

This Un-Christian Century

THE WORLD HAS NOW ENTERED into the new millennium, and the twenty-first century. The twentieth century has turned out to be vastly different from what was confidently expected by the majority of people 100 years ago. This fact was highlighted fifty years ago, by information published in an independent Protestant weekly, "*The Christian Century*," a publication that was still in its prime at that time. Prior to 1901, this magazine was called "*The Christian Oracle*." Beginning then, the name was changed to "*The Christian Century*" as an expression of the editor's conviction that the next hundred years would witness the virtual conquering of the world for Christianity, and he wanted his paper to be among the first to recognize and herald this great accomplishment. Commenting on the reason for this change, in 1950 the paper said:

The files [of "*The Christian Century*"] offer no evidence that the paper's readers found any element of presumption in the new title. Rather, it was greeted as a reflection of the spirit of optimistic prophecy which everywhere marked the passage into a new cycle of time. The nineteenth century just closing had been a period of unparalleled triumph in man's perennial pursuit of control over the forces of nature. What could be more reasonable than to expect that the twentieth would see these conquests multiplied, and that to the physical there would be added commensurate moral and spiritual triumphs? Why should not the century then dawning come to be known, long before its close, as the Christian century? The halfway point, the contrast between the mood in which men entered the century and that which now envelops them, is so completely irreconcilable, that it is difficult to convince oneself that the optimistic expectations of 1901 were so widely and deeply held as scarcely to be challenged."

CHALLENGED VIEW

Perhaps the editor who penned this confession of the failure of human wisdom to properly forecast world developments is not aware of the fact that the optimistic view of 1901 was at that time challenged, and that the challengers were held up to ridicule and scorn by professed Christian

teachers and leaders throughout the world. That challenge came from Bible Students who were contrasting what was being said with their understanding of Bible teachings. These called attention to prophecies of the Bible which forecast the impending collapse of civilization, and that in the place of this selfish social order, there would be set up in power and great glory the long prayed-for kingdom of Christ. This forecast of world developments pointed out that the year 1914 would mark the turning point in man's boasted progress.

Many of the Bible's prophecies foretold these tragic years of the twentieth century, but the meaning of all of them is best summed up by the Prophet Daniel who wrote that there would be a "time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation." (Dan. 12:1) Jesus quoted this prophecy and indicated that its fulfillment would be at the time of his return, when the end of the age would be reached, and the time had come for the establishment of his kingdom.

Contrary to the expectations of the optimists at the beginning of the century, we are now in the prophetic 'time of trouble.' This is apparent, when, for example, we read the statement of the late William Faulkner, a Nobel prize winner. While in New York on his way to Stockholm to receive the prize, he said to reporters: "Man has only one question in mind: 'When will I be blown up?' The question of honor or no honor, courage or no courage, virtue or no virtue, doesn't exist."

THE END OF GENTILE TIMES

This is a far cry from the expectations of the worldly-wise in 1901. All the elements of the social order, which is now sick unto death, have undergone changes which were wholly unexpected by the majority of people in 1901. Take the political changes, for example. What was thought to be a fairly stable political world by the statesmen of that day has almost entirely vanished. In 1901, at the funeral of Queen Victoria of England, there assembled a most impressive array of reigning monarchs who marched through the streets behind the coffin of Victoria. By contrast, when near the close of 1950, the King of Sweden was buried, the best showing royalty could make was a thin line of three Scandinavian rulers, a royal duke from England who represented the British crown, and an Ethiopian crown prince.

Not only has royalty disappeared as a controlling factor in the crumbling world of today, but almost no one is advocating a return to the hereditary ruling house form of government. Winston Churchill was about the only conspicuous defender of monarchy as a preferable ruling system of government. Truly, kings have had their day, and with their going has passed one phase in the crumbling of a social order which must completely give place to God's new social order—the kingdom of Christ.

SAFE FOR DEMOCRACY?

One might suppose that with the passing of monarchy the world would experience a great upsurge in the popularity of the republican form of government; and indeed, the virtues of democracy have been trumpeted far and wide. But as all now know, democracy is very unsafe in the strife-ridden world of today. One of the objectives of the First World War was to make the world safe for democracy. It was thought then that this could be achieved by defeating the monarchists of central Europe. But with their defeat, together with the overthrow of nearly all royalty, including the House of Savoy in Italy, there sprang up the ugly head of dictatorship in the form of fascism, Nazism, and communism.

The world was again dragged through the weary and suffering years of another war in order to stamp out fascism and Nazism; but by joining hands with communism in order to attain victory, the democracies helped greatly to spread the influence and power of this form of dictatorship. After a long struggle, communism started to wane. Apparently the freedom of democracy is the battle cry of the western world; but in order to defeat the dictatorship of communism, democracy had to join with other dictatorships of one sort or another, seemingly blind to the end result of this unholy alliance.

No matter from what standpoint the world situation of today is viewed, to all sincere and truly peace-loving people the outlook is very disquieting. During the hectic years which followed the first and second global struggles, much attention had been given to setting up some form of world government, some authority that would be able to resolve the differences of the nations and promote the well-being and happiness of all. We know how miserably the League of Nations failed. The United Nations has shown more strength than the League of Nations, and has been able to send peacekeepers in the form of troops from different

nations to trouble-spots in the world. The Korean and Vietnam Wars were attempts made, mainly by the United States, to prevent the spread of communism. Recently UN troops have been sent to many countries—most recently to Serbia.

SCIENCE SOLVES ALL PROBLEMS

At the beginning of the century, those who lacked a vital faith in Christianity believed that Science was the god which would bring Utopian conditions to the world. That hope has now foundered on the rocks of nuclear despair. Science is no longer looked upon as the world's redeemer and savior. Science today is feared by the masses, for while great technological advances have been made which could have meant prosperity and security, the assembly line, on the one hand, if uncontrolled, soon results in an overproduction of human needs, thus leading to unemployment and depression; or, on the other hand, is speeded up to produce instruments of destruction by which the human race may wantonly annihilate itself. Science has proved to be without responsibility, and totally unable to solve the problems created by its own inventive genius.

ROLE OF CHRISTIANITY

The Christian religious world is also totally different from what it was expected to become when the century opened. The early years of the century were years of unparalleled missionary effort. China, one of the great missionary fields for all denominations, had now been lost to the churches; while all the missionary fields of Asia are so preoccupied with political strife and international struggle, that the missionaries are greatly hampered in their efforts to gain respectful attention.

Meanwhile, half of Europe or more, came under the atheistic rule of a godless dictatorship, which tried to liquidate all religion. After the demise of communism, a few people turned to religion, but most remained atheists or agnostics. Even in the democratically-free countries of the world, genuine devotion to Christianity and its principles has been at a very low ebb.

