” (Ps. 92:1) The psalmist mentions one of the reasons for this, saying, “Thou, Lord, hast made me glad through thy work: I will triumph in the works of thy hands. O Lord, how great are thy works! and thy thoughts are very deep.” (Ps. 92:4,5) In America, through the official proclamation of the President, a day is set aside in November

in which the people are called upon to give thanks to God for the blessings of the year. Originally it was observed particularly as a harvest thanksgiving, in which the Lord was acknowledged and praised for providing temporal food and clothing.

RECOGNITION OF GOD

While the Founding Fathers of the United States attempted, through the Constitution, to safeguard the country against the evils of the union of church and state, this day of national thanksgiving to God was intended to keep before the people the fact that there is a higher power. This authority is much greater than that invested in the lawmaking agencies in the national capital. He is a great Creator and Provider to whom Paul refers as the One in whom “we live, and move, and have our being.” (Acts 17:28) The brethren in America today feel that one of their great causes for thanksgiving is the fact that in the Lord’s providence it is their lot to live in a country where religious freedom is allowed.

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY

Brethren in many other countries also enjoy the liberty of worship and Divine service, and for a similar reason. In countries where atheism has predominated, brethren have been denied the right to worship and serve their God. The ascendancy of atheism in many parts of the world was one of the ‘signs of the times,’ one of the evidences of the ‘last days’ in which we are living. Even this has changed. We can be patient with atheism and

other forms of pagan worship knowing that these are but a passing phase in world events which is helping to prepare the people for the time now near when all will “know the Lord” (Jer. 31:34), when every creature, in heaven and in the earth will be saying, “Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever.”—Rev. 5:13

One of the greatest causes of atheism is the mass of distorted conceptions of God which have come down to our day and were incorporated in the creeds during the Dark Ages. Progress toward Truth is often accompanied by a swinging of the pendulum of thought from one extreme to another. Thinking minds, freed from the fetters of bondage imposed by the church-state governments of Europe, naturally rebelled against the idea that a God of love would torment his enemies forever in a hell of fire and brimstone. Many, in reaching this conclusion, went still further and decided that there is no God at all, no higher power to which human beings owe allegiance. But how glad these will be when, through the agencies of the Messianic kingdom, the true God of the Bible is revealed to them!

It is in this fact, and in the many ‘thoughts’ of God associated with it, as revealed to us through his Word, that the Lord’s people all over the world this November, and at all times, find their greatest cause for thankfulness. Like all who recognize God as the great Provider, we are thankful for the material blessings of life, whether we have enjoyed them sparsely or in abundance. How much more thankful we are that the Lord has opened the eyes of our understanding to behold and understand the “works” of his hands—those ‘works’ which have been known to the Lord “from the beginning of the world”: his glorious Divine “plan of the ages.”—Acts 15:18; Eph. 3:11, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*

It is in these works that we triumph. Looking back over the times past of our lives, before the Lord “inclined” unto us, heard our “cry” of despair, lifted us out of the “miry clay” and set our “feet upon a rock,” we are reminded of how miserable was our lot. As the psalmist states, the Lord has “established” our “goings,” and has put “a new song” in our mouths, even the “lovingkindness” of our God. (Ps. 40:1-3; 63:3) Being drawn to the Lord, and having dedicated our lives to his service, his works have now become our works, for we are colaborers with him. Since his works cannot fail, we are triumphant in them.

