

Discourses

of

Robert S. Seklemian

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By

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“The Quiet Lion”

A short Biography of Brother Robert S. Seklemian

Born: April 20, 1898 Died: April 6, 1984 at 85 years of age Preceded in death by Sr. Ruth (Mathison) in 1981 Survived by their only son, Robert, and three grandchildren

ONE does not often meet a person of Brother Robert's remarkable character. Those who knew him best remember him as quiet but unyielding, never antagonistic, but loyal to the spirit and doctrines of the truth. A character which combines both strength and gentleness is remarkable at any age in history, but especially so in the tumultuous world in which we live --today.

Of Armenian parentage Brother Seklemian's father was taken prisoner by the Turks during their slaughter of the Armenians in the 1880s. Released from prison his father, mother, and two brothers immigrated to America. While awaiting the train in the darkness at a remote station, one of the boys disappeared and the distraught parents were unable to call out lest they --attract attention to themselves. After a frantic search, however, the son was found safe and sound, asleep under a bench. In America three more boys were born one of whom was Brother Robert. He often delighted in his father's tale of herding sheep as a boy at the foot of Mount Ararat. One day an old man came down from the mountain and told him he had seen the ark up there. The young shepherd boy dreamed of climbing up the mountain one day to see it but he never had the opportunity.

Brother Robert's first exposure to the truth was as a teenager in California. At the age of 20 he left the Fresno area to serve at “Bethel,” the Watchtower Society's headquarters in Brooklyn, N.Y., under “Judge” Rutherford. For a number of years he was in charge of the radio work there, writing and narrating a 15-minute weekly radio program. He possessed a good voice and did some singing on the programs also.

During this period of time the teachings of the Society were undergoing constant change, but Brother Seklemian endeavored to keep the radio message consistent with the truth. One day at the radio station he had just finished his usual broadcast sermon when the door opened in the broadcasting room and in walked the Judge. He asked Brother Robert: “Who prepares your radio transcripts?” Brother Robert replied that he did. The Judge replied: “You're never to teach what you taught today again. From now on someone else will prepare the transcripts for you.” To this Brother Robert replied in his usual gentle fashion that if someone else could prepare the transcripts, then someone else could also broadcast them. With that Brother Robert left the radio station never to return. He pondered

what he had said that the Judge had so strenuously objected to. He soon found out! Brother Robert's sermon that day had been on the subject of the ransom. At that time the Judge was writing a book to prove that the ransom did not apply to Adam.

Brother Robert joined RCA Communications in 1923 as a secretary. (He and Sister Ruth were married that same year.) During his 44-year career with the company, he progressed through various managerial positions in almost every department including Radio Communications, Accounting, and Real Estate. In his spare time he obtained a Master's degree in Law, a degree in Engineering, and a Real Estate Brokerage license. He studied for his law degree on the train he took to and from work each day. The beautiful home they lived in on Long Island was the sole product of his own handiwork. He enjoyed writing. All this time he remained active in and thoroughly devoted to the truth.

After leaving the Society in the 1940's, he and Sister Ruth were isolated from the brethren until 1956 when a class was formed in their area of Sayville, N.Y. Brother Seklemian served the ecclesia there as elder until 1962. At that time he requested and received a transfer to California as manager of the San Francisco office, a position he held until his retirement in 1967.

It was in the fall of 1962 that he began to write radio scripts for the Japanese work, a role for which his previous background in radio had developed him. Later he expended considerable editorial labors on the "*Expanded Biblical Comments*." He remained active in the Lord's service until his death.

In ill health for some years before his death, Brother Robert longed to be taken home. Those who visited with him during this time said that with his deep set eyes and beard (he was unable to shave due to a painful condition in his hands) he looked every bit the image of a Biblical prophet. No more fitting memory of this beloved brother can be imagined for beneath his gentle outward demeanor he was, as one brother expressed it, "like a rock." Those who knew him best loved him most.

Thus ended the earthly career of Brother Robert Seklemian, the *quiet lion*.

After God's Own Heart

“He [God] gave testimony, and said, I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart.”--Acts 13:22

AT THE time of our lesson, the Philistines had invaded Israel. The army of Israel, commanded by Saul, their first king, stopped the advance of the Philistines in the land of Judah. A stalemate developed. The Philistines occupied the hill on one side of a valley and the Israelites occupied the hill on the opposite side. Constantly on the alert, and with only an occasional skirmish, each army waited for the other to make the first move. Then the Philistines attacked with what would today be called a “psychological secret weapon.” The alert sentinels of Israel were astonished to see a huge man emerge from the Philistine entrenchment on the opposite hill and descend to the valley below. This man was literally a giant. His height was “six cubits and a span,” which is about 11.1 feet. That's about twice the height of an average man today.

“And he had an helmet of brass upon his head, and he was armed with a coat of mail; and the weight of the coat was five thousand shekels of brass [about 156 pounds]. And the staff of his spear was like a weaver's beam, and his spear's head weighed 600 shekels of iron [almost 20 pounds].”--1 Samuel 17:5,7

To make sure the Israelites fully realized his great size, from the distance they were watching, he had a normal-sized armor-bearer with him to provide contrast. It is possible his armor-bearer was shorter than normal to make the giant loom even taller in the eyes of the Israelites.

Goliath Defies Israel

The sentinels of Israel gave the alarm and called Saul to see this thing. Then, with a voice matching his bulk, the giant shouted out his challenge: “I defy the armies of Israel this day!” The record says: “When Saul and all Israel heard those words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.” This overgrown monster growled out his defiance of the armies of Israel twice a day, morning and evening, for forty days. We read that each time, “All the men of Israel, when they saw the man, fled from him and were sore afraid.”

Let us consider this remarkable situation in its proper setting. For 450 years the children of Israel had acknowledged no ruler but Jehovah God himself. After the partition of Canaan among the 12 tribes, they had been under the administration of judges, but their supreme ruler was God alone.

Other nations might have misgivings about the justice of the laws decreed and enforced by their kings, but Israel had the absolute assurance that their laws, dictated by God himself, were just and perfect. Other nations led a precarious existence ever on guard to defend themselves lest they be swallowed up by another. But the integrity of Israel was protected by the Lord God Almighty. All the forces of the universe were at their disposal if they but remained in harmony with Him and obeyed Him.

All this was not hearsay. It was demonstrated to them over and over again in ways they could see, feel, and hear. Faith was not necessary. To bring about their release from bondage, ten horrible plagues were visited upon Egypt. The waters of the Red Sea were divided for their benefit, and brought together again to rid them of their pursuers. The pillars of cloud and light led them unerringly. In the wilderness, when they ran short of bread, manna was provided; when they wanted meat, quails were sent. When they thirsted in the desert, water poured out of a rock. Many such miracles were performed. The inhabitants of Canaan were dispersed before them and the land “flowing with milk and honey” was given to them. Not one man, woman or child in Israel was ignorant of these things. These events were read, rehearsed and repeated to them continually by their priests.

Wouldn't you think that with such a history of assurance and help from the Almighty, the Israelites would be the boldest and most courageous people on earth? Wouldn't this be especially true of the army, the pick of the men, sometimes referred to as “mighty men of valor”? What do we find? One lone Philistine, a misshapen and bloated monstrosity, stands up and bellows defiance at the combined armies of Israel--and they flee from him, “dismayed and greatly afraid!”

The One Who Did Not Fear

Ah, but there was one refreshing exception. There was one young man who did not fear the giant. Far from being a giant himself, he had seven brothers who were considered physically superior to him. He was just emerging from boyhood and still had the pink cheeks of youth. He is described as “ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to.” (1 Samuel 16:12) It was David, the shepherd boy, who had come to visit his three oldest brothers who were in the army of Saul. He had come to bring them some special food, a treat from home.

He had just found his brothers and was giving them the news from their home town, Bethlehem, when the Philistine --giant made one of his pompous appearances. Strutting about, and shaking his spear, he



issued his challenge and cursed Israel. David looked and listened in astonishment! But he was not so much astonished by the size and antics of the --giant as he was by the reactions of the men of Israel. He felt something that had --escaped all the others. He saw and felt that by successfully defying the armies of Israel, this lone, ugly creature was defying Jehovah God himself. A wave of indignation and outrage swept over David as he looked about him at the cowering men of Israel. "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine," he cried, "that he should defy the armies of the living God?" (1 Samuel 17:26) He tried to imbue them with his own spirit of indignation and outrage but they would not respond. Not one in the army would stand up to the giant, not even king Saul who was somewhat of a giant himself.

There is a lesson here for us. We are the Israel of God, spiritual Israel. Like Israel, we have tasted of God's benefits. We have been delivered from bondage. We have been led through the wilderness of sin by the one whose footsteps we follow. We have been abundantly fed with manna from heaven, spiritual food, and have had our thirst quenched by the abundant water of truth from the rock.

But what happens? Sometimes one lone, Satan-inspired experience becomes swollen and inflated in our minds beyond all reality. Momentarily forgetting all the Lord's benefits and leadings, we revert to our old, craven, cowardly, earthly natures, and become "dismayed and greatly afraid." Ah, but then David appears and, unlike the men of Israel, we respond. A "David experience" is sent by the Lord which restores our true perspective and we realize that "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us" (1 Samuel 7:12) and, "No weapon that is formed against us shall prosper." (Isaiah 54:17) We lose our terror and are ashamed of our former reaction.

At this point David might have gone back to his sheep herding with a perfectly clear conscience. He was not in the army. He might have said, "This is Saul's responsibility, not mine," and walked away. But he didn't; he lived too close to God for that. Any insult to God was a personal insult to himself. He couldn't hold his peace. Like Jeremiah, the words were in his heart like a burning fire, shut up in his bones, and he could not keep them back. (Jeremiah 20:9) So he went about voicing his indignation against Israel's inaction. We read that "he turned from one to another, and spake after the same manner [who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God]." (1 Samuel 17:26)

As might be expected the matter was promptly reported to the commanding general, King Saul. They probably said to Saul, "There's a young man here from Bethlehem who is stirring up the people." That has a familiar ring, an advance echo of things to come. Years later the same would be said of Jesus.

So David was brought before King Saul. When Saul saw him, he was surprised. Judging from the bold words that had been reported to him, Saul had probably imagined David to be a large and powerful man. Now, a pink-cheeked boy stood before him. Ah but the mind, the intellect, the personality, was not that of a boy! David came right to the point. "Your men are frightened of Goliath," he said to Saul, "but let no man's heart fail because of him. I, thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine." (1 Samuel 17:32)

"But you can't," Saul protested, "thou art but a youth, and he a man of war" (1 Samuel 17:33) Then David told Saul a story which gave the simple secret of his boldness and courage. He related an incident of his life as a shepherd boy. He said, in substance:

"One day, as I kept watch over my father's sheep, a lion and a bear came out of the wilderness. Leaping into the flock, the lion seized a young lamb, and began to make off with it. I went after the lion, and smote him with my rod, and released the lamb from his mouth. Then when the enraged beast turned on me, I caught him by his beard, and

smote him and slew him. The bear also took a lamb, but I rescued the lamb from his jaws, and I killed him too.”

Then he said to Saul: “Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear; and this uncircumcised Philistine shall be as one of them, seeing he hath defied the armies of the living God.” Now he gave Saul the secret of his courage: “The Lord, that delivered me out of the paw of the lion and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine.”

David knew he hadn't conquered the lion and the bear by his own strength. He didn't take any credit for it. A lion can kill a horse or a full-grown steer with one blow of his powerful paw. A bear can do the same. These are not beasts that can ordinarily be killed by one's bare hands. David knew that, but David loved his sheep and when one of the little lambs was threatened, he breathed a prayer for help and without the slightest hesitation, he was willing to lay down his life for the sheep. He attacked the great beasts with what happened to be in his hands at the time--a cudgel; and that was quite enough with God's help.

There's a lesson here that we should --remember: God does his work through the commonplace, the humble, and the meek. God has all the power that is needed. He doesn't look for power in us. When he chooses a man, he looks only at the heart. David was such a man, a man after God's own heart. So with a sincere and simple faith, David told King Saul:

“It was God that gave me the victory over the lion and the bear, when they threatened my flock. The same God will give me the victory over this other beast, who is threatening his flock, Israel.”

With this one simple statement, David robbed the giant of all the glamour he had built up--the glamour of being the great undefeated heavyweight champion of the Philistines--and showed him up for what he was, just another contemptible beast that the Lord would deliver into his hands to be slain.

David Confronts Goliath

Later, as David with staff and sling calmly approached the giant, he must have shown his contempt in his face. Goliath sensed that David looked upon him as only an animal. He gave himself away when he angrily asked, “Am I a dog that thou cometh to me with staves?”

Just picture the scene! It was like a --gigantic amphitheater with the arena in the valley below and the audience on the hillsides--the Philistines on the one side, and the Israelites on the other. For 40 days the Philistine champion had shouted his defiance to the armies of Israel. Now David lifted his voice so that all who had heard the

giant might now hear his reply. David's reply voiced the sublime quality of his faith and the depth of his humility. It must have delighted God to hear it. He said:



“Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield; but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied. And all this assembly shall know that the Lord saveth, not with sword, and spear; for the battle is the Lord's and He will give you into our hands.”--1 Samuel 17:45,47

As a final gesture of contempt and to show his utter fearlessness, David ran to meet the Philistine giant. It was over quickly. The giant, so fully armed, did not even have time to draw his sword before the stone from David's sling sank into his forehead. He fell on his face. David drew the giant's great sword from its sheath--and used it.

David beautifully typifies Christ. His loving care for his father's sheep prefigured Jesus' love and care for the sheep his Father gave him. We are that sheepfold! Jesus saves his lambs from the wiles of the Adversary, from the mouth of the roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. --Jesus lays down his life for his sheep. As Goliath defied and blasphemed the armies of God, morning and evening, Satan has continually defied God by his rebellion against the rule of heaven. He has through the ages blasphemed God by the "doctrines of devils" he has promulgated. He continually assails and brings railing accusations against the Israel of God, spiritual Israel, of which we are members. Christ, the great antitypical David, will in due time be Satan's executioner as David was of Goliath.

The Psalms of David

The psalms of David have been termed the most beautiful poetry ever written. Even worldly scholars with no reverence for the Bible or appreciation of spiritual things have pronounced the psalms to be of the highest order of classic literature. But the psalms mean much more than that to us. The voice of God is there. He speaks to us through the psalms. He instructs us, he encourages us, he inspires us, he comforts us, he strengthens us.

Much of the psalms is sheer praise. As we read the exquisite words of praise to God that filled David's heart, our own hearts also fill and overflow with praise. We feel the same love and closeness to God that David felt when he wrote the words. What a man writes, he must first think. Anyone who could write with such depth of feeling and eloquence must think sublime thoughts indeed!

Although the psalms were written under the inspiration of God, that does not mean that God dictated the exact words. David wrote as he was moved by the holy spirit, but not automatically. He used his own native talent, his own words and expressions, many of them based upon his personal experiences as a shepherd. But the holy spirit of God, acting upon his mind caused him to incorporate in his psalms those elements of prophecy and spiritual sustenance needed by the Lord's people now. As we read in 1 Corinthians 10:11 --[Diaglott] they, "Were written for our --admonition, on whom the ends of the ages have come." David wrote his innermost thoughts, his meditations on the wonders of God, his longings and yearnings, his joys and his lamentations, his angers and sorrows, his love and praises to his God. In the most eloquent language, he poured out his very soul. Through it all ran the thread of prophetic illumination provided by the overruling influence of the holy spirit upon his mind.

David was an out-doors man. He lived in the open. He had seen the glories of --nature in their every mood including the great sea, with its tides, storms and calms, the multitude and variety of its creatures; the seasons of the earth, seedtime and harvest, sunshine and rain; man and his dominion.

“All sheep and oxen; yea, and the beasts of the field; the fowl of the air and the fish of the sea; and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas.”--Psalms 8:7,8

The leadings of the Lord he had personally experienced. Watching the sheep, he meditated on these things in the quietness of his isolation. When he thought of some men even in his day who ascribed these things to mere chance and not a --personal Creator, he exclaimed: “The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God.” (Psalms 14:1)

At night he lay down wrapped in his cloak to sleep; the ground was his bed and the vast canopy of heaven his tent. He studied the stars of heaven before he went to sleep:

“When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers; the moon and the stars which thou has ordained; what is man that thou art mindful of him?”--Psalms 8:3,4

What a magnificent conception of the power of God this is! The universe with its millions of stars and their planets--much greater than our sun and earth--are all highly organized and moving at fantastic speeds in orderly orbits. They are tremendous weights, suspended on nothing yet David says they are the work of his fingers! He does not say they are the work of his mighty arms or the force of his whole being, but his fingers! The universe was but a light task for him, by no means approaching the full potential of his powers!

David wrote this prayer of praise:

“I will love thee, O Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower. I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised; so shall I be saved from mine enemies.”--Psalms 18:1-3

Consider this prayer. If one has to go into battle, it is natural to pray before going. One knows that many will be killed and it is understandable that one pray to be spared. It is natural for a general of an army to pray for victory before committing his troops. But after one's life has been spared and the battle won, the matter is often forgotten. But this inspiring prayer of praise, was made by David after the battle--it says so in the heading. He had just won a decisive victory over all his enemies. So these words do not contain possible motive for self-preservation, no motive of desired victory. The words

show a heart full of thanks and love and praise to God. He did not forget! No wonder David was a man after God's own heart!

There is a lesson here for us. We are told in Philippians 4:6 to make our requests known unto God, and we are **quick** to do this. But when a request is heard and in due course an answer given and the blessing granted, are we **just as quick** to thank and praise him for it? We often give a general expression of thanks, such as "We thank thee for all thy blessings," which is good. But when a specific request has been made and has been graciously granted, how much better to give specific thanks for that particular blessing. An earthly parent loves an appreciative and thankful child; how much more, our heavenly Father!

"I will love thee, O Lord," David said. Then he pours out his love by ascribing to the Lord certain endearing and meaningful titles: My Rock, My Fortress, My Deliverer, My God, My Strength in whom I will trust, My Buckler, The Horn of My --Salvation, My High Tower, Worthy to be praised.

Our "Castle"

There is a maxim of English law to the effect that "A man's home is his castle." In medieval times the law was comparatively ineffective and each man had to take measures for his own personal safety and defense. The feudal lords and barons built themselves castles, usually upon a rock, with thick walls and strong defenses to withstand siege, surrounded by moats so no one might approach without permission. Here they were safe from molestation. Outside they always had to wear armor and carry a sword, but in the castle they could relax and be at peace. The castle became the symbol of the integrity of a person in English law. David had a similar thought when he wrote:

"Be thou my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort. Thou hast given commandment to save me; for thou art my rock and my fortress."--Psalms 71:3

We can identify with this. We too have a castle, a "strong habitation," to which we may "continually resort." Anywhere, anytime, and under any circumstances we can call upon the Lord. One moment we are worried, distressed, and faced with a seemingly hopeless situation. The next moment we feel a "strong habitation" enclosing us, a safe and secure castle around us. Then with David we can sing: "The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"--Psalms 27:1

David said, "Thou hast given commandment to save me." Commandment to whom? Let me illustrate. It is the duty of the

Secret Service to guard the life of the President of the United States. From the moment he is elected, he is no longer a private citizen. His life is not his own; he is under what is known as “maximum security.” He is guarded day and night lest an enemy seek to destroy him. Even before election day, units of the Secret Service are assigned to each likely candidate so that whichever one is successful may have this special protection from the moment of his election. We consider the presidency of the United States to be an enormously --important office, and it is--probably the most important in the world. But there are 144,000 higher positions out of this world, those who shall live and reign with Christ. Of these Jesus said:

“No man can come unto me, except the Father . . . draw him.”--John 6:44

God selects and elects those who shall be the heirs of salvation. As soon as they are so selected, they are in mortal danger from the great enemy Satan. So God assigns a heavenly “Secret Service” to protect his elect. He calls mighty angels into his presence and commands them, charges them, and sends them forth to watch over us. So it is written: “Thou hast given commandment to save me.” Also: “He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.” (Psalms 91:11) And: “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” (Hebrews 1:14)

Do you fully realize and appreciate the care and attention the Lord is giving you? Earthly secret service men, highly trained and dedicated as they are, sometimes fail in their assignment; presidents have been assassinated. But the angels assigned to our protection never fail. When God has given a commandment to save, it cannot fail. Not one of his purposes ever do. An angel who has been given the commandment to protect a child of God, one of his little ones, is backed up by all the power of God himself.

Jesus said, “Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.” (Matthew 18:10) This is a most extraordinary arrangement. By contrast, in a military organization there is what is called “the chain of command.” A private has no direct access to the Commanding General. He makes his request to his sergeant, the sergeant passes it up through the various ranking officers, and only if it is of extreme importance in the opinion of those officers does it ever finally reach the general. A decision must follow the same course downward and be endorsed by all those through whose hands it passed before, until it finally reaches the sergeant, who then tells the soldier. This process may take weeks or even months.

But an angel assigned to one of the Lord's little ones does not have to follow a "chain of command." No! God considers us too precious for that. He says, "Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands." (Isaiah 49:16) We are always before Him! He takes a constant personal interest in our welfare. The angels assigned to us always have a direct and instant access to their Supreme Commander; they always behold the face of the Heavenly Father. It is a direct, face-to-face communication on our behalf.

All Things Are for Our Good

Paul said, "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God; to them who are called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28) Only God could make such a promise because only God with his almighty power has all things under his control; his almighty power is instantly available in our behalf. Does this mean that those who love God and are called according to his purpose do not have a care in the world? Does this mean that we are miraculously supplied with food, clothing, and all the necessities of life? Are we never tired, never worried, never hurt, never discouraged, never sick? Do we never experience trials and difficulties? Is everything in our lives perfect, peaceful, and serene? Is that what is meant by "all things working together for our good"? God could grant all this, but it wouldn't be for our good, for our eternal welfare. Instead he uses his almighty power to manipulate "all things" to give us just the right experiences in life, to develop, shape, chasten, fit, and finally change and exalt us to the glorious divine nature.

Sometimes we don't understand the necessity of the experiences to which we are subjected. There is a tendency to cry to the Lord with tears and ask, "Why? Oh why?" Later, sometimes much later, it becomes beautifully apparent why the experience was necessary, and we thank God for it. Here's a story that illustrates this:

Once, the only survivor of a shipwreck was thrown upon a desert island. He built a hut of driftwood and put in it everything he had. He prayed to God for rescue and scanned the horizon daily for ships. A long time passed, while he lived precariously on what he could get from the sea. One evening, upon returning from a hunt for food, he was horrified to find his hut in flames--struck by lightning! All he had was gone. To his limited vision, this was the worst thing that could possibly happen, and he complained bitterly to God. "Why, oh why? Was not my situation bad enough before? At least I had shelter and a few comforts. Now I have nothing!" Utterly discouraged and giving up all hope he flung himself upon the ground and wept all night, cursing the fire that had destroyed his hut. The

very next morning, a ship arrived. As he was brought aboard, the captain said: "We saw your signal fire last night!"

Joseph's Example

There is another and better example right from the scriptures. It is the story of Joseph. Here was a boy who was rejected by his brothers. They hated him so much that they considered killing him. He was deprived of his most precious possession, a coat of many colors. He was thrown into a deep pit without water and left to die. He was sold for twenty pieces of silver to slave traders. They took him into Egypt and sold him as a slave. His Egyptian master's wife bore false witness against him and he was unjustly imprisoned. In prison he did a favor for a fellow-prisoner who promised to help him when he got out, but did not do so. He stayed in that prison for two whole years. The Egyptians were not noted for coddling their prisoners; the record says that he was "bound." Here is one misfortune after another; here was a seemingly hopeless and impossible situation. But that is the kind of a situation that God handles to demonstrate his power. Jesus said, "The things which are impossible with men, are possible with God." (Luke 18:27) God intervened for Joseph. The record says: "And it came to pass at the end of two full years, that Pharaoh dreamed." (Genesis 41:1) From then on things happened rapidly. Joseph rose to be the ruler of Egypt which at that time was the most powerful nation in the world.

His many painful experiences must have caused Joseph to wonder, "Why are these things happening to me?" But afterward, when it was all over, he saw and freely acknowledged that all things had worked together for good. He said to his brethren:

"Now therefore be not grieved nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither; for God did send me before you to preserve life. And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now, it was not you that sent me hither, but God; and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt."--Genesis 45:5,7,8

The same principle is expressed in Hebrews:

"Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward, it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness, unto them which are exercised thereby."--Hebrews 12:11

So with experience and Christian maturity we learn to "trust him, come what may," knowing it is for our good. It is in this way that we attain the "peace of God, which passeth all understanding" (Philippians 4:7). Jesus said:

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you. Not as the world giveth give I unto you.”--John 14:27

The world cannot assure us of peace based upon “all things working together for good.” Satan is the god of this world. He seeks to devour and destroy the Lord's people. But God manipulates even the overt acts of Satan so that they also work together for our good. This is included in the “all things.”

Guardian Angels

David wrote, “The angel of the Lord encampeth around about them that fear him, and delivereth them.” (Psalms 34:7) These angels are alert, ready for action like troops encamped on the field of battle. They are “round about” us. We are ringed about and completely surrounded by this protection.

The scriptures provide an encouraging illustration of this in 2 Kings chapter 6. At one time the king of Syria warred against Israel. He met in secret counsel with his military commanders to map out his campaign. But every time he planned an attack, the Lord revealed his plans to Elisha the prophet who told the king of Israel. The Israelites anticipated every move of the Syrians and checkmated them at every turn. The king of Syria was greatly disturbed over his defeats and said, “Surely we have a spy among us!” Then one of his own spies told the king that it was Elisha the prophet who revealed his secrets. The king of Syria decided that Elisha must be captured at whatever the cost.

Elisha was then staying at Dothan. The king of Syria sent a large part of his army, described as “horses and chariots, and a great host,” to take him. Why such a large force to capture one man? The record says that they “compassed the city about.” The idea was to approach at night and form a tight ring around the city to prevent Elisha's escape. Then, in the morning, they would close in until they had him. It seemed an absolutely foolproof plan. As the Syrian host moved upon the city that night, and silently formed their noose, Although Elisha knew it, he was not troubled. He slept soundly.

Elisha's young servant did not have his master's calm assurance. When he got up early in the morning and saw the terrifying ring of military might, he ran to Elisha and cried: “Alas, my master, What shall we do? What shall we do?” Elisha answered, “Fear not; for they that be with us, are more than they that be with them.” But the servant did not have the insight and the faith of his master. He was filled with terror. The **enemy** he could see with his physical eyes, the **defense** he could not see with the eye of faith.

“And Elisha prayed and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he

saw; and behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire, round about Elisha.”--2 Kings 6:17

The defensive forces of God took the visible form of horses and chariots because these were symbols the young man could understand. They were “round about” Elisha which means they formed an inner ring between him and the enemy.

All of us who are running for the prize of the high calling are encompassed about and threatened by Satan's forces: “Principalities, powers, rulers of the darkness of this world, wicked spirits in high places.” (Ephesians 6:12) They seek to destroy and devour the new creature. They form a ring around us. This would be a terrifying thing if we did not, by the eye of faith, see the inner ring of vastly superior power: the “horses and chariots of fire” which Elisha described as “they that be with us.”

Since we know this, how can we be afraid of anything? As David put it so beautifully in poetic meter: “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” (Psalms 27:1) Doesn't that give you a warm feeling of security and peace?

Jesus said, “The very hairs of your head are numbered.” (Matthew 10:30) You who are mothers think you know your children pretty well. But do you know how many hairs there are on your child's head? Here is a beautiful figure of speech showing how thoroughly God knows and understands you. He knows everything about you. He knows what you should have and what you should not have. He knows what you should experience and what you should not experience. But does this mean that he knows just how much trouble, aggravation and sickness you can stand, and then proceeds to see that you get every bit you can stand? Oh no! You wouldn't do that to your children. We try to be kind, loving and patient with our children. When our children are in difficulty, we feel pity and compassion; love wells up in our hearts. We spare our children all we can, giving them only the needed discipline. So it is with our heavenly Father, only he is ever so much more kind, loving and patient than we are. Of us he has caused to be written:

“And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of Hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.”--Malachi 3:17

God Loves Us

Someone once said to me many years ago:

“I'm afraid of God's love. I'm afraid to consecrate. I've had trouble all my life. I've been bludgeoned and beaten down by adverse

circumstances, for as long as I can remember. I love God and I want him to love me; but I read in Hebrews 12:6, 'Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth; and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.' Now that's very discouraging. I just couldn't take any more chastening and scourging than I've had. I want peace and rest!"

Perhaps others have felt the same way as this person. We have a very wily adversary and we should not be "ignorant of his devices." (2 Corinthians 2:11) He twists and turns and misrepresents God's character. He misquotes and misapplies scripture in the most plausible manner, shifting his tactics to correspond to the weakness of his intended victim. He has convinced millions who take the name of Christ that God is a fiend who inflicts eternal torment and misery upon the vast majority of mankind. Defaming God is Satan's specialty. This is his device for blinding men's minds. Even to one who has come to a knowledge of the truth and has been drawn to the verge of consecration, he subtly suggests: "Don't do it. You have enough trouble already. Why expose yourself to the chastenings and scourgings of the Lord? He is a God of punishment and pain." This is just a variation of the old torment doctrine.

When Satan tempted Jesus and misapplied scriptures, Jesus answered him with scripture correctly applied. Let us now do the same. In his last talk with his disciples before his betrayal, Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you . . . Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." (John 14:27) On another occasion he said:

"Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls; for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light."-- Matthew 11:28-30

Does this sound like something to be afraid of? A yoke has two sides to permit two to pull side by side. Jesus invites us to share his yoke with him, to walk with him. Think of having the Lord walk with us throughout life, constantly at our side, sharing every burden. When our steps falter, his are strong and carry us along. When our stresses and strains become too great, he invites us to cast our cares upon him. He wants to carry our burdens. It is written, "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee. He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved." (Psalms 55:22) Also, "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you." (1 Peter 5:7) This is a wonderful arrangement, certainly nothing to be afraid of.

Ah, but what about the chastenings and scourgings? The key to the correct understanding of this scripture is in the two words **loveth** and **son**. "Whom he loveth, he chasteneth; and scourgeth every son." God is love and there is no fear in love. So this scripture simply

means that he lovingly applies corrective discipline to us as his children. He applies only enough to teach us the right way. He spares us all he can. He does not, as some suppose, keep books on our conduct, exacting the last full measure of punishment indicated. On the contrary he does not give us all the punishment we deserve. David knew this from personal experience. On one occasion he had sinned grievously and was guilty of death, but God did not exact the full penalty. David, overwhelmed with God's mercy and love, sang with exultation:

“The Lord is merciful and gracious; slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities; for as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are dust.”--
Psalms 103:8,10-14

David knew what he was talking about. He knew God's loving and merciful ways. His thoughts were as close to God's thoughts as is humanly possible. How God loved him for it! He delighted in David. Years and generations after David had passed from the earthly scene, God favored his descendants even though they were sometimes not entirely worthy. Why did he do that? “For my servant David's sake!” Just because they belong to David, that's all! When Jesus came, one of his titles was, “The Son of David.” His kingdom authority by which he will bless the world is called, “The throne of David.”

Here is a most precious thought: We are the heirs of this intimate relationship between God and David. We are of the spiritual “David” class. All the richness of God's love is ours if we will, by faith, receive it.

Belshazzar's Feast

BEFORE going into our lesson of Belshazzar's feast, let us first consider the setting. Babylon, the capital city of the Babylonian universal empire, was the greatest city in the world. In many respects it has not been excelled to this day. It measured 14 miles from north to south, and 14 miles from east to west. It was surrounded by walls up to 350 feet high, the height of a modern 35-story building. The walls were 80 feet thick. Just imagine walls of those dimensions, extending for 56 miles, to enclose the city! There were 100 colossal gates, about one every half mile, which gave access to the city. These gates were of solid brass, swung on massive iron hinges, and secured by huge iron bars, manipulated by an ingenious system of levers. The great river Euphrates looped and flowed diagonally through the city. The walls were arched over the river at the points of entry and exit, and there were water-gates of bronze within the arches, extending down to the water and which opened to permit navigation. In daylight, a constant watch was kept from the top of the walls. From that height the watchers could detect an approaching enemy while still a great distance away. At night, all gates were securely closed and barred. The city was considered absolutely impregnable. An ancient historian has written: "Babylon was the strongest fortress in the world. Even a small force of brave men could have held it for years." It was considered siege-proof.

Within the city were other wonders of construction. There were temples of great size and unsurpassed grandeur, decorated with gold, silver, and, precious stones. In and about the temples there were hundreds of gold and silver images of gods. A solid gold image of Bel stood 50 feet high, and weighed 43,000 pounds. In addition to the royal palace of Nebuchadnezzar, the king, there were a number of other splendid palaces for the nobility of the realm.

There were many magnificent gardens and, in addition to these, the city contained one of the seven wonders of the world known as The Hanging Gardens of Babylon. This was built by Nebuchadnezzar to please his favorite wife, a princess of the Medes. It seems that she was unhappy on the level plains of Babylon and pined for the more rugged scenery of her native country with its terraced hills. To make her happy, a garden consisting of several levels, or tiers, was constructed with a base said to be over a hundred acres. Each succeeding tier, somewhat smaller than the one below it, was supported by enormous stone arches, thirty feet high, arch upon arch, forming a tapering pyramidal structure 300 feet in height. Each level was overlaid with soil, and planted with exotic flowers gathered from all over the world. Their colorful blossoms hung down and cascaded from one level to another with spectacular --effect. Visitors

from the world over came to see this magnificent garden and also to admire all the other wonders of Babylon, the greatest and most prosperous city in the world.

Now with this background we can better understand why King Nebuchadnezzar was so greatly lifted up in pride, as recorded in the 4th chapter of Daniel. The king was walking on the flat roof of his palace. All the beautiful architecture of the city lay before him. There were glittering temples and towering castles. The hanging gardens were not only resplendent in color but the delightful aroma of the blossoms hung in the air. The mighty Euphrates flowed nearby, bringing to Babylon the commerce and wealth of the world. Around all were the secure, impregnable walls. The king's heart swelled with pride as he contemplated that all these things were made solely for his own personal enjoyment and pleasure. It made him feel big and important. So he exclaimed aloud, as recorded in Daniel 4:30,31 (Moffatt):

“There lies Babylon the great, which I have built for a royal residence, by my vast power and to my noble majesty!”

His arrogance displeased God. We read further:

“The words had not left his lips, when a voice fell from heaven: `O king Nebuchadnezzar, here is your sentence: Your kingdom is taken from you! You shall be driven away from human beings, to dwell with the wild animals. You shall be forced to eat grass like cattle, and seven years shall pass over you, till you learn that the Most High reigns over the realm of men, and gives it to anyone whom he chooses.”

The sentence was immediately carried out. When, after seven years, his insanity was at last over and his reason returned, the great Nebuchadnezzar realized that he really was not as important as he thought he was.

Overconfident Belshazzar

Now let us consider our lesson which is found in the fifth chapter of Daniel. Nebuchadnezzar was dead. Nabonidus, his son, was probably also dead. Belshazzar, the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar had but recently come to the throne of Babylonia. Coveting the immense riches of Babylon, the Medes and Persians had consolidated their forces under Cyrus, the Persian, and for several months they had been besieging the city. This was the Cyrus whom the Lord, through his prophet Isaiah, declared should free his people, many of whom were captive in Babylon. See Isaiah 44:28 and 45:1.> But the inhabitants of Babylon felt quite secure behind their immense walls. They were amply provisioned for a much longer siege than it was supposed any army could enforce. They felt they

could survive indefinitely. In addition to stored commodities, there were large farms and pastures within the city walls which supplied abundant food. All the water needed was drawn from the great river which flowed through the city. So the defenders of Babylon had a contempt for the besieging army of Cyrus and were amused at his tactics. Watching from the walls, they could see the enemy troops a considerable distance away. They seemed to be digging and throwing up some sort of earth-works, near the river bend. They did not even approach close to the city to permit bombardment by the catapults on the walls. Cowards! Nothing to fear from them! Belshazzar himself probably climbed the wall to take a look. The tiny figures in the distance, grubbing in the dirt, resembled the futile workings of an anthill. He laughed, and returned to his palace, considering the siege a complete failure. He decided to celebrate the occasion by giving a great feast.

Usually when a siege is in progress, food is strictly rationed. But so confident was king Belshazzar in the strength of his capital and so contemptuous was he of Cyrus, that he ordered a sumptuous feast prepared. He, together with his princes, wives and concubines, would be host to a thousand of the nobility of Babylon. There would be food and wine in abundance, limited only by the capacity of the revelers. No need to skimp. Babylon would never be taken! Was not the city under the patronage and protection of the powerful gods whose temples were there? These were the gods who had enabled his grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar, to conquer the whole world.

The feast was prepared and served in the great ballroom of the royal palace. At an elevated table, at the end of the room, sat king Belshazzar together with his many sons, his wives, and his concubines. The room was illuminated by a huge lampstand, or chandelier, near the king's table. Below were rows and rows of tables, seating a thousand of the nobility of Babylonia with their ladies. At the king's signal, course after course of exotic foods were successively served, on enormous platters, carried from the palace kitchens by hundreds of slaves. Wine flowed freely. As each cup was emptied it was immediately refilled. Toasts were proposed and drunk to the praise of the gods of Babylon. Since there were many gods, there were many toasts. The wine began to take effect, and the toasts became more reckless. We can imagine, at this point, that a prominent noble arose, with brimming cup, and loudly said: "I drink confusion to the God of the Hebrews! Any of the gods of Babylon is greater than He!" A sudden hush fell on the assembly. Many there had a fearful respect for the God of the Hebrews. They had heard something of his wonderful works. So they felt uneasy at this gesture of defiance. The king was displeased at this dampening of the spirit of revelry. Stimulated by the wine, he arose and shouted:

“I will drink that toast! And I'll show you what I think of the God of the Hebrews! Bring here the sacred golden and silver vessels which my grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar, took from the Hebrew temple in Jerusalem, that we may drink our wine from them, to the praise of our own gods! I'll show you which gods are stronger!”

We read now from the record in Daniel 5:2-4:

“Belshazzar, while he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which his father [margin: grandfather] had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem; that the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, might drink therein. Then they brought the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of the house of God, which was at Jerusalem; and the king and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, drank in them. They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone.”

Belshazzar Profanes the Temple Vessels

This act of publicly profaning the sacred vessels of Jehovah's temple, in praise of idols, was an act of grossest blasphemy. Belshazzar's grandfather, Nebuchadnezzar, would never have done so; he knew better. He knew from experience that the God of the Hebrews was above any other god or any earthly king. We read in Daniel 2:47 that he had said to Daniel: “Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings.” He had also said, in Daniel 3:29, “I make a decree, that every people, nation, and language, which speak any thing amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, shall be cut in pieces.” Belshazzar should have listened to his grandfather and not spoken amiss of the God of the Hebrews. He had access to the records of the national decrees. In the archives was a record in Nebuchadnezzar's own hand, made after his recovery from insanity--a most powerful witness, by a most powerful king. We read in Daniel 4:34-37,

“And at the end of the days, I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me; and I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth forever; whose dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation. And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth. And none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou? Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth and his ways judgment. And those that walk in pride, he is able to abase.”

Belshazzar should have known all these things. He should have profited by his grandfather's experience. He should have taken it to heart; especially that last phrase: "Those that walk in pride, he is able to abase," which was the great lesson Nebuchadnezzar had learned. In fact, --Belshazzar did know all these things. As a prince of the blood, successor to the throne, he would be carefully instructed in the history of the empire and the acts of his forefathers. When he defied and blasphemed God, he did it willfully and deliberately.

Suddenly the light in the room dimmed as a dark shadow passed over the great chandelier. Every eye turned toward it in time to see a huge hand beginning to write something upon the wall. We now read from the Moffatt translation, starting with Daniel 5:5,

"That very hour, the fingers of a man's hand appeared, writing on the plaster of the royal palace, opposite the lampstand. The king saw the palm of the hand as it wrote. And the king's fresh color paled; his thoughts alarmed him. The muscles of his thighs relaxed, and his knees struck one against another."

Belshazzar was terrified, and his ruddy color, induced by the wine, paled. His self-assurance left him, and he was instantly sobered. He trembled violently from head to foot. The hand disappeared, but the writing remained; four words, in large characters, mysterious, and undecipherable, high upon the wall where all could see. Reflected by the light, the writing seemed to flow, as though of fire. The whole assembly was dumbfounded. There was absolute silence, until the king cried out. We continue from the record:

"The king cried aloud, for the enchanters, the diviners, and the astrologers to be brought in."

They came in haste, looked at the writing, and each in turn shook his head. The characters were strange, and not of any known language. The king was desperate. He now offered rich inducements. We read:

"The king declared to the sages of Babylon, Whoever reads this writing, and tells me the meaning of it, shall be robed in purple, and wear a golden chain round his neck, and rank as third within the realm."

But even this great incentive, of being the third in rank in the rulership of the world, was to no avail. The record says:

"But not one of all the king's sages could read the writing, or explain the meaning to the king."

Now there was pandemonium. Stark --terror gripped the whole company. The --ladies fled. Some of them sought out the queen-mother and told her what was going on. She had not attended the feast, but even from her apartment she could hear the frightened

cries of the feasters. She quickly went to the banquet-hall. As she entered the noise subsided and they made way for her to approach the king. By this time the king was a pitiful object. Pale as death, and trembling violently, he could scarcely stand upon his feet. His nobles were not much better. We now continue from the record:

“Then, at the cries of the king, and his lords, the queen-mother came into the banqueting-hall. The queen-mother said: O king, live forever! Let not your thoughts alarm you; let not your colour go. Within your realm there is a man in whom is the spirit of the gods divine. In the days of your grandfather, light and learning and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods themselves, were found in him, so that King Nebu--chadnezzar, your [grand]father, himself made him master of the magicians, enchanters, --diviners, and astrologers; since rare ability, knowledge, learning, the power of interpreting dreams, and solving riddles, and reversing spells, were found in this very Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar. Let Daniel be called, and he will explain the meaning of this.”

Daniel Interprets the Writing

The prophet Daniel was at this time about 90 years of age. He was probably still in the government service, although not in the exalted capacity of rulership he occupied under Nebuchadnezzar. He doubtless resided in one of the palace buildings nearby. A messenger of the king was hastily dispatched to fetch Daniel. But I think an angel of the Lord got there first and Daniel knew every aspect of the situation. He knew of the profaning of the temple vessels, the insult to God, the --appearance of the hand, the mysterious writing, and the meaning of the words. So he was not surprised when the messenger of the king knocked at his door. Continuing the narrative, we read:

“Then Daniel was brought into the king's presence. The king said to Daniel, so you are the Daniel belonging to the exiles of Judah, whom the king, my [grand]father, brought from Judah? I hear that the spirit of the gods themselves is in you, and that light and learning and rare wisdom are to be found in you. Well now, the sages, the enchanters, have been brought into my presence to read this writing, and to let me hear the meaning of it, but they could not explain its meaning. However, I hear that you can explain things and reverse spells. Now, if you can read this writing, and let me hear the meaning of it, you shall wear a purple robe, and a golden chain around your neck, and you shall rank third within the realm.”

This offer did not impress Daniel very much. He had been a ruler before ever this king was born. He had once been set over the whole province of Babylon. He knew how to abound, and how to be abased. He knew the futility of earthly glory. At his age, the prospect

of another exaltation in the kingdom of Babylon held no special appeal. He had no fear of this king who was so inferior in every way to his grandfather, the great Nebuchadnezzar. What he was about to do he would do as the prophet of the Most High God and not for earthly favors. So he said to the king, somewhat disdainfully:

“Keep your gifts for yourself, and give your rewards to someone else! However, I will read the writing to the king, and let him hear the meaning of it. O king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar, your [grand]father, the realm, with its greatness and glory and majesty. And, owing to the greatness he bestowed upon him, all races, nations, and folk of every tongue, trembled in fear of him; for he killed whom he pleased, and spared whom he pleased; he raised whom he pleased, and put down whom he pleased. But when his mind became proud; when his spirit became defiant; so that he bore himself haughtily; he was deposed from his royal throne, and deprived of his glory. He was driven away from human beings, his mind was made like the mind of an animal, and his dwelling was with the beasts. He ate grass like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dews of heaven, till he learned that the Most High God rules over the realms of men, and that he sets over it anyone whom he chooses. Yet you, his son, O Belshazzar, have not humbled yourself, though you knew all this. You uplifted yourself against the Lord of heaven, by having the vessels of his house brought in before you, and from them you, and your lords, your consorts, and your concubines, have drunk wine, praising the gods of silver and gold, bronze, iron, wood and stone, which can neither see nor hear nor understand. You have not glorified the God who holds in his power your breath of life, and all your destiny. Hence the palm of the hand was sent from his presence, and this writing was inscribed.”

The king slumped in his chair, and all the nobles stood, fascinated, as Daniel faced the wall and pointed to the strange writing:

“This is the inscription: **MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PERES**. The meaning of it is: **MENE** (numbered); God has numbered the days of your kingdom, and ended it. **TEKEL** (weighed); you are weighed in the scales, and found wanting. **PERES** (divided); your kingdom is divided up and assigned to the Medes and the Persians.”

Great Babylon Under Siege

In the meantime, when the feast was in progress, tremendous events were taking place outside the city. It was dark and the watch on the wall had been withdrawn. The city being under siege, all gates were closed and barred, including the river gates. But now the army of Cyrus had finished its task. What was thought to be the digging of futile earthworks a distance from the city was, in reality, the

excavation of a great trench connecting the two lateral sides of the loop in the river Eu--phrates which flowed through Babylon. About the time the handwriting appeared on the wall of the banquet-room, the river was diverted and began flowing through its new channel. The loop passing through Babylon dried up. The great bronze water gates, so tightly closed, now hung forty feet in the air above a broad highway which was the river bed. Over the dry river bed the armies of Cyrus now marched into the supposedly impregnable Babylon. Rank upon rank, thousands upon thousands of men. The token guard of the city, taken completely by surprise, was quickly overpowered, and Cyrus himself, accompanied by Darius, entered the royal palace with drawn sword. Just as Daniel had finished his speech to the king, and had been given the purple robe and the golden chain, and Belshazzar had --proclaimed him third in rank within the realm, Cyrus strode up the aisle of the great banquet-hall, up to the king's table, and thrust Belshazzar through with his sword. He then proclaimed Darius, king of Babylonia.

I think that promotion of Daniel was the shortest promotion on record. He was third in rank in the kingdom of Babylonia for about five minutes. The account ends with the words:

“That very night Belshazzar, the Chaldean king, was killed, and Darius the Mede received the kingdom, he being about sixty-two years of age.”

The second universal empire of Nebu--chadnezzar's vision had been inaugurated. The breast and arms of silver had succeeded the head of gold. The Medes and Persians now ruled the world.

The Plague of Pride

There are numerous lessons for us in this account of Belshazzar's feast, and the fall of Babylon, but the principal lesson is regarding pride. As Daniel told Belshazzar: You “have not humbled yourself. . . . You uplifted yourself against the Lord of heaven. . . . You have not glorified God who holds in his power your breath of life, and all your destiny.” We read in Proverbs 16:18, “Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.” This is what happened to Belshazzar. Again we read in Proverbs 16:5, “Every one that is proud in heart, is an abomination to the Lord.” Pride in any form and in anybody is abominable. So let us consider the nature of pride and its consequences.

First, there are the various forms of pride found in the world and which constitute the spirit of the world. The Lord's people should be far removed from such forms of pride. For example, some in the world consider themselves superior to --others in every way, as though they were --especially created out of some preferable “dust of

the earth.” They boast of their noble ancestry and inherited qualities. But they had better not look too far back. Mark Twain tells how he began tracing his ancestry. When he got back to a horse-thief, he quit.

Some in the world glory in inherited wealth. But many have found that it is not wise to boast of such riches since an investigation might reveal that many fortunes were founded on piracy, oppression, slavery and other forms of exploitation.

Pride of education is not appropriate either. What is there to be proud of? It only means that you have absorbed what others have found out or written about. Besides, the “wisdom of the world” is wholly unreliable. History has been tampered with, war and violence are glorified, ethics are distorted, philosophy is tainted, and even scientific books of only a few years ago, are obsolete in the face of rapidly increasing knowledge.

Pride in one's beauty or physical superiority is certainly not justified. Such qualities are inherited. The parent, rather than the child, might have some reason for pride.

Pride as respects clothing or adornments is also foolish. The maker of the fabrics, or the ornaments, might have some reason for pride in his handiwork, but surely not the wearer. He is merely appropriating to himself the skill and --labor of others.

Lessons for the Lord's People

But our lesson here is not for the world, but for the Lord's people. The scriptures are given for our admonition. The pride here warned against is spiritual pride. Whereas in the world pride is merely foolish, to the New Creature it is extremely dangerous. It can result in the loss of our calling and election because if we exalt ourselves with pride, as Nebuchadnezzar did, and as Belshazzar did, we place ourselves under the condemnation of Luke 18:14: “Every one that exalteth himself shall be abased.” This eliminates our exaltation to glory, honor and immortality. So we are exhorted in 1 Peter 5:6, “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.” Thus pride is a spiritual sickness which, unless curbed, can lead to the loss of everything. Because James 4:6 says, “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.” What chance do you have if God himself resists you? So let us now consider some of the many forms that spiritual pride can assume, in order that we may shun it like the plague it is.

First there is a general feeling of pride which is most likely to overtake those who are longest in the narrow way and most prominent in the Lord's service. It is insidious because it develops very gradually and imperceptibly. It finally manifests itself in a

feeling of superiority, of being better than others. When attending Berean studies, one afflicted with such pride hears no proper answer to any of the questions except his own. In testimony meetings he hears no really helpful testimony except his own. How halting and ineffective the others are!--to him. He never sees an elder in the chair who knows how to lead a meeting. He considers his discourses much deeper and more profound than those of other speakers, whose best efforts he despises.

If at election time he receives less votes than others, his feelings are hurt. He fancies himself a martyr and blames certain "enemies" in the class. This is an almost hopeless condition. It is difficult to reverse when so firmly established. Only a severe chastening of the Lord can correct it. The only safe way is to prevent it. How can this be done? The slightest tendency toward superiority should be noted and curbed. If you begin to think you are somebody great and have a special standing before the Lord, above your brethren, earnestly consider 1 Corinthians 10:12, "Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall." If you feel smug and conceited, thinking your abilities, which are really so imperfect in the Lord's sight, are better than those of your brethren, take heed to Philippians 2:3, "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind, let each esteem others better than themselves." Or, as the Revised Version renders it: "Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves."

Some exhibit pride by being envious of those who are in more prominent positions in the public promulgation of the truth, thinking that they could do better, and therefore they should occupy those positions. Such should consider 1 Corinthians 12:18, "But now hath God set the members, every one of them, in the body, as it hath pleased him." Also Romans 12:10, "Be kindly affectioned one to another, with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another."

Then there is a form of spiritual pride which is particularly insidious because it stems from the beauty of the truth itself. God's divine plan of the ages is magnificent beyond compare. When one first gets a glimpse of it he is dazzled by its sheer grandeur. He cannot get too much of it. He delights and revels in its radiance--this marvelous revelation of an Almighty God of love, this great salvation, this life from the dead, this perfect solution to every problem of humankind! To know and accept the truth is the supreme experience of a lifetime. The more one delves into it, the more of its luster appears. It is simple, yet glorious. It is absolutely flawless, and there are so few in the world who appreciate it.

Some at this point are susceptible to the virus of pride. He begins to think that he must be a cut above his fellowman to be granted this insight into the Lord's plan, that he must have some natural superi--

ority of mind, or nobility of character, which makes him worthy of it. He begins to feel important, that he is somebody great, God's special favorite. This condition is bad enough but the next step such a one may take is particularly deplorable. --Although he knows that God revealed the beauties of the divine plan to him through the agency of a faithful and wise servant, he comes to believe that he has a clearer grasp of the truth than "that servant" did; that he can use better words to more aptly express the correct thought. Thus he elevates himself and equates his own mind with that of the greatest Bible Student of modern times--God's special instrument for the restoration of "that faith once delivered to the saints." He fancies that he can improve the truth. He begins to see "new light." He finally becomes so swollen with spiritual pride that he believes he has special revelations from the Lord, that he has been appointed God's special instrument to promulgate some great doctrine, to discover some new interpretation of scripture, or some new type. He gets revelations all right, but they are not from the Lord. If he cannot avoid it, he may mention or quote Bro. Russell's writings, but when he does so, it is usually with some disparaging remark that "he disagrees with Bro. Russell in a good many things," or that "he follows no man, but goes to the Word of God directly."

Do you see how terribly destructive spiritual pride can be, how it can destroy the New Creature? Let us be on the alert to quench the slightest beginning of pride. Let us continually keep in mind that it was not because of any value or worth on our part that we were called and given a knowledge of the truth. It was a wholly unmerited favor, a gift of God, entirely undeserved. 1 Corinthians 1:26-29 describes the Lord's people as "Not many wise . . . not many mighty, nor many noble. But the foolish . . . the weak . . . the base . . . the despised . . . things that are not; that no flesh should glory in his presence." We can take credit for absolutely nothing. Everything we have or are is a gift. We read in 1 Corinthians 4:7, "What hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now, if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory?" Also James 1:17, "Every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights." And we cannot even be proud of any service of the Lord we are privileged to perform. It is the Lord who uses us, and not we ourselves. We are tools in his hand. So what do we have to boast of? As Isaiah 10:15 expresses it,

"Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? Or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it? As if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up; or as if the staff should lift up itself, as if it were not wood."

As Luke 17:10 points out, “We are unprofitable servants.” So let us remember the lesson Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar so painfully learned, that “those who walk in pride, he is able to abase.”-- Daniel 4:37

Other Lessons from This Experience

As the Hebrews were taken captive to literal Babylon and were imprisoned there, the Lord's true people have been captive in mystic Babylon. At the end of the Gospel age, the fall or rejection of Babylon is announced and the Lord calls his people out from that system saying in Revelation 18:4, “Come out of her, my people.” As literal Babylon was immensely wealthy, and dominated the world, Christendom, until recently, has done so: subjugating and exploiting heathen nations. But now the controlling role of Christendom is -- being effectively challenged by powerful Communist governments.

As literal Babylon was considered impregnable, the Papacy, an important segment of mystic Babylon, falsely appropriates to itself the promise of Matthew 16:18 that, “The gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

Literal Babylon's feeling of safety followed by its quick fall reminds us of 1 Thessalonians 5:3, “For when they shall say, peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.” This describes the present time when the kingdoms of this world are giving way to the rule of Christ.

As the power and prosperity of literal Babylon depended upon the commerce brought to it by the river Euphrates, and the city fell by the diverting of its waters, so mystic Babylon will collapse because the people of the earth will withdraw their support. Thus the prophecy of Revelation 16:12 will be fulfilled: “And the . . . angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared.” Since the east is the place of sun rising, the “kings of the east” are those who accompany the “Sun of Righteousness,” Christ Jesus, the new king of earth.

The lesson Nebuchadnezzar learned was “that the Most High reigns over the realm of men, and gives it to anyone whom he chooses.” Daniel 4:17 shows that God has always been in supreme control of the earth. He has not abdicated his rulership; not for a moment. Satan is a usurper with no real right to rule. His rule has been merely permissive. In due time the dominion of earth is completely wrested from him and given to Christ, God's choice. In Ezekiel 21:27 Christ is called the one “whose right it is; and I will give it him.”

Nebuchadnezzar's statement in Daniel 4:37--"Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and exalt and honour the king of Heaven; for all he does is right, his dealings are all just, and haughty men he is able to abase" --will be the heart sentiments of restored humankind at the end of the Millennial Age.

Belshazzar's contempt for the besieging Cyrus, who was appointed by God to conquer Babylon and who typified the Christ, the anointed King, reminds us of Psalms 2:1-6, prophetic of the change of earth's rule:

"Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed, . . . let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion."

The eating and drinking of Belshazzar's feast at the time of the impending fall of literal Babylon, brings to mind the prophecy of Luke 17:26,27,

"As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all."

At the feast their praising of the gods of gold and of silver reminds us of the false standards of this present evil world--the praise of success, the feverish pursuit of prosperity, the worship of mammon. With the Lord's people it is different. We heed Jesus' words, given in Luke 12:33,34 (Diaglott),

"Make for yourselves purses which grow not old; an unfailing treasure in the heavens; where no thief approaches, nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will also be."

The rulers of literal Babylon drank wine from the sacred vessels of the Lord. The leaders of mystic Babylon have misused the Holy Bible. They have derived false, God-dishonoring doctrines from it and have been drunken by them, and made others drunk. As Revelation 17:2 expresses it: "The inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication."

At the feast a hand appeared and wrote upon the wall, against the lampstand, and the rulers of literal Babylon were frightened, so much that their knees knocked together. We read in Luke 21:25,26,

"And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea

and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth; for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.”

As the handwriting on the wall immediately preceded the taking of the city, this might indicate that just before the final calamity, earth's rulers will have a definite and frightening indication of it.

The message from God was: “Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.” God weighs and judges nations, and their leaders. He has found that none measure up to the standard of the kingdom and that all must be removed.

We are impressed by the fearlessness of Daniel in interpreting the writing on the wall. This clearly indicates that we should faithfully witness to the kingdom without any fear of the consequences.

As Cyrus slew Belshazzar and took over the government of the world, Christ, the antitypical Cyrus, removes Satan and his government from the scene and inaugurates the Messianic phase of the Kingdom in power and glory.

Daniel was robed in purple, a golden chain was hung around his neck, and he ranked third in the Kingdom. The Church, pictured by Daniel, will be clothed with the royal robe of rulership, given the golden chain of the divine nature, and rank third, after the Heavenly Father and Christ Jesus. Let us strive to be of that faithful Daniel class!

Bible Prophecies Being Fulfilled Today

DO YOU realize the Bible, which was written thousands of years ago, foretells events that are happening today, this very hour? This is possible because the Bible was written by holy men of God who inscribed in it what God wanted to reveal to mankind. Inspired by God, who knows the end from the beginning, these prophets were unanimous in their prediction that the time would come when God would establish a kingdom on earth for the purpose of restoring mankind to life, health, and happiness. This happy time is referred to as “the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all the holy prophets since the world began.” (Acts 3:21)

When Jesus was on earth, he confirmed these ancient prophecies. He told his disciples that he would be crucified, be raised from the dead, go to his heavenly Father, then return at the end of the age to set up the long-promised kingdom of blessing upon the earth. His disciples naturally wanted to know when this would happen. They asked Jesus, “Tell us, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of thy presence and of the end of the age?” (Matthew 24:3) In response, Jesus gave them many signs by which his followers living at the time of the event would recognize that it had come. He said:

“For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes in diverse places. All these are the beginning of sorrows.”

Then, in the same chapter, he gave a prophecy that applies to no other time than the present time and the immediate future. It reads:

“For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time; no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved.”

This prophecy could apply only to the present day because there has never before been a time since the flood when it was possible for all flesh to be destroyed. Plagues have swept the earth, destroying millions, but the human race survived and increased. World wars, fought in the conventional manner, killed millions, but humanity lived on. But with total nuclear warfare and its poisoning of the air which we and all animals must breathe--now, for the first time in history, complete and absolute destruction of the human race is threatened. Now we realize the import of this prophecy, written two thousand years ago: “Except those days should be shortened, there

should no flesh be saved.” But the Bible assures us that those days shall be shortened, and that the human race will not be destroyed.

The threat of atomic warfare is a cause of great anxiety and perplexity in the world today. Entire nations are in fear and distress. This present situation in the world is in fulfillment of another prophecy of Jesus:

“And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring. Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth.”--Luke 21:25,26

But if men only realized that these present calamities are positive signs of the nearness of God's glorious and benevolent kingdom under Christ, they would rejoice instead of fearing. The Bible tells us that there must first be a time of trouble before the kingdom of peace and righteousness takes full control to bless the world.

The very fact that we understand these prophecies is further evidence that we are living in the days known as “the time of the end.” When the prophet Daniel was given certain prophecies regarding this time, he did not understand them. He wanted so much to understand. We read his words:

“I heard, but I understood not. Then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things? And he said, Go thy way, Daniel; for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.”--Daniel 12:8,9

The Lord's words to Daniel tell us just how “the time of the end” can be identified when it has come:

“But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even **to the time of the end**. Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.”--Daniel 12:4

Do we not see these conditions fulfilled today? Has there ever been a time when there was so much rapid and world-wide travel? We not only have supersonic travel by jet plane within the earth's atmosphere, but also travel in outer space at fantastically higher speeds. Whereas in Daniel's day travel between countries took months, it now takes only a few hours. Beside fast railroad trains, there are great highways over which high-speed automobiles constantly run to and fro. There is a prophecy in Nahum that describes present traffic conditions with astonishing accuracy:

“The chariots shall rage in the streets; they shall jostle one another in the broad ways; they shall seem like torches; they shall run like the lightnings.”--Nahum 2:4



This was written more than twenty-five centuries ago! Daniel's prophecy regarding the increase of knowledge has also been spectacularly fulfilled. This is one of the most amazing phenomena of modern times. Man has existed on earth for six thousand years, yet practically all the modern conveniences and scientific achievements we today take so much for granted were developed within the past one hundred and fifty years. Within this comparatively short period of time there has been a sudden awakening, and a tremendous surge of knowledge. One scientist has estimated that man's total body of knowledge doubled between 1775 and 1900; doubled again between 1900 and 1950; again between

1950 and 1958; and is now doubling every five years! It is hard to grasp such a rapid rate of acceleration. This is another proof that we are now living in what is termed “the time of the end.”

Since, as we have seen, the prophetic descriptions given in the Bible are so amazingly accurate of present conditions, can we not reasonably expect the Bible prophecies concerning the future to be equally accurate? That would be the only logical conclusion to draw. What does the Bible tell us will come to pass in the near future? Bearing in mind that, in Bible usage, a “mountain” represents a kingdom, we read:

“And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow into it. And many people shall go and say, come ye, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the Law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”--Isaiah 2:2-4

Because we are now living in the period called “**the last days**,” this prophecy is in the process of fulfillment. In symbolic --language, it describes God's kingdom on earth under Christ, the kingdom for which we have for so longed prayed: “Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

In that kingdom there will not only be peace, but there will be life, life in its fullness, a resurrection to life, everlasting life in perfect health, to all the willing and obedient. This was secured by Jesus' death on the cross as a ransom for Adam and his race. Life is the desire of all nations, and we read, “I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come.” (Haggai 2:7) The shaking is now going on and will soon be followed by blessing. The prophet Daniel said:

“At that time shall Michael stand up; the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people . . . and many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life.”-- Daniel 12:1,2

Gods' kingdom will soon be revealed to all mankind. The great prince, Christ Jesus, is already invisibly present. When the current time of trouble is finished, the kingdom of God will take complete control of earth's affairs and there shall be a resurrection of the dead.

I know it is hard to conceive of a world in which men will no longer die. Nevertheless such a time is really coming and is near at hand.

We read:

“And I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new.”--Revelation 21:3-5

Christ Has Returned

THERE has always been great interest among Christians regarding the second coming of Jesus Christ. He first came to earth nearly two thousand years ago to sacrifice his perfect human life as a ransom price for the forfeited life of Adam and his race. Then he was raised from the dead a glorious spirit being and returned to God in heaven, having purchased the human race. He promised to return in great power as king of earth, to reign for a thousand years, to redeem all mankind from sin and death, and to restore them to human perfection and eternal life. This objective is termed, "The redemption of the purchased possession." (Ephesians 1:14)

Every prophet of God spoke of this wonderful event:

"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord. And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you; whom the heaven must retain until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began."--Acts 3:19-21

Today we are proclaiming a most joyful message: Christ has returned to earth! He is here, invisibly present, and is now setting up his kingdom to bring restitution to the world.

The Bible teaches that when Christ first returns, only a few will know about it, only those who are watching and who recognize the signs of his presence. Jesus himself said, "Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth." (Revelation 16:15) When Jesus told his disciples that he would be crucified, raised from the dead, ascend to heaven, and then, at the end of the age, return invisibly to earth to establish his kingdom, they wanted to be sure they would recognize such an important event when it occurred. So they asked him, "What shall be the sign of thy presence, and of the end of the age?" (Matthew 24:3) In reply Jesus gave them many signs that would be evidences of his invisible second presence. These signs are everywhere around us today and prove that Christ has returned.

Time will not permit us to cite them all, but let us consider some of them. Although there have always been wars between nations, in Matthew chapter 24 Jesus refers to a scope and intensity of conflict such as the world has never before experienced. It refers to extremely destructive world wars involving every nation of the world:

"For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time; no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved."--Matthew 24:21,22

Since Christ's return, and as an evidence of it, there have already been two world wars. A third one, using atomic weapons, is threatened. Such a war could, by poisoning the atmosphere, destroy every living thing upon the earth. This particular set of circumstances has never before existed and is a sure sign of the times. This is confirmed by Daniel:

“And at that time shall Michael [Christ] stand up [return]; the great Prince [ruler] which standeth for the children of thy people; and there shall be a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation, even to that same time.”--Daniel 12:1

The very fact that all nations are now vainly striving to bring peace upon the earth is another sign of Christ's invisible thief-like presence. The Bible says that at the time of Christ's presence, the cry for “peace and safety” would be the loudest. Thus we read the apostle's words to the faithful, watching Christians who recognize the signs:

“For yourselves know perfectly that the day [presence] of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep as do others; but let us watch and be sober.”--1 Thessalonians 5:2-6

Let us take the apostle's advice and not be as others who ignore the signs of Christ's presence.

The Sign of the Fig Tree

Another important sign Jesus gave his disciples, which we see fulfilled today, concerns the fig tree:

“Now learn a parable of the fig tree. When his branch is yet tender and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh.”--Matthew 24:32

This sign becomes beautifully clear when it is realized that the fig tree is a symbol of the nation of Israel. Israel was at one time the only nation recognized by God. He said, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth.” (Amos 3:2) Then they displeased God and were cast off from favor. They were banished from their own land and scattered among the nations. Thus we read:

“Therefore will I cast you out of this land into a land that ye know not, neither ye nor your fathers; and there shall ye serve other gods day and night, where I will not show you favor.”--Jeremiah 16:13

Thus the symbolic fig tree withered. But God promised to restore Israel to his favor, as is written in the next two verses:

“Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that it shall no more be said, The Lord liveth that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; but the Lord liveth that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands whither he had driven them. And I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers.”

This is confirmed by Ezekiel:

“For I will take you from among the nations, and gather you out of all the countries, and will bring you into your own land.”--Ezekiel 36:24

This is something that is happening --before our eyes and it is thrilling to see. Israel is once again a nation and is being built up in her own land. The fig tree, which was withered and dry for so many centuries, is now budding. It is a sure sign of the end of the age and the return and presence of Christ. We are in the beginning of the time referred to in Acts:

“After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up.”--Acts 15:16

The restoration of Israel is an especially significant sign because the Bible teaches that the operation of the kingdom of God on earth, whereby all nations will be blessed, will commence with that nation.

Another important sign that all can recognize today was given by Jesus:

“Upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring.”--Luke 21:25,26

“The sea and the waves roaring” picture the discontented and restless masses of humanity rising up in protest and clamoring for their rights. This is causing distress in every nation to an extent never before experienced in history. Then we read: “Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth.”

Men's hearts are now failing because of several fearful possibilities facing the world for the first time in history, each of which threatens to destroy the human race. There is the threat of an atomic holocaust. There is the ever-increasing pollution of the air, water and earth, whereby people sicken and die. There is the population -- explosion, bringing world-wide famine. There is developing a wide-spread anarchy, threatening to overthrow law and order. Fearful as they are, these are signs that Christ is present and that God's kingdom is about to assume complete power over the earth, to destroy evil, and bring life, health and happiness to all mankind.

Claiming Prayer

“Ye have not, because ye ask not. Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss.”--James 4:2,3

THE healing miracles performed by Jesus attracted thousands and thousands of people and he preached the gospel of the kingdom to them. (Matthew 4:23) This was his method of quickly gaining a large audience. His time was short--he had a brief 3 1/2 years in which to accomplish his ministry. He did not have time to go to them individually; they must come to him--and they did, in very large numbers.

“And there followed him great multitudes of people, from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judea, and from beyond Jordan.”--Matthew 4:25

And he healed them. Matthew 12:15 says he healed them all. When he saw their sufferings and distresses, their lost and aimless condition, his heart was filled with pity for them.

“But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.”--Matthew 9:36

He gave freely of his vitality and his --divine gift of healing. But even a perfect human organism has its limitations. Rest and recuperation are needed even by a perfect man. So at times he simply had to withdraw himself from the multitude no matter how much he pitied them and how much they needed him.

The Importance of Prayer

There were other reasons beside the need for rest to leave the multitude. Most important of all he felt the absolute necessity of regularly communing with his heavenly father. To speak with his father was more important than food or rest to him. As it is written of him, “I have esteemed the words of his mouth **more than my necessary food.**“ (Job 23:12) Luke reports an occasion when “he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.” (Luke 6:12)

And another reason to withdraw himself periodically from the multitudes was to be alone with his disciples and teach them. The teaching of his disciples was very different from the preaching to the multitudes. He had things to tell them that the multitudes would not be permitted to understand, that they could not understand. He told his disciples plainly:

“It is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven; but to them, it is not given.”--Matthew 13:11

But as a practical matter, how did he manage to escape from the multitude? They surrounded him, they cried and clamored for his healing touch. There were endless numbers of them. If he simply walked off with his disciples following, the multitude would follow too. He would never get away. In fact there is an occasion when Jesus wanted to be alone with his disciples, so someone suggested they take a boat, sail across the lake, and land in a quiet spot where Jesus could talk to them privately. But what happened?

“And they departed into a desert place by ship privately; and the people saw them departing, and many knew him, and ran afoot thither out of all the cities; and outwent them, and came together unto him. And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people.”--Mark 6:32-34

That didn't work as they had expected. So what did Jesus do? Reading between the lines, I think it was something like this: Jesus, surrounded by the multitude, would signal just one of his disciples to follow him. Perhaps a nod of the head would suffice. Then, hiding his face, he would quickly mingle with the crowd, and work his way free from the multitude. Before the people realized he was missing, he and the one disciple would be well on their way up the mountain. On the mountain they would find an isolated spot where Jesus could sit down and rest. Then the one disciple would return down the mountain and tell the other disciples where Jesus' secret haven was. Unobtrusively, by twos and threes, and without attracting the attention of the multitudes, they would come to Jesus. This method seems to be suggest--ed in these words:

“And he goeth up into a mountain, and calleth unto him whom he would, and they came to him.”--Mark 3:13

It is also suggested in the occasion we are now considering:

“And, seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain; and when he was set, his disciples came unto him. And he opened his mouth, and taught them.”--Matthew 5:1,2

Alone on the Mountain

The noisy multitudes were gone. The heartrending cries of suffering and the tearful pleas to be healed were left behind for awhile. Instead there was the peaceful quietness of the mountain top. The clean, cool mountain air was so refreshing after the dust, dirt and heat of the plains. --Jesus had taken special pains to be alone with his disciples on this occasion. The multitude could wait. What he had to say was for his disciples' ears alone. He wanted to impart to them some of “the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven,” which the multitude would not understand and could not understand. It would be foolishness to them.

“And he opened his mouth, and taught them,” preaching the most important sermon in history, which came to be called “The Sermon on the Mount.” He opened his remarks by the declarations of blessedness we know as “The Beatitudes.” It is well the multitudes were not there because it would have been utter foolishness to them:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit”--is it not more blessed to be rich?

“Blessed are they that mourn”--is not happiness more to be desired?

“Blessed are the meek”--everybody knows it is the aggressive ones that get the good things of the world!

“Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst”--the getting of sufficient food is our greatest problem; and he calls hunger blessed!

“Blessed are the merciful”--it's only good business to press your advantage, when you have it!

“Blessed are the pure in heart”--well, now, if you don't have a little healthy suspicion, you'll be taken advantage of!

“Blessed are the peacemakers”--tell my enemy that! If he stops fighting, I will!

“Blessed are they which are persecut--ed”--oh come now; is the iron rule of Rome a blessed thing?

“Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely”--is not a good reputation rather to be desired?

Now do you see why he wanted to be alone with his disciples? He had incredible and astonishing things to tell them, real gems of truth, holy things that the world could not appreciate, that they would ridicule and reject. He wanted to use plain speech to his disciples. If the multitude had been present, he would have had to express himself in parables:

“Therefore speak I unto them in parables; because they, seeing, see not; and hearing, they hear not; neither do they understand.”--
Matthew 13:13

In the course of his Sermon on the Mount, he also cautioned his disciples along this line:

“Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine; lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.”--Matthew 7:6

Applying this lesson to ourselves, it is to the hearing ear and the sympathetic mind that our message is directed, to those whom the Lord has drawn and is drawing. As Proverbs expresses it:

“The hearing ear, and the seeing eye; the Lord hath made even both of them.”--Proverbs 20:12

Our message makes no sense to others. They see no beauty in it, it has no appeal. It appears as foolishness.

