Meltdown on Wall Street:
Colossal Crisis

"Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD's wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land."
—Zephaniah 1:18

IN THIS SCRIPTURE, GOD'S prophet used symbolic language to describe the deepening and widening effects of the great time of trouble that clearly marks our day in prophecy. This distress of nations was to come upon them as a result of the untold degree of selfishness and pride especially during the closing years of the present Gospel Age. Those Christian people who are watching the unfolding chaotic events of our day are not disturbed as others may be, but recognize that we are now living in the great day of preparation and are yearning for the long-promised establishment of Christ's future kingdom. The administration of that reign of peace will provide the only

answer for the present dilemma, and it will ultimately bring order out of chaos for the blessing of the whole groaning and sin-sick human family.

PROPHETIC FOREGLEAMS

The Prophet Zephaniah began by pointing out the Heavenly Father's ultimate purpose in allowing the present social order to be destroyed. Guided by the Holy Spirit of God, he wrote, "I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the LORD. I will consume man and beast; I will consume the fowls of the heaven, and the fishes of the sea, and the stumblingblocks [idols, *Marginal Translation*] with the wicked; and I will cut off man from off the land, saith the LORD."—Zeph. 1:2,3

The earth, together with its human and animal creation, will never be destroyed as revealed in the writings of Solomon, who said, "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever." (Eccles. 1:4) Concerning our Heavenly Father's long-range plan for his earthly creation, the Psalmist David also wrote, "Thy righteousness is like the great mountains; thy judgments are a great deep: O LORD, thou preservest man and beast." (Ps. 36: 6) In Zephaniah's prophecy, he used illustrations such as the 'fowls of the heaven' when pointing to earth's ecclesiastical heavens that will be set aside to make way for the soon-to-come kingdom of Christ. The term 'fishes of the sea' serves to identify mankind as likened to by another of God's prophets, who wrote, "[Thou] makest men as the fishes of the sea." (Hab. 1:14) These, and numerous other symbols, taken from our natural surroundings serve as important

illustrations to teach meaningful lessons to the Lord's people.

When Zephaniah spoke of our day in prophecy, he also pointed to its significance and true meaning in relationship with the presence of our Lord at the end of this Gospel Age. He said, "Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord GOD: for the day of the LORD is at hand: for the LORD hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath bid his guests. And it shall come to pass in the day of the LORD's sacrifice, that I will punish the princes, and the king's children, and all such as are clothed with strange apparel."—Zeph. 1:7,8

A DAY OF WRATH

In the context of Zephaniah's prophecy, he foretold, "The great day of the LORD is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the LORD: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, A day of the trumpet, and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers." (vss. 14-16) Earth's ruling class and financiers who felt secure and untouchable behind their 'fenced cities and high towers' of enormous accumulated power and wealth, will be made manifest to the people in a remarkable way as they are swept away under the guise of their selfish and proud and greedy delusions.

FINANCIAL DOWNTURN

A major slowdown in the world's economy began in the late summer and early autumn months of

2007, and continued throughout the year 2008 with widespread and disrupting consequences. Growing chaos quickly spread throughout financial markets, and required unprecedented intervention by world governments and financial experts who sought to restore order, but with little success.

Many analysts, who are studying the crisis, point out that its roots lay within the real estate boom that began in the mid 1990s. At that time, increasing prices for homes and businesses began to rise dramatically and coincided with government deregulation policies and questionable lending practices among many financial institutions. This situation allowed unqualified purchasers to take out large mortgages on properties that they could not afford. Because of the inflationary spiral, the prices for residential and commercial properties began to rise substantially every year which created an unrealistic market value. In the meantime, real estate loans were being spread throughout the financial system to disperse the risk on properties that had been purchased with little or no down payments.

A BURSTING BUBBLE

When the bubble burst, the Federal Reserve, in an effort to stabilize the markets, began a series of interest rate cuts that it charges financial institutions for direct loans. In the summer of 2007, the rate was 5.25%. Since that time the rate has been reduced eight times, and at the time of this writing now stands at 1%. This represents a drastic move to address the problem that was already underway. In addition, the Federal Reserve agreed to extend unlimited credit for six months not only to commercial

banks, but also to investment banks and brokerage firms that are less regulated. This was a move that had no precedent since the Great Depression of the 1930's. By invoking this emergency provision that was enacted in1932, it indicated that the failure of major Wall Street firms were at risk.

BEAR STEARNS COLLAPSE

In March, 2008, Bear Stearns, Wall Street's fifth largest investment bank, was having problems because of sub-prime mortgage debt, and because other banks had stopped lending to it. Rumor had also started that they were having liquidity problems, although they actually had around $18 billion in cash reserves. There was fear that the rumor might spread to Wall Street which had been tense for months. During the past few months, they had seen the mortgage market crash, and major financial companies such as Citigroup and Merrill Lynch write off billions of dollars in bad loans.

The big banks had all but stopped lending money, a trend which could spell disaster for trading firms and others. Within hours, a tidal wave of rumor and speculation began to crash down upon Bear Stearns, and within a few days it had destroyed a major financial institution that had done business successfully on Wall Street since its founding in 1923.

WIDESPREAD BREAKDOWN

However, the fall of Bear Stearns wasn't just another financial collapse. There had never been anything on Wall Street to compare with it, a tragic run on a major investment bank that was in some ways caused by rumor and innuendo that had little basis in fact.

The news rattled investors worldwide. J. P. Morgan Chase helped bail out Bear Stearns by paying just $2 a share to take over the investment firm which a year earlier had been trading for as high as $170 a share. The purchase price was a rude awakening to just how far things had fallen. Financial analysts point out that the deal to buy the investment firm prevented a looming bankruptcy filing that would have created a new crisis in the financial markets who were also fearing that the credit crisis was deepening. Overnight, financial markets in Asia and Europe fell sharply.

There was little doubt that the collapse and its unfolding magnitude was a crisis of historic proportions. After a generation of media propaganda which praised the infallibility of Wall Street's markets and financial wizards, the economy of the United States was at the very brink of a breakdown that had not been seen since the Great Depression of the 1930s. It marked a turning point in the history of capitalism indicating that the economic and social upheaval experienced many years earlier was again a likely possibility.

GIANTS FALL

As the crisis deepened, other major financial institutions began to fail. Among some of the most notable were The Federal National Mortgage Association (Fannie Mae) and The Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation (Freddie Mac) that were both taken over by the federal government. Lehman Brothers declared bankruptcy after failing to find a buyer, and The Bank of America agreed to purchase Merrill Lynch. The American International Group

(AIG)—the nation's largest insurance company—was saved by an approximate $152 billion-and-counting capital injection by the Federal Reserve.

A short time later the assets of Washington Mutual, the nation's largest savings and loan association, were seized by The Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), and brokered the sale to J. P. Morgan Chase. Washington Mutual (WaMu) was the largest bank failure in American history. Several other United States banks that failed were also taken over by the FDIC during the year 2008. The Federal Reserve's actions included massive infusions of liquidity into the financial markets, and an agreement to accept as collateral mortgage-backed assets that cannot be sold and have questionable value. Thus the United States central bank has taken onto its balance sheets hundreds of billions of dollars in bad investments.

BAILOUTS

In early October, President Bush signed an emergency $700 billion bailout fund for the banking industry. This took place after intense negotiation and persuasion that prompted the United States Congress to reverse its opposition to the plan a week earlier. Business leaders hoped that the rescue package would thaw out the frozen credit markets and restore confidence in America's struggling banks. It included measures to limit pay for senior banking executives and to increase the insured limit of United States bank balances from $100,000 to $250,000.

