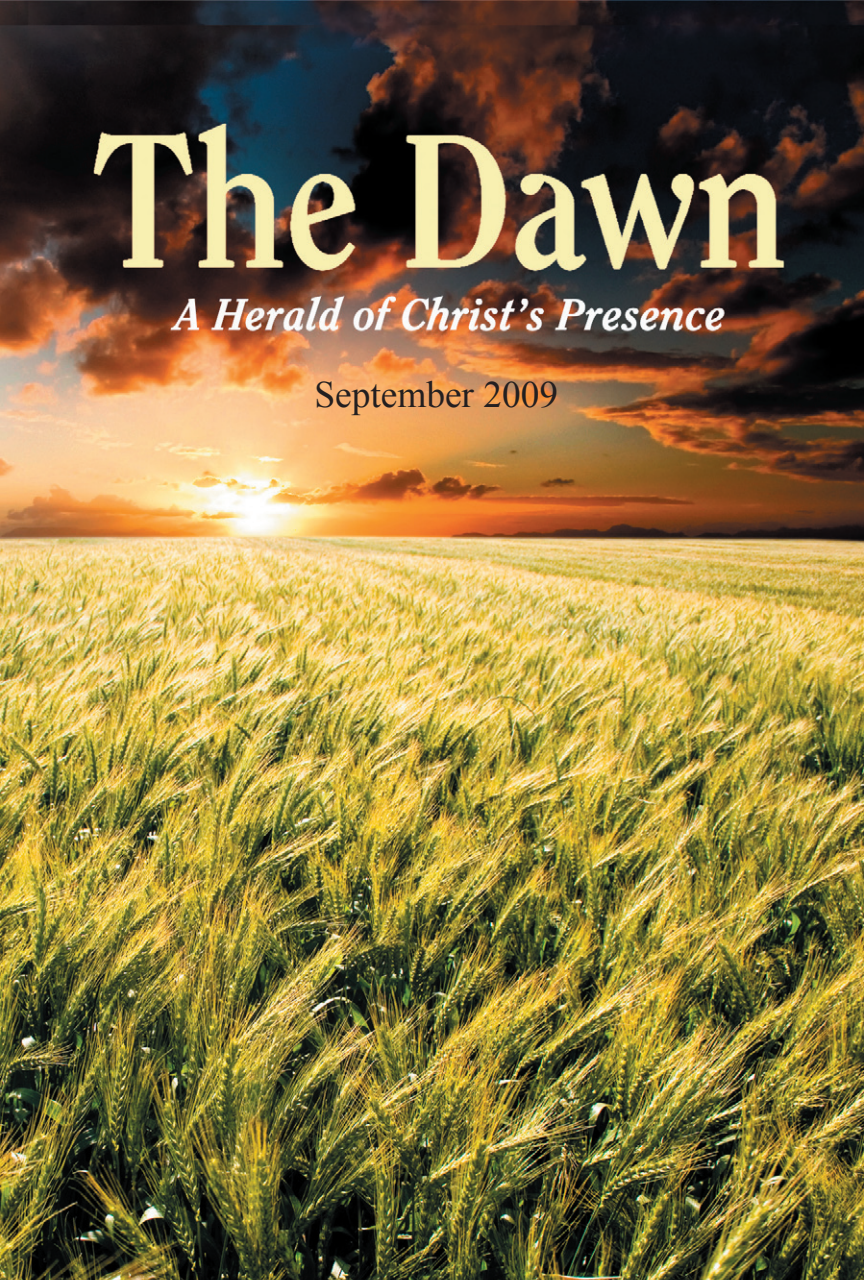


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Nuclear Ambitions: In Perilous Times

*“This know also,
that in the last
days perilous
times shall come.”*

—II Timothy 3:1

THE WORDS OF THIS PROPHECY

were written by the Apostle Paul to Timothy, a brother that he loved dearly even as his own son. The ‘last days’ of which he spoke pointed to the level of violence that would occur at the end of the present Gospel Age, the very time in which we are now living. It marks the prophetic time during our Lord Jesus’ Second Presence, and the closing features of this age. We are all witnesses of the growing momentum of death and destruction in a world that has lost its way.

FEAR OF PROLIFERATION

One of the signs of the present chaos among the peoples of the world is the response to the latest nuclear and long-range rocket tests that have taken place in North Korea. One of the major fears of concern is Pyongyang’s continuing defiance in

spite of the international community's efforts to halt the country's nuclear program and bring the situation under control. There is also widespread concern over the possibility that Iran might try to find ways to sidestep diplomatic efforts by the United Nations to acquire nuclear weapons. This would fuel new and even more violent conditions in the Middle East regional arms race. It is feared that if North Korea is able to get away with becoming a nuclear nation with little or no direct punishment, the future may become even more desperate.

Gerald Steinberg, a political science professor at Bar Ilan University in Israel, says the Americans must show credibility on the North Korean nuclear issue because it serves as a barometer of the rising worldwide tensions. The United States has been threatening to take action against North Korea ever since the 1990s, and this has enabled North Korea to buy valuable time. The Israeli concern is that this is exactly what will happen with Iran if the situation cannot be controlled.

Israeli analysts believe that it should have been easier to apply a proper mix of diplomatic and military pressure on North Korea than it would be on Iran. They point out that this is possible because of its comparative geographic, economic, and political isolation. Uzi Rubin, a former Israeli military intelligence officer who served as head of Israel's Missile Defense Organization from 1991-99, says that this situation will create an open season for the obtaining of nuclear weapons by others. The recent North Korea test was a watershed event, and it means that if you have even minimal technology

and are isolated, it is still possible to obtain nuclear technology if you try hard enough.

DIVISION OF KOREA

At the end of World War II, the people of Korea were liberated from Japanese domination, and the Korean peninsula was broken up into two parts. This took place in 1945 at the 38th parallel when the divisions became known as North Korea, which came under the influence of the Soviet Union, and South Korea, under that of the United States. Russia and the United States were unable to agree on a joint trusteeship, and in 1948 the two divisions were formed into two separate states dominated by communist ideology in the north, and capitalism in the south.

Major differences in the economies, politics, and ideologies have grown between the two divisions since that time. In June, 1950, the North Korean People's Army attacked the south in an attempt to reunify the two Koreas under communist control. The war lasted until July, 1953 when the United States involved the two parties in an armistice agreement. There was no peace treaty, and technically the northern and southern divisions of Korea are still at war.

North Korea began to pursue nuclear technology in the late 1950s and by the early 1960s there were already concerns about their development of weapons of mass destruction. North Korea was a member of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, but withdrew in 2003. In 2006, they announced that they had successfully conducted a nuclear test for the first time. In April, 2009, it was known that North

Korea had become a full fledged nuclear power. In May, they conducted another nuclear test.

THE SECOND NUCLEAR TEST

North Korea's second underground nuclear test in May, 2009 has shown the world that it is only a matter of time before they have the ability to develop and mount an atomic weapon on a missile. Their latest bomb is considerably larger than the first one which was tested in 2006. This indicates their determination to continue to develop nuclear weapons, and to raise their stature among the nations of the world, especially against their main target the United States. North Korea is believed to have processed enough plutonium over the past few years to have built several nuclear bombs. Their nuclear tests are now raising fears of increased nuclear proliferation.

North Korea has been making measurable progress in its nuclear program and is showing its determination to possess a credible threat to its neighbors as well as the international community. It appears unlikely to back down, and is now more of a threat because they are gaining important experience all the time, including data and information about their bomb design and capabilities.

United States' President Barack Obama said the country's latest nuclear bomb test and missile firings pose a grave threat to the peace and security of the world. In response to the President's comments, North Korea has launched even more missiles. They also warned their closest neighbor, South Korea, that if it decided to participate in a United States led program to intercept any of their

shipping vessels for carrying suspected weapons of mass destruction, they would consider it to be equal to a declaration of war.

Yoon Deok-min, a professor at South Korea's state-run Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security, said North Korea appears to still be in the process of mastering the miniaturization technology required to place a warhead on a missile, though he called its ultimate success just a matter of time. He said its development of a nuclear-tipped missile is the worst case security scenario, and noted that the country has already deployed intermediate-range ballistic missiles that can travel nearly 2,000 miles. That easily puts South Korea and Japan into immediate range, and they can almost reach the United States island of Guam.

