Another New Year

A Time for Reflection and Anticipation

"Thou crownest the year with thy goodness; and thy paths drop fatness."
—Psalm 65:11

THE ENDING OF ONE YEAR and the beginning of another new year is the traditional time when many people from all walks of life pause for reflection, as they look back on the events of the year that has just passed. This would include a review of some of the experiences in their own lives, and also the events that had occurred on the world scene. They may also look forward with anticipation to what may, or may not, come to pass in the year just ahead. Many will welcome in the new year with celebration, some will usher it in with uncertainty and apprehension, while others will do so with the making of New Year's resolutions.

A YEAR CROWNED WITH GOODNESS

The word 'crownest' which is used in our featured scripture text means to encircle or surround, either for attack or for protection. In this case, the thought obviously points to God's protection, encirclement, and providential care over his people. This same Hebrew word was also used by the Psalmist

David when he wrote, "Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies." (Ps. 103:4) This thought is also brought to our attention where he said, "Thou, LORD, wilt bless the righteous; with favour wilt thou compass [marginal translation, crown] him as with a shield."—Ps. 5:12, *Marginal Translation*

"THY PATHS DROP FATNESS"

The words 'thy paths drop fatness' were used by David in the second clause of our scripture text and further emphasize the Divine promise, that bountiful blessings are given by God to his people. The word fatness suggests abundance, or fertility, and was used by the psalmist in another psalm where he wrote, "My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips." (Ps. 63:5) He used this word again when he said, "They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures."—Ps. 36: 8

PASSING OF THE OLD YEAR

In reviewing the year which is now coming to a close, we can look back and remember it as a time filled with devastating natural disasters of all kinds, which have affected countless numbers of people in many parts of the world. There have been super storms, including hurricanes and tornadoes, as well as earthquakes and tsunamis. Floods have destroyed lives and property in some areas, while droughts have devastated others. There have been destructive volcanoes, and whole communities have been consumed by mud slides.

THE MONSTROUS TSUNAMI

As the year 2005 began, the world was grappling with one of the most destructive natural disasters of modern times. The people of southern Asia, and particularly those living along the seacoast of the Indian Ocean, were struggling to bring a semblance of order out of the catastrophic carnage that had taken place as a result of one of the most powerful underwater earthquakes ever recorded, along with the tsunami that followed. This had all taken place only a few days before the New Year 2005 began.

Thousands of people were killed, and many more thousands lost their homes and livelihood. This has resulted in great monetary cost, as well as in human resources.

SUPER HURRICANES

Later, in the summer, the Gulf Coast region of America suffered tremendous damage from two monstrous hurricanes that came ashore within the same general region only a few weeks apart. The first of these super storms, named Katrina, was responsible for causing the greatest amount of destruction in the history of the United States. Although widespread damage had been done all along the coastlines of Alabama and Mississippi, the largest impact of the storm was centered in Louisiana, with special focus on the city of New Orleans.

The levee system, which had been built to protect New Orleans from the mighty Mississippi River and nearby Lake Pontchartrain, failed as a result of the heavy rains, high winds, and storm surge that accompanied the hurricane. The city is mostly

below sea level and, with the break in the levees in various parts of the city, it filled up quickly with water. The floodwaters killed many of its citizens, stranded and displaced countless more, and triggered a massive relief and evacuation effort that has involved the efforts of search and rescue teams from all over the country. The cost in property damage has been estimated in the billions of dollars and it may take years to rebuild, if ever. Few hurricanes in recorded history have been as powerful as those which struck these areas of the Gulf States. The adverse effect on the economy and resources of the United States has been enormous.

POWERFUL EARTHQUAKES

A powerful earthquake with a magnitude of 7.6 struck in the area of Kashmir, Pakistan, and other nearby regions, in the early part of the month of October. The epicenter was near Muzzaffarad, in the region of Pakistan-administered Kashmir, and was the strongest and most devastating quake in that part of the world in one hundred years. The effects of the quake, and its several powerful aftershocks, were felt in many parts of South Asia. Many people lost their lives, and countless others were injured and driven from their homes and livelihood. The toll continues to rise, but the current estimates are tens of thousands dead, with millions of others affected by injury, disease, and displacement. Rescue workers and aid were brought into the area from all over the world. The immediate priorities are treating the injured and others to prevent further death and illness from secondary causes.