Federal Reserve's chairman Ben Bernanke welcomed the plan's approval and said, "The legislation

is a critical step toward stabilizing our financial markets and ensuring an uninterrupted flow of credit to households and businesses." The Democratic leader in the House, Steny Hoyer, said "The American people expected us to act, to respond to the best extent we could, to stop the downward flow in the markets and to restore the flow of credit in the economy." John Lewis, a Democrat who switched sides, said, "I have decided that the cost of doing nothing is greater than the cost of doing something." The United States Chamber of Commerce, which represents business leaders said, "With the American economy on life support, Congress took the necessary step to stop the bleeding." Both presidential candidates, Barack Obama and John McCain also expressed support for the package in spite of an estimated $150 billion of controversial tax credits that were added to win support from those who had not voted for the plan a week earlier. Many critics of the bailout plan still have strong reservations.

AUTOMAKERS SEEK HELP

During the first week of December 2008, all three Detroit automaker companies' CEOs returned to Washington a second time to seek billions of dollars of federal government bailout money. They needed the money to help General Motors Corporation, Ford Motor Company, and Chrysler Corporation to survive the present worldwide economic slump. When the 'big three' auto executives arrived in Washington in private jets two weeks earlier their request for $25 billion had been denied. Now they came in cars manufactured by their own

companies, and were asking for a $34 billion bail-out. The question that many lawmakers were asking is why should taxpayers bail out the automakers with billions of dollars?

Many factors have combined to bring the auto industry down, including poor management, too many brands, poor product and efficiency design, too many costly dealerships and the inability to compete with foreign automakers. Analysts point out that modern companies require strong, agile and efficient practices to survive. They ask, "If we bail out the auto industry, then which is next, the airlines?"

Congress has already given the 'big three' a $25 billion low-interest loan, and now they were asking for $25 billion more. These sums of money are more than Congress spends on highways in the United States each year. It is more than they spend annually on food stamps and child nutrition combined. A bailout of this magnitude means that every American household must give $450 to the automakers.

Another of the main reasons why these companies are on the verge of bankruptcy concerns their connection with the United Auto Workers Union (UAW). Through strikes they could easily shut down Detroit's entire auto production and had the power to win almost any concession. UAW workers are among the world's most affluent. Their take-home pay in wages and benefits is triple what the average private-sector worker earns. They may retire after 30 years on a generous pension regardless of age. If they don't yet qualify for Social Security benefits, they may get special bonus payments

until they do. At small cost, UAW workers and retirees are also eligible for comprehensive medical, hospital, surgical, and prescription drug coverage. Under union contracts the companies do not lay off workers when plants close. Instead, they transfer them to the Jobs Bank where they may receive nearly full pay. These and other benefits that are available to autoworkers is a contributing factor in the industry's inability to compete with foreign companies that do not receive these concessions.

CRISIS OF CONFIDENCE

Destructive and convulsive financial panics have occurred several times in the United States since the early nineteenth century. However, the crisis that began on Wall Street in the summer of 2007 has been more devastating and widespread than any other. A climate of uncertainty and distrust has been created on a level that has not been seen until now. For decades, United States monetary indulgence, credit excess, and fiscal irresponsibility finally imploded. The folly of Wall Street financiers and the Federal Reserve, who believed that they could eliminate hundreds of billions of dollars of capital risk by making it appear invisible, were unsuccessful.

As a result, people across the country have lost faith not only with the banking and financial system as a whole, but also a collapse of confidence in the government which has failed to act responsibly on behalf of its citizens. Many family homes have been lost in foreclosure, retirement savings accounts have been lost, and unemployment has risen. What was once the industrial giant of the world has declined,

and countless numbers of jobs have been moved out of the country. A high percentage of United States debt is now owned by foreign banks, and investors are fleeing the stock markets with the market average now down 40% from last year's highs.

Even with the government's unprecedented intervention, and the $700 billion rescue package paid by the taxpayers of this nation, the government has failed to stop the lack of confidence that the general public believes precipitated the collapse. The government's takeover of Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, AIG, and numerous other rescues have turned Washington into a mortgage lender and insurer. Drastic remedies, including partial nationalization of the banking industry and pumping vast amounts of money into the markets, have failed to persuade banks to resume regular lending. Countless numbers of investors have fled the stock markets.

A NEW WORLD ORDER

Students of the Bible are watching with much interest the dramatic events unfold that mark our day in prophecy. In our featured text, the Prophet Zephaniah spoke of the fire of God's jealousy and that silver and gold would not deliver the people from the carnage of the Heavenly Father's ultimate plan concerning his human family. The Prophet Isaiah also wrote of our time at the end of the present Gospel Age. "Come near, ye nations, to hear; and hearken, ye people: let the earth hear, and all that is therein; the world, and all things that come forth of it. For the indignation of the LORD is upon

all nations, and his fury upon all their armies: he hath utterly destroyed them, he hath delivered them to the slaughter. Their slain also shall be cast out, and their stink shall come up out of their carcasses, and the mountains shall be melted with their blood."—Isa. 34:1-3

The prophet's words address the present structure of earth's society that has been based on fallen men's proud and selfish rule. Our Heavenly Father's purpose is to remove these institutions and install a just rulership under the administration of Christ's righteous kingdom. Under that new world order, selfishness and pride will no longer prevail, and everlasting life will be available for all of earth's obedient.

In symbolic terms, the prophet describes the destruction of the old world order. "All the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig tree. For my sword shall be bathed in heaven: behold, it shall come down upon Idumea, and upon the people of my curse, to judgment. The sword of the LORD is filled with blood, it is made fat with fatness, and with the blood of lambs and goats, with the fat of the kidneys of rams: for the LORD hath a sacrifice in Bozrah, and a great slaughter in the land of Idumea." (vss. 4-6) The 'sword' that accomplishes the destruction of the present ecclesiastical heavens is the sword of the LORD's mouth—the Truth that reveals the lies, injustice, and selfishness that has been allowed to prevail over the people.

NEW HEAVENS AND EARTH

Isaiah also wrote of the new world order that our loving Heavenly Father would establish over the earth. God said, "Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But be ye glad and rejoice for ever in that which I create: for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. And I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying. There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed."—Isa. 65:17-20

NEW JERUSALEM

The prophet's reference to Jerusalem points to the completed Christ who will rule over the nations as foretold by the Revelator. "I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." (Rev. 21:1,2) This is the same illustration of the heavenly kingdom, of which the Prophet Jeremiah wrote, "At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the LORD; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it; to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem: neither shall they walk any more after the imagination [stubbornness, *Marginal Translation*] of their evil heart."—Jer. 3:17

NO MORE SELFISHNESS OR PRIDE

Under the administration of the new world order, under 'The Christ,' pride and selfishness will be no more. "They shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the LORD, and their offspring with them. And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD."—Isa. 65:21-25

"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 ■

OBITUARIES

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

Brother Marvin Curell, Louisville, TN—September 27. Age, 73

Sister Ruth Kowaleski, Ithaca, NY—December 5.

Sister Eunice Trebeck, Orlando, FL—December 27. Age, 85

Sister Pat Swartz, Nobelsville, IN—January 3.