Here is the particular part of the Sermon on the Mount we are going to consider:

“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened to you; for everyone that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom, if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give a serpent? If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? Therefore, all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so, to them; for this is the law and the prophets.”--Matthew 7:7-12

Words for His Followers

This is another of those astonishing utterances of Jesus that the world cannot understand. “Ask, and it shall be given you . . . for everyone that asketh, receiveth.” The world hears this and responds:

“This is certainly contrary to our --experience. In fact, you get hardly anything you ask for. We have asked for health, and life, and gotten sickness and death. We have asked for food, and millions have starved to death. We have asked for wise and just rulers, and been saddled with tyranny. We have asked for peace and gotten war.”

Then Jesus made the statement, “Seek and ye shall find . . . for he that seeketh, findeth.” The poor world, naturally endowed with the propensity of veneration and worship, have sought for the true and loving God but have not found him. They have groped blindly and felt after him without success. We read, “That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him.” (Acts 17:27) Seeking safety and security, the nations of the world have united into the United Nations Organization hoping that “he that seeketh, findeth.” But the fearful threat of atomic destruction hangs over all.

“Knock, and it shall be opened unto you . . . and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.” Do the desired doors of opportunity, attainment, and fortune open upon demand to those of the world? We know that they do not. The world is full of disappointment, discouragement and disillusionment. Instead of doors opening, they slam in one's face.

To the world these statements of Jesus make no sense even today. They are piously read in the churches, but are not taken very seriously. They are considered beautiful prose, but impractical and unworkable. So it is a good thing the multitude was not there that day on the mount when Jesus spoke these words. They would have scoffed.

“The learned Rabbi means well, but he doesn't have much practical experience in the ways of the world. If you want something, grab it; don't ask, or seek, or knock, or pussyfoot around. Possession is nine-tenths of the law. Just go after it and get it! It's dog-eat-dog in this world.”

Yes, that's the way it is in Satan's world. That's why the Lord's people are as “strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” (Hebrews 11:13)

“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you, for everyone that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.”

These are indeed beautiful words. They are among the most sublime, meaningful and vital words that Jesus ever uttered. They are comforting, reassuring and restful to the soul. Yet there are some, even among the Lord's people, who are actually discouraged by these words! Why? Because they have tried them and have failed. They have asked, and not received; they have sought, and not found; they have knocked, and it has not been opened. Then that serpent Satan has been quick to suggest to them: “You are obviously not one of the Lord's called-out ones. If you were, his promise would not fail you.” So they stop asking, they stop claiming this exceeding great and precious promise. Instead of bread, they accept a stone; instead of fish, a serpent.

But why does the promise seem to have failed them? We read, “There hath not failed one word of all his good promise.” (1 Kings 8:56) What is wrong? Let us consider some of the possibilities that can be wrong so we can correct them and be able to receive all the lavish blessings the Lord has promised to them that love him. There are several necessary ingredients to the successful claiming of this promise. These are clearly given in the scriptures for our information and benefit. The Lord wants us to avail ourselves of this promise and has supplied all the information necessary for us to do so.

The Proper Way to Ask

Two of the requirements are found in our text: “Ye have not, because ye ask not; ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss.” (James 4:2) One must ask for God's blessings and there is a prescribed way of asking. We also see that there are things we should not ask for, which are amiss to ask for.

An important requirement is faith:

“Without faith, it is impossible to please God.” --Hebrews 11:6

There are specific things mentioned that we may ask for--we are invited to ask for--with the full assurance, that if we do so in the prescribed manner, we shall receive them. There is also the necessity for persistence and perseverance in asking for the proper things. But this is the primary requirement mentioned by Jesus:

“**If** ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.”--John 15:7

There are conditions in this statement: “**If** ye abide in me.” Those who abide in Christ must have gotten into him by faith, by repentance, and by consecration. To abide in him means that faith will abide, the repentance for sin and opposition to it will abide, and the consecration to the Lord and his service will abide and be manifest.

The other condition is also important: “**If** my words abide in you.” The Lord here associates himself and his word (the scriptures) in the minds, in the hearts, in the lives, in the prayers of all who are truly his. The word of God should be a part of our very being. If it is, it will have a tremendous power over us, leading us safely, keeping us secure whether asleep or awake, lighting our way, and instructing us continually along the path of life. This is what we read about God's words:

“Bind them continually upon thine heart, and tie them about thy neck. When thou goest, it shall lead thee; and when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and when thou wakest, it shall talk with thee; for the commandment is a lamp, and the law is a light; and reproofs of instruction, are the way of life.”--Proverbs 6:21-23,

If the word of God becomes part of us, we can say it is “in him we live, and move and have our being.” (Acts 17:28)

Let us analyze the various requirements for claiming this most precious promise: “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.” James says, “Ye have not, because ye ask not.” But some might say:

“Why should I ask? Did not Jesus say your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask him? (Matthew 6:8) If I am his child, and he knows what I need, why should I have to ask?”

Of course your heavenly Father knows what you need. He knows everything, but he still wants you to ask. There is no better proof than that in the next five verses, after Jesus said “your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask him,” he taught his disciples how to pray. In that prayer he included the petition:

“Give us this day our daily bread.” We are told to ask because when we ask, our minds are prepared to receive. God will not give us his precious things until we are prepared to receive and appreciate them. If we say, “There is no use for me to ask for that,” and then do not ask, of course we will not get it. He wants to hear our requests; it means something to him. What we want and long to have, what we consider important, indicates the condition of our hearts. That is what he wants to see. We can't tell him what our needs are; we don't really know ourselves. We don't know what's good for us. But our heavenly Father knows. Jesus said in this same sermon: “Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things [the material things].” Then he said:

“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.”--Matthew 6:32,33

Jesus' Formula for Material Things

Some feel we should not ask for material things, that it is sinful to do so. Now here is a perfectly safe way, an approved way, a formula given by Jesus himself, describing how we might obtain our necessary material needs: “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.” The Diaglott says “SUPERADDED to you.” That sounds like an abundance, all you really need. It is a positive statement. You can positively claim this promise if the kingdom of God and his righteousness is first and foremost in your life. Although we cannot and need not tell the Lord what our needs are, we can tell him (and he loves to hear) our heart intentions, our sincere desires, our longings and aspirations.

“Be careful for nothing [be not anxious about anything], but in everything, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.”--Philippians 4:6

Our asking must be done in the proper manner, in the prescribed way. Jesus said:

“I am the way . . . And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do; that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it.”-- John 14:6,13,14

Unless we have asked in this way, we have not asked properly.

After saying, “Ye have not, because ye ask not,” James adds: “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts [or appetites].” What are these things that are amiss which we may not ask for with any hope of receiving? These are the purely selfish things that are not to the glory of God nor to the benefit of his people. While we are taught to pray for our daily

bread, we are not taught to pray for money or luxuries to be showered upon us. However, it is certainly not amiss to labor and to ask the Lord's blessing upon our labors, to seek guidance from him in the performance of our daily work. It is certainly not amiss to receive with thankfulness the fruit of our labors, much or little, as the Lord may see best for us. "The laborer is worthy of his hire." (Luke 10:7)

Some might think that all the good things of life are "amiss" to ask for. This is certainly not so. It is only the unimportant things that are amiss, things pertaining to the flesh--the short human existence, the brief earthly life. But all the enduring things, the eternal things, the heavenly things, the things that really count, are included in the promise: "Ask and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

Now let us reason together. How long do you expect to live on this earth? Perhaps as much as a hundred years? Such a long human life is a tiny, infinitesimal, insignificant span of life compared with the eternity of the divine nature. In the words of Paul: "Not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." (Romans 8:18) How incomparably more important it is, then, to ask for and receive the heavenly gifts--the treasures of heaven --rather than the miserable, groveling, selfish benefits that are so temporary and which wither like grass. Let us never ask as did the Israelites in the wilderness for flesh and the leeks and the onions of Egypt. Let us not "ask amiss."

In claiming the promise, "Ask, and it shall be given you," there is the tremendously vital ingredient of faith:

"But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering [or, as the Diaglott says, 'not hesitating'] for he that wavereth [or hesitates] is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways."-- James 1:6-8

When Jesus was on earth, he found a woeful lack of faith. He was in the nation of Israel, the people favored of God, a chosen people, heirs of history rich with God's loving kindness. Should he not have found a strong, unwavering faith? But in fact he found little faith. Even among his own disciples, there were doubting Thomases, and sinking Peters. He once said to them, as if in surprise: "How is it that ye have no faith?" (Mark 4:40)

Demonstrations of Faith

When Jesus saw a real demonstration of faith, he was exceedingly pleased. One such account is given in Matthew chapter 8 which I will paraphrase. Jesus had just come down from the mountain and a

great multitude followed him. A man with a hideous case of leprosy came to him and was instantly healed. As Jesus was speaking to the crowd, a centurion, a Roman --officer commanding a hundred soldiers, made an appeal to Jesus. He said that his servant was seriously sick. Jesus said that he would come and heal him. But the centurion said, "Lord, it is not necessary that you leave the service of this multitude to come to my house. I understand your position. I, too, am a man of authority in my small way. If I want something done, I issue a command and it's done. But what do my hundred soldiers compare with this tremendous power of God that is in your hands? My house is far too humble for you to enter." Now I quote from the scripture: "But speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed. When Jesus heard it, he marveled, and said to them that followed: Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel! . . . And Jesus said unto the centurion: Go thy way; and as thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee. And his servant was healed in the selfsame hour."

Note the words, "as thou hast believed." This phrase describes faith! Here is another similar event:

"While he spake these things unto them, behold, there came a certain ruler, and worshipped him, saying, My daughter is even now dead; but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live."--Matthew 9:18

She did indeed live. Here's another example:

"And, behold a woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind him, and touched the hem of his garment; for, she said within herself, if I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole."--Matthew 9:20, 21

And she was! What magnificent exhibitions of pure, and simple faith these are! Think of it! Faith that can say: "My servant is desperately ill; but don't trouble to come all the way to my house to see him. Just say the word here, and he will be cured." Faith that can say: "My daughter is dead; but lay your hands on her and she will live!" Faith that can say: "I've been sick for twelve years; the doctors can do nothing; but if I only touch his coat, I'll be all right!" Why can't we all have faith like that, faith not to obtain physical healing for a few brief years on this earth, but to ask for and receive the eternal and enduring things God has promised us?

On the road to Bethany Jesus had spoken to the fruitless fig tree; the tree instantly withered at his command.

"And when the disciples saw it, they marveled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away! Jesus answered, and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not

only do this, which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea, it shall be done! And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, **believing**, ye shall receive.”--Matthew 21:19-22

From these words of Jesus has sprung a common adage: “Mountain-moving faith” or “Faith to move mountains,” describing a strong and complete faith.

“If ye have faith, and doubt not . . . Ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed . . . and it shall be done!” What a remarkable thing for Jesus to say to his disciples, and to us! Is it possible that through simple faith such a tremendous power is available to us? What did Jesus mean? Of course this statement of Jesus has primarily a symbolic significance. The fig tree represented the Jewish nation, cast off from favor, its hopes withering. When Jesus came to it, he found no fruit. “He came unto his own, and his own received him not.” (John 1:11) As he said:

“Therefore I say unto you, the kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.”--Matthew 21:43

But what did the mountain which shall be cast into the sea represent? I think it represents the kingdom and authority of Satan which will sink into destruction in a sea of anarchy. We see the rising tide of anarchy today.

Personal Mountains

In addition to this specific symbolism, I think there is more a personal application to each one of us. Yes, each one of us, if we have faith, can move mountains.

Do you have mountains of trials, towering before you, seemingly insurmountable? They can be removed, **if** you have faith.

Do you have mountains of problems, piled high blocking your progress in the narrow way? They can be solved, **if** you have faith.

Are there mountains of fleshly weaknesses that seem to come between and threaten your communion with the Lord and his people? **They can be overcome with faith.**

Do you have mountains of earthly obligations that leave so little time and strength for the Lord and his service? **Faith will find a way.**

Are not such mountains as these more important than literal mountains of soil and rock? Is not their removal a much greater accomplishment, a greater miracle, and much more to the glory of God?

Let us suppose you have one of these mountains of trials, problems, fleshly weaknesses, earthly obligations, or other things you would like removed. What should you do? In faith claim the promise: "Ask and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you." First we should ask:

"Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."--Hebrews 4:16

Don't be afraid or ashamed to ask in --Jesus' name. Our mountains may not be removed at once but we are assured of a loving and merciful consideration of our case, and grace to help. If the removal of the mountain is delayed, we know that such delay is designed to work some good thing in us.

After asking let us also claim the promise: "Seek, and ye shall find." Let us implement our desire to remove the mountain by seeking ways to do it ourselves. Let us do our part. We are told we will "find grace to help." To find, we must seek. Have we really done our best? One way to move a mountain from in front of you to behind you, is to climb over it. Another way is to walk around it. Back home on the farm, if we had a tree stump too big to pull and too wet to burn, we plowed around it. Sure it was annoying to see it there, standing in the way. But we learned to accept it and did not let it hinder us in our work. With the passage of time, it finally decayed and collapsed of its own accord. Let us also --remove our mountains by claiming the promise: "Knock and it shall be opened unto you." We can "knock" on the door of the scriptures and often have the answer to our difficulty opened to us.

Consider the case of the disciples on the way to Emmaus. The death of Jesus had been a cruel blow to them, a mountain of disappointment in their path. They --contemplated returning to their former earthly pursuits, thoroughly discouraged. But then we read:

"And their eyes were opened, . . . 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 24:31,32

The opening of the scriptures did the job. Their mountain was removed and they felt a glorious sense of relief. Jesus can also talk to you about your mountain. But you'll have to "knock" by faithfully reading the scriptures, and the wonderful --Bible helps provided in the *Studies in the Scriptures*. If you do this with faith, it will be opened unto you. That's a promise. "Believing, ye shall receive."

Specific Things to Request

We have considered the necessity for asking, that we must not ask amiss, that we must ask in Jesus' name, that we must ask in faith, and

that we must do our part. Now let us consider the specific things we may ask for with the full assurance that if we do and in the prescribed manner, we shall receive them:

“And this is the confidence we have in him; that if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us. And if we know that he hears us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.”--1 John 5:14, 15

Confidence in God

Notice the expressions of faith in this scripture: “The confidence we have in him; we know that he hears us; we know that we have our petitions.” This confidence and assurance is based on our asking “according to his will.”

What are these things that are “according to his will” which we are told to ask for and which, if we ask, we will receive? One of these is suggested by James:

“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.”--James 1:5

“But this is fantastic,” you might say. “God is the source of all wisdom. Can I obtain his wisdom by just asking?” Yes, you can. But God does not open our skulls and pour wisdom into our brains through a funnel. Nor does he speak audibly and privately with us to impart special knowledge not available to others. Nor does he send exclusive revelations to us through a certain organization. No! His wisdom is in his word. As Paul said to Timothy:

“Thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation.”--2 Timothy 3:15

It is through the scriptures that his wisdom is to be revealed to us.

Let us consider the small “if” at the beginning of the promise: “If any of you lack wisdom.” How important it is for us to first realize our lack, that we are nothing and know nothing of ourselves. Everyone dislikes a “know-it-all”; God dislikes it too. The world calls those who have such an --attitude “smart-alecks.” Those who think they know it all have nothing to learn. They can never obtain wisdom. But the humble, the meek, the teachable, those who know their lack of wisdom, these may ask and receive. There is an old saying: “The significance of the vessel is not in the shell, but in the void”--the emptiness, the ability to contain something. A lack of wisdom must be humbly realized before the emptiness or void, can be filled. Solomon provides an excellent example of this principle. The account is in 1 Kings chapter 3. When Solomon was crowned king in the place of his father David, God said to him: “Ask what I shall give thee.” Think of it! The omnipotent God, offering Solomon

anything he wanted! No conditions, no strings. He had but to ask. Anything! What an opportunity! He was already a king, but just for the asking, he could have fabulous wealth, great honor, triumph over all his enemies, long life in good health--ANYTHING! But for what did Solomon ask? He said, "I am but a little child. I know not how to go out, or come in." Then he simply asked God for an understanding heart, to discern between good and bad, to enable him to be a just and good king over Israel. The record says:

"And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing. And God said unto him: Because thou hast not asked for thyself long life; neither have asked riches for thyself, nor have asked the life of thine enemies; but have asked for thyself understanding, to discern judgment; behold I have done according to thy words. Lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked--both riches and honor; so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee, all thy days."--1 Kings 3:10-13

The Way to Please God

"And the speech pleased the Lord." Do you want to please the Lord? Here is the formula: Go to him as a **little child** and ask him for an understanding and discerning heart. That will please the Lord. Your request will be granted, and who knows what other spiritual riches may be granted besides!

Here is another specific gift we may request:

"If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the holy spirit to them that ask him?"--Luke 11:13

God's Gift--The Holy Spirit

This is an extraordinarily rich and lavish gift, because the holy spirit has so many forms and manifestations. It is variously called in the scriptures The Spirit of God, The Spirit of Christ, The Spirit of Truth, The Spirit of Holiness, The Spirit of a Sound Mind, The Spirit of Liberty, The Spirit of the Father, The Spirit of Promise, The Spirit of Meekness, The Spirit of Understanding, The Spirit of Wisdom, The Spirit of Glory, The Spirit of Counsel, The Spirit of Grace, The Spirit of Adoption, and The Spirit of Prophecy.

We may ask for the fruits of the spirit:

"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering [or forbearance], gentleness [or kindness], goodness, faith [or fidelity], meekness and temperance [or self-control]."--Galatians 5:22,23

These treasures of the holy spirit are ours for the asking, and we are invited to ask for them. But don't expect to receive them suddenly, all at once. They will be given gradually as we make room for them in our hearts and minds. As we depose and empty ourselves of the wrong spirit--the spirit of the world, the flesh, and the devil--the promise is, nevertheless, sure if we ask.

We may also ask for the nations:

“Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen [or the nations] for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.”--Psalms 2:8,9

We participate in this promise with Christ, as members of his body. We shall indeed inherit the nations, reducing them to obedience to God's kingdom with a rod of iron, typifying firm divine authority or control, dashing evil governments, principalities, and powers to pieces. This is something we can ask for with assurance.

I came across another interesting thing to ask for in Zechariah:

“Ask ye of the Lord rain, in the time of the latter rains; so the Lord shall make bright clouds, and give them showers of rain.”--Zechariah 10:1

Rain is a symbol of truth. The “latter rains” probably refer to the harvest truths given in the latter, or last days of the Gospel age.

“Ask ye of the Lord rain [a wide promulgation of truth]; in the time of the latter rains [at the end of the Gospel Age, when harvest truth is proclaimed]; so the Lord shall make bright clouds [the clouds of trouble are bright with promises to us]; and give them showers of rain [a really saturating broadcast of harvest truth].”

Let us pray for the harvest work and do our part in it.

Maintaining the Old Paths

Finally, we can ask for the “old paths”:

“Thus saith the Lord; stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls.”--Jeremiah 6:16

Let us stand in the way we have chosen and not be drawn away from it. Let us continue to see the precious truths of old, made clear by a faithful and wise servant, and not deviate from them. Let us ask to be kept steadfast in the old paths, the strait gate, the narrow way, the good way, and not be diverted by new and strange road signs. Let us continue to walk there--in, confidently and serenely, finding rest for our souls.

“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you; for everyone that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened.”

Let us claim this promise, and make it our own!

Crumbs from the Master's Table

TODAY we are going to consider an incident that is recorded in Matthew 15:21-28 and Mark 7:24-30. It is the account of Jesus' healing the daughter of the Syrophenician woman. But first let us consider some background as given in Mark's account.

Herod had beheaded John the Baptist under the most bizarre circumstances and his conscience--what was left of it--was assailed by superstitious remorse. At this time Jesus went about preaching the kingdom and performing wonderful miracles of love and mercy, and the people flocked to him. They even considered taking him and making him a king. This growing popularity of Jesus disturbed Herod. We read:

“And Herod heard of him, for his name was spread abroad; and he said that John the Baptist was risen from the dead, and therefore mighty works do show forth themselves in him.”--Mark 6:14

Jesus knew what was going on in Herod's warped and depraved mind. He knew there was a possibility that Herod would seek to kill him. Jesus was not afraid to die. This was the very purpose for which he had come to earth. But he knew that it was not due time for him to die. He had a work to do, a ministry to perform, and only when that was finished at a certain pre-determined and prophesied time, he would be offered up--not before. So it was because of prudence and not because of fear that he left Galilee temporarily and, together with a few of his disciples, journeyed about 45 miles toward the Mediterranean. It was a two-day journey in those days. Today, by jet, it would take about five minutes. This brought Jesus to what is called in our lesson, “The borders of Tyre and Sidon,” an area within the boundary of the land called Phoenicia of which Tyre and Sidon were the principle cities. Jesus did not enter these cities. Apparently he merely crossed the borders of Galilee thus freeing himself, for a time, from the authority of Herod. By so doing he was by no means abdicating his ministry. It was an interlude he would profitably utilize for necessary physical recuperation, meditation, prayer and the private instruction of his disciples.

Jesus--The Perfect Specimen

Jesus would have preferred that no one recognize him in Phoenicia. Mark 7:24 tells us that he “entered into an house, and would have no man know it. But he could not be hid.” Of course he could not be hid! Have you ever thought of the contrast there must be between a

perfect man and a fallen, depraved man? At that time mankind had fallen for 4000 years, with each succeeding generation “born in sin and shapen in iniquity” (Psalms 51:5), and every generation adding its cumulative effect of physical disfiguration. In 4000 years they had become miserable caricatures of the real thing. It is even more so today. So we can picture Jesus arriving in Phoenicia accompanied by his very ordinary looking disciples. Being a replica of the beautiful and physically perfect Adam with the grace and regal bearing of the King of earth, he, by sheer contrast, caught the attention of everyone who saw him. He was quickly identified as Jesus and the news of his arrival was rapidly passed from mouth to mouth. The great prophet and healer of Israel, about whom they had heard so much, was in their midst! Now we read:

“A certain woman, whose young daughter had an unclean spirit, heard of him, and came and fell at his feet. The woman was a Greek, a Syrophenician by nation. And she besought him that he would cast forth the devil out of her daughter.”--Mark 7:25,26

One can scarcely imagine the heartbreak which that poor woman had to endure! A devil had taken possession of her sweet little girl! The specific manifestations of such an obsession are too horrible to describe in detail. Matthew's account says she was “grievously vexed with a devil.” The --Weymouth translation renders it, “Cruelly harassed by a demon.” This devil, or unclean spirit, was one of the fallen angels who had been instrumental in corrupting the earth in the days of Noah. This was one of the powerful spirit beings who, allied with Satan, had tyrannized and degraded mankind so that,

“Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence.”--Genesis 6:5,11

Under the domination of Satan these fallen angels became demons who were tyrants and bullies. They used their superior powers to influence mankind to wickedness, pulling them down to depths of depravity. Now here was one of these ancient bullies who, as is typical of bullies, did not “pick on someone his own size.” He had seized control of the brain of a helpless little girl. He expressed himself through the lips of that innocent child, using most foul and profane language. That is why he was called an “unclean” or “impure” spirit. He sometimes controlled the girl's body to viciously attack anyone who came near. The poor mother probably had many scars of these encounters with her own daughter. She knew it was only a matter of time when the poor girl would be driven to suicide. The mother was now at her wits' end not knowing what to do. She had been hearing of Jesus, the great healer of Israel, who was doing such wonderful things in distant Galilee. She had heard that he frequently cast out devils from those obsessed. But her daughter had

to be kept under restraint. She could not take her the necessary two days' journey to Galilee; besides, she had heard that Jesus would not have dealings with any but Israelites. So she had just about given up hope on that score. We can imagine her elation when a neighbor ran to her home and breathlessly said,

“A most wonderful thing has happened! Jesus, the great prophet and healer of Israel is here in our village! He arrived just a little while ago with his disciples; and I know the very house he is in, right now!”

A hope, almost dead, revived and surged in her heart.

A Mother's Love

There is really no accounting for the love of a mother for her child. There is nothing logical about mother love. It is a blind and driving force of pure, unselfish devotion. It rejects cold, calculating reason, and gladly attempts even the obviously impossible for her child's



welfare. So casting aside every logical objection this mother lost no time in going to Jesus. We are told that she “came and fell at his feet.” (Mark 7:25) We also read that, “She cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou son of David! My daughter is grievously vexed with a devil!” (Matthew 15:22)

Then Jesus did something that seems so unlike him. Verse 23 says, "But he answered her not a word." You may be sure that this was not because of a lack of compassion. Jesus was never insensitive to grief or pain. He was the most compassionate man the world has ever known. We read in Matthew 9:36 that, when he saw the suffering multitude, "He was moved with compassion on them." His heart went out to them in love and sympathy. It is written of him that he healed "every sickness and every disease among the people." When Lazarus died and Jesus saw the sorrow of Mary and Martha, his heart melted in sympathy and he wept. He certainly knew the situation of this unfortunate woman even before she told him. Why, then, did he turn away in silence? I think it was because he saw in this woman a faith of unusual magnitude, a faith worthy of testing. This seeming indifference on Jesus' part did not deter the woman in the least. She continued her earnest entreaty, "Have mercy on me, O Lord!" over and over again.

A former American Consul at Jerusalem has written,

"To one who has ever held a prominent or official position in the East, the persistency of pleading women is a fact one will never forget! They will not be driven from their purpose in a rough manner. Severe language does not deter them. They are not wearied by delays. They will sit and wait, hour after hour, and come day by day, ignoring all kinds of --refusals. They are importunate beyond anything that I ever experienced in our Western life."

In addition to this natural characteristic of Eastern women, this mother who pleaded with Jesus was driven by a more powerful incentive than most. She was pleading for the life of her daughter.

Finally, they could not stand it any longer and went to Jesus about it. We read, "And his disciples came, and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us." (Matthew 15:23) The disciples were sympathetic to her cause. When they said "Send her away," they did not mean for Jesus to send her away empty. They meant,

"Grant her request, and let her go. It is such a simple thing for you to do. You have healed thousands in Israel. You have cast out legions of demons from others. Cast out this demon also, from her daughter, and send the poor woman away in peace."

Then Jesus "answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Matthew 15:24) In other words,

"My ministry is confined exclusively to the nation of Israel. This woman is a Gentile, an outsider. Do you not remember when I sent you forth to preach and heal, that I told you, 'Go not in the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not. But go

rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel?' [Matthew 10:5,6] This woman has no claim upon us."

At this point it seems that the woman herself came into the presence of Jesus having followed closely upon the heels of the disciples. She probably heard what Jesus just said. Now she prostrated herself before Jesus in an attitude of worship. We read in verses 25 and 26:

"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."

This seems a very harsh thing for Jesus to have said, but it really was not. His answer to her was not one of disdain or contempt, nor did it indicate indifference to her great misfortune. Our Lord had no such feelings toward any. On the contrary he was undoubtedly greatly moved by her predicament. But it was necessary for him to give her a reason for his position in the matter. He was also further testing the great faith he saw in her.

We must remember that at that time the term "dogs" was commonly applied to all Gentiles by the Jews as signifying their inferiority in the sight of God. God's dealings were exclusively with the house of Israel, and dogs were normally kept outside the house. It was an apt term. Our Lord merely made use of an expression common in his day which the Gentile woman understood perfectly. But even here the Lord mercifully softened the expression, giving the woman a ray of hope. It seems that he here used a word for "dogs" which signifies, not ferocious, outside dogs, but house dogs, dogs which were well-loved and were the pets and companions of the children. In Mark's account we find that Jesus gave the woman still another tiny ray of hope:

"But Jesus said unto her, Let the children first be filled. For it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it unto the dogs."--Mark 7:27

This implied that once the children had enough, some bread might be spared for the dogs. Do you see how loving and merciful Jesus really was? Far from discouraging the poor woman, he was helping her and leading her on to the strong declaration of faith which she then made. She saw and eagerly grasped her opportunity: "And she said, Truth, Lord. Yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table." (Matthew 15:27) Or as Mark records it, "Yes, Lord. Yet the dogs under the table eat of the children's crumbs." (Mark 7:28) Jesus was delighted and greatly touched with this response. He saw in this Gentile woman many excellent traits of character, a great love, a humble spirit, a persistent seeking after blessing, and above all, a magnificent FAITH which even the most

devout Jew might emulate. He took her by the hand and gently raised her from her knees, and we read in verse 28:

“Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith! Be it unto thee even as thou wilt!”

At that very moment at the home of the woman a force as of lightning struck the demon and he was violently expelled from the little girl. As the Diaglott says, “And her daughter was cured from that very moment.” The woman hurried home without any doubt in her mind that her request had indeed been granted. “And when she was come to her house, she found the devil gone out, and her daughter laid upon the bed.” (Mark 7:30) Her little girl was peacefully sleeping for the first time in many years.

Some Lessons for Us

Let us go back and consider some of the lessons to be derived from this incident. First, we can learn something from the prudence which Jesus exercised by briefly leaving the jurisdiction of Herod. Unless principle is involved we should avoid trouble all we can. Although we may sometimes feel the enmity of the world, we should never incite it. As Romans 12:18 tells us, “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.” And 2 Timothy 2:24, “The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men.” In this way our usefulness to the Lord, and our influence for good in the world will be prolonged. Considering the special intensity of violence that is in the world today, we should act prudently, not exposing ourselves recklessly, saying “God will take care of me.” Of course he will. He would have taken care of Jesus too. Jesus himself said, “Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?” (Matthew 26:53) Even so Jesus acted prudently just the same until his time had come. So with us. We will get all the help we need when it is necessary just as Daniel received it when, for the sake of principle, he was cast into the den of lions, and the Hebrew children when they were thrown into the fiery furnace. But let us not make the mistake of jumping into a “den of lions” or into a “fiery furnace.”

The great love the Syrophenician woman had for her child, reminds us of God's love for us, his children. Mother-love is an apt illustration of God-love, except that God's love is even more intense. “Can a woman forget her sucking child? Yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee!” (Isaiah 49:15) The same thought is expressed in a psalm: “When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up.” (Psalms 27:10)

No Problem Is Too Great/Small For God

There is a lesson in the fact that this --Gentile woman ignored every logical reason why she should not go to Jesus with her problem--and went anyhow. Do we sometimes have problems that we hesitate to lay before the Lord? Do we wonder whether they are too great, too small, too intimate, too complicated, too simple, too worldly--or too something else? Are we afraid of being ignored or rebuffed? It should not be so if we are God's children. Jesus said, "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me. And him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out." (John 6:37) To which Hebrews 4:16 adds, "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." We read: "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee. He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved." (Psalms 55:22) There is no stipulation about the kind of burden, or problem, or need. It refers to ANY kind.

The manner in which the Syrophenician woman approached Jesus holds a valuable lesson for us because it was an effective approach that the Lord approved and rewarded. Let us note that she was not brazen or assertive. She did not reproach Jesus for his partiality toward the seed of Abraham and did not claim to be just as good and deserving. She was not demanding. She did not even express a specific wish. She merely told the Lord the nature of her trouble and said, "Lord, have mercy on me! Lord, help me!" She did not tell the Lord what to do. She left it entirely to the Lord's wisdom as to how or when the help and mercy should be bestowed. We certainly can learn from this how to approach the Lord acceptably. Are we not dealing with the very same Lord who is now our Advocate, at the right hand of God? So, as Philippians 4:6 instructs us, "Let your requests be made known unto God," and then simply say, "Lord, help me!" You may be sure his way will be the very best way.

God Hears Our Petitions

When the woman had made her earnest plea, we read that Jesus "answered her not a word." Does it sometimes happen that the Lord answers us "not a word"? Do we ever go to him with problems that seem very important and urgent to us and apparently receive no response? I am sure this has happened to every one of us. It can be a severe test of faith. Questions arise in one's mind, "Am I a child of God, or am I not? Has my consecration ever been accepted? Am I in covenant relationship with God? Have I, perhaps, lost favor with the Lord? Has he turned his face from me?" With continued delay comes discouragement. "It's no use to ask any more," one may say. "The Lord evidently does not hear my prayers. And if he does, he doesn't intend to answer."

These are suggestions from the Adversary and should be instantly rejected. We should have no doubt that the Lord does hear our prayer: "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry." (Psalms 34:15) Then reassured, we should next consider Jesus' own words: "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." (John 15:7) This is a positive statement, a firm promise. Then let us ask ourselves, "Am I abiding in Christ? Am I carrying out my consecration as a member of his body?" If so, the next question is, "Does the Lord's word abide in me? Am I seeking to be always guided by his word of truth?" Then the most important question, "Is the blessing I am seeking in harmony with God's Word and Plan?" If it is, we should persist in our request just as the Syrophenician woman did. We will obtain the same result she did. Our prayer will be answered in the Lord's own way and time. Because of our patient persistence, he will say to us also, "Great is thy faith!" The delay will not really be long.

This is the very lesson Jesus taught in his parable of the importunate widow (Luke 18:1-8). He summed it up by saying, according to Weymouth,

"And will not God avenge the wrongs of his own people who cry aloud to him day and night, although he seems slow in taking action on their behalf? Yes, he will soon avenge their wrongs!"

Let us emulate the positive faith of Paul:

"For I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him."--2 Timothy 1:12

When the Lord "answered her not a word," he was testing the woman's strong faith. Let us learn from this that **the Lord tests our strengths not our weaknesses**. When the Lord subjects us to a test of faith, let us take it as an indication that he considers our faith strong and worthy of testing. Such trials should encourage and not discourage us.

When the woman pleaded with him, --Jesus withheld his blessing and said, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." We were all at one time as that woman was. Our former condition is well described as,

"Without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world."--Ephesians 2:12

Yes, at one time we too were dogs, out of favor with the Lord. As the psalm says, "So foolish was I, and ignorant, I was as a beast before thee." (Psalms 73:22) Then a great transformation took place:

“But now, in Christ Jesus, ye who sometimes were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ.” (Ephesians 2:13) And in Galatians:

“For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.”--Galatians 3:26-29

The High Calling Offered to Others

Thus the high calling which was first --offered exclusively to natural Israel, was now made available to individuals who constitute spiritual Israel. By the grace of God we have heard and accepted the call.

When Jesus told the woman “It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs,” she answered, “Truth, Lord. Yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from the Master's table.” This reminds us of Jesus' parable of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16.

“There was a certain rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day. And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, who was laid at his gate, full of sores; and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, the dogs came and licked his sores.”--Luke 16:19-21

Here again we find a person who is an --associate of “dogs” desiring “crumbs” from the “table.” In this picture the “rich man” represented the Jewish nation, rich in God's favor. He was clothed in purple, invested with royalty. The Jews were of a Royal Priesthood because of the promises to Abraham and David. The high calling was first offered to them. The rich man was clothed in the fine linen of righteousness, the Jews being typically a holy people. He fared sumptuously, the Jews being the special recipients of God's favor. His word was given to them. The prophets were sent to them. As we read in Romans:

“What advantage then hath the Jews? . . . Much every way. Chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.”--Romans 3:1,2

The beggar Lazarus, the associate of dogs, represented the Gentile outcasts from divine favor. The Syrophenician woman was one of this class. As Lazarus begged, “Desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table,” she begged Jesus for a crumb from the table of divine favor. The parable goes on to show how later the positions of the rich man and Lazarus were reversed, the

beggar being exalted to favor and the rich man degraded. This shows the temporary casting off of natural Israel and the opening of the high calling to the Gentiles. But that is another lesson.

When the Lord finally acted on behalf of the Syrophenician woman, the result came with lightning speed: her daughter was instantly healed. As the record states, "Her daughter was cured from that very moment." This is often the experience of the Lord's people. After much pleading and crying to the Lord, after much delay and vexation trying one's patience and faith to the utmost, the answer suddenly comes in a time and manner least expected. The difficulty is instantly removed. This has been a part of my own --experience and I can testify that it is powerfully strengthening to faith. After having such an experience one always remembers it and never doubts the Lord again.

There is another lesson we can learn from this incident of Jesus healing the daughter of the Syrophenician woman that I think is very encouraging and heart-warming. It gives us an insight into the wonderful character of God. We learn that the Lord lovingly and mercifully makes exceptions to his stated rules. For example, although Jesus told the poor Gentile woman, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel," --nevertheless, he did heal her daughter. On another occasion, although he commanded his disciples "Go not into the way of the Gentiles," he himself did heal the Roman Centurion's servant. (Matthew 8:5-13) Although he told his disciples, "Into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not," we find that after he talked with the woman of Samaria at Jacob's well, he spent two days in a Samaritan city with his disciples. It is recorded that as a result of this, "many believed because of his own word." (John 4:41)

Someone may ask,

"Is not this making of exceptions to stated rules contrary to God's character? Does not James 1:17 describe the Heavenly Father as one `with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning?' And does not God say in Malachi 3:6, `I am the Lord; I change not?' And is it not written in Psalms 89:34, `My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips?' And does not Numbers 23:19 tell us, `Hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?'"

These scriptures emphasize the absolute justice and dependability of God, that he may be utterly relied upon to carry out his divine plan of the Ages for the blessing of mankind. Such scriptures give us confidence in God. However, we must not forget that in addition to being a just God, he is also a loving God.

Love Tempers Justice

Let us now note how his love tempers his justice, how that even in his law he made provision for the exercise of love. For example, “Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed.” (Genesis 9:6) Yet provision was made for exceptions. Cities of refuge were provided in --Israel to which unpremeditated killers could flee and thus escape the avenger of blood. (Numbers 35:6) We read: “Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.” (Exodus 21:24, 25) These provisions of the law were permissive but they were not compulsory. If someone knocked your tooth out, you had the right to knock out one of his; but you could choose to forgive him if you wanted to. Similarly the loss of a hand or foot might be avenged by the cutting off of the hand or foot of the guilty person, but I am sure few would be disposed to do such a gruesome thing. If someone burned your house down, you had the right to retaliate and burn his house down; but you were not compelled to enforce your right. In all these things you could choose to exercise pity and mercy, and forgive the offender if you wanted to. To do so would be godlike. This is exactly what the Lord does to us. We read:

“Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger forever, because he delighteth in mercy.” --Micah 7:18

In dealing with us, the Lord does not exact full retribution for our sins. This is beautifully brought out in a psalm:

“He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he --removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.”--Psalms 103:10-14

A merciful abstaining from exacting the full penalty of the law does not violate justice; it goes beyond justice, it exceeds justice. Jesus enjoined this superseding law of love upon his disciples:

“Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth; but I say unto you, That ye resist not evil. But whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also; And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.”--Matthew 5:38-41

These are figurative expressions to illustrate the law of love by which a Christian lives. He is not to exact strict justice but to go beyond and above it.

The law of weights and measures which God gave to Israel provides an apt illustration of this:

“Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure. Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have.”--Leviticus 19:35,36

This was strict justice. It was absolutely right. They must not do less. But Jesus taught his followers that by the law of love, they should do more than that; they should exceed justice. He said: “Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together and running over.” (Luke 6:38) The law didn't require them to press down and shake together, to eliminate air spaces and allow more to fit in the container. It did not require them to pour liquid until it ran over the edge of the vessel. So did this teaching of Jesus contradict the law? No, there is no contradiction. It is entirely proper and always permissible to give more than the law demands, but never to give less.

Jesus Gave “Crumbs” to the Gentiles

This is why Jesus, although sent to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, was free to make exceptions and lovingly to give crumbs of blessing to some Gentiles who had no claim to them, being outside the commonwealth of Israel. In this he exemplified his Heavenly Father who so loved the world that he arranged a way for the justly condemned Adam, who had no claim to life, to be released from death.

Do you often like to surprise those you love with a gift, something precious they do not expect and for which they have not asked? God is like that too, only his gifts are exceedingly greater than we can ever give. This is what the apostle means when he refers to, “Him that is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think.” (Ephesians 3:20) Jesus himself said,

“If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your Heavenly Father?”--Luke 11:13

We must not be disposed to chide the Lord if he sometimes makes loving exceptions to his rules and grants crumbs of blessing to those outside our fellowship, even to some in the nominal systems. That is the Lord's business. In the language of Job, “Who can hinder him? Who will say unto him, What doest thou?” (Job 9:12) Daniel says of him:

“He doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth. And none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?”--Daniel 4:35

Knowing what a loving God we have we should expect to receive from him blessings, “Pressed down, and shaken together, and running over.” If faithful to our consecration, we should confidently claim the promise,

“Prove me herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it!”--Malachi 3:10

No, we don't have to beg for crumbs. We are the children seated at the Lord's table. “If children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.” (Romans 8:17) All the marvelous bounties of the Lord are ours!

Elijah and the Prophets of Baal

ELIJAH has been called “the grandest and most romantic character that Israel ever produced.” All we know of his parentage and origin is found in 1 Kings 17:1 which refers to him as “Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead.”

The significance of the name Elijah is interesting. It is dramatically brought to our attention by an incident in the New Testament. Jesus is hanging on the cross; his hour has come and in a few minutes he will die as the ransom price for mankind. Now we read:

“And about the ninth hour, Jesus exclaimed with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, Lama Sa-bach-tha-ni? That is, My God! My God! Why has thou forsaken me? And some of those standing there, hearing him, said, He calls for Elijah.”--Matthew 27:46,47, Diaglott

Why do you suppose they thought he was calling for Elijah? The reason is simple. The name Elijah means “Jehovah, my God.” So when Jesus addressed his heavenly Father as “My God,” he pronounced the name of Elijah.

At the time of our lesson, about 900 BC, Ahab was king of Israel. He was very wicked.

“And Ahab . . . did evil in the sight of the Lord, above all that were before him. . . . And he reared up an altar for Baal, in a temple of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. And Ahab made a grove [for the worship of Ashtoreth]. And Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of --Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him.”--1 Kings 16:30,32,33

He married the wicked woman Jezebel and made her his queen. She was a Phoenician princess, daughter of the king of the idolatrous Zidonians. In her hands Ahab became a mere puppet. By her influence and with Ahab's consent the most abominable idol worship was established in Israel. At her table in the royal palace were supported no less than 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of the goddess Ash--toreth. By her orders with Ahab's weak acquiescence the prophets of Jehovah were persecuted and killed. (1 Kings 18:13) Jezebel was actually trying to eradicate the worship of Jehovah in Israel.

Elijah's Courage

It took a great deal of courage for the prophet Elijah to boldly walk into the --palace, enter the throne-room, face king Ahab, and say: “As Jehovah God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall

not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.” (1 Kings 17:1)

Withholding rain was in strict accordance with the word of the Lord given to Israel. They were promised abundant rain and rich crops as long as they maintained their worship of the true God. But if they turned to idolatry, the blessing of rain was to cease and their crops would fail. Thus the Lord said:

“It shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day; to love the Lord your God, and to serve him with all your heart, and with all your soul; that I will give you the rain of your land in his due season; the first rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil. And I will send grass in thy fields for thy cattle, that thou mayest eat and be full. [*Now the warning!*] Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside and serve other gods, and worship them. And then the Lord's wrath be kindled against you, and he shut up the heaven, that there be no rain, and that the land yield not her fruits.”--Deuteronomy 11:13-17

Ahab knew exactly what Elijah was talking about. He was familiar with the law and he had now been reminded of the penalty for idolatry. It was up to him, as king, to remedy the situation or else have Israel suffer the consequences.

Having delivered his message, Elijah turned around and walked out of the palace. We can imagine that Elijah's encounter with Ahab would be promptly communicated to Queen Jezebel and that she would immediately take steps to have Elijah arrested and killed. As he was leaving the palace, the word of the Lord came to Elijah instructing him to escape and hide in a certain wilderness area. Here he had water to drink from a spring-fed brook and, by a wonderful provision of the Lord, he was miraculously fed in a most delightful way. We read: “And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook.” (1 Kings 17:6)

How would you like to have that kind of service? In fact we do! We are in the wilderness in the sense of being separated from the spirit of the world. We are in the world but not of the world. Not only is our literal bread and water sure (Isaiah 33:16), but more importantly we are amply supplied with the pure water of truth. We also partake of bread. We read: “And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life. He that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.” (John 6:35) We have meat as well:

“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his Lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season.”--Matthew 24:45

Did Elijah complain of the quality of the meat provided? Did he despise the instrumentality of the Lord and drive the ravens away saying, "I want to be served in some other manner?" Of course not. Nor should we. The truth is found in the six volumes of *Studies in the Scriptures* and other writings of Bro. Russell. We should not scorn them nor lay them aside. As Elijah was well fed, we have all we can eat, "morning" and "evening," in the morning of the Millennial Age and the evening of the Gospel Age.



Making the rains to stop was a terrible calamity. Crops failed and there was a severe famine in the land. Flocks and herds could find no pasturage and died of thirst. At first the people irrigated small garden plots by laboriously drawing water from deep wells, but as the drought progressed, even the wells began drying up and the people faced starvation. Instead of blaming herself for the troubles of Israel, Jezebel blamed Elijah. Through King Ahab, she made every effort to find and kill him, but the Lord kept Elijah concealed from her.

According to Luke 4:25 and James 5:17, the rains were withheld for 3 1/2 years. --Israel reached their extremity and cried to the Lord for relief, and the Lord heard their cry.

“And it came to pass, after many days, that the word of the Lord came to Elijah in the third year, saying, Go, show thyself unto Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth. And Elijah went to show himself unto Ahab. . . . And there was a sore famine in Samaria.”--1 Kings 18:1,2

Once again Elijah stood before Ahab. Now what sort of greeting would you expect Ahab to give Elijah under the circumstances, seeing his nation ruined by drought and the people starving? Wouldn't you think he would humbly say to God's prophet:

“I know this trouble upon Israel is my fault, because I permitted idolatry to be established, and I'm sorry. Please ask the Lord to forgive me, and restore rain to our poor suffering land.”

He did not say anything like that. These are his words:

“And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel?”--1 Kings 18:17

Isn't that incredible? He missed the point entirely! He blamed Elijah for everything!

Since he did not admit his guilt and promise reformation, it became necessary for Elijah to demonstrate to him and all the people the real cause of their trouble and give them an opportunity to reform. Before rain could be restored, Israel must abandon idolatry and return to the worship of Jehovah. Elijah replied to Ahab:

“And [Elijah] answered, I have not troubled --Israel; but thou and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou has followed Baalim. Now --therefore send, and gather to me all Israel unto mount Carmel; and the prophets of Baal four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves, four hundred, which eat at Jezebel's --table.”--1 Kings 18:18,19

Confrontation on Mount Carmel

There is an important reason why Elijah requested they be gathered to Mount Carmel. Carmel is a prominent mountain in Israel. It is only about 1700 feet high. It has steep sides, but flattens out at the top into a large level area. In the west we call it a mesa, or --table-mountain. Carmel had --become a stronghold of Baal worship because it was the custom of the priests of Baal to erect their images, altars and groves on prominent hilltops. This gave a sense of dominance and dignity to their idols. Thus we read regarding idolatrous Israel: “And they set them up images and groves in every

high hill.” (2 Kings 17:10) “[The nations] served their gods upon the high mountains, and upon the hills.” (Deuteronomy 12:2)



Elijah requested that the people and the prophets of Baal be gathered to Mount Carmel because it had become the center of Baal worship. His object was to give a demonstration before them all showing Jehovah God to be the only true God. He wanted the priests of Baal to be in their own familiar place of worship with their established images, altars, groves and other paraphernalia so it could not be claimed that they had been at a disadvantage in the test. Another reason to select Mount Carmel was that in ancient times an altar to Jehovah had been erected there, but its stones had since been scattered by the idolaters. This altar was to be vindicated.

So anxious was Ahab for rain to be restored to the land that he complied with Elijah's request:

“So Ahab sent unto all the children of Israel, and gathered the prophets together unto Mount Carmel.”--1 Kings 18:20

The place of meeting atop Carmel was about 17 miles from the palace at Jezreel. At the command of the king and in anticipation of getting relief from the drought, the people arrived early in the morning by the tens of thousands. They made their way up the steep road of the mountain and gathered on the broad flat top. The king also came in his chariot, but Queen Jezebel sullenly remained at the palace. Row upon row the people formed a huge circle. In the center of the circle in an open area stood the image and altar of Baal -- surrounded by the sacred grove. Before this had gathered the 450 priests of Baal and 400 of Ashtoreth, all elaborately dressed in their colorful ceremonial robes. Facing them on one side, dressed in a plain leather garment, stood Elijah the prophet of God all alone. The odds were 850 to one! What do you think of those odds? Were they unfair? Not at all! It is a true saying that one man, with the Lord, is a majority.

We can imagine that there was a great hub-bub of voices as thousands of people excitedly talked to one another, wondering at the significance of the gathering and surprised to see that Elijah, a prophet of Jehovah, had been allowed to live in the presence of all those prophets of Baal. Then Elijah raised his hand, and the commotion ceased:

“And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? If Jehovah be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.”--1 Kings 18:21

Of course “the people answered him not a word”! They didn't know what to say. No doubt the great majority yearned to return to the worship of Jehovah and receive the return of his blessings. But now, right in front of them, were 850 vicious, idolatrous priests. All were supported in the royal palace by the king's consent with full power and permission to take vengeance on any worshippers of the true God. These priests had a stranglehold on the people. They could take note of any who opposed them and perhaps seize their little children for burnt offerings to Baal. The people could not, they dared not, answer Elijah.

Elijah fully realized the situation. He knew that the only way the people could be released from their bondage to Baal was to expose and eliminate the priests of Baal. He had to do it single-handedly, as the Lord had directed him.

“Then said Elijah unto the people, I, even I only, remain a prophet of Jehovah; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men.” (1 Kings 18:22) Then he told the people why they had been gathered there. He proposed a test that would demonstrate, beyond the shadow of a doubt, who the true God was. This would enable them to make a definite decision on the proposition: “If Jehovah be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.” It was an eminently fair test which Elijah proposed:

“Let them therefore give us two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under. And I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on the wood, and put no fire under. And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of Jehovah; and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken. And Elijah said unto the prophets of Baal, Choose you one bullock for yourselves and dress it first; for ye are many. And call on the name of your gods, but put no fire under.”--1 Kings 18:23,24

A Test of the True God

What could be fairer than that? The priests of Baal accepted the conditions of the test without protest. They thought it was a good idea because they would be using their regular altar on Mount Carmel, and that altar was rigged! The proposed test involved nothing new for them. It was their regular custom to deceive the people in this very manner! Tradition says that the altar of Baal was so constructed that one of the priests could hide inside and, at the proper moment, speak out a sepulchral voice and set fire to the wood under the sacrifice to make it appear to be a --miraculous acceptance of the offering to Baal. (See Reprints, page 3406.) When Elijah proposed what he did, the priests of Baal must have laughed to themselves and eagerly accepted the terms. He was playing right into their hands, or so they thought.

“And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of Baal, from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us! But there was no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped upon the altar which was made.”--1 Kings 18:26

When they shouted, “O Baal, hear us!” that was the cue. The priest hidden in the altar was then supposed to answer them and light the fire. But nothing happened. So they leaped upon the altar itself to punctuate their shouting. Still nothing!

Elijah was enjoying all this. He knew something they did not know. He knew that the man inside the altar was dead. Legend tells us that

he was later found suffocated. Elijah began to taunt the prophets of Baal:

“And it came to pass at noon that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud; for he is a god. Either he is talking [on the phone, perhaps?], or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth and must be awaked. And they cried aloud, and cut themselves, after their manner, with knives and lancets till their blood gushed out upon them.”--1 Kings 18:27,28

That must have been a terrible sight: 850 frenzied men, prancing, leaping, and shouting with blood spurting out from self-inflicted wounds, staining their clothes and covering the ground.

“After noon, they raved on, till the hour of the evening sacrifices; but not a sound came. There was no one to answer them; no one to heed them.”--1 Kings 18:29, Moffatt

The hour of the evening sacrifice was three o'clock. If the test began at nine in the morning, they had been summoning Baal in vain for six hours. It was enough. They had failed and they knew it; Elijah stopped their performance. The priests of Baal fell to the ground in various stages of exhaustion.

Now Elijah beckoned to the people to come near him and the people responded. They had now lost their fear of Baal and the prophets of Baal. It had been demonstrated to them that the idol had no power so they came eagerly to Elijah. Elijah set them to work, helping rebuild the altar of Jehovah which had been so long neglected and fallen into disrepair. In contrast with the elaborately carved altar of Baal, it was severely plain: 12 natural stones, unshaped by human hands, arranged to form a table-like structure. We now read, starting with 1 Kings 18:30:

“And Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me. And all the people came near unto him. And he repaired the altar of the Lord that was broken down. And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, . . . And with the stones he built an altar in the name of Jehovah. And he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two measures of seed.”--1 Kings 18:30-32

This was not a small trench that Elijah dug. According to Young's Concordance, a “measure” of grain or seed was equivalent to 10 ephahs of 7 1/2 gallons each. Therefore “two measures of seed” would equal 150 gallons. That was the capacity of the trench Elijah dug around the altar.

“And he put the wood in order and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid it on the wood, and said, Fill four barrels with water and pour it on the sacrifice, and on the wood.”--1 Kings 18:33

In those days they did not have wooden barrels such as we do today. What is here meant by the word “barrel” is an amphora, a large earthenware jar with two handles containing about ten gallons. At Elijah's command, four of these were quickly filled at a nearby spring, the only one in the land still flowing, and forty gallons of water were poured on the altar.

“And he said, Do it the second time; and they did it the second time. And he said, Do it the third time; and they did it the third time. And the water ran round about the altar, and he filled the trench also with water.”--1 Kings 18:34,35

120 gallons were poured over the sacrifice thoroughly soaking it and the wood and overflowing into the trench. Then even more water was brought and the trench around the altar was filled to the brim.

Elijah's Reverential Prayer

What Elijah did next was in great contrast with the conduct of the priests of Baal. He worshipped an intelligent God who did not need to be shouted at to --attract his attention. He reverently approached the altar and in a calm, clear voice uttered an earnest prayer, which is beautiful in its simplicity and modesty:

“And it came to pass, at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, Lord God of Abraham, Isaac and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O Lord, hear me; that this people may know that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again.”--1 Kings 18:36,37

In this prayer the prophet displayed no boastful spirit but humbly recognized that he was merely a servant of the Lord, that his desire was not a personal display of power, but the blessing of his nation and the drawing of their hearts back to the Lord.

No sooner had the prayer ended than there was a blinding flash of lightening. In the language of verse 38, “Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench.” What the Lord does he does thoroughly. Not only was the soaking-wet sacrifice consumed, even the 12 great stones of the altar and the dust upon which they stood were burned up as well. Where the altar had been, there was nothing but bare scorched earth. For a moment there was utter silence. The people were stunned. Then when they realized what had happened, they joyfully reacted and a great shout went up:

“And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces. And they said, Jehovah, he is God; Jehovah, he is God!”--1 Kings 18:39

Then Elijah ordered the destruction of all the prophets of Baal. This was in strict accordance with the law given to Moses, in Exodus 20:3 and 22:20: “Thou shalt have no other gods before me. . . . He that sacrificeth unto any god, save unto Jehovah only, he shall be utterly destroyed.” Undoubtedly the image and altar of Baal were demolished and the grove of Ashtoreth cut down; Israel returned to the worship of the true God.



Although at first there was no sign of it, Elijah knew that it was now going to rain and rain abundantly. He was so sure of it that he warned King Ahab to quickly harness his horse and ride his heavy

iron chariot down the steep road from the top of Mount Carmel, lest it get mired in the mud:

“And he said, . . . Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not. And it came to pass in the mean while, that the heaven was black with clouds and wind, and there was a great rain. And Ahab rode.”--1 Kings 18:44,45

The thirsty earth drank in the refreshing rain. The brooks and springs began to flow and the wells filled up again. The fields turned green, the flocks and herds grazed, and the people rejoiced. The terrible drought of 3 1/2 years was at last ended.

Jezebel Reacts

Jezebel was furious when she heard what had happened on Carmel. She was angry with God, angry with the prophet Elijah for having shown up the falsity of Baal, and very angry that the priests of Baal had been executed. She was particularly angry with Ahab for having permitted the demonstration which revived the faith of Israel in Jehovah God. We can imagine the bitter railing she poured upon her cowering husband, blaming him for everything. If she had been there, it would have been different! Showing the intensity of her rage, she swore an oath to kill Elijah within 24 hours:

“And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time. And when he saw that, he arose and went for his life.”--1 Kings 19:1-3

It seems strange that the great prophet Elijah--he who had so recently faced and defied 450 vicious priests of Baal and who had called down fire from God in a stupendous demonstration of power--now fled for his life because a woman had threatened him. But there is an important reason why this was so. The Lord was using Elijah to make a prophetic picture of the Gospel age which is of great significance to us who are living at this end of the age. Elijah was a type of the church. In this type Elijah was persecuted for fidelity to truth and righteousness. In the antitype, the church was persecuted for fidelity to truth and righteousness. In the type, Elijah's principal persecutor was Jezebel, the wicked queen of Israel, mentioned by name in Revelation 2:20 as the enemy of the saints. In the antitype, the principal persecutor of the church was the apostate Church of Rome which claims to be a “queen” and ruler over spiritual Israel. We read: “She saith in her heart, I sit a queen.” (Revelation 18:7) In the type, Jezebel's persecuting power was exercised through her husband Ahab, the king. In the antitype, Papacy's persecuting power

was exercised through the Roman Empire to which she was joined. In the type, Elijah fled the first time from Jezebel and Ahab into the wilderness, to a place prepared of God where he was miraculously nourished. In the antitype, the true Church fled into the symbolic wilderness, or condition of isolation, and was sustained by God:

“And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and three-score days.”--Revelation 12:6

In the type, Elijah was 3 1/2 years or 1260 days in the wilderness. During that time there was no rain and a great famine was in the land. (James 5:17) In the antitype, the church was 3 1/2 symbolic years--a day for a year makes 1260 literal years--in the wilderness condition during which there was a spiritual famine because of the lack of truth, the living waters. This fulfilled a prophecy of Amos:

“Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land. Not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord.”--Amos 8:11

In the type, after the 3 1/2 years or 1260 days when Elijah returned from the wilderness, the errors of Jezebel's priests were manifested, the true God was honored, and copious rains followed. In the antitype, at the end of the 1260 years beginning AD 1799, the power of the truth and its witnesses were manifested. Since then the truth has flowed at the rate of millions of Bible, books and tracts every year, refreshing the world, and culminating in a fruitful harvest of the true wheat. In the type, the king and the people at first rejoiced, and Elijah and his God were honored. But the spirit of Jezebel was unchanged. She still sought Elijah's life and he was again compelled to flee into the wilderness. In the antitype, the circulation of the Bible has brought such blessings of --enlightenment that the governments and people recognize the Lord's hand. Yet the principles of Papacy [Jezebel] and the so-called Protestant sects compel the true people of God to again flee into the wilderness condition of separation: “Come out of her my people!” This is the time in which we are now living. But there is a part of the picture still unfulfilled. In the type Elijah's career ended when he was taken from the earth in a fiery chariot. In the antitype the last member of the Church will be changed from earthly to heavenly conditions at a time of fiery trouble (*Studies in the Scriptures*, volume 2, page 256).

Other Lessons

Let us consider some of the other lessons contained in this narrative. After 3 1/2 years of drought, the Lord sent Elijah to King Ahab. We read of that meeting:

“And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel?”--1 Kings 18:17

It is astonishing how facts can be twisted and rationalized to make wrong appear right and right seem wrong! It was by Ahab's compliance that Israel had sinned and turned to idolatry. This caused the Lord to withhold rain from the land. All Elijah had done was give them the word of the Lord. He had done no wrong. Now he was greeted as the one who was troubling Israel!

This reminds me of an experience we had in the 1920's involving the same sort of inverse reasoning. The leadership of a Society, formerly used by the Lord, had begun to alter the Harvest Message, introducing various changes which they termed “new light.” Some of us refused to accept and teach these strange new departures, preferring to hold on to the truth as we had been taught by the Lord through his faithful and wise servant. There was a confrontation. We were accused of being enemies. “Evil Servant” was the term then used. But we had not changed a bit. We had done no harm to anyone. All we did was hold what we had. But suddenly we were considered enemies of the truth and were cast out.

The same thing is happening today and we are grieved to see it. “Art thou he that troubleth Israel?” Words to this effect are directed to those who still hold to the Harvest Message of present truth, who refuse to accept the changes of so-called “new light” now being promulgated. It is the same inverse reasoning that Ahab used. “You are troubling spiritual Israel,” they now tell us. “By rejecting our new ideas, you are causing divisions in the church. You must adjust to our views and not rock the boat.” So who is actually causing the divisions? Certainly not those who remain staunch in the truth!

Regarding this matter of “adjustment,” a modern philosopher has written:

“Every society has its own approved form of insanity. Ours is called adjustment which is a circular social movement in which each one is adjusting to another one, and no one knows to whom the first is adjusting.”--S. J. Harris

Brethren, when we have the truth based soundly upon the unchangeable word of God, we don't have to “adjust” to anything else!

Another statement made by those advancing doctrinal changes is that one must have “an open mind” and must examine their theories. That sounds fair, but beware: it is a delusion and a snare! Let me illustrate. When the government trains people to detect the difference between genuine and counterfeit currency, they are never permitted to study counterfeit currency. They concentrate their study on

genuine currency until they are familiar with every minute detail and curlicue of the engraving. Then when in the course of their work they should see the counterfeit, they immediately recognize it as such by contrast. Similarly we must not examine and study every new and questionable doctrine some may see fit to advance. On the contrary, once having proven what is the genuine article, "Made plain upon tables" by our returned Lord through his wise and faithful servant, we must concentrate only upon it and become very familiar with every detail of it.

I once had an "open mind." But that was before I got the truth. When the truth, in all its beauty and harmony, came into my mind, when I found it good and proved it to be true, my mind closed tightly upon it. It is no longer open on that subject! This is how we comply with the instructions of 1 Thessalonians 5:21: "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good." You cannot "hold fast" to anything with an open mind. It has been well said that if you have a mind that is open enough, anyone who passes by may throw rubbish into it. Let that not happen to us.

The first thing Elijah said to the people of Israel on Mount Carmel was: "How long halt ye between two opinions? If Jehovah be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." Joshua presented the same ultimatum to Israel:

"Choose you this day whom ye will serve; . . . but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."--Joshua 24:15

Make up your mind! There is a great need for this lesson in the world today. People have trouble making up their minds regarding the simplest everyday problems that arise. Because of indecision, they are always in a state of mental distress, torn between two opinions. Even when they have acted in a matter, they agonize over it afterward, wondering if they did the right thing. This is the condition of the world. They are in constant distress and perplexity. This will all be rectified in the kingdom. Then there will be no doubt as to what is the right way, when even "the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein." (Isaiah 35:8) But the lesson of Elijah and that of Joshua was not given for the world, but for the church now. This was written for our admonition.

Let us combine the messages of Elijah and Joshua as: "How long halt ye between two opinions. Choose you this day whom ye will serve." What does this mean to us? Today it is not necessary to tell a Christian to choose between Jehovah and some heathen god. We are not tempted to literally worship Baal today. So, what decision must the Christian make? Jesus told us:

“No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”--Matthew 6:24

Prompt, Positive Decisions

This is the choice that must be made, made promptly and decisively! “Mammon” means not only money but anything of earthly value or conducive to pride. It may be the mammon of wealth, the mammon of ambition, or of worldly education, or the love of display, or the catering to fleshly appetites, or the love of ease, the inordinate love of friends, the excessively doting love of family, or any other love that may detract us from the love of God. We must forsake these things in the sense of pushing them aside, of making them of secondary importance, of subordinating them entirely to the service of God. If we do this, we shall gain the kingdom which is a hundred times more important. This is what Jesus meant when he said:

“Every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.”--Matthew 19:29

“Choose this day whom ye will serve.” “Ye cannot serve God and mammon.” Is our consecration to God so full and complete that we have no earthly idols?

Today we can make a special application of Elijah's question to Israel: “How long halt ye between two opinions?” The church is now in a time of decision. There are two opinions today among the Lord's people; each one must decide what to accept. Do you believe, according to Matthew 24:43-47 and Luke 12:42-44, that our returned Lord appointed a certain faithful and wise servant and made him ruler over all his goods, to give the Lord's household meat in due season? Do you --believe that Brother Russell was that servant and that all the Lord's “goods,” which are the beautiful and harmonious doctrines of present truth, are scripturally proven and embodied in the six volumes of *Studies in the Scriptures, Tabernacle Shadows*, and other of his writings? Or on the other hand, do you believe that Brother Russell was mistaken, that his writings are inaccurate and out of date, that the truth is a fluid and changeable thing--this way today, that way tomorrow, and at the whim of many leaders who do not agree among themselves? “How long halt ye between two opinions?”

It is a time of decision. Make up your mind!

“He that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything

of the Lord. A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways.”--
James 1:6-8

Paul tells us of some who are, “Ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (2 Timothy 3:7)

Regarding decision making, Brother Russell wrote:

“The very fact of coming to a positive decision is a great blessing and a great help in the formation of character. Every time we come to a decision, on any question, it strengthens mind and character, and makes us that much more ready for another test--along some other line, perhaps. One decision for the right, prepares the way for others in the same direction, just as hesitancy, indecision, upon one point prepares us for hesitancy upon all points, and more or less stops our Christian progress and character building. . . . Ability to decide quickly, and to decide always on the right side, what the Lord's will is, requires some experience and discipline. But the sooner we begin, the sooner we will become proficient. The more energetically we set ourselves to know the Lord's will and to do it, and to show him by our promptness that we delight to do his will, the better and the quicker will we find our characters established on proper lines.”--
Reprints, page 2930.

The desperate and fruitless antics of the priests of Baal and Elijah's derision of their efforts reminds us of Psalm 2 which describes present conditions:

“Why do the heathen rage and the people imagine a vain thing? He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his sore wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion.”--Psalms 2:1,4-6

Modern man is proud and faithless. They have their gods of science, evolution and atheism. The latter day increase of knowledge has made mankind feel confident and self-reliant. As Elijah let the priests of Baal do their utmost, the Lord gives mankind full opportunity to bring about their own salvation, if they can. But all the vaunted wisdom and knowledge of the high priests of science and of heathen philosophies, all their prancing, posturing and agonizing, avail nothing. Their gods do not answer. Mankind still dies. When they have done all they can, when they have reached their extremity, God will manifest His power. The true sacrifice will then be consumed. The work of the ransom sacrifice of Christ will be consummated in a great “restitution of all things.” After a long drought of 6000 years, rain will fall again bringing showers of blessings and truth:

“The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”--Habakkuk 2:14

Israel's Reaction

Israel reacted to the great miracle and with one voice joyfully shouted: “Jehovah, he is God, Jehovah, he is God!” The world of mankind together with Israel will say:

“Lo, this is our God, we have waited for him, and he will save us. This is Jehovah, we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”--Isaiah 25:9

Then will come true the prophecy of Jeremiah:

“They shall teach no more every man his neighbor and every man his brother, saying, know the Lord, for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord, for I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more.”--Jeremiah 31:34-36

Two things are pictured by Elijah's destruction of the prophets of Baal. It illustrates the ministry of the truth whereby we do a slaying work with “the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God.” (Ephesians 6:17) We utterly expose the religious errors, the doctrines of devils, that dishonor God. It also pictures the final destruction of Satan and all his incorrigible followers at the end of the Millennium:

“And fire came down from heaven and devoured them.”--Revelation 20:9

What a joy to be favored with an understanding of the divine plan and our part in it!

Gideon and the Altar of Baal

“And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord; and the Lord delivered them into the hand of Midian seven years.”--Judges 6:1

AT THE time of our lesson Israel was in deep trouble. At an earlier time Midian was friendly to Israel. It was to the land of Midian that Moses fled after having killed the Egyptian taskmaster. Jethro, priest of Midian, became his father-in-law. Jethro and Hobab his son were good friends to the Israelites during their wanderings in the wilderness. Their descendants, the Kenites, were later united in close union with the Israelites.

Over the years Midian had degenerated into a vicious and warlike nation. They were a nomadic people, living in tents, and shifting from place to place, plundering as they went. They are described as possessing cattle, flocks, and camels as the sand of the seashore in multitude. Through plunder and tribute they became very rich. When Moses was still alive, they --began to demoralize the children of Israel and cause them to sin against the Lord by setting examples of immorality and idolatry. Because of this, Moses was commanded to break the power of Midian which he did. The booty the Israelites took on that occasion was tremendous. In Numbers chapter 31 we find that the livestock captured was 675,000 sheep, 72,000 beef cattle, and 61,000 other animals. Besides this there was taken “jewels of gold, chains, and bracelets, rings, earrings, and tablets” (Numbers 31:50-52) which amounted to 16,750 shekels in weight (Moffatt says it was 34,000 pounds). That's a lot of gold!

This is the nation which, at the time of our lesson, had recovered, had resumed its vicious ways, and was again oppressing Israel. Their method of oppression was particularly frustrating. Rather than open warfare, army against army, they systematically robbed and plundered the Israelites using hit-and-run tactics. They watched and waited until crops were planted, cultivated, brought to maturity and harvested. Then when all the work was done, they swooped down and took the produce. We read, “And so it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up.” (Judges 6:3) In the spring they waited until the grass of the field was green and high. When they saw the flocks and herds of Israel feeding on the lush grass, they drove down their own tremendous herds to completely eat up, fatten on, and destroy the pasturage. Like locusts they denuded the earth. Afterward they drove off the livestock of the Israelites --together with their own. Thus we read,

“And they encamped against them [Israel], and destroyed the increase of the earth . . . and left no sustenance for Israel; neither

sheep, nor ox, nor ass. For they came up with their cattle, and their tents and they came as grasshoppers for multitude; for both they and their camels were without number. And they entered into the land to destroy it.”-- Judges 6:4,5

When the wheat had ripened and had been harvested, the Midianites watched from the hills for the tell-tale signs of threshing and winnowing. In those days the ears of wheat were placed on rock-hard threshing floors and oxen were used to tread out the grains. Then on a windy day the wheat was tossed high into the air so that the wind would blow away the chaff. This was hard work. During the threshing these clouds of chaff were visible from a distance and were observed by the Midianites. As soon as the hard labor of the threshing and winnowing of a particular field was finished, down came the raiders and seized the grain. You can well imagine the frustration of Israel. To have bread to eat they were compelled to do their threshing under great difficulty, in concealed places such as dens and caves where they also hid some of their grain and such produce as they could salvage to provide skimpy rations. This is what is implied in Judges 6:2,

“And the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel. And because of the Midianites, the children of Israel made them the dens which are in the mountains and caves and strongholds.”*I wonder if these were some of the caves which were later used for the storage of sacred scrolls!

As a result of all this Israel lived in constant fear and dread. They were a crushed nation.

Israel's Sin of Idolatry

What was the evil which Israel did in the sight of the Lord and for which they were delivered into the hand of Midian? It was because of their idolatry, specifically Baal worship. All the misfortunes they suffered were in strict accordance with God's expressed law to Israel. This law was expressed over and over again in their scriptures clearly setting forth the rewards of obedience and the penalties for disobedience. No Israelite could claim ignorance of it. For example, we read of the blessings of obedience:

“Ye shall make you no idols nor graven image, neither rear you up a standing image [margin, pillar], neither shall ye set up any image of stone in your land, to bow down unto it; for I am the Lord your God. Ye shall keep my sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuary. I am the Lord. If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them, then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit; and your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach

unto the sowing time. And ye shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely. And I will give you peace in the land, and ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid.”--Leviticus 26:1-6

Because of their idolatry, they were missing all these blessings. Instead they were oppressed and beaten down. They were not able to stand before their enemies. We read further regarding this expressed rule of God:

“There shall no man be able to stand before you; for the Lord your God shall lay the fear of you and the dread of you upon all the land that ye shall tread upon, as he hath said unto you. Behold, I set before you this day, a blessing and a curse. A blessing if ye obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day; and a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God, but turn aside out of the way which I command you this day, to go after other gods, which ye have not known.”--Deuteronomy 11:25-28

This is exactly what they had done. They had gone after Baal and had incurred the curse. Now we get to specifics:

“But it shall come to pass, if thou wilt not hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe to do all his commandments, and his statutes which I command thee this day; that all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee.”--Deuteronomy 28:15,33

Many curses are then listed; one is in verse 33:

“The fruit of thy land, and all thy labours, shall a nation which thou knowest not, eat up; and thou shalt be only oppressed and crushed away.”

Doesn't that sound familiar? This is an exact prophecy of what had come upon Israel at the time of our lesson.