THANKFUL IN THE WORLD

Many are the assurances given in the Word that God's purposes toward the church and the world will not, and cannot, fail. Being confident of this, the works of the Lord give us great cause for thankfulness on behalf of the whole world of mankind, for we know that in the Divine plan a wonderful provision has been made to bless humankind with lasting peace, joy, and life. We know that rivers of blood will continue to flow as selfishness causes man's inhumanity to man to manifest itself in wars, terrorist attacks and other hideous atrocities. The Lord will cause the "river of water of life" to proceed "out of the throne of God and of the Lamb," that 'river' on either side of which there are the trees of life, bearing life-giving fruit, the leaves of which are "for the healing of the nations."—Rev. 22:1,2

In the world today, it is only a minority who enjoy anything approaching an abundant life, made comfortable and rich with material blessings. These will have cause for thankfulness that in this respect their lot has fallen in pleasant places. But how temporary is this lot! In today's world in which seventy-five per cent of the people are living on subnormal rations—and largely because of this—there is seething unrest. The turbulent, under-privileged masses storm the bulwarks of a dying civilization, insisting that they be given their fair share of the earth's bounties. There can be little assurance that those who have been well fed will have their happy lot continued.

The world's cause for thanksgiving rests on a flimsy foundation, but not so our hope for mankind. The Lord in his abundant mercy has revealed his works to us, and we can say to the world that soon the Lord will "make unto all people a feast of fat things,"—not a literal feast, necessarily, but a satisfying of the legitimate desires of the human heart. (Isa. 25:6) Because we know that this is in store for mankind, we like to think of the time when there will be a worldwide thanksgiving day. The Prophet David suggests this when he says, "Let the nations be glad and sing for joy: for thou shalt judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon earth. Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee. Then shall the earth yield her increase; and God, even our own God, shall bless us." (Ps. 67:4-6) How thankful we are for the time now so near when the Lord will 'govern the nations upon earth.' Then they will have genuine cause for thankfulness.

OUR THANKFULNESS

It is fortunate for the human family that even under present difficult conditions so many are able to find cause for thankfulness. There is another side to human experience, however, one which the Apostle Paul refers to when he says that the whole creation “groaneth and travaileth” while waiting for the “manifestation of the sons of God.” (Rom. 8:22,19) “Now are we the sons of God,” John wrote. (I John 3:1-3) If we prove faithful to the terms of our calling we will be blessed when the manifestation of the sons of God takes place and we are associated with our Lord in extending to the groaning creation the rich blessings of the kingdom.

Of Jesus it is written that for the “joy that was set before him [he] endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Heb. 12:2) It is essential to our victory that we also keep before us the future joys of participating with Jesus in the blessing of all the families of the earth. This is a prospect which is indeed transporting, one which is always, and at all times, a great cause for thanksgiving.

When we think of our call to joint-heirship with Jesus in those future joys of the kingdom, the works of God become of deep personal concern to us. Paul refers to these works—the Divine plan of the ages—as God’s ‘purpose,’ and speaks of our being “called according to his purpose.” This alone is an outstanding cause for thankfulness, but in addition the apostle adds that to those who love God and are thus called according to his purpose, “all things work together for good.” (Rom. 8:28) Paul wrote, in our text, that we should give thanks ‘always,’ and for ‘all things.’ The assurance that all things work together for our good because we are called according to God’s purpose, is simply another way of saying that we triumph in the Lord’s works.

GOD’S CARE FOR US

We should always endeavor to think of the Lord, and of our participation in his works in connection with our everyday affairs. Our relationship to him and to his purpose should be more than a beautiful and inspiring theme for which we can always be thankful. The Lord takes a personal interest in our every experience—our joys, sorrows, trials, and problems. To illustrate, Jesus spoke of the very hairs of our heads being

numbered. Knowing this, we should delight, as the poet expressed it, to thank the Lord “for the sunshine and the rain,” and also “for the sorrow and the pain.”

