

The Return of Jesus

FROM THE FIRST DAYS of the Early Church down to our time, the expectation of the return of Jesus has been a topic of high interest. It should not be surprising, therefore, as the world approached the beginning of a new millennium, that this topic should again be prominent in the minds of people. About six months prior to the beginning of the year 2000, an Associated Press writer published an article captioned, “Will New Millennium Bring Jesus Back?” This was a syndicated feature available for many papers throughout the U.S.A. for publication. The article consisted of listing predictions and commentaries of many individuals and organizations on this matter.

IN EXPECTATION

Statistics were cited in the article, and we quote:

“According to a recent Associated Press poll, nearly one out of every four Christian adults—an estimated 26.5 million people—expect Jesus to arrive in their lifetimes. Nearly as many—an estimated 21.1 million Americans—are so sure of it that they feel an urgent need to convert friends and neighbors.”

The writer of the article noted that the expectation of Jesus’ return “has underpinned Christianity from its earliest days.” So he asked, “But what makes today’s prayers so earnest? What separates this generation of end-time prophets from those of the last two millennia?” He further wrote concerning the sign given about Israel, saying:

FIG TREE

“The New Testament compares the kingdom of God, near at hand, to the growth of a fig tree. Some believers substitute Israel for the tree. They say the Second Coming is near at hand when the tree shoots forth branches—when Israel becomes a nation.

“And that happened in 1948.

“Verily I say unto you, ‘This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled,’ Jesus says in Luke 21:32.

“Since many end-time prophets also place the apocalyptic Armageddon in Israel, developments there continue to stir interest. In 1967, when Israel reclaimed much of Jerusalem from Jordan, the prophecy in Luke was only strengthened.

“During the 1991 war between the United States and Iraq, many evangelists— from Billy Graham to John Walvoord, chancellor of the Dallas Theological Seminary—envisioned the beginning of the end.

“And when the 1993 Mideast peace pact was signed, radio evangelist Monte Judah of Norman, Okla., identified the beginning of seven years’ tribulation heralding the Second Coming.

“For evangelicals, signs of the end can be found anywhere, anytime. Worldwide disasters—floods, wars, earthquakes—are what Jesus, in the Gospel of Matthew, told followers to look for. The Hale-Bopp comet, famine in Africa, developments in the European Common Market, even the convergence of full moons and Jewish religious festivals—all are sifted for clues of the apocalypse.”

PRECEDING EVENTS

The illustration of the fig tree, in connection with Israel, was fulfilled when Jews returned to Palestine from all over the world. It is one of several signs given by Jesus to his disciples when they inquired about the signs of his return. The Biblical account of this matter is found especially in Matthew 24:32-34, though it also is mentioned in Mark 13:28-30 and Luke 21:29-32. The writer of this article did not address a number of important issues. One of these is the exact meaning of the Greek word ‘parousia’ which has been translated ‘coming’ by the *King James Version* translators, and many other translators as well. Parousia means ‘presence,’ and the disciples of Jesus were interested in his presence, not in his coming.

In the article, mention was also made that worldwide disasters—floods, wars, earthquakes—were among the signs given by Jesus, and were being sifted for clues of the end. Jesus was, however, telling them that such natural disasters would occur as the normal expectancy of mankind. He said of these, “The end is not yet,” (Matt. 24:6) and, “these are the beginning of sorrows.” (vs. 8) The significant signs of his presence begin with Matthew 24:14.

THE APPEARANCES OF JESUS

It is evident in this article that many of the people interviewed expect Jesus to return in the flesh as at his First Advent. Whereas Jesus said, “The world seeth me no more.” (John 14:19) The Scriptures teach that when Jesus was raised from the dead he was no longer a human, but a powerful Divine being, the “image of the invisible God.” (Col. 1:15; II Cor. 5:16; I Pet. 3:18) This means that by nature Jesus is now invisible to the human eye, even as God is invisible. It is this Divine Christ who returns to earth unrecognized by the natural eye.

True, Jesus did appear as a man to his disciples on several occasions following his resurrection, but this does not mean that he was, by nature, still a human. The circumstances of his few brief appearances prove to the contrary. For example, he always appeared in a different body, which would not have been the case had the human body in which he appeared been his real body.

Only once did Jesus appear in a body similar to the one which was crucified, and that was because Thomas made it plain that he would not believe the Master had been raised from the dead unless he could see his wounds. Jesus satisfied his lack of faith, although only this once did the disciples see any wounds, and this appearance is described by the Apostle John as one of the “signs” by which Jesus proved to them that he had been raised from the dead. (John 20:29-31) On the other occasions of Jesus’ appearances to his disciples after his resurrection, they did not recognize him by his personal appearance, but by the things which he said and did.

Jesus’ appearances to his disciples after his resurrection were of the same nature as those of angels in more ancient times. For example, three angels appeared to Abraham. They talked and ate with him, but they were not humans—although for a time Abraham thought that they were.— Gen. 18:1,2; Heb. 13:2

Jesus was present with his disciples for forty days after his resurrection and before his ascension. During only a very small portion of this time, however, were the disciples able to see him, and then only when he miraculously appeared to them. It is this Jesus, who is able to be invisibly present among humans, who was to return to earth for the purpose of establishing his kingdom of righteousness. The redeemed race of

mankind will have the problems of human selfishness solved, and be restored to happiness and life upon the earth.—Rev. 21:1-5

JESUS' FLESH A RANSOM

Jesus was made flesh that he might give his humanity as a corresponding price—a ransom for Adam and his race. The Master said, “My flesh ... I will give for the life of the world.” (John 6:51) Had Jesus been raised from the dead as a human it would have meant that the ransom was taken back, and that the world of mankind would not have been redeemed.

The Scriptures show that while Jesus was put to death in the flesh, he was made alive in the Spirit, or as a spirit being. (I Cor. 15:44-47; I Pet. 3:18) Jesus had previously explained to Nicodemus that one who is born of the Spirit can come and go as the wind; that is, be invisible to the human eye and have great power. He proved this to be true in his own case, for after his resurrection, his disciples could not tell from whence he came or whither he went when appearing to them.—John 3:8

That Jesus still has the power to appear to humans as he did to his disciples following his resurrection from the dead we do not dispute. However, the Scriptures do not say that his return to earth will be revealed to the world in this manner. His appearances to his disciples following his resurrection were evidently intended to establish in the minds of the disciples the fact that he had been raised from the dead; but this fact having been established we have no reason to expect their repetition.

We read concerning God that “the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made.” (Rom. 1:20) Here is a key which will help us understand the significance of the prophecies pertaining to the return of Christ. He is now invisible to human eyes, even as the Heavenly Father is invisible. At his return he can be recognized only by the visible things which transpire and which can be identified through the prophecies of the Bible as the ‘signs’ which were to mark his second visit to earth.

Let us state the matter another way. We believe in the existence of God, not because we have ever seen him, but because we see his works. With our limited abilities we survey the vast universe and say there must be a powerful, all-wise Creator back of this. Similarly, in the Divine Word we find set forth an impressive array of events which were to take

place in the world following the return of the Divine Christ. If we can see that many of these events are already taking place, we arrive at the logical conclusion concerning Christ's second visit to earth as being already a reality.

SIGNS OF HIS PRESENCE

The events that take place after our Lord's return are called 'signs.' What are some of these signs? The first is recorded in Matthew 24:14: "This Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." This 'end' is that of the present evil world. The Gospel is the good news contained in the Bible telling of God's wonderful kingdom to come. There have been many missionaries trying to convert people who have no understanding of this glorious message, but this scripture is not fulfilled by their efforts. God intended that only a witness be given to every nation; but he did not intend to convert the world at this time. (See Matthew 13:10-17.) The time when all mankind will "come unto the knowledge of the truth" is in God's kingdom. (I Tim. 2:4) This sign then consists of the work done by Bible Societies in making Bibles available in every known language in the world. There are over 1800 languages worldwide, and the Bible has been made available in all of these—an estimated three to four thousand speaking communities.