With this background in mind, we now read the narrative in Judges:

“And Israel was greatly impoverished because of the Midianites. And the children of Israel cried unto the Lord. And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord because of the Midianites, that the Lord sent a prophet unto the children of Israel.”--Judges 6:6-8

This prophet reminded them of their sin of idolatry, the cause of all their trouble, implying that if they returned to the Lord, they would be delivered from the hand of Midian. From what transpired next we know that Israel must have listened to the prophet and indicated a willingness to return to the Lord. But they didn't know just how to proceed. Baal-worship was too strongly entrenched, and they had no

--effective leadership. Seeing their willingness, the Lord provided the necessary leadership. We read from the account:

“And there came an angel of the Lord, and sat under an oak which was in Ophrah, that pertained unto Joash the Abiezrite. And his son, Gideon, threshed wheat by the winepress, to hide it from the Midianites.”--Judges 6:11

A more accurate translation tells us that Gideon “was beating out some wheat inside the winepress.”

The Jewish winepresses of that time were hewn out of rock, and consisted of two large receptacles or vats at different elevations, one above the other. The upper and more shallow part, usually slightly below ground level, was where the grapes were put and trodden, to press out the juice. The still lower and deeper part was the vat into which the extracted juice overflowed. When the lower vat was full, the new wine was ladled out and put into huge ox skins to ferment. After aging the wine was transferred into smaller skins for use and for storage.

Since the grape harvest did not coincide with the wheat harvest, the winepress was empty at this time. Gideon was inside the winepress, apparently in the lower part, where he would be completely hidden from the view of any Midianites who might be watching from a distance. He was using a flail, a wooden paddle, to beat out the wheat. Then he probably tossed the wheat into the upper part of the wine--press to separate the chaff. It is significant that there was an oak tree overspreading the winepress. This would serve to conceal any emanation of chaff that might result from Gideon's efforts.

The record says that an angel of the Lord came and sat down under the oak tree. From this position the angel was probably able to look down into the winepress. Gideon soon became aware that someone was watching him. Looking up he saw a distinguished looking man in bright clothing sitting under the oak. As Gideon quickly vaulted out of the wine--press his visitor stood up and greeted him with the words, “The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour!” This salutation seems a little incongruous. Gideon, in fear of the Midianites, had hidden himself in a winepress to beat out a few grains of wheat to make a little bread for his family. Did this make him a “mighty man of valour?” But I am sure the angel was not mistaken. He did not speak idle words. So this salutation must tell us something regarding Gideon's previous activities, something which the recorded narrative does not reveal. Who, then, is Gideon?

The Facts About Gideon

We know that he was a mature man and had children because Judges 8:20 refers to his firstborn son. We also know from Judges

8:18 that he was of a princely appearance, that he had a look of nobility, and resembled the child of a king. Although the record is silent on this point, I think we can reasonably conclude that he was already an outstanding man in --Israel, that on many occasions he had valorously distinguished himself against roving bands of nomadic robbers who --oppressed Israel. It is significant that Gideon did not protest or contradict the angel's reference to his valor but only questioned the other part of the statement, "The Lord is with thee." We now read from the account:

"And Gideon said unto him, Oh my Lord, if the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? And where be all his miracles which our fathers told us of, saying, Did not the Lord bring us up from Egypt? But now the Lord hath forsaken us, and delivered us into the hands of the Midianites. And the Lord looked upon him, and said, Go in this thy might, and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have not I sent thee?"--Judges 6:13,14

When Gideon addressed the angel as "My Lord," he did not realize it was an angel of the Lord he was talking to but thought it was a man, a prophet sent of God. Now in his response to the angel we see the humility of Gideon and the reason why God had selected him as the one to deliver Israel. We read:

"And he said unto him, Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? Behold, my family is poor in Manasseh; and I am the least in my father's house."--Judges 6:15

God Uses the Humble

Do you see why the Lord could use him? The Lord has no use for the proud and arrogant who glory in their own strength. He uses as his instruments those who realize their own nothingness; and who, consequently, rely solely upon his strength. We continue with the 16th verse:

"And the Lord said unto him, Surely I will be with thee, and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man."

This reiteration of the fact that the Lord would indeed use him in spite of his humble estate interested Gideon very much. He begged the man of God to stay there under the oak until he could go and bring him a present. The man agreed. Gideon then hastened to his tent nearby and prepared a delicious meal of lamb and broth with unleavened bread and brought it in a basket to the man. Today we would call it a picnic basket. But the man did not eat the food. Instead he told Gideon to put the meat and the bread upon a nearby rock and put the broth over them. Then the man reached out with his staff and touched the food. Instantly fire spurted out of the rock and burned up the meat, bread and broth. When he saw this, Gide--on

realized that it was an angel of the Lord he had been talking to all the while and he cried, "Alas, O Lord God, for now I have seen the angel of the Lord face to face!" He was terrified. He was familiar with God's words to Moses: "There shall no man see me and live. . . . My face shall not be seen." (Exodus 33:20,23) He thought that seeing an angel was equivalent to seeing God. But the angel reassured him saying, "Peace be unto thee. Fear not, Thou shalt not die." Then the angel disappeared.

Gideon forgot all about his unfinished job of threshing. He immediately set about gathering stones and erected an altar upon the rock which had spurted fire. Because the angel had said "Peace be unto thee," he called it Jehovah-Shalom meaning "Jehovah's Peace."

It appears that Gideon's father was one of the chief men of his tribe and district. Upon his plantation, high on a hilltop in the midst of a consecrated grove, there had been erected a statue and an altar to Baal. The groves of Baal were not living trees but consisted of huge posts or obelisks, very similar to the totem poles of the Eskimos. They were elaborately carved with figures and scenes depicting the supposed virtues and accomplishments of the idol. Gideon's father may have been in charge or was the caretaker of this grove of Baal.

The worship of Baal was obscene and --licentious. It also involved the sacrifice of little children as burnt offerings which was extremely displeasing to God. In 2 Kings we read of one of the wicked kings of Israel: "And he reared up altars for Baal, and made a grove. . . . And he made his son pass through the fire." (2 Kings 21:3,6) Of other wicked kings it is written:

"They have forsaken me . . . and have filled this place with the blood of innocents. They have built also the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire for burnt offerings unto Baal; which I commanded not, nor spake it, neither came it into my mind."--Jeremiah 19:4,5

In 2 Chronicles we read of wicked king Ahaz who worshipped Baal: "And (he) burnt his children with fire, after the abominations of the heathen."--2 Chronicles 28:1,3

That very night the Lord spoke to Gideon again, this time in a dream:

"And it came to pass the same night, that the Lord said unto him, Take thy father's young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal that thy father hath, and cut down the grove that is by it. And build an altar unto the Lord thy God upon the top of this rock, in the ordered place. And take the second bullock, and offer a burnt sacrifice with the wood of the grove which thou shalt cut down."--Judges 6:25,26

It is interesting to note God's words to Gideon, referring to himself as “the Lord thy God.” This clearly indicates that Baal was not Gideon's god, that he was not in sympathy with his father's idolatry. Amidst all of that Baal worship, he had managed to cling to Jehovah, the true God of Israel.

This command to Gideon to “throw down the altar of Baal . . . and cut down the grove,” was in strict accord with the original commandment telling Israel how they must deal with idol worship:

“But thus shall ye deal with them; ye shall destroy their altars, and break down their images, and cut down their groves, and burn their graven images with fire.”--Deuteronomy 7:5



Their altars and images were to be utterly destroyed, and the groves of sacred totems, or poles, upon which were graven the exploits of the idol, were to be cut down and burned. So this was not a new and strange commandment the Lord now gave to Gideon. It was an important part of the original law which Israel had agreed to keep:

“All that the Lord hath spoken, we will do.” (Exodus 19:8) It was simply a reminder to Gideon to carry out his responsibility as a loyal Israelite, something which should have been done by Israel as a matter of course long before, but which had been shirked. It was a forcible reminder of the reason why the Lord had permitted Israel to fall into the hands of Midian to be oppressed by them seven years.

Gideon Places God First

Under the circumstances it was a hard thing to ask Gideon to do this. The altar of Baal was on his father's property and his father was responsible for it. Defying his father's authority was bad enough, but he must also consider that the entire surrounding community was solidly composed of Baal worshippers who would --certainly resist any tampering with their idol. Obedience to the Lord meant risking his life. Gideon was willing to take that risk, but in doing so, he was as prudent as possible. He knew that if he openly attempted what the Lord had commanded, the priests of Baal and the men of the community would certainly prevent him from carrying it out. So he did his work at night.

“Then Gideon took ten men of his servants, and did as the Lord had said unto him. And so it was, because he feared his father's household, and the men of the city, that he could not do it by day, that he did it by night.”--Judges 6:27

Was this cowardly? Certainly not. He merely did not want his work to be interfered with. But he well knew that, whether done by day or by night, he would still be held responsible for his deed and would have to take the consequences. I am sure it must have crossed Gideon's mind that they might not only kill him but after that, they might even sacrifice his own children as burnt offerings to Baal. There was nothing cowardly in what Gideon did. He was indeed, as the angel said, a man of valor.

The fact that Gideon had ten servants who were willing to help him desecrate Baal seems to indicate that his entire household may have consisted of faithful Israelites who still worshipped the true God, that Gideon had been attracting to himself and to his service those in Israel who abhorred Baal and clung to Jehovah.

A seven-year-old bullock is an ox not a calf. At midnight Gideon and his men harnessed this powerful animal and led it up the hill atop of which stood the altar of Baal. The altar consisted of a huge, ugly, brazen image of the god with arms outstretched. It was hollow so that a roaring fire could be built inside it. When superheated, it was customary to sacrifice to it by throwing a little child into its arms to roast alive. The sheer weight of the idol made the ox necessary. It was too heavy to be moved by hand. Gideon quickly climbed the

image and tied a rope around its neck. Attaching the other end to the harness of the ox, and assisted by his men, he pulled the idol down from its foundation so that it lay ignominiously upon its face in the dirt. Next they gathered stones and erected an altar to the Lord upon the spot where the idol had stood. Lest the noise of chopping arouse the community, Gideon probably used the ox to topple the grove of totem poles surrounding the idol. We can imagine a man climbing each one of the ornately carved poles and attaching a rope to its top. Then he would harness the ox to it and noiselessly pull it down. When the entire grove was thus leveled, the ox was probably used further to drag the huge poles to the newly made altar of Jehovah where they were laid. When all was in readiness, the wood was ignited and the bullock offered upon the fire as a sacrifice to the Lord. As the flames fed by the dry poles consumed the sacrifice, Gideon and his men prostrated themselves before it in humble reverence to their God; then they quietly left the hill.

Gideon Fulfills God's Command

Dawn was just breaking when the fire on the hill leaped skyward, lighting up the countryside. An early riser in the village saw it, and gave the alarm, "Fire comes from the altar of Baal!" he cried, "Our god is speaking to us!" The men gathered themselves and hurried up the hill some distance away to see the miracle. But what they saw when they got there stunned and angered them. The sacred grove was gone. Upon the place where Baal had stood they saw another altar which they recognized as an altar to Jehovah because it was built in austere simplicity, according to the specifications given in Exodus 20:24-26. A brisk fire still burned upon it consuming the last of the sacrifice. Scattered about the altar and still smoldering they saw the charred ends of their totem poles. Before the altar, flat upon its face in the dirt as though doing obeisance to it, was the great brazen image of Baal.

They immediately suspected that Gideon was responsible for this outrage. It was probably well known that he did not worship Baal. They made inquiries to be sure because Gideon's father, Joash, was one of them and was their chief. They would not want to unjustly accuse his son. At this point a witness must have come forward to say that Gideon and his servants had been absent from home that night and that the second bullock of Joash, to which Gideon had access, was missing. We now read from the account:

"And when the men of the city arose early in the morning, behold, the altar of Baal was cast down, and the grove was cut down that was by it, and the second bullock was offered upon the altar that was built. And they said to one another, Who hath done this thing? And

when they inquired and asked, they said, Gideon, the son of Joash hath done this thing.”--Judges 6:28,29

The idolaters armed themselves and went in a body to the house of Joash where Gideon had taken refuge. Meanwhile Joash had talked with his son Gideon --regarding his exploits that night and had come to some definite conclusions. Joash now came out and boldly faced the mob. We continue with verses 30 and 31:

“Then the men of the city said unto Joash, Bring out thy son that he may die; because he hath cast down the altar of Baal and because he hath cut down the grove that was by it. And Joash said unto all that stood against him, Will ye plead for Baal? Will ye save him? He that will plead for him, let him be put to death whilst it is yet morning. If he be a god, let him plead for himself, because one hath cast down his altar.”

Do you see what a powerful argument Joash used? There stood the supposedly mighty Baal surrounded by a veritable forest of poles upon which were engraved the scenes of his reputed great accomplishments and virtues. Along comes a puny man with a cow and pulls down the whole business and the mighty Baal is powerless to prevent it! So Joash told them,

“Now if Baal cannot fight for himself, but has to depend upon you to defend him, he isn't much of a god, is he? Do you still believe in him? If so, perhaps Baal requires a human sacrifice to expiate what has happened to his altar. If you are so eager to plead for him, how about offering yourself to die? Let anyone here who pleads the cause of Baal be put to death this very morning!”

At this the ferocity of the mob quickly cooled. One by one they slunk away. From his performance, I think we can safely assume that Joash had been then and there converted to the worship of Jehovah.

The news of what Gideon had done spread like wildfire throughout Israel. It showed them that Baal was a false god, that he was powerless against the God of Gideon, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the true God of their fathers. The people woke up to the fact that their idolatry was really the cause of all their troubles. As a result there was a great conversion in Israel and there was a determination to throw off the yoke of Midian. All they needed now was an effective leader. Gideon became that leader. With only three hundred men, carefully selected --according to the Lord's direction, he put to rout 135,000 of the host of Midian and freed Israel from their yoke. How this was accomplished is another story and may well be the subject of another discourse.

Some Lessons for Us

Let us see what further lessons we can learn from this account. First of all there is a lesson respecting idolatry. As idolatrous natural Israel had its groves of totem poles carved with intricate imaginations, so nominal spiritual Israel today has for its totem poles the various denominational creeds to which men give veneration. Monstrous "Baal" is still worshipped in nominal Christendom today. Although we do not have a literal Baal of brass heated red-hot with extended arms to receive little children into its fiery embrace, we do have a Baal on a much larger scale: a blasphemous misrepresentation of the only true God. Today we have a --super Baal, not one who is content with an occasional human burnt offering, but a god red-hot with the flames of hell and purgatory, with millions agonizing in his embrace eternally. This Baal, this horrible misconception of a loving and merciful God, will be toppled and laid in the dust by the great antitypical Gideon, Christ Jesus, who will also cut down and destroy the creed totem poles of Christendom.

But there is a more subtle and serious form of idolatry that threatens the Lord's people, true spiritual Israel. The first commandment of the Decalogue was:

"Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven --image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them; for I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God."--Exodus 20:3-5

This commandment was amplified in Deuteronomy:

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord. And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might."--Deuteronomy 6:4,5

Of course, none of the Lord's true people are guilty of idolatry in the sense of worshipping graven images of wood, metal and stone. Yet anything that is loved more than God, which is exalted above God in the mind, is an idol. One's own self can be an idol. In many respects an idol of self is the most horrible one of all--the meanest looking. But most of the friends do not idolize self, or wealth, ambition and fame, nor do we value highly the possession of beautiful homes, automobiles, expensive jewelry, and fine clothing as the world does. I am sure we know enough not to do that. But there is another danger. Because of the very unselfish love which a Christian life engenders, we may set undue affection upon wife, husband, parent, child, brother or sister. Jesus saw this danger, and said:

“He that loveth father or mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me.”--Matthew 10:37

“If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother and wife, and children and brethren, and sisters; yea and his own life also; he cannot be my disciple.”--Luke 14:26

“Hate,” as used here, does not mean to --detest. According to other translations it simply means “to love less.” We are indeed to love our families. We are to love them very much. We are told, “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church.” (Ephesians 5:25) Did not Christ love the Church very much? And in Matthew, “Honour thy father and thy mother; and Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” (Matthew 19:19) We read in 1 John 4:20, “If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar.” So it is not a matter of ceasing to love our families, or loving them any less than we do, but of loving God and Christ even more than these. As the poet expresses it:

“’Tis written, ‘keep yourselves from idols.’ How shall I obey? Oh, not by loving less, but by loving more! It is not that we love our precious ones too much, but God too little.”

Increasing Our Faith

But as a practical matter, how can we increase our love for God? How can we attain that ideal given in Mark 12:30 of loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength? There is no better way than to contemplate, meditate, and study the Plan of God, and cooperate with it. It is a wonderful and flawless plan. It is the perfect solution to all the problems of humankind. It answers every question, and soothes every fear. It is wise, just, and loving. The more we realize and appreciate its beauty and grandeur, the more we will love the Author of that plan. We will grow in love for God. We are bound to do so. Additionally, we can increase our love for God by reminding ourselves, and tracing, God's wonderful providences in our lives, how he has drawn us, and called us, and lovingly led us all the way. We can remember all of his “exceeding great and precious promises” to us which are so sure of fulfillment. It is in these ways that our love for God will grow, excel, and surpass all earthly loves.

If you love God, tell him so! Express your longing in every prayer you make. Say to him, “Lord, I love thee!” David, the beloved of God, did this with beauty of expression:

“As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God; for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God?”--Psalms 42:1,2

Our love for God should be so fervent that this cry of David should be also our own longing and aspiration.

Although our love for God is spontaneous, and not for reward, nevertheless, the Lord does abundantly bless those who love him; here and hereafter.

“As it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.”--1 Corinthians 2:9

“We know that all things work together for good to them that love God; to them who are the called according to his purpose.”--Romans 8:28

We must prove our love for God before we are found worthy. Deuteronomy 13:3 --applies to us, “The Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul.” Let us not forget that there were material blessings promised Israel if they would refrain from idolatry. As spiritual Israel, we are the heirs of the spiritual counterparts of those blessings. The Lord promised them “rain in due season.” We are promised, and have abundantly received, showers of truth, “meat in due season.” Israel was promised that their land would yield her increase and their trees much fruit. We bring forth the fruits and graces of the holy spirit. As Jesus said, “He that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal.” (John 4:36) Israel was promised a good vintage and “bread to the full.” We have the wine of the communion of the blood of Christ. (1 Corinthians 10:16) We do indeed eat bread to the full. We partake of Christ; as it is written:

“Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life. He that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.”--John 6:35

In return for their obedience, the Lord promised Israel peace and safety, and freedom from fear. Spiritual Israel has the “peace of God, which passeth all understanding.” (Philippians 4:7) Our freedom from fear in a troubled world is expressed in Psalm 46:

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.”--Psalms 46:1-3

It was so frustrating and disheartening to Israel when the Midianites laid in wait and then swooped down and took away their produce for which they had worked so hard. They had to start all over again. Similarly it sometimes seems that when we have managed to make a little headway in developing the fruits and graces of the Christian

character, the enemy comes in like a flood and undoes all our work. This can be very discouraging. At such times let us remember,

“Lay not wait, O wicked one, against the dwelling of the righteous. Spoil not his resting place. For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again.”--Proverbs 24:15,16

It's not how many times you fall that counts, but how many times you get up. Let us say as it is written in Micah 7:8, “Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy. When I fall, I shall arise!” Let us remember that, in the prize ring, a fighter is counted out only if he stays down.

We note that the Midianites robbed and plundered Israel at their harvest time, depriving them of the food they had so laboriously acquired. I think this is significant. Are there some today who would take away the harvest truths which we have found so satisfying, some who would rob us of our spiritual food and leave us impoverished? Such plundering must be vigorously resisted if we would maintain our spiritual lives.

Gideon didn't look much like a “mighty man of valour” when he hid himself in the winepress to thresh wheat. But that's what the angel called him. Let this teach us that it is our potential that God sees when he calls us, not what we are but what we can be. If he has called you to run for the prize of the high calling, he knows that you can do it with his grace to help. As he instructed and guided Gideon in everything, he will do the same for you. His words to Gideon-- “Surely I will be with thee. . . . Have I not sent thee”--apply with equal force to you.

You will remember that the Lord said to Gideon, “Take thy father's young bullock, even the second bullock of seven years old, and throw down the altar of Baal.” (Judges 6:25) Then the second bullock was to be offered as a sacrifice. This has a wonderful significance. Adam was the Heavenly Father's first bullock--the first perfect man, who forfeited his life through disobedience. Jesus was the --Father's second bullock, the second perfect man, the number seven signifying perfection. The burnt sacrifice of the second bullock corresponds to the sacrifice of the bullock of the tabernacle. The second bullock was also the Ransom sacrifice. Thus we read:

“The first man, Adam, was made a living soul. The last Adam was made a quickening spirit. . . . The first man is of the earth earthy. The second man is the Lord from heaven.”--1 Corinthians 15:45,47

When the result of this ransom sacrifice is applied to the world during the Millennium, then the antitypical altar of Baal, Satan and the devil who has so long oppressed the world, will be overthrown and the worship of the true God restored. Thus we can see that this

account of Gideon, as with so many others in the Bible, contains an outline of the entire Divine Plan from the fall of man to his restoration. Gideon--A Type of Christ

Gideon of course was a type of Christ. There are so many correspondencies. The scriptures indicate that Gideon was of a princely appearance, that he had a look of nobility and resembled the child of a king. Of Jesus it was written:

“He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest. And the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David.”-- Luke 1:32

Gideon was told, “Thou shalt smite the Mid--ianites as one man.” (Judges 6:16) Similarly, it is through the performance of one man, Jesus Christ, that Satan will be smitten and his oppressive rule over mankind ended. Thus we read:

“As by one man sin entered into the world; and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned. For if through the offence of one, many be dead; much more the grace of God and the gift of grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.”-- Romans 5:12, 15,19

We find that Gideon promptly obeyed the Lord's command to destroy the altar of Baal but that he exercised prudence in doing it. He did it at night to prevent interference. We too can be prudent in our service. We can give our witness to the world and demolish false doctrines in such a way as not to unnecessarily antagonize others, thus preventing premature interference with our work. We know according to John 9:4 that “the night cometh when no man can work”; but let us not precipitate that time. Jesus was similarly prudent. Although he was not afraid of the Scribes and Pharisees, he avoided unnecessary confrontation with them until his time had come. We read, “Therefore they sought again to take him; but he escaped out of their hand; and went away beyond Jordan.” (John 10:39,40) This was not cowardly but prudent.

In obeying the call of the Lord, Gideon risked his life, his family, and everything he had. Not knowing how he would be delivered from the wrath of the idolaters or whether he would be delivered at all, he promptly carried out the Lord's will. When he had removed the altar of Baal, he erected another altar and offered an acceptable sacrifice to God. This is a good picture of consecration. Removing every trace of Baal worship from our hearts, renouncing every earthly idol, and raising God to a supreme position in our lives, we “present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God.”--Romans 12:1

The name Midian means strife or contention. This is what Israel of old suffered. Is there strife and contention in the church today? Israel got into difficulty when they turned away from the true teachings of God. Might the strife in the church today be caused by departures from the truth as the Lord revealed it to us through his wise and faithful servant? This is something to think about.

Beware of “Midian”

There is an intimate and personal lesson to be learned from this account. If the Lord ever seems to have turned his face from you as he did from Israel, if you feel spiritually oppressed and impoverished, if you have lost much of the zestful appreciation of the truth which you once enjoyed--perhaps Midian is robbing you, too. Just as Israel was enticed into idolatry and so lost the Lord's favor for a while, perhaps you have allowed some person or thing to become a stronghold of Baal to you. If this is the case, prompt and vigorous action is necessary. A warfare is required. As God sent Gideon to deliver Israel, he will make his mighty power available to you, through the antitypical Gideon, Jesus Christ. Thus it is written:

“The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God; and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”--2 Corinthians 10:4,5

If you will do this, you will be restored to God's full favor and blessing.

Gideon's Great Victory

“The Lord delivered [the children of Israel] into the hand of Midian seven years.”--Judges 6:1

THE “hand of Midian” was a heavy hand of oppression. Midian systematically plundered and robbed the Israelites of the fruit of their labors. Their situation is described in Judges chapter 6:

“And Israel greatly was impoverished because of the Midianites; and the children of Israel cried unto the Lord. And it came to pass, when the children of Israel cried unto the Lord because of the Midianites, that the Lord sent a prophet unto the children of Israel, which said unto them, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, I brought you up from Egypt, and brought you forth out of the house of bondage; and I delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians, and out of the hand of all that oppressed you, and drave them out from before you, and gave you their land. And I said unto you, I am the Lord your God; fear not the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell; but ye have not obeyed my voice.”-- Judges 6:6-10

Upon hearing the repentant cry of Israel the Lord raised up Gideon to lead them away from their idolatry and deliver them from its consequences. At the Lord's command Gideon destroyed the altar and grove of Baal thus demonstrating that the supposedly mighty Baal was no god, that he was powerless to prevent the desecration of his own altar, that he was powerless against the God of Gideon, the true God of their fathers. As a result there was a great conversion in Israel, a determination to return to the worship of Jehovah and to throw off the yoke of Midian. Gideon was acclaimed their leader.

Midianite spies who had been planted in Israel quickly reported this situation to their lords. The enemies of Israel promptly acted to put down the rebellion. Thus we read:

“Then all the Midianites, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east were gathered together, and went over [the Jordan] and pitched in the valley of Jezreel.”--Judges 6:33 We know from Judges 8:10 that this combined enemy army represented a force of 135,000 men. Realizing that Israel was now committed to war, Gideon did something which shows us that he was familiar with the law which the Lord had given Israel. We read that, “the spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon and he blew a trumpet.” (Judges 6:34) When he blew a trumpet under these circumstances, he obeyed a commandment of the Lord given before. It was not only a commandment but was also an assurance of victory.

“And if ye go to war in your land against the enemy that oppresseth you, then ye shall blow an alarm with the trumpets. And ye shall be

remembered before the Lord your God, and ye shall be saved from your enemies.”--Numbers 10:9

Gideon claimed this promise. He sent messengers throughout the land, blowing trumpets and rallying the men of Israel to the banner of the Lord.

As the men from the various tribes began to gather under his leadership, Gideon had second thoughts as to whether the Lord had really appointed him to lead Israel to victory. This seems quite incredible. Had he not previously met and talked with an angel of God who assured him that he was indeed the one selected?

“And the angel of the Lord appeared unto him, and said unto him, The Lord is with thee, thou mighty man of valour. . . . And the Lord looked upon him and said, Go in this thy might and thou shalt save Israel from the hand of the Midianites. Have I not sent thee?”--Judges 6:12,14

As if this was not assurance enough, the angel of the Lord brought fire out of the rock to consume Gideon's offering of lamb and unleavened bread. The account is in Judges 6:21. Then God spoke to him in a dream and commanded him to throw down the altar and grove of Baal. When he had done this in obedience to God's command, he afterward was saved from almost certain death at the hands of the idolaters. Were not all these evidences assurance enough to Gideon that the Lord would indeed save Israel by his hand as he had said? No. In spite of all this he still had doubts! He felt that he had to put God to the test!

“And Gideon said unto God, If thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said, Behold, I will put a fleece of wool in the floor [that is, the threshing floor]; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then shall I know that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said. And it was so. For he rose up early on the morrow, and thrust the fleece together, and wringed the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water.”--Judges 6:36-38

Now wasn't that a wonderful demonstration? But believe it or not, he still was not convinced!

“And Gideon said unto God, let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once. Let me prove, I pray thee, but this once [more] with the fleece. Let it now be dry only upon the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew. And God did so that night; for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground.”--Judges 6:39,40

Gideon was finally satisfied.

32,000 men of Israel responded to Gideon's call to battle. From a human standpoint they were far too few and stood no chance against

the 135,000 superbly armed and disciplined enemy force arrayed against them. From God's standpoint they were too many:

“And the Lord said unto Gideon, The people that are with thee are too many for me to give the Midianites into their hands; lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me.”--Judges 7:2

So the Lord instructed Gideon to make a proclamation that anyone who was fearful should return home. It is quite understandable that many would be fearful. For seven years they had been oppressed by Midian and every effort to resist had failed. They had lost confidence in themselves. True, the trumpets of Gideon had stirred them up just as today a military brass band stirs up feelings of patriotism. In their momentary enthusiasm they had responded to the call. But now, seeing the huge encampment of Midian in plain sight in the valley below, their courage evaporated. So in response to this new proclamation, 22,000 fearful men left the army and returned home. This left Gideon with only 10,000 men against Midian's 135,000. Now we read:

“And the Lord said unto Gideon, The people are yet too many. Bring them down unto the water, and I will try them for thee there.”--Judges 7:4

God Selects Gideon's Army

The Lord told Gideon the test that would further reduce his forces. Gideon told his captains what to watch for. The men had been training in the hot sun for hours and they were thirsty. Gideon gave the order and they were marched by hundreds down to a nearby brook of cool water to drink. Their method of drinking was to be a test. At the brook most of the men knelt down and threw themselves flat upon their stomachs, immersed their faces up to their eyes in the cool water, and drank deeply. But a soldier could not assume this position without first loosening his armor and removing his helmet and breastplate. He must also unbuckle and lay aside his sword. Otherwise it might slip from its scabbard into the water when he bent forward. But a few of the men did not drink this way. Instead they squatted at the water's edge with their bodies erect and eyes alert. With their armor and swords intact, they cupped their hands and brought the water up to their lips and lapped it. These were the men the captains had been instructed to choose from all the rest. When the test was finished, there were only 300 of them.

“And the Lord said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men that lapped will I save you, and deliver the Midianites into thine hand. And let all the other people go, every man unto his place [or tent].”--Judges 7:7



Gideon must have been shocked. How could he with only 300 men possibly defeat the vast host of Midian? The ratio was 450 to one! These were impossible odds even if his men were equipped with machine guns! He must have retired that night with uneasy thoughts. Then we read in verse 9: “And it came to pass the same night, that the Lord said unto him, rise, get thee down unto the host; for I have - -delivered it into thine hand.” Gideon must have expressed his concern because the Lord reassured him yet once again. He told Gideon to get right up while it was still night, take a servant with him, and under cover of darkness, go down to the camp of Midian and listen to what they were saying. Gideon obeyed immediately.

The enemy camp was of tremendous size.

“The Midianites, and the Amalekites, and all the children of the east, lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude. And their camels were without number, as the sand by the sea side for multitude.”--Judges 7:12

As is customary, sentries were posted around the camp. Under cover of darkness Gideon and his servant crept close to one of the sentry posts where two soldiers on guard duty were talking together.

“And when Gideon was come, behold, there was a man that told a dream unto his fellow, and said, Behold, I dreamed a dream; and, lo, a cake of barley bread tumbled into the host of Midian, and came unto a tent, and smote it, that it fell, and overturned it, that the tent lay along. And his fellow answered and said, this is nothing else save the sword of Gideon, the son of Joash, a man of Israel. For unto his hand hath God delivered Midian, and all his host. And it was so, when Gideon heard the telling of the dream, and the interpretation thereof, that he worshipped, and returned into the hosts of Israel and said, Arise; for the Lord hath delivered into your hand the host of Midian.”--Judges 7:13-15



He woke them all up even though it was still night and not just the chosen 300, but all the men of Israel who were still in the camp. They were to be in readiness to pursue the defeated enemy. So convinced was Gideon of victory that he sent swift messengers to all the tribes to quickly come down against Midian and take a spoil to thus regain some of their losses from the seven years of oppression.

The Lord had instructed Gideon of the plan of attack. It was a simple yet extremely effective plan. Each of the 300 men was given a trumpet, an empty pitcher, and a lighted lamp. Concealing their lamps in their pitchers they silently approached the camp of Midian and spaced themselves so as to completely surround it. Then at the darkest part of the night, the middle watch, at a given signal by Gideon, they blew their trumpets, broke their pitchers, waved their lamps, and shouted: "THE SWORD OF THE LORD AND OF GIDEON!" We read:

"And they stood every man in his place round about the camp. And all the host ran and cried, and fled. And the three hundred blew the trumpets, and the Lord set every man's sword against his fellow, even throughout all the host. And the host fled."--Judges 7:21,22

In the dark they mistook each other as the enemy and slaughtered each other as they fled.

Some may wonder why this strategy was so effective. The reason is simple. A perfect illusion had been created. In those days when an army moved at night, it was customary for only the regimental trumpeter or bugler to signal attack or retreat, as the case might be. So when the Midianites were suddenly awakened by the noise of the breaking of pitchers and saw 300 widely spaced lamps completely surrounding them and heard 300 buglers sounding attack, the instant and natural conclusion of these trained men of war was that 300 regiments of fully armored men were --attacking them, that they were hopelessly outnumbered. The breaking pitchers did sound very much like the rattling of armor and the clashing of swords upon iron shields in battle.

Then the great number of camels in the camp panicked and created pandemonium. A camel is a large, ungainly beast, very unruly when stampeded, running in an erratic, zigzag course, trampling down anything in its path with its enormous splayed feet. We are told in the account that "their camels were without number, as the sand of the sea side for multitude."

It was a complete rout. Now all the rest of the men in Gideon's encampment joined the 300 in pursuit. As dawn broke men from other parts of Israel arrived on the scene and attacked the fleeing host of Midian from every side completely defeating them. We read that "there fell an hundred and twenty thousand men that drew sword." (Judges 8:10)

Although Gideon did not realize it at the time, a great promise and prophecy had been fulfilled. It is found in Leviticus 26 and is addressed to faithful Israelites:

“And ye shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. And five of you shall chase an hundred, and an hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight. And your enemies shall fall before you by the sword.”--Leviticus 26:7,8

This is what happened when Israel had --repented of their idolatry and returned to their God. This was “the sword of the Lord, and of Gideon.”

“Thus was Midian subdued before the children of Israel, so that they lifted up their heads no more. And the country was in quietness forty years in the days of Gideon.”--Judges 8:28

Lessons for Us

There are many valuable lessons to be learned from this account. When the children of Israel realized that their departure from the true worship of God was --responsible for their being oppressed by Midian, they cried to God in sincere repentance. God heard them and delivered them. I think we can learn a timely lesson from this. At this end of the age the Lord has made the truth very plain to his people through the ministry of a special servant. If any of the Lord's people have strayed from the truth, perhaps the Lord will permit chastisement to come upon them as he did upon Israel. He may permit some crushing experiences in order to indicate his disapproval. We know that God does sometimes rebuke his children for their own good because we read, “My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him.” (Hebrews 12:5) Those who are alert to recognize the discipline of the Lord and search their hearts and identify the reason for it, should with broken heart cry to the Lord in humble repentance and return to the true precepts of God. If they do, God will hear their cry and give them relief just as he did to the children of Israel when they abandoned their waywardness and returned to him. God never ignores or despises a humble and heartfelt repentance. On the contrary, he delights in it and considers it an acceptable sacrifice to him. This is beautifully stated in Psalm 51:

“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.”--Psalms 51:17

Rotherham's translation is even more meaningful: “The sacrifices of God are a spirit that is broken. A heart, broken and crushed, O God thou wilt not despise.”

Gideon's sounding of the trumpet throughout all the land, signaling the impending defeat of Midian and the deliverance of Israel from their yoke, has a wonderful significance. It is a portrayal of the Jubilee Trumpet, signaling the Grand --Jubilee of a thousand years during which all the enemies of humanity will be destroyed, “the last

enemy that shall be destroyed is death.” (1 Corinthians 15:26) In the second volume of *Studies in the Scriptures* the time features of the Jubilee system are so beautifully and convincingly brought out that there can be no doubt in a reasonable mind that the Grand Jubilee began in 1874, that “the times of restitution” there commenced, that the King, Christ Jesus, began his reign, that the proclamation of liberty began, that the call to battle against Satan's “Midian” of oppression was then heard, that since then there has been a great awakening of men to a realization of their rights, the rise of Communism, of strong labor unions, of a myriad of protest movements, of powerful and violent demands for a redistribution of properties and privileges, the desire of every man to return to his rightful possessions. Can there really be any doubt about it?

This trumpet is the same as “the trump of God”:

“For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming [Rotherham: presence] of the Lord, shall not precede them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”--1 Thessalonians 4:15-17

Do you believe that the sleeping saints were raised in 1878 and that since then those of us who remain are instantly changed at death? If so, you must believe that the trumpet has been sounding since then and that the Grand Jubilee of a thousand years is under way. This is further confirmed by Paul:

“Behold, I show you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed; in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump [Rotherham: “during the last trumpet”]; for the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”--1 Corinthians 15:51,52

It is this same trumpet mentioned in Revelation:

“And the seventh angel sounded his trumpet; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, The kingdom of the world has become our Lord's and his Christ's, and he shall reign for the ages of the ages. And those twenty-four elders who sit in the presence of God on their thrones, fell on their faces, and worshipped God, saying, We give thanks to thee, O Lord God, the omnipotent; thou who art and thou who wast, because thou hast taken thy great power and reigned. And the nations were enraged, and thy wrath came, and the appointed time of the dead to be judged [Rotherham: “vindicated”; this is the raising of the sleeping saints] and to give the reward to thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and to those who fear thy name, the

little and the great and to destroy those who destroy [corrupt, pollute] the earth.”--Revelation 11:15-18, Diaglott

There is nothing wrong with the sequence of these verses. They are in the correct --order of time. They clearly show that the reign of Christ begins before the time of trouble. This fact is also indicated in Psalm 2:

“Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my King upon my Holy Hill of Zion.”--Psalms 2:1,5,6

This sequence of events is still further confirmed in Daniel:

“And at that time shall Michael stand up; the great Prince [Rotherham: ruler] which standeth for the children of thy people; and there shall be a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation.”--Daniel 12:1

Yes, the Grand Jubilee trumpet is now sounding and will continue to sound until the end of the Millennial age at which time every man shall have returned to his rightful possession--human perfection in a happy, world-wide Eden.

In response to Gideon's trumpet the men of Israel began to assemble under his command. They came by the thousands. Then a very strange thing happened. Gideon, who had received so many positive assurances from the Lord, began to doubt that the Lord would indeed save --Israel by his hand. He put out the fleece --asking God for a sign. Gideon did not act wisely when he did this and he knew it. He felt guilty about not taking God at his word. He knew that he was provoking God by requiring him to confirm his plainly spoken word by a sign. He admitted it when he said to God: “Let not thine anger be hot against me.” (Judges 6:39)

Full Assurance of Faith

There is a lesson here. I think it is wrong for any of us to ask the Lord for a special sign; it indicates a lack of faith. Although the Lord may graciously comply with our request, as he did with Gideon, nevertheless I am sure he is much more pleased with those who are guided in all their --affairs and decisions by the principles --expressed in his word. If we had the priv--ilege of always asking God for a sign--a --direct “Yes” or “No” regarding every affair of life--it would result in a weakening of character. We would not have to use our brains. On the contrary the Lord wants us to study his word, the precepts contained in the Bible, to develop the “mind of Christ,” the spirit of a sound mind, to think like God does, to make sound decisions because we are familiar with the ways of reasonings

of God. He indicates this very thing when he says, "Come now, and let us reason together." (Isaiah 1:18) Also: "My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways." (Proverbs 23:26) Along this line, Bro. Russell wrote:

"We are not to think that because the Lord thus granted proofs to Gideon, it would be proper for us today to make similar tests. We have much advantage every way. Behind us are the experiences of Gideon and others for now thousands of years; added to which we have the New Testament records of God's favor toward mankind and the Lord Jesus. We have the 'wonderful words of life,' and an introduction to the Heavenly Father through the begetting of the Holy Spirit as a result of faith in the precious blood. Ours is a different case. The Lord would have us walk by faith in the lessons already taught us, and not by sights and signs of our own time." Reprints, page 5606.>

We find that the Lord graciously reassured Gideon over and over again, repeatedly bolstering up his faltering faith. He has great patience with us too. He helps us overcome our unbelief. I am reminded of an incident related in Mark 9:17 to 29, about a man whose son was obsessed by a particularly vicious evil spirit. The disciples could not cast out the demon so the man finally brought his little boy to Jesus, begging him for help. Then we read: "Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." The poor man was desperate. He had tried everything to heal his son. Even the disciples of Jesus had failed him. How could he have faith in anything any more? But he wanted so much to have the necessary faith, so he cried out in anguish: "Lord, I believe! Help thou mine unbelief!" And Jesus had mercy on him, and healed the boy. We can learn an encouraging lesson from this. If our faith ever falters, preventing us from attaining some blessing we seek, let us too cry to God: "Lord, I believe! Help thou mine unbelief!" And he will.

A Test for God's People

The account says that at first 32,000 men enthusiastically responded to Gideon's call to battle. But after they had observed the powerful enemy arrayed against them, 22,000 were afraid and accepted the opportunity to return home. They had been entirely sincere when they had gathered to Gideon, but now they had counted the cost, they had seen the possibility of death, and they backed away from the conflict. This illustrates a test that comes upon all those invited to the high calling. Many enthusiastically respond, thinking of the glory, honor and immortality, and the joy of being associated with Christ in the kingdom to bless the world. Then they pause and think soberly about what sacrifice is involved just as those soldiers of Gideon. In

the language of Luke 14:28, they “sit down and count the cost.” They find that it will cost them everything they have, that it means a full consecration and a faithfulness in sacrifice even unto death. They see that the way will be rough and narrow, a constant battle against the forces of evil in themselves and the world. It is at this point the original enthusiasm of many fades and they react like the rich young man of Matthew 19:22 who declined the invitation of Jesus, the Greater Gideon, and “went away sorrowful.”

There is nothing wrong with counting the cost. Jesus himself recommended it in Luke 14:28,31. What is wrong is the reaching of an illogical conclusion and thus passing up the grandest opportunity that will ever be offered to anyone. These do not realize what a tremendous bargain the high calling really is. It is like getting a million dollars by paying just one cent. Paul had the right conception of the matter when he wrote:

“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. . . . For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”--Romans 8:18; 2 Corinthians 4:17

After the fearful 22,000 went home, there were 10,000 brave men left who under Gideon's leadership were willing to do battle against the overwhelmingly superior enemy. These represent those who, after counting the cost, do not draw back but go forward and make a full consecration under the headship of Christ.

Now came the second test by the Lord's direction which reduced Gideon's army from 10,000 to a mere 300. It was a test by water. They were led to the brook to drink. Here, as in many other places in the scriptures, water represents the truth. As all the men were thirsty and eagerly drank of the water, so all the consecrated love and appreciate the truth. But the test of Gideon showed a difference in the manner of partaking which divided the soldiers into two classes. Most of the soldiers forgetting all else but their thirst for water loosened their armor, removed their helmet, unbuckled their swords, threw themselves flat on the ground, soiling their uniforms in the process, and buried their faces in the water. This seems to picture a somewhat careless group of the Lord's consecrated people. They love the truth but only think of their own satisfaction in it. They do not maintain an alertness to their opportunities. They lay aside the “helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit.” (Ephesians 6:17) They lack zeal, both in their own development and in the service of the truth to others. They do not keep “the whole armor of God” (Ephesians 6:11) including “the breastplate of righteousness” securely fastened. They allow their robes to become spotted (James 1:27). You will recognize this group as the Great Company.

A small minority of the soldiers, only 300, a “little flock” so to speak, drank in an entirely different manner. Squatting at the water's edge with bodies erect and eyes alert, and with their armor and swords intact, they cupped their hands, brought the water up to their lips, and lapped it with their tongues. It was these who were chosen from the others. These represent the ones who never for a moment forget their high calling as “good --soldiers of Jesus Christ.” (2 Timothy 2:3) These are they who while partaking of the water of truth remain upright and alert to every opportunity of service, who obey the injunction of Ephesians 6:13 to keep on “the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day; and having done all, to stand”; who never for a moment relax their hold on “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.” (Ephesians 6:17) They hold to the truth with which the Lord has armed them and never let it go. As the selected soldiers cupped their hand for the water, it is written of these: “[their] hands have handled of the Word of life.” (1 John 1:1) They use their tongues; they are zealous in proclaiming the truth to others. These are the “called, chosen, and faithful” of Revelation 17:14.

Thus we read, “Many are called, but few are chosen.” (Matthew 22:14) Only 300 out of 10,000! This proportion should have a sobering effect upon us. Let us determine to be of this small, select group.

Each of the chosen ones was given a trumpet, a pitcher and a lamp. The battle order that Gideon gave them was very simple. “Do as I do.” That's all:

“And he said unto them, Look on me, and do likewise. And, behold, when I come to the outside of the camp, it shall be, that as I do, so shall ye do.”--Judges 7:17

The instruction to us by the Greater Gide--on, Jesus Christ, is likewise simple. It is just two words: “Follow me!” As the apostle puts it, “Leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.”--1 Peter 2:21

They took their places around the camp. When Gideon blew his trumpet, his soldiers blew their trumpets. Similarly we follow the leading of the Captain of our salvation (Hebrews 2:10) in the proclamation of the Harvest Message at this time of the Jubilee Trumpet.

The instruction of Gideon to simply blow trumpets at such a time may have seemed foolish to some of his men. “What can a blast of sound accomplish against a host of armed men?” they may have asked. But foolish as it seemed, it was extremely effective. Similarly some of God's best methods seem strange and foolish to men. In Isaiah 28:21, God's method of defeating his enemies is described as

“his work, his strange work, and the bringing to pass of his act, his strange act.” And it is written: “It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe.” (1 Corinthians 1:21) If we follow the Lord's instructions, our apparently foolish, feeble efforts will accomplish that which the Lord pleases.

Doing exactly what Gideon did the soldiers broke their pitchers and held their lamps high in the air, meanwhile alternately blowing upon their trumpets and shouting: “The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!” The pitchers represent our earthen vessels; the breaking of them to let the light shine out is the faithful carrying out of our consecration. Thus we read:

“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels.” --2 Corinthians 4:7

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”--Romans 12:1

It is written of a faithful child of God:

“He shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use, and prepared unto every good work.”--2 Timothy 2:21

As a beautiful hymn expresses it: “A broken and emptied vessel, for the Master's use made meet.” We read in Psalm 31:12, “I am like a broken vessel.” In this we follow the example of the greater Gideon, --Jesus Christ, who broke his earthen vessel. Paul says this about our Lord:

“[He] took bread, and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take eat, this is my body which is broken for you. This do in remembrance of me.”--1 Corinthians 11:23,24

In other words, “Do the same thing. Sacrifice your human bodies, as I have done mine.” When our Lord broke his earthen vessel and raised his lamp on high during his earthly ministry, the prophecy of Isaiah was fulfilled:

“The people that walked in darkness have seen a Great light. They that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.”--Isaiah 9:2

Jesus confirmed this:

“Then spake Jesus unto them, saying, I am the light of the world. He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”--John 8:12

Speaking of our broken vessels and the reflected light we display, Jesus said:

“Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. . . . Let your light so shine before men, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”--Matthew 5:14,16

Our lights are not as great as his. They are feeble and flickering. But by the Lord's grace and blessing, they are made effective in accomplishing his will.

“THE SWORD OF THE LORD AND OF GIDEON!” they shouted, and the enemy fled, slaughtering one another as they went. Thus by obedience to God's command and without using their weapons, Gideon and his small band exerted a mighty force against the stronghold of Midian. Regarding the antitypical Gideon band of which we are members, we read:

“The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds.”--2 Corinthians 10:4

“Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.”--Zechariah 4:6

The defeat of the Midianites released the people of Israel from their long and hard bondage to Midian. After all they had suffered it was a glorious liberty indeed. Thus Christ and the church are to release mankind from their 6000-year bondage to Satan, the devil, and to sin and death. Then this prophecy will be fulfilled:

“The creature [human creation] itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.”--Romans 8:21

When the enemy was in headlong flight, the 9,700 men of Gideon's army who had failed to show the required zeal in the test at the brook now joined in the chase with great enthusiasm, assisting in the destruction of the enemy. This pictures the hearty and willing cooperation of the Great Company in the great work of the Millennial age, assisting Christ and the church in the elimination of every vestige of sin.

We find in the record that all the men of Israel joined in pursuing the enemy. This represents all the other forces cooperating in the work of the Kingdom. The captains of the various tribes would picture the “Princes in all the earth.” Next in order would be the converted Nation of Israel, the Blessing Nation, followed by every person of good will, all the willing and obedient of mankind, “whosoever will.” Thus the victory over sin and death will be complete.

Paul names Gideon as one of the Ancient Worthies in Hebrews 11:32. His record of faithfulness in leading Israel to victory over Midian is given in verse 34: “Out of weakness was made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.” How delighted Gideon will be when he returns and finds that he was

used as a type of Christ and that his little band of 300 pictured the victorious church!

“Then Gideon built an altar there unto the Lord, and called it Jehovah-shalom: unto this day it is yet in Ophrah of the Abiezrites.”-
-Judges 6:24

We thank the Lord for the lessons of Gideon's victory. We look forward to the victory of the Greater Gideon, our Lord Jesus Christ, over sin and death, and our part in it!

God Prepares a Great Leader (Moses)

THE setting of our lesson is Egypt, where the children of Israel resided, in the land of Goshen. Joseph had ruled Egypt for 80 years, dying at the age of 110. Many years had passed since then, as we read in Exodus 1:6-8.

“And Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all of that generation. And the children of Israel were fruitful, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them. Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph.”

Since Joseph ruled Egypt for 80 years, there was undoubtedly more than one Pharaoh on the throne during the period. But they were benevolent Pharaohs who recognized and appreciated Joseph's administrative ability and remembered the great debt they owed him for saving their nation from famine. But, now, many years after Joseph's death a new Pharaoh had risen, who did not respect Joseph, and who was antagonistic toward the Israelites and did not recognize any debt to them, nor to Joseph whose people they were.

It is generally agreed that this Pharaoh was Rameses the second, a hard hearted, selfish, and wicked despot. It is this Pharaoh who “knew not Joseph.” Using the Revised Version, we read in Exodus 1:9,10:

“And he said to his people, Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war befall us, they join our enemies and fight against us, and escape from the land.”

This Pharaoh saw that the Israelites were more rugged stock, and were multiplying much more rapidly than the Egyptians. Therefore, he considered them a menace to the country.

Up to this time the presence of Israel had been considered a protection to Egypt; a sort of buffer zone. The land of Goshen lay to the eastward and it was from this direction that an attack from Assyria might be expected. Thus, Israel would take the brunt of the attack. But now, with the Israelites becoming more numerous than the Egyptians, a new danger threatened. It occurred to this suspicious and cynical Pharaoh that an invading army might bribe Israel with the promise of independence, thus enlisting their support to overthrow his rule in Egypt. So he decided to do something about it.

In order to stop their population growth, Pharaoh gave orders to have the Israelites subjected to extremely hard labor with the idea that this

would debilitate them. Not many realize the tremendous scope of his program of oppression. He completely and drastically reorganized the lives of the children of Israel. He converted the entire land of Goshen, with its over two millions of population, into a vast prison state with every able-bodied man sentenced to hard labor under the cruel administration of armed slave-masters.

What a contrast this was to their previous condition. When they first came to Egypt they were shepherds and herdsmen. That is why they were given the land of Goshen which was a grassy plain suitable for grazing. Pharaoh said to Joseph these words, as found in Genesis 47:6,

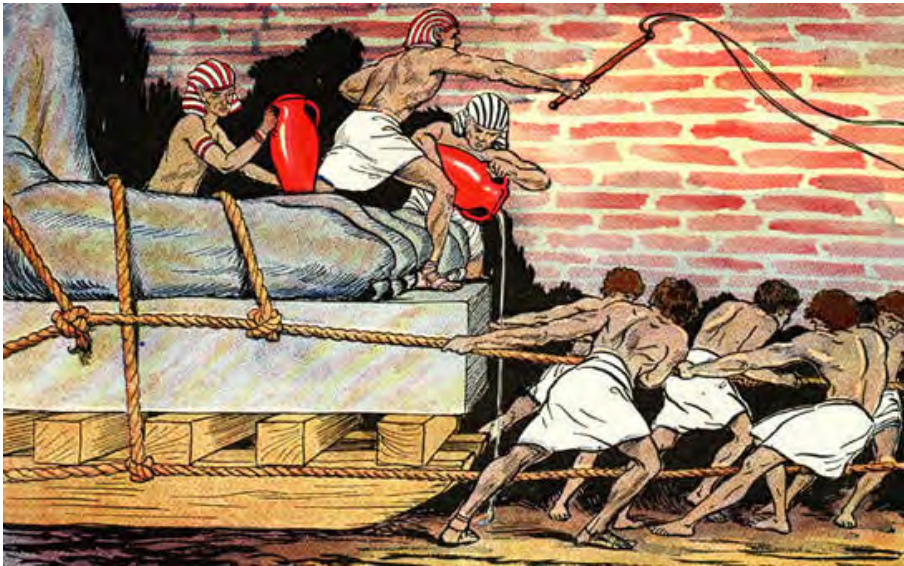
“The land of Egypt is before thee. In the best of the land make thy father and thy brethren to dwell. In the land of Goshen let them dwell.”

Herding cattle and sheep is not easy, but it is a clean invigorating life, spent in large and peaceful open spaces without confining restrictions and the pressure of continual urgency. But now all this was rudely changed. Suddenly, these peaceful shepherd people were rounded up and put in chain gangs for the making of brick and to do heavy construction work. A labor for which they were --totally unsuited. They were driven to the limit of --human endurance by the whips of strong taskmasters. Thus we read the account in Exodus 1:11-14, “Therefore, they did set over them task-masters, to afflict them with their burdens. The Moffatt translation reads:

“They put them under captains of the labor gangs, to crush them with heavy loads, and they built for Pharaoh treasure cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were grieved because of the children of Israel. And the Egyptians made the children of Israel to serve with hard bondage, in mortar and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field. All their service wherein they made them serve with rigour.”

The making and handling of sun-dried brick is hard work, even when one is not driven in his labors as were the Israelites. First, the clay must be dug from the alluvial deposits of the Nile delta, and wet and heavy, it must be back-packed to the factory site. And all the while a lively pace must be maintained. Then the clay must be further wetted and mixed with chopped straw as a binder, and rammed tightly in molds. Then, after the setting of the mixture, the molds must be inverted and the wet bricks carried on heavily-loaded stretchers to the drying floors. High daily quotas were established for brick production, calculated to tax human endurance to the utmost, and severe beatings administered for failure to meet the quotas. Then the bricks after being turned over several times in the drying process

must be --gathered and back-packed to the building site, often miles away. In all this, speed was constantly urged by whip-wielding guards. Many of the workers dropped under their loads in sheer exhaustion. When this happened they were mercilessly beaten with sticks upon the soles of their feet until they got up and staggered on.



The record is, that with these bricks the children of Israel built whole cities of warehouses for Pharaoh, in which to store the treasures of Egypt. This construction work, too, was very laborious. Mortar must be produced. They did not have Portland cement in those days, but used a mixture of clay and bitumen, substances very difficult to combine. As the erection of a building progressed, scaffolding had to be built, and the bricks and mortar carried up ladders to the bricklayers. The Egyptian brick of that time was much larger than ours, weighing perhaps ten pounds each. Here, again, high quotas were enforced. So many bricks a day must be laid, under penalty of severe punishment.

And the women carried their share of the burden. Many gave up their homes, took their young children with them, and set up camp near their men-folk, to cook for them and provide a place of rest and comfort at the end of the long day's toil. Many others undoubtedly replaced the men in the work of tending flocks and herds. The statement of Exodus 1:14, states, "that the children of Israel were pressed into all manner of service in the field." This implies that, in addition to brick-making, they were compelled to learn all the trades and occupations of their master. Thus, from being herdsmen, they were forced into an industrial school, learning the various skills of the most --advanced civilization of that time. Such training, although severe, proved to be very useful later on when they were delivered

from Egypt and were on their own. Thus it was overruled for their good.

But this elaborate plan of Pharaoh did not work as intended--to prevent the increase of the children of Israel. In verse 12 we read, "But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew." But it did provide the Egyptians an enormous supply of very profitable slave labor. So it was continued as a national policy.

Pharaoh Tries Genocide

Now Pharaoh tried another method of --reducing the Hebrew population. He commanded Hebrew midwives to strangle every male child at birth. But this command was disregarded, the God-fearing midwives claiming that they arrived too late. So this plan also failed. Thus we read in Exodus 1:20,

"Therefore God dealt well with the midwives. And the people multiplied and waxed very mighty."

Furious at being thus frustrated, Pharaoh now made a decree displaying far more cruelty than even the notorious Herod who slaughtered the babes of Bethlehem. He commanded every Hebrew parent to slaughter his own male children and --decreed that those failing to do so should themselves be executed. He went further than that in his Satanic cruelty. He commanded the Egyptians that if they saw any Hebrew boy they must seize him and throw him into the river and drown him. In Acts 7, verses 18 and 19 we read where Stephen refers to this Pharaoh and his evil decree:

"Another king arose, who knew not Joseph. The same dealt subtilly with our kindred, and evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end that they might not live."

In Exodus 1:22 we read, "And Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, every son that is born, ye shall cast into the river." These are the distressing conditions which prevailed when Moses was born. Now we can better understand what happened next. We read in Exodus 2, verses 1 and 2:

"And there went a man of the house of Levi and took to wife a daughter of Levi, and the woman conceived, and bare a son. And when she saw him, that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months."

This description of the babe Moses as a "goodly child" is not really adequate. In Acts 7, verse 20, Stephen describes him as being "exceeding fair," which the Diaglott and Moffatt translations render "divinely beautiful." Phillips calls him "a child of remarkable beauty." Recounting this event, Paul wrote concerning Moses, in -- Hebrews 11, verse 23, using the Diaglott,

“In Faith Moses, being born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw the child was beautiful: and they did not fear the edict of the king:”

Weymouth renders the text, “Through faith, the child Moses was hid for three months by his parents, because they saw his rare beauty: and the king's edict had no terror for them.” An interesting sidelight is provided by the Jewish historian, Josephus. He records that, later on, “those who saw the infant Moses as he was carried along the streets, forgot their business, and stood still to gaze at him.”

At first it was easy enough to hide a tiny new-born baby of sweet disposition, who slept most of the time, and seldom cried; and even then, not loudly. But as the child grew, concealment became more and more difficult. The law respecting male infants was well known; and probably a reward offered for information regarding those evading it. So the time came when an agonizing decision had to be made. Considering that the child Moses was bound to be discovered sooner or later, his parents decided upon a unique plan of action.



Moses and Pharaoh's Daughter

They lived near the Nile river and their whole strategy was based upon the fact that Pharaoh's daughter came down to the river to bathe, at a certain spot, at a certain time, every day. Although called “Pharaoh's daughter,” we are told by historians that she was, in reality, the wife of the reigning Pharaoh, being the daughter of a preceding Pharaoh. She was barren, and greatly yearned to have a son who would be heir to the throne. The Nile river was held sacred by the Egyptians as being the source of life and fertility. So her daily immersion in the Nile was a ceremonial religious rite, performed with the object of curing her barrenness. Moses' parents knew all this, and planned accordingly. Now let us read the scriptural account

from Exodus 2:2-9, using the Revised Version, which rivals any fiction story in pathetic tenderness and emotional suspense. We will paraphrase as we go along:

“And when she could hide him no longer, she took for him a basket made of bulrushes, and daubed it with bitumen and pitch. And she put the child in it, and placed it among the reeds at the river's brink.”

How carefully Moses' mother wove that little basket which was to contain the most precious thing in the world to her. It was a tiny little ark, to preserve a tiny life in the water. As she made it, she probably thought of the great ark of Noah's day which the Lord had instructed should be covered with pitch to make it water-tight. So she did likewise, testing it in a tub of water to make sure it would stay dry. Then she lined it with the softest wool for warmth and comfort. She made a cover for it, also of bulrushes, but loosely woven to permit ventilation. Early the next morning, before it was fully light, she dressed the child in his daintiest clothes, fed him, and placed him in the ark, where he promptly went to sleep. Then, as the sun was rising, she and her husband, together with Miriam, the nine-year-old sister of Moses, carried the ark with its precious cargo down to the river. They took a last tearful look at their beautiful baby, then they covered the ark and placed it in the water at just the right spot, tying it to a clump of reeds to prevent it being carried away by the current. Before leaving they bowed their heads, committing their helpless child to God's care. Then little Miriam, who loved her baby brother so very much, stayed behind and watched from a distance to see what would happen to him. But someone else was watching too. The angel of the Lord was there.

Do you realize that, technically, Moses' parents had obeyed the law of Pharaoh? The edict, given in Exodus 1:22, was that every Hebrew boy must be cast into the river, even though he was in a little water-proof cradle! Now we read:

“And his sister stood at a distance, to know what would be done to him. Now the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, and her maidens walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds, and sent her maid to fetch it. When she opened it, she saw the child: and lo, the babe was crying. She took pity on him and said, This is one of the Hebrews' children.”

Can you imagine the impact this had on Pharaoh's daughter? She had come to the river, yearning for a baby son, and, suddenly, she had in her arms a baby boy of surpassing beauty! How her womanly heart must have responded to the situation. The gods had heard her petition, she concluded. She had asked the sacred river to give her a son, and here it was! She immediately determined to adopt him, even though she knew he was of Hebrew parentage.

There is something about a crying baby that touches the heart. They are so entirely helpless. Crying is the only way they have to announce their needs. Pharaoh's daughter surmised correctly that it was from hunger that the baby cried. After all, it had been several hours since he had been fed. So it was at exactly the right moment that little Miriam ran up to her, and she knew just what to say, too. As we read in the account:

“Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, shall I go and call you a nurse from the Hebrew women, to nurse the child for you? And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, go. So the girl went and called the child's mother. And Pharaoh's daughter said to her, take this child away, and nurse him for me, and I will give you your wages. So the woman took the child and nursed him.”

I am sure that Pharaoh's daughter was not deceived a bit. When she handed the baby over to the Hebrew woman, and saw how he immediately stopped his crying, and gurgled with happiness. She saw through Miriam's little scheme. She knew that this woman was the baby's real mother. But she didn't care. The baby now belonged to her. He was no longer a Hebrew boy. He was now an Egyptian prince.

What a transformation there now was in the household of Moses' parents. On one day the child Moses was a danger and a menace in their home. There was an atmosphere of fear and tension. A dread of every footstep, as perhaps that of an Egyptian officer, coming to kill their baby, and to also take their own lives for daring to disobey the royal edict. The next day, through Divine providence, the child is back in the same home, which now had become a safe and secure sanctuary, under the protection of Pharaoh himself. The child's own mother is now paid wages by the Egyptian princess for caring for him.

Moses' Early Years

It took a lot of faith for Moses' parents to do what they did. Because of their faith, they qualified to be of the ancient worthy class. Paul includes them with those he lists in the 11th chapter of Hebrews. We read in the 23rd verse, Revised Version:

“By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid for three months by his parents, because they saw that the child was beautiful: and they were not afraid of the king's edict.”

They now had a powerful incentive to instruct the child Moses in the knowledge of the Lord, and particularly of his promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; that in their seed “all the families of the earth be blessed.” They realized that by his adoption into the royal family of Egypt, Moses might eventually be in a position to alleviate

the sufferings of the children of Israel and, perhaps, in some way even deliver them from Egypt. They knew that --Jacob had prophesied to Joseph: "I die, but God shall be with you, and bring you again unto the land of your fathers." They knew Joseph had said, Genesis 50:24, "I die, and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." Under these circumstances it is only natural that they would continually impress upon young Moses, while he was in their care, the importance of his Hebrew heritage, and his responsibility to maintain his --devotion to Jehovah, the great God of his fathers. They would often remind him of God's promises, that the children of Israel must eventually dwell in the land of Canaan. That their sojourn in Egypt was only temporary. So this is the atmosphere in which Moses was reared. He learned the Hebrew language, and traditions, and customs. He was thoroughly imbued in the faith of his fathers. He saw the sufferings of his people under their taskmasters, and sympathized with them. It all made a deep and lasting impression upon his young mind. We now read the account,

"And the child grew, and she brought him unto Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son. And she called his name Moses, and said, because I drew him out of the water."

It has been suggested that Moses was probably between seven and twelve years of age when he left his parental home, and was taken to the royal palace to live. This does not mean that Pharaoh's daughter never saw him from boyhood until that time. She must have visited him frequently in the home of his parents, perhaps personally delivering his mother's wages to her. She probably brought Moses presents, and colorful Egyptian clothing, befitting a young prince. She had named him Moses, which means, "Born from the water," thus indicating that she had indeed borne a son, out of the water of the sacred river Nile. I am sure that the beauty, and charming disposition and mannerisms of the little boy must have thoroughly captivated her, and caused her to love him very much. But the time finally came when all natural home ties must be broken. Young Moses must take up his life with the royal family, as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. His father and mother had prepared Moses for this eventuality; and he had become well acquainted with his adoptive mother. So the transition was not a distressing experience.

Moses at the Palace

Now we find a gap in the scriptural account. The next verse of Exodus 2:11 refers to Moses as a full grown man. But we can pretty well piece together what happened in the interim. Stephen tells us, in Acts 7:22, Diaglott, that,

“Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was powerful in his words and works.”

Now his formal education began. You may be sure that, as a royal prince, it was the very best education that Egypt could provide. Egypt was the world center of learning at that time. History tells us that the reigning Pharaoh, Rameses the 2nd, had established a library at Thebes, containing 20,000 books, and that two great universities had access to this library. Jewish historians say that Moses attended one of these universities. They tell us that he learned mathematics, geometry, astronomy, celestial navigation, medicine and music. He mastered the art of surveying and the division of lands. Astonishing his instructors with his genius, he designed boats, and invented hydraulic and other machinery, for the use in war and other purposes. We are told that he gained a thorough knowledge of the languages and hieroglyphics of all nations. Beside all this, he is said to have been an outstanding musician in harp and flute. All the while I am sure that he was permitted to frequently visit his parents, whom he loved and respected.

His parents would continue to instruct him regarding the God of Israel, the only true God, and faith in his oath-bound Covenant. This would counteract any Egyptian religious instruction and philosophy to which he was exposed at school. Also, his parents would continually remind him of his relationship to the oppressed -- Israelites, and imbue him with a patriotic feeling of devotion to his own people. We know this to be true because these qualities stand out prominently throughout his entire life as they could not do unless they had been thoroughly implanted and cherished in his youth.

As he had been a very beautiful child, Moses became a very handsome man. We again quote Jewish tradition which says, “As a man, he was so handsome that passers-by would turn to gaze after him. Even laborers forget their tasks in the spell of his rare beauty.” Stephen tells us in Acts 7:22 that Moses “Was mighty in words and deeds.” The Weymouth translation says that he “possessed great influence through his eloquence and his achievements.” The scriptures are silent as to what his “mighty deeds” and “achievements” were. Again we turn to the writings of Josephus to fill the gap. We are told that when Moses was grown to manhood the Ethiopians invaded Egypt. Pharaoh's army was utterly defeated and the enemy began pouring into Egypt. Panic spread over the country and Pharaoh trembled at the approach of the savage barbarians. As was the custom in times of crisis, the Oracles were consulted as to what should be done. They advised that the command of the Egyptian army should be entrusted to Moses. Pharaoh then so ordered. General Moses quickly reorganized the army, and, by a clever strategy, surprised the enemy and drove them out of Egypt

with heavy losses. He then pursued the defeated Ethiopians into their own country, capturing one city after another, destroying all resistance. He is said to have returned from this campaign the most popular man in Egypt. See Reprints, page 3988. This must have been one of the “mighty deeds” and “achievements” to which Stephen refers.

Why do you suppose Moses, a man of God, so willingly took the lead in such a military action? I am sure that the thought uppermost in his mind was not so much the defense of Pharaoh's government but the defense of his own people, the children of Israel, who were domiciled in Egypt, and whose lives were endangered by the invasion.

The Rejection of Royalty

Now we come to the time described by Paul in Hebrews 11:24-26, “By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.”

One wonders what powerful force caused Moses to take this stand: to make such a drastic decision. He was handsome and talented Crown Prince of Egypt, and admired by all. Because of the success of his Ethiopian campaign he had become the most popular man in Egypt. He would probably succeed to the throne, in due course. What induced him to forsake all this and identify himself with the despised and enslaved children of Israel? What incentive did he have to do this?

First of all, a strong sense of justice is indicated. He had come to the realization that the luxury and wealth he had been enjoying were the “pleasures of sin.” Wealth unjustly resulting from the sinful enslavement and oppression of his own people. His sense of justice could no longer accept this. Another powerful force was the faith of his fathers; a belief in God and an absolute conviction that God would keep the oath-bound Covenant made with the children of Israel, that through them all the families of the earth would be blessed. This is what is meant by his “esteeming the reproach of Christ (Messiah), (or the Anointed), greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.”

How were the reproaches of Messiah heaped against the Israelites? No doubt the Egyptians had learned that the Israelites believed themselves to be the heirs of the great promises from the Almighty to their fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and that through their

nation should come the great Messiah, the great Deliverer, who should bless and rule the world. No doubt the children of Israel were frequently taunted by their oppressors because of their extravagant hopes. Perhaps a taskmaster, beating an Israelite, would sneeringly say, "Where is your great Messiah now? Why doesn't he come to deliver you from me?" This would be the "reproach of Messiah." Moses chose to place himself under that reproach, rather than remain in the palace. Believing God's promises, he preferred to associate himself with his despised people, and left the courts of Egypt. As the apostle explains, this was because "he had respect unto the recompense of the reward." He hoped, by identifying himself with his own people, to preserve his share in the Abrahamic promises, and to obtain the reward of a "better resurrection." Moses learned and maintained this magnificent faith through the influence of his parents who taught him these things at every opportunity. So it is no wonder that they, too, are listed as ancient worthies in Hebrews 11:23.

Paul's statement in Hebrews 11:24 that "by faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter," indicates that he went to his adoptive mother and told her of his decision to renounce his position as Crown Prince, and to resign from the royal court. How she must have pleaded with him to change his mind, but to no avail. Pharaoh himself was very displeased and angry. But Moses didn't care. We know this from Hebrews 11:27, "By faith he forsook Egypt (that is, he renounced his position in Egypt), not fearing the wrath of the king." Then Moses must have returned to again live in the home of his parents. This is suggested by Exodus 2:11, saying that "he went out unto his brethren." And by Paul's statement in Hebrews 11:25, that he chose "to suffer affliction with the people of God." And also Stephen's statement in Acts 7:23, that "it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel."

Moses had a plan. He now expected the children of Israel to accept him as their leader, to deliver them from their bondage in Egypt. He felt that God had prepared him from infancy for this very task. And had he not proven his leadership ability in the Ethiopian campaign? He was eager to assume this leadership, feeling confident that he could do it. Thus we read, from Stephen's account in Acts 7:23-25,

"And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel. And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian. For he supposed his brethren would have understood how God, by his hand, would deliver them; but they understood not."

Moses was right, of course. God had indeed selected him to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt. But his timing was off. He anticipated the Lord by forty years. He thought he was ready but really was not. He was too self-assured. He was ready to go ahead in his own might, instead of the Lord's.

The Flight to Midian

We now continue with the narrative by reading Exodus 2:13-15. “And when he went out the second day, behold, two men of the Hebrews strove together. And he said to him that did wrong, wherefore smitest thou thy fellow? And he said, who made thee a prince and a judge over us? Intendest thou to kill me as thou killest the Egyptian? And Moses feared, and said, Surely this thing is known. Now when Pharaoh heard this thing, he sought to slay Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh, and dwelt in the land of Midian.”

In Midian, Moses became a simple shepherd. What a humbling experience this was for him. The handsome, talented, highly-educated Crown Prince and military commander of Egypt, plodding after a flock of sheep, and not for only a few days, but for forty years. But during that time he lost none of his faith and devotion to God. Nor his strength of character, nor all the wisdom of the Egyptians he had learned. But he did lose something. He lost his pride and self assurance.

We read in Numbers 12:3, “Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.” He wasn't that way before. Now he was doubly educated. Now he could be used by the Lord. Now he was fit to lead the children of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt, and he did. God's preparation of Moses to be a great leader, holds lessons for the New Creation. Those who will live and reign with Christ will also be leaders. As Moses led the children of Israel out from the bondage of Egypt, into the promised land, we will have part in leading the world of mankind out from Satan's bondage of sin and death, into the promised kingdom of God and its restitution to life.

With Moses the preparation began very early. When he was born, his parents saw that he was a “beautiful child.” But the Lord saw that he was a beautiful child even before he was born. He saw that Moses was beautifully endowed by inheritance, that his disposition and natural talents would be such as could be molded to make him just right for the Master's use. Others of the prophets were similarly -- selected by God from birth, for example, --Samuel and John the Baptist. And of the New Creation, Paul is an example of this. He said

in Galatians 1:15 that, “It pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace.”

I think others, also, have been so noted and especially led by the Lord from the time of their birth. I believe Brother Russell was one of those. Born of Godly parents, superbly gifted by inheritance, and endowed with a high degree of veneration, he was, from his earliest youth, led by God, surrounded by his providences, and given just the right experiences to fit him to be “that Faithful and Wise Servant” of prophecy, the one through whom we all have received the truth at this end of the age.