Observers point out that it is very disturbing that the country is conducting missile and nuclear tests in close proximity. Their latest test came less than two months after they fired an intermediate-range rocket over Japan and into the Pacific Ocean. Although North Korea claims that it had only launched a satellite, it is very apparent that they meant to test ballistic missile technology instead.

IRAN'S NUCLEAR PLANS

Halfway around the world from Korea, it is reported that Iran's nuclear program has become one of the most difficult issues in one of the world's most violent regions. The country's leadership says that its goal in developing a nuclear program is the ability to generate electricity without relying on their oil supplies that they need to sell to other

countries. The American government believes, however, that their nuclear program was meant to give Iran powerful weapons which they may use to intimidate their neighbors. They have threatened the very existence of the nation of Israel. President Obama has also declared his opposition to the program, but has indicated that he would like to approach talks with them on the subject with more flexibility.

The first nuclear program began in Iran in the 1960s under the Shah. It made little progress, and was abandoned after the 1979 revolution, which brought to power the hard-line Islamic regime. In the mid-1990s a new effort began, and they said they were living up to their obligations under the Non-Proliferation Treaty. In 2002, an exile group obtained documents revealing a clandestine program. Faced with the likelihood of international sanctions, the government of Mohammad Khatami agreed to suspend work on uranium enrichment and would allow a stepped-up level of inspections by the International Atomic Energy Association.

In 2005, Khatami, a relative moderate, was succeeded as president by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who was a hard-line conservative. Shortly thereafter, Iran announced that it was resuming work on turning uranium into a gaseous form, the first step in the so-called fuel cycle. The following year they announced that they would resume their enrichment work. Under the Non-Proliferation Treaty, Iran has the right to enrich uranium, but the atomic energy association halted their program until questions concerning a secret program were resolved.

In 2006, the United States, unable to win agreement at the United Nations for sanctions, said it would join the European negotiations with Iran over its nuclear program if Iran suspended their uranium program. After lengthy negotiations, the United Nations voted to impose sanctions on Iran for failing to heed calls for a suspension. Ahmadinejad and the country's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, vowed defiance, and Iranian scientists continued the work of building a series of centrifuges that concentrate uranium by spinning the gas at very high speeds.

Iran is anxious to obtain nuclear weapons to gain the reputation and prestige of being a major power in the Middle East. President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's recent re-election dispute, however, has cast doubt on any hope of arranging meetings aimed at curbing their uranium enrichment program, which they claim is only for the purpose of generating electric power. The enrichment process may be configured to produce fuel for either nuclear power plants or weapons. It is believed that Iran is very near, or already in possession of, sufficiently low-enriched uranium to produce a nuclear weapon. They argue that with the United States at war in Iraq and Afghanistan, both of which border on their country, and also with Israel's aggressive behavior in the Middle East, it seems but reasonable for them to pursue a weapons program to defend themselves. However, they continue sending rockets to the Hamas rebels in Palestine and Hezbollah rebels in Lebanon that creates a dangerous situation for Israel. In addition Iran has not proved that they can be trusted, or have peaceful intentions.

NUCLEAR-POWERED PAKISTAN

In 1972, Pakistan undertook a nuclear program which was established by Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto. He founded the program while he was Minister for Fuel, Power, and Natural Resources. He later became president and prime minister. When India tested a nuclear device in 1974, Pakistan's nuclear program gained increased interest, and began to acquire new uranium enrichment technology and expertise. Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan had acquired valuable knowledge with gas centrifuge technology while at the URENCO uranium plant in the Netherlands, and he advanced these efforts considerably.

Khan was put in charge of building, equipping, and operating Pakistan's Kahuta facility, which was established in 1976. Under his direction, Pakistan employed an extensive clandestine network in order to obtain the necessary materials and technology for its developing uranium enrichment capabilities. In 1985, they crossed the threshold of weapons-grade uranium production, and by 1986 were able to produce enough material to build a nuclear weapon.

TERRORISTS' CHALLENGES

As nuclear ambitions become more widespread throughout the world, terrorist groups are seeking new ways and devices to obtain weapons of mass destruction, including chemical, biological, and nuclear devices. The problem grows more serious with the passage of time, and world leaders and statespersons try to find ways to deal with the increasingly dangerous situation. This somber fact gained international attention in July, 2009, when

a suicide attack occurred on a bus in Rawalpindi, Pakistan. It drew special interest because it was the first bombing of its kind that had targeted workers who were employed at one of Pakistan's nuclear laboratories.

Military analysts warned that this attack raised new questions about the government's ability to withstand increasingly bold assaults by the Taliban, and especially against the country's military complex. The bombing occurred at the same time as Pakistan's army was fighting Taliban forces on several fronts, and they are preparing to begin an even more ambitious campaign in the insurgents' heartland in Waziristan.

The Taliban and Al Qaeda's goal is to topple the Pakistani government and gain control of its nuclear arsenal. They singled out nuclear workers, even though they were miles outside the weapons lab, but military analysts said this carries a high level of symbolism because Pakistan believes its ultimate strength lies in its nuclear capability. It also suggested a very threatening degree of sophistication. Talat Masood, who is a retired general and a military analyst said that the attack showed that their intelligence is current, and that it was a deliberate strike against those who work in nuclear facilities.

The attacker was killed and 30 workers were wounded when the suicide bomber rammed the bus with his motorcycle. The workers were from the Kahuta Research Laboratories, where weapons-grade uranium is produced. No high-level official or scientist was on board the bus. The United States has spent \$100 million in training Pakistani

security forces in an effort to make the nation's nuclear arsenal safe. American officials are greatly concerned about Pakistan's nuclear facilities.

EFFECTS OF A NUCLEAR ATTACK

The effects of a nuclear attack are both immediate and delayed. The destructive power includes the initial blast, thermal radiation, and ionizing radiation resulting in significant destruction. The delayed effects, such as radioactive fallout and other environmental effects, inflict damage over an extended period of time ranging from a few hours to years.

One of the main differences between a nuclear and a conventional bomb is that nuclear weapons can be thousands of times more powerful than the largest conventional weapons. Both types of weapons rely on the destructive force of a blast and the following shock wave, but the temperatures reached in a nuclear explosion are much higher than in a conventional explosion. A large part of a nuclear explosion's energy is emitted in the form of light and heat, and is generally referred to as thermal energy. This energy is capable of causing skin to burn and can start fires at considerable distances away. Nuclear explosions are also accompanied by various forms of radiation that may last for a short period of time, but may remain dangerous over a considerable period of time.

The power that may be produced by a nuclear weapon is the measure of the amount of explosive energy it can produce. This is given in terms of the quantity of TNT required to generate the same amount of energy when it explodes. Thus,

a 1 kiloton nuclear weapon is one which produces the same amount of energy in an explosion as does 1,000 tons of TNT. A 1 megaton weapon would have the energy equivalent of 1 million tons of TNT.

HIROSHIMA AND NAGASAKI

On August 6, 1945, United States military forces dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan. It was the first time in the history of warfare that there was devastation to such a degree. The bomb was a fifteen kiloton device that completely demolished the city, instantly killed more than 100,000 people and injuring countless others. Three days later a second atomic bomb destroyed the city of Nagasaki killing an additional 70,000 people.

Not only did the two atomic bombs dropped by the United States kill thousands of people and demolish two major cities, but they also put in motion serious medical conditions that affected both the survivors and future generations for many years to come. For months after the explosions, in addition to the severe burns covering most of the victims' bodies, survivors developed symptoms that doctors had no knowledge of and were unable to cope with. Radiation sickness and Acute Radiation Syndrome were terms used by doctors to describe the various symptoms that turned up in survivors a few months later.

HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

It is difficult to accept the fact that man has fallen to such a degree as to develop such terrible weapons of mass destruction to inflict upon one other. At the time Jesus' earthly ministry was coming to a

close, he spoke to his disciples outside of the temple, and said to them, “Then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened.”—Matt. 24:21,22

The Prophet Joel well described the present scene when men would be preparing themselves for war. He wrote, “Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruninghooks into spears: let the weak say, I am strong.” (Joel 3:10) In each of the cases now dominating the news, whether it be North Korea, Iran, or Pakistan, it is the rogue nations and terrorist groups that are challenging the great powers and the long held establishment. With great pride, they are saying, “We are strong.” The spirit of pride and selfishness prevails among fallen men whose ambition it is to harm and destroy their neighbors and their goods.