In this country alone there are many who belong to no church and who make no profession of belief in God, while only a few attend church with any degree of regularity. True, there is seemingly a disposition to turn to

God on the part of many, but to a large extent this merely reflects the attitude of a man who thinks he is about to drown and is willing to ask God to help him until he can get his feet on the ground.

There has, perhaps, never been such a demand for religious literature; and, paradoxically enough, the churches, on the whole, have never been so nearly empty. If this indicates anything, it is that the people have lost faith in the churches, but are willing to try God.

THE FUTURE TRUE CHRISTIAN CENTURY

Certainly, the twentieth century has not turned out to be ‘the Christian century.’ And yet, maybe, before long the world will see Jesus Christ enthroned as its Ruler, and will live under his just and beneficent rulership, enjoying peace and happiness! This is indeed what the prophecies of the Bible clearly indicate! The prophecies gave the true forecast of the first half of the century, although scorned by the wisdom of this world. But in calling attention to this bright outlook, let no one suppose that the statesmen, or militarists, or religious leaders of the world, will at last find a formula for peace, and that Christ’s kingdom will merely be a product of human wisdom which well-meaning men may presumptuously label the kingdom of the Lord.

Christ’s kingdom will be established by Christ, not by the diplomacy of man. Human efforts have failed! The world will gradually learn this great lesson, as one after another of their plans for world peace and security end in failure. Indeed, few have learned this lesson as yet. Even those who speak of God and seem willing to include him in their plans, still imagine that the welfare of the world rests upon their shoulders, and that God’s part is to approve and bless what they plan and do.

God will bless them as individuals, for he has promised to bless all the families of the earth. (Gen. 22:18) But God has his own plans for extending his blessings to the people. These we might call ‘the kingdom plans.’ He has selected and prepared his own personnel for that kingdom. Jesus will be the Ruler supreme, although invisible to the people. Associated with him will be his church—that class of faithful disciples who will be raised from the dead in what the Scriptures describe as the “first resurrection.” (Rev. 20:6) These will reign with Christ in the spiritual phase of his kingdom.

These spiritual rulers will have human representatives who also have been selected and trained in advance. They are the Ancient Worthies of Old Testament times, beginning with Abel and ending with John the Baptist. These will be brought forth in a “better resurrection,” and will be made “princes in all the earth.” (Heb. 11:35; Ps. 45:16) What a wonderful government that will be!

There is every reason to believe that it will be ruling the earth soon!

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The Guidance of the Word

Key Verse: “Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass.”

—Matthew 21:5

Selected Scripture: Matthew 21:1-17

WHEN OUR LORD JESUS made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem upon a humble beast of burden, he did so in fulfillment of Zechariah’s prophecy which had been written about five hundred years earlier. The Prophet said: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass.”—Zech. 9:9

Jesus offered himself to his people as their king knowing that they would reject him. He knew that his people could easily be led astray, and that the self-righteous religious leaders were only waiting for an opportunity to entrap him. He willingly submitted himself to the will of his Heavenly Father as the Lamb of God who would be killed only a few days later for the sins of the whole human family. The time had come to end his earthly ministry, as shown in the Levitical types of old.

Jesus had recently raised Lazarus from death as an illustration of the much grander work of restoration that would take place in the future Millennial Kingdom. This act, together with the many miracles of healing the sick and infirm, as well as opening the eyes of the blind, and the ears of the deaf, were pictorial of that blessed future time. But the leaders of Israel—our Lord’s own people—instead of rejoicing over their king and savior, conspired to murder the one who had come to save them.

Jesus proclaimed to them the seriousness of their rejection, telling them: “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.”—Matt. 23:37,38

The place where Jesus stood to prophesy Israel's calamity was the very same one over which, a few years later, Roman soldiers under Titus marched for the destruction of Jerusalem, and the terrible carnage and suffering that followed. Thousands of Jews were massacred, while many more were crucified outside the very city that had rejected their savior, and had called for his crucifixion.

In due time, the bitter experiences that came upon the Jewish people will give way to rejoicing when our Lord, together with his bride of 144,000, will establish his rule of righteousness over the earth. (Rev. 14:3) The Prophet Zechariah said: "I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn." (Zech. 12:10) This will become a reality in fulfillment of Jesus' mission to give his life in sacrifice for the whole human family.

As Jesus was proclaimed a king in Jerusalem approximately 2,000 years ago, so he will be hailed by all as 'King of kings' and 'Lord of lords' in his kingdom.

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The Joy of Being Prepared

Key Verse: *“Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.”*
—*Matthew 25:13*

Selected Scripture:
Matthew 24:1 – 25:13

OUR LORD’S TEACHINGS IN this lesson are centered around the events of his long awaited Second Presence, and he gives a parable relating to his followers who would be on the scene at that time. In that parable, Jesus brings to our attention two classes of Christians: first, those who would be watching the signs relative to his return and preparing themselves accordingly. These he called ‘wise virgins.’ Others who were careless and neglectful were called ‘foolish.’ During the long period of his absence, both classes had developed together. But as the end of the Gospel Age drew near, a great change was about to take place. Since the late nineteenth century, a separation work has been progressing as part of the harvest of the Gospel Age.

It is noted that all of the virgins were slumbering, and all arose, trimmed their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom at midnight. The difference between the two classes becomes apparent when the foolish virgins realized that they had not prepared themselves by taking sufficient oil along for their lamps. The wise virgins had considered the importance of taking adequate oil along with them. They were not willing to part with any of their supply when asked to do so by those who were less prepared. They answered: “Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.”—Matt. 25:9

While the foolish virgins went to seek oil, the bridegroom came, and those who were prepared went in to the marriage, and the door was shut. And the Lord said to those who were left at the door, “I know you not.”—vs. 12

For over a hundred years, our Lord has been present to direct the affairs of his church as well as to prepare for his future kingdom. Throughout this time his people have been awakened to the message of truth,

including many of the ‘end time’ prophecies that had been sealed up until the closing years of the Gospel Age. Some Christians will be more alert to these wonderful promises, while others will have less appreciation for them. Those who seek a greater measure of the Holy Spirit of understanding, and who keep their lamps trimmed and burning, will be among those of the faithful class who will enter into the ‘marriage feast.’

A period of approximately 2,000 years, called the Gospel Age, was allotted by God for selection of the bride of Christ. The requirements for this selection have a very high standard, and only 144,000 are to be selected. These are pictured by the wise virgins who are described as “called, and chosen, and faithful.” (Rev. 17:14) Those unwise virgins, who did not provide enough oil for their lamps, are pictured by a “great multitude.”—Rev. 7:9

We understand that the door to the High Calling in Christ Jesus is still ajar for those who seek to enter in. When it is shut, it will never open again. This special calling has been limited to the Gospel Age. There will be joys forevermore for those who will have prepared themselves for the marriage with our Lord Jesus, and the wonderful work of the kingdom.