TIME OF TROUBLE

Another sign is given in Matthew 24:21: "Then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be." This trouble has occurred in phases, and has affected the whole world. World War I was a phase; the Great Depression was another; World War II, yet another; and the continual wars that have been fought border many times on anarchy. Every nation will be affected, and it will include social, financial, political, and religious institutions. We must continue to expect anarchy, destruction, strife, hatred, and malignity as part of this trouble.

Only revealed and understood as a sign within the last fifty years are the words of Jesus in Matthew 24:22, where he says, "Except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened." Prior to 1945 we could only speculate as to what could threaten complete destruction of life upon

earth. The deadly force of the atomic bomb exploded over Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan (August 1945) brought the awareness of the terrifying intensity of nuclear weapons to all nations. Many nations scurried to develop these weapons, so that in our day a stockpile exists which could destroy all life on earth many times over. In 1945 the destruction of all life upon earth became a technical possibility, according to Albert Einstein. Since that time the stockpile of nuclear weapons has soared.

THE REGATHERING OF ISRAEL

Another sign already mentioned, in Matthew 24:32-34, is the restoration of Israel in their own land. What has occurred along this line since 1878 is miraculous, and without doubt has been in preparation for the blessings which will be theirs in the Messianic kingdom. This regathering of Israel was prophetically due at the very time when the nations as a whole were to be gathered unto the final destructive battle of Armageddon. Joel 3:1,2 reads: “For, behold, in those days, and in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land.”

This prophecy indicates that, while the Jewish people would be restored to their land, it would be amidst a time of trouble for them as well as for the nations in general. Other prophecies indicate that additional trouble is in store for them—which is not difficult to foresee in view of the circumstances which have existed for several years.

It is not wise to go into detail concerning events which have not yet transpired, but the Scriptures make it plain that near the end of the death struggle of the nations, with virtual annihilation threatening them through the misuse of modern military nuclear implements of war, there will be an attack against the Israelites in their Promised Land. Then the Lord will intervene on their behalf, rescue them from their enemies, and through their resurrected prophets and other worthies of ancient times, establish his kingdom as a literal governing power over the whole earth.

Ezekiel 38:14-23 presents some of the details of this final trouble. The etymology of the names given to Israel’s enemies in this prophecy indicates that they are used prophetically to identify armies, particularly

of Europe and the Middle East. The prophecy shows that these forces eventually will attack the Jewish people. Agreeing with the prophecy of Joel already quoted (Joel 3:1,2), Ezekiel explains that these hordes (as a cloud) are the antiGod forces which finally will threaten the destruction of the returned Israelites.—Ezek. 38:16

It will be a time of ‘shaking,’ the prophet explains. (Ps. 110:5; Isa. 2:17-19) The promise is that the Lord will deliver his ancient people, and that through this deliverance the ‘eyes’ of the nations will discern the presence and power of the new King of earth who, as the agent and right hand of Jehovah, will be directing the issue. Thus, all eyes will discern the presence of Jesus in the clouds of trouble (Rev. 1:7), and become convinced of his majesty and glory through the new kingdom arrangements which will then be put into operation.

This same series of events will lead to the opening of the eyes of the Israelites. We read, “So will I make my holy name known in the midst of my people Israel; and I will not let them pollute my holy name any more: and the heathen [nations] shall know that I am the Lord, the Holy One in Israel.” (Ezek. 39:7) What a change this will bring about in the outlook of the Israelites! The defense of Israel by Divine power will be merely the first manifestation of the operation of the new world powers. From then on the kingdom agencies will rapidly calm the storm of human passions, which by that time will have brought the people of the whole earth to a state of desperation and despair.

How happy the world of mankind will be to realize that the sword hanging over their heads as an executioner’s implement has been removed for all time. With the establishment of God’s kingdom, will come fulfillment of Isaiah, chapters 11 and 35, and many other wonderful prophecies pertaining to that kingdom. Those people interviewed for the news article at the introduction of this lesson will rejoice to know that unbelievers in their families are not to be tormented forever, or destroyed, but will come to a knowledge of God and his truth.—Isa. 11:9

“The zeal of the Lord of hosts shall do this.”—Isa. 37:32

Living Is Christ

Key Verse: “*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*”
—*Philippians 1:21*

Selected Scripture:
Philippians 1:12-30

IN THE EPISTLE TO THE Philippians, the Apostle Paul expresses his special bond of love for the brethren. This feeling was mutual because they also had an intense love for the apostle and his service to them.

He thanks them for their gifts and special attention while being held as a prisoner at Rome. He also took the opportunity to share his experiences with them, and to let them know of his physical condition, continuing faith, and progress in the Lord’s work.

He said, “I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the Gospel; So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places.” (Phil. 1:12,13) He acknowledged that his experiences were directed by the mighty hand of God, and that the truth would be carried forward, with the name of God honored at all costs. He was not concerned about his own comfort as long as he could be of service to the Lord’s people, as well as a witness to those about him.

In the Key Verse the apostle expresses his deep desire to continue his life of service to the Lord. He also assures the brethren at Philippi that he had complete faith in the promises of God and that if it was God’s will that he die in prison at Rome it would not matter, because he knew that he would receive an abundant reward in Christ’s future kingdom.

The apostle shares his inmost feelings with his beloved brethren, telling them it would be difficult for him to choose between life and death. Although life was full of suffering and hardship, and knowing that death would bring an end to those trials, nevertheless he had no personal choice, but was willing to leave the entire matter in God’s hands. Paul continues, “If I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me, and I do not know which to choose. But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better.”—Phil. 1:22,23, *New American Standard Version*

The apostle was dead to his own will, and content to remain in his present state of uncertainty as long as it was the will of God. He counted his present life as of little value other than to serve the Lord and his people. Paul's desire to sacrifice his life for the children of God is brought clearly to our attention when he said, "But it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your joy in Christ Jesus will overflow on account of me."—vss. 24,25, *New International Version*

There is an important lesson in the apostle's words for every Christian believer today. No one knows how long he has to continue in the present life. Only those things that are done in full confidence and faith in the Lord are of any lasting value. Let each esteem the true value of serving the Lord's people wherever there is opportunity, and leaving the results in the mighty hand of God. As the apostle said, "Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ" (vs. 27, *NIV*), and thus fulfill the same desire expressed by Paul: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."—vs. 21

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Genuine Humility

Key Verse: “*Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.*”
—*Philippians 2:5*

Selected Scripture:
Philippians 2:1-18

THE APOSTLE PAUL loved the brethren at Philippi very much, and encouraged them to be filled with the spirit of Christlikeness. He told them, “If therefore there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit

intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus.”—Phil. 2:1-5, *New American Standard Version*

One of the most important desires the consecrated child of God should have is that he might be more faithful and pleasing to the Heavenly Father. Humble-minded Christians, as Paul explains, are more prepared than others to learn the valuable experiences that are permitted to come into their consecrated lives.

They learn to patiently wait upon the Lord, and pray that his will may be done. God cannot exalt anyone who is not of humble mind and spirit. The most submissive will receive the greatest blessing.

The apostle’s joy would be fulfilled in proportion as he was able to recognize in his brethren the proper quality of Christlikeness and love for the Lord. To be like-minded suggests a spirit of love and unity, and hearts that are united in one purpose among the various members of the body of Christ. Our Lord Jesus, in his prehuman existence as the *Logos*, was a humble and obedient Son of God. He did not attempt to exalt himself, or to seek a name higher than his own, as Satan did. He had no intention of putting himself on an equality with his Heavenly Father. The apostle expresses this thought about the *Logos*, and says: “Who, though being in

God's form, yet did not meditate a usurpation to be like God, but divested Himself, taking a bondman's form, having been made in the likeness of men; and being in condition as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."—Phil. 2:6-8, *Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott*

When asked by his Heavenly Father to leave his heavenly home, humble himself and become a man on a much lower plane of existence, the *Logos* promptly accepted the task before him. The psalmist provides a record of Jesus' humble disposition. He writes: "Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God."—Ps. 40:7,8

The Master was ready at any cost to lay down his life in sacrifice for the whole human family. During his earthly ministry as a perfect man, our Lord Jesus always manifested the spirit of love and reverence for God. The lesson for all of the Lord's people in these closing years of the Gospel Age is to "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time."—I Pet. 5:6

Our Lord has shown us the course which will lead to faithfulness. As he was humble in doing God's will, so likewise all who have chosen to walk with him should strive to put on genuine humility.