However, the time is now drawing near at hand for the present social order of Satan’s corrupt world (II Cor. 4:4) to meet its final judgment, and to be replaced by the glorious kingdom of our Lord Jesus and his faithful bride that will rule in the affairs of men.

CHRIST’S GLORIOUS KINGDOM

A new order of righteousness and truth will be established under Christ’s kingdom. “Give the king thy judgments, O God, and thy righteousness unto the king’s son. He shall judge thy people with righteousness, and thy poor with judgment. The mountains shall bring peace to the people, and the little

hills, by righteousness. He shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor.”—Ps. 72:1-4

From the wonderful words of the Prophet Isaiah, we read, “Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I the LORD have created it.”—Isa. 45:8

WARS TO CEASE

When the final number of our Lord Jesus’ bride will have made herself ready, Christ’s kingdom will be set up over all the earth. The psalmist wrote, “The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah. Come, behold the works of the LORD, what desolations he hath made in the earth. He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire.”—Ps. 46:7-9

Again, we read, “Evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth. For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.”—Ps. 37:9-11

Those who do not obey the laws of the kingdom will be brought down. “The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth. The Lord shall laugh at him: for he seeth that his day is coming. The wicked have drawn out the sword, and have bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy, and to slay such as be of upright conversation.

Their sword shall enter into their own heart, and their bows shall be broken.”—vss. 12-15 ■

When Jesus is King

*Praise to our king who is coming to reign.
Glory to Jesus the Lamb that was slain.
Life and salvation His empire shall bring
Joy to the nations when Jesus is King.*

*All men shall dwell in His marvelous light.
Races long severed His love shall unite.
Justice and truth from His scepter shall spring.
Wrong will be ended when Jesus is King.*

*Men shall learn right in His kingdom of Peace.
Freedom shall flourish and wisdom increase.
Foe shall be friend when His triumph we sing.
Sword shall be sickle when Jesus is King.*

*All shall come back who have lived long ago.
Love like a banner shall over them flow.
Sin shall be conquered as light shines within.
O hail happy day—when Jesus is King.*

*Oh, that shall bring praise to our King!
Praise to our King! Praise to our King!
Sing the glad song who to Jesus belong:
Glory to Jesus, to Jesus our King!*

Joshua: A Leader for the People

Key Verse: “*Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.*”
—**Joshua 1:9**

Selected Scripture:
Joshua 1

Ephraimites who were strong in number at the organization of the Israelites, soon after their exodus from Egypt.—Num. 1:10, Judg. 12:4

Joshua is referred to as “Moses’ minister.” (Josh. 1:1) He was constantly in training which would make him familiar with the Divine plans and methods as understood and practiced by Moses. It was Joshua who went with Moses into Mt. Sinai; it was he who led one of the companies of spies, and who brought back a good report. (Num. 14:6,7) He had stood by Moses in advising the people to have faith in God, and to proceed to conquer

JOSHUA, WHOSE NAME SIG-
nifies deliverer, or savior, became Israel’s leader, and under him they won many great victories. The result of these victories helped to make it possible for them to enter the land of the promise made to them by the Heavenly Father in the covenant. We have been told that he came from the tribe of Ephraim, who represented one of their leading families. His grandfather Elishama had been a captain of the army of the

and possess the promised land. However, while Joshua could not be Moses—the leader, commander, law-giver—he was faithful as a follower of Moses. He was one who obeyed Divine law, and his great faith and trust in God would lead him in having much influence with his people. He was just what God desired for him to be, and it shows to us that whoever is worthy of such a testimony from the Father is truly to be considered great.

At the time of taking Moses' place as the leader of the nation, he was in his eighty-third year. He must have been either the oldest, or next to the oldest, man in all the nation, yet he was strong, and evidently the best qualified man for the position. A very important aspect of Joshua's life can be seen in his character. Being meek, he waited for the LORD to authorize his taking command. For twenty-seven years, Joshua was the leader of Israel, faithful to God and to his people. He had not only led them in their first battle but he continued to lead them through Jordan and directed them in the conquering of city after city, including the dividing of the land among the tribes. It is also clear that he governed the people with great acceptance, dying at the age of one hundred and ten.

To accomplish the difficult task of entering their land of promise they would need to 'Be strong and of a good courage.' God had not promised to give them an easy entrance and possession; they were to fight and conquer their foes. They were being told by God through Joshua to have full confidence, not in themselves but in God. "Without me ye can do nothing." (John 15:5) The basis for their strength and courage was the promise of God to Abraham that he would bring his seed into the land of Canaan. "Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I sware unto Abraham thy father."—Gen. 26:3-5



Gideon: A Deliverer for the People

Key Verse: *“The LORD looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites: have not I sent thee?”*
—Judges 6:14

Selected Scripture:
Judges 6-8

AS WE MAY RECALL FROM

our studies, Israel’s history from the time of the division of Canaan until the anointing of Saul to be their king is called the period of the Judges—Joshua being the first judge and Samuel the last. These judges were evidently not elected to their position but raised to it providentially. However, as these judges had no power or authority and collected no revenues it would seem to follow that any power or influ-

ence they possessed was a personal one. To give weight or force to them implied a proper acknowledgement of them as Divinely appointed or raised up. This type of arrangement led the people continually to look to God for their helpers and leaders. Through these men God continued his personal government of Israel. The choice of the judges is an illustration of his will, “Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.”—Zech. 4:6

A judge, in ancient times, was one who executed justice and relieved the oppressed. When under oppression by their enemies because of the transgression against

the LORD, Israel was time and again released and blessed by the raising up of judges. If we were to read the Book of Judges as a complete history of Israel for the 450 years that they were used by God, we would mainly see a bleak picture. The account passes by the happy period of Israel's prosperity and especially points to their disobedience to God. We would also note their punishments for such transgressions and the deliverance from their problems through the judges, or deliverers, whom God raised up for them. They were God's representatives, and, as such, Israel's spiritual interests were more advanced under these judges than when they were subject to kings. It should be noted that this raising up of judges was a gracious action of God's grace, in order to deliver and bless the people, not to condemn and punish them. "Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them." (Judg. 2:16) Spiritual leaders of Divine appointment will always be marked by spiritual victories.

This brings us to our consideration of Gideon, a man of natural nobility who was appointed by God as Israel's sixth judge. Because of the evil that the people had done in the sight of the LORD, they had been delivered into the hands of the Midianites. God would send an angel to speak to Gideon, to inspire him as his appointed deliverer from the hands of their oppressors. 'Have not I sent thee?' Gideon was nevertheless given evidences from the LORD through his holy angel that he was doing the Divine will. The account tells us that Gideon was to assemble an army to go against the Midianites. At first, the army was over 22,000 men, but when God said that the amount was too high he proposed tests that would eventually reduce the number to 300. (Judg. 7:7) The enemy would be routed through the blowing of trumpets, the smashing of pitchers, the shining of lamps, and by shouting "The sword of the LORD, and of Gideon."—
vss. 17-20 ■

Ezra: A Priest for the People

Key Verse: “[Ezra] said, O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to thee, my God: for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens.” —Ezra 9:6

Selected Scripture: Ezra 9

THE BOOK OF EZRA IS THE

first of the post-captivity books, and it deals mostly with the remnant which alone had a heart for God. It records the return to Palestine under Zerubbabel, by decree of Cyrus, of a Jewish remnant who laid the Temple foundations. Ezra followed, and restored the law and ritual. (Ezra 1:1-11; 3:1-13) The mass of the nation, and most of the princes, remained by preference in Babylonia and Assyria, where they were prospering.—chap. 2:2

The material included in the Book of Ezra is historical, and it along with the Book of Nehemiah take up the history of Israel where it was written down by the scribes who also wrote the Book of Chronicles. Ezra, the writer of the book that bears his name, was a scribe, or educated man, whose genealogy can be traced back through the priesthood to Aaron. (chap. 7:1-5,11) It is thought that Ezra was not among those who went up first to Jerusalem under the proclamation of Cyrus; he was probably not born until much later after that important event. The record of the first

six chapters of Ezra covers a period of twenty years, and then an interval of about fifty years passed by before the events recorded in the seventh chapter transpired. The history of the return from captivity and the experiences of the people in connection with the rebuilding of the temple, he probably got from the records of the scribes at Jerusalem.