But with most of us the preparation starts much later in life and without any outstanding talents and natural endowments to begin with. How true it is that “Not many wise, mighty or noble are called.” (1 Corinthians 1:26) But no matter what our station in life when we are called, if our consecration is sincere and entire, and, if we yield ourselves into the hands of the Lord as clay in the hands of the potter, the Lord will see to it that our preparation for the kingdom is thorough and complete. He will see to it that we are surrounded by his providences, and receive every necessary experience to shape us and to mold us, thus to make us fit for the Master's use. Therefore, we read in Jeremiah 18:6,

“O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as the potter? saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand.”

As spiritual Israel, we are the heirs of this promise. And how wonderful it is to be in the hands of our loving Heavenly Father!

Satan Controlled Pharaoh

In the oppression of the children of Israel by Rameses the second, the hand of Satan is clearly seen. Satan was in Eden and heard the pronouncement of God, that the Seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. (Genesis 3:15) He had carefully traced that “seed” through the centuries. He had seen it develop in God's gracious promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. As time went on, he identified the children of Israel as the source of that “seed” which was to bruise his head. So we can see that it was none other than Satan who put the evil thought of genocide into Pharaoh's mind, to destroy Israel and thus kill the “seed” of promise. But Satan's scheme was not successful. It was overruled for Israel's ultimate good. Their troubles drew them closer together, in ties of mutual misery. Their segregation kept them separated from the idolatrous Egyptians. Their oppression led them to cry to the Lord in their distress, and resulted in a great deliverance from Egypt, and an entrance into the promised land.

Satan was not discouraged. He continued to trace the “seed” down through the ages. In time, he identified it as Jesus, and tried repeatedly to destroy him. Failing in this, he has traced the “seed” of promise in the Church, the Body of Christ, and has continued his efforts to destroy it. He is trying to destroy the remnant of it right now.

Let us learn from Israel's experience. When we see Satan's efforts to disrupt the Church, let it draw us closer together in mutual sympathy, and in separateness from the world, the flesh, and the devil; and in holding fast to our heritage of harvest truth. If faithful, our fleshly bondage in Egypt will soon be over, and as Spiritual Israel, we, too, will have a great deliverance, into the glorious promised Heavenly inheritance.

Stephen says, in Acts 7:20, that Moses, as a baby, was “exceeding fair.” The marginal notation is “Fair to God.” The Moffatt translation describes him as “divinely beautiful.” This brings to mind the child Jesus. If the imperfect child Moses was so beautiful, how much lovelier must the perfect child Jesus have been. We are told, in Song of Solomon 5:16, that he was “altogether lovely.” Luke 2:52 records for us that everybody loved him, both God and men, with these words, “Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.”

What a handsome boy he must have been at 12 years of age, when he visited the Temple at Jerusalem, seeking information from the Doctors of the law. We read in Luke 2:46 that after three days his parents “found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking questions.” To hold the interest of those dignified and learned men for three days, suggests not only an unusual mental capacity for one so young, but also a high degree of personal charm.

God's Children Are Beautiful

Do you realize that God sees his spiritual children as very beautiful? Not beautiful in outward physical appearance, because it is written in 1 Samuel 16:7, “The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.” What is this rare and Divine beauty which the Lord sees in his children? It is an inner beauty, it is their total heart-devotion to him. A complete consecration, and an earnest heart-desire to conform to God's glorious character, as exemplified in Christ Jesus. It is because their imperfections and shortcomings are covered by the beautiful robe of Christ's righteousness. With all their hearts, they seek to serve the Lord now. They are preparing themselves for the greater service of the future, when they shall live and reign with Christ. They are

beautiful because they are begotten by the Holy Spirit to the glorious, golden Divine Nature, and are holy in God's sight. This is what is meant by 1 Chronicles 16:29:

“Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name. Bring an offering, and come before him. Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.”

We also read, in Psalms 90:17, “Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish thou the work of our hands.” In Psalm 45, verses 10,11,13-15, we may note how graphically is the expression as the Lord looks upon us. He sees us as his own lovely daughter, a royal princess, the beautiful Bride of Christ. We read,

“Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear. Forget also thine own people, and thy father's (Adam's) house. So shall the King greatly desire thy beauty; for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him. The King's daughter is all glorious within; her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought unto the King in raiment of needlework. The virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee. With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought. They shall enter into the king's palace.”

Besides the beauty of character, illustrated by the “raiment of needlework,” the work of the Lord we are engaged in, also makes us beautiful in God's sight. Therefore, we read in Isaiah 52:7,

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings; that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good; that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!”

God esteems very highly, and considers beautiful, the “feet” members of the Body of Christ; those who now proclaim that Christ's reign has begun.

So we, as the child Moses was, and as Jesus was, are “fair to God.” What a precious thought this is! How careful this should make us in our Christian walk, to maintain this marvelous standing before the Lord.

Parallels Between Moses and Us

As Moses, of the Children of Israel, was born under condemnation to death by the edict of Pharaoh, so we, the children of Adam, are born under the condemnation to death. But by the providences of the Lord, Moses was drawn out of the water, saved from death, and adopted into a royal family. Similarly, as is written of each of us, in Psalm 18:16, “He sent from above, he took me, he drew me out of the many waters.” We were taken out of the world; we were redeemed from sin and death, and have been adopted into the family of God. But although Moses now belonged to the king, he remained

for a while in his parental home. So with us. Although spirit-begotten New Creatures, children of the Heavenly King, we are not immediately glorified, but must remain in the flesh for a while. As the child Moses was there instructed in the faith of his fathers and given a religious training he would never forget, so our characters as New Creatures are developed while still in the tabernacle of our flesh.

The parents of Moses demonstrated an outstanding faith by concealing the babe Moses, and then placing him in the river. Thousands of Hebrew boys must have died because of Pharaoh's cruel edict. But we read of Moses' parents that by faith they hid Moses and "were not afraid of the king's commandment." As far as we know, they had no revelation in this matter. No angel instructed them to do what they did. They had no assurance whatever of success. They acted in pure faith, and laid their lives on the line. How richly the Lord blessed their action. As a reward, they will be of the Ancient Worthy class. They are examples to us. If we remain in the faith and emulate their faith, we also will be richly blessed, and will even gain a higher reward--the reward of the Divine Nature.

Now we come to the beautiful picture of consecration as found in Hebrews 11:24-26. We read,

"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the --pleasures of sin for a season. Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward."

This is an illustration of the Christian course. In consecration, we renounce the world and its pleasures and interests, choosing rather the afflictions of Christ. As in 2 Timothy 2:12, Paul writes, "If we suffer [with him], we shall also reign with him." Thus we renounce the miserable rewards and treasures the world had to offer for the much greater treasures of heaven. As our Lord commanded in Matthew 6:19-21,

"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through nor steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

We also have respect unto the "recompence of the reward." We know our reward, if we are faithful, is the highest reward God will ever grant to any creature.

Now we come to the most important lesson of all. Stephen says of Moses in Egypt, in Acts 7:22 that he "was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds." Phillips

translation: “He became not only an excellent speaker, but a man of action as well.” He was anxious and eager to deliver the children of Israel out of their bondage in Egypt, and felt quite equal to the task. However, forty years later, in Midian, we read of the same man, Moses:

“And Moses said unto God, who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?”--Exodus 3:11

“And Moses said unto the Lord, O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant; but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue.”--Exodus 4:10

Is this the same person, we might ask? What had happened to Moses to so completely transform him from an eloquent, self-assured, eager-for-action man, into the very meekest of men; claiming slowness of speech and saying, “Who am I?” esteeming himself incompetent for the job?

This brings out the most important lesson of all. The necessity for humility. It took 40 years as a lowly shepherd in Midian to teach Moses this lesson. Not a minute of that time was wasted. It was worth it. Now, at last, he was fit to be used of the Lord. He would now go in the Lord's strength, and not in his own.

What do we learn from this? No matter how noble, talented, and wise in the truth you are, God cannot use you if you lack humility. You cannot be of the Little Flock without it. In 1 Peter 5:5,6 we read,

“Be clothed with humility; for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.”

Let it not take us forty years to learn this lesson. See Reprints, pages 1651, 2900, 2903, 2904, 2909, 3982, 3988, 5250, 5251, 5261, and 5264.>

God's Plan of the Ages

SOME do not believe that God exists and hence are unable to accept the idea that there is an orderly and coordinated divine Plan of the Ages concerning mankind. But many who doubt the very existence of God have not given the matter sufficient intelligent thought. When the facts are seriously considered, it is almost impossible not to believe in a Supreme Creator.

Effects must be produced by competent causes. Everything that exists must have been made by someone. If a thing has beauty, symmetry and intricacy of design, it must have been produced by a superior intelligence. We reach this conclusion by pure reasoning. It is not necessary to see the Supreme Creator to believe he exists.

The evidence that God exists is overwhelming. Everything around us proves it. Every tree, plant and flower amazes us. Intricate in design, exquisitely beautiful in form and texture, each speaks of a wisdom and skill above the human. It is absurd to boast of human skill and ingenuity yet attribute to mere chance the regularity, uniformity and harmony of nature. The very fact that there are dependable and unvarying laws of nature presupposes an intelligent lawgiver.

There are some truly amazing attributes possessed by the animal creation that are beyond human wisdom. The snake has an infrared sensor so responsive it can --detect temperature changes of one-thousandth of a degree. The hornet navigates accurately even on cloudy days by sensing the polarization of light. A bird flies thousands of miles from a tree branch in your back yard, and returns to the same branch through stellar navigation. Such powers have been exercised by the lower animals for untold ages. Men have only recently understood these amazing characteristics and are seeking, sometimes vainly, to --duplicate them scientifically. This is certainly proof of an intelligent creator far superior to the human.

The greatest masterpiece of all earthly creation is the human being itself. It is --extremely complicated and exhibits God's handiwork in every respect. Man has mental attributes far above the animal creation. He has moral and ethical qualities totally lacking in the lower animals.

By using deductive reasoning we can prove that God exists and we can also determine what he is like. It is self-evident that the highest and grandest thing created cannot be superior to its maker but must of necessity be inferior to it. Since the grandest earthly creation of God is man, since man is endowed with the characteristics of justice, love and wisdom, it follows that God, the creator of man, must possess these attributes to a far wider and grander degree. We know

what God is like because of the things he has created. We know he is just, benevolent, wise and powerful--much more than we are. It must be so. Without seeing God with our eyes, we see him with our minds. We instinctively love and seek to worship such a great and wonderful God.

How can we know God's plan for humankind? Again we use deductive reasoning. It is logical to suppose that such an infinitely wise and good being as God, who made man mentally capable of realizing that he exists, would then be moved by his love and justice to supply the wants of man's nature by giving him some revelation concerning himself and his plan for mankind. Where do we find such a revelation? We find it only in the Bible. This book was written over a period of many centuries by men inspired by God's spirit. They faithfully recorded what God wanted to reveal to mankind. We can identify the Bible as God's word because it is the only ancient record that explains to the satisfaction of every reasonable mind such important subjects as:

How the earth was prepared for man's habitation, describing the various geological events preceding the appearance of life.

The exact order in which the various forms of vegetation and animal life appeared upon the earth, facts confirmed by the latest scientific findings.

How man was created perfect and designed to live forever, and how he fell from perfection into sin and death.

Why evil is now permitted.

How man was redeemed from death, as a result of which the dead will be raised, and all the willing and obedient of mankind be restored to perfection, to live everlastingly in health and happiness upon the earth.

The Bible also contains prophecies of future events and tells when they will take place. Written thousands of years ago, it foretells and accurately describes present conditions, and locates where we now are in relation to God's plan, and reveals what we can expect in the immediate future.

But if man was created perfect and designed to live forever, why is he in such an imperfect condition today? He suffers diseases, pain, calamities, sorrows, and all manner of evils, and dies an early death. Why? The Bible tells us how God required the first man, Adam, to be obedient to him to continue to live. This was an entirely just requirement. Do we not expect obedience from our children? God purposely made the test of obedience very easy. He simply designated a certain fruit tree and asked Adam not to eat of it. Adam failed the test. God thereupon withdrew his favor from him and

Adam began to die. It was after Adam had sinned against God that he brought forth his children. Thus they were all born imperfect, "born in sin and shapen in iniquity." (Psalms 51:5) The human race began to degenerate and has fallen steadily ever since. This accounts for present day conditions. It was Adam's sin of disobedience that is the cause of all human miseries.

But God did not leave mankind in such a hopeless condition. Being loving as well as just, he provided a way to redeem man from death. He provided a ransom:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son."--
John 3:16

"Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time."--1 Timothy 2:5,6

Ransom means "corresponding price" or "equivalent price." Suppose a man is captured and held by an enemy who demands the payment of a certain sum for his --release. That sum represents the value of the man--his price or ransom. When Adam disobeyed God and was condemned to death, a perfect man's life was forfeited. To redeem Adam's life and thus release him from death, another perfect man's unforfeited life must be yielded up in offset, in the place and stead of the forfeited life. This is the ransom price for Adam.

God arranged for this price to be provided. Jesus was born a man, but unlike other men, he was perfect because God was his father. He was the equivalent of Adam before Adam sinned. He sacrificed his perfect human life; he died without deserving to die in the place of Adam who deserved to die. God accepted his sacrifice as the ransom price for Adam. Thus Adam and all his race who inherited death through him, were redeemed and will live again. Then will be fulfilled the prophecy: "I will ransom them from the power of the grave. I will redeem them from death." (Hosea 13:14) We read, "there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust." (Acts 24:15) Every man who has ever lived, the good and the bad, will be raised from death during God's kingdom under Christ, soon to be fully established on earth. It will be a benevolent but firm kingdom, ruling in absolute justice and equity. Then will be fulfilled the prophecy,

"And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."--
Jeremiah 31:34

Many prophecies of the Bible indicate that this kingdom is near. The signs are numerous and unmistakable.

God's Will on Earth

WE LEARN from the Bible that the first man, Adam, was created perfect, designed to live forever. Because of his disobedience, he was sentenced to death. As a result, all of his descendents were born sinners under the sentence of death. That is why all men die. Then Jesus came to earth as a perfect man and died on the cross as a ransom sacrifice for Adam, thus redeeming him and his race from death. This is made plain by Paul in Romans:

“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned. Therefore, as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one, the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.”--Romans 5:12,18,19

In many places the Bible tells us that there will be a kingdom of God on earth during which the dead are to be raised and all the willing and obedient of mankind --restored to human perfection and eternal life. This is the kingdom for which Jesus taught us to pray: “Thy kingdom come; thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.” (Matthew 6:10) Meantime our good and all-powerful God has permitted evil to hold sway in the earth for the purpose of giving mankind an experience with sin and death so that they will learn to abhor sin, and will turn to righteousness with all their hearts when given an opportunity to do so during that coming kingdom.

Adam sinned over six thousand years ago; Jesus provided the ransom price nearly two thousand years ago. Why has evil been permitted to go on for so long? One reason is that it is necessary for the entire human race to have experience with evil. Adam and Eve were told: “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish [fill] the earth.” (Genesis 1:28) It has taken over six thousand years for a sufficient number of Adam's descendents to be born so as to fully populate the earth. During that time each generation has had its experience with evil, then fallen asleep in death. Since those in death are not conscious of the passing of time, no one person has had contact with it any longer than for his own lifetime. When all are raised from the dead, the whole human race will have had its experience with evil and together will learn the blessed results of righteousness.

There is another important reason for the delay of the kingdom. For the past two thousand years since the time of Christ, a special group of persons is being selected by God. They are called out from among mankind to be associates of Christ in the heavenly kingdom which is to rule the world. They are termed “holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling.” (Hebrews 3:1) These individuals are “saved” in

advance of the rest of mankind for a special purpose: to be prepared to attain the divine nature, to reign with Christ. Paul refers to him "who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling." (2 Timothy 1:9) These lay down their human lives sacrificially as Jesus did to gain immortal spirit life as he did. This is what Paul describes:

"It is a faithful saying; for if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him. If we suffer, we shall also reign with him."--2 Timothy 2:11,12

These individuals must first have their resurrection change from the human nature to the divine before the rest of mankind are raised up in the kingdom.

"Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection . . . they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years."--Revelation 20:6

This is the thousand-year kingdom during which the restitution of mankind takes place; these called-out ones reign with Christ for this purpose. The selection of this special class of called-out persons is now almost complete; the time when God's kingdom on earth will be fully inaugurated is now very near.

In the kingdom there will be an entire change of environment, from evil to good. Satan is the ruler of the present evil world. He is called "the prince of this world." (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11) Under his usurped rulership it has become easy to maintain a sinful course and difficult to maintain a righteous one. Because of Satan's influence, the air is saturated with the spirit of evil. That is why Satan is called "the prince of the power of the air; the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." (Ephesians 2:2) This is Malachi's description of this evil world:

"Now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered."--Malachi 3:15

Because those who take an evil course prosper in this world, most people have no incentive to follow righteousness, but rather the reverse. Today the current of evil is swift and carries them along in the wrong direction.

When God's kingdom is in power in the earth, it will be different. Satan will then be totally restrained.

"And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent which is the Devil and Satan, and bound him a thousand years."--Revelation 20:2

Christ will take full control of earth and change the atmosphere from evil to righteousness. The flow of the current will be reversed; it will be easier to do right than wrong. As much as evil saturates the earth now, righteousness will fill the earth then. This fact, coupled

with the experience each one has had with the dreadful consequences of evil, will break sinful habits and will tend to prevent a relapse into sinful ways. It will be as prophesied in Jeremiah:

“And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”--Jeremiah 31:34

Habakkuk tells us that “the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.” (Habakkuk 2:14)

In the kingdom there will be rewards for following righteousness which will be powerful incentives to do what is right. For example, eternal youth is promised to the one who is obedient to the kingdom laws and turns from evil. “His flesh shall be fresher than a child's. He shall return to the days of his youth.” (Job 33:25) This would be quite an incentive for one who is old and wrinkled.

Here are some scriptures describing that wonderful time when death will cease and human perfection be restored:

“The inhabitant shall not say, I am sick.”--Isaiah 33:24

“Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily.”--Isaiah 58:8

“Behold, I will bring it health and cure, and I will cure them, and will reveal unto them the abundance of peace and truth.”--Jeremiah 33:6

“He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces. . . . And it shall be said in that day: Lo, this is our God, we have waited for him, and he will save us. . . . We will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”--Isaiah 25:8,9

“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing. . . . And 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.”--Isaiah 35:5,6,10

Finally here is the scripture that guarantees the end of all calamities, regardless of their origin or nature:

“And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. And there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying; neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away.”--Revelation 21:4

Heirs of God

“Now I say, that the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; but is under tutors and -- governors until the time appointed of the father.”--Galatians 4:1,2

THE members of the body of Christ are called “heirs of God” in Romans 8:17. This Galatians text suggests that the manner in which an heir to an earthly throne is reared and prepared for his calling may contain valuable illustrations of the manner in which an “heir of God” is developed. To facilitate such a consideration we first present an allegory.

A royal prince is born in a kingdom of this world and the entire nation rejoices. There is an heir at last, a prince of the blood! There are days of celebration. The babe is cherished and most carefully reared. Particular care is taken of his diet so that he may grow up strong and sound. Even before he can walk or talk the task of molding what is called the Royal Character has begun. He is firmly, though kindly, disciplined from the very beginning so that he may learn obedience. He is set apart; his training in every respect is minutely planned and supervised.

As a young boy he is surrounded by just the right people including some children his own age. Great pains are taken to see that he is not “spoiled.” Even though he is a prince of the blood, he cannot have everything he wants. Although constantly watched over he is often treated in a way which might be called “wholesome neglect” so that he might develop self-reliance. Every decision is not made for him; basic principles are laid down and he is often placed in a position where he must consider the circumstances and decide for himself what he will do. If his decision is wrong, he is allowed to suffer the consequences of his own unwise acts to a degree. In this way he learns and matures. But he always has access to his father, the king. If he has a problem which seems important to him--though it may be a childish problem--and he seeks his father's guidance, the king will interrupt even a cabinet meeting of the realm in order to counsel his son.

A normal family life is maintained as much as possible. He eats at his father's table and woe to him if he complains about the food served to him there. He freely --associates with his brothers and sisters without affecting superiority. Just as in any family friction sometimes develops. His reaction to this is considered an important part of his training for rulership. His quickness to forgive and make peace is especially prized by the king because these are royal virtues. As he grows older he is particularly taught courtesy and consideration for others because these qualities will endear him to the people he will one day be called upon to rule. Because his high calling in life

naturally tends to pride, the importance of humility is constantly impressed upon him to counteract this influence. Although the vast resources of the kingdom will some day be at his disposal, he is taught simplicity and self-denial by being given only a limited allowance of money. At the same time he is taught generosity to others and is encouraged to give gifts to his companions and to those less fortunate than himself.

For his education tutors and counselors are appointed by the king to instruct him. Experts in every line are ready to answer his every question and show him the right way. He eagerly avails himself of these helps and grows in knowledge and wisdom accepting any necessary reproof and correction. He is always obedient and loyal to his father never speaking against him or disputing his authority. Very young in life he is assigned an "equerry," a companion not necessarily of royal blood, but someone older and more experienced than himself, to intimately serve him, watch over him, and preserve him. This "equerry" is directly responsible to the king himself for the safety of the royal child.

As his instruction progresses the heir learns to think like his father along the lines of the policies of the kingdom in which he will some day rule. He develops a sound mind which pleases the king very much. He is taught the art of war and the use of armaments of defense and offense. He is taught who the enemies of the king are, the nature of the enemy, his wiles and stratagems, and the best ways of resisting and combating him. He is instructed in the objectives of the kingdom and how to attain them. At every opportunity he acts as an ambassador for his king, telling all the world about the wonders of the kingdom, and promoting good will for it wherever he may be sent. He is much in the public eye. The time comes when he is mature and wise and fully indoctrinated in the policies of the kingdom, and ready to ascend to the throne. When his call to the higher service is delayed, he waits without impatience, being entirely willing with all his might to serve his father in any capacity for as long as is necessary. Finally his call comes when he least expects it. Perhaps he is quietly summoned in the night to quickly rise up and go to the palace to assume his office of power and glory. But he is not surprised when his change comes because this is what he was born for and what he has lived for all his royal life. This is his calling and it is natural for him to assume it at last. His reign is long, peaceful, and prosperous.

Lessons from the Allegory

This is the allegory. To use such an allegory to show our relationship to God and our future prospects is entirely justified by the scriptures. There are so many texts that clearly identify us as sons

of God. “Beloved, now are we the sons of God.” (1 John 3:2) “Ye are the sons of the living God.” (Hosea 1:10) “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God.” (John 1:12) “For as many as are led by the spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” (Romans 8:14) “Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.” (1 John 3:1) “God dealeth with you as sons.” (Hebrews 12:7)



Joseph telling Pharaoh the meaning of his dream

Of course no allegory is perfect. In the world only one royal prince, the eldest son, is in line for the throne. In God's arrangement there is associated with the eldest son many other sons who are also heirs of the kingdom. We read:

“For it became him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory.”--Hebrews 2:10

“The spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God; and if children, then heirs; heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ.”--Romans 8:16,17

We are the heirs of no ordinary king. It is the Almighty God, the Creator of heaven and earth, who is our Heavenly Father and King, and to whom we are the sons and heirs. The kings of earth are as nothing compared to Him. Each of His heirs is far more important than the crown prince of the greatest empire of this world. Consider these words from Isaiah: “Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance.” (In other words, not enough weight to be detected, not enough to sway the balance one way or the other.) “Behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing.” (This could refer to the mighty British Empire.) “All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing and vanity.” (Can you imagine how small less than nothing is?) “It is He that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in; that bringeth the princes to nothing.” (Isaiah 40:15,17,22,23) Yes, compared with His heirs, the princes of this world are as nothing and less than nothing.

How is it possible that we are really heirs of the Almighty God? We are of the fallen human nature, the lowest order of intelligent creation. We are poor and lowly. The psalmist says that “we are dust.” (Psalms 103:14) How can such an honor be ours? Is it just another vain hope that will fade away? No, because we have the wonderful assurance:

“He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory.”--1 Samuel 2:8

Words from Peter confirm it beyond a doubt:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord --Jesus Christ, who according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again to a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead; to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God.”--1 Peter 1:3-5

So we are assured that this is a high hope “that fadeth not away,” as so many human hopes do. This is a hope that will not disappoint us, but will be ours in all its richness.

Applying the Allegory to Ourselves

Let us draw lessons from the allegory. When an heir is born to a throne of this world, there are great demonstrations of joy in the nation. Yet human joy has its limitations. It is of short duration. The pains and cares of this life soon dampen and quench exuberance of human spirit even over the birth of a prince. But how different are the heavenly joys! In Job 38:7 after reference is made to the creation of the earth and man upon it, we are told that “the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.” By this demonstration the angels --exhibited a deep interest in mankind and they have watched the affairs of earth with a fascinated interest ever since. You may be sure they were saddened by the fall of Adam, then rejoiced at every promise that was given of future redemption. They did not always understand these prophecies, but were tremendously interested just the same and wished they could understand. We know this because in 1 Peter 1:10-12 there is a reference to the prophecies, and then the statement, “Which things the angels desire to look into” or, as the Diaglott renders it, “Into which things angels earnestly desire to look.”

For a long time there was not too much for the heavenly host to rejoice over on this earth as the race sank deeper into sin and death. Then one still night they eagerly gathered near a country place called Beth--lehem:

“And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not; for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people; for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward man.”--Luke 2:8-14

Yes, once again they could sing and shout for joy! The great Prince had been born on earth. The only begotten son, the Heir of God, had come. The Savior of man had at last appeared!

Heirs of God, Joint-heirs with Christ

Now we too, poor unworthy humans though we still be, are “heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified --together.” (Romans 3:17) This being the case, don't you suppose there is joy in heaven when one of us is drawn by God “to be conformed to the image of his Son” (Romans 8:29), when such an one heartily responds to the call, is justified

consecrated, sanctified, and assigned a heavenly crown? Of course there is! The words of Jesus confirms it:



Bas-relief of Merdach-Baladan
sent a present of Hezekiah

“I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth . . . There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.”--Luke 15:7,10

Yes, if the arrival of an earthly prince brings joy in the nation, how much more does the begetting of an heavenly heir cause rejoicing in heaven!

In the case of an earthly prince, great care is taken with the royal baby's diet so that he may grow strong and sound. We read of the babes in Christ: "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." (1 Peter 2:2) Paul said to those immature in the truth: "I have fed you with milk." (1 Corinthians 3:2) But the babe in Christ grows rapidly in the truth becoming more and more skillful in the use of the scriptures both in correctly applying them to himself and in using them to hold forth the word of life to others. Paul describes this process:

"For every one that useth milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But strong meat [solid food--Diaglott] belongeth to them that are of full age; even those who, by reason of use, have their senses exercised."--Hebrews 5:13,14

"Full age" refers to maturity in Christ not necessarily age in years.

Developing Character

With an earthly prince the molding of the royal character starts very early. The heir of God must also develop a royal character, a Christ-like character. We are told in 2 Peter 1:5-11 to develop the characteristics of faith, virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly-kindness, and love, with the assurance that if we do so we can make our calling and election to the everlasting kingdom sure. Every act is born in the mind. Thoughts mold character. We are told in Philippians 4:8 just what kind of thoughts to harbor in our minds, i.e., things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, and praiseworthy. As an earthly princeling is set apart that he may enjoy the special favors and training of his father, the king, we read regarding his spiritual counterpart: "But know that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly, for himself." (Psalms 4:3)

The heir to an earthly throne is kindly but firmly disciplined, that he may learn obedience. Of us it is written:

"My son, slight not the discipline of the Lord, neither be discouraged when reprov'd by Him; for whom the Lord loves, he disciplines, and he scourges every son whom he receives. If you endure discipline, God deals with you as sons; for is there any son whom a father does not discipline?"--Hebrews 12:5-7, Diaglott

Yes, this discipline is a very important part of the training of an heir of God, and unless we submit to it we can never inherit the throne. This is clearly stated:

“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Be zealous therefore, and repent. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in His throne.”--Revelation 3:19,21

The young earthly prince is not permitted to mingle indiscriminately with the outside world but is segregated and carefully surrounded by just the right people. He --associates with wholesome companions. Likewise we are told:

“Come out from among them; and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you. And will be a --Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”--2 Corinthians 6:17,18

The thought is not to be separate by deliberately isolating ourselves because we are advised in Hebrews 10:25 not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together. But our association or assembly should be with carefully selected companions, those of “like precious faith.”

Even though his father, the king, is --extremely rich, the earthly prince cannot have everything he wants; he is supplied with everything he needs, and more. So are we as Paul assures us: “But my God shall supply all your need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.” (Philippi--ans 4:19) However, our needs as new creatures are more than food, shelter and clothing. Jesus expressed this: “It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”--Matthew 4:4

This means a knowledge of the truth. This need is abundantly and conveniently supplied to the heavenly heirs.

Every decision is not made for an earthly prince. He must often apply for himself basic principles which have been laid down. He sometimes makes mistakes which his father corrects. In this way he learns and matures. It is the same with us the spiritual heirs of the kingdom. The Lord does not tell us in detail exactly what to do in every little experience of life, but by a continual study of his word, we absorb something of his law, his principles, his wisdom. When a crisis comes or a decision has to be made, the Lord expects us to use what we have learned to decide what to do. Thus he guides us indirectly with his eye, so to speak:

“I will instruct thee, and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go; I will guide thee with mine eye. Be not as the horse or as the mule, which have no understanding; whose mouth must be held in with bit or bridle.”-- Psalms 32:8,9

So we should not desire that the Lord force us to always take the right road, without the need to use our own minds. How much better

to be so sensitive to the Lord's will and so familiar with his ways that just a glance will suffice, that he can guide us with his eye.

God Hears Our Prayers

The father of an earthly prince is never too busy when his son seeks direction and help in his problems. Similarly we always have instant access to our Heavenly Father in prayer. Anytime, day or night, his ears are attentive to our cry. "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers." (1 Peter 3:12) David put it so beautifully:

"My help cometh from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved; He that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep."-- Psalms 121:2-4

Thus we see that there is no affair in all the vast universe important enough to keep His attention away from the needs of his children, his heirs. He says through the prophet:

"Can a woman forget her suckling child? . . . Yea, they may forget; yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palm of my hands."--Isaiah 49:15,16

An earthly king maintains a normal family life for his royal family insofar as possible. A prince eats at his father's table and would not dream of complaining of the food served there. Neither will the child of God complain of the "meat in due season" served in such a flavorsome manner by a "faithful and wise servant" whom his Lord hath made "ruler over his household." (Matthew 24:45)

At times there is friction in the king's family just as in any other family. Even here misunderstandings arise between brothers and sisters. Regretfully God's family on this side of the veil is no exception. But the Lord especially loves those of his children who quickly forgive and make peace. A Christian's daily prayer should be "forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." (Matthew 6:12) We are instructed:

"Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you."--Ephesians 4:32

Indeed, by making peace we prove that we are in the family of God because Jesus said:

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God."--Matthew 5:9

The exalted position and prospects of an earthly prince naturally make him susceptible to pride. To counteract this, the king impresses upon his son the importance of humility. We too have an enormously

high calling. If we are not watchful, we too are susceptible to pride. Jesus said to the heirs of God:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit [or humble-minded], for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. . . . Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”--Matthew 5:3,5

Our great and high king values humility beyond measure:

“For thus saith the high and lofty One, who inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and lofty place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit; to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”--Isaiah 57:15

We also read:

“Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. . . . For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord; but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.”--
- Isaiah 66:1,2

So those who would dwell with God, as members of his household, must be of a humble spirit.

The heir of an earthly throne is allowed only a limited amount of money. There are not many wealthy among us either. Jesus said:

“Verily I say unto you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.”--
Matthew 19:23,24

In other words, divestment is required. A rich man may indeed come into the truth, but he will not die rich in this world's goods if he carries out of the terms of his consecration. As a faithful steward he will expend his funds as well as his energies in the Lord's service.

An earthly prince is provided the most expert teachers and tutors available for his education. What ample provision the Heavenly King has made for our instruction:

“And he gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors, and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”-- Ephesians 4:11-13

“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, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”-- 2 Timothy 3:16,17

We are indeed receiving a royal education!

The heir to an earthly throne is loyal and never disputes the authority of his father the king. We are told:

“Do all things without murmurings and disputings; that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world.”--Philippians 2:14,15

An earthly heir is assigned an “equerry” by the king to serve him and insure his safety at all times. Hebrews says:

“Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?”--Hebrews 1:14

The careful education and training of a prince makes him a fearless and sound thinker which pleases the king. Of us Paul said:

“For God hath not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.”--2 Timothy 1:7

Learning to Fight

The earthly prince is taught the art of war, the use of weapons, who the king's enemies are, and how they may be combated. We, the spiritual heirs of God, are also taught to fight. “Blessed be the Lord, my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight.” (Psalms 144:1) But we do **not** shed blood:

“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh; for the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God, to the pulling down of strong holds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”--2 Corinthians 10:3-5

The enemy of God, and our enemy, is Satan the devil. “We are not ignorant of his devices.” We are skilled in weapons of offense and defense, and we are able to battle mightily:

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole --armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the

wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God.”--Ephesians 6:10-17

“For the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword.”--Hebrews 4:12

An earthly crown prince acts as an ambassador of his father. Wherever he goes, he promotes good will for his father's kingdom. God: “Hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ.” (2 Corinthians 5:19,20)

The heir of an earthly throne is very much in the public eye and always acts circumspectly so as not to bring dishonor upon his father the king. Of us it is written, “We are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to man.” (1 Corinthians 4:9) Realizing how much even the angels are interested in us, how careful we should be in our daily walk!

The time comes when an earthly royal heir is strong and mature and wise, qualified to ascend to the throne and wear the crown. The spiritual heir also reaches that point, as we read:

“Being strengthened with all strength according to his glorious power, for all patience and endurance, with joy; giving thanks at the same time to that Father who called and qualified us for the portion of the saints' inheritance in the light.”--Colossians 1:11,12, Diaglott

Paul said when he had reached this point:

“The time of my departure is at hand. 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, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”--2 Timothy 4:6-8

In the allegory it is a sad day when the heir at last achieves the crown because the king must die. But not so in our case because our King is “The King Eternal and Immortal.” (1 Timothy 1:17) If there was joy when man was created, when Jesus was born, and when the heirs of God are selected, what fulness of joy there must be in heaven when 144,000 kings and priests are crowned! Jude speaks of this happy time, saying,

“Now unto Him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy; to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty and power, both now and ever.”--Jude 24,25.

When earthly kings are enthroned, the cry is: **LONG LIVE THE KING!** The kings and priests whom God has enthroned shall live and reign long indeed:

“They shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.”--Revelation 20:6

That is only the beginning because Revelation 22:5 says: “They shall reign for ever and ever.”

Hidden Gems of Truth

THE Bible is beautifully and sensitively written by men of old who were moved by the holy spirit of God. These men wrote cryptically and in greatly compressed form, without a waste of words. Events spanning centuries, and even millenniums, are often concentrated into a few brief verses. Intensely fascinating episodes involving a variety of deep and moving emotions are often simply and starkly stated with the details left to the imagination.

This was, of course, necessary. If it were not so, the Bible would be so voluminous and unwieldy that, because of sheer size and verbosity, men might be reluctant to delve into its pages and obtain its teachings and revelations. If it were of tremendous size with many thousands of pages, it is doubtful if millions of copies would be printed and circulated each year as now. So it is an abbreviated and coded book, difficult for the casual reader to understand, and meant to be so. The ordinary reader has eyes that see not and ears that hear not. (Romans 11:8)

But we as consecrated Christians, as members of the Body of Christ (whose minds have been enlightened by the --Harvest Message through "that servant"), have partaken of the same holy spirit which impelled those who wrote the book. So our minds are in harmony. Our thoughts run along parallel lines. Our eyes see, and our ears hear. We understand the divine plan. So when we read and meditate upon the Holy Scriptures, A WONDERFUL THING HAPPENS. We catch the spark! Our minds catch fire! Our mentalities are quickened and illuminated by the same holy spirit which inspired the writers. The result is that the few simple and familiar verses we are contemplating take on new beauty and detail. The gaps are filled in for us, and the account becomes clear and alive.

It is like a small and compact flower bud, exquisite in itself, which, before our eyes, opens and expands into a magnificent blossom, fragrant and breathtaking in its beauty. Thus a single verse of scripture already eloquent in its simplicity, when meditated upon in the spirit of truth, assumes really inspiring proportions! It is a never-ending process. There appears to be no limit to the treasures of the scriptures. As our hymn expresses it: " 'Tis a mine, aye, deeper, too, than can mortal ever go; Search we may for many years, still some new, rich gem appears." This is literally true.

So today, in the language of Proverbs 2:4, we are going to seek as for silver and search as for hid treasure, and turn up some of these gems which are hidden in the scriptures. The Lord put them there for us to find and it is a joy to do so. I call these gems "The Plan in a Capsule." You will see why.

A Gem from Psalms

The first of these gems is found in Psalms 104:29-31:

“Thou hidest thy face; they are troubled. Thou takest away their breath; they die, and return to their dust. Thou sendest forth thy spirit; they are created; and thou renewest the face of the earth. The glory of the Lord shall endure forever. The Lord shall rejoice in his works.”

Here are three verses of scripture, totaling only 51 words, which contain the entire Divine Plan of the Ages from the beginning to everlasting--in a capsule! Here is a small bud, beautiful in itself. As we meditate upon it, see how it opens up and flowers before our eyes just as the Lord intended it should.

“Thou hidest thy face; they are troubled.” We know that at first Adam had a wonderful fellowship with God. God used to walk with him in the garden in the cool of the day. They were Father and son together. What fascinating and loving conversations they must have had! Then one evil day, sin entered into the world. The son disobeyed his Father. Adam disobeyed God. We read in Genesis 3:8,

“And they heard the voice of the Lord God, walking in the garden in the cool of the day; and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God.”

They were troubled, sorely troubled. Because of their disobedience, they were banished from their beautiful garden home and they began to die. They brought forth their children in trouble. As God told the woman, “In sorrow thou shalt bring forth children.” (Genesis 3:16) As Job expressed it, “Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward.” (Job 5:7) He also said, “Man that is born of a woman, is of few days, and full of trouble.” (Job 14:1)

When someone has once experienced the favor of the Lord, seen his face so to speak, it is agonizing to lose that favor. Job felt the agony when he cried, “Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and holdest me for thine enemy?” (Job 13:24) David felt it when for a time he was separated from God. He pleaded, “How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? Forever? How long wilt thou hide thy face from me?” (Psalms 13:1) Isaiah, contemplating the miseries of Israel, sadly said to God, “Thou hast hid thy face from us.” (Isaiah 64:7)

When Jesus came and took Adam's place in death, it was necessary that he too know the agony of having God hide his face. For a moment on the cross, God seemed to have abandoned him. He too was troubled. He cried out in anguish of soul: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46) Today the whole world is sorely troubled. We are living in a great time of trouble. God seems to have hidden his face from the world. Evil is permitted

to run rampant; good men do not understand the permission of evil. "Where is God?" men ask. "Why doesn't he do something?" Others say, "God is dead. He must be; otherwise he would do something." They are perplexed and troubled, doubting the very existence of God because he has hidden his face. These are the conditions described by the words, "Thou hidest thy face; they are troubled." It is the history of the world. But it will not always be so, because the Lord in Ezekiel 39:29, speaks of a time to come, saying: "Neither will I hide my face any more from them."

Then our gem text says: "Thou takest away their breath; they die, and return to their dust." We read of man's creation, "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul." (Genesis 2:7) First God designed the intricacies of the human body and planned all its functions to the minutest detail. Then he formed the body of Adam using the elements of the earth or, as the ancient record expresses it, "the dust of the ground." There was no evolution here. The missing link will always be missing because it never existed. The body of Adam was a direct creation of God. There it lay, on the green grass of Eden, complete and perfect in every respect. But it did not beat to circulate the blood which was already in its veins. Its brain and nervous system lacked just one thing: the breath of life! It wasn't breathing! So then God "breathed into his nostrils, the breath of life," or as another translation has it, "the breath of lives." He simply inflated man's lungs with the air which is necessary for any form of life on earth. Suddenly the body breathed and lived! The heart began to beat carrying the life-containing blood to all parts of the body. The brain awakened, the eyes opened, and the man became a living soul.

This is how man's life started, by an in-breathing of the breath of life. Then we read in Psalms 146:4 how man's life terminates: "His breath goeth forth; he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish." The process is simply reversed. God gave man breath and he lived. God takes his breath away and he dies; his body returns to the elements of the earth from which it was taken. As Ecclesiastes 12:7 expresses it: "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit [or breath] shall return unto God who gave it." The spirit or breath represents the right to live. In harmony with this Job 12:10 speaks of God as the one "in whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind." So the sentence upon Adam was, "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken. For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." (Genesis 3:19) Because of his disobedience, Adam forfeited his right to live. He lost that right for all his children as well. All mankind came under the declaration of

our text: “Thou takest away their breath; they die, and return to their dust.”

God Sends Forth His Spirit

Up to this point the import of our text has been sad--the turning away of God's face first from Adam and then from the entire world; the deep trouble and distress resulting from the permission of evil; the taking away of the breath, or right to live; the long and seemingly endless procession to the grave, the final return to the dust. These things sadden us and to those who do not understand the divine plan the situation appears hopeless. But now we come to the happy part of our gem text which says, “Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created; and thou renewest the face of the earth.”

The part reading “Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created,” has a two-fold meaning. Both meanings gladden our hearts. God's spirit is his power or influence. In the past God sent forth his spirit on many occasions and for many purposes. For example, we read in the account of the creation of the world that “the spirit of God moved upon [or brooded upon] the face of the waters.” When this happened, mighty forces were brought into play to shape and prepare the earth for man's habitation.

God poured his spirit upon his holy prophets whom, we are told, “spake as they were moved by the holy spirit.” (2 Peter 1:21) The spirit of God came upon Joseph in Egypt and upon Moses in Midian. It came upon Gideon, Samson, David, and other faithful and worthy servants of ancient times, impelling them and inspiring them to do God's will in mighty ways. Then the holy spirit of God finally came upon John the Baptist, the last of the prophets. It drove him into the wilderness of Judea in fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah 40:3, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord; make his paths straight.” Men were in expectation of Messiah and John baptized the repentant of Israel for the remission of their sins. It was John who hinted of a new and marvelous manifestation of the holy spirit still to come, different from any manifestation heretofore experienced. He said in Matthew 3:11,

“I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance; but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear, He shall baptize you with the holy spirit and with fire.”

Jesus came to John to be baptized but not for the remission of sins for he had none. For him the symbol of immersion in water had a different meaning. It symbolized going down into death and then being raised to newness of life, of sacrificing his human nature and becoming a new creature. Then we read in Matthew 3:16,

“And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water; and lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him.”

This was the beginning of his dying as a man and the beginning of his living as a new, divine creature. This is the first time God's holy spirit had been sent to beget a new creature to the divine nature. Three-and-one-half years later the humanity of Jesus died forever on the cross and his new nature arose to live forever.

After his resurrection Jesus met with his disciples, as we read in Acts 1:4,5:

“And, 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.”

Then the account is given in Acts 2:1-4 of the promised new and powerful manifestation of the holy spirit:

“And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them, cloven tongues, like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the holy spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the spirit gave them utterance.”

“The Wonderful Works of God”

There were people of many nations and tongues in Jerusalem that day and each heard in his own language “the wonderful works of God.” The account says, “They were all amazed . . . saying one to another, What meaneth this?” Then Peter stood up and told them what it meant, saying:

“This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel: And it shall come to pass, in the last days, saith God, I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my spirit; and they shall prophesy.”--Acts 2:16-18

This was nothing less than spirit-begetting; the same holy spirit that had imbued the Head, Christ Jesus, had begun to descend to anoint his Body, the Church. As each member of his Body has received this spirit begetting him to the divine nature, it has had the same effect. When Jesus --received it, he immediately began his preaching ministry. When those at Pentecost received it, they began to use their

tongues to prophesy and preach. As each one of us receives it, we tell out the glad tidings at every opportunity, and build up one another in the most holy faith. We --renounce our earthly interests, aims, and ambitions, and “walk in newness of life.” (Romans 6:4) We begin a new life. We --become new creatures. As Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore, if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” Paul also said, “And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man [or new creature], which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness.” (Ephesians 4:23,24) Also, “Ye have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.” (Colossians 3:9,10)

This is what our gem text means when it says, “Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created.” Those referred to as “they” are Jesus Christ and the members of his body, the Church. By the begetting of God's holy spirit they are a new creation.

But there is another meaning also to this portion of the text, a wider and more general application. It is obvious that the prophecy of Joel was not entirely fulfilled at Pentecost. The prophecy says in Joel 2:28, “And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh.” This is still another and later manifestation of the holy spirit, and it is still future. To better understand this application of the scripture we must consider it together: “Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created; and thou renewest the face of the earth.” This tells us of the resurrection and restitution work of the Millennial Kingdom and the end of death. Resurrection is re-creation. By virtue of our Lord's ransom sacrifice all who have ever lived will be raised from the dead. As Jesus expressed it (John 5:28,29): “Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth.” This is truly a marvelous thing, a tremendous exhibition of the power of the holy spirit of God--to create again the bodies of all who have died and then, from the memory of God, to impress each body with its individual and different personality so that each one is the exact and identical person he was when previously alive. This is a fantastically complicated operation, but it is only the beginning. Then follows the work of restitution, the bringing to perfection. This is also a creative work of spirit. Then the prayer of David will be answered for all men: “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.” --Psalms 51:10

There are so many scriptures that indicate this wonderful work and we cannot cite them all. In Ezekiel 36:26,27 is a promise given to the Jews but applicable to all men:

“A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes; and ye shall keep my judgments and do them.”

This taking away of stony, selfish hearts and replacing with tender, loving hearts, is a work of re-creation, a restoration to righteousness and human perfection. As Peter expressed it, “Nevertheless we, according to the promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.” (2 Peter 3:13) The Revelator saw this glad time in prophetic vision saying, in Revelation 21:1,5:

“And I saw a new heaven, and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away . . . And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new.”

Besides the people and the government of the world, the physical earth itself will --reflect God's glory, as foretold in Isaiah 35:1,2:

“The wilderness, and the solitary place, shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. It shall blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy, and singing. The glory of Lebanon shall be given unto it, the excellency of Carmel and Sharon. They shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God.”

Do you see how much is packed in that short and simple verse of our gem text? “Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created; and thou renewest the face of the earth.” This new arrangement on earth will last forever. The nightmare of the reign of sin and death will be forgotten. Only the lessons learned by the permission of evil will be remembered. This is beautifully summed up by the prophecy of Isaiah 65:17,18:

“For 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 forever in that which I create.”

This leads us to the final verse of our gem text: “The glory of the Lord shall endure forever. The Lord shall rejoice in his works.” Thus it is seen that our gem text is a summation of the entire plan of God relating to his human family. He wanted a human family he could rejoice in, to love and serve him of their own free will. It shows the fall into sin, the loss of the right to live, the redemption from death, the restoration of the willing and obedient to life, the earth made glorious, and finally, God rejoicing in his works forever.

A Gem from Job

The next hidden gem of truth is found in Job 14:7-15:

“For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again, and that the tender branch thereof will not cease. Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground; yet, through the scent of water, it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant. But man dieth, and wasteth away; yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he? As the waters fail from the sea, and the flood decayeth and drieth up; so man lieth down, and riseth not. Till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep. O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave; that thou wouldst keep me secret, until thy wrath be past; that thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me! If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee. Thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands.”

This text too contains the entire divine plan for man, in a capsule. It is complete and beautiful in itself, almost poetic, and as we consider it, see how it's beauty --unfolds and expands, and reveals God's greatness and goodness to his human family.

The first verse of our gem text--“There is hope of a tree, if it be cut down”--seems to refer directly to an episode related in the fourth chapter of Daniel. The account is in the words of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, emperor of the world, and is given in the first person:

“I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at rest in mine house, and flourishing in my palace. I saw a dream which made me afraid, and the thoughts upon my bed, and the visions of my head, troubled me. Therefore made I a decree to bring in all the wise men of Babylon before me, that they might make known unto me the interpretation of the dream. Then came in the magicians, the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers; and I told the dream before them. But they did not make known unto me the interpretation thereof. But at the last, Daniel came in before me, whose name was Belteshazzar . . . and in whom is the spirit of the holy gods; and before him I told the dream, saying, O Belteshazzar, master of the magicians, because I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in thee, and no --secret troubleth thee, tell me the vision of my dream that I have seen, and the interpretation thereof. Thus were the visions of mine head in my bed; I saw, and, behold a tree grew, and was strong, and the height thereof reached unto heaven, and the sight thereof to the end of all the earth. The leaves thereof were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all. The beasts of the field had shadow under it, and the

fowls of heaven dwelt in the bough thereof, and all flesh was fed of it. I saw in the vision of my head upon my bed, and behold a watcher and an holy one, came down from heaven. He cried aloud and said thus: Hew down the tree, and cut off his branches, shake off his leaves, and scatter his fruit. Let the beasts get away from under it, and the fowls from his branches. Nevertheless, leave the stump of his roots in the earth, even with a band of iron, and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth. Let his heart be changed from man's and let a beast's heart be given unto him; and let seven times pass over him. This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones; to the intent that the living may know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will; and setteth up over it the basest of men.”-- Daniel 4:4-17

As the dream was related to him apparently two interpretations appeared before Daniel's vision: one local and contemporary and the other of staggering proportions and scope. He debated which one he would relate to Nebuchadnezzar and he hesitated. We read in the 19th verse: “Then Daniel . . . was astonished for one hour, and his thoughts troubled him.” The Moffatt translation says: “For a moment Daniel . . . was staggered. He was alarmed by what he foresaw.” Then he decided to relate the lesser interpretation which involved Nebuchadnezzar personally, and it was this: As ruler of the universal empire of Babylon, which completely dominated the world, the tree represented Nebuchadnezzar himself. It was to be cut down but the stump and roots were to remain in the earth until seven times had passed. He was to lose his dominion but it would be preserved for him and restored after seven years. This was to teach Nebuchadnezzar a lesson that he was not as important as he thought. Daniel's words were:

“Till thou know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.” In one year, the prophecy was fulfilled. We read from the Moffatt translation: “All this befell king Nebuchadnezzar. Twelve months later the king was saying, ‘There lies Babylon the great, which I have built for a royal residence by my vast power and to my noble majesty!’ The words had not left his lips when a voice fell from heaven, ‘O king Nebuchadnezzar, here is your sentence: Your kingdom is taken from you! You shall be driven away from human beings, to dwell with the wild animals; you shall be forced to eat grass like cattle; and seven years shall pass over you, till you learn that the Most High reigns over the realm of men, and gives it to anyone whom he chooses.’ “

The sentence was immediately carried out. The king lost his sanity and lived like an animal, shunning human association for seven years. Then we read:

“When the time was over, I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted my eyes to heaven; my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, praising and honoring him who lives for ever; for his dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom lasts from age to age.”

Now let us consider the other and vastly greater meaning of this dream which ties in with our gem text and which encompasses the entire history of the human race from the beginning to the ages of eternity.

“I saw and behold a tree in the midst of the earth, and the height thereof was great. The leaves thereof were fair, and the fruit thereof much, and in it was meat for all. The beasts of the field had shadow under it, and the fowls of heaven dwelt in the bough thereof, and all flesh was fed of it.”

The First Dominion of Earth

This remarkable tree in its glory and beauty represented the first dominion of earth given to the human race in its representative and head Adam. God said to Adam, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.” (Genesis 1:28) The original glory of man and the power and dominion vested in him were indeed sublime. He was set over the whole earth to bless, feed, protect and shelter every living thing. Then the dream continued:

“Behold, a watcher and an holy one [Moffatt: `angel-guard'] came down from heaven. He cried aloud and said thus: Hew down the tree, and cut off his branches, shake off his leaves, and scatter his fruit. Let the beasts get away from under it, and the fowls from his branches.”

This is what happened when sin entered the world. Adam failed the test of obedience. Then the command came to hew down the tree. The glory and beauty and power of mankind were taken away. The lower creation no more found shelter, --protection and blessing under man's influence. The sentence of death hewed down the great tree, scattered his fruit and foliage and left the lower creation without its lord and benefactor. Adam lost his Eden. We read in Genesis 3:24, “So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden, cherubims, and a flaming sword, which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.” Might not these cherubims be called “angel-guards”? The dream continues: “Nevertheless, leave the stump of his roots in the earth, even with a band of iron and

brass.” So far as man was concerned, all power to recover the lost dominion was hopelessly gone. But it was not so from God's standpoint. The original dominion was his gracious gift and was his plan for man. Though he had commanded it to be hewn down yet the root, God's purposes and plan of restitution, continued. The hope of it continued in the earth although bound with strong fetters so that it should not sprout until the divinely appointed time.

As the dream progresses, the figure changes from the stump of a tree to that of a man. It says, “Let his heart be changed from man's and let a beast's heart be given unto him.” It shows a man debased and degraded and brought down to the companionship and likeness of beasts, his higher reasoning dethroned and all his beauty gone. How well this describes fallen and depraved man, no longer the Lord of earth, his glory and dominion --departed. Progressively since the fall, the race has been having its portion with the beasts. Although fairly recently knowledge has been greatly increased, the --human heart has become increasingly beastly and degraded. The dream goes on to say,

“And let seven times pass over him. This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones; to the intent that the living may know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever he will.”

Sin and death have already reigned for 6000 years. It will take another thousand years to bring about a restoration of man to his original dominion. When the millennial kingdom has done its work, man's madness will be completely cured. Seven times will have passed over him and he will again be king of earth. He will then be able to say, in the words of Nebuchadnezzar:

“At the same time my reason returned unto me . . . and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added to me. Now I praise and extol and honor the King of Heaven, all whose works are truth and his ways just. Whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation.”

From this fascinating account in Daniel we are able to understand what is meant by the first three verses of our gem text in Job 14:7-15:

“For there is hope of a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again; and the tender branch thereof will not cease. Though the root thereof wax old in the earth, and the stock thereof die in the ground; yet through the scent of water, it will bud, and bring forth boughs like a plant.”

It is getting close to the time when the scent of water will be detected. This will be when Revelation 22:1-17 is fulfilled:

“And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God, and of the Lamb. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”

Then by way of contrast with what shall be, our gem text describes present conditions:

“But man dieth, and wasteth away. Yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he? As the waters fail from the sea, and the flood decayeth and drieth up; so man lieth down, and riseth not. Till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep.”

This last phrase is an indication of the time the resurrection will take place: “Till the heavens be no more.” The “heavens” mentioned here are the spiritual ruling powers of this present evil world. The present “heavens” which are now are dominated by Satan and are to be destroyed. We read:

“But the heavens and the earth which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment, and perdition of ungodly men. Looking for, and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire, shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. Nevertheless, we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.”--2 Peter 3:7,12,13

As the old heavens are dominated by Satan the new heavens will be ruled by Christ. Then will be fulfilled the words of Jesus:

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, . . . when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live. Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth.”--John 5:25,28,29

The rest of our gem text echoes the yearnings of a groaning creation, tired and sick of sin and death like Job who uttered the words, feeling abandoned by God and longing for peace and rest, wishing and hoping for something better after this life which has proved so disappointing, casting themselves upon God:

“O that thou wouldst hide me in the grave; that thou wouldst keep me secret, until thy wrath be past; that thou wouldst appoint me a set time, and remember me! If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come! Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee. Thou wilt have a desire to the work of thy hands.”--Job 14:13-15

God Loves Every Human Being

That last sentence of our text--“Thou wilt have a desire to the work of thy hands”--gives us a wonderful insight to the character and intent of our God. The human family is the “work of his hands,” his supreme creation on earth. He said to the Logos: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” (Genesis 1:26) He loves every human being who has ever lived! It was he who provided a Redeemer. He “is not willing that any should perish.” (2 Peter 3:9) When they go down into death, he misses them! He wants to see them again! He wants them to come back! He wants to enjoy a perfect human creation, a family, that will return his love for them. This last verse is tremendously significant--“Thou wilt have a desire to the work of thy hands.” This means that the great Jehovah God himself eagerly anticipates the resurrection of the dead, each one of the dead!

There are many other such hidden gems of truth in the scriptures, each giving the Divine Plan in a capsule. These are not accidental or coincidental. They are planted there for us whose eyes the Lord has opened through the ministry of a Faithful and Wise Servant. Being able to find them and see their lessons corroborating our understanding of the Divine Plan of the Ages is the strongest possible evidence that we are in the truth!

How Sin Entered the World

THERE are many evil things in the world today, and there is much suffering and unhappiness because of these things. There are all kinds of sickness and pain. After only a few years of life, a person dies, leaving behind those who sorrow for him. All about us we see corruption and immorality. Cheating and robbing are common; there is violence, cruelty and murder. Accidents kill and cripple thousands every year. Fires and floods bring great suffering to the people. It seems there is always a war, revolution, or some kind of civil disorder going on somewhere in the world. Beside this, children disobey and rebel against their parents, scorning the wisdom of the experience of many generations. Of course there is also much beauty, goodness and happiness in the world, in which we rejoice. But evil seems to predominate.

When God had completed the creation of the earth and everything upon it, he “saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good.” (Genesis 1:31) Everything is certainly not “very good” - today. What happened to change the situation? How did evil get a start in the world and develop to the extent it has?

Man Created Perfect

The first man, Adam, was created perfect. It is written that, “God created man in his own image; in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.” (Genesis 1:27) Man was designed to live forever upon the earth. We are told in Genesis chapter two how man was placed in a beautiful garden in which grew every tree good for food and that would sustain life perfectly. Then God put man to the test of obedience. God purposely made the test simple and easy.

“And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat. But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.”--Genesis 2:16,17

Adam was forbidden to eat of the fruit of only one of the many trees of the garden.

Disobedience in such a simple matter when it would be easy to obey, makes the transgression all the more reprehensible. It indicates willfulness. If it were a difficult thing the Lord required of him, Adam might have made the excuse that obedience was beyond his capabilities. But there was no excuse for disobedience in this case. He had plenty of food beside the fruit of the prohibited tree. It was not necessary for him to eat of it for sustenance.

Why did God have to test Adam's obedience at all? Why was obedience a matter of life or death?" By definition, sin is disobedience to God's law. God cannot tolerate sin. Genesis 3:22 states that by continuing to eat of the perfect food of the garden of Eden, Adam had the ability to live forever. So you can see why it was necessary for God to test Adam's obedience before allowing him to continue his life. Adam failed the test. As recorded in Genesis chapter three, Satan deceived Eve and she in turn induced Adam to knowingly disobey. So they both were expelled from the garden, away from the source of their perfect food supply, into the unplanted part of the earth. There they ate food that would not sustain life perfectly.

Thus the death penalty was enforced and Adam began to die. All his children were born after his expulsion from Eden. They were born dying just as we are who descended from them. We all fit the description that David gave of himself when he said: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." (Psalms 51:5)

"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."--Romans 5:12

Why could God not have designed and created man incapable of sin? Then it would have been impossible for Adam to disobey. God would have had a perfect human race living forever upon the earth. God could have made man without the ability to make a choice and to guide his own conduct, but to make him that way would have been to produce a living machine, a robot. He would have been a slave, rendering blind obedience without knowing why. This was not the kind of creature God wanted as the king of earth. He created a superior being, far above the animals with their compelling instincts, a creature with moral sense and freedom of choice, able to reason, to reach decisions, and to act in harmony with them, what we call a free moral agent. "God created man in his own image." (Genesis 1:27)

Could God have shielded the first pair from Satan's temptation so that they would not have disobeyed and incurred the death penalty? Yes, but then man's experience would have been limited to only good. He would have been continually liable to suggestions of evil which would have made the everlasting future of mankind uncertain. An outbreak of disobedience and disorder might always have been a possibility.

How To Know Something

There are four ways to know things. One way is by intuition, which is a direct apprehension without the process of reasoning. Only God

possesses it. Another way is by observation. If God had chosen to teach Adam the dire results of sin by this method, it would have been necessary for sin to be permitted somewhere, among some beings, for man to observe it. Another way is by information, by telling. This method was used, but Adam did not learn by it. God told Adam not to eat, but Adam ate just the same. He could not realize the full import of what it meant to die. At that time he had never seen anyone die. He could not possibly understand the depth of degradation and misery it would involve for himself and his entire race. He lacked experience.

Beside intuition, observation, and information, the only other way to learn is by experience. God saw this as the best way. He permitted Satan to deceive Eve by telling the first lie ever uttered: "Ye shall not surely die." (Genesis 3:4) Why did Eve believe Satan when God had plainly said: "Thou shalt surely die?" She too lacked experience.

Today we do not believe something without question. We have developed mental reservations. We consider whether the source of the information is reliable. We consider the possible motives our informant may have. We mentally compare the information with knowledge we have previously acquired. We do these things as a result of our experience and often without conscious thought. We have learned by experience that there are unreliable, prejudiced and dishonest people in the world, so we do not readily believe everything we are told by just anyone. We have learned to be discriminating.

Because of her innocent inexperience, Eve was childlike and naive. She was easily deceived by the crafty Satan, especially when he promised her that the forbidden fruit would really be beneficial. So she ate and offered it to her husband Adam. He also ate. It seems that Adam was not present when Eve ate the fruit. When he learned what she had done, he was appalled. He loved Eve very much. Thinking that she would now die, he decided he would not live without her. So he ate of the fruit knowingly and deliberately, so that he might die together with his beloved wife. "Adam was not deceived; but the woman, being deceived, was in the transgression." (1 Timothy 2:14)

Adam's disobedience will be for the ultimate good of mankind because it provided an experience with sin and its terrible consequences.

By virtue of Jesus' ransom sacrifice, the entire human race will be saved from death to live again upon the earth. If obedient, they will live for ever. Having learned by experience the truth of the text "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23), they will want no more of it. Instead they will gladly follow righteousness.

Joseph and His Brethren

TODAY we are going to consider the story of Joseph which comprises chapters 37 and 39 to 50 of Genesis. It would take too long to read the actual account so we will briefly summarize and paraphrase the story after which we will see what lessons are to be learned from it.

Jacob, the grandson of Abraham who was renamed Israel, especially loved his wife Rachel. Her firstborn son was called Joseph. Then she died in childbirth bearing another son, Benjamin. Jacob greatly grieved Rachel's death and with her gone, the intensity of his love showered upon her children, especially the firstborn Joseph. Jacob had eleven other sons, but Joseph was his favorite. He showed his favoritism in many ways. For example, he had a special garment made for Joseph, a coat of many colors and of many pieces, a coat such as was worn by nobility. Perhaps he thus indicated to the rest of his family that Joseph would be heir. The ten other brothers were consumed with jealousy. The record says: "They hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him."

As if things weren't bad enough, Joseph dreamed a strange dream one night and in his innocence related it to his brothers. It seems that they were all binding sheaves of wheat in the field and Joseph's sheaf arose and stood upright, whereupon his brothers' sheaves stood around in a circle and bowed down to Joseph's sheaf. As a result of this dream the account says, "They hated him yet more." Then Joseph dreamed again. This time the sun and the moon and eleven stars bowed down to him. When he told this one, his father remarked, "Shall I, and thy mother, and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?" This was the last straw. The hatred of Joseph's brothers was whipped to a jealous rage. This was their frame of mind when they journeyed from their home to find pasturage for their flocks some distance away. They were gone so long that their father began to worry about them and decided to send Joseph to see how they were and bring him word again. We can imagine that Joseph and his dreams of superiority were thoroughly discussed by his brothers in the field. This airing of mutual grievances would further incite their hatred. They were in just such a frenzy of jealous rage when the one posted as the camp lookout called out, "Here he comes! Here comes that dreamer."

In the crystal-clear air of that region an approaching person can be seen a long distance away. They easily recognized it was Joseph because of his long coat of many pieces and bright colors. Each brother instantly had the same thought--now he was in their power! His father was not there to protect him. The object of their hatred was in their hands. As Joseph innocently approached, probably

waving a happy greeting, they held a hasty conference and the almost unanimous decision was:

“Come now, therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit; and we will say, some evil beast hath devoured him; and we shall see what will become of his dreams.”



The Hatred of Joseph's Brothers

So great was their hatred that of the ten there was only one dissenting voice to this decision. It was that of Reuben, the oldest son. He suggested a compromise. “Let us not shed his blood,” he said, “but let us put him into the pit alive.” The record says that it was Reuben's intention to come back later and release Joseph. It was

quickly agreed. When Joseph arrived he was rudely seized, stripped of his colorful coat, and thrown into a deep dry well from which he could not possibly escape unaided. Then, with the anguished cries and pleadings of Joseph ringing in their ears, they sat down to eat. The fact that they could eat under the circumstances shows the callousness of their hearts.

Reuben, who was more compassionate, must have excused himself at this point to go and tend to his flocks because he was not present when a caravan of camels came in sight on its way to Egypt. Judah proposed an idea. Why not turn the situation to a profit? Why not sell Joseph as a slave instead of letting him die in the pit? So they let down a rope to Joseph who eagerly grasped it thinking his brothers had relented, only to find himself trussed up and sold like an animal to some Midianite slave-traders for twenty pieces of silver. In those days the price of a full-grown slave was thirty pieces of silver. Since Joseph was only seventeen, his price was twenty pieces. Again he cried and appealed to his brothers for mercy as he was dragged away by the traders, but they were too busy dividing the money. There would be two whole pieces of silver for each of them. Then Reuben, circling about, returned to the well to release Joseph. Finding him gone, he was genuinely distressed but it was too late.

Then the brothers did an extremely cruel and callous thing. They took Joseph's coat of many colors, dipped and spattered it in the blood of a goat and took it to their poor old father who was so anxiously waiting for Joseph's return, the son he loved so much. "We found this," the brothers said. "Is it your son's coat?" Jacob reached the obvious conclusion. Joseph had undoubtedly been torn to pieces by a wild beast. There were lions and bears in that part of the country. His grief was profound. He refused to be comforted, saying, "I will go down to the grave, unto my son, mourning."

The change in Joseph's life was drastic and complete. From being a beloved and favorite son, tenderly reared in his father's house, he suddenly was transported to the position of a slave in a foreign and heathen land. To this was added the bitter experience of witnessing the murderous hatred and cold-blooded cruelty of his own brothers as well as the homesickness and the thought of his father's grief and loneliness.

Joseph's Experiences in Egypt

Upon reaching Egypt he was exposed for sale in the open market as was the custom of the time. The slave buyers were men of position and substance, members of nobility, officers of the king, wealthy merchants and large landowners. Slaves were expensive. We can

imagine the slave-master expertly sizing up Joseph so obviously superior to the rest, saying:

“Gentlemen, we have a very special item today. A young Hebrew! This man is from a superior race. He is not only strong, but very intelligent. Just look at his high forehead! He will make some fortunate purchaser an excellent and trustworthy servant. Gentlemen what am I bid?”

That is how Joseph was purchased by Poti--phar, an officer of Pharaoh and Captain of the Guard.

Joseph had inherited many fine qualities from his father. He had been reared in an atmosphere of strong faith in the God of Abraham. From infancy he had been --imbued with the noblest precepts; he was honest, conscientious, and a faithful young man. Absolute faithfulness was probably rare at the time as it is today. Joseph's master quickly noted it and gave Joseph more and more responsibility. The record says that, “The Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand.” This too was noticed by his master. When Joseph was about 22, he was made the manager of Potiphar's entire estate. He enjoyed Potiphar's complete trust and confidence. We read, “And he left all that he had in Joseph's hand.”

Joseph had occupied this position for about five years when calamity came. --Unintentionally he caught the eye of Poti--phar's wife. His steadfastness to principle angered her. She falsely accused him and he was cast into prison and made to appear guilty of a heinous crime: disloyalty to his master and benefactor. Shakespeare has described this situation saying, “Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.” We read: “And Joseph's master took him, and put him into prison, a place where the king's prisoners were bound.” I don't think Potiphar, in his heart, really believed his wife's accusation against Joseph. If he had, he certainly would have killed Joseph. After all he was an officer of the king and Captain of the Guard; Joseph was only a slave. No one would have questioned him. Instead he imprisoned Joseph.

The warden of the prison was happy to have someone with Joseph's administrative ability and he quickly put his talents to work. In a short time Joseph came to be in complete charge of the prison arrangements although he was himself a prisoner. Once again we read: “The Lord was with him; and that which he did, the Lord made to prosper.”

Since this was the king's prison, the prisoners were not necessarily criminals. Sometimes they were political prisoners or merely temporary objects of the king's displeasure. One day, Pharaoh became angry at two of his officers, described as “the chief of the butlers, and the chief of the bakers.” The chief butler or cup-bearer

to the king was the highest officer of Pharaoh's household--a sort of a Royal Secretary. The chief baker was the manager of the culinary department and general steward of the Royal Family with its kitchen and supplies. They were confined in the same prison with Joseph, and Joseph was responsible for them. He therefore became well acquainted with them and learned much of the ways and customs of Pharaoh's court. This information would stand him in good stead later on.



Joseph Interprets Dreams

One morning Joseph noticed these two prisoners looked particularly unhappy and he tenderly inquired: "Wherefore look ye sad today?" Joseph's own experiences had made him tender-hearted toward others. He was able to enter into the degradations and sorrows of the other prisoners because of what he himself had been through. He noticed and was genuinely concerned that they were sad that morning.

The chief butler and the chief baker told Joseph they both had dreamed dreams the previous night and were sad and worried because of what the dreams might mean. Joseph encouraged them to tell him their dreams suggesting that God through him might give them the interpretations. The butler told his dream first and God illuminated Joseph's mind to give him the meaning; he was to be pardoned by Pharaoh and restored to his butler's office within three days. Then Joseph made a pathetic plea to the butler, showing how much he yearned for his freedom. He said,

"But think on me when it shall be well with thee; and show kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh; and bring me out of this house. For indeed I was stolen

away out of the land of the Hebrews; and here also, have I done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon.”

Then the baker told his dream. Again God illuminated Joseph's mind with the interpretation. This time it saddened Joseph to tell it. He told the baker that within three days he would be hanged. Within three days both predictions were precisely fulfilled. The butler, restored to his former position, once again gave the cup to Pharaoh's hand. But he forgot Joseph and his wistful plea. Joseph stayed in prison two years after that. He was now 30 years of age.

Then one night Pharaoh dreamed two dreams in one night. These were not ordinary dreams that one takes as a matter of course. So vivid and impressive were they that Pharaoh knew they had special significance. In the first dream he saw seven fine cattle come up to the river; a little later he saw seven very poor, lean cattle--the worst he had ever seen--come up. The lean cattle ate up the fat ones and looked none the better. In the second dream Pharaoh saw a fine stalk of corn grow up out of the earth bearing seven full, healthy, ears of corn. Then he saw another stalk come up with seven withered ears, good for nothing. As he watched the withered ears swallowed up the good ears and looked none the better. Pharaoh summoned his wise men and magicians to --determine what the dreams meant. But to his great disappointment, not one of them could interpret the dreams for him. Then the chief butler, who was always at Pharaoh's side, finally remembered Joseph and told the king of the young Hebrew in prison who had so accurately interpreted his dream as well as the dream of the baker.

I like to think that Joseph was praying, asking God for deliverance, when the summons came. The keeper of the prison came in with astonishment on his face. “Joseph! The King is calling for you! The great Pharaoh himself wants to see you!” Joseph was not really surprised. He had been expecting it for so long. With a heart full of thankfulness, he hastily bathed, shaved, and changed his clothes. It was with a calm assurance, born of faith in God, that Joseph faced Pharaoh, the mightiest monarch in the world. “I understand you have the ability to interpret dreams,” Pharaoh said. “This ability is not in me,” Joseph answered modestly. “It is God who shall give you an answer.”

“What a time to be modest!” someone might say. He had been a slave for ten years and in the dungeon for three years. Now when he had a grand opportunity to shine before the king himself, he threw it away. Yet modesty usually denotes greatness of character. This was not lost on the keenly perceptive Pharaoh. He told Joseph his dreams. The Lord again illuminated the mind of Joseph and he explained to Pharaoh that the two dreams referred to the same matter, given twice to emphasize its sureness. The interpretation was

that there would be seven years of plenty--great plenty--in the land of Egypt. Then these would be followed by seven years of famine which would fully consume all the surplus of the plentiful years. Joseph offered the suggestion that the king appoint a trustworthy agent to buy all the surplus grain in seven years of plenty and to store it for use during the seven years of famine.

Pharaoh was at once struck with the wisdom of this plan. So we read:

“And Pharaoh said unto his servants: Can we find such a one as this is? A man in whom the spirit of God is? And Pharaoh said unto Joseph: Forasmuch as God hath showed thee all this, there is none so discreet, and wise as thou art. Thou shalt be over my house, and according to thy word shall all my people be ruled. Only in the throne will I be greater than thou.”

So it came to pass that Joseph in one day stepped out of the lowest dungeon and was exalted to the rulership of Egypt, the greatest empire of those days. As Brother Russell expressed it: “He had a 14-year contract.”