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The Death in Our Behalf

Key Verse: “When the centurion, and they that were with him, watching Jesus, saw the earthquake, and those things that were done, they feared greatly, saying, Truly this was the Son of God.”
—*Matthew 27:54*

Selected Scripture:
Matthew 27:32-61

THE CRUEL AND MURDEROUS zeal of Israel’s religious leaders culminated in the arrest, mock trial, and crucifixion of the most noble of humankind—Jesus of Nazareth. To satisfy the Jewish Law, and to expedite matters—since no executions were allowable during Passover week—their conspiracy took place hurriedly the night preceding the Jewish High Sabbath.

The High Priest quickly condemned Jesus, and the Sanhedrin hastily arranged an early morning meeting to confirm the decisions that had been made under cover of darkness. The Sanhedrin, however, only had authority to judge the people on religious matters. It still required the arm of the civil authorities to carry out the

death sentence.

Jesus was then rushed along to appear before Pilate, who represented the Roman Empire as its local governor. Pilate quickly saw through the trumped-up charges that were laid against the Master. It was obvious that deceitful methods were being used to condemn their prisoner. Jesus was not guilty of resisting lawful authority, or of disturbing the peace. Certainly he was not a threat to the mighty power of Rome! So Pilate sent our Lord along to King Herod for his decision.

Herod had been anxious to meet Jesus, for he had heard much about him and knew something of his miracles and ministry. He must have been greatly impressed by our Lord’s countenance as he stood there before him. Nevertheless, after permitting Jesus to suffer mocking and insults, Herod sent the innocent man back to Pilate for sentencing. (Matt. 27:2) It was a great disappointment to Pilate when the chief priests and Jesus returned. After again listening to the false accusations regarding Jesus, Pilate proclaimed that he could find no fault with the man. But time was

short, and the religious leaders were anxious to finish what they had begun.

Using their persuasion, they aroused the crowd that had gathered to work in their favor. Pilate was unable to reason with the people who cried out, “Let him be crucified.” (Matt. 27:22,23) He appealed to Jewish custom that would have released Jesus, but they insisted that Barabas—a guilty man—should be set free instead. “Behold the man,” Pilate said (John 19:5), as he brought Jesus into view of the crowd. He was forced, however, by circumstances to sign the papers of execution, but not before washing his hands before them, and proclaiming, “I am innocent of the blood of this just person.” (Matt. 27:24) Satan, who was behind these evil deeds, was sure that our Lord was now out of his way. But God so overruled in the matter that Jesus’ death provided the release for the whole human family from their sentence of death. Jesus, in so doing, “gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.” (I Tim. 2:6) The corresponding price for Adam and his progeny had been submitted.

Truly this was the Son of God, and his death was on behalf of us all.

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The Basis of Our Authority

Key Verse: *“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost [Spirit]: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.”*

—*Matthew 28:19, 20*

Selected Scripture:
Matthew 27:62 – 28:20

JESUS’ EARTHLY MINISTRY was finished. He had faithfully laid down his perfect human life in sacrifice as a corresponding price for Adam’s sin, and had subsequently died for all mankind. He was now dead, and lying in the grave. Yet the religious leaders of Israel continued to conspire against him. This lesson deals with that conspiracy. “Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, Saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the

first. Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can. So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.”—Matt. 27:62-66

While the Master’s enemies spoke of him as ‘that deceiver,’ the Heavenly Father’s mighty power was about to be made manifest. The greatest event in the history of the world was the resurrection of our Lord Jesus from the grave. None of the human barriers erected were able to impede this event. The Father raised him to a life far more grand than that of a perfect man—even to the Divine nature next to Himself. This was his reward for so faithfully laying down his life in sacrifice as the Savior of the whole human family.

The details of events surrounding the resurrection are thrilling! (Matt. 28:1-10) This was not the sentiment of his enemies, who persisted in covering up the events that were unfolding. The chief priests and elders were alarmed with the news from some of the men who had guarded Jesus' tomb. As a result, they met to discuss the situation and decided to offer the tomb guards a large sum of money to hide the truth. They were told to say that the disciples came under cover of darkness and stole Jesus' body. They were further assured that if they were questioned by Pilate concerning the matter, they would be safe from reprisal.—Matt. 28:11-14

The power and purposes of God are not to be tampered with. Jesus' resurrection was a reality, and his followers were witnesses to that fact. He said: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." (Matt. 28:18) He further commissioned his followers to take the message of truth to all nations, and taught that they should continue to observe the many lessons they had learned during his earthly ministry. His comforting assurance was that he would be with his followers, even unto the end of the Gospel Age. "The Word of God is quick, and powerful, ... piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit."—Heb. 4:12

This is the basis of our authority—the sure Word of God!

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Jacob Moves to Egypt

CHAPTER FORTY-SIX

VERSES 1-7 “And Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices unto the God of his father Isaac.

“And God spake unto Israel in the visions of the night, and said, Jacob, Jacob. And he said, Here am I.

“And he said, I am God, the God of thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation: “I will go down with thee into Egypt; and I will also surely bring thee up again: and Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes.

“And Jacob rose up from Beersheba: and the sons of Israel carried Jacob their father, and their little ones, and their wives, in the wagons which Pharaoh had sent to carry him.

“And they took their cattle, and their goods, which they had gotten in the land of Canaan, and came into Egypt, Jacob, and all his seed with him:

“His sons, and his sons’ sons with him, his daughters, and his sons’ daughters, and all his seed brought he with him into Egypt.”

Jacob was now at an advanced age, but was ready to see his long lost son, and to venture the difficult journey to Egypt. He stopped at Beersheba, which was on the southernmost border of Canaan, to offer sacrifices to the Lord, the God of his fathers. He doubtless felt the need of establishing this contact with his God before venturing too far into an experience of which the outcome was so veiled and uncertain.

Now, even as when he fled from Esau, the Lord assured him of his guidance and blessing. God had warned Abraham of the dangers of going down into Egypt (Gen. 15:13,14), and had forbidden Isaac to go there. (Gen. 26:2) However, the Lord assured Jacob that he wanted him to go into the land of the Pharaohs, that he would go with him, and that in Egypt he would make of him a great nation. Under the circumstances, this assurance must have meant a great deal to Jacob.

Prior to the death of Jacob, God dealt with him, with his father Isaac, and his grandfather Abraham, as individuals; but in Egypt, as this promise indicates, the twelve sons of Jacob together with their families were to be recognized by God as a nation, and thenceforth to be dealt with on a national basis. This promise of the Lord, therefore, establishes the transition in the plan of God from the Patriarchal Age to the Jewish Age.

Jacob's great age made it necessary for him to ride in one of the wagons furnished by Pharaoh, in company with the women and children.