As we set the scene depicted in our lesson chapter, we see that the remnant has lost their separated position. In verse 2 of Ezra 9, we read, "The holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of those lands: yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass." When Ezra heard these words he was very distraught, so much so that he rent his clothing, and even plucked the hair off of his head, and beard. It would lead him to speak the words found in our theme text. After falling to his knees and spreading out his hands to God, he would confess the innermost feelings of his heart. He would express his sorrow for their transgressions, render thanksgiving to God for his mercy, and ask him to intervene on behalf of the people. (Ezra 9:3-5,7-15) The people and their leaders would respond to Ezra's petition with a great outpouring of sorrow, and emotion.

Ezra magnified the Law, showing the people that their problems were the result of a failure to keep the Law, and the proper course was to go back to the Law and seek to keep it to the absolute best of their abilities. These were hard words to follow, for conformity to them would mean the breaking of family ties. It was a strong but just penalty for breaking the Law. As a result their separation as a people would be restored. This would prove to be very important to their existence, for this spirit has persisted among the Jews ever since, keeping the nation and people comparatively separate and distinct from all others. "Happy is that people, that is in such a case: yea, happy is that people, whose God is the LORD."—Ps. 144:15 ■

Nehemiah: A Motivator for the People

Key Verse: *“Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king’s words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work.”*
—Nehemiah 2:18

Selected Scripture:
Nehemiah 2

FOURTEEN YEARS AFTER

the return of Ezra to Jerusalem, Nehemiah led a company of men and restored the walls and the civil authority. This book is a record of those events that took place over a period of eleven years. It is an historical book, supervised by Divine providence and intended for the instruction and edification of God’s people. Many good instances of individual faith acting upon the written Word are recorded in its verses.

Though the book of Nehemiah is mainly historical in nature, it depicts the story of the renewal of the people of the nation of Israel. Chapter 1 for example, represents conviction and confession of their sins; our theme scripture from Chapter 2 includes the sincere determination to rebuild; Chapter 3 deals with the actual rebuilding of the defense through sanctification (setting apart); and the remaining chapters

cover attack from without; temptations from the Adversary that are sometimes disguised; confession of our weaknesses; the importance of a covenant relationship with God; making attempts to live a godly life; acknowledgement of God in everything and the renewed influence of the Spirit of God.

Nehemiah was an Israelite of the tribe of Judah. He was of one of those prominent families of the Babylonian captivity that had returned to Palestine under Cyrus' decree. (Ezra 6:1-3) Nehemiah occupied a confidential position with Artaxerxes, the Persian king. During this time, the Jews had become considerable in number, and were despised by their neighbors, who wished to drive them out of the land. Their enemies, taking advantage of the weaknesses of the king who reigned over them, had attacked the partially rebuilt walls and gates of the city of Jerusalem, and had even wrecked and burned it. A plot had been devised for the complete extermination of the Israelites that would have succeeded if it had not been for Divine intervention. (Esther 3:13) When Nehemiah heard of this news, he was greatly troubled because he had a love for the land of promise. "It came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted, and prayed before the God of heaven." (Neh. 1:4) He prayed in this manner for four months, until one day his prayer was answered in the way of promises for forgiveness, mercy, and reconciliation with God. (Deut. 30:4) During a meeting with Artaxerxes, the king noted Nehemiah's saddened condition. Nehemiah used this opportunity to petition the king to send him to Jerusalem to rebuild all that was destroyed. (Neh. 2:3-7) He could have been put to death for this, but instead the king supplied him with all that he requested.

Upon arriving in Jerusalem, Nehemiah got right to work on his appointed task. As an evidence that their hearts were in their work, the entire wall was reared up in fifty-two days. ■

Sustained by the Hand of God

“Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.”
—Acts 14:17

AFTER THE DEATH OF THE

Apostle Paul, the message proclaiming the heavenly calling to the footstep followers of our Lord Jesus entered a new phase. No longer did the many classes that he had established and the numerous consecrated brethren in Christ have the opportunity of his Christian fellowship, powerful ministry and wise spiritual counsel. The members of the Early Church would go on to endure much in the way of experience in the name of their beloved Savior. This would include physical suffering and abuse at the hand of those who would seek to corrupt the glorious message of Truth.

However, our loving Heavenly Father was not about to abandon his specially called people, or to leave himself without a true witness in the world. We know that God has sustained his dearly loved

and cherished faithful ones in all ages and places, even during the darkest period of the Middle Ages.

It was the blessed apostle who proclaimed, "I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew. Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying, Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life." (Rom. 11:1-3) We are thus assured by the great apostle who then pointed out that God's hand was all powerful and sustaining. He continued, "What saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal. Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace." (vss. 4,5) Many precious stones have been gathered out during the long centuries of the present Gospel Age call to "The Christ." They will reflect the marvelous grace and glory of the loving Heavenly Father under the administration of Christ's future kingdom of righteousness.

THE GOSPEL AGE CHURCH

For nearly two thousand years, the heavenly call has gone out to true and honest-hearted followers of our dear Lord Jesus. During all of this time, there has been a common faith and purpose among the consecrated believers in Christ. In his short epistle Jude addressed this very point, when he wrote, "Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful

for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” (Jude 3) The called ones in Christ have willingly accepted the invitation to present their lives in complete consecration to the Heavenly Father. He has sustained them by the power and enlightenment of the Holy Spirit of Truth and his loving hand throughout this very long and difficult period of time.

Thus have the faithful upheld the Truth at great cost, and with much long-suffering and patient endurance. They have been upheld by the wonderful promises of God. “Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.” (Rom. 15:4) “Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.”—Rev. 14:12

FALSE CHRISTS WOULD ARISE

When Jesus’ earthly ministry was drawing to a close, he spoke about false Christs that would arise to deceive the consecrated people of God. He was well aware of the fierce trials that yet awaited his little flock of believers. “Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.” (Matt. 24:23,24) Jesus knew the power of Satan and the degree of evil that he was capable of inflicting upon his faithful followers.

In his second epistle to the church at Thessalonica, the Apostle Paul also cautioned the brethren to

not be deceived by those who did not have the proper spirit of the Truth, and would in turn spread false teachings by either word or action.” (II Thess. 2:2) He then proclaimed, “Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.”—vss. 3,4, *New American Standard Bible*

Paul was warning the brethren that the spirit of apostasy was already manifest and in their midst. “The mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. And then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved.”—vss. 7-10, *NASB*

The Gospel Age was in its early stages, and the apostle warned of an apostate system that would deceive many and cause a great falling away from the true faith. However, he explained that it was necessary that this should take place to test the followers of Christ before the promised day of the Lord should come at the end of the age. Errors would creep in, and selfishness and pride would replace the wonderful spirit of the Lord. The message of Truth and the invitation to share in Christ’s

future kingdom was set aside as the worldly spirit intensified.

THE REVELATION

The Book of Revelation is our Lord's last message to the members of the church—to those who would respond to the heavenly calling during this present Gospel Age. The Apostle John was given a series of visions that contained elaborate symbols which revealed our Lord's wonderful care and guidance for his consecrated people. In chapters two and three, the Revelator was given an overview of the churches' experiences, trials, and spiritual growth which at that time lay nearly two thousand years into the future. The mighty hand of the Heavenly Father would sustain his people with the Holy Spirit of Truth, and lead them to victory in spite of the continued opposition of Satan. "I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night."—Rev. 12:10

The Scriptures pointed forward not only to certain historical events that were about to take place, but they also served in a prophetic sense to foreshadow the spiritual growth and development of the church of Christ during their walk in newness of life. As these visions were about to be revealed to John, he was told, "Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter; The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the

angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.”—
Rev. 1:19,20

JESUS' MESSAGES TO HIS PEOPLE

During John's day, there were seven churches that existed in the seven cities that were named. However, it seems clear that they served to portray a grander meaning, and were intended to represent important aspects of the church's spiritual growth during its long and difficult history over the two thousand years since his day. In a larger sense, these experiences indicate valuable lessons for all the church class throughout this present Gospel Age. The admonition of our Lord Jesus was, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." (Rev. 2:10) Although these inspiring words were directed to the church at Smyrna, they represent the hope of each one of the entire consecrated body of Christ throughout this Gospel Age. The number 'seven' also stands to mark these churches' spiritual development in a very special way. In the Book of Revelation, the number 'seven' appears many times, including seven seals, seven trumpets, seven plagues, and other references to the number seven, and it is also found in many other places in God's Word.

