

The Powers of Heaven

***“There shall be signs in
the sun, and in the
moon, and in the stars;
and upon the earth
distress of nations, with
perplexity; the sea and
the waves roaring;
Men’s hearts failing
them for fear, and for
looking after those
things which are
coming on the earth:
for the powers of
heaven shall be
shaken.”
—Luke 21:25, 26***

THE PICTURE LANGUAGE of the Bible employs essentially all the created things of God with which we, here on earth, are acquainted. There are various reasons why God has used so much symbolic language in his Word. One reason is its unchangeableness. The meaning of words often change through use and misuse. Whatever man creates is also subject to change, but this is not true of the created things of God.

SIGN LANGUAGE IN THE BIBLE

In the sign language of the Bible, God has employed the sun, the moon, the stars, and clouds; and on the earth, oceans, rivers, mountains, valleys, sheep, goats, horses, wheat, tares, fig trees, and other features of earth. The characteristics of these have not

changed throughout the centuries, and when used in the Bible to illustrate the exalted thoughts of God they should have the same meaning to us as they did to the ancients.

Present day events call our attention to God’s use of the heavens, composed of the sun, moon, and stars, and the relationship of the heavens to the earth. Our text mentions both of these. Jesus foretold that there would be ‘signs’ in the heavens, and upon the earth ‘distress of nations with perplexity.’ These prophetic words of the Master constitute part of his answer to the disciples’ question pertaining to the signs of his presence and the end of the age.

In presenting the many signs of that future time concerning which his disciples asked, Jesus adhered closely to the general prophetic testimony of the Old Testament. The Prophet Isaiah wrote:

“Come near, ye nations, to hear; and hearken, ye people: let the earth hear, and all that is therein; the world, and all things that come forth of it. For the indignation of the Lord is upon all nations, and his fury upon all their armies: he hath utterly destroyed them, he hath delivered them to the slaughter. Their slain also shall be cast out, and their stink shall come up out of their carcases, and the mountains shall be melted with their blood. And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig tree.”—Isa. 34:1-4

SYMBOLIC HEAVENS SHAKEN

We normally think of these prophecies as involving Christianity, the dominant religion of the western world, and as they pertain to the events of these last days. Thus, when in recent years we saw the nation of Yugoslavia torn apart when the Serbs, who are Eastern Orthodox Catholics, tried to take Bosnia-Herzegovina, which was dominated by Muslims, and commit genocide, we saw anarchy affecting that nation. Meanwhile the Croatians of that nation, who are Roman Catholic Christians, also attacked Bosnia and also fought against Serbia. Even though a United Nations peacekeeping force was used to restore order, the remnants of these formerly united nations continue to suffer from the tragic years of anarchy, and deep-seated hatreds still fester.

We were reminded of the symbolic heavens being ‘on fire’ and the powers of heaven being ‘shaken’—Christian religions being involved in the fulfillment of that prophecy. We seldom think of ‘the powers of heaven’ beyond the Christian religions, yet all religions are included in the powers of heaven. We are seeing many instances of the powers of heaven being shaken outside of Christianity. A recent article on Indonesia in the “*National Geographic*” magazine (March 2001), presented a reverse situation to that of Yugoslavia. Indonesia is dominated by Muslims, and the article began by stating:

“Night fell fast over the harbor at Bitung on the far northeastern tip of Sulawesi, and the refugee camp, an old rattan factory, was hot and steamy

as a terrarium. A group of shell-shocked Christians, gathered in the glare of a hanging bulb, were telling how they'd lost their homes on Ternate in the nearby Moluccas.

“‘The Muslims burned our houses!’ said a retired army sergeant. ‘They destroyed our churches!’ the village English teacher chimed in. ‘We were massacred!’

“Such commotion was new to this sweet-smelling hillside town of neat homes and manicured yards, but part of a larger malady racing through the watery gut of eastern Indonesia. For decades the area, also called the Spice Islands, had touted its mixed communities of Muslims and Christians as models of interfaith neighborliness. Then, in January 1999, it plunged into primeval war, and now thousands were dead, a half million uprooted, and nobody could say exactly why.

“The ex-army man, Anton Letsoin, said that Ternate’s troubles began when a letter on faked church stationery was circulated among the island’s Muslims. Convinced that a ‘cadre of Christ’ was forming up to attack them, they rallied at the local mosque. There, a witness said he overheard his neighbors raise a chilling cry: ‘Seek out the Ohets’—slang for Christians—‘and destroy!’

“Who had manufactured the letter? The refugees blamed local political schemers, rogue military units, or maybe gangsters from Jakarta, who sought profit by sowing discord. Nobody wanted to believe it was religion. ‘We were living in peace,’ cried the teacher. ‘We never experienced religious hatred before!’

“This is the mystery of Indonesia today. Three years after a crashing economy ended the 32-year rule of Indonesia’s former president, Suharto (who, like many Indonesians, uses one name), the world’s fourth most populous nation boils with such comprehensive religious and ethnic strife that even Indonesians have a hard time explaining it. That’s not surprising, considering their anchor-shaped archipelago sweeps 3,200 miles end to end and contains 6,000 inhabited islands and 225 million people, who are, in turn, divided by religion (Muslim, Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist), ethnicity (some 300 groups and as many distinct languages), and water (four-fifths of the country’s total area).

“It is easy to forget that Indonesians now live in a time of great promise. The collapse of Suharto’s corrupt, crony-encrusted regime in

1998 made way for the republic's first democratically elected government in over 40 years and a chance to rebuild its badly corroded political and economic institutions. But the same surge of popular will that shoved Suharto aside also ended the steely controls he used to cap social unrest. 'Now the lid is off,' said a western diplomat in Jakarta, 'and there is extraordinary trauma and a clashing of mental tectonic plates that could pull the country apart.'"

THE GROWTH OF MUSLIMS

In this instance Muslims attacked Christians. The growing religion of Muslims has shown much more aggression than that demonstrated here. They have attacked Buddhists in Afghanistan and marked them as non-Muslims by tags and other badges of identification similar to that used by Hitler for Jews during World War II. The aggression against Israel by the PLO may be considered to be land-oriented, but in the background the religious beliefs lend aid to the aggression. In addition to the aggression extremist Muslims have had for Israel, they have also targeted the western world, and in particular the United States. We have witnessed in the past few years the aggressive attitudes of Iran and Iraq, though not limited to the United States. The disastrous war fought by the USSR against Afghanistan showed that Muslims do not want to be opposed or suppressed by any other nation or religion.

HOLY WAR

A series of articles on Islam appeared in the "*Los Angeles Times*" in December 2000 which included one on Jihadis, telling how they are developed and trained. It was entitled, "*Jihadi's: Belief in a Day When the Whole World Will Be Islamic.*" Under the section devoted to religion it also was captioned: "*The Chilling Goal of Islam's New Warriors.*" The article was written in Muriake, Pakistan. It began:

"Abu Samara was a gangling lad of 14 when he joined the jihad. He was still too much of a boy to grow the beard required of holy warriors. But he wasn't too young to master the weapons of war.

"Within weeks, his long, thin fingers were proficient with assault rifles, hand grenades, rocket launchers, and the militants' deadliest device: remote-controlled explosives.

"Then he volunteered to die.

“Over the next decade, Abu Samara learned advanced weaponry in the rugged mountains of Afghanistan. He trained alongside Muslim militants from Arab and Asian countries at Afghan camps later attacked by the United States for fostering extremists. Then he joined the Army of the Prophet, or Lashkar-e-Taiba, the most feared of Pakistan’s 14 private armies.

“‘From the moment I discovered the idea of jihad [holy war], I knew what I’d do with my life,’ he explained, sitting cross-legged and barefoot on the ground, an AK-47 slung over his shoulder.