Famine Touches Joseph's Family

The famine was general and severe throughout that region of the world. It included Canaan as well as Egypt. The land dried up and successive crops failed until there was not even seed left to plant. Word spread that there was no lack of food in Egypt. So Jacob directed his sons, who were by this time heads of families themselves, to go down to Egypt and buy wheat. But he did not send Benjamin, who was now his favorite son, with them.

The ten sons arrived in Egypt. As aliens they were directed to Joseph who had been expecting them. He had known they would eventually have to come to him for food. That is probably why he had not tried to contact them before this. When brought before Joseph, his ten brothers bowed themselves before him, not recognizing him. To them he was the ruler of Egypt. As they bowed before him Joseph remembered his dreams of the sheaves and the stars. He spoke to them through an interpreter asking if they were not really spies who had come to see how much wheat there was in Egypt so that they might bring an army to steal it. They explained their situation truthfully and upon questioning mentioned their father and their younger brother Benjamin.

How Joseph's heart must have leaped to learn that after more than 20 years his father and his brother Benjamin were alive and well. But he did not identify himself. He kept his air of severity and finally agreed to sell them grain. But in order to obtain more later, they must first prove their truthfulness by bringing their youngest brother Benjamin along with them. Until that time, Simeon, one of the brothers, would

be kept in prison as a hostage. At this point a single thought must have simultaneously passed through the minds of each of the ten brothers. It was the tragic memory of their 17-year-old brother Joseph in his coat of many colors with anguish of heart pleading, begging them for mercy. Then the brothers turned a deaf ear and sold Joseph for silver. The record states:

“And they said, one to another, we are verily guilty concerning our brother; in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear. Therefore is this distress come to us. And Reuben answered them saying, Spake I not unto you, saying, do not sin against the child, and ye would not hear? Therefore, behold, also his blood is required.”

The Brothers Experience Remorse They were in the presence of Joseph when they said these things, not knowing that he understood every word. Joseph was so overcome that he withdrew so that he could weep unobserved. His tears were tears of compassion and joy, joy at seeing the remorse of his brethren, to realize that the mellowing of the passing years had brought sincere repentance and change of character. Nevertheless he must try them further. He returned to them, took Simeon hostage, and sent them away.

On the way home, when they opened their sacks to get food, they found the money they had paid for the grain in each of their sacks. When the brothers arrived at home with their wheat, they told their father Jacob the whole story, of their being suspected as spies by the governor, and why Simeon was not with them. Then they told their father that the money they had paid for the grain had been returned to them in their sacks of wheat. They told him that in order to obtain more wheat next time they must take Benjamin with them. To this Jacob protested, saying:

“Me have ye bereaved of my children. Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away?”

It must have been a shock to the brothers to hear even their father Jacob echo their fears, that their crime against Joseph was responsible for their predicament, that this was retribution.

When the supply of wheat brought from Egypt began to run low, Jacob urged his sons to go again for more. But they positively refused to do so unless Benjamin went along. Jacob protested strongly. Then Judah spoke up and became surety for Benjamin. Let us remember that it was Judah who many years before had, proposed selling Joseph as a slave. Now he pledged his own life for the safety of Benjamin. What a change had taken place in his heart. Jacob finally consented out of necessity. He sent them to the governor of Egypt with a present of honey, spices, nuts and almonds, and with double the money. He allowed Benjamin to go saying, pitifully,

“And God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may send away your other brother [Simeon], and Benjamin. If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.”

When they arrived in Egypt, Joseph gave instructions that dinner should be served for them in his house and released Simeon to them. When they were ready to eat, Joseph came in robed as an Egyptian prince and again they bowed down to him. He tenderly inquired for their father. He saw his brother Benjamin, his own mother's son, and yearned to embrace him. So deep was his emotion that he had to leave them for a while so they would not see his tears of joy. The brothers were shown to their seats at the table and were astonished to see they had been seated in the exact order of age and birthright. When they were served, they were further astonished to see that Benjamin was served five portions to their one. Did they resent it? Were they jealous as they had been of Joseph so long ago? Not a bit! They loved it. They laughed about it. The record says they “were merry with him.” You may be sure Joseph noted this further evidence of their reformation.

Joseph felt he must test them still further as to their sympathy for their father and for their loving interest in their youngest brother Benjamin. When their sacks were filled with grain, he arranged for his own silver cup to be concealed in Benjamin's sack. In the morning when the brothers were a short distance on their way home, he sent officers after them, accusing them of stealing his cup. They protested their innocence and invited the officers to search for the cup, saying:

“With whomsoever of thy servants it be found, both let him die, and we also will be my lord's bondmen, or, slaves.”

The sacks were searched and the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. What a rude shock it was! They had given their father a pledge of their own lives as surety for Benjamin; now, by their own word, Benjamin should die and they themselves become slaves. The officers magnanimously proposed to take only Benjamin back with them as a slave and allow the others to proceed home. But they would not let Benjamin be separated from them, not for a moment. They all went back with him, stunned with grief. Were these the same men who had so long ago easily let Joseph go his lonely way a slave? Were these the same men who dipped his coat in blood and used it to break an old man's heart?

When they got back to the palace, they fell before Joseph on the ground as he accused them. Words seemed useless. What could they say? How could they defend themselves against the evidence? It was hopeless; they knew they were through. Judah became their spokesman.

“And Judah said: What shall we say unto my lord? What shall we speak? Or how shall we clear ourselves: God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants; both we, and he also with whom the cup is found.”

Thus he offered himself and his brothers including Benjamin to Joseph as slaves. Joseph refused saying that only the one who had taken the cup should be his slave. “As for you,” he said, “Get you up in peace, unto your father.” Joseph was applying the final and most severe test on his brothers. As far as they knew Benjamin had stolen the cup. The brothers could reason that Benjamin should suffer the consequences; it was not their fault. They had their own families to think about. They might reason that food must be brought to them or they would starve. As for their father, he'd just have to understand the situation, that's all. Joseph desired to see if they would reason that way. This was the crucial test.

Judah Heart-felt Plea

Judah, speaking for them all, made one of the most pathetic, touching pleas, ever recorded in history.

“Then Judah came near unto him, and said, O my lord, let thy servant I pray thee speak a word in my lord's ears; and let not thine anger burn against thy servant; for thou art even as Pharaoh. My lord asked his servants, saying, Have ye a father or a brother? And we said unto my lord, We have a father, an old man, and a child of his old age, a little one, and his brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother, and his father loveth him. And thou saidst unto thy servants, bring him down unto me, that I may set mine eyes upon him. And we said unto my lord, The lad cannot leave his father, his father would die. And thou saidst unto thy servants, except your youngest brother come down with you, ye shall see my face no more. And it came to pass, when we came up unto thy servant, my father, we told him the words of my lord. And our father said, go again, and buy us a little food. And we said, we cannot go down if our youngest brother be not with us. Then we go down and may see the face of the man when our youngest brother be with us. And thy servant, my father, said unto us, ye know that my wife bare me two sons; and the one went out from me, and I said surely he is torn in pieces, and I saw him not since. And if ye take this also from me, and mischief befall him, ye shall bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave. Now, therefore, when I come to thy servant, my father, and the lad be not with us, seeing that his life is bound up in the lad's life; it shall come to pass, when he seeth that the lad is not with us, that he will die, and thy servants shall bring down the gray hairs of thy servant, our father, with sorrow to the grave. For thy servant became surety for the lad unto my father, saying, If I bring him not unto thee,

then I shall bear the blame to my father for ever. Now, therefore, I pray thee, let thy servant abide instead of the lad, a bondman to my lord, and let the lad go up with his brethren. For how shall I go up to my father, and the lad be not with me? Lest peradventure I see the evil that shall come to my father.”

As Judah talked any lingering doubt in Joseph's mind melted away. They had indeed changed completely. They were now willing to sacrifice their own lives for their younger brother and to spare their father any anguish of heart.

The time had come for him to identify himself. Sending all others out of the room and with tears streaming down his face, he made himself known to his brethren. Speaking in the Hebrew language he said: “I am Joseph your brother whom you sold into Egypt.” Can you imagine the amazement of his brothers? They felt a stab of guilt for what they had done to Joseph so long ago. They were ill at ease. Joseph quickly noted this and with what is a classic example of graciousness, he set their heart at ease. He said:

“Now therefore, be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither; for God did send me before you, to preserve life . . . So now, it was not you that sent me hither, but God.”

What largeness of heart Joseph had! What God-like forgiveness! Forgotten were the years of slavery, the years of the dungeon, the days and nights of loneliness yearning for his father's house. Now everything was all right! Benjamin was the first one he embraced. This was his kid brother he loved so much. Then he embraced all his brethren and kissed them. They all wept tears of joy. Joseph immediately sent for his father and his brother's families and settled them comfortably in the land of Goshen. We can well imagine the touching tenderness of the reunion of Joseph with his father at long, long last.

That is the story of Joseph, a beautiful, moving story. It is so rich in human emotion that it brings tears to our eyes to read it. It is also rich in prophetic significance. Do you realize what this means? It means that God made his plans in the minutest detail then supervised and overruled Joseph's every experience to illustrate portions of that plan. It is thrilling to realize how completely God is the Master of every situation, how thoroughly he controls and maneuvers the experiences of those with whom he deals.

Joseph a Type of Jesus

Let us consider some of the prophetic and symbolic pictures God made from the life of Joseph. Joseph typified Jesus. As Joseph was the favorite son and constant companion of Jacob, Jesus was God's -- beloved son. Of him it is said that he was one brought up with God

and daily his --delight. (Proverbs 8:30) As Jacob sent Joseph to his brethren in Dothan, the Heavenly Father sent his beloved son to the nation of Israel. As Jesus himself said, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Matthew 15:24) As Joseph's brethren hated him without justification, Jesus said of himself: "They hated me without a cause." (John 15:25) As Joseph's mission to his brethren was not well received but was rejected, so Jesus came unto his own but his own received him not." Also, "He was despised and rejected of men." (Isaiah 53:3)

As Joseph's brethren were cruelly envious of him, we also read in Matthew 27:18 and Mark 15:10 that Jesus was delivered for envy. Joseph's brethren said of Joseph: "Come now, therefore, and let us slay him." In like manner the Jews plotted to kill --Jesus, and shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" As Joseph was figuratively killed when cast into the pit by his brethren, Jesus was actually put to death by the Jews. As Joseph was sold in slavery at Judah's suggestion, so was Jesus sold by Judas for silver, thirty pieces of silver being the price of a slave. Faithful Joseph spent three years in prison; our Lord Jesus, notwithstanding his faithfulness, was three days in the prison-house of death. As Pharaoh raised Joseph up from prison to be next to him the ruler of Egypt, Jesus was on the third day delivered from death and raised up to power and great glory, next to Jehovah God on the throne of the universe. Our Lord Jesus said of himself after his resurrection: "All power is given unto me, in heaven and in earth." (Matthew 28:18) As Pharaoh decreed that all should bow down to Joseph and do him honor, so God decreed, "All men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father."--John 5:23

In the case of Joseph, disaster, treachery, and shame prepared the way for glory and honor as ruler of Egypt. So with --Jesus: his trying experiences proved him loyal to God and led to his exaltation. As Hebrews states it:

"[He] endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."--Hebrews 12:2

Joseph gave bread to all, purchasing for Pharaoh the land and the people. Jesus purchased mankind; during the Millennial age Christ will give life (himself--his merit) to all who desire it. As there was no life for the people except through Joseph as the representative of Pharaoh, there is no life for anyone in the world except in and through Christ representing the Heavenly Father. As Joseph's brethren who originally rejected Joseph finally recognized him, the Jewish nation who rejected Jesus and crucified him will, after many humbling experiences and ordeals including "Jacob's Trouble," finally recognize and accept Jesus. Joseph's brethren wept when Joseph revealed himself to them. So also we read: "They shall look

upon him whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him.” (Zechariah 12:10) As Joseph judged his brethren not according to what they had done to him in the past nor their sins of the past but according to their attitude of heart at the time, so the future judgment of the world will be according to the condition of men's minds and hearts at the time.

These are some of the typical features of this story. There are many more. Do you think these parallels just happened by chance? You know they did not. This is the finger of God. These things were given for our encouragement and benefit to make us realize that we are not following “cunningly devised fables” (2 Peter 1:16), to know that we really have the truth.

Personal Lessons for Us

Let us consider some of the personal lessons contained in the story of Joseph and his brethren. This is one of the stories my mother used to read to me from her Armenian Bible when I was a small child. I remember vividly how I used to be carried away by its high adventure. As the story unfolded, I imagined myself in every situation of Joseph. I couldn't quite understand the hatred of Joseph's brethren since my own brothers were such fine fellows. But I cried when Joseph was cast into the pit and sold as a slave. I wept when his coat was dipped in blood and taken to his father. I alternated between joy and despair as Joseph was in turn favored and degraded. The supreme thrill for me came when Joseph was raised from the dungeon to the rulership of Egypt.

When the story was finished and mother closed her Bible, I sat and mused. I would say to myself: Why couldn't a thing wonderful like that happen to me? Why couldn't God pick me for such care and such an exaltation? I didn't say this complainingly, but wistfully, yearningly; wishing it could be true; wishing with all my heart that I could be Joseph. Years later when the Lord drew me to the truth, the wonderful realization came to me that what happened to Joseph did happen to me. God had indeed selected me and as with Joseph, every incident of my life was noted by God and overruled for my good. I realized that I shall, finally, receive an --exaltation to a rulership far greater than that of Egypt. This is true of each of us who are consecrated and running for the prize of the high calling. It is true of you. The story of Joseph is the story of your life. As a member of the body of Christ Joseph represents you too! His experiences represent your experiences.

As Jacob loved Joseph, God loved Jesus. So also it is written of you: “The Father himself loveth you.” (John 16:27) As Joseph was hated of his brethren and as Jesus was hated by the Jews, Jesus said of

you: "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you."--John 15:18

As Joseph was raised up from the dungeon to the throne of Egypt, so was Jesus raised from death to the throne of God. It is written of us: "If we be dead with him, we shall also live with him." (2 Timothy 2:11,12) As the Lord was with Joseph, --supervising all his affairs, making everything come out all right, and as the Heavenly Father was with his son Jesus throughout his earthly ministry and finally glorified him, so we have the assurance "that all things work together for good to them that love God; to them who are the called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28) As Joseph's experiences of adversity rightly exercised him, developing beauty of character, and as Jesus --demonstrated his obedience by the things which he suffered, it is written of us:

"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you; but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy."--1 Peter 4:12,13

As Joseph distributed food to save lives and as Christ will in his kingdom administer the bread of life to all, we as members of his body will share with him in restoring life to all humanity.

There are some intimate and heart searching lessons to be learned also. The first, and one of the principal lessons, is the effect of envy. We should never be --envious. It is extremely disruptive and destructive. Under the evil influence of envy, normal people are led to do and say the most outrageous things. As James expresses it: "Where envying and strife are, there is confusion and every evil work." (James 3:16) This being true, you may be sure Satan fosters and encourages envy, seeking to disrupt and destroy the church. It is a sad fact that the brethren who are the most widely and effectively used by the Lord arouse the most envy. Let us shun this evil thing. At the slightest sign of it in our hearts, let us earnestly pray for its eradication. Allowed to grow, envy can destroy the new creature.

A Lesson About Pride

Joseph provides a valuable lesson on pride. We read in the account that "the Lord was with Joseph, and showed him mercy, and gave him favor." (Genesis 39:21) This fact is expressed several times in the story. Even under adverse conditions he was favored in many ways. Joseph could have permitted these experiences to develop a great deal of personal pride. He might have reasoned to himself that he was merely lucky, or that he was naturally bright, attractive and smart--that this was the secret of his success, that this was the reason

his father loved him so much. He might have thought this was the reason that when he was sold as a slave he was bought by a good master, that it was his personal brilliance that caused him to rise to eminence in Poti--phar's house. He could have thought that it was his superior abilities that gave him the authority in prison, that it was his keenness of intellect that enabled him to interpret dreams. He might have thought that all these things made him stand head and shoulders above other men and hence he had earned and deserved his success as a matter of right.

Joseph could have reasoned this way. It would have been quite human to do so. But he reflected the attitude of Jesus whom he prefigured. Jesus gave all the credit to God, saying: "I can of mine own self do nothing." (John 5:30) If Joseph had not taken this attitude, he would not have been exalted, but would have fallen instead. We read, "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." (Proverbs 16:18) So let us ascribe to the Lord every good thing we receive remembering: "Every good and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights." (James 1:17) Also: "For promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south; but God is the judge; he putteth down one and setteth up another."--Psalms 75:6,7

Then there is the lesson of patient endurance. Sometimes when we are serving the Lord and the brethren to the best of our ability and when apparently we have the Lord's blessings and favor upon our affairs in a most marked degree, suddenly trouble may arise and adversity come upon us. The powers of darkness seem to triumph. We seem to be forsaken by divine providence. The Lord seems to have abandoned us. These are Joseph's experiences; Jesus too had such an experience when he cried: "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46) Anyone can have them. When this happens, let us react as did Joseph, with a quiet, persevering faith, doing the best we can from day to day not only waiting, but working and waiting. Remember that Joseph did his best to effect his own deliverance from prison by asking the butler to mention his case to Pharaoh.

But one of the most outstanding and heart-warming lessons of this story is the graciousness with which Joseph forgave his brethren. Seeing his brethren ill at ease when he revealed himself to them, his first and instant reaction was of pity and mercy. He was gracious in his forgiveness. He almost made them believe that they had done him a favor to sell him as a slave to Egypt! Listen to his loving words:

"Be not grieved, or angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither; for God did send me before you, to preserve life . . . to preserve you

a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance .
So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God!”

Joseph's Words of Mercy

Aren't those gracious words? His brethren knew they had been guilty of a great sin, a sin equivalent to murder. Joseph knew it too. But he also knew that the Lord had overruled it for the highest good. So that is the part he mentioned, and only that part. As he talked the guilty terror left their hearts and for the first time in 23 years their minds were at ease concerning Joseph. Let us, like Joseph, be merciful toward those who sin against us. Let us study to always give the gracious answer using loving words.

Had Joseph been a saint of this Gospel age, begotten of the holy spirit and running for the prize of the high calling with all the revelations and admonitions of the Bible available to him, with a knowledge of the divine plan of the ages revealing the character and purpose of God, his conduct would still be compatible with the very highest type of Christian development. But when we think of the circumstances and conditions under which his character was developed in that heathen land and with but a small revelation of God's character and plan (the Bible not yet written, the law and ordinances not yet given), we are amazed. When we think of this, what manner of persons ought we to be considering our great advantages every way? With all our advantages, would we have proven as noble and generous and gracious as Joseph under the same circumstances and conditions? These are things to ponder.

Does your heart glow when you consider the story of Joseph? Do you live the story? Are you able to identify yourself with Joseph's experiences, sympathizing with him in his difficulties and rejoicing with him in his successes?

Do you think that what Joseph did was good, and right, and God-like? Does it make you love and praise God the more? If so, this is the finest evidence that you are of the “Joseph” class whom the Lord loves and will exalt.

We thank the Heavenly Father for the example of Joseph and of our Lord Jesus Christ whom he typified. May we be helped to copy the traits and characteristics illustrated so we too may be worthy of exaltation in due time.

Journeying to the Promised Land

“Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples. The Diaglott says, “typically.”> And they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he --standeth take heed lest he fall.”--1 Corinthians 10:11,12

WE ARE those “upon whom the ends of the ages are come.” So today we are going to consider some of the highlights of the history of Israel up to the time of their entering the promised land to see what admonitions there are for us to keep us from falling.

After many difficulties Joseph became ruler of Egypt. At the invitation of a benevolent pharaoh he brought his brethren and their families, as well as his father --Jacob, into Egypt and settled them on the broad and grassy plains of Goshen. It was an ideal land for their flocks and herds. Now we read from Exodus 1:6,7:

“And Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation. And the children of Israel were fruitful and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them.”

This covers a period of about 215 years. Notice how the phenomenal growth of the children of Israel is stressed. In this verse there are five different expressions of their increase: they were “fruitful,” they “increased abundantly,” they “multiplied,” they “waxed exceeding mighty,” and “the land was filled with them.” Thus began the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham:

“In multiplying I will multiply thy seed, as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore.”--Genesis 22:17

We determine from Exodus 12:37 that at that time there were over 600,000 adult males in Israel, beside women and children. If we calculate five to a family, which is not unreasonable for so prolific a people, this would indicate a population of over three million. That was a real population explosion!

We continue with Exodus 1:8: “Now there arose up a new king over Egypt, which knew not Joseph.” This was the --infamous Rameses the second who oppressed the children of Israel and with whom Moses dealt. His mummy has been found and is preserved to this day. One day he may return and see his own mummy.

The phenomenal increase of the children of Israel disturbed this Pharaoh. He considered it a threat to the security of Egypt. We read of this in the first chapter of Exodus. He enslaved and oppressed the Hebrews with hard labor. He gave orders that all their male babies

should be killed at birth which may be the first attempt at genocide in human history. But the midwives would not cooperate. We read in Exodus 1:20 that in spite of Pharaoh's order, "The people multiplied and waxed very mighty." When this scheme failed,



Pharaoh issued a vicious and heartless order which clearly indicated his depravity. It is recorded in Exodus 1:22. Any Egyptian was required to take any Hebrew boy he could find and throw him into the Nile river and drown him! Is it any wonder that the Hebrews cried to the God of their fathers? They probably met together in family units secretly at night and raised their combined voices to their God. What a great cry it was that went up! So we read in Exodus 3:7,8:

“And the Lord said [to Moses] I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt; and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows. And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land, and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey; unto the place of the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites.”

This was the great promise upon the basis of which Canaan came to be called “The Promised Land.”

Then followed the confrontation of Pharaoh by Moses demanding that he let the children of Israel go. Pharaoh stubbornly refused, and the Lord brought ten devastating plagues upon Egypt culminating in the death of the firstborn. On this occasion the Passover ritual was instituted whereby the firstborn of Israel were saved. This last plague, which killed all the firstborn in Egypt, finally broke Pharaoh's determination. His own beloved firstborn son, his pride and joy, the Crown Prince and heir to the throne of Egypt, had died with the others. He now urged the children of Israel to leave and leave quickly. They were ready. They had just eaten of the Passover lamb with their loins girded, their shoes on their feet, and their staffs in their hands. They had eaten it in haste, expecting to leave hurriedly. (Exodus 12:11) Now, under the leadership of Moses they rose up and started out as one man. We read, in Exodus 12:37,38:

“And the children of Israel journeyed from Rameses to Succoth, about six hundred thousand on foot, that were men, beside children. And a mixed multitude went up also with them. And flocks and herds, even very much cattle.”

What a spectacle that must have been: an entire nation on the move! Three million men, women, and children, beside a mixed multitude, marching in a great column. On either side of this vast river of humanity there were shepherds leading enormous flocks of sheep and herdsmen driving tens of thousands of cattle. There was a tenseness in the air, a feeling of suppressed excitement. Not many spoke but their combined footsteps must have been like the rolling of distant thunder.

Then with the Red Sea safely passed and the pursuing armies of Pharaoh destroyed, the children of Israel set their faces toward Canaan, the Promised Land. Their course led through what is called a “great and terrible wilderness” (Deuteronomy 1:19) and a “waste howling wilderness” (Deuteronomy 32:10). They spent nearly a year in the vicinity of Mount --Sinai. It was about a year and fifty days after their departure from Egypt that they broke camp to journey toward Canaan. During this time many stops were made, the tabernacle services instituted, many laws and statutes given and many lessons learned. When they finally arrived at Kadesh-Barnea on the border of the Promised Land, they had achieved at least some semblance of an organized and orderly --nation.

This was a dramatic moment for the children of Israel. The culmination of their hopes was within view. Those lovely green hills on the horizon were of the land which their father Abraham's eyes had beheld when the Lord told him:

“Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art, northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward. For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth so that if a man number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered. Arise, walk through the land, in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.”-- Genesis 13:14-17

The Land Promised to Abraham

Instead of the one pair of eyes of Abraham, three million pairs of eyes of the children of Abraham were looking at that same land. This was the land of which Joseph spoke when he was upon his death-bed in Egypt, saying:

“I die. And God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land, unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob.”-- Genesis 50:24

This was the very land of which God spoke to Moses when he commissioned him to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt, calling it “a good land, and a large; unto a land flowing with milk and honey.”

They were here at last! All they had to do now was to walk in and take possession. Although the land was already inhabited by other peoples, this should present no problem to them. Had not the Almighty God given it to Israel assuring them over and over again that it was theirs? Could not the God who had so easily and so recently destroyed the armies of Egypt on their behalf also disperse these enemies before them? It would be logical to think so. But it did not seem logical to these who had so recently been slaves. They

needed further assurance. So it was proposed to spy out the land before venturing into it, first to see whether it was a good and productive land and second to determine whether the inhabitants were such as they would be able to defeat and drive out. This seemed a very strange thing to do. Were they not assured of both of these points already? Had not the Lord repeatedly told them that it was a good land, that it was theirs for the taking? You would think they would take the Lord at his word. Nevertheless they sent out twelve spies, one from each tribe, among whom were Caleb and Joshua.



After forty days of searching out the country, the spies returned and made their report. They were unanimous as to the facts. It was indeed an exceedingly good land. As proof of this they brought back some of the fruit of it--grapes, pomegranates and figs, which were large and of excellent quality. For example, a single bunch of grapes was of such size and weight that it had to be suspended from a pole and carried between two men. The spies also agreed that the inhabitants of the country were strong and warlike, living in high-walled cities, and that some of the people were of great stature. In all of these things they were in agreement. But it was astonishing to see

how different persons can take the very same set of facts and reach opposite conclusions.

Ten of the spies said, “We be not able to go up against the people for they are stronger than we.” (Numbers 13:31) But two of them reached a different conclusion. Caleb said enthusiastically: “Let us go up at once and possess it; for we are well able to overcome it!” (Numbers 13:30) Then Caleb and Joshua both stood before the people:

“And they spake unto all the company of the children of Israel, saying, The land which we passed through to search it, is an exceeding good land. If the Lord delight in us, then he will bring us into this land, and give it to us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. Only rebel not ye against the Lord, neither fear ye the people of the land; for they are bread for us [Moffatt: “we shall eat them up”]. Their defence is departed from them, and the Lord is with us. Fear them not.”--Numbers 14:7-9

But the people rejected the optimism of Caleb and Joshua and even wanted to stone them for expressing it. They accepted instead the evil and pessimistic report of the ten spies, and became utterly discouraged. They wept, saying, “Would God that we had died in the land of Egypt! Or would God we had died in this wilderness!” (Numbers 14:2) They rebelled against God who had only a few months before demonstrated his mighty power on their behalf in delivering them from Egypt, saying:

“Wherefore hath the Lord brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword; that our wives and our children should be a prey? Were it not better for us to return into Egypt?”--Numbers 14:3

They rebelled against Moses, saying: “Let us make a captain and let us return into Egypt.” (Numbers 14:4) Rather incredible, isn't it. Here they were, on the very border of the Promised Land, an occasion which should have been the happiest moment of their lives, and instead they considered their situation a hopeless calamity! The Lord was very displeased with them. We read:

“And the Lord said unto Moses, How long will this people provoke me? And how long will it be ere they believe me, for all the signs which I have showed among them?”--Numbers 14:11

The Lord took them at their word. They had said, “Would God we had died in the wilderness!” This was their sentence and they had pronounced it upon themselves. The Lord told Moses:

“Say unto them, As truly as I live, saith the Lord, as ye have spoken in mine ears, so will I do to you. Your carcases shall fall in this wilderness; and all that were numbered of you, according to your whole number, from twenty years old and upward, which have

murmured against me . . . Ye shall not come into the land concerning which I swear to make you dwell therein, save Caleb . . . and Joshua . . . But your little ones, which ye said should be a prey, them will I bring in, and they shall know the land, which ye have despised.”-- Numbers 14:28-31

Because of their cowardice and lack of faith they were found unworthy. They must now leave that beautiful Promised Land behind and return into the howling wilderness. They must wander about in it for forty years until all the adults then living except Caleb and Joshua had died. Then their children were to return and enter the Promised Land.

At Canaan's Borders Again

Now we pass over forty heart-breaking years of the wilderness experiences of --Israel. They have now returned. We find them once again on the borders of Canaan, but now there is a great difference! All that rebellious generation had died as the Lord had said. Their great leader Moses also had died and was buried by the hand of God in the land of Moab. Israel now consisted of those who were under age when they were here forty years before, and their children who were born in the wilderness. The cringing slavishness which characterized the adults who came out of Egypt had been eliminated. There were only two men left who remembered the rigors of Egypt as adults and they were the faithful Joshua and Caleb. Joshua had replaced Moses as their divinely appointed leader. We read:

“Now after the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord, it came to pass that the Lord spake unto Joshua, the son of Nun, Moses' minister, saying: Moses my servant is dead. Now, therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, thou, and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel. . . . There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee. I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee. Be strong and of a good courage; for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I swear unto their fathers to give them. Only be thou strong and very courageous.”-- Joshua 1:1,2,5-7

Once again they were poised to enter the Land of Promise, but what a difference! Now there was strength, assurance, and confidence! No cringing fearfulness, no hesitation, no murmuring, no complaining. Their bright new spirit is manifested in Joshua 1:16,18:

“And they answered Joshua, saying, All that thou commandest us we will do; and whithersoever thou sendest us, we will go. Whosoever he be that doth rebel against thy commandment and will not hearken

unto thy words in all that thou commandest him, he shall be put to death. Only be strong and of a good courage.”

What a difference! Instead of the necessity of Joshua encouraging them, they told him to be strong and courageous!

Their first objective upon crossing the river must be the conquest of Jericho, a city located about five miles from the Jordan. It was a high-walled city with strong defenses, capable of withstanding siege. They must first destroy Jericho because if they did not, but marched past it, their enemies would undoubtedly use the city as a sanctuary from which to attack them from the rear. So Joshua sent two spies to Jericho to observe and report on the strength of the city and the spirit of its --defenders. The spies returned:

“And they said unto Joshua, Truly the Lord hath delivered into our hands all the land; for even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us.”--Joshua 2:24

The next day the hosts of Israel approached the Jordan and camped at the edge of it. It was the worst possible time of the year in which to attempt a crossing. The river was in full flood stage and overflowing its banks. Normally a hundred feet wide, and shallow and fordable at this point, it was now perhaps 500 feet wide with the main channel running deep and swift. They had no boats nor pontoons with which to construct a bridge. Even if there had been a bridge and they marched across it ten abreast for twelve hours a day, it would take more than seven days for the three million or more Israelites to make the crossing.

But the Jordan being at flood stage was really a blessing in disguise. The Canaanites, who were aware of the approaching Israelites, considered the river to be an --impassable barrier and felt secure. Had it been shallow and fordable, as it usually was at this point, you may be sure they would have been there in force to repel an invasion. Israel would have had a severe battle with poor weapons against a well-equipped enemy. But all this was prevented by the swollen river which the Canaanites did not believe Israel could cross.

That raging, roaring river must have been a fearful sight to desert dwellers, but there is no record that the children of --Israel were afraid and complained at this prospect of crossing it as their fathers had done forty years before. They rested in the Lord and depended upon him to show how it was to be done.

Joshua sent his officers among the people to instruct them as to the plan of procedure to be followed, which he had received of the Lord. So great was the host of Israel that this took three days. Today with modern radio and voice amplifying equipment it could be done almost instantly. The instructions were simple. The priests were to

take up the Ark of the Covenant and march into the river which would dry up at their approach. Then the children of Israel were to cross over on dry land. The order was given and the priests, bearing the sacred Ark, slowly approached the river. Every eye was upon them as they came closer and closer to the water. Would it dry up before them as the Lord had said? Excitement ran high. The priests got to the very edge of the water and nothing happened. The water did not draw back.

A hush fell upon the watching host of Israel, but the priests did not hesitate; they did not break their stride. Their orders were to march into the river and that is what they did. As soon as they actually stepped into the water, the miracle happened. The water drew away from their feet. Each step they took the water receded further. As they advanced and the level of the water fell, the roaring of the river diminished and the current slowed. As they approached the main channel the raging torrent had shrunk into a limpid-flowing brook. When they finally stepped down into the lowest part of the river bed, the water disappeared entirely. Reaching the center of the river the priests with the ark stopped and were standing on dry ground. The children of Israel had been watching with fascination. Now the signal was given and the millions of Israel who lined the bank in each direction as far as eye could see quickly passed over without even getting their feet wet. When all were across safely, the priests, bearing the ark, --completed the crossing. Now before the astonished eyes of the Israelites the process was reversed. With each step the priests took up from the bed of the river, the water began to flow again and increase in volume, licking at their heels as they walked. As soon as they had gained the opposite shore, the Jordan was once again a raging torrent.

What a grand feeling it must have been to at last enter the Promised Land! For many weary years they had anticipated it, dreamed about it, yearned for it. Whenever things went wrong during their wanderings, when they hungered and thirsted and were weary, how often they must have said: "Some day we will reach that land flowing with milk and honey which the Lord has promised us!" Every time they broke camp to roam some more in the scorching desert they must have said: "Some day we will not need these tents. When we get to that wonderful Promised Land we will wander no more. We will build houses and live under our own vines and fig trees, in a cool land of rivers and lakes!" Now the time had come at long last: they were actually walking on that Promised Land! Then came the conquest of Jericho by another stupendous miracle which may well be the subject of another talk.

Lessons for Us

Let us consider some lessons. As in the case of so many other Bible narratives, this one furnishes first of all a general --outline of the Divine Plan. As Pharaoh --oppressed the Israelites, Satan has been a cruel and severe taskmaster. He has --enslaved and degraded the human race. As Romans 8:21 expresses it, mankind is --under “the bondage of corruption.” As the --Israelites groaned under their burdens and cried to God in their distress, we read: “For we know that the whole creation groaneth, and travaileth in pain together.” (Romans 8:22) As Pharaoh refused to let the children of Israel go, we read of Satan that he “opened not the house of his prisoners” (Isaiah 14:17)--all mankind being confined in the prison-house of sin and death. Does not Pharaoh's merciless killing of the male babes of Israel remind us of the Satan-inspired massacre of the babes of Bethlehem by Herod?



The “Lamb of God” Provides Release

The passover lamb was slain as a result of which Pharaoh's hold upon the Israelites was broken and they set out for the Promised

Land. Similarly, Jesus was sacrificed as “the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29) The human race was ransomed and the Millennial Kingdom became their glorious prospect. But as Israel did not enter in at once but wandered in the wilderness for 40 years, so mankind has continued to wander in the wilderness of sin and death for 2000 years since Jesus died.

As the children of Israel finally arrived at the raging torrent of Jordan within sight of the Promised Land, mankind is now within sight of the Messianic Kingdom when, as Luke 21:25,26 expresses it: “Upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring. Men's hearts failing them for fear.”

There was the stupendous miracle of the drying up of the Jordan and the passing of the children of Israel safely into the Promised Land. The antitype of his magnificent event is just before the world. As the rushing waters of Jordan receded before the advancing priests bearing the sacred ark, similarly the Royal Priesthood--Christ, Head and body--will bring peace to the world when men have reached their extremity. They will usher the world into their Promised Land, the grand Messianic Kingdom. As we read:

“Then they cry unto the Lord in their troubles, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. He will make the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then they are glad because they be quiet. So he bringeth them unto their desired haven.”-- Psalms 107:28-30

In another picture, the Jordan represents Adamic death which will give way before the great Ark of the Covenant borne by the Royal Melchisedek Priesthood enabling mankind to pass into the Messianic Kingdom.

As the children of Israel after crossing the Jordan conquered and completely destroyed Jericho, mankind will, during the Millennial Age, conquer every vestige of Adamic sin in their beings.

That New World will indeed be “a good land, and a large,” “a land flowing with milk and honey.” Eden will be restored and made world-wide, and “the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.” (Ha--bakkuk 2:14) As Isaiah 25:6 expresses it: “And in this mountain shall the Lord of Hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things; a feast of wines on the lees; of fat things full of marrow; of wines on the lees well refined.” To which Micah 4:4 adds in symbolic language:

“They shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid. For the mouth of the Lord of Hosts hath spoken it.”

But besides this general outline of the Divine Plan, segments of the narrative also depict the course of the Church. In this picture Egypt

represents the world and Pharaoh represents Satan who is the god of this world. As the children of Israel were in Egypt but were not Egyptians, the Lord's people are in the world but not of the world. As the Israelites were burdened by heavy labor and cried for relief, these hear and obey the Lord's invitation, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."-- Matthew 11:28

However, the Church is more particularly represented in the firstborn of Israel being called in Hebrews 12:23 the "Church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven." As the passover lamb was slain and its blood applied to save the firstborn of Israel, Jesus died as a ransom and the merit of his sacrifice was applied on behalf of the Church. As 1 Corinthians 5:7 says: "Christ our passover is sacrificed for us." We are justified and covered by the robe of Christ's righteousness and delivered from the bondage of sin and death just as Israel was delivered from Egypt. How happy we are to be released from this burden. In our exodus from under Satan's dominion we are led by Christ Jesus, a greater than Moses, whom Moses prefigured. The Red Sea, in which Pharaoh's host perished, pictures the second death which the Church escapes but which will be the final fate of Satan and all his willing agents.

The wanderings of the children of Israel in the wilderness journeying to the Promised Land, "a land flowing with milk and honey," also depicts the course of the Church. We too have a promised land, the heavenly kingdom, a land of glory, honor and immortality, toward which we are journeying. We read in 2 Peter 1:4 that there "are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature." Jesus spoke of our promised land when he said in John 14:2,3: "In my Father's house are many mansions . . . I go to prepare a place for you . . . that where I am, there ye may be also."

As the Israelites in the wilderness ate manna and drank water from the rock, we are abundantly supplied with "daily heavenly manna," spiritual food, "meat in due season," and drink deeply of the clear water of truth.

As the timid and slavish Israelites were disciplined by their forty years of wilderness experiences during which the old, --rebellious ones were eliminated and the --nation renewed, the Lord's people on this side of the veil are subjected to chastening and disciplines until their old natures are transformed and they mature as new creatures of whom it is written, "Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."--2 Corinthians 5:17

We may consider the swollen river Jordan as representing consecration unto death which is required of those who will become

new creatures in Christ Jesus, who become heirs of the exceeding great and precious promises. This is suggested by the fact that it was in the river Jordan that Jesus symbolized his consecration.

As the children of Israel found enemies in the land which they must eliminate, the consecrated child of God has enemies which must be conquered. He must fight the weaknesses, the imperfections, the evil attitudes and desires of the old nature. These, as the apostle declares in 1 Peter 2:11, “war against the soul,” the new creature. Thus we are told to “fight the good fight of faith; lay hold on eternal life.” (1 Timothy 6:12) We are instructed to “war a good warfare.” (1 Timothy 1:18) As the children of Israel after their warfare found rest in the Promised Land, the glorified Church finds rest in the Heavenly Kingdom.

Some Personal Lessons

Let us consider some of the precious personal lessons contained in this narrative, which is “written for our admonition”--lessons which will keep us from falling.

At their first arrival to the borders of the Promised Land, the Israelites instead of being elated were terrified and would not enter in. Similarly some spiritual Israelites approaching the Jordan of consecration and catching a glimpse of the promised glories beyond, are afraid to proceed. As the Israelites sent out spies, they sit down and count the cost. But they sit too long and count too much. As the ten spies did, they misinterpret the facts. They see only the frightful giants of opposition and despair. Instead of taking the Lord at his word and believing his promise of “grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16), some of the Lord's dear people wish they were back in Egypt! As a result they must suffer many weary wilderness experiences which might have been avoided before they finally cross the Jordan.

Some never cross over but fall in the wilderness. They lose the High Calling by default. Let us remember this example to keep us from falling. As it was God's good pleasure to give the Promised Land to the children of Israel if they would but enter in, let us remember the words of Jesus: “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom.” (Luke 12:32) Let us not hesitate. In the words of Caleb of old, “Let us go up at once to possess it; for we are well able to overcome it.” (Numbers 13:30) Let us echo the strong affirmation of faith by Paul: “I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me.” (Philippians 4:13) Paul believed that God would perform his promise as he said: “I know whom I have believed; and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.” (2 Timothy 1:12) Of all the

people in the world the Lord's --people should be supremely optimistic. Do you think the Lord would have invited you to the High Calling if he did not intend to give it to you? Don't you think he is ready to give you every assistance to attain it?

Those of Israel who lacked the faith and zeal to promptly enter the promises of God were sentenced to suffer tribulation in the wilderness. Does this not remind us of the Great Company of whom it is written, "These are they which came out of great tribulation"? (Revelation 7:14) Let us resolve not to be of this class.

Prompt, Willing Obedience

Let us rather emulate the spirit of Israel as they approached the Jordan the second time with full assurance of faith. (Hebrews 10:22) As they said to Joshua let us say to the Lord: "All that thou commandest, we will do. Withersoever thou sendest us, we will go." This is true consecration. A prompt, willing and complete obedience. This was the attitude of Jesus when he came to his Jordan of consecration as we read:

"Then said I, Lo, I come. In the volume of the book it is written of me; I delight to do thy will, O my God. Yea, thy law is within my heart."-- Psalms 40:7,8

If we do this, we will inherit God's encouragements to Joshua:

"Arise, go over this Jordan . . . There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life . . . I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee . . . Be strong and of good courage."

As the children of Israel found the river at flood stage, and apparently impossible to cross, the child of God sometimes encounters situations in his life which seem impossible of solution. The raging waters of circumstance seem to be an impassible barrier to Christian progress. But just as the waters of Jordan receded before the sacred ark, the obstacles which seem so formidable to us have a way of eventually disappearing before the Lord's providences. Let us not forget that the overflowing river prevented the enemy from attacking Israel. With us the seeming calamities and hindrances permitted by the Lord often turn out to be blessings in disguise. Therefore, in the language of 1 Peter 4:12: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you." There is a good reason for everything that happens to a child of God. It is never a "strange thing."

As the priests bearing the ark marched into the river while it was still flowing, we should boldly face our problems and march right into them, "strong in the Lord, and the power of his might." (Ephesians

6:10) Just try it and see if they will not flee before you! Don't forget that we also bear the Ark of the Covenant. We may get our feet a little wet, but the waters will not overwhelm us because we are assured:

“When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee . . . For I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour.”--Isaiah 43:2,3

The Lord promised rest for the children of Israel. The Promised Land was a promise of rest. He said to Moses, “My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.” (Exodus 33:14) The apostle Paul in the third and fourth chapters of Hebrews draws a lesson from the experiences of Israel in their provoking the Lord, and their failure to promptly obtain the promised rest. We read:

“Harden not your hearts as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness; when your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do always err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. So I swore in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.”-- Hebrews 3:8-11

Then the apostle points out that the reason Israel did not find rest was a lack of faith, and he exhorts us not to fail along this line. We read:

“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end. . . . And to whom swore he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.”-- Hebrews 3:12-14,18,19

Just what is this very important “rest” promised to the children of God? Paul gives the answer:

“For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labour therefore, to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.”-- Hebrews 4:10,11

The Jordan of Consecration

When we cross the Jordan of consecration, we cease from our own works in the sense that we give up our own wills. We relinquish every earthly interest subordinating them to the Lord's will. Things which were important to us before, things which caused us anxious thought, are now committed to the Lord with full assurance and trust

that he will make them come out right. We have obeyed the injunction of Psalms 37:5, "Commit thy way unto the Lord. Trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass." But this wonderful rest of mind does not come to us easily and automatically upon consecration. It must be striven for just as the children of Israel had battles to fight after crossing Jordan. Paul says that we must labor to enter into rest. We must train our thoughts. We must consciously develop a restful mind based on faith. We must work at it.

How can we do this? There are practical procedures we can follow. For example, if we find ourselves worrying about something we cannot control, let us by instant prayer place that very thing into the Lord's hands and rest in the knowledge that it is in good hands. This is the way Paul sums up the matter saying, "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (Hebrews 4:16) If our restlessness continues, let us go to the scriptures reminding ourselves of such promises as: "Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you." (1 Peter 5:7) "Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee. He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved." (Psalms 55:22) "For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways." (Psalms 91:11) "The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil. He shall preserve thy soul." (Psalms 121:7) There are many, many more such scriptures that will bring reassurance and rest to the mind if we will read and repeat them to ourselves.

Doing this may be labor at first, but if persisted in, it will become easy and habitual; then you will truly enter into that wonderful rest of faith. To attain it is eminently worthwhile. We can be undergoing the hardest physical labor with weariness and sweat of face and still, at the same time, have this rest. We can be desperately sick, on a bed of pain, and still have this rest. Every earthly thing can be going wrong with us without in the least disturbing this rest. The time of trouble may --intensify and anarchy rage in the streets, "Though the earth be removed and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea, though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof." (Psalms 46:2,3) Still we will not fear. Impossible you say? It does seem impossible. That is why it is called "the peace of God which passeth all understanding." (Philippians 4:7) But it is attainable because the same verse tells us that this peace "shall keep your hearts, and minds through Christ Jesus."

We should be able to rest in the truth. You cannot rest in something which is always changing. We should not be like the wicked who are described as being "like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt." (Isaiah 57:20) At one time in the past, when under the domination of a Society which frequently changed

its teachings, we hesitated to express ourselves on even basic doctrines. "Is this the latest thought?" we would ask ourselves. We had no rest. Every issue of their magazine brought --further changes. But we broke away from that organization and went back to the *Studies in the Scriptures* and other writings of Brother Russell which are the Lord's provision of "meat in due season" for the Household of Faith. We have had rest ever since. Now when we are told of "new light," we are not disturbed. We have already been through that experience. We have already learned that lesson. We rest in the truth which the Lord revealed at this end of the age through his Faithful and Wise Servant. We are sure of the truth as it has been revealed. If we are never sure of the truth, we cannot rest in it. Such are described as "Tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine." (Ephesians 4:14) James says, "He that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with wind and tossed." (James 1:6) One cannot rest if he has an "itching ear," always craving to hear something new. It is a wonderful thing to rest in the truth. Let us not miss this great blessing.

Our final rest will come beyond the veil. It is written of those who participate in the first resurrection that they "rest from their labours, and their works do follow them." (Revelation 14:13) That glorious rest will not mean a cessation of activity. Quite the contrary. Then we will have the capability and opportunity of serving God fully and effectively. This great prospect is not too far distant for any of us!

Meat in Due Season

“The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.”--Psalms 145:15,16

WE HAVE a most wonderful, and thoughtful God. He has always fed his creatures. He has amply supplied their needs. When he created the animals, he provided for their sustenance and said:

“To every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat. And it was so.”--Genesis 1:30

He had regard for every living thing no matter how lowly it might be. The psalmist says of him:

“These wait all upon thee, that thou mayest give them their meat in due season. What thou givest them, they gather. Thou openest thine hand; they are filled with good.”--Psalms 104:27,28

Our wonderful and thoughtful God has always fed his people. As soon as he created man, God thought of his food supply, and amply provided it. Thus we read:

“So God created man in his own image. In the image of God created he him, male and female created he them. And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth; and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed, To you it shall be for meat.”--Genesis 1:27,29

Man is so designed, that he must eat to live and he must eat regularly. He must have his bread. Recognizing this basic need, Jesus taught his disciples to pray: “Give us this day our daily bread.” (Matthew 6:11) This prayer of the righteous has always been answered. As David said:

“I have been young, and now am old. Yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.”--Psalms 37:25

Jesus beautifully impressed upon his disciples God's provision of food for the natural man, saying:

“Behold the fowls of the air. For they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns. Yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?”--Matthew 6:26

This need for daily bread is true of the natural man. But the man of God has an additional requirement just as basic, just as necessary as natural food. Jesus told us of this need when he said:

“It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.”--Matthew 4:4

The reference is to spiritual food which is vastly more important than material food. “How can it be more important?” a worldly person might ask. “If I don't eat, I will die.” Of course you will, but what will you lose? You will lose only this temporary life of pain and sorrow under the reign of sin and death. As we read:

“Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down. He fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not.”--Job 14:1,2

“The days of our years are threescore years, and ten. And if, by reason of strength, they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labour, and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away.”--Psalms 90:10

But by such a death, nothing is really lost because by virtue of Jesus' ransom sacrifice, there shall be a glorious resurrection to life under ideal conditions. There is to be a grand restitution, an opportunity for --restoration to human perfection for every man. So, to the natural man who dies through lack of material food, nothing is really lost. But to the unnatural man--the man of God, the justified, consecrated, spirit-begotten child of God, the new --creature--one who has sacrificed and renounced his human restitution prospects, it is different. If he does not receive and assimilate the spiritual food provided, if he does not continually eat of “every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God,” he will lose everything. He will lose the most stupendous prize ever offered to mankind. He will lose “the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:4) He will lose “glory, honor, and immortality.” More than that, he may lose even life itself! That is why the child of God esteems spiritual food so highly. That is why he hungers and thirsts for it. That is why he eagerly partakes of it at every opportunity and cannot get enough of it. That is why he carefully guards his source of supply, will not let it go, nor permit it to be adulterated. It is because he does not live by material bread alone, that he can say with Job:

“I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.”--Job 23:12

The child of God finds the spiritual food that the Lord has provided to be a most tasty and satisfying morsel. He has an appetite for it. He savors it, and rejoices over it.

“Thy words were found and I did eat them. And thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart.”--Jeremiah 15:16

“Meat in due season” may be defined as **“the right food at the right time.”**

“A word spoken in season, how good it is!”--Proverbs 15:23

“To every thing there is a season; and a time to every purpose under the heaven.”--Ecclesiastes 3:1

The Right Message at the Right Time

Meat in due season is the right message at the right time. For example, Noah was given a message:

“And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them. And, behold, I will destroy them with the earth. Make thee an ark of gopher wood . . . And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven. And every thing that is in the earth shall die.”--Genesis 6:13,14,17



The Lord told Noah to stock the ark with the animals that were to be carried over the flood. By obeying the message of the Lord, Noah

became a witness to that evil generation. By so doing, “he condemned the world.” (Hebrews 11:7) This was the right message at the right time. It was “meat in due season” for that time, and for that time only. We do not proclaim this message today because it is not the season for it.

God gave meat in due season to the children of Israel in a literal way. They were hungry.

“[God] commanded the clouds from above, and opened the doors of heaven; and had rained down manna upon them to eat, and had given them of the corn of heaven. Man did eat angel's food. He sent them meat to the full.”--Psalms 78:23-25

There is an interesting hidden gem in this scripture which became spiritual “meat in due season” at a later time. Corn means wheat from which bread is made. This “corn of heaven” is the same as what is described in John when the Jews said to Jesus:

“Our fathers did eat manna in the desert. As it is written, He gave them bread from heaven to eat. Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life. He that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven; that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever. And the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. This is that bread which came down from heaven. Not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead. He that eateth of this bread shall live for ever.”--John 6:31-35,50,51,58

“Meat in due season” may be the giving of the right statutes and ceremonials at the right time. In due time the laws and statutes were given to Israel. They were told how to construct the tabernacle and were given detailed instructions on how to conduct its ceremonials. They were promised material blessings if they obeyed.

“If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them; then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield her fruit.”--Leviticus 26:3,4

“And it shall come to pass, if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day, to love the Lord your God, and to serve him with all your heart, and with all your soul; that I will give you the rain of your land in his due season; the

first rain and the latter rain; that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil.”--Deuteronomy 11:13,14

Corn, Wine, and Oil

Here, again, are hidden gems. Corn, wine, and oil are promised. These things “are written for our admonition.” Corn is for bread. (1 Corinthians 10:11) The reference is to our participation, or communion, in Christ's body and blood with the oil of the holy spirit.

When Jesus was baptized in Jordan, the holy spirit came upon him and the heavens were opened unto him. His mind was stimulated to understand spiritual things. All the scriptures recorded by all the prophets--the letter of which he was already so familiar--now took on a new and deeper meaning. He saw clearly that all the prophets spoke concerning him, that he would die as a ransom sacrifice, that he would be glorified, that he would develop a church, his body members, that he would come again and establish his kingdom upon the earth bringing restitution from sin and death for all the willing and obedient. Although this new and complete understanding was “meat in due season” for him, he could not fully impart it to his disciples. It was not yet meat in due season for them. Their minds were not yet illuminated by the holy spirit. Thus we read that Jesus told his disciples:

“I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the spirit of truth is come, he will guide you into all truth.”--John 16:12,13

They must wait until Pentecost for a full understanding. But Jesus began to open their minds even before Pentecost. He laid the groundwork for their understanding on the way to Emmaus. We read:

“Then he said unto them, O foolish, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses, and all the prophets, he expounded unto them, in all the scriptures, the things concerning himself.”--Luke 24:25-27,32

For those not having the holy spirit but having a humble and receptive heart, even a mechanical or narrative understanding of the truth can be thrilling. Thus it was with these disciples:

“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?”

At Pentecost, Jesus' promise was fulfilled. The holy spirit was imparted and they were guided “into all truth.” All the truth then due to be understood became “meat in due season” for them. Now they could “bear” or appreciate the things Jesus had told them

before. Now they could understand the testimony of all the prophets. Now it fully entered their hearts. Whereas before they understood as spectators, as though watching a drama, now they became personally involved. Now they understood as participants, as actors in the drama. Now they understood God's Plan of the Ages and their part in it. Their spokesman, --Peter, preached about:

“Those things which God before had showed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer . . . And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you; whom the heaven must retain until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.”--Acts 3:18,20,21

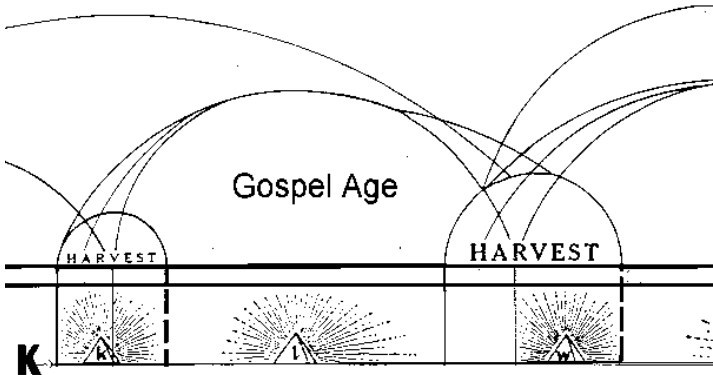
They understood ransom and restitution.

The church was established at Pentecost and Jesus continued to supply “meat in due season” to perfect their character. As it is written:

“And he gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man; unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.”-- Ephesians 4:11-13

The End of the Gospel Age

Now let us pass over almost 2000 years when the light of truth dimmed and was almost extinguished in the “dark ages,” then gradually brightened during a reformation period. Finally, the end of



the age came, the time of our Lord's return, the --beginning of the times of restitution. Now these words of Jesus applied:

“Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord, when he will return from the wedding; that, when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching. Verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.”--Luke 12:35-37

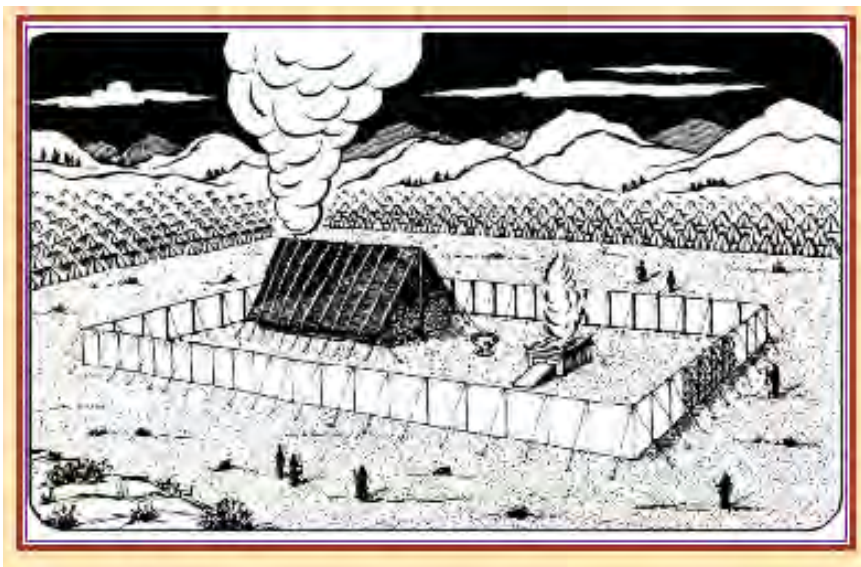
Here again was a promise of “meat in due season.” Was it fulfilled? You know that it was, and you know how it was fulfilled. In dispensing “meat” to his household upon his return, it was not the Lord's method to give it personally and individually to each member, separately enlightening each person's mind. He could have done it this way, but he didn't. No. His method was to choose one special man fully consecrated, wise, ready, willing, and able servant. He then placed him in full charge of his household. He filled this man with his spirit, enlightened his mind, and gave him **all the meat** in due season to pass on to the others of his household who were waiting. This is exactly what Jesus said he would do:

“Who then is the faithful and prudent servant, whom his master has placed over his household, to give them food in due season? Happy that servant, whom his Master, on coming, shall find thus employed! Indeed, I say to you, that he will appoint him over all his possessions.”--Matthew 24:45-47, Diaglott

A person who is given authority to administer and dispense the possessions of another is called a steward. In confirmation we read:

“And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his Lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his Lord, when he cometh (“at his arrival”--Diaglott) shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath.”--Luke 12:42-44

While it was the returned Lord who provided the lavish table of “meat in due season,” he used a human instrument to dispense it, to be his mouthpiece. Of course there are many fellow-servants. We are all fellow-servants of one another. But the Lord illuminated the mind of Brother Russell in a special way. This is well illustrated in the manner Brother Russell was given an understanding of the tabernacle, which is a fine example of “meat in due season.”



In 1881 a prominent brother who had come to deny the ransom, began teaching obviously false views concerning the significance of the Atonement Day tabernacle sacrifices, overthrowing the faith of some. Brother Russell was greatly disturbed about this and took it to the Lord in prayer. We read of this in his own words, written in 1906: "I told him [the Lord] that I realized that he was the shepherd, and not I; but that I knew also that he would be pleased at my interest in the sheep, and my desire to be his mouthpiece, to declare the truth, the way, and the life to them; that I felt deeply impressed that if the time had come for the permission of a false view to deceive the unworthy, it must also be his due time to have the truth on the same subject made clear, that the worthy ones might be enabled to stand, and not fall from the truth. Believing that the due time had come for the correct understanding of the meaning of the Jewish sacrifices, which, in a general way all Christians concede were typical of "better sacrifices," and that the Lord would grant the insight as soon as I got into the attitude of heart best fitted to receive the light, I prayed with confidence that if the Lord's due time had come, and if he were willing to use me as his instrument to declare the message to his dear family, that I might be enabled to rid my heart, and mind of any prejudice that might stand in the way, and be led of his spirit into the proper understanding. Believing that the prayer would be answered affirmatively, I went into my study next morning, prepared to study and write. The forenoon I spent in scrutinizing the text, and every other scripture likely to shed light upon it, especially the epistle to the Hebrews, and in looking to the Lord for wisdom and guidance; but no solution of the difficult passage came. The afternoon and evening were similarly spent, and all of the next day. Everything else was neglected, and I wondered why the Lord kept me so long. But on the third day, near noon, the

whole matter came to me as clear as the noon-day sun; so clear and convincing, and so harmonious with the whole tenor of scripture, that I could not question its correctness; and no one has ever yet been able to find a flaw in it.”--Reprints, page 3824.

Brother Russell goes on to say how this knowledge of the tabernacle straightened out in his mind the subject of justification, and this includes what he thereafter called tentative justification. Do you think the Lord answered the earnest prayer of his faithful and wise servant for special guidance deceptively, giving him an erroneous understanding of the tabernacle types to pass on to his household? I think not! I think it was “meat in due season” as it was written, and it still is.

The very beginning of the truth movement was based upon the realization that Christ's second presence began in 1874. Examining the scriptures together with others, Brother Russell came to that conclusion in 1876. Of that time he writes:

“The evidence satisfied me. Being a person of positive convictions, and fully consecrated to the Lord, I at once saw that the special times in which we live have an important bearing upon our duty and work as Christ's disciples; that being in the time of harvest, the harvest work should be done; and that present truth was the sickle by which the Lord would have us do a gathering and reaping work everywhere among his children. . . . The knowledge of the fact that we were already in the harvest period gave me an impetus to spread the truth such as I never had before. I therefore at once resolved upon a vigorous campaign for the truth. I determined to curtail my business cares, and give my time as well as means to the great harvest work.”--Reprints, page 3822.

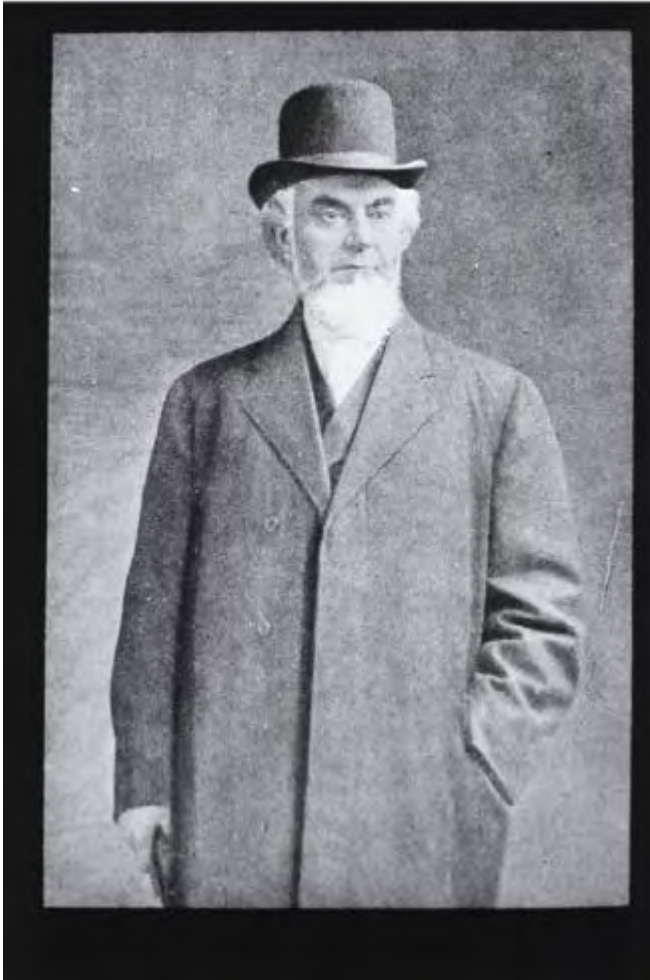
“And be you like men waiting for their Master, when he will return . . . that when he comes and knocks, they may instantly open to him.”--Luke 12:36, Diaglott

Notice how promptly and positively Bro. Russell acted when he realized the Master was there! It was the truth of the Lord's presence that triggered the commencement of the harvest work. Is it reasonable to suppose the Lord permitted the harvest work to start and the truth movement to begin based on a fraudulent assumption? I don't think so!

The Harvest

What a glorious time the harvest has been for the Lord's faithful people! To see the very truth that was enjoyed by the early church unfold and restored in all its beauty and purity! To see the divine plan of the scriptures topically arranged, as a series of *Studies in the Scriptures*, and a Chart of the Ages! To see the fulfillment of the

prophecy, "Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it." (Habakkuk 2:2) To enable the called ones to run for the prize of the high calling! To have the truth firmly and unchangeably established as a rallying point for all the people of God to gather around! To enable God's children in Babylon to hear, understand, and heartily respond to the call: "Come out of her, my people!" (Revelation 18:4) To realize that the Millennial Age has actually started, that we are living in it! This was the joyful message that first attracted many of us to the truth. It was the main feature of the Harvest Message.



Brother Russell's Last Sermon

Before Brother Russell started on his last trip during which he passed beyond the veil, he wrote a sermon. He intended to deliver it at the New York Temple upon his return. He never gave that sermon in person, but it was printed in December 1916 and also as the last sermon in the Sermon Book. In it Brother Russell, with a tone of

exultation, reiterated what had been the theme of his preaching from the very beginning. He said:

“Let us awake, and take note of the fact that the dawning of the New Age is already here. We have been in it, and enjoying many of its blessings for the past 42 years. . . . Some few have been calling attention to the fact that we have been in the Millennial dawn ever since the year 1874. Bible chronology quite clearly teaches that the six thousand years from Adam's creation have ended; six great days of a thousand years each, mentioned by St. Peter--“a day with the Lord is as a thousand years.” (2 Peter 3:8) Now the great Seventh Day, also a thousand years long, has commenced! We have been enjoying its dawning. It is to be a grand Day!” --Reprints, page 6013.

In the October, 1916, foreword to the second volume, written only a few days before his change, Brother Russell said:

“The Bible chronology herein presented shows that the six great thousand-year days, beginning with Adam, are ended; and that the great seventh day, the thousand years of Christ's Reign, began in 1873. The events of these 43 years, which this volume claims as the beginning of the Millennium, we still find fully corroborating Bible prophecies, as herein set forth.”

In passing, it is interesting to note how the Dawn Magazine came to be so named. We read from a Dawn publication:

“It was called THE DAWN in keeping with the original MILLENNIAL DAWN literature; and because of a deep conviction that we are living in the dawn of the Millennium.”--*When Pastor Russell Died*, 1946 edition, page 28

This is still “meat in due season.” Here are some of the scriptures that clearly indicate that the reign of Christ has begun and that it began before the time of trouble started:

“And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever. . . . Thou hast taken to thee thy great power and hast reigned; and the nations were angry and thy wrath is come.”--Revelation 11:15,17,18

“Why do the nations rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed. . . . Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.”--Psalms 2:1,2,5,6

“And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great Prince which standeth for the children of thy people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation.”--Daniel 12:1

“And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed. And the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.”--Daniel 2:44

Then there is a scripture proving Christ reigns as king during the harvest:

“And I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle.”--Revelation 14:14

We are told by Isaiah what the theme of the preaching of the feet members of the body of Christ should be:

“How beautiful upon the mountain are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings; that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good; that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, **THY GOD REIGNETH!**”--Isaiah 52:7

This is the same “God” as described in another prophecy of Isaiah:

“And the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.”--Isaiah 9:6

Brother Russell comments on this scripture:

“This proclamation [“Thy God Reign--eth”] is now due, before the feet are joined to the body in glory, and before the judgments of the Lord go abroad; for then it will need no proclamation.”

Meat and Milk

All cannot digest meat. Some of the Lord's children are on a milk diet. They are immature and easily led away from “the meat in due season.” The scriptures said it would be so. Paul said that such:

“are dull of hearing. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which is the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age; even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised, to discern both good and evil.”--Hebrews 5:11-14

Then Paul counseled us:

“That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight [or trickery] of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive [“in systematic deception”--Diaglott].”--Ephesians 4:14

“Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.”-- Hebrews 2:1

“Ye should earnestly contend for **the faith** which was **once** delivered unto the saints.”--Jude 3

Paul indicated to Timothy the serious necessity of holding to sound doctrine, that he would be saved by so doing:

“Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine. Continue in them; for in doing this, thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.”--1 Timothy 4:16

“O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust; avoiding profane and vain babblings, and opposition of science falsely so called; which some professing have erred concerning the faith.”--1 Timothy 6:20,21

“But shun profane and vain babblings; for they will increase unto more ungodliness. And their word will eat as doth a canker.”--2 Timothy 2:16,17

Paul, invoking the name of God and of Christ, gave a solemn charge and a grave warning to Timothy. He indicated that it would especially apply at the end of the age during the time of his second presence, just before the full establishment of the kingdom which will bring about the resurrection of the dead. In other words, he described the time in which we are living:

“I charge thee, therefore, before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season. Reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears. And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. But watch thou in all things.”--2 Timothy 4:1-5

As we would say today, “Watch out!” This solemn advice of Paul's is “meat in due season” to which we do well to take heed. We read of those who are:

“Always learning something new, and yet are never able to arrive at a real knowledge of the truth.”--2 Timothy 3:7, Weymouth

Instead let us be as one described in Titus:

“Holding fast the faithful word, as he hath been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers.”--Titus 1:9,10

How very precious the truth should be to each one of us! How grateful we should be to the heavenly Father for opening our eyes to the grandeur of the Divine Plan of Salvation, and our part in it! How very much we should appreciate and honor the instruments he has used: the prophets, the apostles, the early disciples, the reformers, and, at this end of the age, the returned Lord himself who used a special pastor, a faithful and wise servant, to give us his “meat in due season”! Let us eagerly and heartily partake of it! May it be said of us:

“These wait all upon thee, that thou mayest give them their meat in due season. What thou givest them, they gather. Thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good.”--Psalms 104:27,28

Let us gather what the Lord has given us and be “filled with good.”

Miracles at the Sea of Galilee

THE incidents of our lesson occurred in the early part of the third year of our Lord's ministry, in the spring nearing the time of the passover. John the Baptist had just been beheaded by King Herod, which greatly surprised and stunned the people of Israel. The ministry of John, followed by the ministry of Jesus, had stirred their minds and awakened them to Messianic kingdom hopes. Huge numbers were attracted by Jesus' healing activities and by the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. Up to now their civil rulers had been conciliatory and permissive. The Romans seemed to have adopted a "hands-off" policy toward Israel.

The people first began to get uneasy when John the Baptist was imprisoned. Now they were appalled to learn that he had been beheaded under the most ghastly circumstances. This spread consternation among those who had appreciated his ministry as well as among those who recognized Jesus as the Messiah. Devout Jews were greatly shocked and considerable excitement prevailed. There was speculation as to what Herod might do next. Would the Lord Jesus himself be safe? What of the apostles and those who trusted in him?

The matter aroused great interest and drew unusually large crowds to the preaching of Jesus especially at this season when hundreds of thousands of Jews were enroute to the usual passover festival at Jerusalem. Business was practically suspended by a considerable proportion of the population. As some departed others were coming; thus our Lord and his apostles were kept extremely busy. It soon reached the point that they were not getting enough rest and were even interrupted during the few minutes they took for their meals. Although Jesus himself could stand the stress, he was always tenderly alert to the needs of those around him. He realized they were near collapse and should get away from all the pressure for a while. So we read in Mark 6:31, "And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a --desert place and rest awhile." Weymouth says, "A quiet place." Moffatt says, "And get a little rest." The verse continues in explanation: "For there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure, so much as to eat." We can imagine that Philip now spoke up and said,

"Master, I know just the place, near my home town of Bethsaida. We can go there by boat and thus avoid the crowds."

So this is how it was that the Lord and a few of his disciples entered a fishing boat and sailed across the northern tip of the sea of Galilee, landing near Bethsaida. Leaving their boat they walked leisurely up a pleasant grassy hillside and sat down in the shade of a grove of trees

overlooking the sea. As John 6:3 describes it, “Jesus went up into a mountain and there he sat with his disciples.” It was quiet and pleasant, and as Jesus talked to them and reassured them, their tensions and fears left them. The Master's voice was sweet music to their ears and they relaxed in the warmth of his radiant and loving personality. What a wonderful little one-day convention of Bible Students that was! In our conventions today we do feel the nearness of the Lord and hear his words through the lips of his servants; it is an exalting experience. But how very blessed it must have been for those disciples to have the Lord right there before them, to feel the magnetism of his literal presence, to hear the melody of his own voice speak the wonderful words of life to them!

It seems that they had not brought any food with them. One wonders at this until it is remembered that Philip's home was in nearby Bethsaida. Perhaps they had planned to go there for their evening meal before returning across the sea. But their plans suddenly changed. A cloud of dust appeared on the horizon raised by thousands of tramping feet. The disciples were alarmed. Was it a Roman legion coming to take Jesus and them to suffer the fate of John the Baptist? Jesus calmed their fears. He knew who they were. The multitude had missed Jesus. Some had seen him enter the boat and sail in a northerly --direction across the lake. Word got around spreading like wildfire, and a huge segment of the multitude began to walk around the lake in that direction to find Jesus. It was a spontaneous thing. They depended upon him so much. They needed him. He was all they had. He healed them and taught them and sympathized with them, and told them about the Kingdom of God. He gave them love and hope. No one else did this. Other leaders had failed them. This Jesus was indeed their Messiah sent from God. So they came, singly and in family groups, women, children, and aged ones, leaning upon their staffs. Many were sick. Some had to be carried on stretchers. Now they had found him at last! They assembled on the grassy hillside below where Jesus was standing, a very great company. Matthew 14:21 says there were “about 5,000 men, beside women and children.” From this we might estimate the total number to be as high as 15,000 people.

Jesus Had Compassion

As he looked upon them, Jesus' heart was deeply touched. We read in Mark 6:34 that Jesus “was moved with compassion toward them because they were as sheep, not having a shepherd.” There is nothing more pitiful than a sheep without a shepherd. Sheep are helpless and dependent. Unless led they will go astray and be lost. They must sicken and die. They must be led to streams of pure water or else they will die of thirst. They cannot defend themselves against wild

animals. If they fall into a ditch, they cannot extricate themselves. They are easily injured and require attention to their hurts. They must be treated gently. All these things the shepherd must do for them.