FIRST MESSAGE

The first message in this group of seven was addressed to the Early Church at Ephesus. (Rev. 2:1-7) It was sent by our Lord Jesus who holds the "seven stars in his right hand," and who walks "in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks."

(vs. 1) The word Ephesus means ‘first’ or ‘desirable’ and describes the spiritual condition of the church during the Apostle Paul’s day. He was a wonderful servant in promoting the Truth to the Early Church, and he had received visions from God. In this message to Ephesus, the brethren living at that time were commended for their labors of love, patient endurance, and for hating the deeds of the Nicolaitans—those who were growing weary of God’s arrangements for conducting the affairs of his people, and favored having a clergy class to rule over them. Those at Ephesus were also chastised for leaving their “first love” for the Lord, and were encouraged to repent from their error lest the light of their candlestick be removed from them.—vss. 4,5

A most blessed promise was given to the faithful members of the church at Ephesus. “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.”—vs. 7

SECOND MESSAGE

Our Lord Jesus was “the first and the last,” and the one who was “dead” but now “is alive” (vs. 8), and he addressed this second message to the church at Smyrna. (Rev. 2:8-11) The word Smyrna means ‘bitter’ and points to the bitter persecutions suffered by those who loved the Truth and were responding to the glorious heavenly calling that went forth during that early period in the church’s history. The Apostle John was a special servant to the Lord’s people during that period.

The Scriptures speak well of the brethren who were living at that time. In respect to them, we read, “I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.” (vs. 9) The brethren were suffering much for the Truth, yet they proved faithful to the High Calling they had received in Christ Jesus. These events took place during the cruel reign of Emperor Diocletian. The account also tells us that these faithful followers of Jesus were accused by false brethren who are described as being from the synagogue of Satan because of their defiling spirit.

Again, the brethren were given a blessed promise that if they were faithful to their High Calling they would receive a great reward. “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.”—vs. 11

THIRD MESSAGE

When the Lord addressed the third church at Pergamos (Rev. 2:12-17), he informed them that he possessed a “sharp sword with two edges.” (vs. 12) The name Pergamos suggests ‘earthly elevation.’ It applies to that period in the church’s earlier history that saw a spiritual decline and growing relationship between members of the church and the powers of the state. They were losing the spirit of their first love for the Truth. From the scriptural account, we read, “I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan’s seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and *(Continued on page 35)*

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(Continued from page 31) hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.” (vs. 13) A few faithful brethren were opposing the rise of apostasy, and had thus earned the title, ‘my faithful martyr.’

We learn that some were beginning to fall under the influence of the doctrine of Balaam, and this was leading to spiritual immorality and the committing of fornication, which was totally unacceptable to the Heavenly Father. They also were chastised for turning to the teachings of the Nicolaitans, which had been an earlier warning to the brethren at Ephesus. It was leading them to the development of a clergy class and its lordship over the Lord’s people.

The faithful at Pergamos also received a special promise. “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that received it.”—vs. 17

FOURTH MESSAGE

The fourth message was sent by the Son of God, who has eyes like a “flame of fire,” and feet “like fine brass” (vs. 18), to the church at Thyatira. (Rev. 2:18-29) The word means ‘sweet perfume of sacrifice’ and describes the spiritual condition of the few humble members of the church who were living during the darkest period of the Middle Ages. It was a time that may be compared to the multiple evils of Jezebel, a self-proclaimed prophetess who

sought to seduce the servants of God to commit fornication.

Although tested severely, the spiritual life of the truly consecrated child of God was accepted by the Lord as a sweet perfume of sacrifice, even at the time when the apostate system reigned with complete power and authority with the state. Jesus told them, "I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first."—Rev. 2:19

Blessed promises were held out to those faithful members of the little flock who rejoiced in their heavenly calling. "He that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father. And I will give him the morning star."—vss. 26-28

FIFTH MESSAGE

The message to the church at Sardis was sent by the one who had the "seven Spirits of God and the seven stars," to those who had a name that had life yet appeared to be dead. (Rev. 3:1-6) The word Sardis means 'to strengthen that which remains' and points to the very darkest hour of the Dark Ages. It was a time when the voice of Truth was nearly snuffed out. The few remaining faithful ones were aroused to the changing scene of the time, and the work of the reformers who were challenging the apostate system.

"Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief,

and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee. Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.”—vss. 3,4

Because of their faithfulness to the Truth they were given wonderful promises for their steadfast courage. “He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.”—vs. 5

SIXTH MESSAGE

Jesus sent the sixth message to the church at Philadelphia. (Rev. 3:7-13) He was holy and true, and had the “key of David.” He could open and no man could shut, and he could shut and no man open. (vs. 7) The meaning of the word Philadelphia is ‘brotherly love’ and points to a new era of reformation and liberty that was transpiring. It was also reflected in the spiritual life and growth of the followers of our Lord Jesus. Centuries of bondage, confusion, and decay were being challenged, and a new time of revival and restoration was being made available in the study of the Scriptures.

The expression “I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it” suggests new liberties for thought, and an opportunity to bear witness to the Truth that had previously been denied. (vs. 8) Jesus said, “Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.”—vs. 10

The rewards for faithfulness are promised from the storehouse of God's promises. "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name."—vs. 12

SEVENTH MESSAGE

The seventh and last message to the people of God was sent by Jesus who was the "Amen," and who was the "faithful and true witness" of God. He was the "beginning of the creation of God." (vs. 14) He sent it to Laodicea (Rev. 3:14-22), which means 'justice for the people.' It marks the Second Presence of our Lord's promised return, and the watchers who were on hand were led by the ministry of Pastor Charles T. Russell. For over a century, the harvest message of Truth has been spread worldwide to countless numbers of the Lord's people during the closing years of this present Gospel Age and its harvest.

The church at Laodicea was chastised for being lukewarm. They were "neither cold nor hot," and believed themselves to be "rich." Neither did they recognize their state of spiritual weaknesses and would be spued out of the Lord's mouth as a consequence. (vss. 15-17) Thus they were admonished to seek after heavenly riches and to anoint their eyes with the wonderful "eyesalve" of God's Word and its unfolding riches. (vs. 18) In connection with our Lord's return they were told, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and

open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”—vs. 20

In each of the seven messages from the Lord to his followers, they were promised a rich reward for their faithfulness. To the church at Laodicea, we read, “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.”—vs. 21

MEAT IN DUE SEASON

The Lord’s ‘knock’ as a part of his message to the Laodicean church is a clear evidence of his presence at the end of this Gospel Age. It aroused his followers to a fresh, new study of the Scriptures, and especially those prophecies pointing to the promised return of our Lord, and the closing features of the Gospel Age call to the church.

During his earthly ministry, Jesus had taught, “Ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.”—Luke 12:36,37

Those of his followers who were watching the prophetic events of the foretold ending of the age, were privileged to be served by our Lord at his table with a bountiful spiritual feast of refreshing Truth. “Every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness: for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses

exercised to discern both good and evil.”—Heb. 5:13,14

Those who hunger and thirst after Truth and righteousness will partake of the spiritual food that has been provided. May we all be strengthened and thus renew our vows of consecration, and strive more diligently to make our calling and election sure. Let us praise him for all the way that he has sustained us by his powerful and caring hand. ■

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SEPTEMBER 3—“I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.”—Hosea 6:6 (Z. ’03-220 Hymn 177)

SEPTEMBER 10—“Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.”—Ephesians 4:29 (Z. ’99-70 Hymn 136)

SEPTEMBER 17—“Christ in you, the hope of glory.”—Colossians 1:27 (Z. ’03-375 Hymn 238)

SEPTEMBER 24—“I keep by body under, and bring it into subjection, lest...I myself should be a castaway.”—I Corinthians 9:27 (Z. ’03-425 Hymn 200)

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—*Ephesians 2:8*

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EXCEEDING GRACE

The thought of Divine grace being exercised on our behalf points especially to those followers of our Lord who are now being gathered from the world during the present time. The Apostle Paul proclaimed that this exceeding grace of God was for a very special purpose. “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I

do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”—Phil. 3:13,14

One of the words frequently used with reference to the various phases of God’s grace toward his people is ‘exceedingly.’ The apostle tells us that one reason the Law Covenant was given to Israel was that sin might be seen by them in its true sense. In his letter to the Roman brethren he explained this to them. “Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.”—Rom. 7:13

AWARENESS OF SIN

If no Law Covenant had been made with the Israelites, or if God had not revealed the perfect standards of his Law to his people, the true and exceeding sense of sin in the human family would have become gradually lost. As a result, mankind’s natural impulses would eventually have come to be regarded as right and proper. Selfishness and self-gratification would therefore gain full control, and would have been accepted as the principles governing men’s lives instead of an awareness of the power of sin.