David said that the thoughts of God toward us are very deep. The fact that he thinks of us at all is beyond comprehension. But it is true! David wrote, “How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God! how great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with thee.”—Ps. 139:17,18

How wonderful that the great God of the universe should think of us as individuals! He has recorded his thoughts so that we may know what he thinks. We realize from what he has recorded in his Word that he knows all about us. He knows our every weakness and imperfection. “He knoweth our frame;” and remembers that we are but “dust,” yet he assures us of his love.—Ps. 103:14

God has thought of every experience that has ever, or ever will, come into our lives—every joy, vexation, emergency—and has told us in his Word what he thinks about them all. He has assured us that he will share our joys, strengthen us in trial, guide us by his wisdom, protect us from harm, and that he will give his angels charge over us to keep us in “all” our ways. (Ps. 91:11) Paul wrote confidently that ‘all things work together for good’ to those who love the Lord, and are “called according to his purpose.”—Rom. 8:28

THE VICTORY OF FAITH

The Lord wants us to accept these many promises and realize that they actually apply to us as individuals, and not merely to others whom he has called. David said that because of the many thoughts of God toward him, when he awoke the Lord was still with him. At the beginning of each new day, David realized that the presence of the Lord was with him even as it had been the day before. So it is with each one of the David class at the present time.

Am I as fully aware as I should be that the Lord is with me today—in the kitchen, in the workshop, in the factory, in the office? Do I realize that each joy I experience is an occasion to lift my heart to him in thanksgiving for his goodness? Do I have the assurance that in my every trial I can go to him for strength; that when I need guidance I can ask him for wisdom; that when I fail he wants me to ask his forgiveness?

Do I realize as fully as I might that the Lord is especially blessing my every effort to show forth his praises? When I distribute tracts bearing a message of the glorious Gospel of the kingdom, do I do it simply because I feel it is a duty, or is it an experience of sacred joy in the thought of having a share in helping someone else to know a little more about my Heavenly Father, and his loving plan of salvation for all mankind?

God promised his servant Moses that his “presence” would go with him. (Exod. 33:14) We can apply that same promise to ourselves. If we do, it will mean that we are enjoying the sacred companionship of our God as we colabor with him in that glorious partnership in which, as “ambassadors for Christ,” we have been given the “ministry of reconciliation.” (II Cor. 5:18-20) It matters not what particular part the Lord, in his wisdom, has permitted us to have in his work. The principal thing is that we have been invited to work in his vineyard, ‘called according to his purpose,’ and that being employed by him, we can be assured that all things are working together for our good. Thus, whether we labor directly or indirectly in his service, we see in every experience a cause for thanksgiving—not merely on one day of the year, but every day, or as the apostle says in our text, always.

THE GENERAL WORK

From the standpoint of the vineyard work as a whole throughout the world, the Lord’s people have much for which to be thankful. Another year of widespread witnessing over the radio, television, and the internet has been completed, and, as a result, many have been helped to a better understanding of our Heavenly Father and of his Word, and, perhaps have been led to a full consecration to do his will. We can be thankful also for the prospect of being able, in the Lord’s providence, to continue this work.

We have great cause for thanksgiving as we look back and recall the many blessings we have enjoyed in fellowshiping with our brethren—at conventions, and in our ecclesias. May we never permit the blessed experiences of communion with the Lord’s people to become commonplace. There are many who, because isolated, or because of varying circumstances, cannot attend meetings and enjoy the privilege of fellowship with others of like precious faith. We can be thankful that

the Lord makes up to these in other ways, that he is a compensating portion to them in their loneliness.

We can be thankful that as we look ahead we can do so with the assurance of “he who led us once will lead us still.” Knowing this, we will lift our hearts and voices with praise and thanksgiving for the joy which we know will be ours as we continue to walk in the Master’s steps. We are thankful for all the opportunities of service which lie ahead as we continue to “shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.”—I Pet. 2:9

So, always, and in all things, we will give thanks unto the Lord.

Dawn Bible Students Association

“Work Out Your Own Salvation”

***“My beloved, ... work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”
—Philippians 2:12,13***

ACCORDING TO MANY Christian people this advice would commonly seem strange because of the commonly accepted belief that a person is saved as soon as he becomes one of the Lord’s people. While it is true that “we are saved by hope” (Rom. 8:24), actual salvation will not be attained until we are born on the spirit plane, in the first resurrection. Up to that time there is always a possibility of our

leaving the faith—ceasing to follow on faithfully in the doing of the Lord’s will concerning us, failing to so run as to obtain the prize.