WAR AND TERRORISM

The year 2005 saw a rising level of violence and death as a result of war and terrorism. Destruction has taken place in many parts of the earth at the hands of terrorists, with a total disregard for human suffering and loss of property. Furthermore, there is little evidence that the war in Iraq will be over any time soon, and that the thousands of American troops will be coming home. Specialists who study terrorism and their techniques openly acknowledge that they foresee the prospect for endless war with the terrorists, and some say that Al-Qaida is already mutating into a global insurgency. Others say that the battle against terrorism has hardly begun.

IRAQ WAR

There is growing apprehension and criticism among many Americans concerning the role of the United States military in Iraq. Some are voicing their criticisms, while others are asking for the reasons why the country was invaded in the first place. They point out that there has never been any credible link established that legitimizes the invasion, or that proves there ever was a substantial connection between Iraq and the perpetrators of the 9/11 terrorist bombing in New York City. Further, the war has seriously undermined the ability of United States military forces to maintain law and order, or to accomplish many of the goals that were initially set out for them to do. Many Americans believe that the war in Iraq is not going well, and that the whole matter is becoming a disaster. At the time of this writing, the casualty figure

of American soldiers killed has reached two thousand, and there are thousands more who have been injured, many of them critically.

THE LONDON BOMBING

In midsummer, central London's busy mass transit system became a scene of senseless horror and carnage as three terrorist bombs blew up in the Underground while a fourth bomb exploded on a double-decker bus above ground. Approximately fifty people were killed, and another seven hundred or more were injured.

A clear message was sent by the terrorists, not only to those who ride the London subways everyday, but also to the rest of the world, that in the present age of terror, there are no safe places anymore. Analysts pointed out that this was the bloodiest day in London since the terrible days of the Nazi Blitz during the early years of World War II. To many Americans, this bombing was a wake-up call to those who ride the subways in New York, and other large cities in the United States. Cities in other parts of the world are also now on high alert.

THE GAZA PULLOUT

One of the most dramatic events that took place in the Holy Land during the year 2005 was Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip after having occupied the region for the past thirty-eight years. Israel's Prime Minister Sharon was seen by many of his people as having turned his back on the Jewish settlers who were being forced from their homes in Gaza and a small part of the West Bank. The Sharon government promised that they would be properly compensated for the move.

The rest of the world generally viewed the pull-out in a positive way, believing that Sharon had achieved a milestone in Israeli-Palestinian relations. Within his own country, his initial move was viewed with alarm and as a huge political gamble. As the evacuation proceeded, and as Israeli troops were completing their removal from the settlements in Gaza, national support for Sharon's plan rose to more than 50%. His standing within his own Likud party at that time, however, plunged to a new all-time low. Until he had unveiled the disengagement plan a year before, he had presided over a powerful coalition in the Israeli government. But the coalition began to break up as far-right and religious parties removed their support for his plan, and he lost considerable credibility as a result.

The situation remains unpredictable, but the Gaza disengagement has weighed heavily on Sharon's shoulders, especially the plight of the evacuees. Long-term housing continues to be a major concern for these displaced people although the Treasury Department has allocated large sums of money to compensate settlers for their former homes and property. The problem that these people are having, however, is trying to find comparable housing with the funds which have been appropriated for that purpose. There is a sudden demand for housing all over the country, and prices are not stable. It takes time to build new homes and when they become available the prices for these properties will likely have risen.

MAN'S PLANS WILL FAIL

As the world enters another new year, there is a rising level of apprehension and fear among the

general population. This sense of foreboding has come about largely because of the tragic events that have taken place throughout the world in recent years. This includes terrorism, instability in the world's economies, changing weather patterns, and a host of other calamities both man-made, and otherwise. International statesmen and heads of government cannot find solutions to solve the many problems confronting the world, and financial leaders don't have the answers to the world's monetary difficulties.

Luke points forward to this closing time at the end of the Gospel Age. He says, "Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken." (Luke 21:26) Religious leaders differ widely in their views as they endeavor to find answers in the Bible, and some see the future as one filled with gloom, doom, and the final destruction of the earth and everything in it. However, there is a growing interest in end-time prophecy as it relates to the times in which we are now living.

REFLECTIONS ON THE OLD YEAR

For the Lord's people, the closing of one chapter in their consecrated lives and the opening of another one is usually a special time for reflection. They will no doubt include a mental account of their personal experiences, and the degree of spiritual progress and growth that may have taken place during the previous year. Their resolutions will be of a spiritual nature, and will include a renewed commitment to be more resolute and faithful to

God in connection with their High Calling in Christ Jesus during the coming year.