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Striving to be Christlike

Key Verse: “I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

—Philippians 3:14

*Selected Scripture:
Philippians 3:1-21*

STRIVING TO BE MORE Christlike is a quality sought earnestly by the Lord’s people. Every child of God should endeavor to become more like our Lord Jesus in all of life’s affairs, whether in action, word, or deed. This means the necessity of resisting the worldly spirit of selfishness and unrighteousness, and focusing our attention on obtaining a greater measure of Christian grace and holiness in our daily lives.

There was a special bond of love between Paul and the brethren at Philippi, and the apostle shared his feelings and intentions with them in this epistle. He deeply appreciated the invitation to set aside his own ambitions in life, and to follow our blessed Lord by pressing forward in seeking the grandest prize that the world has ever known. He brings this to our attention again in another of his epistles, where he said: “To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life.”—Rom. 2:7

He tells the Philippian church about the High Calling which leads to the great prize of the Divine nature offered by God during the present Gospel Age. It is for those who appreciate and strive to be Christlike. The apostle put aside his own will and preferences to obtain the spiritual inheritance to which he had been called. All earthly interests and considerations were counted of no value when compared to the hope that was set before him.

The heavenly calling, together with all of its precious promises, is so glorious that all other things fade away into insignificance. He said, “Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ.” (Phil. 3:8) Paul considered it a privilege to suffer and die for the Lord. He wanted to share in the fellowship and sufferings of Christ, and to be conformed

unto his death, “If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.”—vs. 11

The apostle continues: “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.” (vss. 13,14) It takes effort and diligence on the part of the Lord’s people to continue on in full assurance of faith, but we can trust that our Lord will be with his people all the way.

Those who are faithful hold onto these spiritual promises in full assurance of faith. “For our conversation [citizenship] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.”—vss. 20,21

Let each child of God continue to strive diligently to be more Christlike, in order to gain the prize of the High Calling.

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Deep Joy

Key Verse: “*Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice.*”

—*Philippians 4:4*

Selected Scripture:
Philippians 4:4-20

CHRISTIAN PEOPLE HAVE many things to be glad about, and the Apostle Paul exhorts the child of God to always be in the attitude of rejoicing. One of the most important things to be thankful for is the gift of God’s dear Son, our Lord Jesus, as a ransom sacrifice not only on our behalf but also on behalf of the whole human family. Many have not heard about this wonderful gift. But God will manifest his

Son to the world during the future kingdom when all will receive the benefits of restitution of all that was lost because of sin.

Because of sin, all mankind were condemned to death, but because of Jesus’ willingness to leave his heavenly home, come to earth as a perfect man, to suffer and die for all mankind, all will have an opportunity for life in his future kingdom. Paul tells us “Be not anxious about anything; but in everything let your petitions be made known to God.” (Phil. 4:6, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*) Prayer is one of the special blessings accorded to the Christian believer. God hears the prayers of his people and is always alert to direct their lives in accordance with his holy will. The apostle writes about the peace of God and how it passes all understanding. Those who have experienced this peace and its outworking in their consecrated lives will experience much joy.

Continuing, the apostle admonishes the Lord’s people to think upon holy things that are uplifting and joyful. He says, “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” (Phil. 4:8) He tells the brethren at Philippi that if they do the things they have learned from him in his service to them, they will have the peace of God.

The apostle shared many tender ties with the Philippian brethren, and was thankful for their care for him during times of hardship and stress.

But, no matter in what position he found himself, he was always content to abide in God's providential leadings. He says, "I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need."—vs. 12

It was a wonderful service that Paul provided to the brethren at Philippi, and the admonitions of this epistle were encouraging and helpful to those he loved so much. Their appreciation is made known in their attempt to alleviate his suffering as a prisoner at Rome, as well as at other times of need. As Paul said, "It was good of you to share in my troubles. Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the Gospel, when I set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving except you only."—Phil. 4:14,15, *New International Version*

During the present harvesttime of the Gospel Age, the Lord's people should continue in faith, trusting in the promises of God's Word. We should heed the words of Paul: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."—vs. 13

Those who have this attitude of heart will have the most joy in the Lord!

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Jacob's Burial and Joseph's Death

CHAPTER FIFTY

VERSES 1-14 “And Joseph fell upon his father’s face, and wept upon him, and kissed him. “And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father: and the physicians embalmed Israel. “And forty days were fulfilled for him; for so are fulfilled the days of those which are embalmed: and the Egyptians mourned for him threescore and ten days. “And when the days of his mourning were past, Joseph spake unto the house of Pharaoh, saying, If now I have found grace in your eyes, speak, I pray you, in the ears of Pharaoh, saying, “My father made me swear, saying, Lo, I die: in my grave which I have digged for me in the land of Canaan, there shalt thou bury me. Now therefore let me go up, I pray thee, and bury my father, and I will come again. “And Pharaoh said, Go up, and bury thy father, according as he made thee swear. “And Joseph went up to bury his father: and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt, “And all the house of Joseph, and his brethren, and his father’s house: only their little ones, and their flocks, and their herds, they left in the land of Goshen. “And there went up with him both chariots and horsemen: and it was a very great company. “And they came to the threshingfloor of Atad, which is beyond Jordan, and there they mourned with a great and very sore lamentation: and he made a mourning for his father seven days. “And when the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning in the floor of Atad, they said, This is a grievous mourning to the Egyptians: wherefore the name of it was called Abel-mizraim, which is beyond Jordan.

“And his sons did unto him according as he commanded them: “For his sons carried him into the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, which Abraham bought with the field for a possession of a buryingplace of Ephron the Hittite, before Mamre. “And Joseph returned into Egypt, he, and his brethren, and all that went up with him to bury his father, after he had buried his father.”

The account of Jacob’s burial says, ‘Only their little ones, and their flocks, and their herds, they left in the land of Goshen’ when they went back to Canaan to bury Jacob. This included, in addition to Jacob’s sons and their grown children, ‘all the servants of Pharaoh.’ This was a wonderful tribute of respect and love for Jacob, and revealed the high esteem in which he was held by his family. Besides, it showed that they shared their father’s faith in God’s promises pertaining to Canaan.

VERSES 15-21 “And when Joseph’s brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him. “And they sent a messenger unto Joseph, saying, Thy father did command before he died, saying, “So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil: and now, we pray thee, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of thy father. And Joseph wept when they spake unto him. “And his brethren also went and fell down before his face; and they said, Behold, we be thy servants. “And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God? “But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. “Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them.”

Until the death of Jacob, Joseph’s brethren had taken for granted he would not endeavor to inflict special punishment upon them for their attempt to do away with him in earlier life. But now they became fearful lest his leniency toward them had been on account of the great love he had for his father; and for the first time they formally and humbly asked his forgiveness, explaining that this was the deathbed request of their father.

Joseph was ever head and shoulders above his brethren in matters of righteousness, and he assured them that they had no cause to fear. ‘Am I in the place of God?’ he inquired, then explained that while they had sought to do him harm ‘God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.’ Since God’s will had been manifested in what had taken place, why should he hold anything against them? Thus Joseph comforted his brethren, and ‘spake kindly unto them.’

VERSES 22-26 “And Joseph dwelt in Egypt, he, and his father’s house: and Joseph lived an hundred and ten years. “And Joseph saw Ephraim’s children of the third generation: the children also of Machir the son of Manasseh were brought up upon Joseph’s knees.

“And Joseph said unto his brethren, I die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. “And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence. “So Joseph died, being an hundred and ten years old: and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.”

Our account ends saying, ‘So Joseph died, being an hundred and ten years old.’ ‘The dreamer,’ as his brethren had called him, had lived to see his prophetic dreams come true—his brethren had bowed down before him, yea, even his father had become dependent upon his mercy. He had not misused the authority and power which Divine providence had entrusted to him; but rejoiced that God had given him the honor of being the savior of his people, the preserver of the ‘seed’ of promise.