However, the Apostle Paul previously explained to the brethren at Rome, “I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived

me, and by it slew me. Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.”—vss. 9-12

Paul’s words remind us how mankind has to a considerable extent lost sight of the finer principles of the Divine law, and that many things are said and done which are really transgressions of God’s perfect law. Without having these perfect standards set before us, the apostle points out that these transgressions may not be realized to their fullest extent. Through the Mosaic Law these principles of truth and righteousness were set before men, even as they had originally been when God put them in the heart of his perfect creature Adam.

The psalmist said, “The mouth of the righteous speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment. The law of his God is in his heart; none of his steps shall slide.” (Ps. 37:30,31) When the Israelites were made aware of these perfect standards, they realized they were sinners in ways they had previously not thought about. As Paul had said, ‘Sin revived, and I died.’ Israel had lost the hope of life and the Heavenly Father’s favors and this understanding came to them under the Abrahamic Covenant.

SPIRITUAL ISRAELITES

Those who are called by God during this present Gospel Age are also known as antitypical, or spiritual, Israelites. They have been similarly affected by this understanding and appreciation of sin and its powers of darkness. Before coming to the Lord many of these had wandered in the ways of the world, and where the great principles of right and

wrong were but dimly appreciated by their fallen minds.

By God's wondrous grace he provided for them a mental and moral awakening which took place under the influence of the Holy Spirit and Word of Truth. The ruinous nature of sin was seen in its true light, and to be the source of all the suffering and misery which are the present lot of mankind. The result of this enlightenment was to cause those who were being called by the grace of God to give diligence and to strive against all unrighteousness. They now realized, "All unrighteousness is sin, and there is a sin not leading to death."—I John 5:17, *New American Standard Bible*

Those who came to the Lord in full consecration found that their sins were covered by the wonderful merit of our Lord Jesus' perfect sacrifice. They experienced deliverance from Divine condemnation, and entered into a new condition of justification by faith. They understood, too, that it was only in their hearts that they could live up to the perfect standard of the loving Heavenly Father's perfect requirements. The merit of Christ's blood on their behalf had covered all of their unwilling shortcomings and imperfections of the fallen human flesh.

Newly justified believers in Christ saw the exceedingly sinful nature of sin as a result of the revelation that God had given them. It enabled them to see that through sin all deception, trouble, pain, suffering, and death have come into the world. They realized that it cost the Heavenly Father a stupendous sacrifice in order to provide a Savior for man, even his well-beloved Son. He was the

only one able and willing to carry out God's loving plan for human salvation and for the removal of sin and its terrible results.

GROWTH IN GRACE

The word 'exceeding' was used by Paul when writing to Timothy. "The grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus." (I Tim. 1:14) He reminded Timothy that at an earlier time he had not been a true follower of our Lord Jesus, and had persecuted his people. He explained this to Timothy by saying, "According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust. And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief." (vss. 11-13) In spite of his past sinfulness, the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant on account of the faith and love that the apostle was able to exercise in Christ Jesus.

Although "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23), some have drifted much farther from the paths of righteousness than others, and in many cases some of these have been much more responsible for their condition than others have. "Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound: That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord."—Rom. 5:20,21

The grace of God can indeed be described as a favor that is abounding exceedingly toward those who come to him in true penitence and consecration. The proper heart attitude is necessary before forgiveness and justification to life is possible. The child of God may come to him daily to receive forgiveness for his many sins and shortcomings. Such a gracious arrangement for God's favor to continue toward those who have hearts that are right and pure toward him may be thought of as grace that abounds exceedingly.

GROWTH IN FAITH

In the early days of our walk in newness of life with our dear Lord, we may see something of Christ's salvation and the Divine plan as a whole. We may not yet have built up faith in the wonderful promises, and learned to trust him where we cannot trace him. On one occasion, "the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith." (Luke 17:5) Paul addressed this matter, when he wrote, "We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth." (II Thess. 1:3) We see from the Apostle Paul that it is through the Lord's providence and his wise dealings with us that our faith and confidence in him increases. We have faith in his goodness, love, great wisdom, and power whereby he is able to make all things work together for our highest good as New Creatures in Christ Jesus.

EXCEEDING AND ETERNAL GLORY

The Master has described the course that the Lord's people are called upon to take. He said, "Strait

is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” (Matt. 7:14) Of necessity, these will meet with many trials and other tests of faith as they seek to take up their cross and follow in the footsteps of Jesus. The apostle, in referring to these experiences, says, “Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.”—II Cor. 4:17,18

It is a great aid in enduring the trials of the narrow way to patiently remember that they will soon be over, and that the period during which they are being experienced is short, if we take into consideration the eternity of blessing to follow. How thankful we are to be assisted by the Lord’s promised grace. This makes our trials very light when compared with the eternal weight of glory to be bestowed upon those who shall be faithful. “Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my glorying of you: I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation.”—chap. 7:4

UNSELFISHNESS

The manifestation of unselfishness in a child of God, and a willingness to share with others of that which we have, is surely a manifestation of the grace of God in the heart. Paul spoke of some of the brethren who had gone to exceptional lengths in helping their brethren. “It hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem.” (Rom. 15:26)

Another time he wrote, “Whiles by the experiment of this ministration they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal distribution unto them, and unto all men; And by their prayer for you, which long after you for the exceeding grace of God in you.”—II Cor. 9:13,14

The question may be asked as to why the poor saints at Jerusalem should receive financial help from these Gentile brethren? Paul records for our information, “It hath pleased them verily; and their debtors they are. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things.”—Rom. 15:27

To find a reason for this, we must go back to the early days after Pentecost and note the sacrifices made by the Jerusalem church in order that the Divine purpose might be fulfilled—that the glad tidings of salvation might go eventually to “the uttermost part of the earth.” (Acts 1:8) The scriptural account tells us that these Jewish brethren sold their houses and lands, and brought the money and laid it at the apostle’s feet. (Acts 4:34,35) This was their only means of survival, because prejudice and animosity made it difficult to earn a living. This resulted in there being ‘poor saints’ at Jerusalem deserving the help of their better-off Gentile brethren. If one gives much in the way of service it is surely because one loves much, the result of the exceeding grace of God in their heart.

IN POWER AND WORD

In Ephesians 1:19, Paul says, “What is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe,

according to the working of his mighty power.” He would have us know this, whether it be in the way of assistance toward measuring up to the standard of character set by the Master, or in the way of power to overcome in other directions. All vital progress results from the exceeding greatness of his power operating in the mind and heart. It is a power upon which we can place no limit. None of the called ones can possibly say it is not possible for him to be an overcomer and to attain a place in the little flock. This would be like saying that the great power of God is insufficient to accomplish this in his life.

We must admit that any failure on our part means that we have not been laying hold of, and responding sufficiently to, the grace and strength promised in such abundant measure. Paul, in calling our attention to God’s power operating for the development and exaltation of the church to the Divine nature, tells us that it is the same power that was sufficient to raise Jesus from the dead and to set him at God’s right hand in heaven. For our encouragement, the apostle reminds us that this same great power is being used on our behalf.

Paul further tells us that this exceeding richness of God’s grace that we have begun to experience is to be continued increasingly even unto the ages to come—the countless ages of eternity. “Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God.”—Eph. 2:5 -8

Speaking of the grace of God operating in the calling of the church, Paul also reminded us that God is prepared to strengthen us. “That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love.” (chap. 3:17) “Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us.” (vs. 20) If at any time we feel discouraged or cast down, let us remember that God has promised to do for us exceeding abundantly through the various channels by means of which he operates to encourage his people. The power by which he is pleased to help us is exactly suited to our needs, and is being exercised in accordance with his infinite wisdom.

THE EXERCISE OF HIS POWER

The apostle has frequently spoken to us about God’s great power and grace to help and encourage his people, and to bring them off conquerors. This is emphasized by his use of the words ‘exceeding’ and ‘exceedingly’ and he speaks in this same way of his own deep love for the brethren and of his desire to help them. (I Thess. 3:10) He also prayed exceedingly for his own progress and growth in grace and especially because such progress would make him more useful to others.