A Shunammite Woman Helps

Key Verses: "She said unto her husband, Behold now, I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually. Let us make a little chamber, I pray thee, on the wall; and let us set for him there a bed, and a table, and a stool, and a candlestick: and it shall be, when he cometh to us, that he shall turn in thither." —II Kings 4:9,10

Selected Scripture: II Kings 4:8-17

AS A GREAT PROPHET OF Israel, Elisha performed numerous miracles that attested to the glory and power of God. "It fell on a day, that Elisha passed to Shunem, where was a great woman; and she constrained him to eat bread. And so it was, that as oft as he passed by, he turned in thither to eat bread."—II Kings 4:8

Our Key Verses demonstrate the deep appreciation this good woman had for the pious man of God. She petitioned her husband to provide a room for Elisha's use whenever he should travel through Shunem.

During one of his visits, Elisha inquired through his servant Gehazi how he could make recompense for her hospitality. (vss. 12,13) Her reaction reaffirmed her generosity of spirit. She was not expecting any special favors and was quite content with her station in life. Nevertheless, Elisha

continued to pursue the matter further through his servant. He observed the woman's husband was aged and she had no son. The prophet then seized upon this opportunity by summoning his hostess once again and informed her she would bear a son. (vss. 14-16) This joyous news was difficult for her to believe but at the appointed time, the proof of this promise was confirmed.—vs. 17

It is quite probable that following the birth of her son, his mother was exceedingly joyful and would always feel a sense of deep gratitude towards Elisha for this wonderful blessing that was bestowed upon her.

As the child grew older, one day he was in the field with his father during the reaping of grain and he suddenly became ill. He was carried back to his home to be with his mother, but he died about noon. Without informing her husband that their son was dead, she traveled to Mount Carmel to seek out Elisha who observed her deep anguish. Elisha ultimately returned to the Shunammite woman's home, laid his body upon the lad, prayed to the Heavenly Father, and the child was restored to life.—vss.18-37

The latter portion of this narrative attests to the great faith of the Shunammite woman who sought out the prophet in her hour of trial, as well as Elisha's trust in God's power as he was permitted to awaken the lad from the sleep of death.

This wonderful miracle was illustrative of the great work to be performed during the coming kingdom, because Jesus Christ gave his life to purchase the dying race of humanity. (John 5:25) All of the sorrows associated with sin will be removed from mankind during this forthcoming period of promised blessings. What a time of rejoicing that will be!

"The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."—Isa. 35:5-10 ■

Nathan Challenges David

Key Verses: "When the mourning was past, David sent and fetched her to his house, and she became his wife, and bare him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD. And the LORD sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor." —II Samuel 11:27-12:1

Selected Scripture: II Samuel 12:1-15

KING DAVID COMMITTED A grievous sin after he noticed Bathsheba, a beautiful, married woman, from the roof of his house one evening and took her to his bed. In an attempt to hide this wicked deed, he ultimately arranged for the murder of her husband, Uriah the Hittite.—II Sam. 11:3-24

Our Key Verses indicate David then took Bathsheba as his wife and she subsequently bore him a son. In view of God's displeasure with David's conduct, he sent the Prophet Nathan to rebuke the king.

Nathan gave a parable in which a rich man took a poor man's possession. Upon hearing of the rich man's actions David became angry and said this evil deed should surely be punished.—II Sam. 12:2-6

In a pointed fashion, Nathan drove home the lesson by declaring to David "Thou art the man."—vs. 7

As God's mouthpiece, Nathan, in condemning David, cited many Divine blessings which the king had received, but also indicated several sinful acts he had committed despite God's goodness towards him. (vss. 8,9) Additionally, Divine retribution was meted out against the king for his gross misdeeds. David then acknowledged his sin, repented, and received forgiveness. (Ps. 32:1-4) Although David's life was spared, the son that was born from his illicit union with Uriah's wife was struck with an illness and eventually died.—II Sam. 12:13-18

Each believer who has consecrated his life to God during this Gospel Age may take important lessons from this narrative for self application. (Gal. 6:7,8) If we are seeking to do the Heavenly Father's will, even though imperfect in the flesh, we will have to manifest purity of heart as well as a life of devotion towards spiritual ideals.

As we seek to be faithful to the great calling we have received to share in the privilege of reigning with Christ in his kingdom to help bless the human family, may we ever keep this admonition close to our hearts and minds. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed."—James 1:13,14

God is totally opposed to sin, is not the author of sin, and does not tempt anyone to sin. However, when believers err and sincerely repent, God's mercy is applied and the errant one is forgiven and restored. As Spirit begotten children, even though we have a compassionate Heavenly Father, it would be far better if we did everything possible in our lives to resist sin by setting our affections upon heavenly, rather than fleshly, pursuits. "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, . . . Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth."—Col. 3:1,2 ■

Esther Risks Her Life

Key Verse: "Go gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish."
—Esther 4:16

Selected Scripture: Esther 4,5

FOLLOWING THE END OF their Babylonian captivity, some Jews did not return to their homeland but chose to remain in Persia. One of the officials at the king's palace was a Jew named Mordecai who had a beautiful young cousin named Esther that he had raised as his own daughter.

Eventually, Esther became the queen to King Ahasuerus, but hearkened to Mordecai's advice that she should not reveal her Jewish ancestry. The king's chief assistant, Haman, desired everyone to bow to him but, when Mordecai refused to do so, he persuaded King Ahasuerus that all the Jews throughout Persia should be killed on a given date.

When Mordecai learned of this wicked plot, he began mourning, and throughout the provinces the Jews wept concerning their impending calamity.—Esther 4:1-3

Subsequently, Esther learned of Mordecai's sorrow and inquired as to the cause of his grief. Mordecai responded by informing Esther of the plan to exterminate all the Jews and requested that she approach the king

and ask him to issue another edict that would cancel his initial decree. Esther, however, replied that she had not been in the king's presence for over a month, and to approach him uninvited would bring certain death unless he felt favorably towards her by extending his golden sceptre.—vss. 4-15

Our Key Verse reflects Esther's grasp as to the gravity of the situation for herself and all of her people. She, therefore, sent word to her uncle and through him to all of the Jews to join her in a fast for three days.

One important lesson this narrative underscores is the necessity of having faith in God. (Heb. 11:6) It is for this reason Mordecai impressed upon Esther that it was quite possible that she had come into her honored position as the queen for the very purpose of saving her people from the evil that Haman had plotted.

Following the period of fasting, Esther put on her royal garments and approached King Abasuerus, who favorably received her as he extended his golden sceptre.—Esther 5:1,2

In a series of events that were providentially overruled, Haman was executed, Mordecai was elevated to a prominent position by the king, and the Jews were saved from extermination because of Esther's intervention.

As Christians, none of us is free from trials of one sort or another involving family, health issues, employment, or persecution because of our adherence to scriptural precepts. We are to remember, however, that difficult situations are permitted in our lives to demonstrate our faithfulness and obedience to righteous principles and devotion to God. "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, . . . shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:38,39) With such an exhortation, we should be confident that if we are loyal to our Heavenly Father, we have nothing to fear because of his supreme love and protection to meet all of our needs. ■

Isaiah Answers God's Call

Key Verse: "I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me." —Isaiah 6:8

Selected Scripture: Isaiah 6

GOD USED THE PROPHET Isaiah to denounce the sinful conduct of the Israelites and also to exhort them towards repentance and reformation. Because they failed to heed these messages, Isaiah was given a prophetic vision in which God's majesty, power, and holiness would be revealed at a time when the entire earth would be filled with his glory.—Isa. 6:1-3

The surrounding atmosphere depicting Divine and angelic presence contained in this vision shook the heavenly temple's foundation, and created a sense of awe as Isaiah considered this scene. Since Isaiah acknowledged his imperfection and inadequacy to describe the Divine glory, a seraphim was sent forth with a live coal from off the altar to purge his lips. Thus, in a symbolic fashion, he was equipped with the power of eloquence beyond his own natural ability in order that he could speak in a forceful manner as God would so direct.—vss. 4-7

Our Key Verse describes Isaiah's affirmative response to God's inquiry by willingly volunteering to proclaim a heaven-sent message to the people of Israel. Isaiah was called upon to declare the Word of the LORD to the Jews

who were in a covenant relationship with God but, as a nation, they rejected him.—vss. 9,10

In a larger sense and on a prophetic level, Isaiah represented Christ who referred to this vision as recorded in the New Testament.—John 12:38-41

Isaiah was given a commission to continue preaching about the LORD's judgment despite the fact that the people would harden their hearts and not change their ways. (Isa. 6:11-13) In similar fashion, through Christ, God sent a message of grace and an invitation for the humble-minded ones of Israel to accept the privilege of becoming disciples and ultimately sharers in his kingdom to bless the human family.