It was his faith in God’s promises that caused him to arrange that his body should be embalmed and ultimately taken to Canaan. In exacting an oath from his brethren that they would carry out his wish in this respect, Joseph said to them, ‘God will surely visit you, ... and ye shall carry up my bones from hence.’ Joseph’s willingness to have his bones remain in Egypt until the Exodus might indicate his desire not to impose an unnecessary burden upon his brethren by asking that they make a special funeral trip to Canaan as they had done in the case of Jacob. Or possibly he realized that when he was dead his people would not enjoy the same degree of freedom to come and go as they did while he was alive and serving as deputy ruler.

So we come to the end of the first book of the Bible which shows the outworking of the Divine plan for human salvation. We also come to the end of the Patriarchal Age, the first age in this present evil world. With the Book of Exodus, the Jewish Age begins.

While historically the Book of Genesis covers the first world, or age, and the Patriarchal Age, prophetically it embraces all the ages, including the Millennium, when as promised to Abraham, all the families of the earth shall be blessed. The development of the spiritual ‘seed’ of promise has been the work of the present Gospel Age. The promises of the book applying to the deliverance of the natural seed of Abraham from Egypt, and planting them in the Land of Promise, were fulfilled during the Jewish Age.

In this wonderful book, we are told of the creation of man, and the Divine purpose concerning him—that he was to ‘multiply and fill the earth, and subdue it.’ We are informed of the entry of sin and of its tragic results, man’s loss of life and his earthly home. We are assured, nevertheless, of God’s continued love, and that a provision would be made for the redemption and recovery of the human race from the result of its own transgression.

This provision is the seed, first referred to as the ‘seed of the woman’ and later as the seed of Abraham. With the aid of the New Testament, we learn that primarily this seed is Christ Jesus, the Redeemer and Savior of the world; also that his faithful followers of this Gospel Age, the church, as members of his mystical body, are a part of that seed, ‘and heirs according to his promise.’

Thus does the opening book of the Bible introduce the main features of the plan of God, and wonderful is the harmony of the entire Bible as we trace the reiteration of these features throughout its sacred pages.

The Shepherd's Care

***“The LORD is
my shepherd; I
shall not want.”***
—*Psalm 23:1*

THE ISRAELITES WERE the typical people of God, and they recognized Jehovah as their shepherd. They were God's covenant people, and he dealt with them through their mediator, Moses. So David could say, 'The Lord is my shepherd.' God was a shepherd and provider

for our first parents, Adam and Eve. The green pastures and still waters of Eden were theirs.

But through disobedience they were lost from the fold of God, with the result that the entire human family have been as 'lost sheep.' These 'sheep' are not hopelessly lost, however, for God sent his Son as the Good Shepherd to 'seek' and 'save' the race.

Jesus said, "The Son of man is come to save that which was lost. How think ye? if a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth into the mountains, and seeketh that which is gone astray?"—Matt. 18:11,12

"FEAR NOT, LITTLE FLOCK"

But though we might properly liken the world to 'lost sheep,' the 23rd Psalm is not the expression of 'sheep' which have gone astray, but of those reposing in the shepherd's care. These are the ones to whom Jesus said, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."—Luke 12:32

These can truly say, 'The Lord is my shepherd.' To some there are "gods many, and lords many, but to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him." (I Cor. 8:5,6) The Heavenly Father, then, is our Great Shepherd, and Jesus said, "No man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."—John 10:29

We may emphasize that the Lord IS our Shepherd, not that we hope he is, or think that he is.

Then, too, the Lord is MY Shepherd. This is no mere generalization, but something definitely personal. What a joy should be ours that each of us can say MY God, MY Shepherd, MY Father!

What is a shepherd? King David had been a shepherd before he was anointed king. No one knew better the work of a shepherd than he. It was to provide food by leading the sheep into suitable pastures. It was to keep the sheep together; to water, heal, and defend the flock. All this was the work of the shepherd. David slew both a lion and a bear in defense of the sheep entrusted to his care. So, the Lord is our provider, our guide, our defender.

“THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD”

Formerly, as members of the Adamic race, we were all lost in sin. “All we like sheep have gone astray.” (Isa. 53:6) Then it was that “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”—John 3:16

Now Jesus, the Son of our Great Shepherd, is our Good Shepherd, who “giveth his life for the sheep.”—John 10:11

“I SHALL NOT WANT”

“God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus,” wrote Paul. (Phil. 4:19) Another promise: “No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.” (Ps. 84:11) We can testify to the words of Joshua: “Ye know in all your hearts and in all your souls, that not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you; all are come to pass unto you, and not one thing hath failed thereof.” (Josh. 23:14) Truly, ‘I shall not want,’ neither his providential care, his grace and strength, nor any spiritual good thing.

“IN GREEN PASTURES”

We are made to “lie down” in the “green pastures” (Ps. 23:2) which the Shepherd provides. This means to rest, or abide, in these pastures. We all should be able to exclaim, “How green are my pastures!” We are living not “by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”—Matt. 4:4

We are resting on the promises of God, and resting in the peace of God which passeth human understanding. In the assembling of ourselves together for praise and testimony, and in our study of God's Word, we are dwelling in the 'green pastures' which he provides. We are no longer feeding on the husks of human tradition, or on creedal misconceptions, but on the glorious truths of God's Word.

"BESIDE THE STILL WATERS"

Our Shepherd leads, not to the dangerous, swift torrents of the mountainside, but "beside the still waters" (Ps. 23:2) to safe waters where we may drink without danger. However, these still waters are not stagnant, but the pure and living waters of truth—dispensational truth, harvest truth, present truth. These harmonious truths satisfy both our heads and our hearts. This 'water' is in us as "a well of water springing up into everlasting life."—John 4:14

And how reassuring the words, "He leadeth me." (*Hymn 87, Hymns of Dawn*) This thought is repeated throughout the Bible. For example, "The meek [sheeplike] will he guide in judgment: and the meek will he teach his way. All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies."—Ps. 25:9,10

Our Great Shepherd has promised to lead us through Christ. In Jesus we have an example of how we should walk, and where, for we are following in his steps. The Master calls his own sheep by name. The Lord knoweth them that are his, "and when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice." (John 10:4) Blessed are those of whom these words of the Master are true!

"HE RESTORETH MY SOUL"

Throughout the Bible, 'soul' means the being, the life, one's self. In the eastern country with which David was familiar, there were perilous places for the sheep on all sides, and the shepherd There were also private fields and vineyards in the countryside. If a sheep strayed into one of these and was caught there, it was forfeited to the owner of the field or vineyard.

Our souls, or lives, were lost through Adam's disobedience, but we have been restored through faith in Christ. The Bible speaks of this as our

justification. Romans 8:1 reads, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.”

This assurance of soul restoration (Ps. 23:3) might also well apply to times in our Christian walk when we become spiritually ‘weary,’ or, through neglect, allow ourselves to stray from the footsteps of our Shepherd into situations of danger to us as New Creatures. How often we need to be ‘restored’ to the full sunlight of our Great Shepherd’s love!

“PATHS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS”

In the land where David served as shepherd there were many ways in which the sheep could be led. One might lead to the wilderness, another to a precipice, and still another to a place from which the sheep could not find their way back. But the faithful shepherd always led his sheep in the right paths—“paths of righteousness.”—Ps. 23:3

How important it is for us to follow the leadings of our Shepherd. How unable we are to choose our own ways. How true the words, “There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.”—Prov. 14:12

Our Shepherd leads by the ‘still waters.’ He leads in ‘green pastures.’ He leads in the ‘paths of righteousness’—not in the way of worldly ambition, not after the flesh. If we are following his leadings we are walking in the ‘narrow way.’ Jesus said, “Enter ye in at the strait gate: ... Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” (Matt. 7:13,14) Again, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.”—Luke 9:23

“HIS NAME’S SAKE”

The good name or reputation of a shepherd was at stake in connection with the care of his flock. A good shepherd loves his flock and takes a personal interest in every sheep under his care. However, his success does not bring honor to the sheep, but to his own name. Jesus may have had this in mind when in prayer to his Father he said:

“Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are. While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept,

and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled.”—John 17:11,12

“THE SHADOW OF DEATH”

The ‘right paths’ upon which the Good Shepherd leads his sheep are not always pleasant ones. Sometimes they are through situations of deadly peril. David describes these as the “valley of the shadow of death.” (Ps. 23:4) May it not have been in one of these literal valleys that David, as a shepherd lad, occasionally rescued a lamb from the mouth or claws of a lion or a bear?