“The former peasant boy, who at 24 now has a full-untrimmed beard and a head of long, tousled black hair to match, spends most of his time these days in Kashmir, the idyllic Himalayan territory of snowcapped peaks and verdant valleys that has become the world’s highest battlefield. His cell of commandos crosses into Kashmir from Pakistan for months at a stretch to carry out suicide missions intended to wrest all of the disputed region from Hindu-dominated India. Most volunteers don’t survive more than four years.

“Abu Samara is the archetype new ‘Jihadi,’ a breed of Islamic warrior whose mission is no longer simply fighting infidels and oppressors in Muslim lands—the kind of campaign that put earlier generations of holy warriors on the map in war zones such as Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Lebanon, and Chechnya.

“The new Jihadis are the most dangerous face of Islam today. In Pakistan, they are the most aggressive among a growing array of activists and organizations replacing or challenging crumbling state institutions. They’ve already played a major role in transforming South Asia into the world’s most volatile region—and Pakistan into what the United States views as the world’s most explosive country.

“As a result of escalating tension over Kashmir, a U.S. intelligence estimate predicts a 40% to 60% chance of open warfare within the next couple of years between India and Pakistan—two countries that openly tested nuclear weapons in 1998.

“Yet Abu Samara’s mission is not limited to Asia’s subcontinent. He’s out to change—perhaps conquer—the world in the name of his faith.

“‘Jihad is not just about fighting against oppression and occupation. Jihad is about the way you think and say prayers, the way you eat and

sleep. It's about creating an Islamic environment. It's about the struggle of life,' said Abu Samara, a nom de guerre that means 'father of bountiful.'

“‘Jihad gives life purpose,’ he said. ‘Without it, we’re useless.’”

ROLE OF PAKISTAN IN JIHAD

The article continues to tell of the inspiration received for this latest movement because of success against the Soviets, saying:

“Virtually all of the private armies in Pakistan, the only Muslim country created solely to preserve a religious identity, are offshoots of groups launched with the help of Pakistani intelligence during the Soviet occupation of neighboring Afghanistan in the 1980's. But they weren't disbanded after Moscow's 1989 withdrawal. Inspired by Islam's role in defeating a superpower, their mission and numbers expanded rapidly.

“The impoverished South Asian nation is now home to at least 128 camps for militants dedicated to retrieving Kashmir and widening the Islamic world. Once the militants were proxies of the government. Now, even the new military regime is unable or unwilling to rein them in.

“‘If the government tried to stop us, we'd just carry on our jihad. We do what we want,’ said Abu Samara.”

The article describes the extensive facilities of the training center provided, which—in addition to wheat fields, orchards, a dairy, and lakes for raising fish—include a clinic, grammar and secondary schools, an Islamic University, homes for families of those who died for the cause, a mosque and barracks for fighters. Recruiting centers (2,300) bring in recruits. The goals of the training center are described by a spokesman as:

“We're Muslims, and we believe Islam is more than a few rituals. It's a religion of peace with solutions to all of today's political and economic problems. It's important for us to spread that message because we want one system in the whole world, which, of course, is Islam. And to make Islam dominant, we must do jihad.

“The Islamic ruling system does away with all nationalities, tribalistic bonds and races, and melts them into Islam. Under the Islamic ruling system, foreign policy is tied with jihad, conquest and the spread of

Islam. It destroys borders and physical barriers to lead humanity from worshipping each other to worshipping the Lord of humanity.”

This Center gets most of its recruits for both fighting and preaching from the 8,000 Madrasas, or religious academies, that have sprung up in Pakistan during the past two decades. More than a million youths are enrolled because of Pakistan’s deteriorating educational system. Here boys of 10 to 12 are told how they can get to heaven, and are prepared to join the jihad to make the whole world Islamic.

A POWER OF HEAVEN

This is another ‘power of heaven’ which appears to be destined to play an important part in the events of the last days of this present evil world. A new political party has become dominant in Pakistan called Jamaat. It is succeeding the conventional parties because of the discontent with these by the people of Pakistan.

With branches throughout Asia, Europe, and even North America, Jamaat now has a wider network than Egypt’s Muslim Brotherhood, one of the Islamic world’s oldest movements. It is active in the five Central Asian former Soviet republics, as well as among the Muslim Uighurs of western China. It has strong ties to Muslim groups as far afield as Malaysia and Sudan.

A spokesman for Jamaat said, “A feeling is emerging in Pakistani society that we have a special role to play in uniting Muslims all over the world. It seems like wherever there’s a war, Muslims are being killed. People feel that we need to get together to stop it, but there’s a leadership vacuum. With our independence and history of democratic institutions, what we have is better than many Muslim countries. And as a nuclear power, Pakistan is a country looked up to by the Muslim world—and the obvious place to provide new leadership.”

Just what part these ‘heavens’ of Islam will play in the closing events of our day we can only wait to see. As a power of heaven, it too must be shaken and burned with fire. Fire is associated with the manifestation of the presence of Christ; that is, he is revealed by fire as well as by the shaking of the heavens. On this point the Apostle Paul says, “To you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them

that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.”—II Thess. 1:7,8

THE POWERS OF HEAVEN DESTROYED

The ‘mighty angels’ which are to be revealed with Jesus are undoubtedly the members of his glorified church. The word angel means ‘messenger,’ and these will be messengers with him to dispense the blessings of the new kingdom. But, first, every vestige of Satan’s empire must be destroyed, and all opposition to the laws of God’s new world broken. The gathering to himself of those who will reign with him is part of the work of Christ in the first part of his Second Presence. This is fully accomplished before the old order is completely destroyed; hence Paul’s reference to the ‘flaming fire’ which reveals the presence of Christ when his church is with him is a sign which is still future.

The sequence of world-changing events continues to emphasize to the people the utter futility of all human efforts to bring order out of chaos, and peace and prosperity out of war and starvation. Later, in the Lord’s own way, they will be made to realize the true meaning of what is occurring—that Jesus has come, and as the Arm of Jehovah his first work is to set aside the old order of things which is based upon selfishness—thus the people might more fully realize their need of Christ’s coming kingdom. (Ps. 110:1-6) Then they will realize that what they first thought to be a dire calamity concerning which they said, “Alas, alas,” was but the evidence that the king of a new world order had come and was preparing to establish his righteous kingdom in the earth.

Seeing is Believing

Key Verse: “This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.”

—John 2:11, New International Version

***Selected Scripture:
John 2:1-11***

JESUS HAD JUST RETURNED from Bethabara, beyond Jordan, where John the Baptist was baptizing. John had baptized Jesus prior to our Lord’s forty days in the wilderness. Two of John’s disciples, Andrew and John, had heard him identify Jesus as the Lamb of God (John 1:36,37), and following him, they both were convinced he was the Messiah. Their natural brothers, Peter and James, were brought to Jesus, also, and learned of him. When they left the area to return to Galilee, Jesus found Philip and Philip found Nathanael, and brought him to our Lord.

Three days after Nathanael met Jesus there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee. The bridal party is not identified, but they may have been acquaintances of Mary, the mother of Jesus, and possibly of Nathanael. Our Lord and his disciples also attended the marriage feast. The number in attendance must have been greater than originally expected, because they ran low on the supply of wine. Jesus’ mother learned of their problem, and asked Jesus to assist the host, telling his servants to do whatsoever he instructed them.

Jesus told the servants to fill six stoneware vessels to the brim with water (capacity unknown, but could be from 14 to 54 gallons). These were used for guests to wash their hands. The servants were then told to draw from the vessels the wine which Jesus had made, and to present it to the governor of the feast. After tasting the wine, the governor called the bridegroom, and he commented that, as a rule, men use their best wine at the beginning of the feast, and the poorest at the conclusion. He, however, had saved the best for the end of the feast.

Our key verse says that this was the beginning of miraculous signs. The Greek word *simelōn* may be translated ‘miracle, sign, token,

wonder.’ Using ‘miracle’ or ‘sign’ alone to translate the word, is not enough. It was both a miracle and a sign. All of the miracles Jesus was to perform were signs pointing to him as the Messiah of Israel. His disciples, who were present, knew this, and our text says that his disciples put their faith in him, or believed him to be the Messiah. *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott* says they “believed into him.” It was intended also to be a manifestation of his glory.