The epistle to the Philippians is addressed to the saints in Christ Jesus, and when the apostle says, ‘your own salvation,’ he is particularizing the salvation peculiar to the Gospel Age, the “great salvation.” (Heb. 2:3) It is not merely a salvation from sin, but very much more. Not only is it to be everlasting, but it is a salvation to glory, honor, and immortality, joint-heirship with Christ Jesus in all the glorious things that are his—in his exalted position, far above angels, principalities, and powers, and every name that is named.—Eph. 1:21

GOD WORKETH

‘It is God which worketh in you.’ We, who were of the Adamic family, are being transformed, and developed along the lines which the Father has marked out for us, that he may make of us a New Creation.

We did not begin this work ourselves. It would never have occurred to us, uninvited, to endeavor to become members of a Divine family. It would have been the height of presumption for us to do so, without an express invitation. It is God who planned the whole matter. He has been working in us. There is no changeableness with him, and when once he made this proposition, he meant it to the full. We are assured that if we are faithful, he who has begun the good work in us will complete it.

The only requirement is our own faithfulness. God will never fail. We are his workmanship. He is doing a great work, and we are to cooperate with him diligently. “Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth,” and by the Holy Spirit. (James 1:18) Our Father’s will is revealed to us by his holy influence, and through the inspired Word. By his Divine providence, we have experiences in life that teach us both ‘to will and to do of his good pleasure.’

When we made our consecration we were willing to do God’s will, but we did not then understand that will fully. As we went on, we perceived his will more and more distinctly. As we discern the leadings of his providence in all the experiences of life, we become more and more imbued with his Holy Spirit. Thus God gradually works in us. The ‘willing’ comes first, then the quickening, energizing, doing, follows. The will of God has become our will, our mind. The apostle wanted to do so and says, “With the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.” (Rom. 7:25) The flesh has inherited various weaknesses and fallen tendencies, therefore we are unable to do perfect works.

We need always to remember that the loving Redeemer shall be our great Advocate that we may come with courage to the throne of heavenly grace and find mercy and help in time of need. God is working in us—first to will, and then to do his good pleasure. (Heb. 4:16) Every promise of God is to this end, not merely that we should acknowledge his will, but that we should rejoice to do his good pleasure.

OUR RESPONSIBILITY

When we gladly complied with Romans 12:1 we were justified (declared right), not by works but by faith (Rom. 5:1), and became sons of God, begotten by the Holy Spirit through the Word of Truth. Then came the time when we could do acceptable works, as members of the Lord’s family.

The Holy Spirit within us, through this begetting, now has an opportunity to manifest itself, to do some works. In other words, as imperfect human beings we cannot work out our salvation, but as New Creatures we can do this, with the Lord’s help. The expression, ‘Work out your own salvation,’ has a peculiar force and meaning. It suggests something that is difficult, that requires time and patience. As

consecrated followers of Jesus, we have already presented our bodies as living sacrifices, and that which we have undertaken lies before us.

We see how our Master laid down his earthly life, and we learn from the Scriptures that he is our Exemplar. “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son.” (John 3:16) The Lord Jesus was baptized by John in Jordan. There he was fully consecrated, and the Holy Spirit came upon him in begetting power. Then it remained for him, during his earthly sacrificial walk and ministry, to ‘work out’ that consecration. Every act of life during that crucial period was the fulfilling of his covenant of sacrifice.

Jesus had covenanted to sacrifice his human nature with all its conditions and possibilities that he might carry out the Father’s eternal purpose. For this cause he came into the world, and he faithfully fulfilled his covenant. His glorious reward was the Divine nature and the authority to execute all the Father’s great program.