All mankind is walking through a ‘valley of death.’ The world has been in this dark valley now for more than 6,000 years. But the world is wandering and lost—and dying. We are in the same valley, but we are being led through its dangers by our Shepherd. Our life is hid with Christ in God.

“THOU ART WITH ME”

In the places where David served as shepherd, the sheep were in almost constant danger of being preyed upon by wild animals. The tendency of sheep when attacked is to excitedly scatter and run, making it nearly impossible for the shepherd to reach the foe—most likely a wolf—which is among them.

The shepherd knows what to do at such a time. He leaps to a rock, or another elevation where he can be seen and heard. Then he lifts his voice and intones a long call, something like the howl of a dog. On hearing this the sheep remember the shepherd, and they heed his voice. The poor, timid creatures, which were helpless with terror and scattered, instantly rush together with all their strength into a solid mass.

The pressure is irresistible; the wolf is overcome. Frequently it is nearly crushed to death. This happens because the shepherd is with the sheep and has given his call. No wonder that David, in applying this lesson to God’s care for his people, wrote: “I will fear no evil: for thou art with me.” (Ps. 23:4) Is that not reason enough?

Faith should bring to the child of God a continual sense of his presence. And the Great Shepherd has given assurance that he will be with us—“My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.” (Exod. 33:14) To this the Good Shepherd added, “I am with you always, even unto the

end of the world [age].” (Matt. 28:20) Even though we are still in the valley of the shadow of death, we will fear no evil, for under the leadership of our Shepherd we shall pass safely through.

In			pastures			green?
Not						always.
Sometimes	He	who	knoweth			best,
In						kindness
Leadeth	me	in	weary	ways		where
Heavy			shadows			be.
So	whether	on	the	hill	tops	high
And		fair		I		dwell,
Or	in	the	sunless	valley,		where
The			shadows			lie,
What	matter?		He	is		there!

The Lord my Shepherd is!

Because our Shepherd is with us, we can hear his voice. The voice of the Good Shepherd is a blending of various sounds in a manner in which they are blended by no other voice. His voice sounds forth the chord of justice commingled with the chord of love, and the whole intoned with wisdom and with power.

At times, two or more shepherds may come together to visit. While they are doing this, the sheep and the lambs all commingle about them in a seemingly inextricable manner. But when the time comes for the shepherds to go their way, each will sound his call and the sheep will follow the call of their respective shepherds.

Various ‘voices’ are calling us today. There is the voice of the world—the pride of life. There is also the voice of the flesh—self. The voice of Satan, in all its many disguises is making its appeal. Also calling are the voices of ambition, fame, selfishness, or mammon and pleasure; sometimes even of friends and family. These and many other attractions are attempting to lure the Lord’s people away from the footsteps of the Good Shepherd. Let us not heed these voices, nor follow them.

To the extent that any of them have a legitimate claim upon us, we will be apprized of it by our Good Shepherd. In this connection we hear him saying, “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s.” (Matt. 22:21) Let us listen for the

still small voice of a conscience instructed by the Word of God—“Thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.”—Isa. 30:21

THE ROD AND STAFF

“Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me,” wrote David. (Ps. 23:4) The rod and staff were used by the shepherd in the care of his sheep. The double expression, ‘rod’ and ‘staff,’ covered the whole ground of protecting care, by day and by night. The shepherd carries a crook for guiding the sheep, and a rod for defending them.

God’s protection and his correction should both be a source of comfort to us. The Old and the New Testaments are a comfort and defense. Through the comfort of the Scriptures we have hope. How comforting indeed are the expressions of Divine love! “He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.” (Isa. 40:11) Truly, “we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”—Rom. 8:28

“THOU PREPAREST A TABLE”

The promised ‘table’ (Ps. 23:5) is said to be prepared “in the presence of mine enemies.” Here some would change the scene from the pastoral life to a banquet hall. However, this is not necessary. But whether we do or not, the thought is just as reassuring and beautiful.

The word here used for ‘table’ simply means something which is spread out. Have we not all seen some wonderful picnic spreads, even though the ‘table’ was more like those still seen among the Arabs in eastern countries—a piece of cloth or mat spread out upon the ground? Is this not exactly like the ‘table’ the shepherd prepares for his sheep?

In addition to finding water, he has the task of searching out a safe feeding place. He spreads this table on a slope of grass-covered ground. All the shepherd’s skill, and often heroic work, is called forth in this duty, for it could often be done in the very presence of the sheep’s enemies. These enemies are poison plants and snake holes. And in the caves of the hillsides there may be wolves, hyenas, and panthers. Bravery and skill are required in closing up these dens with sticks, or slaying the wild

beasts with long bladed knives. Perhaps, at times, David used his sling to good advantage.

So our Good Shepherd prepares a ‘table’ for us, despite the enemies with which we are surrounded. Satan and all his cohorts would like to take this ‘meat in due season’ away from us if they could. They would also like to destroy the Lord’s ‘sheep,’ but his presence is with them. His wisdom, his power, and his love are their protection, so they continue to feast unharmed at his table.

Are we not indeed enjoying a rich spiritual feast of truth! Can we not say, “I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love.”—Song of Sol. 2:3,4

We have been served by the returned Master: “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 12:37) We have been fed as suggested in Matthew 24:45: “Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season?” Truly the Lord has prepared a ‘table’ spread with spiritual bounties that we might grow strong in the things of the Spirit.

THE “ANOINTING” AND THE “CUP”

In the expression, “Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over,” (Ps. 23:5) begins the beautiful picture at the close of the day. The psalm has sung of the whole round of the day’s wanderings, referring to all the needs of the sheep, and the wonderful care given them by the shepherd. Now it closes with the last scene of the day.

At the door of the sheepfold the shepherd stands, and the ‘rodding of the sheep’ takes place. He turns his body to let the sheep pass, for he is the “door” (John 10:7), even as Christ said of himself. With his rod he holds back the sheep while he looks them over one by one as they go into the fold.

The shepherd has with him a horn filled with olive oil, and also a supply of cedar tar. With the tar he anoints a knee which had been bruised on the rocks, or a side scratched by thorns. As he scrutinizes the sheep he

finds some which are simply worn and exhausted. He bathes the heads and faces of these with the refreshing olive oil.

Are we not associated with One who was anointed with the “oil of gladness above thy (his) fellows”? (Heb. 1:9) Have we not received of his anointing? John wrote, “The anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you.”—I John 2:27

“MY CUP RUNNETH OVER”

For this closing scene of the day, the shepherd has provided a supply of cool, refreshing water. He takes a large two-handled cup, dips it in his supply, and gives it to his weary sheep to drink. There is nothing in the psalm finer than this.

Our ‘cup’ of experiences is largely one of joy in the Lord. Even our communion in the afflictions of Christ we can count as joy, because they are a provision of God’s loving-kindness. “Surely,” David continues, “goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.” (Ps. 23:6) *Rotherham’s Translation* uses the word “pursue” instead of ‘follow.’ This suggests that the goodness and mercy of the Lord are very close to us, keeping up with us, never letting us get out of sight. In all the experiences represented throughout the psalm, God’s goodness and mercy are manifested, the last loving touch being shown by the cup of refreshing water just as the weary sheep enter the fold for the night.

THE HOUSE OF THE LORD

The fold reached at the end of the day could represent our eternal home into which we enter at the end of the “narrow” way. (Matt. 7:14) And what a prize this will be—to dwell in the house of the Lord! It is the house which Jesus, our Good Shepherd, promised when he said to his disciples, “I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go ... I will come again, and receive you unto myself.” (John 14:2) In this ‘house’ we will abide forevermore.

The Word of God

“As the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: so shall my Word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.”
 —Isaiah 55:10, 11

THE WORD OF GOD REVEALS the Divine plan for the reconciliation of the sin-cursed and dying race. In our text we are given the blessed assurance that this Divine purpose will not fail, that God will cause the things spoken by his Word to be accomplished. This is one of the most important lessons we learn when we first become acquainted with the truth.