Our Lord had been sent to earth to become the Redeemer of mankind. At the same time he was to be tried and tested for worthiness to receive the Divine nature. Much suffering and trials awaited him, but at the conclusion would come the glory of his exaltation and kingdom. This was fitly represented by the wine—a symbol of joy and gladness.

Jesus also was to find those who, as the bride of Christ, would be invited to share with him in his heavenly glory, after being willing to suffer with him. (II Tim. 2:12) Such were those he already met—Andrew, Peter, James, John, Philip, Nathanael. These are represented by the earthen vessels which are first filled with the water of Truth, which Truth leads to the glories of the kingdom by way of the miraculous work of Jesus. The marriage background for this illustration is appropriate because “the marriage of the Lamb” comes, and his bride makes “herself ready.”—Rev. 19:7

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Filling Our Needs

Key Verse: *“The men marvelled, saying, What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!”*
—Matthew 8:27

Selected Scriptures:
Matthew 8:23-27;
14:14-21

OUR LESSON IS IN TWO parts. The first deals with the wondrous power Jesus had over the elements of a storm. He had been very busy, and after he had preached to the multitudes he went up into a mountain to teach his disciples. Coming down from the mountain, great multitudes followed him and he healed the sick. He continued to perform miraculous healing for many. By evening he decided to go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. He was so tired that he fell asleep.

Meanwhile, a sudden storm arose, typical of that area. It was so furious that the waves generated by the winds swept over the ship. The disciples were afraid and awoke Jesus, saying, “Lord, save us: we perish.” (Matt. 8:25) Jesus said, “Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?” And then he “rebuked the winds and the sea; and there was a great calm.” (vs. 26) The disciples did not hear his chiding them for their lack of faith. Instead, in great awe they said, ‘What manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!’ (vs. 27) This was a fore gleam of the great power that will be employed in God’s kingdom to control the extremes of weather.

The second part of our lesson involves the miracle recorded in each of the Gospels, where Jesus fed five thousand men, besides women and children. He had learned of John the Baptist’s violent death by beheading, and wanted to be alone so that he could pray to the Heavenly Father. So he went by ship to a desert area. The people, however, would not let him be alone, and walked a long distance until they found him in the desert. When Jesus saw this great multitude, he forgot about his own feelings and had compassion upon them, and healed those who were sick.—Matt. 14:12-14

When evening came, the disciples came to Jesus and suggested that he send them away so that they could buy food in the villages. He responded

by telling them, “They need not depart; give ye them to eat.” (vs. 16) In the other accounts of this incident, it appears that they did not have enough money in their treasury to buy the required food, and Andrew found a lad who had five loaves and two fish. These were then miraculously multiplied by Jesus so that the multitude was fed and there were twelve baskets full of fragments left over.

This event illustrates the power Jesus has to fill all our needs. We never should be concerned about our welfare. In God’s kingdom, no one will want. “Then shall the earth yield her increase.” (Ps. 67:6) As prophesied in this psalm, it will be a time when all the people will praise God because they will be the recipients of his salvation. God’s favor will be shown by his face shining toward them. “Let the nations be glad and sing for joy: for thou shalt judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon earth.” (vs. 4) The psalm concludes by saying, “God shall bless us; and all the ends of the earth shall fear [reverence] him.”—vs. 7

In our present experiences we are not to be concerned about getting the necessities of life. Jesus said, “Take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? ... But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”—Matt. 6:31-33

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Restoring Wholeness

Key Verse: “When he had looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man, Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out: and his hand was restored whole as the other.”
—Mark 3:5

Selected Scriptures:
Mark 3:1-6;
John 9:1-12

WHEN PEOPLE WERE healed by Jesus, they were made whole again. The infirmity that they had possessed which made them incomplete was removed. Two incidents of this nature form our lesson. Both occurred on the Sabbath. The first was in the synagogue at Capernaum. Jesus had traveled through the grain fields on that Sabbath Day with his disciples; and as they walked along plucking kernels of grain to eat they met a man with a withered hand. They were chided by the Pharisees who saw them eating the grain, and who accused them of violating God’s Law. Jesus replied, “The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath.” (Mark 2:27) In the synagogue all were watching Jesus, anticipating that he might try to heal this man. Their anticipation was correct.

Jesus asked the man to “stand forth.”

Then he asked those who were watching him, “Is it lawful to do good on the sabbath days, or to do evil? to save life, or to kill?” (Mark 3:3,4) There was no response. Then, in the words of our key verse, ‘He ... looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts.’ He then proceeded to heal the man, which caused the Pharisees to join with the Herodians to plot Jesus’ death. Did Jesus violate God’s law by his actions? If you would like to get more information on this topic, see the note at the end of this article. This incident is typical of all the healing works to be performed in God’s Millennial Kingdom.

The second incident is recorded in John 9:1-12. On another Sabbath Day, Jesus passed by a man who was blind from his birth. His disciples asked Jesus, “Who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born

blind?” This was a strange question, because how could someone sin before being born? Jesus did not seek to correct their thinking, but said, “Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.” (John 9:3) Jesus then proceeded to make a clay pack for application on the man’s eyes, and told him to wash in the pool of Siloam. The man followed our Lord’s instructions, and the man received sight!

This miracle was difficult to believe! This man’s neighbors interrogated him, and reported the matter to the Pharisees. They, in turn, interrogated the parents, and also their son. They tried to have him refute the fact that Jesus had healed his blindness, but he would not. He gave a marvelous testimony concerning Jesus, and as a result he was cast out of the synagogue. He was then visited by our Lord who revealed himself to this man as his benefactor. He said, “For judgment I am come into this world, that they which see not might see; and that they which see might be made blind.”—vs. 39

The Gospel Age is the time for finding a people for God’s name. Only those being selected—chosen—by God in advance of his kingdom have their spiritual sight made whole, while many learned men may not be able to see God’s wonderful plan.

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Persisting in Faith

***Key Verse: “Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.”
—Matthew 15:28***

***Selected Scripture:
Matthew 15:21-31***

GOD HAD PROMISED TO the nation of Israel seventy weeks of exclusive favor (Daniel 9:24) in which 490 years were involved, starting from 454 BC, when Nehemiah was commissioned by Artaxerxes to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem until Messiah would come (69 weeks later) in AD 29. That was when Jesus went to Jordan to be immersed, and began his ministry. The key for these calculations is given in Ezekiel 4:6, as a day for a year.

Jesus was aware of this exclusive favor and only favored Israel with his healing works, but he left Israel to go to Tyre and Sidon briefly, as recorded in Matthew 15:21-28. While he was there a woman of Canaan (a Gentile) came and asked him to heal her daughter vexed with a devil. Our Lord's fame had gone beyond the borders of Israel. Some of these Gentiles had heard of the promises made to Israel, as apparently did this woman.

It is hard to imagine our gracious Lord ignoring this woman's pleas, “but he answered her not a word.” (vs. 23) She was persistent and kept crying out after them, so that the disciples with Jesus begged him to send her away. Jesus tried saying, “I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.”—vs. 24

This did not discourage the woman who knelt before Jesus, impeding his way, and asking for help. Then Jesus said that it wasn't right to take the children's food and to throw it unto “dogs,” in essence calling her a ‘dog,’ as Gentiles were viewed by Israel. (vs. 26) This, too, did not daunt the woman, who replied, “Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.”—vs. 27

This answer by the woman could not be ignored by Jesus, as he saw her great faith and said to her, ‘Be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.’

This was one of the few exceptions by Jesus, in which a Gentile received a blessing during this time of Israel’s exclusive favor. Another exception is recorded in Matthew 8:5-13 and Luke 7:1-10. In each case, great and persistent faith was demonstrated that would be typical of all the Gentiles called once exclusive favor for Israel ended. This favor ended in AD 36 when Cornelius, the first Gentile convert, his family and friends were brought into the body of Christ. The bringing of Cornelius into the family of God did not mean that favor to Israel ended. Rather, the favor was no longer exclusive, as mentioned in Amos 3:2, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth.” After Cornelius, both Jews and Gentiles were being brought into the Church.