VERSES 8-27 "And these are the names of the children of Israel, which came into Egypt, Jacob and his sons: Reuben, Jacob's firstborn. "And the sons of Reuben; Hanoch, and Phallu, and Hezron, and Carmi. "And the sons of Simeon; Jemuel, and Jamin, and Ohad, and Jachin, and Zohar, and Shaul the son of a Canaanitish woman. "And the sons of Levi; Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. "And the sons of Judah; Er, and Onan, and Shelah, and Pharez, and Zerah: but Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan. And the sons of Pharez were Hezron and Hamul. "And the sons of Issachar; Tola, and Phuvah, and Job, and Shimron. "And the sons of Zebulun; Sered, and Elon, and Jahleel. "These be the sons of Leah, which she bare unto Jacob in Padanaram, with his daughter Dinah: all the souls of his sons and his daughters were thirty and three. "And the sons of Gad; Ziphion, and Haggi, Shuni, and Ezbon, Eri, and Arodi, and Areli. "And the sons of Asher; Jimnah, and Ishuah, and Isui, and Beriah, and Serah their sister; and the sons of Beriah; Heber, and Malchiel. "These are the sons of Zilpah, whom Laban gave to Leah his daughter, and these she bare unto Jacob, even sixteen souls. "The sons of Rachel Jacob's wife; Joseph, and Benjamin. "And unto Joseph in the land of Egypt were born Manasseh and Ephraim, which Asenath the daughter of Potipherah priest of On bare unto him. "And the sons of Benjamin were Belah, and Becher, and Ashbel, Gera, and Naaman, Ehi, and Rosh, Muppim, and Huppim, and Ard. "These are the sons of Rachel, which were born to Jacob: all of the souls were fourteen. "And the sons of Dan; Hushim.

“And the sons of Naphtali; Jahzeel, and Guni, and Jezer, and Shillem. “These are the sons of Bilhah, which Laban gave unto Rachel his daughter, and she bare these unto Jacob: all the souls were seven. “All the souls that came with Jacob into Egypt, which came out of his loins, besides Jacob’s sons’ wives, all the souls were threescore and six; “And the sons of Joseph, which were born him in Egypt, were two souls: all the souls of the house of Jacob, which came into Egypt, were threescore and ten.”

So far as God’s plan is concerned this is a relatively unimportant listing of the children and grandchildren of Jacob. The total is made significant by its comparison with the great number of Israelites who left Egypt at the time of the Exodus. By that time the ‘three score and ten souls’ had increased to the point where they were referred to “as the stars of heaven for multitude.”—Deut. 10:22

That these children and grandchildren should be designated ‘souls’ which came out of the loins of Jacob is quite in keeping with the scriptural understanding of what constitutes a soul, but out of harmony with the generally accepted idea that when each human being is born an ‘immortal soul’ is secretly and miraculously implanted somewhere in his body, and when that body dies, this ‘soul’ escapes.

Here we learn, on the contrary, that the ‘souls’ of Jacob’s children were in his loins, the term soul, as elsewhere, simply denoting a living, sentient being. These beings are symbolically represented as being in the loins of Jacob because he was their progenitor.

VERSES 28-34 “And he sent Judah before him unto Joseph, to direct his face unto Goshen; and they came into the land of Goshen. “And Joseph made ready his chariot, and went up to meet Israel his father, to Goshen, and presented himself unto him; and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while. “And Israel said unto Joseph, Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive. “And Joseph said unto his brethren, and unto his father’s house, I will go up, and shew Pharaoh, and say unto him, My brethren, and my father’s house, which were in the land of Canaan, are come unto me; “And the men are shepherds, for their trade hath been to feed cattle; and they have brought their flocks, and their herds, and all that they have.

“And it shall come to pass, when Pharaoh shall call you, and shall say, What is your occupation? “That ye shall say, Thy servants’ trade hath been about cattle from our youth even until now, both we, and also our fathers: that ye may dwell in the land of Goshen; for every shepherd is an abomination unto the Egyptians.”

Probably there have been few happier meetings of father and son than that experienced by Jacob and Joseph. After so many years of separation from his father, Joseph literally ‘wept for joy’ when they met, and Jacob said to his son, ‘Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive.’ Jacob expected to mourn over the loss of Joseph until he died, but now he could cease mourning and die in peace.

Joseph continued to show his wisdom in dealing with difficult problems. He instructed his father and brethren how to answer Pharaoh’s questions as to their occupation, when they were presented to him—that they were herdsmen. Joseph knew that if the Egyptians learned this, it would tend to keep his people separate from them, which was what he desired. Besides, the land of Goshen, although within Egyptian territory, seems to have been inhabited largely by non-Egyptians. Since it was a rich section and desired by Joseph for his people, this too may have had a bearing on his strategy.

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With Us in the “Fire”

PAUL WROTE, “BY FAITH ... they quenched the violence of fire,” in reference to the experience of the three Hebrew children in the fiery furnace. (Heb. 11:34) Faith is “the evidence of things not seen.” (Heb. 11:1) Certainly Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, from the natural standpoint, could ‘see’ no way of escape from the wrath of Nebuchadnezzar in the event that they should defy his command to worship the golden image he had set up. But their faith in God’s ability to care for them took the place of sight, so they were determined “to obey God rather than men.” (Acts 5:29) One “like the Son of God” (Dan. 3:25), took his place with them in the fire and delivered them from what would have been certain death.

Jesus taught that his followers should “render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s.” (Matt. 22:21) The Apostle Paul wrote that we should be subject to the powers that be. (Rom. 13:1; Titus 3:1) However, with the servants of God in every age, there have been times when their allegiance to God has prevented them from rendering unqualified obedience to earthly rulers, and they have had forced upon them the necessity of deciding what belongs to God and what could properly be rendered to ‘Caesar.’

UNUSUAL TEST

This was the position in which the three young Hebrews found themselves when confronted by Nebuchadnezzar’s demand that they worship the golden image which he had caused to be erected. This was an especially severe test which had been thrust upon them, for it came soon after they had been given high positions of trust in the government at the personal request of their great friend and brother in exile, Daniel. From the standpoint of their own personal interests and advantage, it would have seemed much better for them to have obeyed the king’s edict to worship the image.

The Lord often tests his people by permitting circumstances to come into their lives which offer an easier way to serve him, and with plausible reasons why the way of fewer hardships would be better. It could easily

have been so reasoned by the three Hebrews. Certainly their exaltation to positions of authority in the kingdom had been the result of Divine overruling, and it seemed evident that the Lord wanted them in these strategic positions for the purpose of rendering some special service to him and to his people. This being true, from the standpoint of human reasoning, it would seem foolhardy to take a stand against the king which would destroy this advantage, and cost them their lives as well.