And how blessed it is to be thus assured! It gives us a firm foundation for faith, enabling us to rejoice in the hope set before us in the Gospel. Blessed assurance!

Not only does our text comfort us with the assurance that God is graciously willing and abundantly able to accomplish his loving purpose which he has revealed through his Word, but also that his Word itself has a function to perform. This also will be effectively accomplished in keeping with the Divine purpose. The Apostle Paul assures us

that the Word of God is “quick” and “powerful,” sharper than a “twoedged sword.”—Heb. 4: 12

Not only does God’s Word reveal his plan, it is also used by him to accomplish much of it. This is especially true with respect to the outworking of his will in the hearts and lives of his consecrated people. And in this connection also, how blessed it is to realize that if we yield ourselves unreservedly to the influence of the Divine Word, we will certainly be sanctified by it, and made “meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.”—Col. 1:12

A LAMP TO OUR FEET

The psalmist wrote that God's Word was a lamp to his feet, and a light unto his path. (Ps. 119:105) And again, "The entrance of thy words giveth light." (Ps. 119:130) How much we need this enlightenment! The people of the world are engulfed in darkness, but by his Word God gives us 'light'—"the light of the knowledge of the glory of God." (II Cor. 4:6) He has 'shined' into our hearts by the Gospel, and while we are still in a darkened world we can now see our way.

Light is a symbol of knowledge, of understanding, and how wonderful is the understanding the Lord has given us through his Word! We now know the Divine plan, both for ourselves and for the world. In our daily walk in the narrow way our steps are guided by the Word. We can depend upon its directives to guide us aright; that is, if we are sincere and humble in their application. James wrote, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all liberally, and upbraideth not." (James 1:5) It is through his Word that God answers our prayers for wisdom. If we search diligently for this wisdom, our pathway will become "as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."—Prov. 4:18

WE FEED UPON THE WORD

God's Word is also likened to food, because it nourishes us as 'New Creatures' in Christ Jesus. (II Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15) As we feed upon it, we grow strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. Through this spiritual nourishment we grow up to the stature of manhood in Christ Jesus. Quoting from Moses, Jesus said to the Adversary, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."—Matt. 4:4

Jesus referred to the Word of God as 'food' in one of his promises pertaining to the end of the age and the time of his Second Presence. He told his disciples that when he returned he would gird himself, and would serve the household of faith with "meat in due season." (Luke 12:37; Matt. 24:45) How rich has been the feast of truth we have enjoyed through the fulfillment of this promise! It is all the 'Word' of God, the Word that has gone forth from his mouth.

WATERS OF REFRESHING

Again, the Word of God is like water. It is refreshing, invigorating, life-giving. How dry and desert-like our lives would be without the refreshing waters of the truth! We rejoice in the assurance given by the Master that spiritual ‘bread’ and ‘water’ will be abundantly provided for those who “hunger and thirst after righteousness.” (Matt. 5:6) Jesus promised that such would be “filled.” This has proved to be true. How satisfying and refreshing has been the Word of present truth!

The Word of God is also likened to water because of its cleansing effect in our lives. Paul wrote concerning our being cleansed “with the washing of water by the Word.” (Eph. 5:26) This function of God’s Word was foreshadowed by the water in the laver located in the court of the typical Tabernacle. (Exod. 30:18) Here the priests washed, and to us—the antitypical priesthood—the Word is a laver, a place for cleansing from the filthiness of the flesh.

AN ARMOR OF PROTECTION

“His truth shall be thy shield and buckler,” David wrote. (Ps. 91:4) As Christians we are “soldier[s] of Jesus Christ.” (II Tim. 2:3) We are fighting a “good fight of faith.” (I Tim. 6:12) Soldiers have enemies who fight against them; and our enemies are the world, the flesh, and the Devil. Against these enemies the Word of God is as an impregnable armor of protection. Satan, and the unseen powers allied with him, are especially powerful, and Paul tells us that to “stand” against these we will need to put on “the whole armour of God.”—Eph. 6:11

Paul identifies each part of this ‘armor’ and suggests the manner in which it serves to safeguard us against all “the fiery darts of the wicked.” (Eph. 6:13-18) There is the “helmet of salvation.” This well represents our knowledge of the truth. It is essential that we know the Word of God in order to give battle to the Adversary. When Satan attacked Jesus as he was leaving the wilderness, his knowledge of the Word was his protection. Against every fiery dart of temptation, the Master’s defense was, “It is written.” (Matt. 4:4-10) So it will need to be with us if we are to be good soldiers of Jesus Christ.

Another part of the Christian’s armor is the “breastplate of righteousness.” (Eph. 6:14) The breastplate of an ancient armor bearer was designed to protect the heart and other vital organs. The Word says,

“Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.”—
Prov. 4:23

We know the Lord is not judging us according to the unwilling imperfections of our fallen flesh, but the Adversary endeavors to discourage us along this line. He would have us believe that there is little use in our trying to please the Lord, because we always come so far short of the Divine standard of righteousness. But in this also the ‘Word’ affords protection, for it assures us of our Heavenly Father’s loving provision of justification through Christ—that our standing of righteousness is in him, and not in ourselves.

So when the Adversary hurls his fiery darts of discouragement, they fail to injure us, for we remember the protective assurance of the Word which declares, “Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.”—Rom. 8:33,34

Paul mentions the “shield of faith” as that part of the Christian armor designed to quench “all” the fiery darts of Satan. It is the faith ... “once delivered unto the saints.” (Eph. 6:16; Jude 3) Merely to have a knowledge of this faith is not sufficient. We must have full confidence in it. The symbolism of the ‘shield of faith’ also includes our belief in the promises of God. Full confidence in the rightness of the Divine plan, including the manner in which God’s providences are operating in our lives, furnishes a bulwark of strength against any efforts Satan may make to destroy us as New Creatures.

AN OFFENSIVE WEAPON

Next is “the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.” (Eph. 6:17) This is the offensive part of our armor. With it we give battle to our enemies; but it is not a carnal sword. None of the weapons of our warfare, Paul says, are “carnal, but mighty, through God to the pulling down of strong holds; ... and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God.”—II Cor. 10:4,5

Satan’s fiery darts are suggestions which are contrary to the will of God for the body members of Christ. These often seem plausible, and are always more pleasing to the flesh than is the expressed will of God. If we accept these and are governed by them, they result in serious injury to us

as New Creatures. If we wield the ‘sword of the Spirit’ to repel and destroy them, we will be victorious in each skirmish with the Adversary.

Our walk in the narrow way is also protected by the Word. Paul says that our feet are “shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace.” (Eph. 6:15) The way of the Christian is often rough and difficult. The Adversary places stumbling stones in our pathway over which we may fall. The Word speaks of the “snare of the fowler.”—Ps. 91:3

Since the protection of our feet is referred to as the Gospel of ‘peace,’ it indicates that one of Satan’s methods of attack is to lure us into carnal strife and controversy with those who oppose the truth. Such a course is often appealing to the flesh, but is a snare and a stumbling stone to the New Creature. “Blessed are the peacemakers,” says the Word, “for they shall be called the children of God.”—Matt. 5:9

We are to have our “loins girt about with truth.” (Eph. 6:14) The function of a girdle in ancient times suggests it as an apt symbolism of service. The protective qualities of the truth depend upon our holding it unselfishly, in love. We must be faithful servants of the truth, of the Word. We cannot enjoy the benefits of the truth just for ourselves, but are to use them faithfully for the blessing of others; otherwise the ‘whole armor of God’ will not remain securely bound to us, and sooner or later we will fall before our enemies.

THE CHANNEL OF GOD’S WORD

When the Lord assures us that the ‘Word’ which ‘goeth forth’ from his ‘mouth’ shall not return unto him ‘void,’ it is important to remember that as his servants he uses us as channels of his truth, his Word. God does not shout his Word from his throne in heaven, but conveys it to the hearts and minds of his people through human instruments. He inspired the ancient prophets to record his plan in the Old Testament. He guided Jesus in his teachings. His Holy Spirit miraculously enlightened the minds of the apostles so that their sermons and writings serve to elaborate further the ‘Word’ that goes forth from his mouth.