A comparatively small number from that chosen nation accepted this opportunity to become the nucleus of his Gospel Age church. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate: and verily I say unto you, Ye shall not see me, until the time come when ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."—Luke 13:34,35

Nevertheless, the great commission of sending forth the same message of grace and the blessings of the coming glorious reign of Christ continues to be proclaimed throughout the earth by his followers. "Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus." (Heb. 3:1) If we are faithful in emulating the Master's example of witnessing to the Truth of God's Word, then surely we can entertain the hope of being united with him in the grand work of bringing mankind back from the tomb. "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness."—II Tim. 4:7,8; Isa. 35:5-10 ■

Gentiles Are Called

"Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name."
—Acts 15:14

FOR CENTURIES, THE NA- tion of Israel had received exclusive favor from God as recorded by Moses, when he wrote, "Thou art an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth." (Deut. 7:6) This is substantiated by the Prophet Amos, who also said, "Hear this word that the LORD hath spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying, You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."—Amos. 3:1,2

In the Apostle Paul's letter to the church at Rome, he wrote concerning Israel's special position of Divine favor. "What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were

committed the oracles of God." (Rom. 3:1,2) 'Oracles' are Divine utterances from the Heavenly Father, and suggest a very high level of favor. When Stephen stood and spoke before his accusers he used the same word oracles in his defense. He referred to Moses and made it clear that he had received the oracles from God's angel. "This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear. This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us: To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt, Saying unto Aaron, make us gods to go before us: for as for this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him."—Acts 7:37-40

EXCLUSIVE FAVOR ENDS

This special period of favor lasted until the conversion of Cornelius, the first Gentile convert, and the receiving of the Holy Spirit by Gentiles as recorded in Acts, chapter10.

From the account, we read in part, "While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Spirit fell on all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Spirit."—Acts 10:44,45

The nation of Israel was then cast off from favor, as proclaimed by Jesus. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem,

thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate. For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord."—Matt. 23:37-39

When we look back at those days of the Early Church, we note that the heavenly call went out exclusively to the nation of Israel. As the Heavenly Father's special people, we also observe his faithfulness in keeping his Word to the chosen ones of Israel. However, that exclusive favor brought penalties for unfaithfulness and disobedience. Thus Jesus proclaimed, "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof."—chap. 21:43

THE KEY SCRIPTURE

The words of our featured scripture (Acts 15:14) were spoken by James in response to a problem that had arisen in the Early Church in which certain men were teaching that without circumcision after the manner of Moses, they could not be saved. (Acts 15:1) A dispute had arisen in the ecclesia and, because of the seriousness of the issue, Paul and Barnabas travelled to Jerusalem while declaring the conversion of Cornelius and the Gentiles along the way. They arrived there to discuss their concerns with the apostles and elders of the Early Church.—vss. 2-6

THE DISPUTE

After being warmly greeted at Jerusalem, they met to consider the matter of Gentile conversion.

"When there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Spirit, even as he did unto us; And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they."—vss. 7-11

The two prominent guests arose and, "Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me." (vss. 12,13) He then spoke the words recorded in our featured scripture, and added, "To this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written [Amos 9:11], After this I will return, and build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things."—vss. 15-17

LESSONS FROM THE PAST

The nation of Israel has a very long and colorful history. They had endured God's chastisement long

before their house was left desolate as a result of their not having accepted our Lord Jesus as their promised Messiah. Neither had the heavenly call yet been heard. One of the more severe punishments the Israelites suffered was their seventy years of captivity in Babylon centuries before Jesus had been born. Daniel was one of those who had been taken captive at that time, and in his and other prophecies there are important factors leading up to Jesus' First Advent.

DANIEL'S PRAYER ANSWERED

When Daniel realized that the determined time of Israel's captivity was nearing its end, he went to the Heavenly Father in prayer to seek his will in connection with the return and favor to the people of Israel.

God answered his prayer through the angel Gabriel, as recorded by Daniel. He wrote, "Yea, whiles I was speaking in prayer, even the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening oblation. And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give thee skill and understanding." (Dan. 9:21,22) The angel then proclaimed, "Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city."—vs. 24

Daniel's contemporary, the Prophet Ezekiel, was also given information by God that revealed important aspects of his will for the Israelite nation, and which provided the key to understanding the time features. Under the guiding hand of God, the prophet wrote, "I have appointed thee each day for

a year." (Ezek. 4:6) Thus Daniel understood that the seventy weeks that were determined upon Israel were not intended to be four hundred and ninety days, but rather four hundred and ninety years. This was a very important point in connection with the Heavenly Father's ultimate plans and purposes.

UNDERSTANDING REVEALED

Daniel then understood that his people would soon be delivered from their long period of captivity under Babylonian rule, and that the nation of Israel would once again be restored to exclusive Divine favor. True to Gabriel's prophetic announcement that a commandment would go forth to restore and rebuild Jerusalem (Dan. 9:25), Babylon was soon conquered by the power of the Medo-Persian empire. Cyrus, the king of Persia, then made a decree to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem, therefore ending their captivity by Babylon.

The particulars in connection with these exciting events concerning the children of Israel are recorded by Ezra, who wrote, "Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah [Jer. 25:12-14; 29:1-10] might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The LORD God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah."—Ezra 1:1,2

THE PROMISED MESSIAH

When God's angel Gabriel visited Daniel, he also gave him detailed information that led up to the

coming of Messiah the Prince, the purpose of his becoming a perfect man, and coming to earth as a ransom sacrifice for the sins of the sin-sick human family. (Dan. 9:24,25) One of the first things Jesus did was to ask John the Baptist to baptize him at the Jordan River which officially began his earthly ministry. The angel's words also revealed that Messiah would be "cut off, but not for himself" (vs. 26), and that this would occur "in the midst of the week." (vs. 27) It was exactly three and a half years after Jesus began his ministry that he was put to death in the foretold middle of the week of seven years, thus fulfilling the angel's proclamation from God.

RETURNING FAVOR

The returned favor to Israel was again exclusive, but during Jesus' ministry there were certain Gentiles who also sought blessings from our Lord. It is recorded that on one occasion he met a woman who asked for his favor. We read, "Behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us." (Matt. 15:22,23) Although she had been ignored by our Lord the woman was very persistent.

The account continues, "He answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it

to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour."—vss. 24-28

The Canaanite woman was one of several Gentiles who received blessings from Jesus from time to time, but they were few in number when compared to the great majority of natural Israel who received the benefits of our Lord's teaching and healing on a regular basis.