ABIDING BY PRINCIPLE

These ardent servants of God, however, did not take this view of the situation, for a very definite principle was at stake. The law of their God clearly stated that they were not to worship other gods, neither were they to bow down to images, and these facts overshadowed every other consideration in reaching their decision. To them, no matter what good might result, or what advantages might be gained by yielding to the king's demand, to do so would still be disobedience to Divine law; and, like the Apostle Paul, they did not believe that they should do evil that good might follow.—Rom. 12:17-21

It is much easier and more pleasing to the flesh to fall in with the crowd, especially when the conformists are hailed as heroes and receive the blessing of the powers that be. This was the alluring opportunity offered to the three Hebrews, but they chose to be nonconformists, thus refusing the “deliverance” that was offered to them in return for obedience to Nebuchadnezzar. (Heb. 11:35) The issue was clearly stated, for a ‘herald’ or spokesman for the king announced to the gathered representatives of the kingdom, “O people, nations, and languages, that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up: And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.”—Dan. 3:3-6

It must have taken considerable time to erect the golden image which stood for Babylon's gods; and the three Hebrews, being highly placed in the government, would be aware that sooner or later they would have to face the issue of loyalty to their God as against bowing down to this ‘graven image.’ It was not something which had been forced upon them suddenly when the band began to play. Undoubtedly they had made up

their minds in advance what they would do when the crisis came, and they could not be swayed from their position, either by the emotional appeal of the ‘musick,’ or by the mass hysteria of heathen worshipers.

TRUST IN THE LORD

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego trusted in the Lord. They knew that he was able to deliver them, and would if he chose to do so. They did not know ‘how’ their God would intervene to save them. Faith does not need to know ‘how’ or ‘when’ God will make good his word on behalf of his people. It is enough to know that he is ‘able,’ and that his infinite wisdom directs the time and manner in which his grace is made to abound toward those who put their trust in him.

Neither Daniel nor these three young Hebrews were popular among the other officeholders of the realm, who were always glad when they could find or even make an opportunity to discredit them in the eyes of the king. And here was just such an opportunity. Doubtless the three Hebrews were especially watched by the others to see if they would bow down to Nebuchadnezzar’s image when the band began to play, and when they did not, were quick to report their disobedience.—vs. 12

The king was understandably angry. He was a dictator over his empire. He was not accustomed to having his decrees ignored or flouted. But he was in a peculiar position. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had been especially honored by the king at the request of Daniel, and he felt under some obligation to Daniel because of the wonderful service rendered in the recalling and interpretation of his dream in which he saw himself as the golden head of a great image. Perhaps it was because of this, and despite his ‘rage,’ that he gave the disobedient Hebrews a ‘second chance.’

THE KING DEMANDS

Seemingly, the king spoke personally to the three, and asked them if it were true that they deliberately had not bowed down to his image. The *Marginal Translation* reads: “of purpose.” The king did not doubt the report that had been given to him, but he wanted to make sure whether the Hebrews had willfully refused to obey, or whether it had been merely a case of misunderstanding. To decide this he said: “Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut,

psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; well: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?”—vs. 15

The issue was now clear-cut. Nebuchadnezzar had not only threatened the three Hebrews, but had defied their God. The faith and courage reflected in their reply to the king are somewhat obscured by a poor translation. The *King James Version* reads, “We are not careful to answer thee in this matter.” (vs. 16) The Hebrew word rendered ‘careful’ could more properly be translated “no need,” as the *Revised Standard Version* renders it, while the word ‘answer’ is from a Hebrew word meaning “come back.” It is rendered “restore” in Ezra 6:5. A free translation of the thought would seem to be: “We have no need to reply in a manner to restore ourselves to your favor in this matter.”

Then they gave the reason—and what a wonderful reason! “If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.” (Dan. 3:17,18) The king had endeavored to frighten them by saying that their God would be powerless to interfere with what the king proposed to do. But this did not cause their faith to waver in the slightest.

‘Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us.’ This the three Hebrews knew. What they were not sure of was whether it would be His will to deliver them from the fiery furnace, but even if it were not, they did not propose to accept deliverance on the conditions offered by Nebuchadnezzar. While they did not understand God’s great plan of salvation as his people are privileged to know it today, they did believe that they would be raised from the dead—that death was not the end of their experience. Thus, while they were confident of God’s ability to thwart Nebuchadnezzar’s purpose to destroy them, yet if this were not his will, they would still be faithful to him and thus prove worthy of deliverance in a “better resurrection.”—Heb. 11:33-35

GOD’S DELIVERANCE

When Nebuchadnezzar learned that the failure of the Hebrews to worship his image was by design, and that they could not be frightened

into changing their minds even when another opportunity was afforded, he was “full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against” them. (Dan. 3:19) He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual, and commanded that the “most mighty men” (vs. 20) in his army be used to bind these disobedient ones and cast them into the furnace. The heat of the furnace was so intense that even these ‘most mighty men’ were killed as they cast the three Hebrews into the flames.

The king had made good his threat. As dictator of the realm, there was no other course he could take. He had satisfied the demands of his ‘fury,’ and perhaps relaxed quite pleased with the thought that nothing could interfere with the supremacy of his rulership. Through Daniel he had learned something of the ability of Israel’s God, in whom Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had such abounding confidence. But he had caused them to be cast into the fiery furnace, and their God had not interfered.

Seemingly the king was not wholly at ease, for he had defied Israel’s God, the God who enabled Daniel to recall and interpret his dream when all the wise men of the kingdom had failed. It was not a reassuring thought. Under ordinary circumstances, probably a king of Babylon would not be especially concerned over the fate of criminals he had condemned to death. But this was not an ordinary circumstance, and it would seem that as soon as the heat of the furnace subsided sufficiently to permit inspection, Nebuchadnezzar went personally to peer into the flames.

We do not know, of course, the thoughts which went through the king’s mind, nor why he troubled himself to look into the furnace. However, had he been sure of his position, he would have known that there would have been little or nothing to see in that furnace, except the flames. But he was “astonied” (Dan. 3:24, Hebrew, ‘amazed and alarmed’) by what he saw. Daniel’s God, and the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had delivered them, not by removing them from the fire, but by preserving them alive in the flames.

The king called his counsellors and inquired of them concerning the number who had been cast into the furnace. He was told it was three; but now, as he said, he saw “four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.”

(vs. 25) What occurred then is what we should logically expect. The three Hebrews were bidden to leave the fiery furnace; a proclamation was issued by the king forbidding anyone in the whole empire to speak against Israel's God; and Shadrach, Me-shach, and Abednego were promoted to even higher positions in the government than they had formerly occupied.