The Lord had always set shepherds over his people Israel. Moses was their first great shepherd, leading them like a flock. Jesus identified the shepherds of his day saying in Matthew 23:2, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat." But these shepherds were not functioning. Not only were they neglecting the sheep, but instead they were feeding upon the flock, enriching themselves by virtue of their positions. Thus they fitted the prophecy of Ezekiel 34:2-5,

"Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God unto the shepherds, Woe be to the shepherds of Israel, that do feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed, but ye feed not the flock. The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost; but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them. And they were scattered because there is no shepherd; and they became meat to all the beasts of the field when they were scattered."

This is what Jesus must have thought of when he looked out over that vast multitude. Neglected and betrayed by their leaders, they had followed him into the wilderness as lost sheep seeking a shepherd. They loved him and trusted him. Jesus' heart went out to them. He came down the hillside and mingled with the crowd. He quickly sought out those that were sick. At each touch of his strong hands a tremendous surge of vitality flowed into them and healed them. As is written in Matthew 14:14 of this occasion, Jesus "was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick." Thus he became their shepherd in contrast with the evil shepherds that had failed them. As he himself said,

"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep."--John 10:11

After he had healed all their sick we can imagine that he stood upon a rock and the multitude crowded around to hear him. He began to speak. The account says, "He began to teach them many things." (Mark 6:34) Without the need of a public address system his beautifully resonant voice reached the ears of each one of that vast multitude, encouraging them, inspiring them, and telling them of God's love for them and of the coming kingdom of God. Thus in the

Lord's providence the little one-day convention of Bible Students culminated in a very well attended public meeting.

Late in the afternoon the disciples began to get worried on behalf of the people. Perhaps they heard some of the little children whimpering for food. We read:

“And when the day was now far spent, his disciples came unto him, and said, This is a desert place, and now the time is far passed. Send them away that they may go into the country round about, and into the villages, and buy themselves bread; for they have nothing to eat.”-- Mark 6:35,36

Matthew 14:16 tells us, “But Jesus said unto them, They need not depart. Give ye them to eat.” Now we read from John 6:5-8 that Jesus turned to Philip, whose home was in the vicinity and asked,

“Philip, whence shall we buy bread that these may eat? And this he said to prove him, for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, Two hundred pennyworth of bread is not sufficient for them, that every one of them may take a little.”

Two hundred pennies was no small sum in those days. We know from a parable of Jesus that a penny was a day's wages at that time. We continue from John's account:

“One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, saith unto him, There is a lad here which hath five barley loaves and two small fishes. But what are they among so many?”

Then we read that Jesus said, “Bring them hither to me.” (Matthew 14:18) We continue the account from Mark 6:39,40,

“And he commanded them to make all sit down by companies upon the green grass. And they sat down in ranks, by hundreds, and by fifties.”

We read now from Matthew's account:

“And he took the five loaves and the two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed and brake, and gave the loaves to his disciples, and the disciples to the multitude.”--Matthew 14:19

The Loaves and Fishes

If our estimate of 15,000 persons is correct, this would mean that they were seated in a hundred groups of 150 each.

If the disciples served the food, each one would have to serve only ten groups, turning the food over to the leader of each group for further individual distribution. Thus the work involved would be divided among many hands, and quickly accomplished. We continue the account:

“And they did all eat, and were filled. And they took up of the fragments that remained, twelve baskets full. And they that had eaten were about five thousand, beside women and children.”



We should remember that in those days, loaves of bread were flat and circular, about an inch thick, and ten inches in diameter, and pliable in texture. Bread is still baked in this form in Near Eastern countries. My mother used to bake this kind of bread. The loaf was broken by tearing it apart into two pancake-like layers. Then the rest of the meal, whether cheese, meat, or whatever, would be rolled up in the bread and eaten like a sandwich. Thus it was possible to do very nicely without individual dishes or other utensils.

I don't think many of us realize what a really stupendous miracle this feeding of the multitude was. Consider the facts. The five barley loaves and two small fishes could not have weighed more than a total of five pounds. But the food distributed to that multitude, allowing

only about half a pound per person, weighed almost four tons! We see that whatever the Lord did he did generously and lavishly. He told his disciples to give, “Good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over.” (Luke 6:38) But he himself far exceeded this standard, setting a glorious example of bountiful dealing.

After they had eaten, and the fragments had been gathered up, Jesus told his disciples to board their boat, and return across the Sea of Capernaum while he dismissed the people. The disciples left, but the people were reluctant to go. They were greatly excited over the miracle they had seen. That was the best bread and fish they had ever tasted. They were thrilled at the gracious words of God that had proceeded out of Jesus' mouth. They had literally tasted of the Lord's goodness. We read:

“Thereupon the people, having seen the miracle he had performed, said, this is indeed the Prophet who was to come into the world.”-- John 6:14,15 (Weymouth)

They remembered God's promise to Moses:

“I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.”--Deuteronomy 18:18

We continue from John's account:

“Perceiving, however, that they were about to come and carry him off by force to make him a king, Jesus withdrew again up the hill, alone by himself.”

Matthew's account says that,

“He made the disciples go on board the boat, and cross to the opposite shore, leaving him to dismiss the people. When he had done this, he climbed the hill to pray in solitude. Night came on, and he was there alone.” [Weymouth]

Meanwhile things were not going well for the disciples in the boat. The wind was against them so they could not use their sails. They began to row as hard as they could but even then could make no headway. “But the ship was now in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves, for the wind was contrary.” (Matthew 14:24) John says, “And the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew.” (John 6:18) They had embarked at dusk and now it was the “fourth watch,” which a footnote of the Diaglott says was between three and six in the morning. In all this time according to John's account they had gone 25 to 30 furlongs, only 2.5 to 3 miles. Reprints, page 2649. How tired they must have been! They had come on this outing to “rest a while,” but what had --happened? They had rested only a couple of hours. Then the multitude had arrived and they had served food to thousands of people. Now they had been rowing against the wind for

over eight hours! As their efforts grew weaker, the wind seemed to get stronger and the waves higher. They were nearing the end of their endurance and thought they must surely perish in the sea.

Although it was dark and they were many miles away, Jesus saw them; another miracle. We read, “And he saw them, toiling in rowing, for the wind was contrary unto them.” (Mark 6:48) The disciples were rowing desperately, their muscles aching, their heads bowed with weariness. The waves of the angry sea crashed against the boat causing it to pitch wildly. They were being driven backward. It was only a matter of time when their strength would fail and they would no longer be able to keep the boat headed into the wind. Then they would surely capsize.

Jesus Walks on the Sea



Stormy as it was, the approach of dawn brought some light. Suddenly the disciple at the helm saw an object moving over the waves near the boat. It looked like a man walking upon the water! But that's impossible! Thinking he must be having hallucinations, he called out to the others to look also. It was no hallucination. They all saw the same thing; a man walking upon the sea! They screamed in terror not recognizing who it was in the dim light of dawn. Now we read from the account:

“And in the fourth watch of the night, Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, it is a spirit; and they cried out for fear.”-- Matthew 14:25,26

Moffatt says, "They thought he was a ghost, and shrieked aloud." Then we read:

"But straightway, Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good courage; it is I; be not afraid."

Then the impetuous Peter did a characteristic thing:

"And Peter answered him and said, Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee, on the water. And he said, Come. And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus. But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid; and beginning to sink, he cried, saying, Lord, save me! And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? And when they were come into the ship, the wind ceased."

We conclude the account from John 6:21, because there it tells of still another miracle of Jesus, which many overlook:

"Then they willingly received him into the ship; and immediately the ship was at the land whither they went."

Moffatt renders it, "And the boat instantly reached the land they were making for." Considering that according to Matthew 14:24 they were then in the middle of the sea, this was faster transportation than by modern jet! It was a miracle of the first magnitude.

Some Lessons for Us

Let us go back and see what lessons there are for us in these incidents at the Sea of Galilee. First of all, when Jesus suggested to his disciples that they leave the service of the multitude and go to a quiet place and rest awhile, he was not seeking to evade responsibility toward the multitude. He knew very well what would happen, that the multitude would regather to him on the other side of the lake. But he also knew that sailing across the lake would give his disciples needed relaxation and that a few hours alone with him on the hillside would relieve their tensions. Then they would once again be ready to serve a multitude greatly stimulated and elated by the miracle of the loaves and fishes. We too, the Lord's present-day disciples, are invited to occasionally go to a quiet place and rest awhile. We go to conventions, not only for physical rest but to "rest in the Lord." (Psalms 37:7) The Lord says:

"Come unto me . . . and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest for your souls."--Matthew 11:28,29

As we who wear the yoke of consecration gather to hear the Lord's words through his servants, we too are stimulated and refreshed and better able to serve the Lord with renewed zest.

That mixed multitude setting out by common consent to seek Jesus on the mountain above the sea reminds us of the time coming mentioned in Isaiah 2:3, "And many people shall go and say, Come ye and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord." We are also reminded of Jeremiah's words:

"They shall go and seek the Lord their God. They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord."--Jeremiah 50:4,5

As that multitude sought their Messiah with all their heart, and found him, we read, in Jeremiah 29:13 of the time of the Messianic Kingdom: "And ye shall seek me and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart."

When Jesus saw the multitude approaching, was he resentful of the intrusion upon his privacy? Did he attempt to evade them? No! Quite the contrary. He welcomed them. He was moved with compassion toward them. His heart of love went out to them. He eagerly seized the opportunity to heal them and, most importantly, to preach the gospel of the Kingdom to them. In this he set an example for us as enunciated by Paul: "Preach the word; be instant, in season, out of season." (2 Timothy 4:2) Following in the footsteps of Jesus, we will witness to the truth whenever opportunity presents whether convenient for us or not, whether "in season, or out of season" for us.

The shepherds of Israel had failed them and the people flocked to Jesus as their shepherd. Jesus had compassion on them "because they were as sheep not having a shepherd." (Mark 6:34) But only a few became the true sheep of Jesus at that time. It was to such that Jesus addressed himself just before his betrayal at Gethsemane:

"Then saith Jesus unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night; for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad."--Matthew 26:31

When Jesus said, "It is written," he quoted in part from Zechariah 13:7,

"Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts. Smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered; and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones."

Although Jesus was the Great Good Shepherd, called in 1 Peter 5:4 the Chief Shepherd who gave his life for the sheep, there have been other shepherds--under shepherds over the flock of God. The apostles were special shepherds and the elders of the church are shepherds also. Paul was speaking to the elders when he said:

"Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over the which the Holy Spirit hath made you overseers [or shepherds], to

feed the Church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.”--Acts 20:28

Thus we see that it is the responsibility of shepherds to feed the flock of God.



We note that Jesus did not quote Zech--ariah 13:7 in its entirety. He did not quote the part about “the man that is my fellow,” or as Leeser renders it: “The man whom I have associated with me.” Why not? I think it was because this part referred to someone else, another shepherd at another time, a shepherd who would be feeding the flock at the time of Jesus' second advent. A definition of “shepherd” given by Dr. Strong is “pastor.” It is of this person we read:

“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord, when he cometh, shall find so

doing. Verily I say unto you, that he shall make him ruler over all his goods.”--Matthew 24:45-47

Brother Russell was a faithful shepherd or pastor, the Lord's special instrument at the time of his second presence, to restore to his people the doctrines of the early church, “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” Beside the basic doctrines he fed the Lord's sheep with dispensational truths, designated “meat in due season.” His voluminous writings are “meat” to the Lord's household to this very day. No modern man lived closer to the Lord than he did. The Lord well described him as “the man that is my fellow,” or, “the man I have associated with me.” The Lord's people depended upon him so much.

I remember the day Pastor Russell died. Our feelings must have closely paralleled those of the early disciples when the Chief Shepherd was smitten. We cried, my brother and I. The prophecy of Zechariah now had a secondary fulfillment. Again the sheep were scattered; they did not know where to turn. Strange shepherds arose each calling the sheep in a different direction with enticing voices. For a while there was confusion and chaos. Powerful leaders led many astray. Many of the sheep isolated themselves. It was the greatest time of testing the harvest church has ever had to endure. Then the latter part of Zechariah 13:7 began to be fulfilled. “I will turn mine hand upon the little ones.” The sheep began to regroup under the Lord's hand and his power to protect and lead. As Psalm 37:23,24 expresses it:

“The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord; and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand.”

The Lord sought out his true sheep, found them, and brought them together again. That is why we are here today. But there was no successor to Brother Russell nor will there ever be. There can be no improvement on the *Divine Plan of the Ages* which the Lord revealed to us by the ministry of That Servant.

Lessons from the Feeding

Now let us consider the lessons contained in the feeding of the multitude. First, we can make a personal application. When the disciples reminded Jesus what a large quantity of bread would be required, Jesus asked, “How many loaves have ye? Go and see.” (Mark 6:38) The disciples returned and said to Jesus, “There is a lad here which hath five barley loaves, and two small fishes. But what are they among so many?” (John 6:9) Someone may say, “My talents are so few and so small. What are they among so many? There are so many who have so much more than I have.” But what did Jesus tell

his disciples when they reported their meager resources? “Bring them hither to me.” (Matthew 14:18) The Lord wants you. He will accept your small offering of five barley loaves and two small fishes. He can greatly multiply the effects of your small efforts in ways you never dreamed of. “Bring them hither unto me!”

If nothing else give a little word of --encouragement to someone, a little smile. Write a little letter of cheer and consolation, a little visit to someone sick or suffering. Give a little witness to a neighbor or relative. Put a tract under someone's door. Build someone up a little in the truth. Let your light, dim though it be, shine out just a little in the darkness of this world. If you can do nothing else, offer a little prayer for the harvest work. These are small things but they are things the Lord can bless and use. If we cannot do them all, we can do some of them, at least one of them. The Lord can greatly amplify their effect just as he increased the loaves and fishes. Let us bring the Lord all we have whether great or small.

There is another more general application of this incident. Jesus said:

“Ye shall be witnesses unto me, both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”--Acts 1:8

“This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations, and then shall the end come.”--Matthew 24:14

“The gospel must first be published among all nations.”--Mark 13:10

It seems to me that a mere circulation of the Bible without explanation does not completely fulfill this requirement. It must be the gospel of the Kingdom which Jesus preached because he plainly said, “THIS gospel of the Kingdom.” Have there been any missionaries since the early church who have preached the Millennial Kingdom of Christ beside Brother Russell and those with him? “Gospel” means “good news.” Certainly the hell-fire doctrine preached by nominal church missionaries is not the good news which must be published among all nations. The handful of true Christians today who have the true gospel may say,

“Lord, this task is too great for us. What are we among so many? We cannot reach them all. Let others feed them. Let them just take the Bible and find their own spiritual food therein.”

But Jesus says to his people: “Give ye them to eat!” “Others do not have the truth, the gospel of the Kingdom. Others cannot feed them like you can.” We may answer, “But Lord, we are so few, and have very limited resources. We have only five barley loaves and two small fishes! We do not have enough!” “Bring all you have to me,” Jesus answers, “I will bless what you have, and make it do. It will be more than enough. There will even be some left over.”

Miracles of Our Day

In the account Jesus performed a staggering miracle and the multitude ate and were filled. What a magnificent fulfillment of this we now see possible with only a limited expenditure of money aptly comparable to only five barley loaves and two small fishes. By an equally staggering miracle--that of radio, television, tapes and mass media, facilities Brother Russell never had--the power to give a tremendous, worldwide public witness is now in our hands! Instead of thousands, millions can be fed with the sound, satisfying message of truth, the true gospel. Many ecclesias are taking full advantage of these opportunities. Although we are not seeking to --convert the world but only to garner the wheat, who can say what a powerful effect our sowing of the seed of truth may have in preparing the hearts of men to receive the blessings of the kingdom?

“In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand; for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good.”-- Ecclesiastes 11:6

This scripture applies now. We are in the evening of the Gospel age and the morning of the Millennial Age.

Then there is still another application of this event. That multitude that Jesus fed also pictures the world during the Millennial Age. As Jesus gave the bread to his disciples to pass on to the people, those who are now the Lord's faithful disciples will in the Kingdom be the dispensers of this Bread of eternal life to all the families of the earth. Jesus told the multitude later:

“The bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.”--John 6:33

The Church glorified will be the channel through which the merit of Jesus' sacrifice will be applied to the world. As the hungry multitude ate all they wanted and were filled, life will then be freely dispensed to all the willing and obedient. We read of that time:

“The Spirit and the bride say Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”--Revelation 22:17

Communing with God

After feeding the multitude Jesus “climbed the hill to pray in solitude. Night came on, and he was there alone.” On some occasions, Jesus prayed in the presence of his disciples. These public prayers were invariably simple and short, and the disciples were able to remember and record his words. But Jesus frequently sought the Father alone and held long communion with him. On one occasion he “continued all night in prayer to God.” (Luke 6:12) We too are

encouraged to go the Heavenly Father alone for secret and personal communion with him. Jesus said:

“But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet [or private room], and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.”--Matthew 6:6

There are times when we can open our hearts to God alone. Unlike public prayers the words we then use are not important because God listens to our hearts and not our stammering lips. These private and personal prayers may often be long. We may have much counsel and help to seek of the Lord, or much joy to share with him, or much love, and praise and thanks to express to him. But by the example of Jesus, our public prayers should be short.

After Jesus parted from his disciples and went up into a mountain to commune with his Heavenly Father, we see the disciples rowing against a contrary wind, tossed with waves. Nineteen centuries ago Jesus left his church to ascend to his Father. After his departure the Lord's people embarked upon stormy seas. They were in the world, but not of the world. The winds of life were contrary. They were buffeted by the world, the flesh and the devil. As the Dark Ages closed around them, progress was difficult and for a while impossible. They were driven back and lost ground when “Darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people.” But they struggled and toiled on throughout this night of the Gospel age. Then came the dawning of the Millennial morning when, lifting up their weary eyes, they suddenly saw a most wonderful sight! They saw Jesus returning to them walking on the billows of the world's stormy sea. The Lord's people discerned Christ's second presence. Many cried out in disbelief saying it was impossible, that it was a phantom. “Be not afraid!” Then they realized, “The night is far spent, the day is at hand.”--Romans 13:12

The account says that when they received Jesus into the ship, the wind ceased. The realization of Christ's second presence brought a flood of truth to the church. Doubts and conflicts dissolved. The imminence of the Messianic Kingdom was realized and the harvest work was pursued with zeal and vigor. Under the direction of the returned Lord the world's stormy sea lost its terror. The restless masses could now be viewed with detachment as something prophesied and to be expected. This resulted in a great calmness and serenity of mind among the Lord's people.

Peter's desire to walk to the Lord upon the water was admirable. It showed a high degree of faith, and faith is always pleasing to the Lord. We read that “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” (Hebrews 11:6) But we can learn a lesson from Peter's failure of

faith. Looking to Jesus he stepped down from the boat onto the raging sea with superb confidence and, for a moment, actually walked upon the water! But he didn't keep his eyes upon Jesus! Instead he looked up at the black clouds and down at the wind-tossed waves. He became frightened, his faith failed, and he began to sink! Let us learn from this. In the storms of life let us always look to -- Jesus and never take our eyes from him. Let us maintain our faith. "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith."--Hebrews 12:2

There is another lesson here also. When Peter began to sink, he cried, "Lord, save me!" Jesus immediately stretched forth his hand and caught him. It is not written that Jesus then carried Peter into the ship. No! He caught his outstretched hand and at that moment, Peter must have again walked on the water side by side with Jesus; they went aboard together. Which one of us does not at times become distracted and frightened in the storms of life and begin to sink in despair? When this happens, let us as Peter did look to Jesus and cry, "Lord, save me!" And he will!

Then the narrative says, "And the boat instantly reached the land they were making for." What land are you making for? This illustrates something which has not yet happened to us here. This is something we will experience individually. It will be much quicker than jet-travel! We read,

"Behold, I show you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye!"--1 Corinthians 15:51,52

Let us be found worthy of experiencing this miracle also!

We thank God for the miracles of Jesus and the lessons they contain for us. We thank Him for the greater miracles to come in which we will have a part and by which all mankind will be restored to life. May He save us from the contrary winds and overwhelming storms of life, and bring us at last to our desired haven!

More Than Conquerors (Stephen & Paul)

“Be ye followers of me, as I also am of Christ.”--1 Corinthians 11:1

IT WAS shortly after Pentecost and the early church was in its formative stage. Full of the holy spirit bestowed in great abundance, the apostles and disciples preached Christ. We read: “The Lord added to the church daily, such as should be saved.” (Acts 2:47)

“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.” --Acts 6:9

Why did they dispute with Stephen? He was a deacon, not an apostle.

A short time before in the early church, there had been a complaint made to the twelve that service of material things was being neglected. This was important in those days because:

“The multitude of them that believed, were of one heart, and of one soul; neither said any of them, that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.”--Acts 4:32

With thousands added to the church, this posed quite a problem of administration. Impartial distribution of food, clothing, and other materials must be made. Wishing to use their time for the more important spiritual duties, the apostles directed that seven deacons be appointed for serving tables and other such service. The qualifications were that they should be, “Men of honest report [or reputation], full of the spirit of wisdom.” (Acts 6:3) Stephen was one of the seven selected to be a deacon.

Stephen did not limit his service to --material things. At every opportunity, he preached Christ.

“And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.”--Acts 6:8

This was far beyond the scope of a deacon's duties. It would seem that the Lord recognized Stephen as an elder before the brethren discovered his ability. Like Jesus, he went into the synagogue to preach. According to the law of the synagogue, any Jew may express himself on the scriptures publicly. Those of the synagogue could not prevent this. That is why they attempted to nullify Stephen's preachings by disputations. But “they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.” (Acts 6:10)

How could this young deacon speak with such authority and force of reasoning that the wise ones of the synagogue could not resist him? These were highly educated men who made a career of their religion. But these dignified men, robed and bearded, were not able to resist before their own congregation this young Christian upstart, a deacon! How humiliating! It must have infuriated them. Yet how encouraging to Stephen to realize he was a direct recipient of a promise by Christ: “For I will give you eloquence, and wisdom which all your opponents will not be able to gainsay or resist.” (Luke 21:15, Dia--glott)

This was a testimony that he had been with Jesus and learned of him, that he had patterned himself after the Master. Just as the chief priests, elders, scribes and Pharisees, when they failed to gainsay or resist Jesus, sought to destroy him, these of the synagogue employed the same tactics toward Stephen. This identified them as being of “their father, the devil, who was a murderer from the beginning.” (John 8:44) Now we read:

“Then they suborned [or bribed] men, who 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, who 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.”--Acts 6:11-14



Stephen Preaches to the Sanhedrin

The council then arrested Stephen and set him in their midst. This was the famous [or infamous] Sanhedrin, the same court that had condemned Jesus. “And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face, as it had been, the face of an angel.” (Acts 6:15) What a superabundance of grace and power God had given

Stephen; it literally shone from his face! Standing before that court, Stephen realized that the charges against him were the same as those against his Master. It gave him great joy to be accounted worthy of treading so closely in his footsteps. He was transported by this realization. It glowed within him and showed in his face. “Then said the high priest, Are these things so?” (Acts 7:1) This was an illegal question--a man need not testify against himself. But the question gave Stephen the opportunity he was waiting for. He knew this counsel had the power of life or death, yet he faced them boldly, and he spoke boldly. He did not dignify the false accusations made against him by answering them directly. He simply preached the gospel to the council.

He started with the call of Abraham out of his native country. He told them of Isaac and Jacob and Jacob's sons. He told them the story of Joseph, how the children of --Israel came to reside in Egypt, and how they fell into bondage there. He related the raising up of Moses and the deliverance of Israel through his leadership, the great signs and wonders performed through him, and the weary wilderness journey of forty years under Moses. He showed them that Moses had pointed to Jesus:

“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.”--Acts 7:37

Next he reminded them of the fantastic and incredible history of Israel's unfaithfulness to God. Here was a people who had frequent and mighty demonstrations of God's powerful care over them; physical demonstrations they could see, hear, taste and feel. Faith was not needed. In spite of this they spurned God and turned to the most abominable idolatry--not once, not twice; they did it again and again and again, for decades!

As a surgeon probes deeply into a wound to cut out the rotten flesh, Stephen relentlessly reminded them of their national --disgrace, telling them of the golden calf erected as soon as Moses' back was turned, of their idolatrous worship of the corrupt host of heaven (the fallen angels), of the sacrifice of their living children to the cruel and fierce Moloch, the “eternal torment” deity, and of their worship of the mocking god Remphan.

Every word was true and they knew it. But instead of bringing sorrow and repentance, this recital of their national sins stung and goaded them. Stephen looked around him, and saw not a single sign of remorse in their faces. He realized that further reasoning was not possible. So now, like his Master before him, he spoke words of condemnation. Jesus had called them a generation of vipers, killers of prophets. Now Stephen, facing his tormentors, said:

“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 showed before, of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers.”--Acts 7:51,52

The Council Turns Vicious

As he spoke these words, the air became charged with the horrible compelling power known as mob psychology. A viciousness, communicating itself unspoken from one man to another, turned them --almost instantly from human beings into bloodthirsty beasts. At that moment Stephen knew he was going to die. He could read it in their cruel, twisted faces, and bright staring eyes. They had become as ravening wolves! The record says: “When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart; and they gnashed on him with their teeth.” They were ravenous animals!

The Lord never fails his people. That does not mean he spares them every painful and distressing experience. Not at all. But he does give us the strength to bear them. At this point, the Lord showed his approval by graciously granting Stephen a wonderful heavenly vision:

“But he, being full of the holy spirit, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God. And he said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.”--Acts 7:55,56

This was the last straw! The charge against this man was blasphemy because he preached that Jesus was the Son of God. Now he claimed he had looked into heaven itself and had actually seen this Jesus on God's right hand! This was too much!

“Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord. And cast him out of the city, and stoned him.”--Acts 7:57,58

“With one accord!” One dissenting voice would have raised a diversion. One dissenting voice might have broken the evil spell. But in all the council, there was not even one voice! Just as Satan had entered into Judas, he now dominated every one of these men!

Stephen Is Executed

As the stoning began, Stephen again demonstrated how very much like his Master he had become. Hanging on the cross just before his death, Jesus had cried: “Father, into thy hands, I commend my spirit.” (Luke 23:46) Stephen now said: “Lord Jesus, --receive my spirit.” Then Stephen knelt down, giving his murderers a more

compact target. As the heavy stones thudded against his body, he cried out: “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.” (Acts 7:60) He just fell asleep. There is something so serene and comforting in this expression--a peacefulness and rest. It describes a child, tired at the end of the day, who falls asleep in its mother's arms. I like to --believe that the Lord tempered Stephen's suffering at the end, that he died peacefully and gently, not in agony. He just fell asleep!



The word “sleeping” indicates a future awakening. Stephen's Christian career had been intense and brief; now it was complete. God gave him rest until the first resurrection when he would be awakened to the glorious divine nature.

The flame of mob violence went out as suddenly as it had been kindled. Sheep--ishly, and hardly looking at one another, the mob dispersed, stopping only to pick up their garments over which a young man, named Saul was watching. This Saul was a member of the Sanhedrin that condemned and killed Stephen and he was fully in sympathy with the acts of that council. We read:

“And 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. 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.”--Acts 8:1,3,4

Here is another example of how God uses the wrath of men to praise him. The brutal stoning of Stephen and the persecutions of Saul caused many of the church to flee from Jerusalem. Wherever they went, they preached Christ and the gospel spread! Thus what first appeared to be a triumph of Satan was transformed into a victory for Christ. How often we see this principle illustrated in the Bible. It is so encouraging to see that our Lord is always the complete master of every situation.

Saul Becomes the Apostle Paul

“And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings, and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest; and desired of him letters to Damascus, to the synagogue, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.”--Acts 9:1,2

This Saul had fully consented to what we would today call a lynching. Stoning a man to death is a brutal and bloody affair. Not only did this stoning of Stephen leave Saul unmoved by pity, it appears to have actually encouraged him. Now he wanted authority to capture other Christians and bring them bound, like criminals, to Jerusalem, to be tried by the same kangaroo court that tried Stephen, and to probably meet the same fate as Stephen. He wanted it expressly understood that Christian women would be similarly treated.

What opinion would you form of a man like that? Human judgment would say:

“Here is a cruel sadist; a monster, without natural pity; delighting to inflict pain and suffering; even willing to see women publicly stoned. Here is a depraved character, thoroughly worthless, to be shunned like a mad dog.”

God Selects Saul

Would you select such a one for God's service, to be a leader and foremost instructor to the Church, to become the great apostle Paul? Human wisdom would indignantly rebel at the thought. But see what happened:

“And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus; and suddenly there shined, round about him a light from heaven; and he fell to the earth; and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest. Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee, what thou must do.”--Acts 9:3-6

In what sense did Saul persecute Jesus? Jesus was then glorified and quite safe from all his enemies. As far as we know, Saul had never harmed Jesus when Jesus was on earth. But Jesus considered every act against his followers, his little ones, his sheep, as a personal act against himself. Do you get the full implication of this? It means that he loves us as himself, his own body. He knows what we are going through from day to day, what we are up against every day. He watched Saul persecuting his church, and he cared. He watches over us, every one of us, individually. He cares, and, when necessary he intervenes.

In a vision the Lord instructed a disciple named Ananias to meet Saul and accept him into the brotherhood. But Ananias had misgivings:

“Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard . . . of this man; how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jerusalem. And here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on Thy name. But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way; for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel; for I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.”--Acts 9:13-16

You and I would never have selected Saul for such a service, for a ministry of such scope. Here is a prime example of the fact that “The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7) Also: “The Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts.” (1 Chronicles 28:9) The Lord looked into Paul's heart and saw he could use this man. He has looked into every one of our hearts before he called us to his truth. What did he see in Paul's heart? He must have seen a consuming dedication of purpose, that Saul was sincerely and conscientiously doing what he thought was right.

But how could a man with such sincerity of purpose be so wrong? Consider Paul's background. He said:

“I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee.”--Acts 23:6

“My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews; which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most strictest sect of our religion, I lived a Pharisee.” --Acts 26:4,5

There's the clue: “**the strictest sect of our religion.**” He was from childhood thoroughly imbued and saturated with the customs, traditions, and distorted doctrines of the Jewish religion of that time, what Jesus called “doctrines of men.” Because he was so conscientious, he hated with all his heart anything that seemed to threaten that religion. Remember, it was a Pharisee who asked Jesus: “Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders?” (Matthew 15:2) This is what they resented.

Many today have had a strict religious upbringing, but their hearts are closed and sealed to the truth. These are those to whom the gospel is hid, whose minds the god of this world has blinded, lest the glorious gospel of Christ should shine unto them. (2 Corinthians 4:3,4)

In the case of Saul, it would take a light and a voice from heaven to convert him. Yet there are some today who think they can simply witness to such as these and, by so witnessing, fix their eternal

destiny, that if they refuse to hear, they are doomed to the second death. This is obviously absurd. A blind man cannot see, it is not to be expected. But these blinded ones shall indeed have a light and a voice from heaven in due time:

“And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it; for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations shall walk in the light of it.”--Revelation 21:23,24

“And I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them; and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.”--Revelation 21:3

In the kingdom, these presently blinded ones will have a real opportunity to accept God and they will know where the light and voice originate. They will accept or reject God and Christ with complete knowledge. Then, and only then, can they be completely responsible.

Jesus Saw Saul's True Character

So Jesus saw in Saul a man willing to leave his home, suffer personal hardship, and travel about the country pursuing with great energy and determination what he thought was right. He also saw that after being converted and shown the true way, he would be just as energetic in following the right course. “I will show him, how great things he must suffer for my name's sake,” he said.

And Paul did suffer! He said about himself:

“In stripes above measure; in prisons more frequent; in deaths oft. Of the Jews, five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods; once was I stoned. [*Now he knew how Stephen had felt!*] Thrice I suffered shipwreck; a night and a day have I been in the deep. In journeyings often; in perils of waters; in perils of robbers; in perils by mine own countrymen; in perils by the heathen; in perils in the city; in perils in the wilderness; in perils in the sea; in perils among false brethren. In weariness and painfulness; in watchings often; in hunger; and thirst; in fastings often; in cold and nakedness.”--2 Corinthians 11:23-27

He bore it all with great joy as he said: “I am exceedingly joyful, in all our tribulation.” (2 Corinthians 7:4) How glad we are that God reads our hearts, that he “seeth not as man seeth; but looketh on the heart.” Our fallen humanities are so imperfect. We cannot express ourselves as we would like, even to God in prayer! We must use imperfect language to express ourselves. We even think with imperfect language. How can we adequately express to God the

longings of our innermost hearts, our --sorrows, our disappointments, our hungers and our thirsts? With our miserable human limitations, we cannot even adequately express to the Lord how much we love him! This would be most frustrating if we did not know that while we are expressing ourselves, haltingly, as best we can, he reads our hearts; he sees and understands what we would like to express but cannot. It is like a little hurt child who needs only to run to its mother with tears and without a word to be completely understood and comforted. What a wonderful manifestation of God's power or spirit, this is!

“The spirit also helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for, as we ought, but the spirit itself maketh intercession, with groanings which cannot be uttered; and he that searcheth the hearts, knoweth what is in the mind of the spirit.”--Romans 8:26,27

What of the blood guilt Paul incurred when he became an accessory in the stoning to death of Stephen? Stephen's last prayer was, “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.” This prayer was heard and granted in the case of Paul. As Paul himself said, “I am pure from the blood of all men.” (Acts 20:26) Yet this was not quite enough. He always remembered the bloody scene of the stoning to the end of his life. When the sword of Nero's executioner flashed in an arc to cut his head from his body, his last earthly thought must have been one of satisfaction and joy to finally expiate by his own martyrdom the martyrdom of Stephen.

The instantaneous conversion of Paul “puts us on the spot” so to speak. How can we hate an enemy, no matter how evil he appears to be, when there is a possibility the Lord may almost instantly show him the light? How can we judge a man to be truly an enemy since we cannot read his heart? An enemy's ugly exterior may, as in the case of Paul, hide a gem of rare and transcendent beauty and worth. How humble, and tolerant of others, this should make us!

The Disciples Feared Paul

After his sudden conversion, the disciples were naturally, afraid of Paul. They were suspicious of the sincerity of his conversion. Perhaps it was only a scheme to gain admittance to their meetings to complete a list of names which would be followed by wholesale arrests. But when Paul preached Christ in the synagogues and the Jewish leaders turned on him and tried to kill him, the disciples were convinced.

Paul had much to learn but the Lord --arranged that Luke should become associated with him. In his writings, Paul calls Luke “the beloved physician” (Colossians 4:14), and “fellow-worker” (Philemon 24). He wrote: “Luke alone is with me.” (2 Timothy 4:11)

Those originally called by Jesus himself were a most favored group. For more than three years they were his constant companions. Let us remember that aside from his spiritual powers, Jesus was a perfect man with a vital and magnetic personality. He could and did impress his mind upon those so constantly under his influence--even before they received the holy spirit. Dr. Luke was one of these. As a physician, Luke was trained to be logical and methodical, and he had a retentive mind. In the prelude to the gospel which bears his name, Luke wrote:

“It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things, from the very first, to write unto thee.”--Luke 1:3

Though Paul lacked the personal association with Jesus, Luke supplied what Paul lacked. Under the guidance of the holy spirit, Paul absorbed the mind and spirit of Jesus to a remarkable degree. A striking similarity of thought runs throughout Paul's writings. Here are a few examples:

Jesus: “Whosoever exalteth himself, shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself, shall be exalted.”--Luke 14:11

Paul: “Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate.”--Romans 12:16

Jesus: “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”--Matthew 25:40

Paul: “Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is offended, and I burn not?”--2 Corinthians 11:29

Jesus: “Blessed are they, which are persecuted for righteousness' sake.”-- Matthew 5:10

Paul: “I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake.”--2 Corinthians 12:10

Jesus: “Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on.”--Matthew 6:25

Paul: “Be not anxious about anything.” --Philippians 4:6, Diaglott

Jesus: “There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him, can defile him.”--Mark 7:15

Paul: “There is nothing unclean of itself.”--Romans 14:14

Jesus: “Judge not, that ye be not judged.”--Matthew 7:1

Paul: “Let us not, therefore, judge one another any more.”--Romans 14:13

Jesus: “Love your enemies; and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.”--Matthew 5:44

Paul: “Bless them which persecute you; bless and curse not. Recompense to no man, evil for evil.”--Romans 12:14,17

Jesus: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. This is the first commandment.”--Mark 12:30

Paul: “Love is the fulfilling of the law.” --Romans 13:10

Do you see the beautiful similarity and harmony between these two minds although they never met in the flesh? Some have said:

“If only I could have lived while Jesus was on earth!--to sit and learn at his feet! To have through him, direct access to the fountainhead of all knowledge! To ask any questions, and receive exactly the right answer! To hear his encouragements, and precious promises, and expressions of love, while looking into his eyes!”

Of course it would be wonderful! But Paul did not have such a personal contact with Jesus, and yet, in the Lord's providence, he surpassed those who did. He wrote more than half the New Testament. He was used mightily by the Lord. He was able to develop the mind of Christ. As he wrote, “But we have the mind of Christ.” (1 Corinthians 2:16) He also wrote, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ.” (Philippians 2:5)

The Bible Provides Everything

In the Bible the Lord has furnished to us everything we need, and he has given us helps to understand the Bible. As Paul himself said to Timothy:

“From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 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 [or complete], thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”--2 Timothy 3:15-17

Is your faith strong enough? If it is, you can, here and now, sit and learn at Jesus' feet. You can, here and now, have access to the fountainhead of knowledge. You can, here and now, receive the answers to your questions. You can, here and now, feel his nearness, receive his encouragements, and claim his precious promises.

Paul's faith was so strong that he spoke of Jesus as an old familiar friend and Master. To him Jesus was a real and living presence. It can be the same with us, too if our faith is strong enough. Paul said:

“I shall speak to you either by revelations, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine.” --1 Corinthians 14:6

Sometimes he spoke by his own knowledge. For example, on the subject of marriage relationships he wrote: "But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment." (1 Corinthians 7:6) Again he said: "But to the rest, speak I, not the Lord." (1 Corinthians 7:12) Again: "I have no commandment of the Lord, yet I give my judgment." (1 Corinthians 7:25) He speaks of women's conduct in the church and adds: "But, if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom; neither the churches of God." (1 Corinthians 11:16) Some have concluded that they may or may not take Paul's advice as they choose. But as for me, I'll take Paul's opinion any time. He had the mind of Christ to a superlative degree. Therefore the conclusions reached by that mind must be correct. He invited us to follow him as he followed Christ. Let us be willing to do that. Even though he gave some advice as his own personal opinion, I believe his entire --writings were under divine inspiration whether he himself realized it or not.

When one consecrates, he determines to do God's will at all times with all his might. But very early in our Christian careers, we discover that there is an opposing force to contend with, and we sometimes lose to this opposing force. Our new, consecrated minds, do not always fully control our old, imperfect human bodies. This would be very discouraging to us if we did not realize that all the Lord's people have had the same problem including the great apostle Paul who had the mind of Christ. We know because he wrote:

"For the good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now, if I do that I would not; it is no more I that do it, but the sin that dwelleth in me. I find, then a law; that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God, after the inward man; but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. Oh, wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?"--Romans 7:19-24

What did he mean by "the body of this death," or "this dead body"? He referred to an ancient and horrible Roman cruelty practiced on condemned prisoners. It was a method of execution worthy of Satan himself, a method of slowly tormenting a man to death. They bound a dead body to a living man, obliging him to carry it about until the contagion from the putrid mass took away his own life.

This is the thing to which Paul likens our fallen natures. "Who shall -deliver me from this dead body?" he asks in seeming desperation. Then he answers his own question, reassuringly and confidently:

"I thank God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. . . . There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus; who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit. For the law of the spirit of life

in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.”--
Romans 7:25; 8:1,2

In succeeding verses Paul gives us some of the most encouraging and heartwarming words, ever written:

“Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died; yea rather, that is risen again; who is even at the right hand of God; who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Nay! in all these things, we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come; nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”--Romans 8:33-39

Naaman, the Syrian

“And many lepers were in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet. And none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman, the Syrian.” --Luke 4:27

TODAY we are going to consider the account of the healing of Naaman, the Syrian, as found in chapter 5 of 2 Kings. The kingdom of Syria bordered the land of Israel on the north and east. At the time of our lesson, about 840 BC, it was quite influential among the nations of the earth.

Naaman was commander-in-chief of the army of Syria, under King Ben-Hadad II. He was noted for his personal ability as a soldier and strategist. We are told that, “By him the Lord had given deliverance unto Syria.” (2 Kings 5:1) He is also called a “mighty man in valour.”

But Naaman was a leper. Although this disease can now be controlled, in those days leprosy was incurable. It was synonymous with a horrible, lingering, certain death. There was absolutely no hope. It usually began with little specks on the eyelids and on the palms of the hands, and gradually spread over different parts of the body, bleaching the hair white wherever it showed itself, crusting the affected parts with shining white scales. From the skin, it slowly ate its way through the tissues, to the bones and joints, and even to the marrow, rotting the whole body piecemeal. Fingers and toes, and eventually the hands and feet, dropped off. It dulled the nerves as it progressed and was comparatively painless until the final stages when the vital organs were attacked. The process often took many years, but death was inevitable.

So we can imagine Naaman's consternation and frustration in having this disease. A human enemy he could face in battle, fearlessly, and with “valour.” But this was something else! This was something he could not cope with. It is probable that, under the circumstances, a man of his character would contemplate suicide.

But in Naaman's darkest and most --desperate hour, a ray of hope appeared. It seems that some time before this incident, the Syrians had conducted raids across the border into Israel. On one of these forays they had captured a young girl, called in the account “a little maid.” She had been sold as a slave to the household of General Naaman and became his wife's personal maid. She had apparently been treated kindly and therefore felt kindly toward Naaman. When this little Hebrew girl heard that Naaman had contracted leprosy, she was concerned.

“And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samar-ia! For he would recover him of his leprosy.”--2 Kings 5:3

She referred to Elisha, who was then prophet in Israel, and who was living in the capital city of Samaria. When this girl was in Israel, she had undoubtedly heard of the miracles Elisha had performed: the dividing of Jordan; the waters of Jericho sweetened; the widow's oil increased; the Shunammite's son raised from the dead; the deadly pottage rectified; 100 men fed with 20 loaves; plus other wonderful things. Reports of these miracles of Elisha were current in Israel. Because she knew that Elisha was an instrument of God's power, she reasoned, correctly, that even leprosy could be cured by that power.

Her remark to her mistress was immediately communicated to Naaman. Ordinarily, Naaman would have entirely discounted the possibility of miracles. As a military man, he was a realist. He believed in physical force, not ethereal power. He was not one to be swayed by superstition or vague rumor.

But Naaman was at the point of desperation. He was ready to grasp at straws. He must investigate even the seemingly idle words of a little Hebrew slave girl. It was now the only hope he had. So he went to the king of Syria and asked for a leave of absence, telling him of his intention to go to Israel where there was a prophet who supposedly had the power to heal him of his leprosy. The king who had been worrying about losing his most able general, was enthusiastic at the prospect that he might be healed. “Go, by all means,” he told Naaman. “I'll give you a letter of introduction to the king of Israel. A prophet who can perform such miracles must be well known to the king. No doubt he is a high official and a member of the royal court. Out of courtesy to me, the king of Israel will see that you receive the very best attention from this miracle-worker.” Naaman gladly accepted the letter and lost no time in leaving for Israel. We read in verse 5: “And he departed and took with him ten talents of silver, and six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment.” This was a great fortune in those days--and even in these days! This probably represented all his wealth. Naaman was a rich man and was prepared to pay richly for his healing. To convey such a treasure safely over dangerous, robber-ridden roads, all the way to Israel, Naaman's chariot was probably accompanied by a strong troop of cavalry.

Naaman Meets Israel's King

In due time, Naaman arrived and presented to the king of Israel the letter from the king of Syria. It was brief and to the point. After the usual formalities of greeting, it simply said:

“Now, when this letter is come unto thee, behold, I have therewith sent Naaman, my servant, to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy.”--2 Kings 5:6

Notice that there was not a word about the Prophet Elisha in the letter. It was presumed that the king of Israel would know where to direct Naaman.

To better understand his reaction to the letter, let us remember who the king of Israel was at this time. It was Jehoram, the son of Ahab, of whom it is written:

“And he wrought evil in the sight of the Lord . . . He cleaved unto the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, which made Israel to sin.”--2 Kings 3:2,3

While professedly making some acknowledgment of Jehovah, Jehoram was really an idolater. He had no dealings with the Prophet Elisha nor scarcely any knowledge of him. The result was that he completely misconstrued this sincere and courteous letter. He thought that the king of Syria, by asking him for something impossible, was trying to provoke a quarrel with him, to provide an excuse for invasion. And the fact that Naaman was a --Syrian general, accompanied by a strong detachment of cavalry, contributed to this erroneous conclusion. Accordingly, we read in verse 7:

“And it came to pass, when the king of Israel had read the letter, that he rent his clothes and said, Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me, to recover a man of his leprosy? Wherefore consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me.”

Of course he did not say this in the presence of Naaman. He had undoubtedly with--drawn and called a hasty counsel of his --advisors to determine what to do.

Perhaps it was one of these advisors, --secretly sympathetic to Elisha, who informed the prophet of the situation, or it may be that the Lord told Elisha. In any event, Elisha knew it and sent a servant with a message to the king. We read in verse 8:

“When Elisha, the man of God, had heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel.”

In those days, people were more demonstrative of their emotions. The tearing of one's outer garment was a sign of sorrow and despair, denoting a hopeless situation. So Elisha's message to the king was:

“Why do you despair? Why do you not consult God, through his prophet, --regarding your problem? Don't you know God has a

prophet in Israel? If you don't know, Naaman will soon know. Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel.”

This was a rebuke to Jehoram, the idolater. But the king was happy to be so easily rid of Naaman and his problem, and he gladly directed him to follow the servant of Elisha.

Elisha lived very simply, in a small, plain house. We know this because “the sons of the prophets said unto Elisha, Behold now, the place where we dwell with thee is too strait for us.” (2 Kings 6:1) “Strait” means narrow, difficult, distressful. So we can imagine Naaman's surprise, and disappointment when his chariots and horsemen arrived at the home of Elisha. He --expected a splendid palace, befitting a person with supernatural powers. Here was a hovel. Is it possible that a miracle-worker would live in such a lowly place? Naaman dismounted from his chariot, and Elisha's servant, who had guided him there, disappeared into the house.

Naaman Does **NOT** Meet Elisha

Naaman naturally expected that Elisha would immediately appear and greet him. He waited and waited. Verse 9 intimates this when it says that “he stood at the door of the house of Elisha.” Finally the door opened, but it was not Elisha. It was his servant with a short message from Elisha saying: “Go, and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean.” THAT'S ALL!

We read in verse 11 that “Naaman was wroth.” He had expected great consideration for his rank and as a representative of the king of Syria. He had come many days' journey bearing costly presents. This man would not even come out of his house to see him. Should not a healer be expected to see his patient, to make gestures over him, and pray? Should not a prophet of God be expected to conduct some sort of ceremony, offering sacrifice and incense, make a great ado to bring about a cure from such a serious disease?

“This man turns me away like a dog with a bone. As to his direction to wash seven times, this is nothing but an insult, Does he intimate that I need a bath? Besides, if washing were necessary, we have rivers in Syria with much cleaner water than this muddy river Jordan of theirs!”

So Naaman was very angry and gave the order to start back to Syria immediately.

“But Naaman was wroth, and went away and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of Jehovah his God, and strike his hand over the place, and

recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them, and be clean? so he turned and went away in a rage.” --2 Kings 5:11,12

As to the superior quality of the waters of Syria, Naaman was quite correct. For example, an ancient writer says of the Abana river which is fed by the snows of Hebron:

“It has the clearest waters possible, and singularly bright in color; in the morning a full, deep, emerald green; in the evening, a sapphire blue; like a gem.”

But to return to Syria, Naaman and his company had to cross the Jordan. They probably stopped at the river to rest and water their horses. In the meantime, Naaman's anger had cooled somewhat, as anger will. He began to think more rationally. He reminded himself that the prophet's reputation for miracles was far too widespread to be groundless. His humble abode might indicate nobility of character rather than meanness. It might mean that he was not accustomed to taking bribes or payment for his services and this might account for the fact that he did not come out. Perhaps he simply did not want to claim a reward for his prescription to heal Naaman. Besides, Naaman may have reasoned that Elisha was a representative of Jehovah God, the Lord of Hosts, the greatest king of all. Therefore, it was not entirely unreasonable that Elisha's dignity of office would prevent him from coming out to a mere general of the king of Syria. So might it not only be his pride that made him angry with Elisha? As he was resting on the bank of Jordan, Naaman was musing over these things. At this point, a delegation of his soldiers approached, asking to speak with him. It was a tribute to Naaman's character that he was beloved of those under his command. He was a father to them. They sincerely wanted him to be healed. They said to Naaman:

“If the prophet had asked you to perform some great exploit, such as leading an army against Israel's enemies, as a condition for your healing, would you not do it? But he has not asked any hard thing of you. He has asked something very simple and easy. Why not do it? Here we are at the river. It would be easy to do as the prophet says.”

Thus we read in the account:

“And his servants came near and spake unto him, and said: My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? How much rather, then, when he saith to thee, Wash and be clean?”--2 Kings 5:13

This was all the encouragement Naaman needed. He arose and walked down the bank into the water. We read in verse 14:

“Then went he down, and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God. And his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.”



We can imagine his soldiers watching Naaman from the bank as he went down to the water. He immersed himself once and then looked at his horribly leprosy skin. No sign of improvement. He dipped himself again; still no improvement. Three, four, five, six times; still no sign. A lesser man would have been discouraged. But Naaman was a man of discipline. He knew how to give orders and how to carry them out. The prophet had said seven times. He dipped himself once more. The last dip only took one second, but this time, when he came up, his leprosy was clean gone, and his flesh was like that of a baby: soft, smooth, pink and healthy. Naaman was the happiest man in the world.

We know from what happened later that Naaman must have knelt down, then and there, on the bank of the Jordan, together with his soldiers, and raised his voice in thanks to the God of Israel, and swore that thenceforth he would worship no other God but Jehovah.

So Naaman was healed, not only of his leprosy, but also of his idolatry.

He immediately started back to Samaria to see Elisha. We read from the account:

“And he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and came and stood before him.”

Naaman **DOES** Meet Elisha

This time Elisha came out to see Naaman. Naaman said:

“Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel. Now, therefore I pray thee, take a blessing [or present] of thy servant. But he said, As the Lord liveth, before whom I stand, I will receive none. And he urged him to take it, but he refused.”

Thus Elisha, who lived frugally in a small house, turned down a gift of ten talents of silver, six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of raiment! Elisha could certainly have made good use of the money as well as the clothes in the Lord's service. He had, under his care and instruction, a group of young men known as “the sons of the prophets.” There were fifty of these (2 Kings 2:7). Sometimes they did not have enough to eat. (2 Kings 4:38) Why, then, did Elisha not take the gift? Because accepting it would have meant the selling, and making merchandise of, the divine power operating through him. Elisha well knew that God's gifts are not for sale.

Then Naaman made a request which showed his conversion to the worship of Jehovah God. We read:

“And Naaman said, Shall there not then, I pray thee, be given to thy servant, two mules' burden of earth? For thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto Jehovah.”--2 Kings 5:17

This demonstrated a most unusual degree of dedication. Because they were the chosen people of God, Naaman considered the very soil of Israel to be sacred, the only earth upon which an altar to Jehovah might properly be erected. Then, as further proof of his sincerity, he asked forgiveness in advance for the times when, in the discharge of his duties, he would have to accompany the king of Syria into the temple of the idol Rimmon; saying in verse 18: “In this thing may Jehovah pardon thy servant.” Elisha replied, “Go in peace,” and Naaman returned to Syria.

What do you suppose was the first thing Naaman did when he got home? The scriptures do not say, but I think that the first thing he did was to release from servitude that “little maid” of Israel. Perhaps he bestowed upon her much of the treasure that Elisha would not

accept, then escorted her happily back to her family. I like to think he did that.

A Picture of the Divine Plan

There are many lessons we can derive from the story of Naaman, the Syrian. First there is a general, broad outline of the --Divine Plan of the Ages for the salvation of mankind.

Leprosy is a symbol of sin, and a very fitting one it is. Note the similarities: As, in the time of Naaman, leprosy was incurable, sin is incurable without divine intervention. It is loathsome. It is contagious. It has a small beginning and becomes progressively worse. It is terribly destructive. It deforms, distorts, and makes ugly. Once the nerves of conscience are dulled, it is, like leprosy, deceptively painless as it progresses. It ends in death. As James puts it: "And sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." (James 1:15)

As Naaman became a leper, Adam contracted the leprosy of sin and passed it to all his posterity. Every member of Adam's race can say, as David did:

"Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me."--Psalms 51:5

As centuries rolled by, the situation appeared hopeless, just as Naaman lost all hope. Then, as in the case of Naaman, a ray of hope was given to mankind through Israel. Moses said:

"The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me. Unto him ye shall hearken."--Deuteronomy 18:15

In due time, the prophet foretold by Moses came to earth. As Naaman had heard from the little Israelitish maid that there was a prophet in Israel capable of healing his leprosy, the people of Jesus' day realized that there was, among them, a great prophet who was endowed with power over sin and death. When Jesus at Nain raised up the widow's son from the dead, we read that, "They glorified God, saying, that a great prophet is risen up among us." (Luke 7:16) We read that on the way to Emmaus, the disciples spoke, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet, mighty in deed and word before God and all the people." (Luke 24:19) The "little maid" of our story may have used similar words to describe Elisha to Naaman. Then the apostle conclusively links "that prophet" with the "times of restitution" during which the whole world will be healed of the leprosy of sin:

"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord. And he shall send Jesus Christ, who before

was preached unto you; whom the heaven must retain, until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began. For 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 3:19-22

When Naaman told the king of Syria that he had heard there was a healing prophet of God in Israel, the king said: “Go to; go!” This reminds us of Isaiah's words:

“And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.”--Isaiah 2:3

As Naaman hastened to go to the land of the Jews, to the capital of Israel, to seek healing from Jehovah God at the hand of his prophet, others in the future will do the same:

“And the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of Hosts. I will go also. Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord. Thus saith the Lord of hosts, In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you; for we have heard that God is with you.”--Zechariah 8:21-23

Does this not also remind us of the woman who came to Jesus and touched the hem, or skirt of his garment and was instantly healed?

Perfect Health Is a Great Incentive

This brings to mind one of the great incentives that will be offered to man to fall in line with the kingdom of God under the -- administration of the Ancient Worthies. Physical healing will be a positive incentive. As people hear that those in Israel who are obedient to the Lord are attaining perfect health and are getting younger instead of older, there will be a veritable stampede to find out how they also can attain such benefits. Thus they will learn of the Lord's ways and walk in his paths. The coming of leprous Naaman from Syria to Elisha the prophet in Israel for healing may well picture the world of mankind, aliens from God and leprous with sin, submitting themselves to the “princes in all the earth” for deliverance from sin and death.

Elisha's directing of Naaman to the river to be healed of the curse of leprosy reminds us of the beautiful promise in Revelation when the curse of sin and death will be washed away:

“And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God, and of the Lamb. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse.”--Revelation 22:1-3

We also think of that wonderful time foretold in verse 17:

“And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”--Revelation 22:17

Naaman found that the river was indeed the “water of life.” A few moments before, sitting on the bank of Jordan, he was --despondent, discouraged, afflicted, and --facing death. After the seventh dip he was --delivered from his affliction and his flesh became “like the flesh of a little child”--soft, smooth, pink and healthy. We are immediately reminded of that grand restitution promise in Job to all mankind afflicted by the leprosy of sin:

“Then he is gracious unto him, and saith, --Deliver him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom. His flesh shall be fresher than a child's. He shall return to the days of his youth.”--Job 33:24,25

Just as Naaman acknowledged Jehovah as the only true God, and said that he would thenceforth serve no other, we read:

“For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord [Jehovah], to serve him with one consent.”--Zephaniah 3:9

“For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”--Habakkuk 2:14

The dipping of Naaman seven times is also significant. A similar picture is given in Daniel chapter 4. We remember that Nebuchadnezzar was deprived of his sanity until “seven times” had passed over him. Then his reason returned to him and he “praised and extolled and honored the King of Heaven.” Six thousand years of sin and death have already passed over mankind. When seven thousand years have passed, at the end of the Millennial Age, man's reason will have fully returned. As also pictured by the “seven times” of Naaman, the leprosy of sin and death will be cured. Then all mankind will “praise, and extol, and honor” Jehovah God, the great King of Heaven.

Spiritual Lessons

In addition to this general outline of the Divine Plan, the account of Naaman the Syrian contains valuable spiritual lessons for the “household of faith.” Let us consider some of them.

First of all, we see the progression of a Christian life. Naaman was a man of Syria, of an alien nation, having neither part nor lot with Israel, having no covenant relationship with God; he was a hopeless leper. It is written of us, while we were yet sinners:

“At that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.”--Ephesians 2:12

Consciousness of Sin Is Necessary

Then the Lord draws us. But before he does so, there must be a consciousness of sin, a realization that of our own selves we can do nothing, just as Naaman was aware of his hopeless, leprous condition. Just as Naaman heard that there was a prophet who was able to save him from his leprosy, we are given “ears to hear.” Our attention is drawn to our Saviour, Jesus Christ, of whom we read, “The blood of Jesus Christ . . . cleanseth us from all sin.” (1 John 1:7) The Lord draws us to his truth. We discern the ransom by which sin may be remitted.

In Naaman's case, a “little maid” was the agency used. One wonders at this. In view of the fact that Elisha had done so many wonderful things in Israel, should not the people of Syria, a nation immediately adjacent, know something about them? Granted, there were no newspapers in those days, but caravans performed the same function, carrying news as well as trade goods from country to country. Miracles of the magnitude Elisha performed would be exciting news indeed. In those days, as now, nations who were potential enemies had spies in each other's territories. Should not Syrian spies have reported to General Naaman the miracles of Elisha? It would be reasonable to think so. Yet Naaman heard of the prophet-healer of Israel only from the mouth of a little slave girl. Similarly would it not be logical today to expect to hear the message of truth from the churches of the world? But that is not where we get it. Instead we are put in contact with the truth in all sorts of strange ways, often by unusual agencies. This should not surprise us.

The Lord sometimes uses methods to accomplish his purpose which appear illogical to our minds. For example, the tremendously important event of Jesus' birth was not announced through the Scribes, Pharisees and religious leaders of Israel, as would appear to be logical, but by a few humble and unlearned shepherds to whom

people paid almost no heed. So with us. We may come to a knowledge of the tremendously important message of truth, a force that will transform us from sinful humans to the divine nature--to glory, honor and immortality, the highest prize in the universe--perhaps by means of a simple tract which just happened to be put under our particular door by some poor sister who could scarcely walk.

I have heard of one who was brought into the truth by a robin. The bird took a sheet of paper from a trash pile and made it the foundation for her nest. She wove her nest upon it and raised a family. The next winter a windstorm dislodged the nest and deposited it with a thump upon a front porch. When the lady of the house came out to pick it up, the big black word HELL caught her eye. She smoothed out the paper, and saw the title to be WHAT SAY THE SCRIPTURES ABOUT HELL? She had been worrying sick about hell-fire, and had been earnestly praying about it.

There is another instance where a tract was put under the door of a small Jewish store. But apparently that wasn't where it belonged. Later in the day, a man living several blocks away came into the store to make a small purchase, which the thrifty storekeeper wrapped in the tract. You know in the old days, tracts were quite large, about magazine size when folded. So that is how the tract came to be delivered to the right place. The brother read it and accepted the truth.

Many other such instances can be given. Let us not despise the small opportunities of service: mailing a comforting tract to the bereaved, distributing invitations to hear a local public lecture, or a radio or television program, a word to a fellow-worker, neighbor or relative. This is what the "little maid" did. The Lord uses various means to draw his people. Although they are sometimes unusual, they are rarely spectacular. It may be a chance turning of the radio dial, a sudden impulse to change channels for no logical reason at all, a rambling walk on Sunday that brings one to a meeting hall where a Bible study is in progress.

There must also be some cooperative efforts by the Lord's people to do things that an individual or small ecclesia cannot do alone. Tracts and other literature must be printed. Radio programs must be prepared and broadcast. Television films must be produced. Tools must be provided for willing workers to use. Everyone can have a part in this also, even if it is only by offering a sincere and earnest prayer for the harvest work.

As Naaman came to the capital of Israel to find the prophet, we read of the household of faith:

“But ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem . . . to the general assembly, and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven.”--Hebrews 12:22,23

As Naaman was drawn to the prophet, we are drawn to Christ:

“No man can come to me, except the Father . . . draw him.”--John 6:44

Elisha told Naaman that if he immersed himself in water seven times, his leprosy would be healed. We know that water --immersion is a symbol of consecration and that the number seven means completeness. So combining the two symbols would indicate that a full and complete consecration, a perfect submission to the will of God, is required to bring about the cancellation of Adamic condemnation.

But at first Naaman was not willing to do what the prophet said. He “went away” grieved. This reminds us of the rich young ruler who came to Jesus, also seeking life:

“Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me. But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.”--Matthew 19:21,22

Naaman sat on the river bank thinking over Elisha's instructions and was undecided what to do. We “sit down and count the cost,” as instructed in Luke 14:28. The apostle Paul did some reckoning too, and he reached the right conclusion:

“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”--Romans 8:18 Paul referred to a spiritual glory, but what an earthly glory was revealed in Naaman! As in the case of some us, Naaman required a little persuasion. But once having made up his mind, he promptly and completely carried out the prophet's instructions. Upon rising up from the water, his leprosy was completely gone, his flesh was new as a little child's, his life saved. It might be said that he had an earthly “newness of life.” It was like a resurrection from the dead. One might say he was “born again.” For years he had been haunted by death and despair; now, in an instant, it all slipped away. All his worries were gone, and his mind was at peace. Similarly, of us it is written:

“Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.”--Romans 6:4,5

“Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” --Romans 5:1

Cured “Leprosy” Brings Joy

What a joy to know our leprosy is cured, that we are justified in the sight of God, that our sins are forgiven, that the robe of Christ's righteousness covers us, that we are released from the power of sin, and death! As David expressed it:

“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity.”--Psalms 32:1,2

In due course we too shall be “born again.”

Upon being cleansed, Naaman offered Elisha all his wealth. The refusal of Elisha to accept it, and his permitting Naaman to retain control of it, may well illustrate the fact that when we consecrate our all to the Lord--our means, our time, our strength, our talents, our influence, our opportunities, our lips--he hands it all back to us to administer for him as his stewards. He notes our faithfulness in our stewardship, and rewards it. As we read, “It is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.” (1 Corinthians 4:2)

Personal Lessons

There are some lessons of personal application as well. There is a lesson about pride. Naaman was offended when no deference was paid him and his high position. The prophet did not even come out to see him. Was he not a great general, the commander-in-chief of the armies of Syria? Should there not be some special recognition, some pomp and ceremony? Those of the Lord's people who happen to be better endowed than others, whether in means, or talent, or opportunities of service, should not expect to be treated preferentially or different from others, as though they were heaven's favorites. None have anything in which to glory. All come short of the perfect standard. We read:

“For who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now, if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?”--1 Corinthians 4:7

“For there is no difference. For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.”--Romans 3:22,23

Let us remember that all are “unprofitable servants” (Luke 17:10) and that it is only by the Lord's grace and provision that our poor offerings are acceptable.

As Elisha lived in a small and humble house, Bible students often meet in dismal and unpretentious halls because they can afford no

better. Yet in spite of outward appearances, these humble meeting places are the embassies of a great king because, "We are ambassadors for Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:20). If God had any regard for external appearances, he would not have permitted his son to be born in a stable.

Then of course, there is the lesson of faith. Naaman had great faith. He **believed** that there was a great prophet in Israel. It took faith to take his entire wealth with him and journey to Israel to find the prophet. It took faith to follow directions which seemed **foolish and** dip himself in the Jordan seven times as the prophet said. There must have been thousands of lepers in Israel at that time, many of them in the very city of Samaria. Some could probably have gone around the block to Elisha's house, but none did. They didn't have faith. Almost a thousand years later Jesus paid a great compliment to Naaman's outstanding faith which was greater than any in Israel. He said:

"And many lepers were in Israel, in the time of Elisha the prophet. And none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman, the Syrian."--Luke 4:27

Let us emulate Naaman's faith.

One wonders what the status of Naaman will be in the kingdom. Of course, he was not of the High Calling for that was not then open. Nor would he be one of the Ancient Worthies, although he did have their kind of faith. But he was not of the commonwealth of Israel, he was not in covenant relationship with God. What then, was his standing? Since Jesus found him worth mentioning as a high example of faith, and since he dedicated himself to the worship of Jehovah, the true God, I have no doubt he will be accorded some special place in the government of the world, and be a ready, able and willing instrument of the "Princes in all the earth."

Nehemiah

THE name Nehemiah signifies “Consolation from God,” and this is what we will receive by a consideration of some of his experiences recorded in the book that bears his name.

Nehemiah was the son of Hachaliah, of the tribe of Judah, of one of the prominent Hebrew families of the Babylonian captivity. The Medes and Persians had conquered Babylon. The second universal empire, represented by the breast and arms of silver of Nebuchadnezzar's vision, now ruled the world. Our story starts at about 445 BC, at Shushan, the palace of Artaxerxes, king of Persia. Josephus tells us that Nehemiah was a very young man at this time, probably in his twenties. In spite of his youth, he held a high rank in the royal court, that of cupbearer to the king. This title, sometimes translated “butler” is somewhat deceptive to modern ears and does not give the proper conception of the dignity of his position. His duties did not consist solely of tasting the king's food and drink to prevent poisoning. He was, in fact, one of the most trusted officers of the realm, a confidant of the king, always at his right hand. He was one whose advice the king valued and sought, what today we would call a Minister of State. Daniel held a similar position in his time in the universal empire of Babylon.

We are not told how it came about that young Nehemiah was appointed to such an exalted station. We can only surmise that as in the case of Daniel, it resulted from some sort of competitive examination in which Nehemiah excelled. We may be absolutely sure by his conduct that he was reared by Godly parents who from earliest infancy inculcated in him a reverence and love for the God of Israel; who taught him the history, language, and law of Israel; who imbued him with his ancient and rightful heritage, so that, although he was in Persia, he was not a Persian.

As confidential officer and counselor to the king, it was Nehemiah's duty to be acquainted with the mood and temper of the people so as to be able to advise the king of any potential threat to the empire. To this end, it appears to have been his custom to mingle, unrecognized, with the people in the marketplaces and especially among those of arriving caravans who could tell of conditions in other parts of the realm. Josephus tells us that he was doing this one day when he heard some new arrivals speaking the Hebrew language. He engaged them in conversation and was delighted to find that one of them was a close relative returning from an extended visit to Jerusalem. It was a tribute to Nehemiah's upbringing in the faith of his fathers that he eagerly inquired respecting the holy land, the holy city, God's holy temple, and the conditions of the Jews who had, years before,

returned from captivity in Babylon under the proclamation of Cyrus. He was deeply interested in the welfare of Israel. Now let us read the record in Nehemiah's own words:

“Hanani, one of my brethren, came, he and certain men of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, which were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. And they said unto me, The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction, and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire. And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days, and fasted and prayed before the God of heaven.”-- Nehemiah 1:2-4

Do you see how keenly young Nehemiah felt about his people? How closely he identified himself with them and the holy city? He had never seen Jerusalem. He had never been there. All he knew about its former glory was from nostalgic accounts by his parents and others of the captivity. Yet he was deeply moved and distressed to hear of the devastation and degradation of Jerusalem, so much so that he wept. It is an evidence of his great faith in the God of his fathers that he immediately and naturally turned to prayer.

Nehemiah Reverenced God

Let us consider some aspects of this beautiful and effectual prayer as found in Nehemiah 1:5-11.

“I beseech thee, O Lord God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and mercy for them that love him and observe his commandments.”

In effect Nehemiah said, “How great thou art!” He had a proper conception of the majesty of God. That word “terrible” in the original does not mean terrifying but rather “greatly to be revered.” Then he showed his familiarity with the holy scriptures by an almost direct quote from Deuteronomy 7:9, which reads:

“Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant, and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations.”

We continue from Nehemiah's prayer, verse 6:

“Let thine ear now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hear the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee now, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, and confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee.”

This reference to the ears and eyes of God reminds us of Hezekiah's prayer when he spread before the Lord the insulting letter from Sennacherib. He said, as recorded in 2 Kings 19:16:

“Lord, bow down thine ear, and hear; open, Lord, thine eyes, and see; and hear the words of Sennacherib, which he hath sent to reproach the living God!”

Such an expression is not at all presumptuous; it is entirely in harmony with one of the precious promises the Lord has given his people, found in Psalm 34:15, “The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry.” In the prayer Solomon made at the dedication of the temple, he said:

“Now, my God, let, I beseech thee, thine eyes be open, and let thine ears be attent unto the prayer that is made in this place.”--2 Chronicles 6:40

Then in his prayer Nehemiah made a confession, not only for himself, but for all Israel. He said:

“Both I and my father's house have sinned. We have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the judgments, which thou commandest thy servant Moses.”

A confession of sin should be a part of every prayer. Then Nehemiah reminded the Lord of certain promises he had made to his people. He said:

“Remember I beseech thee, the word that thou commandest thy servant Moses, saying, If ye transgress, I will scatter you abroad among the nations. But if ye turn unto me, and keep my commandments and do them; though there were of you cast out unto the uttermost part --under the heaven, yet will I gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen, to set my name there.”

In saying this, Nehemiah cited to the Lord his own edict of Leviticus 26:33:

“I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you, and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste.”

This is exactly what had happened to the holy land and the city of Jerusalem. This was a curse upon Israel because of their disobedience. But Nehemiah was a good Bible Student. He also knew that a blessing was promised if Israel obeyed the voice of the Lord. He called to mind, and cited to the Lord, the promise of Deuteronomy 30:1-3:

“And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and

thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations whither the Lord thy God hath driven thee, and shalt return unto the Lord thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; that then the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations whither the Lord thy God hath scattered thee.”



Do you see what Nehemiah did here? First, he quoted to God his own word, that he is a covenant-keeping God, a God that will surely perform what he has promised. Then he reminded the Lord of a promise he had made to regather his people under certain circumstances. Then he claimed the promise. This is reasoning with God. Then he concluded his prayer by specifically referring to the distressed inhabitants of devastated Jerusalem who desired to return to God and prosper. He said:

“Now these are thy servants, and thy people whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand. O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who desire to fear thy name, and prosper. I pray thee, thy servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man.”

The one referred to as “this man” was Artaxerxes, the king, an absolute monarch, not accountable to any parliament or laws, whose every whim was law. History records that he was arbitrary and self-willed, easily aroused to violent anger, often killing on the spot those who offended him. Artaxerxes was also called “Longimanus,” which means “long-handed.” His right hand was longer than his left. He was proud of this deformity, claiming it was the result of his frequent and sudden use of the sword. This was the man through which Nehemiah must work to accomplish his purpose!

God Answers His Prayer

Nehemiah did not pray only once and then wait for the Lord to answer him. He says that he prayed day and night. So this prayer is merely a summation of what he prayed continuously for four months. We know this because the first verse tells us that it was in the month Chisleu when he learned of the plight of Jerusalem and began to pray. We are told in Nehemiah 2:1 that it was in the month Nisan that he finally received an answer to his prayer, a lapse of four months. If his custom was the same as that of Daniel who prayed three times a day with his windows open toward Jerusalem (Daniel 6:10), Nehemiah must have uttered the sentiments of this prayer at least 360 times!

The answer came suddenly and unexpectedly. The king had prepared a banquet for his nobles at which the queen also was present. We can imagine that the guests were all attired in their best silks and jewels, and were smiling and joyous. Nehemiah, as usual, was at the king's right hand so that he might taste of the food and wine before it was served to the king. As he served the wine, the king glanced up and noticed the contrast between Nehemiah and the happy guests. He saw a sadness and pallor he had never seen before. After all, let us remember, Nehemiah had not only been praying, but had also been fasting, eating sparingly for four months, sorrowing on behalf of his people. He was gaunt and hollow-eyed. Artaxerxes placed his hand on Nehemiah's arm. “What's troubling you?” he asked. “Everybody else here is happy, and you are sad. Are you sick?” “Oh no, your majesty,” Nehemiah replied, trying to smile, “I am quite well.” The king's eyes bored into his own. “Well, then,” he said, “If you art not sick, it must be a great sadness of the heart. It shows on your face.” Nehemiah was terrified. As he himself expresses it in Nehemiah 2:2,

“Then I was very sore afraid.” Or, as Moffatt puts it: “I was dreadfully afraid at this.”