Paul explains that in addition to the miraculously inspired channels of the Word, the Lord has provided pastors, teachers and evangelists. In a broader sense, every consecrated child of God is a channel of his truth, for ‘the Spirit of the Lord God’ is upon them all, anointing them to this service. The great plan of God which is outlined by his Word is the

reconciliation of the sin-cursed and dying race. The plan is centered in Christ Jesus, the Redeemer and Savior. Paul wrote: “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself,” and then adds that in this great project we are “ambassadors for Christ.” In order to serve in this way, the Lord has given to us “the Word of reconciliation.”—II Cor. 5:19,20

We cannot keep the truth to ourselves and expect to receive all the rich benefits it contains for us. We feed upon the truth as we serve it to others. We are refreshed by it as we seek to ‘water’ others. The cleansing power of the truth in our own lives is the more effective as we exhort one another to love and good works. The defense of the truth against the attacks of the various enemies of the New Creature is greatly strengthened as together we contend earnestly for the faith once delivered unto the saints.

THE “FOOLISHNESS OF PREACHING”

Paul speaks of the work of God accomplished by the “foolishness of preaching.” (I Cor. 1:21) This ‘preaching’ is not limited to lecturing from a platform. Every faithful consecrated child of God participates in it to the extent that he permits the Word to radiate from his lips and his life. From the human standpoint it might well seem foolish that such a mighty work could be accomplished in seemingly so ineffective a manner. The reason it can be done is because “God ... giveth the increase.”—I Cor. 3:7

The work of God in preparing for the kingdom is symbolically described in Isaiah 51:16 as planting “the heavens” and laying “the foundations of the earth.” The ‘earth’ referred to here is the visible phase of the kingdom of Christ, the personnel of which will be the resurrected Ancient Worthies, such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and the prophets of the Old Testament. They were prepared for this honored position through their obedience to the Word of God as it was made known to them in past ages. The ‘heavens’ are symbolic of the spiritual phase of the kingdom, made up of Jesus and his church who also are prepared for their positions of glory by obedience to the will of God as expressed through his Word.

Jesus said, in consecration to his Father, “Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God.” (Heb. 10:7) It was his faithfulness to this covenant that qualified him to be the ‘King of kings and Lord of lords.’ Thus it was the Word of God recorded by the

prophets that sanctified the Master, or set him apart for the holy and honored position he occupies in the ‘new heavens.’ On behalf of his followers, Jesus prayed, “Sanctify them through thy truth,” and then he added, “Thy Word is truth.”—John 17:17

But in order for the truth to accomplish this Divine purpose in ‘creating’ the new heavens, it must be communicated from one to another. God does not emblazon it upon the skies where all can read it. He gave it to the prophets, to Jesus, and to the apostles, by the power of his Spirit; and we receive it from them and continue to communicate it one to another.

This being the Lord’s arrangement, we get the force of the Lord’s own statement, when through the prophet he said, “I have put my words in thy mouth, and I have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand, that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion, Thou art my people.”—Isa. 51:16

THE WORD IN OUR HEARTS

We must also have the Word in our hearts, but it should not be hidden there. If it is to be truly effective in our lives it must also be upon our lips. It was so with Jesus, who is represented prophetically as saying, “I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation.”—Ps. 40:9,10

It is a humbling thought that the Word of God, which he declares shall not return unto him void, can be communicated through us, and will be if we are faithful to the commission given to us by the anointing of the Spirit. How reassuring it is to know that even though our efforts are feeble, and we speak with lisping, stammering tongues, the ‘Word’ will accomplish the good pleasure of the Lord.

Very soon the work of the entire age will be successfully completed. We may not be able to see now just what our part in this labor of love has accomplished, but beyond the veil we will discover that the Word of God, as uttered by our imperfect lips, contributed something to the total effort, that the words we spoke to glorify our God were blessed by him to the

strengthening of others in the narrow way, and to the enrichment of their spiritual lives.

That same Word, while being communicated for the gathering and building up of the church, has served as a witness to the world. In this way also it accomplishes the will of God. We may at times think that our efforts are in vain, but that is only because we do not always realize that the Lord's ways are higher than our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts. God's Word, as proclaimed by us and by his authority, may not accomplish what we would like to see, but we may be sure that it will accomplish what he pleases. In this we can rejoice.

Upon the basis of this assurance, let us endeavor to be more and more emptied of self, and filled with his Word—so filled that it will overflow from our hearts and lips for the blessing of others, and the glory of God!

It is strengthening to our faith that the many beautiful promises contained in God's Word are described by our Father thus: "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it. For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands."—Isa. 55:11,12

The blessing of mankind will not occur without an appreciation of God's Word by the world, and this 'water of life' will be available free, as will all the other blessings of that kingdom. Even the vegetation on earth is animated, and joins in the joy that will come. The mountains and hills 'sing,' and the trees 'clap their hands,' to give praise and glory to the Author of the Word—Jehovah, our Heavenly Father!

Dawn Bible Students Association

Strong Doctrine

***“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.”
—Hebrews 5:14***

DISCUSSIONS AMONG Christians often involve establishing what is more important—character building, or understanding doctrine, the teachings of God’s Word. To be properly balanced, both must be pursued.

Some lay great stress on the fact that to live right is the principal thing. Pious, righteous living is a necessary Christian endeavor. We have come to see that control and knowing standards of morality depends on our knowledge of God’s

holiness and his glorious character which makes him bless all mankind. Unless we know God’s plan and his teachings, we imperfectly appreciate his character. Hence there is need of doctrine if we are to qualify as able “ambassadors for Christ.”—II Cor. 5:20

Oftentimes in our discussions of the truth of the Scriptures we may classify their teachings as the beginning principles of the doctrines of Christ, or the “milk of the Word” (I Pet. 2:2; Heb. 6:1), and the remainder of the doctrines as ‘meat.’ But when we desire to get more specific information as to the difference between these, we may find a great variety of answers, and to the conclusion that the ‘milk’ is merely the ‘Divine plan’ and the ‘meat’ a deeper understanding of complex matters.

THE FIRST PRINCIPLES

In Hebrews 5:12 Paul speaks of “the first principles of the oracles of God.” In the next chapter he outlines just what those ‘first principles’ (fundamentals, or ‘milk’ as he calls them) consist of: “faith toward God;” “repentance,” implying that all are sinners; “baptism” (consecration); “resurrection,” which embraces the ransom; “eternal judgment,” referring to the millennial day of judgment or trial. The “doctrine ... of laying on of hands” might be added to this listing if desired, but we

realize that this was essential to the Early Church only. It was a means of establishing unquestionably the position of the apostles in the body.

Peter agreed with this outline when on the day of Pentecost he preached to the multitude as recorded in the second chapter of Acts. He no doubt preached with the view of awakening their faith in God. With this he proclaimed the resurrection (vss. 24-36) and also stated that through our Lord Jesus the people could obtain “remission of sins.”—vs. 38

His message contained an exhortation both to “repent, and be baptized,” and by referring to Joel’s prophecy which speaks of the “last days,” in which the Lord would pour out his Spirit upon all flesh (vs. 17), he was, in effect, declaring the day of judgment for the world. While no mention is made of the doctrine of ‘laying on of hands,’ the fact that they were enabled by the Holy Spirit to speak miraculously in tongues was an absolute demonstration of that very doctrine.

Another good example of what constituted the ‘milk’ of the Word comes through the ministry of Paul to such as were only at best able to appreciate the ‘first things’ of the Gospel. These were the Grecians, unbelievers, to whom he spoke on Mars’ Hill, which is recorded in Acts 17:22-32.

From verses 23 to 29 he explains beautifully the need for all to exercise faith in the true and living God. Paul omitted the direct mention of the term ‘baptism,’ deferring this until some would first recognize their need of justification which some apparently did; for the account indicates that “certain men clave unto him, and believed.” (vs. 34) However, in this remarkable discourse he strongly implies baptism by saying “that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him.”—vs. 27

Included in his dissertation is God’s command that “men everywhere ... repent.” (vs. 30) He further explains the doctrine of judgment by pointing out that God “hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained,” and then he sums up his thoughts with the doctrine of the resurrection, maintaining that Jesus was “raised ... from the dead” and that hence there would be a “resurrection of the dead.” (vss. 31,32) By not mentioning the doctrine

of the ‘laying on of hands,’ it is apparent that this doctrine grew less important as the church became more established.