Many have wondered about Nebuchadnezzar's reference to the 'Son of God.' In the Hebrew text, however, there is no definite article to warrant the translation of the word 'the.' The expression would be more properly translated 'a Son of God.' In verse 28, the king identifies this fourth one in the furnace as an "angel" whom the God of Israel sent to deliver his servants. The expression 'the' Son of God, does not appear to have been used earlier than the *New Testament*, where it is applied to the Only Begotten of the Heavenly Father. In the New Testament, angels are referred to as 'sons' of God. For example, the "angels which kept not their first estate."—Jude 6; I Pet. 3:19,20; II Pet. 2:4,5; Gen. 6:2

However, the important consideration in this reassuring illustration is that God is able to deliver his people from the hands of their enemies. To Moses, God said, "My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest." (Exod. 33:14) This does not necessarily mean that Jehovah would be personally present with Moses at every step of the way, but simply that he could be assured that the Lord would know of his needs and supply them, of whatever nature they might be. In a beautiful statement concerning God's care over ancient Israel we read, "In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them: ... and he bare them, and carried them all the days of old."—Isa. 63:9

The word 'angel' is used in the Scriptures to denote a messenger. In the majority of cases it does undoubtedly refer to heavenly beings, as in Hebrews 1:7, which reads, "Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire." (Ps. 104:4) And again, "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them." (Ps. 34:7) On the other hand, any agency or instrument the Lord might use to accomplish his purposes, is scripturally referred to as an 'angel' or messenger, and while it is interesting to know just how God may be showing himself strong on our behalf, it is well to look beyond the 'angel' and recognize God himself as the one whose presence gives us deliverance, peace, and rest. Nebuchadnezzar saw a 'Son of

God' in the fire with the three Hebrews, but realized that God was the actual deliverer, for he had 'sent his angel' for this purpose.

All God's people may be assured that whatever fiery trial may befall them, a 'Son of God' will be with them. This experience by the three faithful Hebrews is a picture of the loving care supplied by the Heavenly Father through his Son, Jesus, his many agencies, and heavenly angels.

Dawn Bible Students Association

“Gather the Wheat into My Barn”

THESE WORDS OF JESUS, included in one of his parables, are very specially applicable to the days in which we now live. The parable of the ‘Wheat and the Tares’ is recorded in Matthew 13:24-30, and was given immediately following the parable of the Sower. (Matt. 13:18-23) In the parable of the Sower, Jesus describes four kinds of hearers of the Word of the kingdom, and reveals also that the majority who hear the Word are not faithful to it—that only one class of hearers brings forth the required fruitage. These are the ones “who, having heard the Word, retain it in a good and honest heart, and bear fruit with perseverance.”—Luke 8:15, *Wilson’s Emphatic Diaglott*

There is an intimate connection between these two parables. The one dealing with the ‘wheat and the tares’ shows some of the difficulties which interfere with those who are the best hearers—who have good and honest hearts—those begotten with the seed, the Word of truth, and who continue faithful to the Lord. These are the true children of the kingdom.

The parable of the ‘Wheat and Tares’ reads: “The kingdom of the heavens may be compared to the field in which the owner sowed good grain: but while the men slept, his enemy came and sowed darnel [weeds, tares] among the wheat, and went away. When the blade shot up, and put forth the ear, then appeared also the darnel. And the servants of the householder, coming said to him, Master, thou didst sow good seed in thy field; whence, then, has it darnel? He replied, An enemy has done this. And they say to him, Dost thou wish then, that we should weed them out? And he said, No; lest in weeding out the darnel, you also tear up the wheat. Let both grow together till the harvest; and in the time of harvest, I will say to the reapers, First gather the darnel, and bind it in bundles for burning; then bring together the wheat into my granary.”—Matt. 13:24-30, *WED*

Later in the chapter Jesus gives an explanation of the parable as follows: “He who sows the good seed is the Son of man; the field is the world; the good seed are the sons of the kingdom; the darnel [tares] are the sons of the evil one. That enemy who sowed them was the Adversary;

the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are messengers.”—vss. 37-39, *WED*

The important work at the end of the age or harvest portrayed in this parable involves the gathering of the true children of the kingdom of heaven into a condition of separateness from the world and its spirit, and into the closest possible oneness with Christ. This oneness will be complete when, as Jesus explained, the “righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”—vs. 43

The ‘wheat,’ the children of the kingdom, those fully consecrated to God, begotten of the Holy Spirit through the Word of truth, gladly and gratefully accept the Lord’s proposition of becoming heirs with Jesus in the kingdom. They heartily lay hold upon the exceeding great and precious promises, and accept the terms of joint-heirship with Christ—that they must suffer with him if they would reign with him. (II Tim. 2:12) These bring forth many of the fruits and graces of the Holy Spirit as they develop as Christians.

On the contrary, the ‘darnel’ or tare class are those who are not begotten of the truth, having been misled by error into forms of godliness, without real power of the truth. (II Tim. 3:15) Further, the entire parable attests to the overwhelming majority of the tares:

(1) They were not merely such as usually sprang up amongst the wheat. The parable declares that they were sown by the enemy in the same systematic manner as the wheat, and with the deliberate intention of ruining the wheat field—choking the wheat.

(2) It shows that the tares were too numerous to be dealt with after the ordinary fashion of pulling up—that such a procedure would have unsettled everything, endangering the true wheat.

(3) It shows the same preponderance of the tares in the picture of the harvest, when it is the tares and not the wheat which are gathered and bound into bundles; the wheat, evidently in smaller proportionate quantity, being taken directly to the barns unbundled—precious, scarce. The parable pictures what we are to expect as the result of the entire work of grace throughout the Gospel Age. The results will be a tremendous harvest of tares and a comparatively small gathering of the precious wheat.

The spiteful enmity to choke the wheat is to be expected. Throughout the history of the world Satan's opposition is apparent; for among 'nations' everywhere he has planted the seeds of error and blasphemy against God, misrepresenting his character and plan, and making these appear anything but godlike.

These seeds of error were planted in the wheat field of Christendom, scattering them so that they would intermingle with the truths of the Lord's Word. This evil seed is represented in all the false doctrines of the Dark Ages which misrepresent the Divine character and plan. Those influenced by the errors of Satan are begotten of fear and not of love, not of the Spirit of Truth with which the Lord begets those who are truly his, the wheat.

Those begotten by God's Holy Spirit experience perfect love, which casts out fear and brings the fruitage and graces of the Holy Spirit in heart, character, word, and deed. The error may bring outward forms of godliness, but does not affect the heart so as to bring forth the fruitage of full consecration and self-sacrifice. These are the essential qualities of the wheat class which the Lord is now developing.

The harvest time is specially favorable to the ripening of the wheat. The Lord's true people are now finding much assistance for growing in grace and knowledge and the fruits of the Spirit such as they never have enjoyed before. This is because the Lord provides rich spiritual food for these messengers of truth and grace, for their help and development.

During the Gospel Age our Lord's instructions have been not to attempt a separation of the true from the imitation children of the kingdom. To accomplish such a complete separation would occasion the general turning of the world (or the field) upside down; a general unsettling of the wheat, as well as of the tares, would result.

The parable reveals that in the time of harvest we must expect a general separating work, hitherto prohibited. While these symbolized by the 'wheat' are encouraged to stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ made them free, and to avoid entangling alliances with open transgressors, and with error, yet they are not to attempt to classify between the fully consecrated (the wheat, the saints) and the tares who profess Christ's name and doctrines. To some extent, the tares allow Christ's doctrines to influence their outward conduct, but their hearts' desires are far from

the Lord and his service. This judging of hearts, or motives—which is beyond our power or ability, and which the Lord commanded us to avoid entirely—is the very thing which is so easy for the fallen nature to attempt to do.