On a larger scale, the children of God, in their endeavor to watch the signs of the times as they have been instructed to do during these closing years of the Gospel Age, look forward to the approaching new age of Christ's kingdom which is ever close at hand. Their meditation will likely include consideration of the prophecies and other scriptures dealing with the wondrous events of our day. Surely we are living in momentous times with increasing anticipation, as we look ahead to the events of the future and particularly in the new year.

Students of the Bible who have learned to love and trust our Heavenly Father and his dearly beloved Son, our Lord Jesus, will look back on the previous twelve months and reflect upon the many ways in which he has led them in the paths of Truth and righteousness. This reflection will undoubtedly include many spiritual blessings that may be remembered with joy and gladness, especially in our fellowship with others of like precious faith. On the other hand, some of our experiences may have been painful and difficult to endure, yet we count them as all joy in our special calling of God.

To the dedicated and well-seasoned Christian, this reflection is one which includes our heartfelt devotion and praise to God in the crowning of our year with blessings, and the achievement of spiritual growth as New Creatures in Christ Jesus. In all of this reflection, they will readily acknowledge that the year just ending has been one which was filled with all goodness and mercy, and for which they will render their highest degree of thanksgiving.

ANTICIPATION FOR THE NEW YEAR

Not one of us is capable of foreseeing all of the numerous and varied circumstances, personal and otherwise, that may transpire in the future, or perhaps during the coming year. However, those of the Lord's children who have learned to put their complete trust in him concerning the outworking of his wondrous plans, and for their spiritual growth as New Creatures in Christ Jesus, will manifest evidences of character development as seen in the special qualities of hope and trust. They will have developed a degree of trust that whatever may be permitted by God to come to pass in their lives is a manifestation of his loving and providential care for them, and also in the affairs of all of his people. They will also put their trust in the Heavenly Father's ultimate plans for the reconciliation of the whole world of mankind during the future kingdom of Christ, and the eventual outworking of the Divine plan for the blessing of all the families of the earth at that time.

CHRIST'S KINGDOM THE ONLY HOPE

Many passages of scripture foretell the blessed promises that will be a part of Christ's kingdom; and Isaiah describes that wonderful time in symbolic language, when he says, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price." (Isa. 55:1) The prophet describes the calling that will go forth all over the world during that future thousand-year kingdom, when the human family will thirst for righteousness and Truth.

Concerning this water Jesus tells us, "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." (John 4:14) This water of life is a symbol to illustrate the gift of life that will become available for all of earth's obedient to drink.

As we look ahead to the New Year 2006, it is proper that we reflect on the many mercies and provisions of grace, both temporal and spiritual, that we have enjoyed in the past. This appreciation for the Lord's direction and guidance in our lives should not only be a part of our meditation at this particular time, but in a grander sense it should include an appreciation for those blessings that have come to pass throughout the entire time of our association with the Truth, and with those of like precious faith. This is a time to renew our consecration to do the will of God to the best of our ability. Let us strive to be faithful even unto death that we may share in the grand uplifting of the whole world of mankind in Christ's kingdom. ■

Another Year for Thee

Another year we welcome! Dear Master, may it be,
In thought and word and action, another year for thee.
Another year of leaning upon thy loving breast,
Where heartaches, pain and sorrow are lost in happy rest.

Another year of proving thy holy blessed will,
To find my joy in doing, and in thy hand hold still;
Another year of service, to prove to Thee my love;
Another year of training for greater works above.

—Poems of Dawn

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

QUESTION: Will those who have been cremated be raised from the dead?

ANSWER: Yes. In principle there is no difference between cremation and burial. It is merely that in cremation the disintegration of the body is brought about more quickly. In both cases the body returns to the earth as it was. (Gen. 3:19) The manner in which one's body is disposed of after death will have no bearing on the resurrection, for the Apostle Paul wrote, "Thou sowest not that body that shall be."—I Cor. 15:37

The chemical elements that make up the human body are constantly undergoing change, even while the body lives. It is not these elements that determine character or personality The bodies of the lower animals, as a matter of fact, are composed of identical chemical elements.

The brain is part of the body structure, and it is the sum total of the thoughts recorded by the brain which makes the person. It is this personality that will be restored in the resurrection. The new brain will not need to contain the same chemical elements as the former one, but it will contain the same thought impressions, so the person will be the same. This is possible through the creative power of God.

Those who in this life have set their affections on things above, and therefore have developed a mind that is bent toward heavenly things, will, in the resurrection, be given "celestial," or heavenly, bodies. All others will be restored as humans. If they then prove faithful to the LORD they will go on to human perfection, and live forever. ■