So it is to be with us, his followers. We, being imperfect, but “justified by faith” (Rom. 5:1), are covered by “the robe of righteousness,” which constitutes our “wedding garment.” (Isa. 61:10; Matt. 22:11,12) Thus we stand before our Father acceptable in Christ Jesus. All the children of God who are true to their covenant are working out their salvation from day to day. It is a work of sacrifice; a daily work of crucifying the flesh. From the beginning of our consecrated life we are reckoned as being fully “crucified with him [Christ];” but the actual crucifixion is a slow, painful, lingering process, and ends only with the completion of our sacrifice in death.—Rom. 6:6; Gal. 2:20; 5:24

“Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice” (Ps. 50:5) is the command of Jehovah. To what extent are we performing this work of sacrifice in ourselves, and also assisting in the work of gathering the saints of God unto him? Are we faithful to the extent of our ability and opportunity? Are we sure that we are careful to note the opportunities, great and small, that are within our reach? If we do not see our opportunities, the Lord will use another to do the work that might have been ours—and we shall lose the blessing and the reward of the service that we might have rendered.

Our agreement was to be dead to the world, dead to earthly hopes, aims, ambitions, and alive toward God. We are to demonstrate in our

thoughts, words, and deeds that everything in this contract is ‘bona fide’ on our part, that we still mean every word of it, and that we are determined to be faithful unto death.

FEAR AND TREMBLING

In the expression, ‘Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,’ we are not to understand that the Lord wishes his children literally to tremble with fear before him. The thought is, rather, to exercise much carefulness, realizing our great responsibility, and the liability of our failing to meet all the requirements unless we give the most earnest attention.

While it is true that we are to “come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16), it is for us to understand also that our eternal interests are in the balance. It is an issue of life or death. Those who win the prize will be heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ, partakers of the Divine nature to a glory and honor beyond human power to imagine. The Scriptures teach us that no such offer will ever be made again.

The Son of God holds the position next to Jehovah, and is only to have but one ‘bride.’ Surely, then, there is need that we work out our salvation with fear and trembling; in other words, with great carefulness and earnestness in respect to everything connected with it. We should be keenly appreciative of the fact that it is the most wonderful opportunity in all the universe of God.

When the church is complete beyond the veil, the door for this “high calling” (Phil. 3:14) will be shut, never to open again. As we realize these facts, it is no wonder that we feel our need of walking, as the apostle, says, “circumspectly” (Eph. 5:15), and of weighing our thoughts so as to be in conformity to the will of God in Christ. There is no room here for foolishness or frivolity. God is testing every power we possess, to prove the depth and sincerity of consecration.

GOOD PLEASURE

‘It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.’ The fully consecrated children of God have been called with a heavenly calling to joint-heirship with Jesus in the glory, honor, and immortality of the kingdom. “It is your Father’s good pleasure to give

you the kingdom.” (Luke 12:32) During our earthly pilgrimage the way is narrow and difficult, because the successful enduring of the necessary tests is indispensable to those whom God would grant this honor of being partakers of the Divine nature.—Matt. 7:14; Rom. 8:17

The Apostle Paul who indeed was called to run for the heavenly prize, wrote of the necessity he had of severely disciplining himself: “I severely discipline my body, and make it subservient [word for word translation, ‘I ... lead it captive’]; lest possibly, having proclaimed to others, I myself should become one unapproved.”—I Cor. 9:27, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*

We similarly have to discipline our body severely. The new mind, the New Creature, begotten and energized by the Holy Spirit and by the inspired Word, must take control. “Put off, according to the former course of life, that old man, corrupted by deceitful desires; ... and be you clothed with that new man, who, according to God, has been formed in righteousness and holiness of the truth.”—Eph. 4:22,24, *WED*

As long as we are in this earthly tabernacle, we shall be conscious of the weaknesses of the flesh. We can rejoice with great peace of mind and complete assurance in the knowledge and experience of Ephesians 1:6,7, that our Father has made us accepted in the Beloved; “In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace.” As we continue to cling to that righteousness from God, which is through the faith of Christ (Phil. 3:9), we cultivate, by the Lord’s help, all the graces of the Holy Spirit to the fullest extent of our ability, seeing to it that we grow more and more in the image of our Lord and Head.—Rom. 8:29