THE DIVINE NATURE

We are told that when the members of the church have apprehended that for which they have hoped, and have reached the presence of his glory, they also will have reached a state of ‘exceeding joy’ of

which Jude wrote. “Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.”—Jude 24

What lengths, breadths, heights, and depths of joy will be the portion of the overcomers suggested by the unspeakable Divine nature. Words are imperfect vehicles of thought when we attempt to describe this glory. It was not only the Master of which the psalmist spoke prophetically, but also of the church, when he wrote, “Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”—Ps. 16:11

In his endeavor to express for our learning and encouragement concerning the exceeding riches of God’s grace provided for us in Christ Jesus, Paul proclaimed, “As it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.”—I Cor. 2:9 ■

OBITUARIES

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

Brother P. Vijaya Kumar, India—June 1. Age, 74

Sister Caroline Meyers, Floral Park, NY—July 8.

Age, 91

Brother Rick Buss, Albuquerque, NM—July 12.

Age, 91

Sister Mercy, Ooty, India—July 30. Age, 78

Pilgrim Trip to Philippine Islands

Bro. Ray Charlton

THE BRETHREN IN Manila requested that Bro. Adam Kopczyk and I make a return visit to the Philippines to visit those that are living on different Islands. A request was also made that Bro. David Christiansen join us on this visit.

DEPARTED MELBOURNE ON 11 FEBRUARY, 2009

When we checked in at the Melbourne airport, we were informed that our flight was one hour late, and that our connecting flight to Manila may not happen. Singapore Airlines offered to provide us with an overnight stay if this was to eventuate. If the connection was very tight, a shuttle would meet us at the plane to speed up the Singapore transfer.

When we arrived at Singapore the shuttle was not waiting, and this created a problem. Ray had broken his toe the week prior to our trip, and this made the fast walk to catch the next plane very uncomfortable. Whilst walking to the connection

Ray noticed that his Australian passport was missing. Adam went ahead to hold the connecting plane to Manila while Ray went back to the Melbourne flight to locate his passport. It appears that it had been stolen during the flight, but without it Ray could not continue the journey to Manila. Fortunately, the passport was located, and the police stated that with only 6 months validity, it was of little value and therefore the thief had left it behind.

The plane to Manila had to be held up at Singapore because the airline had mistakenly tagged both bags in Ray's name, so they could not split us up. The plane to Manila left a little late but with both of us on board. We thank our dear Heavenly Father for his overruling in this difficult matter.

We arrived on Wednesday at 8:20 PM in Manila and we were met by Bro. Agripino and many of the Manila class, along with Bro. David Christiansen, who had arrived a day earlier. After the excitement of the flight, we were happy to relax at Taguig apartments, our old hotel from last year's visit, but this time on level four which faces the school and in a refurbished room.



Bros. David Christiansen, Ray Charlton, and Adam Kopczyk

THURSDAY, 12 FEBRUARY

Thursday morning was free time, giving us a chance to show David some of the sights of Manila, including a tour of the Mall of Asia. It was then time to head to the local market to buy supplies for the evening meal, plus time to send out emails telling our families and brethren of our safe arrival in Manila.

On Thursday evening we attended an evening meeting at Sr. Lita's place, where the Manila class holds regular meetings from 5:00 PM to 8:00 PM. There were 23 adults and 6 children in attendance. The evening started with hymn singing, followed by three discourses, "Wise as Serpents" a discourse on how we are to witness, "Humility" showing that even in very humble situations pride can become a snare, and "Paul's Travels" based on Acts 17.

Bro. Agripino's adopted son Roger and his tenant Bambam attended the meeting, and joined in with the hymn singing. The service concluded with a



Philippine brethren meeting together

testimony meeting, with many of the brethren giving thanks to their Heavenly Father for his many favors.

We arrived back at the apartments for a well earned rest which was shattered with the fire alarm going off at 2:00 AM as a kitchen on the 2nd floor had caught fire. The Fire Chief turned up on a motor tricycle, waiting patiently for the fire engine that arrived 10 minutes later well after the fire had been extinguished by the residents.

FRIDAY, 13 FEBRUARY

The day was spent visiting the brethren in their homes. Some of the brethren we visited:

- Bro. Oscar, who lives in a tent on the top of a 3 story building. We could only imagine what it is like during the rainy season.
- Sr. Meleng and son who have a home meeting each Tuesday night.
- Sr. Leonora's home which had been the first home of the Manila Bible Students.
- Sr. Grace Sinahon who was to be baptized on Sunday.
- Sr. Delia Tamos, who was baptized on Saturday and her niece Kamille Tamos.
- Bro. Charles Tarinqui's home, the third candidate for baptism.
- Bro. Nando Rosauo who is blind and suffers from diabetes and arthritis.
- We also visited a blind man near the airport who asked the question "Why did God take away my sight?"

SATURDAY, 14 FEBRUARY

Meetings were held from 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM as follows:

- Testimony meeting—There was plenty of singing, and Sr. Grace has a beautiful voice as she was a professional singer for some years and used her voice to give her testimony.



Philippine brethren meeting together with joyful hearts

- Discourses—by Bro. Ray—“History of Bible Students” and “Devotional Discourse”
- Discourses—by Bro. David—“Jehovah Witness and Bible Student Differences” and a “Baptismal Discourse”
- Discourses—by Bro. Adam—“Bible Students Around the World” and “Consecration”

One of the many highlights was the election of Bro. Oscar Domanico as an elder to assist Bro. Agripino in Manila (the other two elders are now on the Island of Cebu).

The day of convention ended with the baptism of Sr. Grace, Sr. Delia, and Bro. Charlie at a military swimming pool.

In the evening we enjoyed a meal with the parents and young children.

SUNDAY, 15 FEBRUARY

Meetings were held from 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM, which included:

- Hymn signing
- Children's session
- Discourses by Bros. David, Ray, and Adam.
- Lunch with the brethren in the hall.

After the meeting, we moved on to the Unitarian Church where we had been requested to give short devotional talks on character and Christian life.

The day ended at 4:00 PM. In the evening, we took the young adults to the Mall of Asia.

TRIP TO THE ISLANDS—MONDAY, 16 FEBRUARY

On Monday, 16 February, we flew from Manila at 11:30 by turbo prop plane to Surigao on Mindanao Island, and we arrived at 1:30 PM.

The wrong name of Surigao Island had been interpreted by Bro. Agripino. It turned out that the island where Sr. Vicki and Bro. Romell lived was on Siargao Island, 60 nautical miles away!

We had to take a van to the Port of Surigao and then a 4-hour ferry ride, which we just managed to catch with only minutes to spare, to Siargao Island. We landed at the Port of Dapa at 4:00 PM. There is only one ferry that leaves around midday to this island. It was timetabled to leave at 2:00 PM, but we found it leaves whenever the captain feels like it. On the day of our arrival it was 2 hours early.

From the Port of Dapa, we had to take a one-hour truck trip to General Luna, a village on the coast where Sr. Vicki lives. The road to General Luna was

deeply flooded in 3 places and the truck driver had to cover the front of the truck to make it possible for him to pass the flooded sections. Some sections were about 3 feet under water for a mile! Sr. Vicki and her husband Bro. Romell have a 6-month-old baby. Their house was chest deep in water following heavy rains, so they are temporarily living with her sister near the partially constructed chapel.

A Bible Students' chapel is being built on General Luna, a village on Siargao Island. It only has a roof and some side cladding. Sr. Vicki and Bro. Romell plan to live alongside this chapel as their house is on a flood plain. In their village, there is a Jehovah Witness kingdom hall and a Pentecost church. We stayed at the premises owned by the Pentecostal couple on the beach. The place is a real tropical island with fantastic views of the ocean and the sound of waves breaking on an outer reef.

Bros. Ray, Adam, and David gave discourses under the open sky. About 20 adults and 15 children attended the evening service from 7:00 PM to 8:20 PM. We gave an outline of God's plan and how we differed from other groups. One of the young men (a Trinitarian) had trouble with accepting our definition of 'hell' as he had hoped to see his non-believing friends and relatives screaming in pain as they suffered.

The meeting ended with a prayer at 11:00 PM.

TUESDAY, 17 FEBRUARY

We left General Luna at 3:00 AM to catch the ferry from Dapa to Leyte Island. The truck took one hour, and once again the driver had to set up engine protection to ford the flooded road, but this time in total darkness.