This was evident when Paul and Barnabas made their first trip to find people for God’s name. They always went to a synagogue first, because the Word of God was to be found there. Not only did the people of Israel hear Paul’s message, but Gentiles, who sat in the back of the synagogue also heard and believed. At Antioch of Pisidia. “The Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath. ... many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas.” (Acts 13:42,43) Only those with persistent faith, however, continued as disciples.

Believing and Living

Key Verse: “Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?”
—John 11:25, 26

Selected Scripture:
John 11:1-6, 11-15, 25, 26, 38-44

JESUS PREACHED **A RESURRECTION** from the dead as an important part of God’s plan. During his earthly ministry he gave three examples of the work God plans for his kingdom. He raised Jairus’ daughter, who had died on her sickbed. (Mark 5:22-24,35-43) He interrupted a funeral procession in the city of Nain, and restored the dead son of a widow to her as he was enroute to be buried. (Luke 7:12-17) The last example involved a dear friend, Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary of Bethany, where Jesus was often a guest.

Our Lord was traveling beyond Jordan when he received a message sent by Martha and Mary that Lazarus was very sick. (John 11:3) He purposely delayed his return to Judaea so that Lazarus died. He then told his disciples that “Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.” (vs. 11) The disciples thought that Lazarus had taken a turn for the better. Then Jesus plainly told them, “Lazarus is dead.” (vs. 14) He was using sleep as an illustration of death because there is to be an awakening from death.

When Jesus came to the outskirts of Bethany, Martha went out to meet him, and said, “Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee.” (vss. 21,22) “Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again.” (vs. 23) Martha replied, “I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” (vs. 24) He had taught Martha and Mary very well, and they believed that there would be a resurrection of the dead. This led Jesus to reply in the words of our key verse. When Martha was asked whether she believed what he said, her reply was, “Yea, Lord:

I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world.”—vs. 27

Martha then went to get Mary. She came to Jesus and also expressed the thought that if Jesus had come, Lazarus would not have died. Jesus asked to be brought to the tomb where Lazarus had been buried four days earlier. He proceeded to raise Lazarus from the dead.

When Jesus said, ‘I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live,’ he was referring to his part in God’s plan for providing the ransom sacrifice to redeem all of Adam’s fallen human family. Those believing in the efficacy of that sacrifice will receive life. The Father has placed all this power in the hands of Jesus. (John 5:19-27) Thus, Jesus told the people “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.” (vss. 28,29, *Revised Standard Version*) Those then that are brought back to life and believe on him in this time of judgment shall never die.

The understanding of the doctrine of the resurrection is what is meant by ‘believing’ and ‘living.’ The wonderful opportunity for all mankind to come to a knowledge of this great truth is promised by God in I Timothy 2:4.

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Looking unto Jesus

IN THE PREVIOUS chapters of this epistle Paul has opened our understanding to many of the types and shadows contained in the Tabernacle and its services. By contrast, he has shown the grandeur and majesty of the antitypes—the “substance” (Heb. 11:1)—as they are centered in Christ Jesus our Lord. We are reminded of our “heavenly calling” (Heb. 3:1) to joint-heirship with Christ, based upon our willingness to share in his suffering, and counseled to be watchful and full of faith lest we be caught in some of the pitfalls which Satan has set for us along the narrow way. In chapter eleven he has encouraged us to steadfastness by presenting that grand array of faith heroes who through the power of faith endured suffering faithfully unto death in order that they might obtain “a better resurrection.” (Heb. 11:35) Now he comes to the grand climax of it all, pointing us to Jesus, the supreme example of faithfulness, bidding us to “consider him” and follow him in order that we might obtain a “kingdom which cannot be moved.”—Heb. 12:3,28

CHAPTER 12

VERSE 1 “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.”

‘Wherefore’—that is, having noted these noble examples of faith, these can serve as a ‘great cloud of witnesses’ to us. The thought in the word witnesses is not that the Ancient Worthies are now in heaven looking down upon us, but rather that their lives of faithfulness serve as a witness, or testimony, of God’s integrity and of his ability to uphold those who believe his promises, and who endeavor to demonstrate their faith by their works, and are as onlookers in an arena.

‘Let us lay aside every weight’—This is a reference to the practice of runners to strip themselves of every unnecessary weight of clothing and other hindrances which might tend to retard their speed on the racetrack. The experiences of a runner are illustrative in some respects of the

Christian life. We are running for “the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus,” (Phil. 3:14) and in order to be victorious we also must lay aside all hindrances of whatever nature they might be, such as “the cares of this world,” the “deceitfulness of riches,” the “lust of the flesh,” and the “pride of life.”—Mark 4:19; I John 2:16

‘And the sin which doth so easily beset us’—It has been suggested that each runner in the heavenly racecourse has some particular sin which, more than any other, tends to impede his progress. This doubtless is true, but Paul seemingly is referring to a close-girding sin which is common to all the Lord’s people. Judging from his many references to it, and his admonitions to overcome it, it is the sin of unbelief. Lack of genuine, working faith in the promises of God lies at the root of most of our shortcomings. It was the sin which led to Israel’s downfall. If we are overcomers, it will be through faith that we gain the victory.

‘Let us run with patience the race that is set before us’—To win the Christian race it is necessary not only to run with “all diligence,” but also with patience, that is, with cheerful endurance, not grumblingly, nor in the spirit of wishing we were doing something else.—II Peter 1:5,10

VERSE 2 “Looking unto 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.”

‘Looking unto Jesus’—In the Greek text the thought is ‘to consider attentively.’ Paul, through his eloquence displayed in chapter 11, has caused us to give careful consideration to the manner in which faith wrought victory in the lives of the Ancient Worthies, and now he reminds us of the crowning example of faithfulness, even ‘Jesus the author and finisher of our faith.’

Jehovah, our Heavenly Father, is the author of the plan of salvation. The Greek word translated author in this instance is one which means ‘chief leader.’ It is translated “captain” in Hebrews 2:10. We can, and should, follow the examples of faithfulness we see in the Ancient Worthies. Paul wrote that we should follow him as he followed Christ, but we should ever keep in mind that Jesus is our ‘chief leader,’ for it is in his footsteps that we are to walk. He is the finisher, or ‘perfecter,’ of our faith. The faith life of others tends to strengthen our faith, and Jesus’ faithfulness does this for us. If we look to him attentively, despite our

imperfections, we can finish our course victoriously and win a crown of life.

‘For the joy that was set before him’—The Heavenly Father gave Jesus an incentive to faithfulness. The Apostle Peter informs us that the prophets testified not only concerning the sufferings of Christ but also of “the glory that should follow.” (I Pet. 1:11) It was these promises of the glory which would follow his suffering that assisted Jesus to endure the cross and despise the shame. This was not a selfish joy, for although he would delight in the prospect of again being personally present with his Father, he knew also that this position of glory would enable him, during the thousand years of his kingdom, to bestow blessings of life upon all the families of the earth.

As Paul declares, because Jesus faithfully endured he is now at the right hand of the throne of God. This is in fulfillment of the Father’s promise, “I [will] divide him a portion with the great.” (Isa. 53:12) God always fulfils his promises to those who are faithful to him.—Ps. 16:11

VERSE 3 “Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.”

The Greek word in this text translated ‘consider’ means ‘to estimate.’ It is taken from a root word meaning ‘analogous.’ In other words, we are to consider him in the sense of making a comparison between what he suffered and the much less trying experiences through which we are passing. The ‘contradiction of sinners’ led Jesus to his death. He was the Son of God, but his enemies contradicted this, charging him with blasphemy. He was a king, but this was also contradicted, so he was charged with treason, and crucified.