Using the sentiments of the apostle, we pursue, that we may lay hold on that (heavenly prize) for which we have been “laid hold on by Christ.” (Phil. 3:12, *WED*) Indeed, maintaining our full consecration to God, and receiving an increasing measure of the Holy Spirit; also feeding daily upon God’s Holy Word and persevering in prayer, trusting not in our own strength and ability, but upon our Father’s almighty power, we “press along the line, towards the prize of the high calling of God by Christ Jesus.”—Phil. 3:14, *WED*

In II Peter 1:2-11 is given a guarantee that “if ye do” certain things mentioned, “ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered

unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” It will then be our great joy and privilege as part of a Divine government (Christ Jesus and his glorified church) to assist in the grandest of all kingdom work—raising earth’s dead billions and establishing God’s glorious kingdom in the earth, which kingdom of life, joy, and peace shall never pass away.

MARVELOUS DIVINE GRACE

By the grace of God we are invited to work out a wonderful salvation. Ours is a marvelous transformation. Selected from a race of bond-slaves of sin, beings of a fleshly nature, depraved, death-stricken, sin-cursed, we are lifted out of the miry clay, are washed, cleansed from our pollution, our soiled rags of unrighteousness, and a new nature has been begun in us. Our earthward tendencies are gradually being bent heavenward.

We are transformed, day by day, rising up and up until, our resurrection completed, the work of transformation fully accomplished, we are exalted to heights unimaginable; seated upon Messiah’s throne, beside the infinite Son of God, partakers of his glorious nature, the nature of Jehovah himself—the Divine nature. Can mortal man conceive so marvelous a glory? What can we render unto the Lord that can fittingly demonstrate our gratitude, our thankfulness, for so unspeakable a favor? Surely the most faithful service we can give is but a very feeble return to him who has so loved, blessed, and honored us!

We receive the Holy Spirit at the time of the Lord’s acceptance of us, at our consecration. But the New Creature cannot long remain quiet. It must grow through nourishment, through feeding. At first we desire the sincere milk of the Word that we may grow thereby. (I Pet. 2:2) We become strong by the exercise of ourselves as New Creatures.

But it was God who started the new life in us. All our studying, without the help of the holy influence, would not have made New Creatures of us. No amount of works would have done it. These endeavors of our own would never have brought us into the Lord’s family; but after we come into his family through the Lord Jesus, these good works will begin to show.

The new mind takes over the old body as its possession, to be its servant. The new mind masters its old body, and gets more and more

control of the old disposition of the flesh, and, by Divine help, becomes strong. We more and more become copies of God's dear Son.

If any are disloyal and fail to take a firm stand for the Lord and the Truth for fear that they will be disesteemed among their fellowmen, or for any other reason, it will prove that they are not worthy to share with Christ the glories of his throne, as members of his body. All who hope to be of this number have professed his name; and they must be steadfast, holding fast their confidence and the profession of their faith even unto the end.

As fully consecrated children of God, we have learned to know our Father, and to trust his precious Word. We have proved his gracious promises in many a time of stress and danger, and we know that he will not fail us. Our God has led us thus far, and he will continue to lead and help us, and work in us by his Spirit and his Word of Truth, if we continue to give heed, and render obedience to his counsel.

It is our great privilege to rejoice in the full assurance, and in the experience, that we are "kept [or guarded] by the power of God through faith." (I Pet. 1:5) Emptying ourselves more and more of self, thereby enabling us to receive an increasing measure of the Holy Spirit, we should see to it that we are "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." (Eph. 6:10) And his 'might' is powerful. Paul speaks of it as "the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places."—Eph. 1:19,20

Ours is a marvelous calling! Heroic overcomers are wanted; those who have the Master's spirit. "To him that overcometh" will Jesus grant to sit with him in his throne. "They that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful." (Rev. 3:21; 17:14) The Apostle Peter encourages us, saying, "Give diligence to make your calling and election sure."—II Pet. 1:10