We took a different ferry which carried passengers only. It took 3.5 hours to get back to Surigao City. From there, we took a van to a port on the other side of the island which services vehicle ferries going to Leyte Island. The ferry terminal is on Liloan Island which is connected to the mainland of Leyte by a bridge. We stayed at the Port accommodation as it was late at night, with two double bunks in a small room. We slept on beds made of thin bars with large gaps in between with very thin mattress.



Bro. Agripino, Philippine elder, in center

WEDNESDAY, 18 FEBRUARY

We arose at 3:00 AM, and from Liloan boarded a bus to Sogod. In Sogod, we transferred to another bus that went to Hilongos. From Hilongos, we took a multi cab that took us to Bro. Agripino's home in Inopacan. There we met his parents and brother's family, and spent a little time as he had not seen them for 6 years. Sr. Leonora was there with Sr.

Delia and we all took a van from Inopacan, stopping at Ormoc City.

At Port Isabel we purchased food for the evening meal with the brethren, and then took a motorized canoe where Sr. Leonora lives with Sr. Aurora, her mother. The motorized canoe took 35 minutes and we landed at Buena Vista, a small village by the sea. The owner of the canoe is Sr. Leonora's relative. We stayed at a house where she is housesitting for her aunt. It was very good accommodation compared to the conditions that many of the brethren live in. About 40 adults and 18 children came to the house. Bros. Heno and Lucian had come across from Cebu with their families.

The meeting started at 6:00 PM and Bros. Genio and Luciano spoke in their native dialects. It was most encouraging to see the growth in these two elders who were now quite accomplished speakers without reading from notes. Then Bros. Ray, David, and Adam spoke. We had a meal break and, after the meal, there were still 25 adults and 15 children who stayed for the dedication service by Ray. We even had a Pentecostal preacher there who was 82 years old, who stated that we were the very first white missionaries to visit the island. He took copious notes of our talks and was most impressed with our presentations. He has a hall attached to his house and welcomed us to return and pay him a visit next time.

THURSDAY, 19 FEBRUARY

We left Buena Vista by motorized canoe at 3:00 AM to catch an early morning bus to Ormoc City. The van ride took 2 hours to reach Tacloban city

airport. We left for Manila at 11:00 AM and landed at 12:35 where we parted with Bro. Agripino. Bros. Ray, Adam, and David then boarded our international flights. Adam and Ray flew out of Manila at 6:00 PM on a flight to Melbourne via Singapore. David flew out of Manila at 7:00 PM for Seattle via Hawaii.

CONCLUSIONS

It was wonderful to see the spiritual growth in the brethren that we had met with one year earlier. The classes have grown and spread out to three other Islands. The prayers and the assistance of the brethren around the world have certainly helped this fledgling group of Bible Students.

In the Manila class, there are 21 consecrated brethren. There are 5 other members who are not baptized, but attend the classes regularly. There are also 5 young people. In Manila, there are 4 meetings held in 4 homes during the week with rotations.

There are brethren who meet together on a regular basis in Cebu, and in Inopacan on Leyte Island. There are also meetings held in Buena Vista, and in Suriago.

Bro. Agripino and some of the sisters are translating the first volume of *Studies in the Scriptures* into the Tagalog language. It is a very lengthy and difficult task as there are not as many words in Tagalog as in our English language. Therefore, many of Bro. Russell's thoughts have to be explained as they do not have words to directly translate many key words. ■

SPEAKERS' APPOINTMENTS

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

M. Balko

Seattle, WA September 4-7
Clay City, IN 25-27

J. Panucci

Italy:
Rome September 2,3
Pescara 4-6
Agrigento 8-10
Montallegro 11,12
Agrigento 13,14
Ribera 15
San Giovanni 16

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

T. B. Alexander

Kalispell, MT September 18-20

G. Balko, Jr.

Clay City, IN September 25-27

M. J. Balko

Clay City, IN September 25-27

C. Chandler

Seattle, WA September 4-7

O. B. Elbert

Seattle, WA September 4-7

A. Fernets

Seattle, WA September 4-7

J. Freer

Seattle, WA September 4-7

R. Goodman

Jackson, MI September 5,6

L. Griebs

Jackson, MI September 5,6
Kalispell, MT 18-20

B. Keith

Kalispell, MT September 18-20

T. Krupa

Jackson, MI September 5,6
Kalispell, MT 18-20

E. Kuenzli

New York, NY September 5,6

H. Montague

New York, NY September 5,6
Kalispell, MT 18-20

P. Mora

Seattle, WA September 4-7

D. Rice

New York, NY September 5,6
Huntsville, AL 11-13
Kalispell, MT 18-20

R. Sconyers

Seattle, WA September 4-7

T. Ruggirello

Jackson, MI September 5,6
Huntsville, AL 11-13

C. Willis

Clay City, IN September 25-27

CONVENTIONS

These conventions are listed by request of classes who sponsor them. So your convention can be placed in these columns in time, make your request in writing three months before the date of the convention to Dawn Magazine, 199 Railroad Avenue, East Rutherford, NJ 07073.

SEATTLE LABOR DAY CONVENTION, September 4-7—Seabeck Christian Conference Center, 15395 Seabeck Highway NW, Seabeck, WA 98380. Contact D. Christiansen. Phone: (360) 440-3283

JACKSON LABOR DAY CONVENTION, September 5,6—Fa-Ho-Lo Camp and Conference Center, 3000 Mt. Hope Road, Unit 1, Grass Lake, MI 49240. Contact: R. Lumley. Phone: (517) 782-7252

HUNTSVILLE CONVENTION, September 11-13—Bevill Conference Center & Hotel, 550 Sparkman Drive, Huntsville, AL 35816. Phone: (256) 721-9428. If making reservations, mention Huntsville Bible Students. Make reservations before August 31. For other information, contact J. Cothren, 1300 Huntsville Hills Drive, Huntsville, AL 35802. Phone: (256) 852-8505

NORTHWEST MONTANA KALISPELL CONVENTION, September 18,19,20—Red Lion Hotel, 20 N. Main Street, Kalispell, MT 59901. Contact M. Burns. Phone: (406) 756-7789

CLAY CITY CONVENTION, September 25,26,27—Canyon Inn, McCormicks Creek State Park, 451 McCormick Creek Park Road, Spencer, IN 47460. Contact S. Clark, 7861 Clearwater Parkway, Indianapolis, IN 46240. Phone: (317) 578-2634

DETROIT MONTH-END CONVENTION, September 27—Mahany/Meininger Senior Community Center, 3500 Marias Avenue, Royal Oak, MI 48073. Contact N. Zendler, 20 Devonshire, Pleasant Ridge, MI 48069. Phone: (248) 399-8843

LOS ANGELES CONVENTION, September 27—Burbank Auditorium, 406 Irving Drive, Burbank, CA. Contact R. Wojcik. Phone: (818) 982-7253

PITTSBURGH AREA CONVENTION, October 3,4—Sewickley Grange Hall, Route 136, West Newton, PA 15012. Contact J. Krasonic, Sr., 1106 State Route 136, Belle Vernon, PA 15012. Phone: (724) 872-6215

GRAND RAPIDS CONVENTION, October 10,11—Kenowa Hills Middle School, 3950 Hendershot Avenue NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49544. Contact T. Malinowski, 5609 Buttrick Avenue SE, Alto, MI 49302. Phone: (616) 868-0313

SAN LUIS OBISPO CONVENTION, October 17,18—Masonic Temple, 859 March Street, San Luis Obispo, CA 93401. Contact M. Allard. Phone: (805) 773-2962

DETROIT/DETROIT METRO JOINT ECCLESIA MEETING, October 18—Pleasant Ridge Community Center, 4 Ridge Road, Pleasant Ridge, MI 48069. Contact N. Zendler, 20 Devonshire, Pleasant Ridge, MI 48069. Phone: (248) 399-8843

ORLANDO CONVENTION, October 24,25—Garden Club of Sanford, 200 Fairmont Drive (Corner of Hwy. 17-92), Sanford, FL. Contact: J. Kuenzli, 330 Jasmine Road, Casselberry, FL 32707. Phone: (407) 831-2098

CHICAGO NEW YEAR'S CONVENTION, January 1-3—Location to be announced. Contact J. Farrell, 310 S. Lambert Road, Glen Ellyn, IL 60137. Phone: (630) 469-9511

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To us the Scriptures clearly teach:

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

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

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

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

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

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