I HAVE CHOSEN YOU

This exclusive favor to Israel was shown in different ways. For example, the twelve apostles were chosen from Israel, and they became the foundation members of the Early Church. Judas, however, failed in his calling and had to be replaced. The apostles decided to make a selection of their own, but they had overlooked the fact that it was not their position to select the apostles. This appointment could only be made by the Heavenly Father and his Son Jesus. "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you." (John 15:16) Later, Saul of Tarsus, who was also a Jew, was called by the Heavenly Father to replace Judas.

At first, all witness activity was centered in Jerusalem. The eleven apostles as well as other disciples continued to reside there as Jesus had instructed them to do. "Being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.

For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence."—Acts 1:4,5

EXTENDING THE HEAVENLY CALL

After the Holy Spirit of God had come upon this small group of specially called believers, many new converts began to join with the apostles in Jerusalem. The call to become members of the body of Christ required a certain amount of organized effort. Therefore, key people were motivated by the Holy Spirit to travel to other geographic locations so that the work could be extended in those areas. It was no doubt in this way that the Heavenly Father touched the heart of a certain Levite who lived on the island of Cyprus. In the scriptural account, we read, "Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet." (chap. 4:36,37) No doubt this was God's way of bringing Joses to Jerusalem where he could also share in sending forth the message of Truth concerning the heavenly call.

There were still many Israelites in the Holy City who had come to Judah from other places to celebrate the Passover. Some of these stayed there, and became disciples of our Lord. Among these were certain Hellenists, or Greek-speaking Jews. Later on, some of the widows of this group began to complain that they were being neglected in their share of community supplies. When word of this situation reached the apostles, they sought to correct

the problem by having deacons appointed to oversee this particular service.

STEPHEN CALLED

One of those deacons was Stephen, who is believed to have been a Hellenist. Because of his humble service, God granted him new opportunities for the service of the Truth where he could exercise his talents in a more public manner. His preaching of Jesus as the promised Messiah, however, caused major confrontation with some of the other Greek-speaking Jews who were not believers. The scriptural account of his ministry, trial and sentence to death by stoning is recorded in Acts, chapters 6 and 7.

From that account we read in part, "Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people. Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake."—Acts 6:8-10

How true were the words of the Master who had foretold, "I will give you a mouth and wisdom, which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist. And ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolk, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death. And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake. But there shall not an hair of your head perish."—Luke 21:15-18

Concerning the young brother Stephen's fate, we further read, "Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words

against Moses, and against God. And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, And set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law: For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us. And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel."—Acts 6:11-15

Worldly-minded men procured witnesses and bribed them to make false charges against Stephen. The official representatives of the Sanhedrin—the elders and scribes—misrepresented his words and placed him on trial to face the charge of blasphemy. But his face shone as with an angelic beauty before the council.

DEFENDER OF THE FAITH

After speaking eloquently before his accusers, Stephen then said to them, "Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it."—chap. 7:51-53

Thus the 'stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears' to whom Stephen spoke became full of rage and immediately demanded his life. They killed him by stoning him to death, and the

young convert who had readily accepted the Heavenly Father's call died for his faith. Stephen's death had a severe impact upon the Master's disciples in Jerusalem. This profound evidence of increasing persecution caused many to move away and settle in distant places. Some left for former homelands, and others who were natives of Judea decided to go with them.

SCATTERED ABROAD TO PREACH THE CALL

The heavenly call for a New Creation in Christ Jesus had taken another tragic step forward with the martyrdom of Stephen. The wonderful call was to continue to go out throughout this present Gospel Age even to our own day, and in many distant places.

"Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him. As for Saul, he made havoc of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word."—chap. 8:1-4 ■

"If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified."
—I Peter 4:14

The Covering Garments

"Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them."
—Genesis 3: 21

THIS LESSON'S FEATURED scripture speaks of the garments that the Heavenly Father provided for our first parents, Adam and Eve. They had transgressed his Divine law and had thus brought upon themselves and their unborn progeny the forewarned condemnation and sentence of death. This was a seeming state of eternal hopelessness for the human creation, and rescue from their plight seemed impossible. A faint hint, however, points to the fact that rescue was a possibility, and that hint came in the form of the coats which God provided the condemned pair.

COATS SYMBOLIC OF ATONEMENT

The coats of skins were related to the Divine concept of atonement. In the Hebrew language in which this Old Testament scripture was written, the root word for "coats" means "to cover" [*Strong's Bible Concordance*, #3801]. The root word for "atonement" also means "to cover" [*Strong's*, #3722]. Thus the garments provided Adam and

Eve were the earliest indicators of a meaningful truth. God had foreseen a way by which the transgressions of mankind could be expiated without violating the exacting demands of his Divine justice. The transgressions of Adam and Eve could, by a yet undisclosed means, be 'covered.'

The coats were symbolic of our first parents need to be covered, as a result of their sin and the Divine penalty which demanded their death. "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." (Heb. 10:31) Adam and Eve realized their nakedness after their disobedience to the Divine law. This is in the same sense that the Israelites would later be characterized as being naked following their transgression when they made the golden calf at Mount Sinai. The scriptural account reads, "When Moses saw that the people were naked; (for Aaron had made them naked unto their shame among their enemies)." (Exod. 32:25) "It came to pass on the morrow, that Moses said unto the people, Ye have sinned a great sin: and now I will go up unto the LORD; peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin."—vs. 30

Unless Adam's transgression could somehow be covered, or otherwise hidden, Divine justice would not allow him nor his posterity any hope of returning to covenant relationship with God. Because of their disobedience they were condemned, and would be held in the prison-house of death in perpetuity. It was the atoning blood of Jesus' sacrifice to which the coats ultimately pointed. Israel entered into covenant relationship at Mount Sinai, and the atonement and covering for sin served as a type, or illustration, of a future grand fulfillment. This is

seen in the words of the psalmist, who wrote, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." (Ps. 32:1) "Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people; thou hast covered all their sin."—Ps. 85:2

RECONCILIATION IMPLIED

Many centuries after Adam's fall into sin and death, God gave his promise to Abraham, saying, "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice." (Gen. 22:16-18) In that promise is the prospect of full reconciliation between God and man, the implication being that the penalty of death wrought upon the human family by Adam's transgression would, in due time, be reversed. These prophetic words point to reconciliation for the entire human family in due time, and relate to the requirements of Divine justice—the immutable principle which governs the very foundation of the Heavenly Father's throne as revealed in his Word. "Justice and judgment are the habitation [establishment, *Marginal Translation*] of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face."—Ps. 89:14

FIGURES OF THE TRUE

Divine justice was illustrated at Mount Sinai when Moses presided over the ceremonies that established the Law Covenant between God and Israel. The Apostle Paul recounts the occasion saying, "When Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people, Saying, This is the blood of the testament

which God hath enjoined unto you. Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry. And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission. It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." (Heb. 9:19-24) Paul says that everything that occurred ceremonially at Mount Sinai served as patterns, or types, of the true. Therefore, the sin that was figuratively covered by sacrificial blood in the type will be literally removed by the sacrificial blood in the antitype.

JUSTICE TYPICALLY SATISFIED

The blood of animals used at Mount Sinai typified the blood of Jesus which would be shed many centuries later for the whole world. The sprinkling of 'the book' prefigured Christ's shed blood satisfying Divine justice in the Gospel Age. The subsequent sprinkling of 'the people' illustrated the cleansing, restoring and reconciling of mankind to God in the coming Millennial Age. In all, the typical arrangements at Mount Sinai illustrated that God and man will be reconciled only after Adamic condemnation, human imperfection, and estrangement from God are not merely covered, but entirely removed.