When we compare his sufferings with our own we will discover that there is no occasion for our becoming ‘wearied and faint,’ that is, becoming “weary in well doing.” (Gal. 6:9) In the Greek text, the word translated wearied is the same as that used by James when he wrote, “The prayer of faith shall save the sick,” or wearied. (James 5:15) This is more than a temporary discouragement. The word seems to be descriptive of a condition of mind in which one is about ready to give up the good fight of faith entirely. But if we compare our lot with the sufferings of Jesus, we will realize that there is no occasion for an attitude of this kind.

The Greek word used by Paul and translated faint is one which means ‘to relax.’ One does not need deliberately to step out of the Christian racecourse in order to lose the prize. It is merely necessary to relax, to be a little less zealous and energetic. As a rule, to relax results in fewer trials. In other ways also it is appealing to the flesh, but it could easily lead to what Paul describes as being a “castaway.” (I Cor. 9:27) The opposite attitude is described by the poetic lines, “Awake my soul, stretch every nerve, and press with vigor on.”

VERSE 4 “Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.”

This text can be understood properly only in the light of the Divine plan, particularly as it relates to the church’s share in the “better sacrifices” of the Gospel Age. (Heb. 9:23) Paul is not here especially emphasizing a Christian’s warfare against his own personal sins, although such a warfare is most essential. However, such does not lead to death—‘unto blood.’ To the extent that one is able to overcome sinful tendencies in his own body there generally results an improvement of physical health.

The word ‘against’ is from a Greek preposition which in some instances in the New Testament is used to denote the thought ‘because of,’ and is so translated. Jesus did not die as a result of striving against sin in his own body, for he was “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.” (Heb. 7:26) It was sin that caused his death, however; that is, the sin of others—the sin of the whole world. His striving against sin was in the fact that he laid down his life as a sin offering.

It is this that is brought to our attention by the Apostle Paul in Romans 6:10,11. In this passage he explains that Jesus died “unto” sin, and then says that “likewise” we should reckon ourselves to be dead “unto” sin. The only sense in which Jesus died ‘unto,’ or because of sin, was as an offering for sin, and by Paul’s authority we can reckon ourselves to be dying in the same way. Thus we are said to be “planted together in the likeness of his death”—Rom. 6:5

The “body of sin” (Rom. 6:6) that is destroyed as a result of Jesus’ crucifixion, and our crucifixion with him, is the whole cancerous growth of sin which has fastened itself upon the entire race, and which must be removed ere the people can have life. *Strong’s Concordance*, in a broad definition of the Greek word, *soma*, in this text which is translated

‘body,’ says that it means the ‘sound whole body’ to be used in a broad application, literally or figuratively.

That the reference is not to our own individual bodies is proven by the fact that Jesus’ crucifixion is included. Besides, the text declares that “he that is dead” is justified. (Rom. 6:7) Our bodies, although sinful by nature, are justified by the blood of Christ and thus made acceptable as a sacrifice, so Paul wrote, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, ... that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” (Rom. 12:1) Accepting this invitation to sacrifice, we are “crucified” with Christ.—Gal. 2:20

The purpose of this in the plan of God is that the body—not bodies in the plural—of sin might be destroyed. Thus the joint work of Christ and his church is likened to a great struggle against the enemy ‘sin,’ and it is to this that Paul refers when he writes, ‘Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.’ This great battle against sin is a fierce one, and while the forces of righteousness will ultimately triumph, during this Gospel Age all who participate in the struggle lose their lives as human beings. But they have the Master’s promise, “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”—Rev. 2:10

It is this faithfulness unto death that Paul describes by the expression, ‘unto blood.’ ‘Ye have not yet resisted unto blood,’ he told the Hebrew brethren. This observation by Paul is linked to his admonition to ‘consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself.’ As we have seen, the word consider in the Greek text has the thought of ‘making a comparison.’ When the Hebrew brethren did this, they would realize that although they may have suffered a great deal, they had not yet been fully planted together in the likeness of Jesus’ death.

The Hebrew brethren indeed had suffered! They had endured a great “fight of afflictions,” and had taken “joyfully the spoiling” of their goods. (Heb. 10:32-34) Throughout the epistle Paul endeavors to explain why these, and all true followers of the Master, should expect to suffer. The “captain of their salvation” was perfected for his position in glory by suffering, so the “many sons” who attain to glory with him must also expect to suffer.—Heb. 2:10

Now Paul presents another viewpoint of Christian suffering, another reason we “suffer with him.” (Rom. 8:17) It is because, together with

Jesus, we participate in the great battle against sin. He reminded the Hebrew brethren—and us—that having entered this struggle we should not consider relaxing in the fight, that we should follow the example of Jesus, who, in his striving against sin, did so ‘unto blood,’ that is, unto death.

VERSES 5,6 “Ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.”

The word ‘chastening’ as used in this text does not necessarily imply punishment. *Strong’s Concordance* defines the Greek word *paideia* from which it is translated as meaning ‘tutorage,’ or by implication, disciplinary correction. It is translated ‘nurture’ in Paul’s admonition to fathers to bring up children “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” (Eph. 6:4) The same word is translated ‘instruction’ in the text which informs us that the inspired Word of God is profitable for “instruction in righteousness.”—II Tim. 3:16

VERSES 7,8 “If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.”

‘If ye endure’—It was this that Paul, throughout the entire epistle, was encouraging the Hebrew brethren to do. They had endured faithfully for a time, but he admonished them to endure unto the end. While the chastenings of the Lord are not manifestations of his anger, but corrective in nature, they do, nevertheless, usually involve more or less of suffering. Paul was strengthening the Hebrews to endure this also. While closely related to our suffering with Christ as a result of our being planted together in the likeness of his death, corrective discipline is not the same. However, it calls for endurance if we are to reap the benefit therefrom.

VERSES 9,10 “We have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.”

The lesson here is obvious! If we consider that the corrective measures taken by our earthly parents served a good purpose in our lives, we must conclude that the chastenings administered by our Heavenly Father are of much more value, for they have to do with our eternal destiny. The text states that our earthly parents chastened us for ‘their own pleasure.’ The marginal translation gives a more correct thought. It reads, “As seemed good to them,” that is, they used the best judgment they could. When our Heavenly Father chastens us, it can always result to our profit. In his wisdom he knows exactly the sort of experiences that are best for us in order that we might be ‘partakers of his holiness’—that is, fully set apart to the doing of his will.

VERSE 11 “Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.”

No amount of philosophy can convert pain into joy. However, no matter how trying our experiences may be, if we allow them to exercise us in the proper way, the after result will be good—‘the peaceable fruit of righteousness.’ To be ‘exercised’ is to be trained. The thought in the Greek text is akin to our English word ‘gymnastics.’ The Lord permits various experiences to come into our lives in order that we might be properly trained for the high position in the kingdom to which he has called us.

VERSES 12,13 “Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.”

Paul here quotes from Job 4:3,4, the words of Eliphaz to Job. Eliphaz, one of Job’s ‘comforters,’ states that in the past Job had been able by his words of encouragement to lift up the hands of others which hung down, and to strengthen feeble knees. But now Job was in this very position himself, and needed help. So there were some among the Hebrew brethren who likewise needed encouragement, for they were showing signs of becoming ‘weary in well doing.’ All who are running for the prize of the High Calling have the blessed privilege of assisting others in the same racecourse. It is not a competitive race in the sense that we are running against our brethren, but a cooperative one.

We are ‘to make straight paths for our feet, lest,’ as Paul explains, ‘that which is lame be turned out of the way.’ There are probably always some in the racecourse who are less vigorous than the others—lame ones. If the strong runners swerve from side to side in an uncertain manner, the way is made the more difficult for the lame; for in addition to their halting progress, they become confused. This is simply an admonition to set a good example for our brethren.

VERSE 14 “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.”

We can have peaceful intentions in our dealings with ‘all men,’ but it might not always be possible to attain peace. Elsewhere Paul wrote, “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.” (Rom. 12:18) James wrote that “the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable.” (James 3:17) The Lord does not want us to compromise principle in order to have peace, either in our association with the brethren, or with the outside world. ‘Holiness,’ that is purity of character based upon principles of righteousness, is essential to our winning the prize and being with our Lord in glory.