The truth now due is the sickle to be used in this harvest, just as a similar sickle was used in the Jewish harvest. The reapers, or messengers, are the Lord's followers, just as a similar class were the reapers in the Jewish harvest. The chief Reaper, our beloved Lord and Head, is here at his Second Advent. He is present; the harvest work is urgent and we are exhorted: "Thrust in the sickle" of present truth (Rev. 14:15), and "gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice." (Ps. 50:5) "They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels."—Mal. 3:17

While the 'wheat' was not to be bundled, the parable declares that one of the effects of the harvest would be to gather and bind the 'tares' in bundles before the burning—or the time of trouble. This work is in progress all around us, and the truth must continue to go forth. Never was there a time like it for bundling people together into denominations.

While the sickle of truth prepares and gathers out the 'wheat' for that freedom which is in Christ Jesus, this same sickle has an opposite influence upon the 'tares.' They become bundled together more and more against the truth.

According to the parable, the bundles of tares are to be burned. This furnace of fire symbolizes 'the great time of trouble' belonging to the close of the present harvest. The destruction of the tares does not imply the destruction of all the individuals composing the tare class. It signifies, rather, a destruction of the false pretensions of this class. Their profession is that they are Christians, whereas they are still children of this world. When burned or destroyed as 'tares' they will be recognized in their true character, as members of the world, and will no longer imitate Christians as nominal members of Christ's church.

From the 'good seed'—the Word of the kingdom—have sprung all the true wheat, or those begotten by the Spirit of Truth. During the time that followed the initial sowing of wheat, to our day (including the Dark Ages), Satan sowed tares. These tares were begotten of false aims and ambitions because of false doctrines. Many were led to defend these

errors of doctrines, believing them to be true and necessary for their development.

Surely then, many of these ‘tares’ are little to blame for their false position as imitation wheat. Yet they may be aware that they have never made any true consecration—of heart and life, time and means, talents and opportunities—to God and to his service. It is indeed full consecration to God that is our reasonable service.

Taking a backward glance at the Jewish harvest, we note that the “chaff” (Luke 3:17) ceased from all pretension to Divine favor as the triumphant kingdom of God. Before that harvest closed, a great fire of religious and political contention consumed that religious system. So shall it be in the present Gospel Age harvest with the ‘tare’ class. They will be consumed; they will cease to apply to themselves the exceeding great and precious promises which belong only to the overcoming saints, the wheat.

The parable, after telling of the burning of the tares, further declares: “Then shall the righteous [wheat] shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.” (Matt. 13:43) What better testimony than this could we have that the true church will not be set up fully in power, and the heavenly phase of the kingdom functioning for the blessing of mankind, until the present harvest is ended?

Then shall the Sun of righteousness—of which Christ Jesus will be the central glory—arise with healing in his beams to bless, restore, to purify and free from sin and error, the whole world of mankind. (Mal. 4:2) This will include the raising of earth’s dead billions. The incorrigibly wicked, after a full and fair opportunity to attain life on the human plane, if persistently wicked, will be cut off in the second death. (Isa. 65:20) The kingdom will be glorious, for “there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”—Rev. 21:4

The Lord has shown us what to expect in this present harvest. Our attitude in it—both in being separated, and as ‘reapers’ in using the sickle of truth to assist others to liberty and security in Christ and separation from bondage, should be evident. It is the privilege and responsibility of the faithful people of God, who are now translated out of darkness into his marvelous light, to be coworkers with their Lord as his messengers in

the work of gathering his elect from “the four winds”—from all quarters of the earth.—Rev. 7:1

The future work, under the favorable conditions of the Millennial Age, will soon have sway in the earth. Indeed, the seeds of truth concerning restitution blessings which will produce that coming crop are even now being dropped here and there into longing truth-hungry hearts.

The most valuable work now being done, as the true Gospel continues to be proclaimed in all the world, is the reaping, or gathering unto the Lord of those who will fully and completely fulfill the condition of consecration to God. Proving faithful unto death, these will, in the first resurrection, be exalted to the Divine nature and associated with their Lord beyond the veil in the glorious future work of the world.

Dawn Bible Students Association

The Christian Charge

“I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, ... Preach the Word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. ... But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.”
—II Timothy 4:1, 2, 5

THOSE FAMILIAR WITH THE LORD’S Word realize that Paul’s charge to Timothy was a reminder of the commission to preach the good tidings prophesied by Isaiah: “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives.”—Isa. 61:1

Jesus applied this to himself. His true followers have realized that it has been their privilege also. It is even more than a privilege, it is a commission—a charge. If preaching is our charge, we do well to consider thoroughly to whom we may preach.

REPROVING

Some have hastily concluded that when Paul said, ‘Reprove, rebuke, exhort,’ this must be the bulk and substance of their preaching, forgetting that he also said, ‘With all longsuffering [forbearance] and doctrine.’ Reproof or rebuke may sometimes be necessary, but it should never be administered merely according to our own whims or imaginations. In every instance it should be ‘with doctrine’—with sound and scriptural reasoning—that it may be recognized as a correction from the Lord, though administered through the agency of a brother with Christian maturity, and not with an arrogance which forgets that all are subject to similar failures. Had this advice been more closely followed among the Lord’s people, how much richer many of their experiences along the way would have been.

Exhortation is also necessary, but should never degenerate into mere coaxing and urging without a sound and logical basis. Without sound reasoning and the strong support of the inspired Word, exhortation is weak, and is not lasting in its effects. This method of preaching without reason is common today, but was never indulged in by our Lord. Of him it was said: "He shall not cry, nor call out aloud, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street." (Isa. 42:2, *Leeser*) His preaching, and that of his disciples, was reasonable, doctrinal, and was delivered with the dignity and meekness becoming God's messengers.

WHAT MESSAGE?

Some may inquire: "What are we called to preach?" To this Paul answers: 'Preach the Word.' It is in the Word that the 'good tidings' are found. Before we can engage in this commission we must familiarize ourselves with the Scriptures and have a clear comprehension of their message. The first duty, then, of everyone who would obey the call to preach is to become an earnest, faithful, diligent student of the Word of God, that he may be able to minister grace to the hearers.

Our invitation to be 'ambassadors for Christ' may precede our opportunities to engage actively in service. At the Jordan River, Jesus was anointed to preach, but he did not begin his ministry until after he had endured the wilderness temptations. The early disciples were called, but were told to tarry until endued with power from on high. For the special purpose of introducing the Gospel, the power came upon the Early Church suddenly and miraculously as soon as they received the anointing of the Spirit, but this has not been the case with the church since. Power in presenting the truth comes now to the anointed as the reward of diligent study of Holy Writ.