TYPICAL ATONEMENT

The typical arrangement between God and Israel was established at Mount Sinai, but it was breached

by Israel thereby severing the state of atonement. Foreknowing Israel's inability to keep the Law, God introduced an annual Day of Atonement, the particulars of which are recounted in Exodus, chapters 25-31. God's role and purpose states, "This shall be a statute for ever unto you: that in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, ye shall afflict your souls, and do no work at all, whether it be one of your own country, or a stranger that sojourneth among you: For on that day shall the priest make an atonement for you, to cleanse you, that ye may be clean from all your sins before the LORD."—Lev. 16:29,30

Typical reconciliation was reestablished annually between God and Israel on each Day of Atonement. Israel's prior transgressions were thus typically covered by the blood of animal sacrifices as offered by Israel's High Priest. The freshly reconciled condition made possible the continuation for another year of the typical covenant relationship between God and Israel. For many centuries, the Atonement Day sacrifices were Israel's only hope. They alone stood interposed between that nation and Divine justice. "It shall be, if thou do at all forget the LORD thy God, and walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them, I testify against you this day that ye shall surely perish."—Deut. 8:19

ANTITYPICAL ATONEMENT

Later, the Apostle Paul declared that the antitype to which the Atonement Day provision had been pointing had arrived with the earthly ministry, sacrificial death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus. He says, "By so much was Jesus made a surety

of a better testament [covenant]." (Heb. 7:22) The apostle then explained, "This man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." (vss. 24,25) The old Law Covenant permitted the Jews alone to have access to God through the Atonement Day rituals. These were presided over by a long succession of priests from the lineage of Aaron. When 'the Christ' is completed, it will include all who have come to God through Jesus Christ—the antitypical High Priest of a better covenant than was provided under Israel's Law.

FORESHADOWINGS

The Law Covenant was intended to provide illustrations and types of that new and better covenant. Aaron, who was anointed as High Priest, functioned under the Law Covenant. He offered the sacrificial blood of bulls and goats in the typical sanctuary of Israel's Tabernacle. That priesthood and those various ceremonial practices collectively foreshadowed the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. These illustrated the better means by which a future New Covenant will be established for all of earth's people.

In the atonement type, it was not sufficient that a sacrificial death merely occur. For it to be efficacious, the evidence of sacrificial death, the blood, had to be taken into the Most Holy compartment of the Tabernacle, and sprinkled on the mercy seat by the High Priest as an offering to God on Israel's behalf. The antitype was fulfilled by the sacrificial death of the

perfect man Jesus, and was entirely sufficient in value at Calvary as an offset for Adam's transgression. It would free mankind from its Adamic condemnation. The liberating benefit of that value would have never reached mankind had there been no High Priest qualified to take that value into heaven itself and there to figuratively sprinkle it before God. The qualified priest is the resurrected Lord, Christ Jesus. Paul wrote, "Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession." (Heb. 4:14) Again the apostle said, "Now of the things which we have spoken this is the sum: We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens."—chap. 8:1

Christ's earthly ministry accomplished a major step in the Heavenly Father's ultimate purpose to restore the sin-sick and dying human family. In his letter to the Hebrew brethren, the Apostle Paul wrote, "Though he [Jesus] were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him." (chap. 5:8,9) The ransoming value of Jesus' sacrifice at Calvary was first applied on behalf of the members of the church during the present Gospel Age. Upon the church's completion, the value of Christ's death will be applied to benefit the remainder of mankind. "He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."—I John 2:2

JESUS A SURETY

Israel's priests inherited their position generation by generation, their authority being derived

from their predecessors. Beginning with Aaron, the installation ceremonies of these are recounted in Leviticus, chapter 8. Christ was made High Priest of an order superior to that of Aaron by Divine declaration. "Inasmuch as not without an oath he was made priest: (For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by him that said unto him, The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec:) By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament. And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death: But this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."—Heb 7:20-25

Just as the promise to Abraham was made with an oath, likewise Christ—the true seed to whom the Abrahamic promise was referring—was made a High Priest by an oath. Through the power and authority of that superior priestly office all the nations of the earth will be blessed. The High Priest is imbued with the ability to take sin and all of its effects entirely away. It is that ability of the future High Priest to which the Prophet Isaiah wrote, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool."—Isa. 1:18

JOHN'S GRAND PRIVILEGE

The Prophet Isaiah compares sin to the color red, and this word has been translated from the

Hebrew word Adam [*Strong's Bible Concordance*, #119]. The forgiveness of sin, in comparison, is related to the color white, as in snow or wool. The relationship of wool to the eradication of sin was declared by John the Baptist centuries later when he identified the Lord Jesus as a sacrificial lamb, and proclaimed, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." (John 1:29) Not until that pronouncement at the First Advent of Christ was the Divine concept of forgiveness of sin expressed in this connection. It was to this truth that the garments provided by God to Adam and Eve symbolically pointed. From that time forward, salvation would be predicated upon faith in Christ to take sin away, and faith in his ability to render that which was 'red' to become 'as white as snow.' The Apostle Paul would become a most able and prolific expounder of that profound truth.

FAITH DEFINED

In the eleventh chapter of his epistle to the Hebrews, Paul defines faith, then cites several examples of its exercise by the elders of prior ages. He explains, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report." (Heb. 11:1,2) The apostle then declares faith as the indispensable element in the forgiveness of sin. "Without faith it is impossible to please him [God]: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." (vs. 6) The Divine promise to bless all the nations of the earth was predicated upon the faith

of Abraham. There would have been no such promise given him if he had lacked a mature, crystallized faith. In this present Gospel Age, and during the next age, those who would seek God will be rewarded if they find him through Christ Jesus. All who come to God through Jesus will be saved from their prior condemnation in Adam. The coverings provided Adam and Eve after their transgression in Eden were rudimentary illustrations of what Christ's sacrifice will ultimately accomplish for all mankind under the administration of Christ's future kingdom to bless all the families of the earth.

THE FEW

By the end of this Gospel Age, a 'little flock' of footstep followers of Christ, a very small minority of the human family in advance of the world, will have manifested faith sufficient to have pleased God. "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." (Luke 12:32) Those relative few will have proven acceptable to God for the single reason that by the various trials of the narrow way during this Gospel Age they will have manifested the same faith exemplified in Abraham and personified by Christ Jesus. "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." (Matt. 7:14) To these faithful alone the promise now applies, "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years."—Rev. 20:6

THE MANY

God will not directly interact with mankind during the thousand years of Christ's kingdom in the Millennial Age, Christ being interposed between them as Mediator of the New Covenant. "He hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." (Acts 17:31) The church, when completed, will join its head and master, the Lord Jesus Christ, as he assumes the role of Mediator between God and man. In that 'day,' the Lord Jesus and his resurrected church will constitute that 'prophet' about whom Moses spoke. (Deut. 18:15) "Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you."—Acts 3:22

Under the benevolent rule of that prophet, the fallen and degraded human family will learn the laws, principles, and purposes of the kingdom—the life-giving benefits of righteousness, justice, and obedience. The human family will come to understand what the church is now privileged to know—the vital relationship of faith in Christ Jesus and reconciliation to God. "All things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, . . . To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; . . . For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."—II Cor. 5:18-21

CONSUMED BY PRIDE

Through the disobedience of Adam, the human family was condemned to death, furthering Lucifer's pride and his selfish agenda. "He was a murderer from the beginning." (John 8:44) Fascinated by his own brilliance, we read of Lucifer, "Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness." (Ezek. 28:17) Consumed with pride in his own genius, he dared to challenge God. "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High."—Isa. 14:13,14