VERSE 15 “Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled.”

The thought here is to beware, and diligently so, lest we fail of the grace of God. The admonition is much the same as in chapter 4, verse 1. “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.” There is nothing which can so quickly cause us to ‘come short’ as permitting bitterness to develop in our hearts, either against one or more of our brethren, or against our own experiences in the racecourse.

We sometimes hear the expression, ‘souring on life.’ If we do not maintain the proper viewpoint and the right attitude of heart, we could easily become embittered by our trials—not directly against the Lord, perhaps, although it could lead to that. In such an attitude of heart one becomes a grumbler, a complainer, causing dissatisfaction to spread, with the possibility that ‘many’ will be ‘defiled.’

VERSES 16,17 “Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how

that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.”

Esau stands out in the Scriptures as one who hastily decided to sell his inheritance in the Abrahamic promise for a mess of “pottage,” (Gen. 25:30) that is, temporary material gain. Unlike the Ancient Worthies, he did not have sufficient faith to endure hardships. Such hardships were necessary to really inherit the promised blessings.

However, when Esau discovered that Jacob had taken necessary steps to make sure that he received that which he had purchased, he was greatly perturbed. He inquired diligently of his father if something could not be done about it. Paul says that Esau ‘found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.’ Figuratively, the word place in the Greek text, denotes ‘opportunity’ or ‘condition.’

Strong’s Concordance in defining the Greek word *metanoia* in this text, translated ‘repentance,’ says that by implication it denotes ‘reversal of [another’s] decision.’ This is revealing, for it suggests the probability that the repentance which Esau so diligently sought was not a reformation of his own heart, but a reversal of Isaac’s decision whereby he bestowed the much desired blessing upon Jacob.

The account in Genesis 27:30-34 bears this out. When Isaac discovered that he had pronounced his chief blessing upon Jacob, he said, “Where is he that hath taken venison, and brought it me, and I have eaten of all before thou camest, and have blessed him? yea, and he shall be blessed.” ‘He shall be blessed.’ This was Isaac’s decision, but Esau was not satisfied with it.

The next verse (34) records, even as Paul tells us, that Esau “cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father, Bless me, even me also, O my father.” But, just as the Lord, when telling us of his determination to plague death and to destroy *sheol*, the grave, said, “Repentance shall be hid from mine eyes,” (Hos. 13:14) so Isaac refused to repent, or to reverse his decision. His blessing had gone to Jacob, and no condition could be found which would justify making a change. Actually, Paul does not say that Esau sought repentance in his own heart. He says that this profane person sought a ‘place’ or condition of

repentance, and the original record shows that it was his father's repentance Esau was seeking.

Dawn Bible Students Association

Our Faithful Creator

“Let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.”

—I Peter 4:19

IN GIVING THIS ADVICE Peter probably remembered the words of Jesus on the cross, “Into thy hands I commend my spirit.” (Luke 23:46) Stephen used a similar expression in his dying hour. (Acts 7:59) Peter, however, suggests that this committing be done often, whenever experiences of suffering come. He also uses the word ‘soul’ instead of spirit, or breath of life. Jesus and Stephen committed the spirit, that mysterious

power to live, to God. They knew that their future life must come from God since they couldn’t raise themselves from the dead. The soul is our entire being, and we are to use this up gradually in the service of God. In doing so we are following in the footsteps of Jesus and committing our future life to our faithful Creator. We have the example of Jesus who “poured out his soul unto death.”—Isa. 53:12

OUR CONSECRATION

At consecration we gave our all to God or, more accurately, we promised to do so. We promised solemnly to do his will, but can do it only moment by moment. Each day we must pay our vows by doing God’s will as each new experience comes along.

‘Committing’ as used in our text seems to refer to putting a particular matter into God’s hands. It is our privilege and duty to “commit” our way unto him. (Ps. 37:5) This is one way of acknowledging that we want his will to be done in the particular matter under consideration. This is carrying out our vow of consecration and keeps the relationship with our Heavenly Father active and up to the minute.

Peter advises that when we suffer according to the will of God, we should commit our souls to him. Suffering is an occasion of special trial, a time of special need of God’s help. Yet experience shows that at this specific time it is easy to forget this important fact. Our minds are

disorganized to a certain extent, making it difficult to realize that God is supervising this particular experience. A mental fight is usually required at such times to apply the exceeding great and precious promises to ourselves. Peter's advice is of special value and if followed will give us Divine help when we need it most. In any time of suffering we should commit ourselves to God. Instead of murmuring and rebelling, we will say as Jesus did, "Not my will, but thine, be done." (Luke 22:42) It will also mean asking for help to endure, and for strength to overcome. This may require a repeated struggle in the mind, but it is a part of the good fight of faith and will surely bring us the true peace that comes to a mind stayed on God.—Isa. 26:3

CHASTENING OF THE LORD

Our Father does not expect too much at once. In Hebrews 12:11 we read, "No chastening [discipline] for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous." God knows our frame, "He remembereth that we are dust." (Ps. 103:13,14) When a particularly severe experience comes, we should not be discouraged. The important thing is to ask God for help as soon as possible. Then we should try to get our bearings by viewing things from God's standpoint. In an unusually severe trial this procedure will have to be repeated. Eventually we will get the proper perspective. With it will come "the peaceable fruit of righteousness."—Heb. 12:11

Our text uses the word 'Creator' instead of God, or our Father. This is because every true Christian is in the process of creation. "If any one be in Christ, he is a New Creation." (II Cor. 5:17, *Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott*) "We are his [God's] workmanship." (Eph. 2:10) God's work is done upon the mind and character. A Christian is transformed by the renewing of his mind. "God ... hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels."—II Cor. 4:6,7

This knowledge from God does its work on the mind. If a Christian continues faithful unto death, he will receive a Divine body fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body. (Phil. 3:21) Suffering is an important and most necessary part of this creative process. Of Jesus, the Head of the New Creation, we read, "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him." (Heb.

5:8,9) He could not be perfect or complete as a New Creature until he had proven loyal to God under conditions of suffering. Even though a Son of God, a perfect human being, he had to endure suffering before being completed as a Son on the Divine plane of being.

His followers, originally “children of wrath,” (Eph. 2:3) must suffer with him if they would be glorified together with him. This suffering is an indispensable part of the creative process. Even love, the sum of all graces, is proven genuine by obedience—“This is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.” (I John 5:3; John 14:21) The test becomes severe when doing God’s will involves suffering. At such times we should commit ourselves to our faithful Creator. This is done by accepting the experience, saying in our hearts, “Not my will, but thine be done.” Our part is to submit our wills in this way. God’s part is to direct the issue.

“God is faithful, who will not permit you to be tried beyond your ability; but with the trial, will also direct the issue, that you may be able to bear it.” (I Cor. 10:13, *WED*) He is truly a faithful Creator. In a particularly severe trial we should ask him for help and strength. Asking him for this help proves that we are sympathetic with God’s will for us. We want to please him, even though the flesh is weak. We accept the experience and are learning obedience. With such an attitude of mind, our faithful Creator will give us the help needed. Committing ourselves to him at such times definitely strengthens the New Creature.

HOW WE SUFFER

The word suffer in our text is defined by *Strong’s Bible Concordance* ‘to experience a sensation or impression (usually painful).’ This is a broad definition since we experience sensations and impressions continually. Peter limits the meaning by saying ‘suffer according to the will of God.’ This means that the experience has come to us by his providence, and that we are taking, or enduring, it in a way that pleases him. Other texts explain what sufferings are in harmony with God’s will. Suffering for wrongdoing is not counted as suffering with Christ. (I Pet. 4:15) “What glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently?” (I Pet. 2:20) Such experiences have no glory attached to them.