Why was he so frightened? It was because he well knew the temper of his king. He had seen this man summarily thrust through with his sword any who offended him. Nehemiah realized that his sadness of heart might be misconstrued. It might indicate to the king a spirit of discontent and loss of interest in his duties, even disloyalty and treachery. An urgent, silent prayer, went up to God and Nehemiah quickly recovered his poise. He instantly realized that this might be the Lord's doing, proving just the opportunity he sought. We read his words in Nehemiah 2:3,4:

“And I said unto the king, Let the king live for ever. Why should not my countenance be sad, when the city, the place of my father's sepulchres, lieth waste and the gates thereof are consumed with fire? Then the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of heaven.”

The exact words that he should speak to the king now came easily and readily to his lips, as though prompted from above:

“And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favor in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my father's sepulchres, that I may build it. And the king said unto me, (the queen also sitting by him), For how long shall thy --journey be? And when wilt thou return? So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time.”

Nehemiah Receives a Leave of Absence

It was no short time that Nehemiah set. We know from Nehemiah 5:14 that he asked for and got a twelve-year leave of absence!

It took great courage for Nehemiah to make the request he did. The king could easily have considered the rebuilding of the walls and gates of Jerusalem an act of rebellion against his rule--a desire by Nehemiah to set up the nation of Israel as a separate and rival government with himself as king. In fact, we read in the fourth chapter of Ezra that this same king, Artaxerxes, had previously stopped the restoration work of Ezra because of similar accusations. So when Nehemiah asked for what he did, he laid his life on the line. He won, because the Lord had answered his oft-repeated prayer: “Grant me mercy in the sight of this man.”

Nehemiah had complete confidence that his prayer would eventually be answered. He didn't know just how or when it would be answered, but he knew it would be. He had complete faith. We know this because he had carefully planned in advance just what he would need for the success of his undertaking, just what he would request

of the king when the opportunity came. He didn't have to go away and figure it out, then come back and ask the king for more favors. He struck while the iron was hot without hesitation. This is evident from the next two verses:

“Moreover, I said unto the king, If it please the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the river, that they may convey me over, till I come to Judah; and a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the palace which appertained to the house, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into. And the king granted me, according to the good hand of my God upon me.”-- Nehemiah 2:7,8

So we see that Nehemiah had the necessities of the work all laid out in his mind. He had done his homework. This also indicates how closely he had previously questioned his kinsman as to the details of the damage which must be repaired. Such foresight and thoroughness impressed the king with his wisdom. He not only granted Nehemiah's requests, but gave him what he had not requested. He appointed him Governor of Judea, and gave him a strong military escort of cavalry befitting a governor.

A four-month journey brought them to Jerusalem where Nehemiah was welcomed by the desolate city's inhabitants. He did not at first reveal the object of his coming, nor the fact that he had been appointed their governor. To them he was simply a visiting dignitary, a wealthy young Hebrew who had attained high office in the Persian government. This they could see from his military escort and the richness of his caravan. He wanted to first make a personal appraisal of the situation. After three days of mingling with the people and becoming well acquainted with them and their tribal rulers, he secretly made his inspection of the ruined city. He waited until everyone was asleep. Then on horseback accompanied by a few trusted servants on foot, he toured the broken walls by moonlight. We read his own words:

“And I arose in the night, I, and some few men with me; neither told I any man what my God had put in my heart to do at Jerusalem. Neither was there any beast with me, save the beast that I rode upon. And I went out by night, by the gate of the valley, even before the dragon well, and to the dung port, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire. Then I went on to the gate of the fountain, and to the king's pool; but there was no place for the beast that was under me to pass. Then I went up, in the night by the brook, and viewed the wall; and turned back, and entered by the gate of the valley, and so returned. And the rulers knew not whither I went, or what I did; neither had I as yet told it to the Jews, nor to the priests, nor to the

nobles, nor to the rulers, nor to the rest that did the work.”--
Nehemiah 2:12-16

This moonlight ride would have been a --distressing experience for Nehemiah. If before he had wept when he had merely heard of the plight of Jerusalem, how overwhelmed he must now have been to see it with his own eyes! But now he had firsthand knowledge of the facts. What he had seen confirmed the feasibility of his plan for rebuilding.



The next morning he called together the elders and prominent representatives of the people and explained to them the real --object of his coming. He showed them his authority from the king and told them how God had heard his prayer and how wonderfully he had prospered him in this undertaking. Then he outlined to them a method whereby the repair work could begin immediately. We read his words:

“Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in; how Jerusalem lieth waste and the gates thereof are burned with fire. Come, let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we be no more a

reproach. Then I told them of the hand of my God, which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build! So they strengthened their hands for this good work.”-- Nehemiah 2:17,18

Do you see how Nehemiah was able to inspire the people? He fired them with his own zeal. It was they who said: “Let us rise up and build!” As they went to work, Nehemiah worked with them. He worked as hard as any of them with his hand, with stone, mortar and heavy timbers.

Why was the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem considered so important? Was it merely a status symbol? No, it was not just that. There was also a very practical aspect. With the city walls broken down, the enemies of the Jews raided and robbed them regularly. They were at the mercy of every nomadic tribe that chanced to ride that way. But if the walls were repaired, it would be a different story. My Bible dictionary says of the original walled city:

“Jerusalem was an almost impregnable Gibraltar. The steep sides of the ravines on the east, the south, and the west provided bulwarks against siege. The north was the only direction from which a foe could attack the city, under the conditions of ancient warfare.”

No one knows how high the original walls were but as restored in 1542 AD, they ranged from 20 to 60 feet high. It seems likely that the original walls formed an irregular quadrangle a little more than two miles in circuit.

In the third chapter of his book, Nehe--miah lists 50 families as participating in the building work. This would mean an average of about 240 linear feet of wall for each family to repair. It was Nehemiah's plan that each family would work on that portion of the wall nearest its home quarters. This was a wise plan. Each would be specially interested in having the wall strong in his own neighborhood. There would be a certain degree of proper pride of workmanship, each family making their portion of the wall a monument to their skill.

Through many trials, difficulties and discouragements, which could well be the subject of another discourse, the work progressed. Every difficulty was overruled by the Lord and the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem, with the original stones, was completed in the incredibly short time of 52 days!

Lessons for Us

Now let us consider some of the valuable lessons to be learned from this account. --Although Nehemiah was a very young man, he was held in high esteem by the king as possessing rare ability. This

reminds us of Paul's words to Timothy, in 1 Timothy 4:12, which I will read from the Weymouth translation:

“Let no one think slightly of you because you are a young man; but in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, be an example for your fellow Christians to imitate.”

The younger brothers and sisters of our fellowship should not be despised. It must not be presumed that they are “shallow” because they are young. This is a serious mistake. Stephen too was a young man, but in a few months he made his calling and election sure. By contrast, I have been in this narrow way for 67 years. The Lord held young Stephen in such high esteem that he was accounted worthy of the honor of being the first to follow his Master's footsteps even unto death.

The fact that Nehemiah was so carefully reared in the faith of his fathers has a lesson for those of us who are the parents of young children. Just as Nehemiah was born in Persia and received his formal education in that heathen nation, our children are subject to the influences of this present evil world. But these influences can be counteracted by godly parents. Nehemiah's intensity of feeling for the welfare of Jerusalem indicated that this had been accomplished in his case. Similarly it is our privilege and duty to imbue our children with the truth, with a feeling for the Lord and his people. As Nehemiah was taught the Hebrew language by his parents, we can teach our children the language of the truth. Who knows if the Lord may not draw them and use them for exalted service as he did Nehemiah? Let us at least prepare them for the Master's use.

In the World But Not Of It

As Nehemiah was in Persia, but was not a Persian, the Christian is in the world, but not of the world. Jesus said of such: “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” (John 17:16) No matter what our positions in the world, whether high or low, our primary interest should be the welfare of Zion. We should have an intensity of feeling for the truth and its service, praying for opportunities, ready to act when the Lord opens the way.

The thing that particularly distressed Nehemiah was the condition of the walls of Jerusalem. We read in Nehemiah 1:3,4 that they reported to him: “The wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.” Then he gives us his reaction to this report, saying: “And it came to pass, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept.” Without walls, Jerusalem was no city. It had no cohesion, no integrity, no honor. Enemies could invade and rob and plunder at will. It was a by-word and a laughing-stock. In the words of Nehemiah 2:17 it was “a reproach.” The Church, as established by

our Lord and the apostles, was a city or community of God. As we read in Hebrews 12:22,23:

“But ye are come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels; to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven.”

The primitive church was a city that had walls. It had integrity and cohesion. It was held together by a strong faith in the truth, “the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” (Jude 3) The great Divine Plan of Salvation was understood. As Isaiah 60:18 expresses it prophetically: “Thou shalt call thy walls Salvation, and thy gates Praise.” This “most holy faith” was its protection against the assaults of the adversary. The walls of sound doctrine kept the church apart and safe. But after the apostles fell asleep, the walls began to be broken down. Paul foresaw this, saying:

“For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things.”-- Acts 20:29,30

False doctrines and evil practices began to be introduced into the Church. Paul's prophecy of 2 Timothy 4:3,4 was also fulfilled:

“For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers having itching ears; and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned to fables.”

As the great antichrist system developed, the walls of Zion were broken down more and more until, in the Dark Ages, little remained of the original structure of sound doctrine. Even the great foundation stone of the Ransom was lost amid the rubble. Then came the reformation and the walls began to be rebuilt, in spite of great opposition. David's prayer of Psalm 51:18, echoed by faithful Christians, began to be answered: “Do good in thy good pleasure unto Zion. Build thou the walls of Jerusalem.” Truths long lost sight of were rediscovered and placed in their proper settings. The work of rebuilding accelerated. Then Christ returned and by the hand of a Faithful and Wise Servant, the structure of sound doctrine was rebuilt to completion. Don't forget that Nehemiah used the same old stones to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. He did not quarry new ones. Similarly it was the old, old story, “the faith once delivered to the saints,” that was restored.

Rebuilding Spiritual Walls

There is a tendency to disturb the walls of Jerusalem again. Some feel they can improve the walls by substituting new stones for the

old ones, by changing the contour, chipping off a little here, and adding a little there. Such feel they know more about how it should be than the original architect and the faithful restorer. I don't think they do.

Then there is another meaning to a city with broken-down walls. It is a more personal application and is given in Proverbs 25:28: "He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down and without walls." The "spirit" referred to here is the spirit or disposition of mind, the thoughts of the mind that control our -- actions. We must rule our thoughts and imaginations, and cast out and keep out anything unprofitable to us as new creatures. Our warfare is in the mind. The new creature is developed in the mind. The new creature must use our fleshly mind as its instrument, making it a captive of the new will, the mind of Christ. This is concisely stated in 2 Corinthians 10:5:

"Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God; and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

This is not something which is easily accomplished. The building of stone walls is not easy. It takes energy and stamina.

Those who come into the truth have their spiritual "walls" in varying stages of disrepair. Some of us have more work to do than others. But as we learn to exercise self-control, first in little things, and then, persistently and progressively conform our thoughts and words and deeds to the perfect standard, we will gain in strength of character. This is illustrated by the legend of Milo of Croton. To develop his strength, Milo one day lifted a small calf to his shoulders and carried it for a mile. The next day he did the same thing, and the next day, and the next day. He carried that same animal for a mile every day for four years. As the calf gradually grew, Milo's muscles developed correspondingly, until at the last he was able to carry a full-grown ox upon his shoulders. Of course our flesh will never be brought under complete control, but the will must be there. The spirit must be ruled. Such a development of character is highly prized by the Lord. He has caused to be written in Proverbs 16:32: "He that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city."

Walls also have another significance for the Lord's people. There are walls between us and the world. We are separated from the world by walls of thought and action. Our thoughts are not their thoughts neither are their ways our ways. Let us keep the walls of separation from the world in good repair. As we are exhorted in 2 Corinthians 6:17: "Come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord."

As Nehemiah earnestly prayed for the welfare of Jerusalem and of fleshly Israel, our earnest prayers should be in the interests of Zion, for spiritual food: "Pray ye the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth laborers into his harvest." In harmony with this, our resolution is:

"Daily will I remember, at the Throne of Heavenly Grace, the general interests of the harvest work, and particularly the share which I myself am privileged to enjoy in that work, and the dear co-laborers everywhere."

We should, as Nehemiah was, become personally and emotionally involved, thinking of our part in the Lord's work. We have a work of development in ourselves; we also build up one another in the most holy faith; and we witness to the world, as we have opportunity. As Nehemiah cited and claimed God's promises to Israel, we should claim and lay hold upon all the "exceeding great and precious promises, that by these we might be partakers of the divine nature."--
2 Peter 1:4

Answers to Prayer May Be Delayed

Nehemiah prayed four months before the answer came. That does not mean God had not heard his prayer. There was good reason for the delay. Not only was it a test of Nehemiah's sincerity and faith, but favorable circumstances were being shaped. In due course there came the occasion of a special banquet at which the queen was present and the king was in an expansive mood. In the meantime Nehemiah's long, self-imposed, ordeal had altered his appearance so that the king noticed it and made sympathetic inquiry. Thus the stage was perfectly set for Nehemiah's best interests. So with us. When we have made a request, the Lord often keeps us waiting. We cannot always understand why, but there is always a good reason. In addition to being a test of our sincerity and faith, perhaps it is a shaping of circumstances, so that the outcome may be more glorious. Let us be persistent in our prayers for the right things as Nehemiah was, remembering the precious promise of Romans 8:28 that "all things work together for good to them that love God; to them who are the called according to his purpose."

Sometimes when things seem to be --going the worst, they are really going the best. When the king noticed and commented on his paleness, Nehemiah says: "Then was I very sore afraid." He thought the worst had happened and that he might lose everything, although it was really the beginning of the answer to his prayer. A good maxim is: "When in doubt, pray." --Another way of saying the same thing is: "When your knees are knocking, kneel on them." At the time of his greatest fear, --Nehemiah prayed. This was his instant

and automatic reaction. As we read in Nehemiah 2:4, “The the king said unto me, For what dost thou make request? So I prayed to the God of Heaven.” It was a --silent prayer, a prayer of the heart. The --answer came instantly. This time it didn't take four months! So let us never be terrified when everything seems to be going wrong. It may be, as the poet has said: “The clouds ye so much dread, are big with mercy, and shall break, in blessings on your head.” Nehemiah had prayed: “Grant thy servant mercy in the sight of this man.” He got the help he sought. Similarly in the language of Hebrews 4:16,

“Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

The king gave Nehemiah more than he requested. He not only approved his mission but, additionally, appointed him governor of Judea and assigned him a military escort. This reminds us of the case of Solomon, related in 1 Kings chapter three. When the Lord said to him, “Ask what I shall give thee,” Solomon simply asked for an understanding heart. The Lord was pleased and granted him not only a wise and understanding heart, but much more than that. He gave him great riches and honor besides. So with us. The Lord is very generous to his people. If we ask in accordance with his will, he will not only grant our request but give us much more than we ask, things that we do not even think to ask for. He has the power to do so. It is written of him: “Now unto him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us.” (Ephesians 3:20)

In Malachi 3:10 he says for us to try him and prove if this is not so:

“Prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.”

We too have been granted a powerful military escort by our great king. We have the same protection that Elisha had, of whom we read in 2 Kings 6:17, that: “The mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.” These forces of the Lord encircled him for his protection, and they encircle us. Just as Nehemiah's escort of cavalry surrounded and protected him on his journey, we read of our heavenly escort in Psalm 34:7, “The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.”

Nehemiah was undoubtedly one of the faithful ones referred to in the 11th chapter of Hebrews who will be “princes in all the earth.” He fits the description. He “wrought righteousness; obtained promises; escaped the edge of the sword; out of weakness was made strong; had trials of cruel mockings; of whom the world was not worthy.” He finally “obtained a good report through faith.”

Nehemiah somehow sensed that the Lord would have use for him at another time, in another age. He wanted so much to continue to serve his God beyond this life. He wanted to be remembered and resurrected, and given more opportunities to serve. So in the last chapter of his book he expresses a certain wistfulness and yearning. It is similar to that of Job who prayed: "O that thou wouldst appoint me a set time and remember me!" In Nehemiah 13:14, he says, with great earnestness:

"Remember me, O my God, concerning this; and wipe not out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God."

Then in Nehemiah 13:22 he refers to his restoring of sabbath observance, and expresses his heart desire: "Remember me, O my God, concerning this also; and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy." His last word, in the last verse of his book are: "Remember me, O my God, for good!"

Do you see how Nehemiah casts himself on the mercy of God? We can do this, too. We can pray,

"Remember me for good. I don't know how faithful I have been. I have tried so hard! I cast myself upon thee. Into thy hands, I commend my spirit. Remember me, O my God, for good!"

Ointment, Very Precious

“Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her.”--Matthew 26:13

WE ARE told that “God is love.” (1 John 4:8) Love is God's predominant characteristic. It tempers his every act. Everything he has done, is doing, or will do, is motivated by love. When God created his only begotten son, who became Christ Jesus, he endowed him with his own attributes. Therefore love was the dominant trait of Jesus also. God loved his human creation even when they were sinners:

“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”--Romans 5:8 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”--John 3:16

But the love of God did not compel the sacrifice. Not at all. Jesus Christ in his prehuman existence also loved the world with the same intensity as his Father. At one time he told his disciples, “I and my Father are one.” (John 10:30) He told Philip, “He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father.” (John 14:9) When he saw Adam's race suffering and dying under the heel of Satan, his heart went out to them. He demonstrated his great love by volunteering to be the redeemer, the ransom. It was the greatest love that could possibly be demonstrated because we read, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13)

When Jesus became a man, his every act was characterized by love and compassion, just like his heavenly Father.

“But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.”--Matthew 9:36

He demonstrated his love by giving lavishly of his strength and vitality, healing all their diseases.

But there are different degrees of love. For example, as members of the Little Flock, we love the world of mankind in general. It must be so because we are looking forward to blessing them in the millennial kingdom. We long for those times of restitution to fully come--times when we can give life and health to the people of the world. But we love the members of our earthly families more than we love the world, do we not? It is only natural that we should do so. If we are obedient to the --command, we also love our enemies. But of course we do not love our enemies as much as we love our brethren in

Christ. So although Jesus had compassion on the multitude, the lame, the halt and the blind, and his heart of love went out to them in miracles of healing, yet he loved his --disciples more. He prized them highly. He thanked God for them: "Thine they were, and thou gavest them me." (John 17:6) This, too, is only natural.

Love intensifies love. The multitude had regard for Jesus, but only because of the material benefits they received. As --Jesus himself said when they thought to take him by force to make him a king:

"Verily, verily, I say unto you: Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves and were filled."--John 6:26

His disciples were different. They loved him for himself, because of his message, because of his gracious words, because he came from and represented the heavenly Father, and because of his personal goodness. As to material benefits, the disciples left more than they got. As Peter expressed it: "Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee." (Matthew 19:27) So it is natural that Jesus would love them more than the others.

Jesus Could Read the Heart

Let us go one step further. Jesus was extremely perceptive. He could read men's minds. He knew what they were inside--their characters and heart's desires were an open book to him. He could see and measure their degree of love for him. In regard to their love for him some of his disciples were more noble than others. Jesus knew it and reciprocated. He loved some of his disciples more than others. John, for example, is frequently referred to as "the disciple whom Jesus loved."

There were other disciples whom Jesus especially loved: "Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister [who was Mary], and Lazarus." (John 11:5) Why did Jesus love them especially? Probably because they loved him especially. They loved to have Jesus in their home and he was a frequent guest there. Jesus greatly appreciated their hospitality. He had no home of his own: "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." (Luke 9:58) He wandered from place to place in his ministry, without a home.

Once he had returned to his childhood home in Nazareth. This was the only real earthly home he had known. As he neared it he must have had some feelings as he saw the house he had lived in as a boy. --Perhaps he hoped to rest there for a while among old friends, perhaps in the very room he had occupied as a child. But what happened? His home-town people tried to throw him headlong over a cliff! The --account is found in Luke 4:16 to 30. That wasn't much

of a home. In other places when he entered into a house, the people crowded in after him so there was no room to move around, much less rest. There is an account in Mark chapter 2 about such an incident. The doorways of the house were so jammed that a man with the palsy could not be brought to Jesus to be healed. They finally removed the roof tiles to let down the bed upon which the sick man lay so Jesus could heal him.

When Jesus was in the vicinity of Jerusalem in the evening after his work was done, he used to slip away from the multitudes and walk about two miles from Jerusalem to the quiet little village of Bethany, to the home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus, where he was assured of a warm and hearty welcome, where he could eat, rest, relax and restore his strength. This was the closest he came to a home of his own on this earth.

On one occasion when Jesus was teaching in Jerusalem, he walked through that part of the temple called Solomon's Porch.

“Then came the Jews about him and said unto him: How long dost thou make us to doubt [or, hold us in suspense]? If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly.”--John 10:24

That sounds like a sincere and innocent question. To the casual reader, the implication is: “Tell us plainly that you are the Christ, the Messiah, and we will accept you, and follow you.” Ah, but there's something wrong here. Notice that they came “round about” him; they made a ring around him, they surrounded him. If they had come to him with a sincere desire to hear and learn, they would have stood before him. They would have faced him. Jesus immediately sensed that they had violence in mind and that the question they asked was designed to provide an excuse for it. He did not show the slightest fear, but --answered them plainly, saying that he was indeed the Son of God. He even said, “I and my Father are one.” (v. 30) This is what they were waiting to hear him say! This was blasphemy! Then, suddenly, an astonishing thing happened: there was a stone in the hand of each Jew who surrounded Jesus.

Let us remember that this was in the temple at Jerusalem, the very center of Jewish worship. It was a revered and holy place. They were in that part of the temple called Solomon's Porch, a very special place in the temple. We read in 1 Chronicles 28:11 that David himself had designed this porch and had given the pattern to Solomon to incorporate in the temple plan. Do you suppose there were a lot of stones lying around on the floor in such a place as that, stones the Jews could stoop down and pick up? You see what was happening. This was premeditated murder. Each of those men had brought a stone with him, concealed upon his person, with the express object of killing Jesus. Jesus looked around at them, and what he said next

showed his contempt for them. He calmly reiterated that God was his Father:

“Jesus answered them, Many good works have I showed you from my Father. For which of these works do you stone me? The Jews answered him saying: For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God.”--John 10:32,33

Then Jesus completely exploded their accusation of blasphemy by pointing out that in their law, even their human judges, or rulers of old, are called gods:

“Thou shalt not revile the gods [margin, judges] nor curse the ruler of thy people.”--Exodus 22:28

But of course they had not come to reason, they had come to kill. The stones were raised and in the next instant they would have been cast. But something happened. Their arms did not function and they fell back as Jesus calmly walked through their midst. The Diaglott says that “He went forth out of their hand.” (v. 39) Jesus knew they would try again to stone him. Since his time had not yet come, he left Jerusalem to teach elsewhere. He and his disciples journeyed to the far region beyond Jordan where John the Baptist had first preached. The scripture says, “Many believed on him there.” (v. 42)

This is where Jesus was when Lazarus the brother of Martha and Mary took sick. The account is found in John chapter 11. We read: “Therefore his sisters sent unto him, saying, Lord, behold he whom thou lovest is sick.” This was no ordinary sickness. It was serious enough for Mary and Martha to be very worried. They had to be to send someone about two days journey to ask Jesus to interrupt his ministry and return to Bethany. They expected, of course, that Jesus would come immediately because they knew he loved Lazarus very much. But Jesus remained where he was until Lazarus died. When he finally returned to Bethany, Lazarus had been dead four days. When Jesus approached their home, Martha came out to meet him and said: “Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.” Then Mary also came to Jesus, fell down at his feet, and said: “Lord if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.”

This affected Jesus very deeply, to see those whom he especially loved so sad and stricken. Lazarus was dead, Mary and Martha were weeping, overwhelmed with deepest grief, and he loved them all so dearly. “Jesus wept.” Perhaps this is one of the scenes that Isaiah saw centuries --before in prophetic vision when he wrote: “Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows.” (Isaiah 53:4) This was a demonstration that human griefs and sorrows do touch Jesus' heart. He takes them to heart. He feels them! They become his own. He does something about it. The magnificent display of God's power

with which he then raised Lazarus from the dead, the way he instantly changed the sorrow and weeping of Mary and Martha into joy, illustrates and foretells how he will, in due time, use the merit of his ransom sacrifice in a great resurrection, turning the present night of weeping into a morning of joy. This is what the psalmist saw when he wrote: “Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.” (Psalms 30:5)

Lessons for Us

There are further lessons we can learn from this incident. When Jesus heard that Lazarus was sick, he did not immediately come; he stayed away until Lazarus died. Sometimes we reach a serious crisis in our lives, something we cannot handle by ourselves. We go to the Lord urgently asking for help just as Mary and Martha who sent for Jesus to come. Sometimes the Lord does not respond as quickly as we think he should. In fact, a response may be withheld until, as far as we can see, it is too late. The damage has been done. Lazarus dies, so to speak, and nothing is more final than death. Then we despair.

Although we may not reproach God, we do say, in effect and with aching heart: “Lord, if only you had done something faster!” It is like Mary and Martha who said, “Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died!” However, Jesus' --delay in returning to Bethany resulted in a much more glorious demonstration of power than a mere healing. An unheard-of thing happened! The grim finality of death was shattered: “He that was dead, came forth!” So with us. When our prayers are not answered, we sometimes think in our human wisdom that all is lost, that the --results are so final, that it is too late for --anything to be done. But it is in just such -- “impossible” situations that God often gives his more glorious demonstrations of power, raising dead hopes to newness of life and turning the deepest sorrow into the greatest joy.

It was after this incident of raising Lazarus from the dead that the chief priests and the Pharisees held a council and condemned Jesus to death in absentia. Their problem was to catch him. We read:

“Jesus therefore walked no more openly among the Jews, but went thence unto a country near to the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim, and there continued with his disciples.”--John 11:54

But the chief priests and Pharisees had a plan. The time for the Jewish Passover was near and they knew it was Jesus' custom to celebrate the feast in Jerusalem with his disciples. So they set out spies in the temple and elsewhere, probably with a promise of reward, to let them know when Jesus appeared:

“Then they sought Jesus, and spake among themselves, as they stood in the temple: What think ye; that he will not come to the

feast? Now both the chief priests and the Pharisees had given a commandment, that if any man knew where he was, he should show it, that they might take him.”--John 11:56,57

They were right. Jesus did intend to keep the Passover at Jerusalem. After leaving Ephraim, he approached Jerusalem several days before the Passover. He knew he was about to die. He knew the Jews would take him, that he would suffer, that he would be crucified. Knowing this, where do you suppose he would want to spend some of his last hours on earth? I think you can guess it.

Skirting Jerusalem, Jesus, accompanied by a few disciples, came to Bethany in the evening, to the home of those whom he loved and who loved him--to the home of Mary, Martha and Lazarus. What a warm and hearty welcome he must have received! “Master, we have missed you so much. You must be tired and hungry. Here is water for washing the dust of the road. Rest yourself until supper is ready.” The supper was soon prepared and served. We read:

“Then Jesus, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead. There they made him a supper, and Martha served; but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him.”--John 12:1,2

Martha was serving, but where was Mary? Jesus must have remembered a similar --occasion in the past when he had supped here before. That time also, Martha served but Mary sat at his feet, hearing his every word. Martha had come to him then, saying, somewhat impatiently:

“Dost thou not care, that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her, therefore that she help me. And Jesus answered and said unto her. Martha, Martha; thou art anxious about many things; but one thing is needful, and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.”--Luke 10:38-42

Both women loved Jesus, but they manifested their love differently. Jesus did not disapprove of Martha and her carefulness as a cook in providing for his comfort, but he especially appreciated the spirit of Mary, a spirit that drew her to his feet to hear his every word. What gracious words, what wonderful words they were! They were wonderful words of life! What a privilege it was to hear the words of God directly from the mouth of the Son of God! In her fascination with the heavenly conversation of Jesus, Mary had forgotten about the need for the preparation of material food. In this, her spirit reflected that of Jesus after he had fasted for 40 days. He said: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” (Matthew 4:4) The same thought is expressed by Job: “I have esteemed the words of his mouth, more than my necessary food.” (Job 23:12) Mary was just as hungry for the words

of Jesus as a starving man is for bread, and Jesus loved her for it. Jeremiah felt the same way:

“Thy words were found, and I did eat them, and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart.”--Jeremiah 15:16

Jesus must have fondly remembered that previous occasion. Now he was once again at supper in the same home in Bethany. Once again, loving and faithful Martha was serving alone. Where was Mary, the one who loved to sit at his feet and hear his word? Martha must have known where Mary was, that she had gone to get something very special, because this time Martha did not come to Jesus, demanding that Mary help her with the work. Then, as Jesus and his disciples and Lazarus were at the table, Mary quietly entered the room.

Mary Anoints Jesus

Let us try to visualize the scene. It was the custom in those days to eat at a low table in a half-reclining position, with the feet drawn up, on mats or couches arranged around the table. Mary came up behind Jesus holding a beautiful alabaster box in her hands. She quickly broke the seal and poured the contents of very precious perfume, first upon Jesus head, then upon his feet. Kneeling down, she began to wipe Jesus' feet with her hair. The whole house was filled with the delightful fragrance of the perfume. The account is found in Matthew chapter 26, Mark chapter 14, and John chapter 12. It was not a tiny vial of perfume that Mary poured upon Jesus. John says it was a whole pound of spikenard. Spikenard is an essence derived from a rare and aromatic root. It would take an enormous quantity of this root to yield a pound of essence. Perfume of spikenard was so costly in ancient times that it was reserved for use only by kings, princes and other nobility. It was prepared in a manner similar to attar of roses, which was --another perfume made in ancient times. My encyclopedia says it took 100,000 roses to produce only 180 grains, or less than half an ounce of attar of roses. 100,000 roses, arranged side by side, would extend almost five miles and would weigh over three tons. Such a quantity of roses after laborious treatment and distillation would yield only half an ounce of perfume. Mary poured a whole pound of spikenard on Jesus. That's why Matthew and Mark call it “very precious”; John calls it “very costly.”

Now we can better understand the reaction of the disciples to this act of Mary:

“Then said one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, Why was not this ointment sold for 300 pence and given to the poor? This was said, not that he cared for the poor,

but because he was a thief and had the bag, and bare what was put therein.”--John 12:4-6

Although Judas had an ulterior motive, the others were swayed by him and immediately agreed. Matthew says: “But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying: To what purpose is this waste? For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor.” Mark reports: “Why was this waste of the ointment made? For it might have been sold for more than 300 pence, and have been given to the poor. And they murmured against her.”

In those days a penny was a day's wages for a man. (Matthew 20:2) Ignoring the Sabbaths and other holy days when no work was done, 300 pence was a year's wages at that time. How much is a year's wages today? This alabaster box of perfume must have been either an heirloom that had been handed down in Mary's family, or else the result of Mary's own labors over a long period of time. It was apparently not purchased for the occasion because if it had, Judas would have deplored spending the money in the first place. Instead he suggested its sale for 300 pence. Judas, the thief, had probably known of its existence and had his eye on it for some time. He undoubtedly expected Mary would eventually sell it and donate the money for Jesus' ministry. Then he would have it because Judas had charge of the treasury. The Diaglott says he “stole what things were deposited in it.” He had apparently gone to the trouble of having the alabaster box appraised. How else could he quote an exact figure of 300 pence so readily? He was terribly disappointed when Mary poured out the perfume on --Jesus.

We can see what a lavish act of love this represented on Mary's part. She loved Jesus with her whole heart; nothing was too good for her beloved. She freely poured out to him her most precious possession and then, lest her act be construed as containing any element of pride or vanity, she knelt down and with her hair, her crowning glory, she humbly wiped his feet.

I think we can guess what was going through Jesus' mind just before Mary did this beautiful thing. During the last few days, Jesus had been trying to tell his disciples that he was going to leave them--that he would go to Jerusalem, be delivered into the hands of the Jews, be tormented and crucified, and return to his Father in heaven. But they wouldn't believe him.

“From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples how he must go into Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee.”--Matthew 16:21,22

They just didn't understand. Had they --understood and believed he would be with them just a few days longer, how different their attitude would be! How they would prize the last few hours of his presence! How lovingly and carefully would they listen to his last words. He had so much to tell then before his death. He yearned to tell them many things. But no. When he referred to his death, they thought he spoke in parables. "Be it far from thee, Lord," they said. They didn't understand. There was no one on earth that understood. These must have been the thoughts of Jesus at the supper table there in Bethany that night. They were sad, lonely and disappointed thoughts. It was then that Mary came up behind him with her precious alabaster box of spikenard. So rare was this perfume that emperors and kings used it sparingly. But so full was Mary's love that she lavished a whole pound on one anointing of Jesus; and, by so doing, proclaimed him to be above all the emperors and kings of the earth--to be King of Kings and Lord of Lords! How refreshing it was to the spirit of Jesus! What lift and buoyancy of spirit it gave him! He took it, as well he might, as a sign from heaven that all was well and would be well. Mary's act was the act of an angel, ministering to him.

Then, suddenly, a clamor broke out all around. Carping, criticizing voices arose. "What a waste!" "Why was not this ointment sold and the money given to the poor?" "This woman has no regard for the poor!" "Lord, rebuke her! She has thrown away 300 pence!" It was the disciples of Jesus, incited by Judas. Instead of commending, they condemned. They spoke as though, by this tender act, Mary had been guilty of a great sin. Mary was hurt and humiliated. Tears came to her eyes and she bowed her head in shame. Jesus turned and laid his hand softly, with a blessing, on Mary's head. Turning to his disciples he said:

"Why do you criticize her? Let her alone. She has done a wonderful thing for me. Without realizing it, she has poured this ointment on me before my death; but really to prepare my body for burial. The poor ye have always with you; but me ye have not always. I have been telling you of my impending death, but me ye have not understood. She hath done what she could, and this is such a wonderful act of love, and devotion, THAT I WANT ALL AGES AND GENERATIONS to know about it. Verily I say unto you, wheresoever this gospel shall be preached, in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her."

Do you realize what this means, what a wide publication this implies? Jesus said, "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations." (Matthew 24:14) That is how widely he wanted this incident related.

Thus, Jesus rebuked the attitude of the disciples, impressing on them that there are things far more important than money. They humbly took his rebuke and were ashamed--all, that is, except one. In the next verses after this narrative, we read:

“Then one of the twelve, called Judas Iscariot went unto the chief priests, and said unto them: What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you? And they covenanted with him, for thirty pieces of silver.”--Matthew 26:14,15

This event at Bethany had been the last straw for Judas. He had been following Jesus for his own personal enrichment, systematically stealing from the treasury of the group. Now Jesus was apparently encouraging his followers to dissipate their resources and the money would no longer fall into his hands. Jesus had plainly said he was going to die. Judas knew that the chief priests, scribes and Pharisees had offered a reward for anyone betraying Jesus into their hands. To the perverted and twisted mind of Judas, it was but a natural decision; he may as well have their money as anyone else.

Mary's act of devotion with the alabaster box had touched Jesus' heart as nothing else had done, so he commanded that it be brought to the remembrance of all to whom the gospel is preached. But there are other reasons too, for remembering and considering this episode. There are precious lessons to be learned and much encouragement to be derived from doing so. Let us now consider some of them.

Lessons from Mary's Act

Whenever Mary was in the presence of --Jesus, she forgot everything else except to listen to his words, to learn of Him. When Martha protested that Mary was not helping her serve, Jesus implied that what Mary was doing was good, and was also important. “Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her,” he said. (Luke 10:42) The lesson is that the Lord does not condemn those who, lacking the ability and opportunity for prominent service, simply sit at the feet of Jesus and hear his word. Neither should we be critical of such. It has been suggested that Martha was not concerned merely with her cooking, but also in the niceties of hospitality which in our Lord's and Mary's estimation were not important compared with the words Jesus had to say. This could be implied from what Jesus said to her: “Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things.”--Luke 10:41>

What did the very precious ointment or perfume, which Mary lavishly poured upon the head and feet of Jesus signify? I think the primary significance is love, pure, fervent love. “Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart; so does the sweetness of a man's friend.”

(Proverbs 27:9) “A friend loveth at all times.” (Proverbs 17:17) This is what Mary demonstrated.

In the highly figurative language of the Hebrews, the sensing of an aroma is used to denote the perception of a moral quality in another. Thus, God is said to “smell a sweet odor” from a sacrifice to signify he perceives with pleasure the good disposition which the offerer expressed by such an act of worship. (See Diaglott, page 656) David expresses a similar meaning:

“Let my prayer be set before thee as incense, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.”--Psalms 141:2

The fervent, sincere prayer of the heart is to God a sweet savor. This is confirmed in Revelation which speaks of “golden vials, full of odors [or perfume], which are the prayers of saints.” (Revelation 5:8)

Mary first poured the perfume upon the head of Jesus. Our love and adoration is primarily to our head, Christ Jesus, the head of the body of Christ. Our sacrifices which rise as a sweet odor before God are acceptable because of him. Our prayers are heard, because they are made in his name.

Then Mary poured the perfume upon the feet of Jesus. This refers to the “feet members” of the body of Christ mentioned by Isaiah:

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him, that bringeth good tidings; that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good; that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!”--Isaiah 52:7

These are the ones who today are preaching “good tidings,” good news, happy news; not the news of pointless slaughter nor universal Second Death. These are they who “publish peace” and “bring good tidings of good.” They tell of a time of trouble, but emphasize the enduring peace to follow, the good tidings of God's kingdom on earth. These are they who “publish salvation,” the pure, unadulterated doctrine of a ransom for all, together with the blessing of all mankind. These are they who “say unto Zion, Thy God reigneth,” who see and preach the presence of Christ, the great King. These are our brethren, those of “like precious faith,” fellow-members of the Body of Christ. Just as Mary poured the very costly perfume upon the feet of Jesus, we should love and serve our brethren lavishly with the same love and service we render our Head, because of this principle:

“As ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”--Matthew 25:40

John says in his account that after Mary anointed the feet of Jesus she wiped his feet with her hair. What was the result? You may be

sure that this caused her hair to be thoroughly perfumed. Blessings given bring blessings in return. This is a law of God.

“There is he that scattereth, and yet increaseth. . . . The liberal soul shall be made fat, and he that watereth, shall be watered also himself.”--Proverbs 11:24,25

“He that hath pity upon the poor, lendeth unto the Lord; and that which he hath given, will he pay him again.”--Proverbs 19:17

Can you imagine lending to the Lord? This means if you do a service to one who cannot repay you, and you do it without any hope or expectation of repayment, the Lord considers it as lending to Him! He will open the windows of heaven to such, pouring out spiritual blessings in return. There is even some evidence that the Lord often makes it up to them in temporal matters as well.

It is written of this act of Mary: “And the house was filled with the odor of the ointment.” The house of God is his Church; and the costly sacrifices of the Mary-like members bring sweet and savory blessings upon all God's household. For example, there are ecclesias and individuals who produce truth literature such as reprints, volumes, booklets, tracts; others put on --radio and television programs, here and abroad, and make audio tapes; others --perform other services. Like Mary's spikenard permeating the house with a delightful fragrance, these efforts permeate the House of God far and wide. There is no competition in the Lord's service: “Go ye also into the vineyard,” the Lord said.

Devotion to God Is Not a Waste

“What a waste!” they said when Mary's sacrifice was poured out. “What a waste!” our worldly relatives and friends say when we consecrate our all to God: our time, our talents, our energies, our resources, everything. Ah, but as Jesus said, “The poor ye have always with you; but me ye have not always.” There will always be the poor heathen, and other unbelievers, until the Kingdom has done its work. But the body of Christ will not always be here. “Me ye have not always,” Jesus said. “The last members of my Church will soon be glorified. So lavish your love and service upon these, while you have the opportunity.”

Some of the disciples were critical of Mary's generous act and some of the Lord's people today react the same way. They tell the humble Marys of today: “Do not break the seal of your alabaster box. Do not give too generously of your time, talents and means to the friends. You will only impoverish yourself. You will ruin your health. Hold back.” But Jesus said: “Let her alone! She hath wrought a good work upon me.” Just as Jesus deeply loved Mary of Bethany, you

may be sure he loves the Marys of today as well. Regarding Mary of Bethany Bro. Russell says:

“Not only was the Lord willing that the matter should be told for a memorial of Mary, but we may safely conclude that in the everlasting future, Mary will be ranked very high amongst the faithful followers of the Lord. She may not be one with the apostles, upon the twelve thrones of Israel, but we may be sure that she will have some grand, some honorable place, near to the one she loved, and for whom she showed her devotion.”--Reprints, page 3878.

I think he is absolutely right.

“Our Baptism Into Christ”

THE disciples of Jesus loved him very much, being constantly with him during the three-and-one-half years of his ministry. They had been --personal witnesses of his great compassion and loving kindness demonstrated by his many miracles of healing as well as the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. They had never seen anyone like this before. They knew he was indeed the Messiah; they adored him. They had given up everything for his sake and in exchange for this, Jesus had made them a wonderful promise. We read:

“Then answered Peter, and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all and followed thee. What shall we have therefore? And Jesus said unto them, Verily, I say unto you, that ye which have followed me; in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory; ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”--Matthew 19:27,28

He thus promised that they would be a part of his glorious kingdom which would regenerate the world, that they would reign with him and inherit everlasting life.

Now the time neared when Jesus must be offered up as a ransom on a fixed date pre-determined by prophecy. So he turned his steps toward Jerusalem for this purpose. When his disciples saw where he was heading, they were surprised and frightened, because they knew of the vicious opposition of the Scribes and Pharisees and the personal physical danger Jesus would be faced with in Jerusalem. Jesus knew their thoughts so he took them aside and talked to them, telling them exactly what was going to happen to him. He was very frank and did not gloss over anything. We read from the account in Mark:

“And they were in the way, going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus went before them; and they were amazed, and as they followed, they were afraid. And he took again the twelve, and --began to tell them what things should happen unto him. Saying, behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests, and unto the scribes, and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles; and they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him, and the third day he shall rise again.”--Mark 10:32-34

At this point his disciples, James and John, apparently realized the import of what Jesus told them. If he was going to rise again from the dead, he would be glorified. They presumed he would immediately set up his glorious kingdom so they spoke up and asked him if he would grant them a special favor. We continue the reading:

“And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came unto him, saying, Master, we would that thou shouldest do for us, whatsoever we shall desire. And he said unto them, what would ye that I should do for you? They said unto him, Grant unto us that we may sit one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand in thy glory. But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask. Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? And be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? And they said unto him, We can.”--Mark 10:35-39

They said this without hesitation. Jesus looked at them. He loved these two disciples so young, impulsive, and enthusiastic, these brothers whom he fondly referred to as “sons of thunder.” (Mark 3:17) As he looked at them, his prophetic mind leaped years ahead, and what he saw saddened him. James would be the first of the apostles to die, hanged against a pillar by Herod Agrippa. His brother John, the disciple whom he especially loved, would not be so fortunate. After a long imprisonment on a stony island of Patmos, he would suffer martyrdom by frightful torture. Jesus' heart filled with compassion for them: “And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I shall drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized with, shall ye be baptized.”

When James and John said, “We can,” they knew what was involved, that it was some kind of death. Jesus had just been telling them of his coming ordeal of suffering and of death. They understood perfectly that this was the “cup” he referred to, that this was the baptism he was talking about. Yet they unhesitatingly said, in effect, “Yes, Lord, we have a desire to do the entire thing whatever it may be.” They were fully devoted to the Lord to do his will. They would be willing to do anything. Their association with Jesus had given them such an appreciation of the kingdom he preached and such confidence in their Lord that whatever he was about to do, they were willing to do. “We can,” they said. Or, as Matthew has it, “We are able.”

Jesus' Baptism by John

Consider the circumstances of Jesus' baptism by John in the river Jordan. Of John it is written:

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness; prepare ye the way of the Lord; make his paths straight. John did baptize in the wilderness and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins. And there went out unto him, all the land of Judea, and they of Jerusalem, and were all baptized of him in the river of Jordan, confessing their sins.”--Mark 1:3,5

John prepared the way of the Lord. He said:

“There standeth one among you, whom ye know not. He it is who, coming after me, is preferred before me; whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose.”--John 1:26,27

John preached that the time for Messiah to appear was at hand. When the invitation to come into the real kingdom of God would be given, he exhorted the people to get ready for this event; otherwise they would not be prepared to receive Messiah.

The people washed away their own sins typically by acknowledging them and repenting of them. John the Baptist did not wash their sins away. Those of Israel who had not been living in harmony with their Law Covenant but heard John gladly and turned from sin, were the very ones to whom the message respecting the coming Messiah appealed. Thus they became “Israelites indeed, in whom there was no guile,” as was Nathanael. (John 1:47) This washing away of sins was not actual cleansing from guilt; only the blood of Jesus, the merit of his ransom sacrifice, could actually take away sin. Reprints, page 5962.> But it “prepared the way of the Lord.” It prepared the minds of the people. It generated a consciousness of sin, and emphasized the need of a Savior. It prepared the people to accept Jesus as their Messiah when he appeared.

One day as John was waist deep in the water of Jordan busily immersing all who came to him, he looked up and saw a strikingly handsome young man striding toward him. Suddenly, by some inner prompting, he knew who it was! Greatly elated he pointed to Jesus and loudly announced for all to hear:

“Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, after me cometh a man who is preferred before me; for he was before me. And I knew him not; but that he should be made manifest to Israel! Therefore am I come baptizing with water.”--John 1:29-31

John quickly went up to Jesus on the bank. “Why do you come to me?” John asked. “To be baptized,” Jesus answered. “I couldn't do that,” John said. “My baptism is for the repentance and remission of sins. You have no sin! You are the Son of God, you should baptize me instead.” Then we read, “And Jesus answering said: Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness.” In other words, “You may not now understand why but my immersion will fulfill a good and righteous purpose.” Then John consented and led Jesus into the water. We can imagine that John omitted his usual exhortation to renounce sin and silently immersed Jesus. As Jesus went down into the water it is entirely possible he prayed to his Heavenly Father with the words of Psalm 40:

“Lo, I come in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God! Yea, thy law is within my heart!”--Psalms 40:7,8

Now what was the special significance of this immersion of Jesus? He had no sins to wash away. He was “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.” (Hebrews 7:26) Although immersed by John his --immersion was different from the others. What did it signify?

In the case of Jesus, immersion was a symbol, a symbol of his consecration to the will of God. What was the will of God? Jesus knew what it was from the prophecies. He was familiar with the 53rd chapter of Isaiah. He knew the prophet referred to him when he said: “He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter.” Hadn't John just called him a lamb? He knew that Isaiah had also prophesied of him: “Who shall declare his generation? For he was cut out of the land of the living. For the transgression of my people was he stricken.” He also knew he was the one referred to in the --passage: “Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him, he hath put him to grief; when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin.” He was very familiar with verses 11 and 12 with which he identified himself:

“He shall see the travail of his soul, and be --satisfied. By his knowledge shall my righteous --servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide the spoil with the strong. Because he hath poured out his soul unto death. And he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”

Thus Jesus knew that the will of God for him was death--a sacrificial death, the death of his sinless humanity to provide a ransom price for Adam. He knew what was written of him, “In the volume of the book.” So his consecration to the will of God was a consecration unto death. This is what he symbolized when he permitted John to immerse him in water.

Baptism as a Symbol

What an appropriate symbol it was. Going down into the water and being completely covered by it represented death and the grave. Being raised up out of the water --pictured a resurrection from the dead which the prophecies also indicated. So for Jesus this was merely a symbol of the real baptism. His real baptism into death progressed for three and one-half years, from Jordan to Calvary. When he cried on the cross, “It is finished,” he meant that his baptism into death was completed. This is what he had anticipated when he said, “I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how I am straitened till it be accomplished.” (Luke 12:50) This is what he had referred to when he asked the sons of Zebedee, “Are ye able to drink

of the cup that I shall drink of, and be baptized with the baptism what I am baptized with?" (Matthew 20:22) In other words, "Are you willing to follow in my footsteps: to die with me, that you may live with me?" "Yes," they answered, "we can, we are able, we are willing."

It was later that Paul echoed their answer: "It is a faithful saying, For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him." (2 Timothy 2:11) He also wrote:

"Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; That like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection."--Romans 6:3-5

What did Paul mean when he said, "We also should walk in newness of life"? The Diaglott renders it, "We should walk in a new life." The answer is very concisely given by Paul:

"Therefore, if any man be in Christ, **he is** a New Creature. Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."--2 Corinthians 5:17

When John raised Jesus up out of the water, a wonderful thing happened. Matthew's account reads:

"And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and lo, the heavens were opened unto him; and he saw the spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him, and lo, a voice from heaven saying: This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."--Matthew 3:16,17

At that instant Jesus became a new creature. He was consecrated; now he was spirit begotten.

Our Consecration

Let us talk about our consecration of which immersion is only a symbol. First, we might say that consecration has always been proper. It is the normal attitude of all God's intelligent creatures. They are all under obligation to God for every blessing they enjoy, for life itself. Consecration is only their reasonable service to their creator and benefactor. This is the minimal expectation. The whole world of mankind will be given the opportunity of consecration eventually. It is written that they shall "all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent."--Zephaniah 3:9

Without consecration no one will ever gain everlasting life on any plane. Whether angels or man, all should be in this attitude. But the consecration we are talking about today is more than this. It goes immeasurably further than this. Its object is much more sublime. It leads not merely to everlasting life, but to glory, honor, and immortality! It leads to the divine nature. It is an induction into the mystical body of Christ. As Paul tells us:

“For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many are one body, so also is Christ. For by one spirit are we all baptized into one body.”--1 Corinthians 12:12

The holy spirit which descended upon the head of Jesus at Jordan comes down and anoints and imbues each member of his body. As Psalm 133:2 expresses it, “It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard; that went down to the skirts of his garments!”

The ointment covered his body. By this consecration, by this justification, and by spirit-begetting, we become members of the most unique and exclusive group in the history of the universe. This is not a group whose names are known and recorded on earth but a “Church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven.” (Hebrews 12:23) One hundred and forty four thousand kings and priests who together with their head, Christ Jesus, will rule the world for a thousand years, speak peace to the nations, restore health and life, and bring all the willing and obedient into perfect harmony with God. What a tremendous honor it is to be of this group. How do we ever aspire to it? We cannot of ourselves. We do not choose to be of this body. We are chosen! We read, “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you.” (John 15:16) Also, “No man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.” (Hebrews 5:4) This confirms what Jesus said:

“All that the Father giveth me shall come to me, and him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out. No man can come to me except the Father who hath sent me, draw him.”--John 6:37,44

Do you fully realize what this means? It means that every one of you who have come to Jesus have been personally selected by God himself, for we read: “The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him.” --2 Chronicles 16:9

Think of it: the eyes of God the Father move back and forth in the earth, passing by many great, wise, and noble people and fix upon you! He does not look upon your outward appearance but looks at your heart. 1 Samuel 16:7 is a companion text of thought. God likes what he sees. He sees a heart of love and devotion to him and a

desire to do his will. He also sees certain potentialities there. He sees that you have the willingness and the ability, with his abundant grace to help, to conform yourself to the likeness of his son, to give up your own desires, aims, and ambitions and follow in the footsteps of Jesus; that you “are able” in the language of James and John. He then draws you to Jesus. He points you out. He tells Jesus about you, that he has selected you as a member of Christ's body to be sacrificed with him, to die with him that you might reign with him. Do you see what a wonderful thing this is, to be personally noticed and selected from among so many millions by the great God himself, to be led to Jesus, to be consecrated and justified? What great mercies of God these are!

To those who are so selected of God, the ones who are also drawn of God, Paul says:

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice; holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”--Romans 12:1

When we present our bodies it means all our human faculties, our wills, our hearts, health, strength, time, talents and possessions: everything. This presentation of our bodies is the right thing to do, it is the reasonable thing to do, and it is a happy and joyful thing to do. It was for Jesus:

“Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”--Hebrews 12:2

If it was a reasonable and joyful service for Jesus to leave the heavenly glory, to become a man, and to sacrifice himself unto death, then surely ours is most reasonable and joyful. Let us remember that our Heavenly Father did not permit Jesus to sacrifice his life for humanity without any reward of a future life. To have done so would have been a most unreasonable thing. No! The Father set before the Redeemer a great joy to be the recompense of his obedience. And Jesus entered into that joy. “I delight to do thy will, O my God,” he said. So with us. The Lord does not invite us to sacrifice ourselves at the present time without any reward from him, without any incentive. He tells us that if we do this, he will make us joint-heirs with his son, participators with him in all the joys of the kingdom.

After beseeching us to present our bodies living sacrifices, Paul continues:

“And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”--Romans 12:2

This transformation by the renewing of our minds is the development of the new creature. This is the work of sanctification which follows justification. “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification.” (1 Thessalonians 4:3) How is this sanctification accomplished? The answer is found in a prayer Jesus made on our behalf: “Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth.” (John 17:17)

God's Word Sanctifies

Everything necessary for the furtherance of our sanctification and development as new creatures is in the inspired scriptures. In 2 Timothy 3:16 Paul writes: “All scripture given by inspiration of God is profitable; for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” Then Paul adds: “That the man of God [or new creature] may be perfect [or complete], thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” This is the key as to how this work of sanctification will proceed. We are to be helped onward by the power of the revealed word, by the message of truth. “But,” you may ask, “how will God's Word sanctify? Has everyone who has ever read the Bible been sanctified? Have the learned scholars who translated the Bible been sanctified? Have the monks, confined in monasteries, who copied the ancient Bible manuscripts been sanctified? Have the printers who set the type for our modern Bibles been sanctified?” Some few of these may have been but I am sure most were not. Why not since Jesus promised sanctification through the word of truth? There must be a missing ingredient somewhere. There is indeed! Jesus referred to it many times when he gave his parables. He said, “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.” Then our Lord added when speaking to his disciples: “It is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven; but to them it is not given.”

What makes the difference between “you” and “them”? What do you have that they do not have? Paul gives us the answer:

“Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard; neither have entered into the heart of man; the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us, by His Spirit; for the spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.”--1 Corinthians 2:9,10

It is the holy spirit that is what is missing from all others. Without it the scriptures may indeed be valued as an ancient historical record; a compendium of laws and statutes, a collection of fascinating stories, teaching lofty moral precepts. But without the holy spirit it contains

no message from God, no revelation. The essence of the scriptures cannot be extracted and appreciated, cannot sanctify us, without the holy spirit.

Things Are Not Necessarily What They Seem

Consider a phonograph record. Given to a savage, a phonograph record may be highly appreciated and greatly prized because it is a disc made of a shiny, black, ebony-like substance. It is perfectly round, beautifully designed with a colorful seal in its center containing characters inscribed upon it. It has mysteriously engraved grooves on either side which give a peculiar sensation to the touch. It has a hole in its center by which it can be strung around one's neck as a magical charm. This is the limit of a savage's appreciation of a phonograph record.

Let us suppose he has possessed it for many years. Although it is valuable to him, he has no conception of its full potential. One day a missionary arrives with a phonograph machine. Seeing the record hanging from the neck of the savage, he asks: "Do you know what you have there?" With great pride the savage describes the various unique and ornamental features of the record. Then the missionary takes the record, places it upon the phonograph turntable, puts the needle in the groove and magnificent music fills the air! Beautiful voices, recorded years and years before, come alive and are heard in all their glory

Do you see the application of this --picture? When the phonograph record was made, a diamond stylus cut those grooves. Similarly the Bible was written long ago by holy men of God as they were moved by the holy spirit. (2 Peter 1:21) All the glorious music of God was recorded by that spirit. The Bible is the original high-fidelity recording of God's supreme greatness, his mercies, his loving attributes, his magnificent divine plan of the ages. It also has his exceeding great and precious promises, his counsel with his encouragements, and expressions of his love and care. These are all recorded by the spirit in the Bible. But as far as the world is concerned, like the savage with a record in his possession, the deep things hidden in the grooves of the record are inaudible. The world does not have "ears to hear." But when one has the diamond needle of the holy spirit, the very same holy spirit that moved the writers to make the record, the scriptures come beautifully and magnificently alive. Then are made manifest the deep things of God which Paul describes:

"Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is, made manifest to the saints."--Colossians 1:26

At this end of the age we once again have the truth “which was hid from ages and generations” and which by Satan's devices, was largely lost during the Dark Ages and the passing generations. It has been made manifest to us, his saints. How was it restored and by what instrumentality? When the due time came at this end of the age, the details of God's glorious divine plan of the ages, hidden for so long, were made manifest to a saint of the Lord, a saint of God, a faithful and wise servant, Brother Russell. He was consecrated and spirit begotten. He was ready, able and willing to be used of the Lord to revive the old truths. He was faithfully watching, anxious to dispense meat in due season to the household of faith. Jesus said of him, “Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing.” (Luke 12:43) His mind was, in the language of the prophet:

“I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower; and will watch to see what he will say unto me. . . . And the Lord answered me, and said, write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it [meaning he that reads it may run for the prize of the high calling].”--Habakkuk 2:1,2

That is how I got the truth and how you got the truth, the whole truth, entirely and only through the writings of that servant. When we came into the truth, we proved all things and found them sound and good. If you didn't, you wouldn't be in the truth now. The apostle in 1 Thessalonians 5:21 tells us to do just that. But he also tells us something else which some are inclined to ignore. Paul first says, “Prove all things.” Then he adds, “Hold fast that which is good.” Once you've proven the truth to your thorough satisfaction, hold on to it; never let it go. Don't keep questioning it and feel that you have to prove it over and over again. Don't be like those who are “ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (2 Timothy 3:7) If you have found the truth and found it good, hold it. Keep it. It is the most precious thing in the world. Do not change it. The wise man says, “My son, fear thou the Lord and the King. And meddle not with them that are given to change.” (Proverbs 24:21)

I recommend reading the six volumes of *Studies in the Scriptures* regularly, so many pages a day. I do. This will keep me in the truth. I agree with Brother Russell when he says in the first paragraph of the first volume:

“We believe the teachings of divine revelation can be seen to be both beautiful and harmonious, from this standpoint and from no other.”

You Have a Personal Relationship with the Father

Jesus spoke five words which are precious and thrilling beyond measure: "The Father himself loveth you." (John 16:27) This ties in with the words: "No man can come to me, except the Father, who hath sent me, draw him." (John 6:44) This identifies you. So it is to you Jesus spoke when he said, "The Father himself loveth you." Do you fully realize what this means? It means that the heavenly Father doesn't just give impersonal orders to his angels to take care of you and then busy himself with more important affairs. He doesn't delegate your care and well being to others. No, he himself, personally knows you and loves you and has selected you. He takes a continuous and personal interest in all your affairs, even the smallest matters. This is what Jesus meant when he said, "The very hairs of your head are all numbered." (Matthew 10:30)

The great God of the universe, the Creator of heaven and earth, himself loveth you. So talk to the Lord often. Lay all your problems before him, and also your love and joys. Do not only tell him your troubles, but talk to him when things are going well too. Don't be stiff and formal in these conversations. He is your Father. Talk to him freely and frankly as you would talk to your earthly father. He understands you far better and loves you far more than any earthly parent. This will please the Lord. By his loving providences he will tell you as he told Jesus, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Tell him you love him. He already knows it, of course, but tell him just the same. It will serve to remind you of the wonderful promise: "All things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called --according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28) This is a promise that nothing can really hurt you any more; that henceforth everything that happens to you is for your eternal spiritual welfare: everything, even the seeming calamities.

When you consecrate, you say good-bye to fear. Jesus speaks to you and says:

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you. Not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."--John 14:27

Our Lord also said:

"Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly of heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."--Matthew 11:29

Remember this along your Christian way: Jesus is your yokefellow. A yoke has two sides and you are walking side-by-side with Jesus. You are weak but he is strong. When you stumble, he bears you up. He shares your burden. He makes up for what you cannot perform.

No wonder his yoke is easy and his burden is light. Never leave that yoke. Never take it off. You cannot stand alone. But together with Jesus, you can win the crown of life.

Consecration is not an ending, it is a beginning, the beginning of a new nature, a new creature. It is the beginning of trials and testings, yes, but also the beginning of wondrous joys and blessings. Eventually it will culminate in pleasures for evermore at God's right hand. (Psalms 16:11)

Peace Be Still

OUR lesson today centers on the Sea of Galilee, a large fresh water lake in the land of Israel. My Bible dictionary says: “The water of the lake is sweet, cool and transparent, and, as the beach is everywhere pebbly, it has a beautiful, sparkling look. It abounds in fish now, as in ancient times.”

How true this is today I do not know. I imagine that by this time it has been considerably polluted like every other lake.

The Sea of Galilee lies about 700 feet --below sea level, surrounded by a high and almost unbroken wall of hills. These hills are pierced by deep canyons and ravines which, under certain atmospheric conditions, act like gigantic funnels to draw down the cold winds from the mountains. Thus the lake is exposed to frequent and sudden violent storms. These would be particularly dangerous to boats propelled by sails or oars because the strong off-shore winds coming from every side would make it --almost impossible for such boats to reach land. A traveler who witnessed such a storm on Galilee writes:

“The sun had scarcely set when the wind began to rush down toward the lake; and it continued all night long with constantly increasing violence so that when we reached shore the next morning the face of the lake was like a huge boiling cauldron. The wind hurled down every wady, from the north-east and east, with such fury that no efforts of rowers could have brought a boat to shore at any point along that coast.”

Now let us consider an incident which is related in three of the Gospels: Matthew chapter 8, Mark chapter 4 and Luke chapter 8. It was in the second year of our Lord's ministry. A multitude had gathered to him on the shore of Galilee. He had been teaching them all day, standing in a boat anchored a few feet from shore. The boat must have belonged to one of his fisherman disciples. This was an ideal position from which to speak to a large audience. The beach sloping down to the water's edge formed a natural amphitheater and thus all the multitude could see and hear him.

At about three in the afternoon, Jesus ended his teaching and dismissed the multitude. He then asked his disciples who were with him in the boat to take him over to the other side of the lake. Thus we read:

“And the same day, when even was come, he saith unto them, Let us pass over to the other side. And when they had sent away the multitude they took him, even as he was, in the ship.”--Mark 4:35,36

Jesus was very tired. Even a perfect man has his physical limitations. Healing in particular depleted his vitality, as we are told in Luke 6:19. So he went to the stern of the ship and lay down on a cushion on a sheltered bunk. He immediately fell into a deep sleep of exhaustion.

A Vicious Storm Arises

When the boat was in the middle of the lake, there suddenly arose one of the vicious storms for which Galilee is famous. The wind blew a howling gale, whipped up the water, and great waves began breaking over the side of the ship. It was impossible to row against the wind and, in spite of desperate bailing by all hands, the boat began to fill with water and threatened to founder. We read from the account:

“And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full. And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow.”-- Mark 4:37,38



Although as we have seen storms of Galilee are a common natural phenomenon, I am sure this particular storm was whipped up by Satan. He was an implacable enemy of Jesus and always sought to destroy him because he knew that Jesus was the Seed of Promise who would eventually deal him a mortal blow. God had told the serpent in Eden:

“I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed. It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” --Genesis 3:15

The creation of such a storm was entirely within Satan's capability. He is designated "the prince of the power of the air." (Ephesians 2:2) He had the power to manipulate atmospheric conditions to bring vicious winds down upon Galilee.

He had done this sort of thing before. He had wreaked his wrath upon Job by killing his children with a hurricane. As the messenger said to Job:

"Behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead."--Job 1:19

That storm was pretty selective. It hit only the house where Job's children gathered. Do you see Satan's power to maneuver and manipulate the air?

So when he saw Jesus exhausted and fast asleep in that small boat in the middle of the lake, he seized his opportunity and made a brazen attempt to quickly destroy him. It would be all over in a few minutes and Jesus would be dead, or so he thought. How foolish Satan was! He forgot that this was the one who could walk on water if he wanted to.

As the storm raged, Jesus still slept. At first the disciples did not want to awaken him. But when their best efforts failed, they ran to him. They shook him awake and shouted above the roar of the wind. I will read what they said from each of the three accounts, because they vary somewhat:

"And his disciples came to him, and awoke him, saying, Lord, save us; we perish!"--Matthew 8:25

"And they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish?"--Mark 4:38

"And they came to him, and awoke him, saying, Master, Master, we perish!"--Luke 8:24

Which one of these accounts is true? I think each one is. Some said one thing and some another. They reacted differently to the situation. Although there is no contradiction here, the differences do have significance as we shall see.

Then Jesus performed one of his most magnificent miracles. We read:

"And he arose and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, PEACE BE STILL! And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm."--Mark 4:39

Jesus Calms the Sea

Do you know what the greatest part of this miracle was? It was not so much the stopping of the wind. Wind can stop almost instantly as it sometimes does under natural conditions. The most astonishing part of the miracle was the instant calming of the sea. This could not be a natural thing. Waters which have been lashed to fury by gale winds do not quickly subside. Waves normally persist for days after a hurricane at sea. This quick calming of the sea demonstrated a tremendous supernatural power. When Jesus "said unto the sea, Peace be still!" and immediately there was a great calm, his fishermen disciples who knew the ways of the sea were astonished beyond measure. One moment they were reeling and staggering around on a flooded, pitching deck, holding on for dear life, their shouting voices drowned out by the shrieking of the storm; the next moment Jesus raised his hand, spoke a few words, and everything changed! They found themselves gliding along, in peaceful silence, on an even keel, on a glassy smooth sea! No wonder we read:

"And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?"--
Mark 4:41

When the disciples awakened Jesus, and expressed their fear, Jesus spoke to them before he performed this miracle. Combining the reports of Matthew, Mark and Luke, he said to them: "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? How is it that ye have no faith? Where is your faith?" They had been with Jesus for two years. They knew he was the Son of God. They had witnessed his mighty miracles. They should have known that he could handle this situation also. By this time they should have developed an implicit faith in him. They should have felt safe with him in the boat, realizing the Heavenly Father's protecting care over him. So it was with sorrow and disappointment that Jesus asked: "How is it, that ye have no faith?"

Jonah's Experience

We find a similar storm at sea related in the Book of Jonah. The Lord told Jonah to go to Nineveh, but Jonah took a ship going in the opposite direction in an effort to flee from the presence of the Lord. We read:

"But the Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken. Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep. So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not."--Jonah 1:4-6

The mariners finally concluded that the storm had resulted because God was displeased with someone on board. They cast lots to determine who it was and the lot fell on Jonah. Then Jonah admitted that he was the one at fault:



“He said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you; for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you. Nevertheless, the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not; for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them. Wherefore they cried unto the Lord, and said, We beseech thee, O Lord, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life; and lay not upon us innocent blood; for thou, O Lord, hast done as it pleased thee. So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea. And the sea ceased from her raging.”--Jonah 1:12-15

Jonah did not drown in the sea. God had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah and transport him to Nineveh where he should have gone in the first place. What a way to go! I think that must have been the very first submarine voyage on record. It is indeed true, as the Wise Man has said:

“There is no new thing under the sun. Is there anything whereof it may be said, See this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us.”--Ecclesiastes 1:9,10

Lessons for Us

Returning to the incident at the Sea of Galilee, let us consider some lessons. The waters of Galilee are beautiful, sparkling, clean and sweet. It receives its waters from the River Jordan and gives them forth again. Thus it remains sweet, fresh, and life-giving.

Further along the Dead Sea receives the same waters from the Jordan but it does not give them forth. That is why it is dead.

Pure water is a symbol of truth. We must not only receive the truth into good and honest hearts but we must give it forth to others in all its beauty and purity. We must ever give out the truth to keep it fresh and sweet in our own hearts and minds. Jesus said:

“Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; that it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”--Matthew 5:14-16

The Sea of Galilee is only a small sample. We look forward to the time when “the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.” (Isaiah 11:9)

Satan is a very sneaky and cowardly person. He is malicious, ferocious, and heartless. He has no honor or sense of fair play. He takes advantage of every circumstance suitable to his evil purpose without pity or remorse. We remember that it was after Jesus had fasted for forty days that Satan tempted him with food. Now when he saw Jesus exhausted and fast asleep in a fragile boat in the middle of the Sea of Galilee, he took advantage of it and made a vicious attack just like the bully that he is.

There are important lessons here for the Lord's people. As Satan attacked Jesus when he was physically exhausted and asleep, he attacks us at a time when we are the most vulnerable, when our spirituality is at a low ebb. As he brought the storm upon Galilee, he comes upon us like a flood. Such an attack and the remedy is described in Isaiah:

“When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him.”--Isaiah 59:19

What is this “standard” that is lifted up against Satan? It is the Standard of Truth; it is a faith and strength in the Lord. We read: “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.” How? “Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.” (Ephesians 6:10,11) We must ever be on guard and keep up our spiritual vigor . . .

“Lest Satan should get an advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.”--2 Corinthians 2:11

How do we maintain our spiritual health and vigor, and put on the whole armor of God? We do it by studying and maintaining the Standard of Truth, the pure truth which our returned Lord has provided us through a wise and faithful servant, and by daily

conforming our lives thereto. There is no other standard of truth. It was to spiritual prosperity and health that John referred:

“Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth. For I rejoiced greatly when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth.”--3 John 2,3

As the normally tranquil Sea of Galilee suddenly became stormy, our circumstances can change suddenly and drastically for the worse. When this happens, let us realize that we are sharing the experience of Jesus on Galilee, and rejoice. Thus we read:

“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you; but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.”--1 Peter 4:12,13

The storm on Galilee did not last long. It passed as suddenly as it had come because Jesus took charge. He will do the same in your storm.

“And It Came To Pass”

Once at a testimony meeting the leader asked each one to quote a favorite Bible verse. One brother simply quoted the words, “And it came to pass.” This surprised everybody because it is not even a verse. Yet he insisted that the phrase “and it came to pass” was the one most meaningful to him. “Why?” asked the leader. The brother explained that in every trouble the problem or the difficulty did not come to stay; it came to pass. It came to teach its particular lesson; to leave its imprint upon his character; but it was not, of itself, a finality. It did not come to stay --“It came to pass.”

Our trials will never be more severe or last longer than we can bear. That's a promise:

“No trial has assailed you, except what belongs to man. And God is faithful, who will not permit you to be tried beyond your ability; but with the trial, will also direct the issue, that you may be able to bear it.”--1 Corinthians 10:13, Diaglott

It is commendable that the disciples did their best to reach shore and to keep their ship afloat before they asked for help. We learn from this that we should always do our best to resolve our own difficulties --before expecting the Lord to perform miracles on our behalf.

According to the three gospels that describe this incident the disciples expressed themselves differently when they ran to Jesus for help in their extremity. This may show how individuals with different

personalities and various stages of Christian development react to an overwhelming crisis. According to Matthew's account, some cried, "Lord, save us!" This is the cry of faith. It says, "You are the Lord, we know you have the power to save us!" Then, according to various translations of Matthew 8:25 and Luke 8:24, some said, "We are perishing! We are lost! We are drowning! We are going down!" This is the cry of despair, of little faith, of fearing the worst, that it is too late for anything to be done. According to various translations of Mark 4:38, some plaintively called in question the mercy and compassion of Jesus, saying, "Master, carest thou not that we perish? Does it not concern thee that we perish? Master, we are sinking! Do you not care? Don't you care that we're drowning?" These disciples not only exhibited little or no faith, they actually showed an active distrust. They reproached Jesus, --accusing him of insensitivity to their problem. In effect, they said: "Here we are, in terrible trouble, and YOU DON'T CARE!"

How do we compare with those disciples? When some serious storm of life overtakes us and the relief we seek does not quickly come, does our faith fail? Do we tend to despair and accuse the Lord of not caring? The Lord may permit some such experience to see how we react to test our faith. Let us determine that after doing our very best we will go to the Lord and simply say: "Lord, help me!" Let us never doubt that he does care, that he is there with us in the boat. Thus we will obey the admonition, "Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you." (1 Peter 5:7) We also have the assurance that no storm will ever overwhelm us:

"Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee. He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved."--Psalms 55:22

"He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."--Hebrews 13:5

Let our reliance on the Lord be such that he need not sorrowfully say to us, as he did to his disciples that day: "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? How is it that ye have no faith? Where is your faith?"

"Peace Be Still"

This experience of the storm on Galilee not only tried the faith of the disciples, but it crystallized and established their faith. "What manner of man is this?" they said, "that even the wind and the sea obey him!" How could they ever again doubt Jesus' power to save? So with us, when we have had a severe crisis and have been carried through it, and have heard the Lord's "**Peace be still,**" how can we ever again doubt the Lord's power on our behalf?

And this experience also made a strong impression on Jesus. We know this because later, when he gave a prophecy regarding the end of the age, he remembered that roaring storm on Galilee, and the perplexity and heart-failing fear it had caused the men in the boat. He used that very incident to describe the great Time of Trouble. Note his words:

“And upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth.”--Luke 21:25,26

Doesn't that describe the storm on Galilee?