Lucifer, thinking it impossible for God to remain just and yet be the justifier of any who transgressed his laws, confronted him with the ruined man and woman whom he had so recently enticed into sin. However, Lucifer's challenge was met at Calvary, thereby sealing his doom. The Apostle Paul explained, "God hath set forth [Jesus] to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus."—Rom. 3:25,26

The resurrected Lord Jesus Christ will be Almighty God's eternal bright flame ever illuminating Lucifer's grave miscalculation in Eden. (Gen. 3:15) In the end, death will be his only companion, and the grave his possession. Satan's end is seen in the prophetic words of Ezekiel, who wrote, "Thine

heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground, I will lay thee before kings, that they may behold thee." (Ezek. 28:17) "I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold thee."—vs. 18

PREFIGURED IN EDEN

As the garments provided Adam and Eve had prefigured, the atoning blood of Christ was mercifully provided as a wonderful means for mankind's recovery and reconciliation to their Heavenly Father. The Apostle Paul proclaims, "When we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."—Rom. 5:6-8 ■

Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Does his successive journeys run;
His kingdom spread from shore to shore,
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.

To Him shall endless prayer be made,
And endless praises crown His head,
His name like sweet perfume shall rise
With every morning sacrifice.

People and realms of every tongue
Shall praise His name with sweetest song,
And loud their voices shall proclaim
Honour and blessings on His name.

Walking Daily with the Lord

"He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked."
—I John 2:6

THE SCRIPTURES ABOUND with figures of speech signifying various aspects of our relationship to the Lord and the Truth. We are told to 'run with patience;' 'having done all, to stand;' 'sit down and count the cost;' 'wait upon the Lord.' Perhaps the most frequent portrayal of this relationship is in the sense of walking. We are told to 'walk in the light,' 'walk circumspectly,' 'walk by faith,' 'walk by the same rule,' 'walk in the Spirit,' 'walk ye in him,' 'walk in newness of life,' 'walk in Truth,' 'walk honestly as in the day,' 'walk after his commandments,' 'walk worthy of our vocation,' 'walk humbly with thy God,' and 'walk in love.'

In our title text, the Apostle John declares that if we say we abide in the Lord then it is vital to us that we walk worthy of our vocation, and that we walk daily with him. The Lord is proving us in our daily walk, and we are living in a time when it is increasingly more difficult to walk circumspectly.

We must learn to become so subject to the new mind that all we think, say, and do is 'as unto the Lord.' Considering our weaknesses, this is a great project that requires all of our attention and energies.

The chief concern in the life of each one of us, whether we are just starting out, or whether we have been in the Christian way for many years, is to heed the apostle's words, "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God." (Col. 1:10) As we think of how God is dealing with us and is preparing us for a place in that great spiritual temple, it is needful to consider our daily walk with him. The Scriptures tell us that walking worthy of the Lord involves every aspect of our consecrated life. Let us notice just a few of the many scriptures along this line.

A WALK OF FAITH

Ours must be a walk of faith—"We walk by faith, not by sight." (II Cor. 5:7) It is this important element of faith that sustains us daily. It is faith that makes it possible for us to endure severe trials of health, family, the job, and many other problems and disappointments which beset us from time to time, and yet rejoice in heart at the blessings of the Lord's overruling in our life and the lessons being learned. It is faith that makes it possible for such to not complain, but to praise God and thank him for these experiences. It is faith that prompts us, even as we may "walk through the valley of the shadow of death" (Ps. 23:4), to value the lesson in the experience, that our spiritual life is being made even richer. It is faith that makes it possible for the

consecrated child of God to say no to the allurements and temptations of the world and take their stand on the side of truth and righteousness. It is faith that will make it possible for all of the Lord's people to surmount every difficulty, every trial, and temptation that is before us in our Christian walk, regardless of how severe.

The flesh would have us desire to walk by sight. In order then to walk daily with the Lord, we must first have a foundation of faith and trust in him. The Apostle Peter says that after having this basic faith we must add to it, or build upon it, the various qualities of character—virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and love. He indicates that these are all qualities of the new mind, and which we are required to have in order to prove faithful. "If ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."—II Pet. 1:5-11

We recall Jesus' lesson of faith, that except we be as little children we would not enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. 18:3) Here is given a beautiful picture. Think of the faith of a little child and their complete dependency upon their parents. As a child is led through a strange place, it has complete faith and trust and has no fear whatsoever as long as he or she firmly clutches the hand of their parent. This is our position since we placed ourselves in God's hands. He took hold of our hand and lifted us up out of the miry clay of this world. (Ps. 40:2) Later, the psalmist says, "So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee. Nevertheless I

am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever."—Ps. 73:22-26

WALKING IN TRUTH, HUMILITY, WISDOM, AND LOVE

The Scriptures also say that we must walk in truth. "Teach me thy way, O LORD; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear [reverence] thy name." (Ps. 86:11) The Truth, as found in God's Word, must be the standard that is before us constantly in our walk with the Lord. We read, "Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart." (Prov. 3:3) Here is another beautiful text, and so meaningful to those walking with the Lord.

We can only walk successfully in the Christian way if we are clothed with humility. The prophet said, "What doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Mic. 6:8) We must also walk in wisdom. "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise. Redeeming the time, because the days are evil." (Eph. 5:15,16) This reminds us that an important part of the Christian walk is that of our stewardship. 'Redeeming the time' means using it wisely, remembering that all that we have belongs to the Lord and must be used in a way pleasing to him, and for our best interests as New Creatures in Christ. Our stewardship covers

everything that we have control, or influence, over in our Christian life. "Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful."—I Cor. 4:2

To walk worthy of the Lord, we must also, "Walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us." (Eph. 5:2) We prove our love to God by demonstrating it to our brethren. Think of the joy, the unity of the Spirit, the many blessings that have come to the Lord's people because of the outpouring of love one to another. This is shown through prayer, acts of kindness, words of comfort and encouragement, and the assistance provided one to another in sickness and in trial. All this is a part of our fellowship, and these same cords of love that unite us together in our walk also unite us with our Heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus.

As we daily walk with the Lord we should become familiar with, and seek application of, the Scriptures which speak of this walk, for the hand of the Lord, and his will for us, is revealed through his Word. The Lord is gently leading us from day to day and is giving us such experiences that will best prepare us for the great work that he has in mind for us to do at a future time, that of helping to bless "all the families of the earth." (Gen. 28:14) It is therefore necessary that we submit ourselves fully to the will of the Lord if he is going to accomplish in us all that is necessary before we will be prepared to share with him in that great work of the future.

DEVELOPING A NEW CHARACTER

As cited earlier (II Pet. 1:5-11), Peter tells us that the very purpose of these many and varied experiences

of our daily lives is that we might develop a new character. This new character is not associated with the old fleshly mind, but represents the attributes of the new mind of Christ dwelling in us. After laying the groundwork of our faith, we begin the lifelong task of adding to our faith all of these various branches of character, and that the only way this can be done is through the experiences of life.

It is easy to seek the Lord for guidance and display the facets of Christian character in the larger, more important matters of life. If we look over the record of our lives we may find that our greatest failures to uphold the principles of Truth lay in the relatively minor experiences of this life. "All things work together for good to them that love God." (Rom. 8:28) Perhaps we would be surprised to know how carefully the Lord is silently observing our conduct of life, in every experience great or small. If we could always think of him as having hold of our right hand, how differently we would speak and act many times, even in the seemingly mundane experiences of daily life.