Glory comes only when we voluntarily suffer for doing right in the same way that Jesus did. This is to the glory of God. It is doing more than what will be required of perfect beings on the human plane in the Millennial Age. Christians in the flesh are imperfect and need correction and discipline. Taking the rebuking for our faults patiently is helpful if we try to correct them. Proverbs 3:11 and Hebrews 12:7,8 show that we must have these rebukes. Let us endure these necessary corrections, but, at the same time, be active in letting our light shine and in living a life of righteous action. Whatever opposition this brings will be to the glory of God and thankworthy.—I Pet. 2:19

JESUS OUR EXAMPLE

When Jesus “was reviled, [he] reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed his cause to him that judgeth righteously.” (I Pet. 2:23, *Marginal Translation*) Jesus is our example. (vs. 21) No one should suffer for welldoing. God does not require this of perfect men nor angels. Those being created for the Divine plane, however, are required to endure suffering for righteousness because they learn obedience this way. This proves they have an exceptional degree of love for God. Thus they become like Jesus. As Jesus committed his cause to God, so do they. They commit themselves unto their faithful Creator.

The Scriptures also use the word suffer in the sense of permitting, or letting, things be as they are. “Suffer it to be so.” (Matt. 3:15) When Jesus was reviled he could have taken matters in his own hands and retaliated. Instead, he chose to suffer it. When he was taken for crucifixion, he explained that he could call for twelve legions of angels. He could have prevented his capture. He did not do this, but ‘suffered’ his enemies to take him because it was God’s will. Had he not submitted, how would the Scriptures have been fulfilled?—Matt. 26:54

We are told that the life of Jesus is to be an example to us. (I Pet. 2:21) When we are reviled, we are not to revile again. We are not to return evil for evil, but are to suffer such things and commit our cause to him that judgeth righteously. This way is contrary to fallen human nature which continually urges that we should ‘get even.’ We must expect a fight between the old and new natures. We should oppose the old, and strengthen the new, by a determined effort to follow the example of Jesus in each such experience. It is helpful to remember that God will avenge

all unrighteousness in his own time and way. “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.” (Rom. 12:19) The responsibility for getting even is not ours.

The principle of suffering things to be as they are is very useful to the Christian. Few will have such an extreme experience as when Jesus suffered himself to be taken for crucifixion, but all Christians will experience some reviling because of their loyalty to God’s Truth and the principles of righteousness. Such experiences will enable them to follow the example of Jesus who suffered without returning evil for evil. Paul advises brethren to take, or suffer, wrong rather than go to law with brethren.—I Cor. 6:7

The Christian must also suffer conditions to be as they are in this present evil world. He is often tempted by the natural desire to reform the world and make it a better place in which to live. Such noble desires must be curbed by remembering that the Millennial Age is God’s time for converting and reforming the world of mankind. With few exceptions, he must suffer present conditions to be as they are. This way will be misunderstood by the great majority of professed Christians who do not know, or cannot believe, God’s plan for the restitution of all things during the Millennial Age. The true Christian may be reviled as he gives his reasons for the hope that is in him. In fact, he may be merely thought foolish. Whatever the result, he will suffer it to be so, committing himself to his faithful Creator.

SUFFER IT TO BE SO

Jesus as a perfect human being could have done much reform work at the First Advent. Even imperfect people with strong wills have accomplished great things at various times. Had Jesus devoted himself to something of this sort, he could have made a great name for himself and had some satisfaction as a human being. Such a course would not permanently solve the problems of humanity. Jesus knew God’s long-range plan which required the sacrifice of his humanity. He believed in this plan and was determined to go through with his part. He refused to be swerved from this singleness of purpose by any halfway measures. God’s plan was more difficult in that it required sacrifice. True Christians, like Jesus, are “living” sacrifices. (Rom. 12:1) They, like him,

will suffer present conditions to be as they are now and will trust God's promises for future glory.

Even in simple vexing trials, the Christian is helped by suffering things to be as they are. In this evil world, there are so many things which annoy and anger us. It is natural to grumble and speak our minds, but this does not help the New Creature. We can do very little in the way of changing things, but we can help ourselves by remembering that God will change conditions soon. We prove our faith in his plan by suffering things to be as they are. We fight our tendencies to grumble by applying such promises as "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." (Rom. 8:28) Paul advises us not to murmur as the Israelites did in the wilderness. (I Cor. 10:10) Developing and maintaining the attitude of suffering unpleasant things to be as they are will help us to endure more severe sufferings when they come to us. If we have the habit of murmuring at little things, it is more than likely that we will find it difficult to take greater trials patiently.

A Christian may have to take a position with a lower salary, or be put under an unreasonable foreman. He may have a landlord or a neighbor that is disagreeable or offensive. The proper course is to ask God for wisdom, and endeavor to weigh the matter from the standpoint of his eternal interests as a New Creature. His present opportunities for serving the Lord and having fellowship with others of like precious faith may be greater in one place than another to which he might move in order to ease temporal difficulties. The Christian who suffers difficult situations for this reason will surely please God. He is committing his interests unto a faithful Creator. The process of 'creation' will continue as he grows in knowledge and grace. By enduring disagreeable conditions he will allow patience to have her perfect work.

REGULATING THE CONSCIENCE

"This is thankworthy [well-pleasing—*WED*] if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully." (I Pet. 2:19) The consecrated Christian educates his conscience by studying God's Word and watching his providence. He decides that God wishes him to do certain things and not to do other things. If his endeavors to please God

result in grief, he can take satisfaction in the above promise. God reads the heart and knows the sincere intention and effort to please him.

In Romans 14:5, Paul shows that the consciences of some were more fully regulated than others. "One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike." He was one who regarded every day alike. (Gal. 4:9-11) Every day was to be fully devoted to God's service, even when he supplied his temporal needs by making tents. Paul went on to say, "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." He then explained that the conscience of another must be respected. (Rom. 14:13) Each one is responsible to God alone who can read the heart.

One who serves God sincerely will study God's Word diligently to educate his conscience by discerning God's will more clearly as time goes on. It is also helpful to question our motives occasionally. Why did I do this, or that? Can I truly say that I did it solely because I understood it to be God's will? Such heart-searching helps to counteract the deceptive tendencies of our natural earthly desires and habits of thought.

AVOID EXTREMES

It is necessary to avoid extremes. In the Early Church there was a conflict about faith and works. James 2:20-26 showed that both were necessary. Faith without works is dead. There can be a tendency to specialize on one phase of Christian living and ignore the others. The Christian should accept the disagreeable conditions of this present evil world patiently, but this alone will not make him a follower of Christ. The Christian must be active, taking the initiative in using his talents and opportunities. He will be careful to follow God's instructions in letting his light shine as a witness and for the purpose of taking out a people for God's name. He will suffer present conditions to be as they are until God's kingdom changes them. He will do what he believes God would have him do regardless of what the results are. The Apostle Paul states the matter well in II Corinthians 12:15, "I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved." He would continue to be active in sacrificing for others regardless of what the recipients did. It is comparatively easy to do things that bring appreciation. When this is not forthcoming, it is natural to quit giving; but the Christian does not follow his natural tendencies. He does all things as unto God, not unto men.

LIVING SACRIFICES

Those who follow Jesus are to be living sacrifices. (Rom. 12:1) They permit their all to be used up gradually in serving God. As they see opportunities to exercise their talents they take the initiative and do with their might what their hands find to do. This activity costs them much—their all. It uses up their time, their energy. They sacrifice their human hopes for success in this life. They, like Jesus, will make themselves of no reputation. They suffer all of these things to be so, knowing that this is God's will for them. When their old nature, the flesh, tends to rebel, they ask God for help and he responds. He has promised to give grace to help in every time of need.—Heb. 4:16

We have but one sacrifice, our all; but it consists of many little sacrifices, some of which are too small to mention or even consider; yet all of these are necessary parts of the whole. To withhold in anything we see to be God's will, would be disobedience no matter how little it is. Things of small value can become important in that they exercise us in the great principles of faithfulness and obedience. "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much." (Luke 16:10) Carelessness in little things is a danger signal. On the other hand, it is possible to be deceived into thinking that because we are sacrificing some comparatively small things, we are fulfilling our entire obligation. Paul said, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." (I Cor. 10:12) We cannot stand still. We must grow as long as we are on this side of the veil.