THE NEED FOR STUDY

To many, study is distasteful; they have not been accustomed to it, and are not willing to give it the necessary time and concentration. Still they want to obey the call to preach, and the result obviously is confusion, bringing reproach and dishonor both upon themselves and upon the cause of Christ. The bearing of such reproach may possibly be for Christ's sake, but it is not to Christ's glory. The loss is the result of imprudence and negligence in regard to the injunction: "Study to show thyself approved

unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth.”—II Tim. 2:15

However, in the study of the Word, there must be a sincere and earnest desire to learn the real truth contained therein, and an accompanying willingness to be taught. Without these motives for study we might be among those who are “ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.”—II Tim. 3:7

Truth, rightly divided and fairly presented, commands the respect of even its opponents, in many instances. Its symmetry and beauty will often irresistibly stamp itself upon the mind. Thus it was in the case of Jesus’ preaching, when the very men that were sent to lay hands on him and deliver him to the chief priests and Pharisees returned, saying: “Never man spake like this man.” (John 7:46) The people recognized that “he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.” (Matt. 7:29) So also Festus said to Paul: “Thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.” Paul answered with becoming dignity and due deference to the powers that be: “I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness. For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely. ... King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian. And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.”—Acts 26:24-29

Paul had great natural talents in speaking, which excelled most others of the Lord’s people; but the power of his speech lay in the great truths which he proclaimed. The weight of his message commanded even the respect of his enemies. They could not say, “Paul, you do not know what you are talking about.” Neither could they turn away with the excuse that his words were empty and his phraseology barren.

When Jesus, our great Exemplar, went out to preach and teach, the people listened with astonishment, and said: “Whence hath this man this wisdom?” (Matt. 13:54) And if we preach the same great truths which he declared, our message will, to some extent, bring similar response.

READY TO PREACH

Again the query arises, “How long must I tarry for preparation, and how shall I know when I am adequately qualified to tell the good tidings to others?” Of course there are ways in which it is possible to make known God’s wonderful truth even while we are laying the groundwork of our faith. This is possible through the use of the printed page wherein we are able to pass on valuable information to others. However, it is requisite that all who proclaim any message first have the deep conviction that what they are heralding forth is true. As long as there is uncertainty in our minds we are correspondingly unprepared to illuminate the minds of others. “If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle?”—I Cor. 14:8

We cannot form real convictions by hastily glancing at the Word of God, for that would merely be a matter of ‘jumping to conclusions.’ We must be thoroughgoing in our study, and search the Scriptures until we clearly see and comprehend the Divine plan of the ages which is contained therein. When we see clearly the Divine plan of the ages, we will want to tell it to others, “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh.”—Matt. 12:34

Even when we are prepared “to give an answer to every man that asketh ... a reason of the hope” that is in us, we must not feel that our need for study has diminished. (I Pet. 3:15) Can any say concerning the Bible, “We have sounded all its depths, and measured all its heights, and therefore have nothing more to learn”? Surely not! To have a general outline of God’s plan clearly in our minds is very desirable, but we should have its various features so clearly fixed as to be able to convey them to others. Therefore, review is also necessary.

IN SEASON

Paul charged Timothy to preach the Word. He said: “Be instant in season, out of season.” (II Tim. 4:2) This also applies to all who would have a part in proclaiming the message of truth. But did Paul mean that we are to preach when it is ‘out of season’ for others to hear? No, for that would be contrary to the Lord’s teaching to be “wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.” (Matt. 10:16) We must, therefore, understand his words to mean that we are not to regard our own convenience or

inconvenience, but always to be ready to show forth his praises when it is opportune for others to hear, even if it might be inopportune for us.

In Acts 16:23-34 is recorded an occasion wherein Paul, by his actions, effectively demonstrated what he meant by preaching ‘out of season.’ We can, perhaps, recall how Paul and Silas were seized by the authorities in Philippi and thrown into a dungeon after they had first been beaten. And there in the dark cell we can imagine that Paul called out to Silas to inquire for his welfare, saying, “Silas, are you all right?” And we can imagine him replying, “Yes, I’m all right, Paul, even though they beat me unmercifully.” And Paul perhaps said, “They did the same to me.” And no doubt, like Peter, James, and John, they began to give thanks for the privilege of suffering for Christ’s sake.

Doubtless in this experience they recalled some of the words of our Lord that we are to suffer persecution for righteousness’ sake. This is why they were rejoicing, and began to sing hymns of praise unto God. While singing, an earthquake miraculously shook the prison doors open and loosed their bonds. There were other prisoners in that prison who heard Paul and Silas talking and singing (Acts 16:25), and must have been impressed with Paul’s message, because none of them tried to escape. The keeper, aroused from sleep, and seeing what had happened, prepared to kill himself. But Paul called to him, telling him not to harm himself because “we are all here.” (vs. 28) This miraculous demonstration of the Lord’s power awakened the keeper’s interest, and he began to inquire about salvation.

It would have been easy for Paul to have said, “I am badly bruised; my arms and feet are benumbed from being in those stocks, and much weariness is with me; so just let us rest up tonight, and perhaps tomorrow we will tell you what you must do to be saved.” But no! Notwithstanding the cruel and unjust treatment they had received, they used the opportunity to proclaim the glad tidings not only to the prison-keeper, but to all his house. From this account we can better appreciate that no matter how much ‘out of season’ to ourselves, we should be willing to preach.

The apostle further enjoins that we “watch [be sober] ... in all things.” (II Tim. 4:5) Therefore, we must exercise ourselves to handle the truth with all gravity and reverence, living as examples of its influence, not carried away with excitement or emotion. With this, he further exhorts

that we “endure afflictions.” Such afflictions will naturally arise from those who love darkness rather than light, even though they measurably recognize the light we bring.

ALL ARE TO PARTICIPATE

The extent to which each one of the Lord’s people may be used in proclaiming the good news may differ greatly, both in opportunity and in natural abilities and qualifications. Some may never have the opportunity to discourse to public audiences. God uses us according to our talents. Paul, Peter, and others were able to preach publicly, but Aquila and Priscilla, unable to preach in a public way, could invite Apollos to their home and explain to “him the way of God more perfectly.” (Acts 18:26) Thus the devoted and eloquent Apollos, more perfectly prepared, was better enabled to continue his public ministry. If Aquila and Priscilla had not been students of the Word, what an opportunity they would have lost.

Our opportunities to explain the meaning of the Scriptures include not only our neighbors and fellowmen, but oftentimes enable us to edify our brethren by furnishing them with our findings, as well as by helping them to a more perfect understanding of God’s Word. Hence, it becomes mandatory for the Lord’s people to study if they would have the Lord’s approval.

The charge given to Timothy applies to all of us. Paul, as God’s and Christ’s spokesman, is exhorting us to be faithful in carrying out of our consecration vows. May we do so as faithfully as Timothy did, not only in his assistance to Paul, but to the Early Church in general.

Dawn Bible Students Association