LEARNING FROM FAILURES

The Heavenly Father knows we are going to make mistakes and have many failures. Jesus has been touched with a feeling of our infirmities and knows how difficult it is to do all things as unto the Lord. Accordingly, he has arranged our experiences of life in such a way that our failures many times are really laying the groundwork for future successes, even as a child fails a lesson and has to do it over until it is learned. Once learned, such lessons are not likely to depart from memory.

We might illustrate this in the following way. Perhaps we have had occasions in the past when circumstances were such that we said and did things in the spirit of anger against someone whom we felt had wronged us. If this was our attitude, then it would be evidence that our conduct in such an experience did constitute failure. If, after reviewing our initial anger, we regret having allowed the 'old man' to rise up and assert itself in such a way, and determine that in the future we would more carefully try to keep our bodies under and bring them into subjection concerning these matters of our daily walk, then the seeming failure will have been turned into success.

WALKING TO EMMAUS

We learn many lessons by observing the way the Lord revealed himself to others. We remember the story of the two disciples who were walking along the road to the village of Emmaus, near Jerusalem. (Luke 24:13-32) They had been on the mountaintop of joy as they followed the Master and listened to him expound to the people the wonderful words of life. Then the one whom they had supposed to be the deliverer of Israel was crucified, put to death by his enemies. After witnessing the events of his betrayal and death, they were returning home, sad and disappointed and without hope concerning the future. They were discussing the things that had transpired over the preceding days when suddenly a stranger joined them and began to enter into their conversation and expound unto them the Scriptures. As they walked and talked with the stranger along the way, their courage and faith

began to be renewed, and a ray of hope began to enlighten their hearts.

There are times when we have 'Emmaus road' experiences, and severe trials come to us in our lives that for the moment seem to form a cloud of separation between us and the Lord. Is this an indication that he has turned his back on us? No, the Lord has given us the assurance that he will never leave us nor forsake us. (Heb. 13:5) Sometimes these perplexing experiences come into our lives because of our own bad judgment or misunderstanding of God's will. We may momentarily lose sight of the smile of his face and the warmth of his hand. Nevertheless, he is still with us, even though as a 'stranger,' as he was to the two walking to Emmaus. He is with us only as a stranger because we have been unable to see the Lord's leading in some very trying experience. When these occasions come into our lives, he tells us to go to the Word of God, as this 'stranger' did. If we do that diligently, we will find the answers to all these perplexing matters. Only through looking into the Word of God can we find that comfort and help, and the peace "which passeth all understanding" (Phil. 4:7), which lifts us up from the depths of discouragement back to the mountaintop of joy in the Lord!

When the two disciples reached their home at Emmaus, being late in the day, they invited the stranger to tarry with them for the night. "It came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him; and he vanished out of their sight. And they said one to

another, Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?"—Luke 24:30-32

There are times in our walk with the Lord when we must come apart from the world for meditation and study and for refreshment at the Lord's table, such as we enjoy every time we meet together for fellowship with the Lord and his people. One of his promises is that, even where only two or three are meeting in his name, he will be in their midst to bless them.—Matt. 18:20

THE LORD DESIRES TO SUP WITH US

One of the unusual circumstances in connection with this experience of the two disciples is that the Lord, who was the invited guest, was the one who broke the bread and gave it to his hosts. That arrangement would not be customary in today's society, and yet we believe the Lord was here giving a very important lesson to his people. We recall his words: "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me."—Rev. 3:20

It is necessary that we open the door of our heart and invite him to come in, sit down, and sup with us. We perceive that we have nothing worthy to offer the Lord, and we wonder by what means we can invite the Lord to tarry with us. Then the Lord says, I know that you are poverty stricken and that you have nothing worthy to offer that could be acceptable, and yet I see in you a sincere desire to know God and to do his will. I have brought you food and raiment, and a place of shelter for you.

You will be provided with the bread that comes down from heaven, and he that feeds upon me will have life everlasting. A beautiful robe of righteousness has been provided that will cover all your imperfections, and this is made possible through the shedding of my blood on the cross. I am not giving you this robe outright, but it is for you to use as long as you are in this life, and then you must return it to me. Then you will dwell in the house of the Lord.

When we invite the Lord to come in and sup with us, he brings all of these blessings to us and declares that these are the gifts of the Heavenly Father, and all that is required of us is that we walk worthy of our vocation, that we may prove ourselves worthy to share in all these wonderful blessings. We truly dwell "in the secret place of the most High," and "abide under the shadow of the Almighty," and this is all by grace. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God."—Ps. 91:1; Eph. 2:8

BREAKING THE BREAD OF TRUTH

While tarrying with the two disciples at Emmaus, the stranger took bread and broke it and gave it to them to eat. By this action, they immediately recognized that he was the risen Lord. There were other occasions in which the Master was identified by his manner of breaking bread. No doubt he had an unusual way of doing it and was very consistent in doing it in the same manner each time. The Master was not identified because he had the bread, but by the way in which that bread was broken.

As we have learned to study to show ourselves approved unto God, and as we endeavor to rightly divide the word of Truth, the Lord reveals himself in a most marvelous way. We see the beautiful harmony of the Scriptures. We see that all scripture given by inspiration of God "is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." (II Tim. 3:16,17) Through the enlightening influence of the Holy Spirit and the various helps that have been provided by the Lord in breaking unto us the bread of life, we have come to see that every text of scripture has its proper place and fulfillment in the outworking of God's great plan of the ages. It is the daily appropriation of this bread of life to ourselves that will help us to grow stronger in him and increase our ability to walk faithfully with him.

LOOKING BACK AND AHEAD AT OUR WALK

When these two disciples looked back over the experience, they exclaimed one to another, 'Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?' This is likewise true with us. Many times our hearts burn within us as we look back upon some of the more bitter trials and experiences of the past, and from this vantage point see how, though the experience seemed grievous at the time, the Lord was using it for the purpose of drawing us closer to him, the Truth, and to our brethren. Looking back, we can praise the way the Lord has led us day by day.

As we look ahead, we know not what awaits us in the way of trials and testings, but our faith

should be such that we recognize it is by his right hand that we are being led, and that gives us confidence and peace respecting the future. Our Lord indicated that the Christian way was a strait and narrow way. A strait is a narrow body of water forming a passageway between two large bodies of land. An ocean strait is usually very rough and narrow and dangerous for ships to pass through except by exercising extreme caution. In most straits where there is a considerable use of the passageway, a special pilot comes aboard the ship to safely guide the vessel through.

We are told that "strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." (Matt. 7:14) If it were not for our pilot—Jesus, the Captain of our salvation—who is carefully leading us along this narrow way, we would certainly be dashed upon the rocks. The fact that we are still in the way is proof that the Lord has us by his own right hand, and is safely guiding us through. Therefore, we have no need to fear what lies before us, but simply rejoice in the fact that we are on the way that leadeth unto life, and that more abundantly, if we continue walking with him.—John 10:10

If we are faithful unto death, and reach that glorious eternal condition beyond the veil, each one of us will look back upon the way that we have trodden and ask ourselves how could we ever have weighed the eternity of blessings with the Lord against the trivial allurements of this world! Let us continue to set our affections upon spiritual things above, and may each one of us have a firmer determination to be faithful to the one who has called us out

of darkness. Let us prepare ourselves for that future work of glory, remembering that this can only be done if we are 'walking daily with the Lord.' We know the Lord will do his part in this. Let us not neglect to do ours. ■