Our covenant of sacrifice requires that we continually ask ourselves, "What more can I do? I will not be discouraged because I can do little, but will ask the Lord to help me to recognize new and larger opportunities which I might have overlooked. I am a steward of all my time, talents, energy, temporal things. Can I use them to greater profit for the Lord?" This attitude will be a great help in fulfilling our consecration vow. It is pleasing to God because it was that attitude of Jesus, who said, 'Not my will, but thine, be done.' One who maintains this attitude will become more and more like Jesus. He will be transformed by the renewing of his mind. He will gradually bend his affections heavenward, away from the natural earthward tendencies, learning to think from God's viewpoint.

In time of suffering, our thinking is more intensified than in quiet meditation or study. We are forced to face great problems, and make

decisions on principles such as loyalty and obedience. The path of duty becomes clear as we try to discern God's will, even though the right course involves suffering. If we follow Peter's advice and commit ourselves to our faithful Creator, we will receive the necessary strength to do God's will. Our efforts to think the matter out from his viewpoint will accentuate the transforming process and develop us as New Creatures. Let us continue faithful until our humanity is entirely used up as a living sacrifice.

Dawn Bible Students Association

“A Still More Excellent Way”

“Earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.”

***—I Corinthians
12:31, Revised
Standard Version***

THE APOSTLE PAUL STATES in I Corinthians 12:1, “Concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant.” He then names some of the gifts of the Spirit given to the Early Church saying, “To one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge ... To another faith ... to another the gifts of healing ... To another the working of miracles;

to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues.”—I Cor. 12:8-10

GIFTS TO THE EARLY CHURCH

God thus bestowed on believers in the Early Church one or more of these miraculous powers known as gifts of the Spirit, or ‘spiritual gifts,’ which played an important part in the establishing of the Early Church, being a witness both to themselves and to the world of God’s dealings with them.

In the orderly use of these spiritual gifts as suggested by the Apostle Paul in the fourteenth chapter of this same epistle, these might indeed be thought of as a way of life; in fact an ‘excellent way’ in many particulars, and a proof of Divine power exercised in the affairs of God’s people.

The Apostle Paul, after showing the superiority of some of the gifts over others, and that the gift of tongues should not be used in the church to any great extent unless in connection with the interpretation of tongues wherein all might understand and be edified, proceeds to show that the Christian life and way consisted of much more than the exercise of these gifts, excellent as they are. “Yet,” says he, “shew I unto you a more excellent way.”—I Cor. 12:31

THE MORE EXCELLENT WAY

What is this ‘more excellent’ Christian ‘way’? It is, as he outlines in the thirteenth chapter of I Corinthians, the way of love. The apostle then (in the first part of I Corinthians 13) emphasizes the superiority of love, and the way of love over any of the miraculous powers given to the church for a time. These later were done away with after they had served their purpose. Even while the spiritual gifts were exercised, he shows that they were of little value to the possessor unless love was in the heart at the same time. Paul says, “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity [love], I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.” (I Cor. 13:1) No one certainly ever claimed to be able to speak with the tongue of an angel, but here for emphasis Paul declares that even could such be the case, without love it would be but noise.

He proceeds, “Though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity [love], I am nothing.” (vs. 2) In this statement are named the spiritual gifts previously mentioned in the twelfth chapter, which are the gift of prophecy, the gift of wisdom to understand all mysteries, of knowledge beyond one’s natural powers, and of faith. Paul was not speaking of ordinary faith, but the miracle-working gift of faith, and that in excess of anything actually given—mountain-moving faith. If I have all of these, says Paul, ‘and have not love, I am nothing.’ Love is superior, therefore, to all these things, and they are valuable only when accompanied by love.

“Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity [love], it profiteth me nothing.” (vs. 3) Is it not good to give to the poor? Do we not honor Christian martyrs? The poor might profit from our charity even where the giving might be done to be “seen of men.” (Matt. 23:5) They would benefit, but without love on the part of the giver it would profit the giver nothing in God’s sight. Even with such a sacrifice as life itself, if we could think of it as being motivated by anything other than love, then, it too would be unprofitable.

THE SPECTRUM OF LOVE

As a man of science might take a beam of light and pass it through a crystal prism and break it up into the component colors of the rainbow,

so Paul takes love and passes it through the magnificent prism of his inspired intellect and it comes out broken down into its component parts, the beautiful fruits of the Spirit.

At least ten ingredients are ascribed to the spectrum of love:

Patience—“Charity	[love]	suffereth	long.”
Kindness—“And	is		kind.”
Generosity—“Charity	[love]	envieth	not.”
Humility—“Charity [love]	vaunteth not itself,	is not	puffed up.”
Courtesy—“Doth not	behave	itself	unseemly.”
Unselfishness—“Seeketh	not	her	own.”
Good Temper—“Is	not	easily	provoked.”
Guilelessness—“Thinketh no	evil.”	(Does not surmise	evil.)
Sincerity—“Rejoiceth	not	in	iniquity.”
Joy—“Rejoiceth in the truth.”			

Here, then are the Christian graces and virtues comprehended and embraced in the one word love.—I Cor. 13:4-6

Additionally, we are told that love “beareth ... believeth ... hopeth ... endureth all things,” and “charity [love] never faileth.” (vss. 7,8) What wonderful qualities and graces, then, go to make up this sum of all graces—love! Truly a more excellent way indeed! An unfailing way, for it is the way of God. God cannot fail, and he will see that those who faithfully pursue his more excellent way of love do not fail. Love and love’s adherents will triumph. The more excellent way of love during this present Gospel Age leads to “glory and honour and immortality.”—Rom. 2:7

LIMITATIONS OF SPECIAL GIFTS

Following this declaration of love’s constancy and triumph—that it never faileth—the apostle reminds the Corinthian brethren of the temporary nature and use of the spiritual gifts of prophecies, tongues, and knowledge. “As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.”—I Cor. 13:8, *RSV*

The word prophesy as used in the New Testament usually means ‘to preach,’ or publicly ‘to expound or discourse.’ Occasionally prophecy is used, as we are more familiar with its meaning today, as the prediction of things to come. The gift of prophecy as it was given to some in the

apostle's time was a miraculous, God-given ability to excel in these respects, beyond the normal capacities of the individual. This miraculous gift of prophecy has been "done away" as Paul indicated would occur. (I Cor. 13:10) The same is true concerning the ability to speak with 'tongues.' 'As for tongues, they will cease.' Those given the gift of tongues have ceased to speak.

'As for knowledge, it will pass away.' This statement has been difficult for many to understand. What the apostle is saying is not that all knowledge shall pass away, but that the 'word of knowledge,' that is, the gift of knowledge by special inspiration, which had been possessed by some, would pass away. And so it has.

Later he does show that any of our knowledge is "in part," and it shall be done away with in the sense that it shall be swallowed up in the fulness of perfect knowledge. (I Cor. 13:9) But this picture is one of a vast increase of knowledge for the future "when that which is perfect is come," a fulness of knowledge, not a doing away with it. (vs. 10) Paul further indicates that our knowledge has been expanding from childhood to manhood, and that even yet "we see through a glass, darkly; but then [in the resurrection when born of the spirit we shall see] face to face." He continues, "Now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known [by God]."—vs. 12

How beautifully, forcefully, and logically the Apostle Paul led the brethren of his day from any overemphasis on the spiritual gifts which were to pass away, to an appreciation of a more excellent way—the Christian way, the way of love! Is this not in harmony with the teachings of the Master himself, who when asked as to which was the greatest commandment answered, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. ... And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."—Matt. 22:37,39

The more excellent way is love. "Now abideth faith, hope, charity [love], these three; but the greatest of these is charity [love]."—I Cor. 13:13