REPENTANCE

Singling out one of the five aforementioned doctrines, namely the doctrine of repentance, it might be helpful to divide it into three parts. First, it points to the original perfection that Adam possessed when created, of which Paul reminds us when he says: “The first man Adam was made a living [not a dying] soul.” (I Cor. 15:45) Second, it implies a fall from this perfection into sin, which fall came as a result of Adam’s disobedience to God’s commands. Thus Paul declares: “For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners.” (Rom. 5:19) Third, it makes clear that as a result of sin, death is the inevitable penalty. The dying process ends in death. The apostle writes, “The wages of sin is death.” (Rom. 6:23) A full realization of these three factors constitutes the basis of repentance, which in turn should lead the honest heart to conversion.

Some students of the Bible feel that these three subdivisions of repentance should be added to the apostle’s list of ‘milk’ doctrines, and no doubt this could be done with scriptural authority. Thus by omitting ‘repentance’ as a ‘milk’ doctrine and replacing it with its three component subdivisions, and by adding the doctrines of ‘faith toward God,’ ‘baptism,’ ‘resurrection,’ and ‘judgment,’ we would have a total of seven doctrines which would constitute the “first principles of the oracles of God.” (Heb. 5:12) There is, of course, much entailed in these basic doctrines, but likewise much has been written in *Studies in the Scriptures** to explain these doctrines, so we do not treat them here.

* Available at *The Dawn Bible Students Association*

LEARNING THE PRINCIPLES

A word of caution may fittingly be added here, lest some conclude that these ‘principles of the doctrines of Christ’ have little importance to more developed Christians. These are basic principles which will always be near to the hearts of those who love the Lord, and also they will always be given due consideration and meditation. They are to the Christian what addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division are to the mathematician.

The mathematician will always need these basic elements of arithmetic no matter how advanced in the subject he may become, for they are essential in all mathematical calculations. Every mathematical problem needs to use these four basic factors of arithmetic, and higher mathematics such as algebra, geometry, trigonometry and calculus, must employ these fundamentals.

Similarly, the Christian will always have in mind the first principles which he has learned in the school of Christ, and will find them essential factors in all his thoughts and studies. We leave these principles only in the sense that once we comprehend them, we should be persuaded fully of their value and importance and not need continually to call them in question or to survey them in doubt. If we continue in uncertainty of these ‘first principles,’ how could we go on to perfection, unto “the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ”? (Eph. 4:13) We could make no further progress than the mathematician who became uncertain of his addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division.

“STRONG MEAT”

Having singled out the ‘milk’ doctrines into five, or seven, items, then it is not difficult to point to that which constitutes the “strong meat.” (Heb. 5:14) It would of necessity have to be the remainder of the “faith which was once delivered unto the saints,” (Jude 3) the glorious Divine plan of the ages, including the Second Presence of Christ. It is true that types, shadows, parables, etc., were all written for our learning, but they do not in themselves constitute the ‘meat’ of God’s Word. They are fittingly added to help the truth-hungry clearly to comprehend the outline of God’s purposes. They merely illustrate and picture to our minds that which is otherwise clearly stated or taught elsewhere in the scriptures, aiding us to grasp their import.

We can be sure that ‘strong meat’ is not speculative interpretation; but rather, it is clear and positive teachings of God’s Word. Paul admonishes us against striving “about words to no profit,” and exhorts us to “shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness.”—II Tim. 2:14,16

THE LAW AND CIRCUMCISION

An example of doctrine reaching beyond what might be termed the ‘milk’ of the Word is seen in an experience of Paul. We recall the narrative concerning Paul and Barnabas upon their return from a missionary tour which was to serve both Jews and Gentiles, and how they reported their success to the congregation that had sponsored their journey’s expenses. Together, the church and their missionaries rejoiced in their mutual service for the truth, and they were especially glad to hear that the door of faith was open to the Gentiles.

Certain brethren, Hebrews by birth, came from Jerusalem, the headquarters of the church. They perceived that the Gentile Christians ignored circumcision, raising a great commotion, claiming that it was essential to salvation. The minds of many were disturbed, and for a time a division in the church seemed probable. But better counsels prevailed and the beloved brethren, Paul and Barnabas, were sent to Jerusalem as a committee to confer with the apostles and elders there. The fact that circumcision was not necessary to Christian believers apparently was ‘strong meat’ to some Judaizing Jews and was causing them difficulty because of their immaturity as Christians.

The decision of the council was not reached through an unveiling of some great scriptural mystery, or by making known the meaning of some of the Bible’s symbolic language. Plain scriptural evidence was brought forth by the apostles which led to the conclusion that the yoke of the Law was unnecessary for Christians. When they had reached this decision, they wrote it out and sent it forth at the hands of Judas, Silas, Paul, and Barnabas, thus making sure that the matter would be made clear to all.— Acts 15:22

DOCTRINES OF THE TRUTH

The doctrines of the truth may be broad, deep, and long, but they are likewise clear and concise and need only diligent study and “newness” of mind (Rom. 6:4;12:2) in order to comprehend them. For this reason Paul chided the Hebrew brethren, saying: “When for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God.” (Heb. 5:12) Their failure to understand the ‘first principles’ was due to a neglect of study and application of their minds to the Scriptures, and not because the doctrines were too difficult

to comprehend. They had no justifiable reason for their lack of development because the apostle never shunned to declare “all the counsel of God.” (Acts 20:27) He no doubt had declared all needful doctrine to them and for the time they had been acquainted with the message, they should have been not only able to understand it, but also to explain it to others.

Those who have developed into maturity as Christians and who by experience are able to “discern both good and evil” (Heb. 5:14), will not find themselves carried away “with every wind of doctrine;” for they will know after due consideration, that “if they speak not according to this Word [the law and testimony of God], it is because there is no light in them.” (Eph. 4:14; Isa. 8:20) Their experience in handling the Word will enable them to discern quickly what is backed with a ‘thus saith the Lord’ and what is merely conjecture and idle fancy mixed with a smattering of ill-chosen scriptures. The spiritually mature will not only understand and keep God’s commandments and teachings, but additionally, will find that “his commandments are not grievous.” (I John 5:3) Further, they will not be among those who say, “This is an hard saying; who can hear it?” Nor will the Master ever need to ask of these, “Doth this [saying or teaching] offend you?”—John 6:60,61

In this time of harvest, many have come to a knowledge of present truth and have found their spiritual appetites sharpening more and more for a deeper and clearer understanding of it. They love the ‘strong meat,’ and take delight in masticating it. But even here there is danger in this spiritual feasting.

CHRISTIAN MATURITY

We know that an understanding of doctrine is not the Christian goal, but merely a means to an end. It enables us to reach the Christian maturity which our Heavenly Father is looking for in his people—a maturity of character. It is the knowledge and understanding of the Scriptures that enable the man of God to be “Complete, equipped for every good work.” (II Tim. 3:17, *Revised Standard Version*) God caused them to be written for our profit and instruction, and without them we would be unprepared for the Christian warfare.

It was just such a maturity of character that enabled Peter, who noted that Paul wrote in his epistle of “some things hard to be understood,” to

forego pressing an untimely interpretation of Paul's difficult writings. Some, "unlearned and unstable" in the Word could not forego this urge, and hence they wrested these and other scriptures "unto their own destruction." (II Pet. 3:16) It was such largeness of heart that enabled Paul to rejoice that Christ was preached, even though some preached "Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction" to his bonds. In the face of such antagonism he could say, "Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice." (Phil. 1:16,18) And again, it was such advanced development that enabled Stephen to pray for those who stoned him—even Saul, who later became the Apostle Paul. While unjustly committed to death, he loved his enemies, and could pray, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge."—Acts 7:60

Christian maturity becomes essential for all who would comply with Paul's parting charge to faithful Timothy: "Preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine. ... But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry." (II Tim. 4:1,2,5) By doing so, Timothy would never "turn away" "from the truth."—vs. 4

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