As the winds suddenly came upon Galilee from every direction, causing a cyclone, the four winds of earth, spoken of in Revelation 7:1, are loosed by the four angels and great calamities come upon the world. We read:

“Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Behold, evil shall go forth from nation to nation; and a great whirlwind shall be raised up from the coasts of the earth.”--Jeremiah 25:32

“For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind.”--Hosea 8:7

Proverbs says that Israel and the world of mankind, like the men on Galilee, will, in the final stages of the Time of Trouble, call upon the Lord in their extremity:

“When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind, when distress and anguish cometh upon you; then shall they call upon me.”--Proverbs 1:27,28

“Woe to the multitudes of many people, which make a noise like the voice of the seas; and to the rushing of nations, that make a rushing like the rushing of mighty waters! The nations shall rush like the rushing of many waters; but God shall rebuke them.”--Isaiah 17:12,13

This great Time of Trouble and its termination is graphically described in Psalm 107:

“They that go down to the sea in ships; that do business in great waters; these see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep. For he commandeth, and raiseth the stormy wind, which lifteth up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven; they go down again to the depths. Their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit's end. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble; and he bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven. O that men would praise the

Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!"--Psalms 107:23-31

“Be Still”

We read in the psalms of the tremendous power of God to still the Time of Trouble, the very same power that Jesus used to quickly quiet the raging waters of Galilee:

“O Lord God of hosts; who is a strong Lord like unto thee? . . . Thou rulest the raging of the sea. When the waves thereof arise, thou stillest them.”--Psalms 89:8,9

“O God of our salvation Who stilleth the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the people.”--Psalms 65:5,7

As Jesus said to the troubled sea, “Peace be still!” God will proclaim to a troubled world, in the words of Psalm 46:10, “Be still, and know that I am God.”

The psalmist said, “Then are they glad because they be quiet. So he bringeth them unto their desired haven.” What is the world’s desired haven? We read:

“For thus saith the Lord of hosts, Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land. And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come.”--Haggai 2:6,7

The “desired haven” is “the desire of all nations.” It is the Kingdom of God that is desired. The world earnestly desires it without knowing exactly what it is and how it will come. All they know is that they are suffering and want relief from their troubles--from sickness, sorrow, sighing, pain and death; from poverty, hunger, tyranny and anarchy. Paul describes this time:

“For we know that the whole creation is groaning together, and suffering the pangs of labor, which have not yet brought forth the birth. For the longing of the creation looks eagerly for the time when the glory of the sons of God shall be revealed.”--Romans 8:22,19, Conybeare

Yes, they will finally come to their desired haven of rest when the sons of God, Christ and the church, are revealed in kingdom power and glory. Then will be fulfilled the prophecy of Revelation 21:1, “And 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”--no more restless and discontented masses of humanity.

After the psalmist says, “Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven,” he exclaims:

“Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!”--Psalms 107:31

The last verse of the last psalm voices this fervent hope: “Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord.” (Psalms 150:6) This hope will be realized.

When the kingdom has done its work, every intelligent creature in the universe will praise the Lord for his goodness. John saw this time in prophetic vision:

“And every creature which is in heaven and on earth, and such as are in the sea; and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever!”--Revelation 5:13

The terror of the men on the boat that day on Galilee aptly pictured the world at their wits' end during the Time of Trouble. But it did not picture any fear on the part of the Lord's true people. We who know the plan of God, who know the blessed outcome, will not fear. Psalm 46 describes our position:

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea. Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled. Though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.”--Psalms 46:1-3

This brings to mind what happened to Jonah. He also was in a ship and as was the case on Galilee, a terrible storm arose and the ship was about to be capsized. The men on board were frantic, reeling and fro, their hearts failing them for fear. But where was Jonah? He was fast asleep in the hold. He was completely relaxed. He knew the hand of God was upon him, that nothing could happen to him without God's permission. Even when they threw him into the sea, he was not worried. In fact, he told them to do it. He was always safe. He was safe on board ship. He was safe when he dropped over the side. He was safe as he sank deeper and deeper into the water. He was worried for a moment when a huge fish with wide-open mouth rushed toward him. Then he was safe in the fish's belly. It didn't hurt a bit. Did you know that prayers can go through water, too? We read that “Jonah prayed unto the Lord his God out of the fish's belly.” (Jonah 2:1) Notice this: It was not a prayer of fear but one of thanksgiving and praise. Jonah actually thanked God for casting him into the sea--not the men on the boat, but God. He said: “For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about.” (Jonah 2:3) He thanked God for the storm too! “All thy billows, and thy waves passed over me,” he said.

This beautifully illustrates what should be the attitude of the Lord's people during not only the great Time of Trouble, but any trouble in their lives. If we are the Lord's, we are always safe, always in his hands. As Jonah was cast into the sea but was safe in the belly of the fish, we can be in the midst of the raging sea of trouble, and yet safe from it. Any storm that may come is His storm. Regardless of where we are and what he may permit to come upon us, we are safely and securely under his hand. Realizing this we can repeat and apply to ourselves the beautiful sentiments of Psalm 139:

“Thou hast hedged me in, behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is high. I cannot attain unto it. Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there. If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.”--Psalms 139:5-10

Winds of Doctrine

Now we come to a lesson which is not so pleasant but which must be learned. There is another kind of wind blowing today and it is blowing upon the church of God. It is causing waves of dissention and division. Some are being carried away by this wind and are in danger of shipwreck. It is the “wind of doctrine.” Paul describes this wind and those who bring it upon the church:

“That we be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ.”--Ephesians 4:14,15

Here is the same text from the Weymouth translation which brings the thought out very clearly:

“So we shall no longer be babes, nor shall we resemble mariners, tossed on the waves and carried about with every changing wind of doctrine, according to men's cleverness, and unscrupulous cunning, making use of every shifting device to mislead. But we shall lovingly hold to the truth, and shall, in all respects grow up into union with him who is our head, even Christ.”

In these stormy days when changing winds of doctrine are blowing, let us “lovingly hold to the truth.” Let it not be necessary for Jesus to sorrowfully say to us,

“Where is your faith? Where is the Most Holy Faith which I revealed to you through my faithful and wise servant upon my

return?--the Divine Plan in all its beauty and purity which I have caused to be written upon tables, and a chart for you to read. How is it that you have let it slip? Where is your FAITH?"

If we waver in our understanding of the truth and are tossed about with winds of doctrine, we will not receive the promised reward.

"He that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord."--James 1:6,7

"Be not carried about with diverse and strange doctrines; for it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace."--Hebrews 13:9

"Retaining faith and a good conscience, which some, having thrust away concerning THE FAITH, suffered shipwreck."--1 Timothy 1:19, Diaglott

Let us take Paul's advice to Timothy:

"Take heed unto thyself and unto the doctrine; for in doing this, thou shalt both save thyself and them that hear thee."--1 Timothy 4:16

Let us not forget the qualification for eldership given in Titus:

"Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught; that he may be able by sound doctrine, both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers."--Titus 1:9

We read, "When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble?" (Job 34:29) Satan whipped up that mighty storm on Galilee. But when Jesus raised his hand and quietly said, "Peace, be still," Satan's power utterly failed "and there was a great calm." If we constantly bear in mind that this tremendous power of God is always available on our behalf in our storms of life, what quietness of mind and heart it will give us!

"And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds, through Christ Jesus."--Philippians 4:7

Let us trust in this promise. As we read:

"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee; because he trusteth in thee."--Isaiah 26:3

Jesus spoke to you too when he said, "Peace be still!" He said:

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you. Not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."--John 14:27

We thank our Heavenly Father for the --lessons taught us by his son, our Lord Jesus Christ. May we learn them well and achieve that peace of God which passeth all understanding.

Peace on Earth

MOST people consider the hope of peace on earth as wishful thinking; something quite impossible to attain. "Man is a warlike animal," they say. "He has been fighting from earliest antiquity. The histories of every nation, from the most ancient times to the present, are filled with accounts of wars and bloodshed. This is the very nature of man," they say. But the Bible clearly teaches that war and violence are not the true nature of man.

Man was not originally created a warlike animal. The first man, Adam, was created in the image of God:

"And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. . . . So God created man in his own image; in the image of God created he him."--Genesis 1:26,27

We also read, "God is love." (1 John 4:8) This is his image. Jesus confirmed this when he said:

"Love your enemies . . . and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven."--Matthew 5:44,45

"Love your enemies . . . and ye shall be the children of the Highest; for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful."--Luke 6:35,36

We read a description of the character of God in Psalm 145:

"The Lord is gracious and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy. The Lord is good to all; and his tender mercies are over all his works."--Psalms 145:8,9

God-like conduct is described in the words, "If thine enemy hunger, feed him. If he thirst, give him drink." (Romans 12:20) This is the character image in which man was originally created, but it is certainly not man's character now. Mankind has, to a large degree, fallen from the image of God in which Adam was created; he has been transformed into another image.

In Genesis chapter 3 we are told how this transformation started. The perfect Adam and his wife Eve, created in the image of God, were given a beautiful garden home where all their needs were abundantly supplied, and where they might live for ever in happiness. Then God put Adam to a test of obedience. This was entirely proper. Is it not right for a parent to require obedience of his children? Adam fully intended to obey God. But Satan, the devil, a powerful spirit being who had rebelled against God, induced Adam's wife to disobey and to influence Adam to also disobey. God had previously told Adam that if he disobeyed, he would surely die. (Genesis 2:17) When he

pronounced sentence upon him, he told him that he would “return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken. For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” (Genesis 3:19)

Sin is defined as disobedience to God's law. Thus it was that sin entered into the world.

“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”--Romans 5:12

It was after Adam sinned that he had his children. Thus all of Adam's children were born imperfect. They were all “born in sin and shapen in iniquity.” (Psalms 51:5) Sinful Adam could not bring forth a perfect race. Job says, “Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one.” (Job 14:4) Not one of Adam's descendants was without sin and each succeeding generation fell still further from the image of God.

War has been called an evil disease which afflicts mankind, but war is not the disease. It is merely the symptom of the real disease which is sin. This is the underlying cause of all unhappiness in the world. Sin not only accounts for wars between nations, but also antagonisms within nations, disharmony between parties and organizations, strife between and within families, and the lack of tranquility in a person's mind.

This steady degeneration of mankind from the image of God, going deeper and deeper into sin and death, would present a hopeless prospect were it not for the sure word of God. The Bible gives us the only hope of the world. It foretells a wonderful future for mankind when all wars and violence will cease, when sin and death will be completely eliminated, when even those who have already died will be restored to life, and when all the willing and obedient will live for ever in perfect health and happiness upon the earth, having been restored to the image of God. Then there will be true peace on earth.

Let us cite some of these prophecies, starting with one which has already been partially fulfilled. The prophet Isaiah described a most joyful occasion, the birth of a mighty Ruler who would eventually bring peace on earth:

“Unto us a child is born; unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder. And his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end.”--Isaiah 9:6,7

This foretold the birth of Jesus, the Prince of Peace, who is to rule the world. To bring peace on earth, it was necessary for Jesus to first eliminate the underlying cause of all the trouble, which was sin and

the sentence of death. It was sin that alienated man from God and resulted in the present deplorable condition of the world. Jesus had first to provide a basis for the removal of sin and for the reconciliation of mankind to harmony with God. This he accomplished by his sacrificial death nearly two thousand years ago, giving his life for the life of Adam and his race. When Adam -- disobeyed God, he forfeited his life and brought forth an imperfect and dying race. Jesus, whose father was God, was born on earth and grew to perfect and sinless manhood--the exact equivalent of Adam before Adam sinned. Unlike Adam, Jesus was obedient to God. He died without deserving to die, giving up his unforfeited life in exchange for Adam's forfeited life--thus redeeming Adam and all his descendants. He thus became a ransom for Adam, releasing him and all his children from the sentence of death.

“For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”--1 Corinthians 15:21,22

“Therefore, as by the offence of one, judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.”--Romans 5:18,19

Peace Via the Ransom

Paul refers to Jesus, “Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.” (1 Timothy 2:6) This means that in due time, as a result of the ransom that Jesus provided, all mankind will be released from sin and death. When this has been accomplished, there will be peace on earth. Then will be fulfilled the words of Isaiah:

“They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”--Isaiah 2:4

“The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion, and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the suckling child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain [kingdom]; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”--Isaiah 11:6-9

That Faithful and Wise Servant

“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his Lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due --season? Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord, when he cometh, shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, that he shall make him ruler over all his goods.”--Matthew 24:45-47

WHEN Jesus was on earth, he was the head or ruler of his own spiritual household, the household of faith, the house of God. Just as the head of a literal household provides food for his family, Jesus, when present in the flesh, fed his disciples as much spiritual food as they could absorb. But they could not absorb everything he wanted to tell them because the holy Spirit had not yet been sent. Their natural minds had not been stimulated and sensitized to spiritual things. As it is written:

“The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God . . . because they are spiritually discerned.”--1 Corinthians 2:14

On one of the last talks he had with his disciples before his crucifixion, Jesus said to them:

“I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when the spirit of truth is come, it will guide you into all truth.”--John 16:12,13

Notice that he said ALL truth. Of course this does not mean all scientific truth, or all the facts pertaining to the universe, or all the unsearchable wisdom of God. But it does mean every spiritual truth, every basic doctrine, every concept essential to our making our calling and election sure--“that the man of God may be perfect [or complete], thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” (2 Timothy 3:17)

They remembered this promise in the dark days that followed when they saw their beloved master betrayed, unjustly accused, scourged, tormented, and put to an agonizing death upon the cross. Even his body was missing from the tomb! We read:

“Then arose Peter, and ran unto the sepulchre; and stooping down, he beheld the linen clothes laid by themselves; and departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass.”--Luke 24:12

Yes, they wondered. It was all very confusing to them. But Jesus had promised that they would understand, and they waited for that promised spirit of understanding to come.

They were in this frame of mind when, after the crucifixion, two of the disciples decided to walk from Jerusalem to a village called Emmaus. Emmaus means “hot springs” and was about eight miles

from Jerusalem. One of the disciples was Cleopas and the other is thought to have been Peter. They probably wanted to get away from the hustle and bustle of the city to a quiet place where they could talk and think, and perhaps understand. Their hearts were heavy and as they walked the record says: "They talked together of all these things which had happened," and "they communed together, and reasoned." (Luke 24) In other words, they tried to make sense out of the situation but had difficulty doing so. Jesus joined them on the road in a form they did not recognize. "And he said unto them, What manner of communications are these ye have one to another as ye walk, and are sad?" They must have sensed a sympathetic understanding in this stranger because they poured out what was in their hearts. They told him how their beloved master whom they described as "a prophet, mighty in deed and word before God and all the people," had been delivered up by the chief priests, condemned to death, and crucified; how all their high hopes had been shattered; and they added wistfully: "But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel." Then we read:

"[Jesus] said unto them, O foolish and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them, in all the scriptures, the things concerning himself."--Luke 24:25-27

What a feast it was for their souls! What a balm for their hearts torn by grief and confusion! What a thrill! What an exaltation of spirit! To see everything fall perfectly into place as he talked, to see the reason for it all, to know that it was the truth! Confusion and doubt dissolved and the mystery of recent events became an open book. As they said later after Jesus had revealed himself to them and departed:

"Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?"

Here is a prime example of "meat in due season." These were things Jesus had not told them before. Why not? Because as Jesus had said, "Ye can not bear them now." When Jesus was on earth as a man, his disciples looked for him to set up an immediate earthly government, to supplant Roman rule, to wrest the sovereignty of Israel away from Rome. As they said: "We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel." They had stubbornly held to this idea and closed their minds to any other. When Jesus told them of his impending suffering and death, they said: "Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee." (Matthew 16:22) They simply refused to believe it. Things were going too well for them. Now it was different. Jesus had indeed suffered and died. They had to face this grim reality. As a plow rips deep into the hard subsoil to soften and prepare it to receive and nurture the seed, so their hearts had been

bruised, torn, humbled, and made ready for what was NOW meat in due season for them. What did Jesus tell them, as he walked with them to Emmaus? “Beginning at Moses, and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures, the things concerning himself.” These were the “many things” he had to say to them which they could not “bear” before. But they could bear them now! Now it was meat in due season. It gave them a key to the scriptures.

They learned their lesson well. They remembered. After the holy spirit was given at Pentecost, Peter spoke these words: “Those things which God before had showed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer.” (Acts 3:18) Then he pointed to the future saying:

“When the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and he shall send Jesus Christ which was before preached unto you; whom the heaven must retain until the TIMES OF RESTITUTION OF ALL THINGS, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.”--Acts 3:19-21

This is what Jesus had revealed to them on the way to Emmaus. Now the seed had borne fruit.

If there is one central, predominating theme, common to the preaching of all God's holy prophets since the world began, it must be of vital importance in the plan of God, it must be an essential, basic doctrine. Let us consider the messages of these prophets and see the thread that runs through them all--the common denominator. Let us take each prophet in turn, selecting and paraphrasing for the sake of brevity, a few prophecies from each.

A Look at the Prophecies

Jude quotes ENOCH, the seventh from Adam, as prophesying: “Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints; to execute judgment upon all.” (Jude 14,15) Here we have a prophet living way back there, the seventh from Adam, telling of the second coming of Christ, the exaltation of the church with him, and the judging of all men in righteousness. This implies ransom and restitution.

Next JACOB prophesied (Genesis 49:10): “The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and to Him shall the gathering of the people be.” Here we have the coming of Christ, with the sceptre or right of rulership, to gather and bless the people. This also implies ransom and restitution.

MOSES, as a historian, recorded the circumstances of man's creation and God's original purpose to give him dominion over the earth. (Genesis 1:28) He recorded God's declaration to the serpent

that the seed of the woman would bruise its head. (Genesis 3:15) He wrote of the promise to Abraham that in him all the families of the earth shall be blessed (Genesis 12:3), that Abraham's inheritance should be an earthly one (Genesis 13:15), an everlasting one (Genesis 17:8), that all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him (Genesis 18:18), and that in his seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed. (Genesis 22:18) This promise was renewed to Isaac and Jacob.

From the statutes recorded by Moses we see that the sacrifices on and after the day of atonement and the blessing of the people typically showed the ransoming and perfection of mankind in the Millennium. (Leviticus 1:5) The glory appearing unto all the people foretold their future release from sin and death. (Leviticus 9:23) In the sounding of the Jubilee trumpet and the return of every man to his possessions, we see the world's restoration to the image and likeness of God. (Leviticus 25:10) Could ransom and restitution be more clearly taught?

As a prophet, Moses declared that God would raise up a great prophet and deliverer like unto himself to whom all the people shall give heed in the Millennial age (Deuteronomy 18:15,19); that this great deliverer would set before the people life if obedient and death if disobedient. (Deuteronomy 30:15) In the 90th Psalm, called "a prayer of Moses," we read: "Thou turn--est men to destruction, and sayest, Return, ye children of men."

This is what Moses taught. So when --Jesus began with Moses and expounded to them the scriptures on the way to Emmaus, these are the things he must have talked about. What is the central, predom--inating theme? Ransom and restitution!

The prophet SAMUEL recorded Hannah's prophecy: "The Lord killeth, and maketh alive. He bringeth down to hell, and bringeth up." (1 Samuel 2:6) Again, ransom and restitution.

The prophet JOB in his suffering prayed that he might be hidden in the grave and stay there until God's wrath should be passed--that God would then remember him in resurrection. Job also records ELI--HU's prophecy reiterating ransom and restitution:

"If there be a messenger with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to show unto man his uprightness; then he is gracious unto him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit; I HAVE FOUND A RANSOM. His flesh shall be fresher than a child's. He shall return to the days of his youth."--Job 33:23-25

The prophet and sweet psalmist DAVID foresaw and wrote that after this dark night of weeping will come a morning of joy (Psalms 30:5); that the meek shall inherit the earth (Psalms 37:11); that

whereas now men are like sheep laid in the grave, they shall come forth, and the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning (Psalms 49:14); that mercy and truth will meet, righteousness and peace kiss each other, and truth spring out of the earth when righteousness looks down from heaven (Psalms 85:10,11); that the heavens, earth, seas, fields, and trees of the wood, shall rejoice because the Lord is coming to judge the earth with righteousness and the people with his truth (Psalms 96:11-13); that all the earth shall join in a joyful noise to the Lord with songs of praise, harps, psalms, trumpets and cornets, while the seas, floods, and hills clap their hands because he comes to judge the earth (Psalms 98:4-9); and that the foundations of the earth have been laid so that it shall not be removed but be forever the home of man. (Psalms 104:5) What is the theme of all this? The common thread is ransom and restitution.

SOLOMON declared in his Proverbs that the upright shall dwell in the land, and the perfect shall remain in it (Proverbs 2:21) and that the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth. (Proverbs 11:31) He says that the earth abideth forever. (Ecclesiastes 1:4)

There are over forty references to --ransom and restitution in ISAIAH. Time permits the mention of only a few. He prophesied that in the last days the Lord's Kingdom will be established on the ruins of all earthly kingdoms, all nations will flow into it to learn of his ways, at which time they will beat their swords into plowshares, their spears into pruning-hooks, and learn war no more (Isaiah 2:2-4); that the poor and the meek will be lifted up and the earth filled as full with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:4-9); that at the time the pillar of the Lord is recognized in the world, the world will return to the Lord and he will be entreated of them and heal them (Isaiah 19:22); that the Lord will make to all people a feast of fat things--doctrines of joy--well refined, will swallow up death in victory, and wipe away tears from off all faces; all the people will say, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us (Isaiah 25:6-12); that when the Lord's judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness and the dead will live again (Isaiah 26:9,13,19); that the inhabitant shall not say I am sick because the people shall be forgiven their iniquity. (Isaiah 33:24)

Isaiah also declared that the wilderness and solitary places shall blossom as the rose, the weak hands and feeble knees be strengthened, the fearful be encouraged, the blind have their eyes opened, the deaf have their ears unstopped, the lame made to leap as an hart, the tongue of the dumb made to sing (Isaiah 35); that all the prisoners in the great prison-house of death shall be brought forth (Isaiah 42:7); that the Lord will establish the earth and cause the people to inherit the once desolate heritages (Isaiah 49:8-13); that the

redeemed of the Lord--which is all mankind --shall return from the tomb and gain salvation with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads; sorrow and mourning shall flee away (Isaiah 51:11); that the Lord will make this earth, his footstool, glorious. (Isaiah 60:13) How unmistakable the common, predominating theme of all these prophecies: ransom and restitution!

The prophet JEREMIAH foretold that the Lord will give the people a heart to know him and they shall return to Him with their whole heart (Jeremiah 24:7); that the children shall come again from the land of the enemy and shall no longer suffer for the sins of the parents; that they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know Him, from the least even unto the greatest (Jeremiah 31:16, 29,34); that the Lord will give the people one heart and one way and make an everlasting covenant with Israel and the world of mankind, and not turn away from them to do them good; that they shall not depart from Him. (Jeremiah 46:27)

EZEKIEL foretold a coming time when the Lord will take away the stony hearts out of the people and give them hearts that are warm and tender (Ezekiel 11:19); that the Sodomites, Samaritans, and the Jews shall return to their former estate; that the Lord will establish his covenant with them (Ezekiel 16:55); that it will no more be true that the children suffer for the sins of their parents (Ezekiel 18:2,3); that it will no longer be necessary for anybody to die (Ezekiel 18:31,32); that the Lord will put his spirit into the people and cause them to walk in his ways, and the land that was desolate shall become like the garden of Eden. (Ezekiel 37:24; 36:35) What is all this but ransom and restitution?

DANIEL foretold that the God of Heaven shall set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed but shall break in pieces and consume all other kingdoms and shall stand forever (Daniel 2:44); that the dominion and greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven shall be given to the saints of the Most High as an everlasting dominion. (Daniel 7:27)

HOSEA prophesied that the Lord will break the bow and sword, stop battles, make all to lie down safely, and hear the cries of men (Hosea 2:18,21); that the people will be raised up and live in the Lord's sight (Hosea 6:2); that he will ransom them from hell and redeem them from death, and destroy hell altogether. (Hosea 13:14)

The prophet JOEL prophesied that the Lord will cause the pastures to spring, the trees to bear fruit abundantly, and that whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered. (Joel 2:22-32)

AMOS was the next holy prophet. He said that the Lord would return and build again the tabernacle of David and set it up--which

means to re-establish the Kingdom of God on earth--that the residue of men, all the rest of mankind, might seek after the Lord. (Amos 9:11,12) Again, the common theme is ransom and restitution.

In the last verse of OBADIAH's short prophecy he says: "And saviours shall come up on mount Zion, to judge the mount of Esau." In other words, Jesus Christ and his body members, the church, shall constitute the heavenly phase of the kingdom and shall judge the world in righteousness.

The prophet JONAH, by his experiences with the great fish, prophesied of Jesus who was sacrificed and was three days in the grave. The sparing of Nineveh pictures God's mercy upon the poor world in the times of restitution.

The prophet MICAH wrote of the coming of the kingdom of God on earth accompanied by the rebuking of strong nations afar off; that then they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning-hooks; that nation shall not lift up sword against nation neither shall they learn war any more; that they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and none shall make them afraid; that all people will walk in the name of our God; that the first dominion lost by Adam in Eden will be restored to Christ the Tower of the flock. (Micah 4:1-5,8) Could restitution be more clearly taught than this?

NAHUM prophesied that the Lord will revenge himself upon Satan, undoing his work; that the Lord will rebuke and quiet the sea, the restless masses of humanity (Nahum 1:2,4); that upon the mountains will be seen the feet of him that bringeth good tidings and publisheth peace. (Nahum 1:15)

HABAKKUK was the prophet who foresaw that at the time of the end a faithful and wise servant would attune his ear to the word of God, especially the dispensational truths, saying according to Moffatt: "On my watch-tower I will stand, at my post upon the turret, watching to see what he will say to me, what answer he will offer to my plea"; that the Lord would bless that servant's efforts and lead him to make a chart of the Divine Plan of the Ages, saying: "Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it." (Habakkuk 2:1,2) Habakkuk also wrote of the time when "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." (Habakkuk 2:14)

ZEPHANIAH foresaw the time when the entire social order of the earth would be devoured by the fire of God's jealousy; that then he would turn to the people a pure language or doctrine with the result that they would call upon the name of the Lord to serve Him with one consent. (Zephaniah 3:8,9)

HAGGAI said that, “The desire of all nations shall come.” (Haggai 2:7)

ZECHARIAH prophesied that many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that Day and be his people, and he will dwell in the midst of them (Zechariah 2:11); that the ground shall give its increase and that the Lord will remove the fears of the people (Zechariah 8:3,8,12); that the battle bow shall be cut off and the Lord shall speak peace to the people (Zechariah 9:10); that the Lord shall be king over all the earth and men shall dwell in it; that there shall be no more utter destruction but all shall be holiness unto the Lord. (Zechariah 14:9, 11,20)

MALACHI foretold that from the rising of the sun even unto the going down thereof the Lord's name shall be great among all the people, and in every place heart adoration shall be offered to His name (Malachi 1:11); that a Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in its beams. (Malachi 4:2)

JOHN THE BAPTIST was the last of the holy prophets because Jesus said: “The law and the prophets were until John.” John turned and looked at Jesus and said:

“Behold, the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sin of the world.”-- John 1:29

Thus, we can scripturally confirm Peter's words that the time of restitution of all things was spoken by the mouths of ALL God's recorded holy prophets since the world began. What an abundance of testimony! We are indeed “compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses”! (Hebrews 12:1) While these prophets spoke of many other things, there is one central, predominating theme common to them all: RANSOM and RESTITUTION.

The Loss of Ransom and Restitution

Where is this doctrine today? With a doctrine as prominent as this found on almost every page of the Bible you would think it would be clearly taught and understood by all who name the name of Christ in every corner of the world as the waters cover the sea. But search as we might among the hundreds of nominal Christian denominations throughout the world, we find not one that teaches the pure doctrine of ransom and restitution! This seems incredible. How did such a state of affairs ever come about? Let us see.

In the early church through the preaching of Peter and other apostles the significance of Jesus' ransom sacrifice and the coming restitution of all things “spoken by the mouth of all the holy prophets since the world began,” was clearly seen. They clearly saw and fully appreciated their part in the high calling, to be the joint-

administrators of that restitution. As Paul said, “Ye see your calling, brethren.” But Paul also warned them of things to come. He told the church:

“For I KNOW this [*he was positive about this*] that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw disciples after them. Therefore, watch and remember [*Note: he said REMEMBER*] that I ceased not to warn every one, night and day, with tears.”--Acts 20:29-31

Paul had been given a revelation about this. “For I KNOW this,” he says. If the revelation was important enough for him continually to warn every one night and day with pleading and tears, it must be of utmost importance to the church THEN and NOW.

Let us see what happened and whether Paul's warning was justified. After the apostles fell asleep in death the lights --began going out. Paul had “departed” and the “grievous wolves” he had foreseen so vividly had entered in among the Lord's people. “Perverse things” began to be --spoken. For a while they did heed Paul's warning and “watched” and “remembered,” and held to the pure and precious truths. It did not last; the pressure became too great. It was easier to submit to powerful leaders than to continually challenge and resist. It is always easier to drift with the current. Darkness gradually settled upon the earth. When new thoughts were introduced--“new light”--the apostles were no longer there to consult about their validity. It was all very subtle and gradual which is the way Satan works. The time finally came when the obliteration of the pure doctrine of ransom and restitution was virtually complete. Instead of the ransom paid by Jesus once for all, there was a constantly repeated, ceremonious celebration of the Mass. Instead of a future kingdom of Christ on earth to bring about a restitution of all things, there was a counterfeit kingdom, reigning now with popes as Kings. Instead of the restoration of man to human perfection to live forever upon the earth, there was the repulsive doctrine of eternal torment. Instead of a merciful and compassionate God to be loved with all one's soul because he is good, there was a demoniac God to be feared with terror! Instead of one God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent, there was a three-headed, six-eyed Trinitarian monster!

One by one, all the beautiful and harmonious doctrines of the Divine Plan so familiar to the early church were subverted, transposed, twisted, and corrupted. With each substitution of error for truth the light became dimmer and dimmer. The rivers and torrents of truth that the original Christians had enjoyed slowed down to a trickle, then finally sank and disappeared into the quicksand of error and confusion. A counterfeit kingdom of God was established which was great and powerful. “Darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness

the people.” Even the reading of the Bible was forbidden and the translation of it from dead languages was prohibited.

Satan's Apparent Triumph

It would seem that Satan had completely triumphed. As always happens when Satan has his way, terror and frightfulness held sway. The name of God was dishonored and degraded by the horrors committed in his name. Inquisitions were instituted against so-called heretics and every conceivable instrument of torture was used to obtain conversions. Tens of thousands died after long agony, their consciousness deliberately prolonged to the utmost so that the greatest possible suffering might be experienced. All happened in the name of God and Christ!

“After all [they reasoned] what are the tortures we inflict compared with the eternity of torment ordained by God for sinners? And it has been estimated by those who seemingly have given the subject thorough investigation, that this great counterfeit kingdom of God has, directly or indirectly, during the past 1300 years, caused the death of fifty millions of people!”--Volume 2, p. 346.

It has been said that the darkness is greatest just before the dawn. We find that the same scripture that foretold the darkness also foretold the lifting of it and the restoration of the old truths:

“For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people. [*That's the DARKNESS*] But the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. Arise, shine; for thy light is come; and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee!”--Isaiah 60:2,1

How was the restoration of the light of truth to be accomplished in the face of such utter darkness and savage opposition? It was accomplished in a simple but effective way which God has often used. God stirred up the hearts of honest and consecrated men. He inspired them with the courage to proclaim what light they had and to suffer martyrdom if necessary. This spirit is exemplified by Martin Luther's declaration at the Congress of Worms. When he stood alone before the princes of Germany and the stern Emperor Charles V and was commanded to recant his teachings, he boldly said:

“Unless I shall be convinced by scriptures--for I can put no faith in popes and councils, as is evident that they have frequently erred, and even contradicted each other--UNLESS MY CONSCIENCE SHALL BE CONVINCED BY THE WORD OF GOD, I neither will nor can recant, since it is unworthy of an honest man to act contrary to his own conviction. Here I stand! It is impossible for me to act otherwise; so help me God!”--Reprints page 504.

God did help Martin Luther and all the other great reformers.

The Lord never lacked a man to represent him in the earth. There were Zwingli and Carlstadt under whose preaching the images of the church were being dashed to pieces and the ceremony of the Mass abolished. There were Calvin, Knox, Wesley, Wycliffe, Huss, and others. The old truths, long forgotten, slowly began to emerge. Satan fought it, every inch of the way!

The span of human life is short. When each great reformer died, Satan saw to it that his work died with him. He saw to it that organized religious systems were built around the reformer's teachings and further progress hedged and hampered with creedal and dogmatic fences. But this did not mean a reversion to the former darkness. The reforms were cumulative thanks to the art of printing. As one lost momentum and stopped, another picked up where it left off and the restoration of truth steadily advanced. It could not be stopped in spite of persecutions and book-burnings. When God's time comes for his word to go forth, it MUST be accomplished. The words of Isaiah now had direct application:

“So shall my word be, that goeth forth out of my mouth; it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereunto I sent it.”--Isaiah 55:11

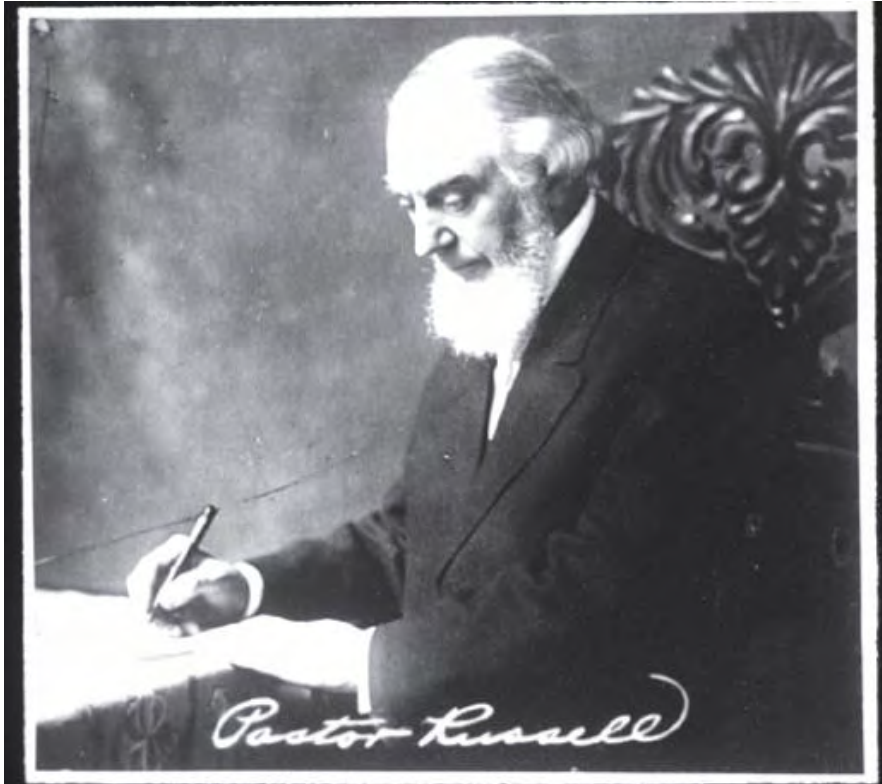
Now let us reason together. If something has been possessed, then is lost, then is steadily restored, the time must eventually come when restoration is complete. This is only logical. For example, if you had a thousand dollars and lost it, then --began a program to make regular deposits to regain that amount, the day would come when you once again had one thousand dollars. By the same token the time must come when the basic truths of the Divine Plan enjoyed by the early church but lost in the dark ages, are fully restored to the watching ones. The time must come when there is a LAST reformer because the reformation work is complete. It follows that any reformer arising beyond this point is spurious. It is possible for the basic truths to be restored 100% but they cannot be restored 150%.

The Last Reformer

The last great reformer to whom was given the honor of being the instrument for the COMPLETE restoration of “the faith once delivered to the saints,” was Charles Taze Russell.

He made no claim of a special revelation from God. He only claimed that because it was God's due time for the Divine Plan of the Ages to be understood, because he was fully consecrated to God and ready, able, and willing to serve God, his mind was stimulated and illuminated. He was permitted to understand the plan and transmit his knowledge to others. He was not the founder of a new religion and never made such a claim. He was only an instrument. He simply

revived the great truths taught by Jesus and the apostles which were spoken by the mouth of all God's holy prophets. It was God's due time--the time of Christ's second presence. This very fact further identifies Pastor Russell because our text says: "Blessed is that servant whom his Lord, WHEN HE COMETH, shall find so doing." Doing what? Giving the Lord's household "meat in due season." Dispensational truths are meat in due season. Whom did the Lord find so doing? Was anyone else extensively preaching dispensational truths at the time of our Lord's return? The timing is perfect. It just could not be anyone except Pastor Russell.



Then in this same text we have a statement of tremendous significance. It says: "He shall make him ruler over ALL his goods!" All the beautiful and harmonious doctrines of the Divine Plan were restored and dispensed by the ministry of "that servant." All the basic truths spoken by the mouths of all God's holy prophets since the world began were included!

Brother Russell was a modest man. But he knew he had the truth. He was so certain of it that his modesty did not forbid him to write these first 49 words of his first volume of *Studies in the Scriptures*:

"The title of this series of studies, The Divine Plan of the Ages, suggests a progression in the Divine arrangement, foreknown to our

God, and orderly. [Note what he says next.] We believe the teachings of Divine Revelation can be seen to be both beautiful and harmonious from this standpoint and from no other.”

Thus he lifted up a positive standard for the people of God. (Isaiah 62:10)

During his ministry, Pastor Russell traveled more than a million miles and this was before the advent of air travel. He delivered 30,000 sermons many of them three hours long. He wrote over 50,000 pages of Bible teachings which were circulated by tracts, newspapers, and books, by the --millions of copies and in many languages throughout the entire world. He wrote about a thousand letters a month. Is it any wonder that he is called “the man . . . which had the inkhorn by his side?” One of my favorite pictures of Pastor Russell shows him at his writing desk with a fountain pen in his hand. At one time his writings were subjected to an analysis of 20,511 scripture references. These were assembled in Biblical order and disclosed only six points of inquiry, all easily harmonized.

Through his writings the scriptures were once again seen to be beautiful and harmonious, teaching a loving plan of redemption and honoring God. Faithful hearts seeking to walk in the way of the Lord who were confused and distraught just like those disciples on the way to Emmaus, now had the pure gospel preached to them. Through the instrumentality of Pastor Russell the Lord joined them on the way and spoke to them. Once again beginning at Moses and all the prophets he expounded unto them all the scriptures. Once again the hearts of these modern disciples burned and glowed as the treasures of the scriptures were opened to them and everything fell perfectly into place! As Jesus' words were “meat in due season” for those who walked with him to Emmaus so long ago, so those who now sought to walk in his footsteps were supplied the same abundant and nourishing “meat in due season” through the ministry of Pastor Russell.

He called his books “Berean Studies.” By this he encouraged his readers to emulate those noble ones of the early church who “searched the scriptures daily,” to prove “whether those things were so.” (Acts 17:11) He did not desire anyone to accept what he taught because it came to them through a certain channel. Not at all! The scriptures must be searched and --everyone fully persuaded in his own mind. But he also taught that **doctrines once proven are to be faithfully held.**

Pastor Russell fulfilled his ministry and passed beyond the veil in 1916. Then were the words of Ezekiel fulfilled:

“And behold, the man clothed with linen, which had the inkhorn by his side, reported the matter, saying, I have done as thou hast commanded me.”--Ezekiel 9:11

What had he done? He had been the ready instrument in God's hands for the restoration of the basic truths of the Bible--the faith once delivered unto the saints. These basic truths of the Divine Plan are not subject to change; they are ETERNAL truths.

After Pastor Russell died Paul's prophecy regarding “grievous wolves” had a --secondary fulfillment. “Perverse things” again began to be spoken. Ambitious leaders repudiated Brother Russell's writings and many were drawn away from the truth. I saw this happen; I was there. It was a heart-breaking experience.

Now after many years Paul's warnings are once again appropriate. “WATCH and REMEMBER,” he said. Let us remember and hold to the old truths.

The truth regarding the ransom and sin-offering has not changed. Justification is still the same as Brother Russell saw it and taught it. The words he used to describe it are still good. *Tabernacle Shadows* is still correct as he wrote it. Chronology is still accurate even though some hoped-for events have not yet occurred. The chart of the Divine Plan of the Ages is still correct as drawn. There is no doubt that we are in the seventh thousand year period of man's history, the Times of Restitution. The time prophecies of the Jubilees fit too well to be denied. It is still true that Christ has returned and that he came as king. There is no change in the future role of Israel as a channel of blessing to the world. These and other truths promulgated through “that faithful and wise servant” are worth holding and fighting for. As Jude 3 says, we “should earnestly contend for **the faith** which was **once** delivered unto the saints.” That is why the reprinting of all of Brother Russell's works is so important.

But someone may quote, “The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.” (Proverbs 4:18) This is supposed to prove that we must always expect new light to be revealed until God's kingdom is fully established. But that isn't what this scripture says. Let us look at the context. Verse 14 reads: “Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil men.” The subject here is paths. This is --followed by three verses emphasizing the sinfulness of a wrong course, or path, in life. Then by way of contrast it says in verse 18: “But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.” In other words, “Avoid the wrong path, the evil way; but rather walk in the right path, the path of the just.” What are the rewards of the right path? As we walk in it there will be an increased “shining”--an individual development and growth into the likeness

of our Master--a development of character. This is exactly the same thought that we find in 2 Corinthians 3:18: "But we all, with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory," or "shining more and more unto the perfect day." When is that "perfect day"? Paul describes it:

"Till we all come, in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a PERFECT MAN, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."--Ephesians 4:13

The perfect day for each one of us will come when, having walked in "the path of the just" to the end of it, we are considered worthy to hear the Lord's "Well done"--when we have made our calling and election sure. This does not mean, of course, that nothing will be seen clearer than what Pastor Russell saw. We are bound to see things clearer as prophecies begin to be fulfilled before our eyes. For example, the restoration of Israel as a nation; the division of the world into Communistic and Capitalistic camps--East and West; the development of the atomic bomb which for the first time in history threatens "all flesh"; and other such events. **BUT THE FUNDAMENTAL DOCTRINES OF THE TRUTH REMAIN THE SAME!** Tampering with any one of them destroys the balance of the entire structure. The pieces no longer fit. As Brother Russell said, they are harmonious from this one standpoint, and from no other!

Although to the Jews "were committed the oracles of God" (Romans 3:2), they were always straying to other pastures. They had been delivered from bondage in Egypt, sustained with food and drink in the howling wilderness, and brought at last to their Canaan. Yet they repudiated their Master's provision again and again, and went after idols. Isaiah aptly puts it:

"The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his Master's crib; but Israel doth not know; my people doth not consider. . . . They have forsaken the Lord; they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger; they are gone away backward."--Isaiah 1:3,4

We too, the Israel of God, have been delivered from the bondage of false doctrines. We too have been sustained and fed with the word of truth from our Master's table as served to us by that faithful and wise servant amid a howling wilderness of confusion all about us. We too have been brought at last to a Canaan of brilliant enlightenment and rest in the Lord. Should we as the Jews did, forget **OUR** Master's -- table and long for the leeks and onions of Egypt--the so-called "new light" doctrines of sensual appeal--to exchange our heavenly manna for the fleshpots of Egypt--to go backward into error?

Did any of you come into the truth by yourself? Did you without assistance and guidance discover for yourself all the precious details of the Divine Plan? Of course not! We all received the truth through

the voice of the seventh angel, Brother Rus--sell--the COMPLETE truth, the FINISHED truth. As it is written:

“But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be FINISHED, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets.”--Revelation 10:7

It is no longer a mystery. It is a RE-understanding of the Divine Plan for the “restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.”

It is once again appropriate to remember Paul's warnings which he made with pleadings and tears concerning grievous wolves and men speaking perverse things. Let us remember that Paul also said:

“Be no more children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, and cunning craftiness.”--Ephesians 4:14

“Be ye steadfast, unmovable.”--1 Corinthians 15:58

“Rooted and grounded.”--Ephesians 3:17

The Admonitions of Peter

JESUS had just partaken of his last Passover, and had instituted the Memorial supper. After supper, he and his disciples went out into the Mount of Olives. They were nearing a place called Gethsemane. Satan must have been right there with them, invisibly present. He would certainly want to be on the scene of his great triumph which was about to take place--the betrayal of Jesus with a kiss by his own disciple, Judas Iscariot. If the disciples had known that the Prince of Darkness was at their side, they would have been terrified. But Jesus knew he was there.

Then Jesus did an astonishing thing--he read Satan's mind! We know this because he then turned to Simon Peter and said: "Simon, Simon; behold Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat." This must have startled Peter, so the Lord reassured him, saying: "But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." Then he added something Peter would remember and act upon in the days to come: "And when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." (Luke 22:31,32) To be converted, means to turn, to change. Peter's triple denial of the Lord and the remorse that followed "converted" his headstrong and impetuous will into a humble and a contrite heart. (Psalms 51:17) We read: "And Peter went out, and wept bitterly."

After the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the several appearances of Jesus to his disciples there was a short time when the disciples did not know just what to do. One day about seven of them who used to be fishermen, including Peter, gathered at the seashore. They enjoyed the old familiar sights, sounds and smells of the sea. They were all of the same mind as to what they would do, but each hesitated to make the first move. You can well imagine who did make the first move:

"Simon Peter saith unto them, I go a fishing. They say unto him, We also go with thee. They went forth and entered into a ship immediately."--John 21:3

What a powerful natural leader Peter was. He said, "I'm going fishing!" The others said, "We'll go fishing with you!" And that's what they did.

This incident illustrates how easy it is to lose direction--to misplace one's energies when the leader is gone and the objective is not clear. These were the ones Jesus had for over three years made "fishers of men." He had left them for just a few days, and now, once again, they were back to being "fishers of fish!"

All that night they caught nothing. They tried again and again, but no luck. Perhaps in the silent watches of the night, they began to have some doubts as to the wisdom of going back to the fishing business.

Early the next morning, Jesus appeared to them for the third time since his resurrection. He revealed himself in a characteristic way, by a miraculous incident. This they could instantly recognize because they had witnessed his loving miracles for 3 1/2 years. Objects were indistinct in the early morning light, but at the direction of a man on shore, whose face they could not recognize, they let down their net once more. Then, after catching not one single fish all night, their net now --contained 153 great fishes! They instantly knew it was Jesus on shore. They knew by the sheer bounty of his gift. "Great fishes" must weigh at least 30 pounds each, wouldn't you say? So, one moment they had nothing; the next moment they were practically engulfed by over two tons of fish! It took another miracle to keep their net from being torn by the weight of their catch. (See John 21:11.) Besides being a gesture of recognition, why did Jesus allow them to make such a stupendous catch? Was it to encourage them to remain in the fishing business? I don't think so; quite to the contrary. Two tons of fish would have a considerable market value, and money could finance their return to the ministry as "fishers of men."

When the disciples came ashore, Jesus had food prepared for them. He invited them to eat, and he served them. Think of it! This was no longer the man Christ Jesus, this was the resurrected Jesus, a mighty spirit being, a divine being, who said of himself: "All power is given unto me, in heaven and in earth." (Matthew 28:18) He made them sit down and he served them! No, he had not changed in character. He was still the same Jesus who came not to be ministered unto but to minister; who taught them that the chiefest among them should be their servant (Matthew 20:27,28), and who demonstrated it by washing their feet. He still serves us our spiritual food to this day if we have not left his table. Now we read from the record:

"So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter: Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these [these boats, these nets, these earthly interests]? He saith unto him, Yea Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him: feed my lambs. Jesus saith unto him again, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him: Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him: feed my sheep [or: tend my sheep, Diaglott]. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved, because he said unto him the third time: Lovest thou me? And he said unto him: Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, feed my sheep."--John 21:15-17

When Jesus asked Peter the third time, Peter suddenly understood. Three times he had denied the Master even though he loved him deeply. He had been remorseful and heartbroken. Now he was

required to affirm his love three times as if to expiate. This was the punishment his Lord imposed--the only punishment he imposed--and



it was a gentle punishment indeed. With it Jesus imposed a duty upon Peter, a duty by which Peter could prove his love. The duty was threefold: “Feed my lambs; tend my sheep; feed my sheep.” Don't you think under these circumstances Peter would have a tremendous incentive, an eager and consuming desire, to comply with the Lord's wishes? He had miserably failed his Lord before. Now he was being accorded another chance to prove his love and devotion. This time he would not, he must not, fail.

And he did not fail! In his years of faithful ministry, he fed the Lord's lambs, those immature in the truth. He tended the Lord's sheep as they matured, warning them against false teachers, damnable

heresies, and denial of the ransom. (2 Peter 2:1,2) He fed the Lord's sheep, those established in the truth, with meat in due season, stirring them up and stimulating them to progress in the race for the great prize of the high calling. You may be sure he would not disappoint the Lord again! As he said:

“Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. Yea I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle to stir you up, by putting you in remembrance.”--2 Peter 1:12,13

Let us consider some of Peter's admonitions to us--we who are the Lord's lambs and sheep--admonitions which are a part of Peter's efforts to prove his great love for his Master by feeding and tending us.

“Simon Peter, a servant, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us, through the righteousness of our Lord, and Saviour Jesus Christ; grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord; according as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue; whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you, that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins. Wherefore the rather, brethren; give diligence to making your calling and election sure; for 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.”-- 2 Peter 1:1-11

We are told to “add to our faith” certain things. This implies that we can't even start to carry out these instructions, unless we have this faith. This automatically eliminates a lot of people in the world, even good people. There are some people in the world who are naturally noble and good, who possess an excellent character. They prefer righteousness to evil and conduct their lives accordingly. Does this qualify them for the prize of the high calling? Not for a minute! There must be a foundation of faith, a faith of a certain kind, before the structure built upon it can be recognized by the Lord.

Peter directs his opening words “to them that have obtained like precious faith with us.” (2 Peter 1:1) This is not --ordinary faith, it is “like precious faith.” Mere faith in God is not enough. “The devils also believe and tremble.” (James 2:19) What is required is an absolute faith in the redemption accomplished through the precious blood of Christ, a firm belief in the application of that blood to ourselves by which we have a standing before God, are justified, accepted, begotten, and in the race for the high calling. It is an abiding confidence in the divine plan for salvation, not only for ourselves, but for the whole world. It is upon this “like precious faith” --a faith like the faith of the apostles--that we are to build.

Fortitude

“And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith, virtue.” The word “virtue” is better translated “fortitude.” It is strength of character in righteousness and implies the cultivation of the strictest integrity in all our dealings, both with God and with our fellow-men. It means scrupulous honesty, justice and truth. The psalmist defines this characteristic for us:

“Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speak--eth the truth in his heart. He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbor, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbor. In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoreth them that fear the Lord. He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not. He that putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward against the innocent. He that doeth these things shall never be moved.”--Psalms 15:1-5

“He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart,” the psalmist said. The same thought is expressed in Proverbs:

“They that are of a froward heart, are abomination to the Lord; but such as are upright in their ways, are his delight.”--Proverbs 11:20

There are many among our nominal Christian friends, who walk as uprightly as they possibly can. Many work righteousness with all their might, often risking great personal danger in missionary work among savage aborigines. But do they speak the truth in their hearts? Sometimes it is their personal fear of hell fire that impels them to “be good,” and try to make others be good as well. Sometimes their frantic missionary efforts are motivated by their conviction that the heathen would otherwise go into eternal torment or the second death. This is the wrong motive. The truth is not in their hearts.

Of course, any effort by anyone at any time to walk uprightly and work righteousness brings a blessing. Of course the one who has “escaped the corruption that is in the world” and is qualifying to become a partaker of the divine nature does walk uprightly and work righteousness. But he does more than that: “he speaketh the truth in his heart.” His motives are pure; he has taken the truth to heart. “Out of the fullness of the heart the mouth speaketh.” He speaks the truth gently and without malice, without God-dishonoring threats, of either hell fire or wholesale second death.

The psalm also says, “He backbiteth not with his tongue; nor doeth evil to his neighbor; nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbor.” One that is striving for the prize of the high calling should certainly not indulge in evil-speaking or character assassination. One who knows the importance of developing character surely will not destroy another's character. There is a poem, translated from the Arabic, that contains some excellent advice:

“If you are tempted to reveal a tale to you someone has told,
Make it pass, before you speak, three gates of gold. These narrow
gates: First, Is it True? Then, Is it Needful? In your mind Give a
truthful answer. The next is last and narrowest, Is it Kind? And if,
to reach your lips at last, it passes through these gateways three,
Then you may tell the tale, nor fear what the result of speech may
be.”

The Harm from Evil-Speaking

The frightening thing about evil-speaking is that the harm done may be irreparable. There's a story illustrating this point. When a man asked the Moslem prophet Mohammed how he might make amends for false--ly accusing a friend, he was told to go and place a goose feather on each doorstep in the village and he did it. The next day Mohammed said, “Now go and collect all the feathers.” The man protested: “That's impossible! A wind blew all night, and the feathers are scattered beyond recall.” “Exactly,” said Mohammed. “And so it is with the reckless words you spoke against your neighbor.”

Along the same line, Paul wrote:

“Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good, to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. And grieve not the holy spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice; and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted; forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you.”--
Ephesians 4:29-32

“Bitterness, and wrath, and anger.” Anger has been compared to drunkenness and insanity. The speech and actions of a drunkard or insane person are not under the control of a logical mind. Such control is also lost in anger. When we lose our tempers, we lose the power that tempers and logically controls our actions. Aristotle is quoted as saying:

“Anybody can become angry. That's easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way--that is not within everybody's power, and is not easy.”

The only person, other than God himself, who could qualify in these respects was Jesus Christ. When he was angry with the Scribes and Pharisees, the money-changers and others, he could read their hearts, minds, motives, and innermost thoughts. We can't! But, someone might claim, “My anger is righteous anger, as Jesus' anger was.” Perhaps it is, in some measure. But Jesus' anger was truly righteous anger because he himself was truly righteous. If I am not righteous, how can my anger be righteous anger? “There is none righteous, no not one.” (Romans 3:10)

Then we read, “Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted; forgiving one another.” The fallen human nature is a bundle of perverse and illogical contradictions. For example, we can be our most charming and gracious selves to utter strangers. But familiarity breeds contempt and we often become careless in our attitudes to those closest to us. As the poet expresses it:

“But there's one truth in life I've found, While journeying east and west; The only folks we really wound Are those we love the best.

“We flatter those we hardly know, We please the fleeting guest; And deal full many a thoughtless blow To those we love the best.”

Psalm 15 continues: “In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoreth them that fear the Lord.” It is easy to love those who love the Lord. They are our brethren, our spiritual associates, fellow-partakers of the precious promises, joint-heirs of Christ and of God. But to love an enemy, a vile person, that's different! True, we are told to love our enemies, but we are not told to love the vileness of our enemies. There's a big difference. When I was told, long ago, I must hate a man's bad actions, but not the man, I used to think it was a silly, hair-splitting distinction. How could I hate what a man did and not hate the man? Years later it occurred to me that there was one man for whom I had been doing this all my life: myself. If I am to love my neighbor as myself, I must extend the same consideration to him.

“He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not.” An honorable person who has made a contract and later finds it to be to his disadvantage will nevertheless perform it even if it means a loss. This is basic integrity. But this scripture has a deeper significance. All the consecrated have “sworn to their own hurt.” We have vowed to “suffer with him, that we may be glorified together.” Let us not change. Let us add to our faith, fortitude, to continue in the footsteps of Jesus.

Knowledge

Peter says we must add to virtue [or fortitude], knowledge.

“Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom; and with all thy getting, get understanding.”--Proverbs 4:7

Does this mean that we must be “learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians” (Acts 7:22), that we must all pursue the higher education of this world? No. The kind of knowledge that is required is that which will make us “wise unto salvation” (2 Timothy 3:15). A sound knowledge of the truth represents the wisdom that “is the principal thing.” Scientific knowledge and wisdom can release the power of the atom and unleash its tremendous physical forces. It can put men on the moon. But it cannot invoke the “power of God unto salvation” (Romans 1:16), the mighty power that takes the foolish, the weak, the base, the despised, those who in the eyes of the world are nothing (1 Corinthians 1:27,28) and exalt them to the pinnacle of life, the divine nature. That is real power!

In adding knowledge, we should, as the apostle says: “Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason for the hope that is in you.” (1 Peter 3:15) We should have a sound knowledge of the fundamentals of the divine plan, --especially the ransom. We must be --convinced in our own minds, beyond the possibility of shaking, that ransom means corresponding price. We must be convinced in our own minds beyond the possibility of shaking that the ransom given by our Lord Jesus was a man's life, for a man's life. There are other fundamentals of truth revealed through a faithful and wise servant. Many who once walked with us and who did not diligently add to their faith this unswerving fundamental knowledge have been deceived and have fallen from the way.

Self-Control

Then we are told to add to our knowledge, temperance, or self-control. This is one of the most important elements of good character. The wise man said, “He that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city.” (Proverbs 16:32) Self-control has application to our every activity. It has to do with all our sentiments, thoughts,

tastes, appetites, labors, pleasures, sorrows and hopes. Its successful cultivation means a high order of character development. The fruit of self-control is moderation. Paul --exhorts, "Let your moderation be known unto all men." (Philippians 4:5) It takes strength of character to be moderate in all things. It is contrary to the spirit of the world, with its depraved tastes, appetites and excesses. Moderation balances all the other virtues. A philosopher named Ogburn has written a bit of worldly wisdom worth repeating:

"Moderation is the only virtue. The other so-called virtues are virtuous only in-so-far as they are joined with moderation. To be over-courageous, is to be foolhardy. To be over-thrifty, is to be parsimonious--miserly. To be over-loving is to be doting. To be too unselfish is to weary the world with the spectacle of your martyrdom. To give a child, a mate or a friend too much attention, or too little, is equally disastrous. Self-abnegation and self-glorification are both vices. To be too thoughtful is to be incapable of action; to be over-active is self-defeating and likely to prove fatal. Moderation is what counts."

But we as Christians know that there is one thing in which we must not be moderate, to which we must give no restraint--"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind." (Matthew 22:37) There is no moderation here! We must go all the way!

Patience

We must add to temperance (or self-control), patience. Jehovah is called a "God of patience." (Romans 15:5) How true this is! He has plenty of time. The psalmist wrote, "From everlasting to everlasting, thou art God." (Psalms 90:2) Extending from everlastingly into the past, to everlastingly into the future, without the necessity of hurrying to "meet a deadline," as human creatures are always doing. He has taken millions of years to create the universe, and ages upon ages, to create the world. Peter tells us:

"Beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is, with the Lord, as a thousand years; and a thousand years as one day."--2 Peter 3:8

Think of it! Man's creation, fall, redemption, resurrection and restitution, all happen in only a week as far as God is concerned! Let us remember this the next time we are impatient with the seeming delay in the outworking of God's plan.

There is a text that indicates patience will be one of the final and most shaking tests upon the church at the end of the age --where we are now:

“Cast not away, therefore, your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward, for ye have need of patience that after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come, will come, and will not tarry.”--Hebrews 10:35-37

Many have said, “We have done the will of God. The `times of the Gentiles' have ended. 1914 has come and gone. Is it not time for our change? We know the reign has begun, but is it not time for Christ the Lord to appear openly and to manifest his kingdom on earth in power and glory?”

Lacking patience some were disappointed at the delay and “cast away their confidence,” and with it, “the great recompense of reward.” They lost interest in the truth; they lost their calling and election. Others with impatience took action by trying to hurry things up. They tried to hasten the work of the kingdom by their own efforts. They established Kingdom Halls. They twisted, perverted, and misapplied the prophecies. One error led to another until the fundamental doctrine of the ransom was tampered with--all because of a lack of patience.

The outworking of the times and seasons should be left to the Lord! We read: “Wait ye upon me, saith the Lord.” (Zeph--aniah 3:8) Wait! This applies also to our development as new creatures. It takes time for anything worth while to mature. Hastily picked fruit is unripe, hard, sour and bitter. But time, as well as pruning, fertilizing, cultivating, and exposure to sunshine and rain produces ripe and luscious fruit which delights the taste. This is confirmed by James:

“Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the --coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth; and hath long patience for it; until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts.”--James 5:7,8

The child of God must have patience, --patience with the poor blinded world, with our enemies because they know not what they do, with the “babes in Christ,” with the slow and ignorant, with the excitable and blundering, with the over-confident Peters and the skeptical Thomases. By the application of the time element, patience will work to perfect our characters in love. “Let patience have her perfect work.” (James 1:4) There is no substitute for it, there are no short cuts. Once when James Garfield was president of Hiram College in Ohio, a father asked him if the course of study could be simplified to enable his son to “go through by a shorter route.” Garfield replied:

“Certainly, but it all depends upon what you want to make of your boy. When God wants to make an oak tree, he takes a hundred years. When he wants to make a squash, he requires only two months.”

We are being schooled and prepared for an exceedingly high position. It takes time! We are of “them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, and honor and immortality; eternal life.” (Romans 2:7) “He that endureth to the end, shall be saved.” (Matthew 10:22) “Let us run with patience the race that is set before us.” (Hebrews 12:1)

Godliness

Next, we are told to add to patience, godliness, or God-likeness. This comes with Christian maturity. As we learn of God's plans and ways, we conform our plans and ways to his. We taste of his goodness and see positive evidences of his leadings and disciplines in our individual lives. Through constant communion in prayer over the years we become very close to our Lord. As a son who loves and admires his father, seeks to emulate him, and copy his ways, we pattern ourselves after God and Christ. We reach the point when, even with our finite minds, we reason like God does. He has said, “Come now, let us reason together.” (Isaiah 1:18) We learn to love him with all our hearts, minds and souls. We heartily, cheerfully and lovingly conform to his will. Just as an earthly father loves a son who emulates him, God loves us for it!

This Godliness is a later development of Christian character; and a very vital one if we are to gain the prize. It is what Paul describes as the “Holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.” (Hebrews 12:14) Let us not be discouraged by the seeming stringency of this requirement. We are not required to be sinless. Please notice that the same verse of scripture that invites us to “come, let us reason together,” is the one that assures us “though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” (Isaiah 1:18) Confirming this, John wrote, tenderly and reassuringly:

“My little children, these things write I unto you that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.”--1 John 2:1

Praise God for such a wonderful provision!

Brotherly-Kindness

We are counseled to add to Godliness, brotherly-kindness. Does this mean we are to be kind only to the brethren? No! The prefix “brotherly” describes the **quality** of kindness, not its **scope**. We are to manifest this choice variety or degree of kindness known as brotherly-kindness to all but, as with any other good thing, especially to the household of faith. In this we are also being God-like because

God is --described as “a God ready to pardon; gracious and merciful; slow to anger; and of great kindness.” (Nehemiah 9:17)

Some may say, “Of course he is merciful and kind to his own people--to those who are in covenant relationship with him; but others can expect no mercy. For them the second death awaits.” There is a large society holding to this view today. This view puts a false limit on the goodness of God. Jesus himself said of the Heavenly Father:

“For he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful as your Father also is merciful.”--Luke 6:35,36

We are of all men most fortunate to have been called and enlightened of God. Our hearts should be tender toward those less fortunate than ourselves. It is through us that the Lord will manifest his kindness and mercy to the world in the future; we are expected to demonstrate kindness and mercy now. But in this we will often be misunderstood by the world. Many of the world cannot comprehend unselfish kindness. Do good to such, and he will say or think, “What's your angle? What's in it for you? What's the gimmick? Nobody gives something for nothing!” Doing good without any hope of return is simply incomprehensible to the world. But how astonished they will be when during the kingdom, the very windows of heaven will be opened and they will be deluged with good things beyond their imaginations! When “whosoever will” can take freely of the rich blessings provided. (Revelation 22:17) With the application of the principle that “it is more blessed to give than to receive,” we, the instruments of dispensing good things, will be very blessed indeed!

Love

Finally we are told to add to brotherly-kindness, charity or love. The kind of love here referred to is the highest form of love. It is higher than the love suggested by brotherly-kindness. It is this kind of love: “God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son.” (John 3:16) This love, which God exemplifies, is the kind he sets before us as the highest standard, or “mark” toward which we must run. This perfect standard of love is impossible to our fallen flesh. But it is possible and --attainable, by our renewed minds, wills and hearts. We read: “The end of the commandment is love” (1 Timothy 1:5), this highest form of love. The object of all God's counsel and discipline is to bring us to this character-likeness to himself--this exalted form of love. As we read:

“God is love, and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him.”--1 John 4:16

Love to God alone is not the full manifestation of this grace. There must be a corresponding love to man. John wrote:

“If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God, whom he hath not seen?”--1 John 4:20

Jesus said: “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” (John 13:35) With diligence let us add to our faith, virtue [or fortitude], knowledge, temperance [or self-control], patience, godliness, brotherly-kindness, and the highest form of love.

“For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren, nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off; and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.”

Some in the Society who were formerly of like mind, have scoffed at character-development and have become blinded to the true counsel of God in this respect. They are short-sighted and “cannot see afar off.” They cannot see that as a man sows now, he reaps in the future. They have forgotten the years already spent in developing character fruits, and the measure of cleansing that resulted. They have forgotten that they were purged from their old sins.

“Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure; for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall.”

Someone might say, “There's a big if here. The Jews could have attained life, too, if they had kept the law perfectly.” True, but there's a big difference here. With us, the contingency is not in the doing of these things perfectly as it was with the Jews. We have at our disposal the righteousness of Christ to cover our transgressions and to compensate for our daily shortcomings. But if, added to our faith in the imputed righteousness of Christ, we have cultivated all these graces to the extent of our ability, we shall not fall!

That is a positive statement: “Ye shall never fall.” You shall never cease to be in line for the great prize of the high calling.

“For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

Notice: It is an **abundant entrance!** There is nothing grudging about it! It brings to mind a wide open door, open arms, a hearty welcome home with those we love best, after a long and weary journey.

The Astonishing Doctrines

“And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the -- people were astonished at his doctrine; for he taught them as one -- having authority, and not as the scribes.”--Matthew 7:28,29

VERY early in Jesus' ministry, almost from the very beginning, the Jews sought to kill him. Why did they want to do this? Everything Jesus did was good. It is written that he was “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.” (Hebrews 7:26) He went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed. (Acts 10:38) He was anointed to “proclaim the gospel to the poor, bind up the broken-hearted, and preach deliverance to captives.” (Luke 4:18) These are good things to do and should gain a sympathetic response from all good-hearted people. He faithfully did these things with all the might of his perfect human organism. “And the common people heard him gladly” (Mark 12:37), or as the Diaglott has it: “And the great crowd heard him with pleasure.”

Wherever he went, he performed miracles of mercy, love and compassion. He did it lavishly and freely, to all who had need. The poor people, the common people, the poverty-stricken, the sick, the oppressed, the tax-ridden, those in servitude, the unfortunate who had never in their lives gotten anything free before, flocked to him in huge numbers. They had been waiting for Messiah, the Christ. Luke says that at this particular time, all men in Israel “were in expectation of him.” (Luke 3:15) From the prophecies, they expected Messiah to come with great power, performing miracles. Here was a man who fitted that description. This must indeed be the Messiah.

This rising tide of sentiment infuriated the chief priests, scribes and Pharisees who saw their positions threatened. As we read:

“And many of the people believed on him and said: When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these, which this man hath done?”--John 7:31

The Pharisees Try to Take Jesus

The Pharisees heard that the people --murmured such things concerning him, so what did they do? “And the Pharisees and the chief priests, sent officers to take him.” Think of it! These were the religious leaders of the people, the teachers, the models of morality and truth. They sat in Moses' seat and were the custodians of the oracles of God. What was their first reaction when faced with a rival? They had no consideration as to the mercy, goodness and truth being brought to the people; they had not even a shrinking or a fear of opposing a work that was obviously blessed of God. Their only primitive, savage reaction, as old as Cain, was: “Take him, and kill

him!” So we read: “The Pharisees and the chief priests sent officers to take him.” They undoubtedly had a plan. Perhaps they would judge him to be a wizard and stone him. This was perfectly legal according to Mosaic law. A few false witnesses procured with pieces of silver could testify about a number of acts punishable by death. Then they would be rid of him. It was as simple and as crude as that!

They sent officers to take him and waited for them to return with Jesus. They waited, and they waited. There seemed to be some delay, but finally, “then came the officers to the chief priests and Pharisees.” (John 7:45) Jesus was not with them! They were empty-handed and shame-faced. “And they said unto them, why have ye not brought him?” The officers answered, “**Never man spake like this man!**” What kind of an excuse was this for such men to make? These officers were hard, tough-minded men, callused to all kinds of violence and cruelty. They were of the same band who were later assigned to go with Judas to Gethsemane, who watched, unmoved, the most loathsome betrayal in history, a betrayal which has become a byword, to this day: the Judas Kiss. These were the ones who captured Jesus, bound him, and took him to the palace of the high priest for questioning. (John 18:15) They were the same band of officers who slapped Jesus with the palms of their hands (John 18:22), who dragged Jesus to Pilate’s judgment hall (18:28), and turned him over to the cruel Roman soldiers for scourging and other indignities.

These were not soft men by any means. They were strong, reckless men, armed with swords. All Jesus had was his manner and speech, but it was quite enough! As Jesus spoke they stood, listened, backed away, and returned to the chief priests without him and with the lame excuse: “Never man spake like this man!” What had happened? I think it is obvious that being men used to authority, they had met a superior authority; they had met their master! Later, when Jesus had completed his ministry, he would permit them to take him; but it was not yet time. Even in Gethsemane, when the time had come for Jesus to submit to them, the superior authority of his manner and voice almost prevented these men from carrying out their mission even then. We read from John:

“Judas then, having received a band of men and officers from the chief priests, and Pharisees, cometh thither, with lanterns and torches and weapons. Jesus . . . went forth and said unto them: Whom seek ye? They answered him: Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus saith unto them: I am he. . . . As soon, then, as he had said unto them, I am he, they went backward, and fell to the ground. Then asked he them again: Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered: I have told you, that I am he.”--John 18:3-8

Do you see what happened here? It was the custom in those days for officers to step back and prostrate themselves in the presence of a king. Jesus had but to say three words, "I am he," and the power and authority of his speech caused these hard but simple men to prostrate themselves before the king of kings! But Jesus' time had now come and he had to actually help these men take him!

Jesus' Sacrifice Was Voluntary

There is a very important reason why it had to be this way. Jesus' sacrifice was to be voluntary so he laid down his defenses, he relinquished his command over more than 12 legions of angels, and gave himself a ransom for all (1 Timothy 2:5,6). As Jesus himself said:

"Therefore doth my Father love me; because I lay down my life . . . No man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself."--John 10:17,18

These men did not forcibly take Jesus; he gave himself into their hands!

There is another illustration of the power of Jesus' presence and speech. The rulers of the synagogue were present when he taught one Sabbath day. As usual the --common people heard him, hungrily and gladly. We read: "And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth." (Luke 4:22) Then we read:

"[Those] of the synagogue when they heard these things, were filled with wrath and rose up, and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong. But he passing through the midst of them, went his way."--Luke 4:28-30

These people had murder in their hearts. They fully intended to push Jesus over the cliff and kill him. Jesus allowed himself to be pushed along to the very edge of the cliff as a witness against them, to confirm their murderous intentions beyond a doubt. Then he simply turned around and walked "through the midst of them." If he said anything, it is not recorded. He certainly did communicate his authority to them, by his looks and manner. As he advanced, their murderous spirit suddenly evaporated and they fell back allowing him to pass. Even these evil men knew when they had met their master! Then we read:

"[He] came down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee, and taught them, on the sabbath days; and they were astonished at his doctrine, for his word was with power."--Luke 4:31,32

He radiated power and authority. It was something you could feel, that took hold of you, that moved you.

There was also the incident when “the Pharisees took counsel, how they might entangle him in his talk” by asking him whether they should give tribute to Caesar or not. (Matthew 22:15) Jesus answered: “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's.” (Matthew 22:21) Then we read: “When they had heard these words, they marvelled.”

The Multitudes Were Amazed The Sadducees also tried to trip up Jesus before the people, by dreaming up a strange case of the woman who had had seven husbands in her lifetime. “In the resurrection,” they asked, “Whose wife shall she be, of the seven?” Jesus gave a concise answer and we read: “And the crowds, hearing this, were amazed at his teaching.” (Matthew 22:33, Diaglott) They had never heard anything like this before. His teachings were obviously true but they hopelessly confounded the chief priests, Pharisees, scribes and Sadducees, the most brilliant minds in the land! It was amazing, indeed!

It is written of Jesus that “there followed him, great multitudes of people.” (Matthew 4:25) “And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain, and when he was set, his disciples came unto him; and he opened his mouth, and taught them.” (Matthew 5:1,2) Then follows what is generally known as Christ's Sermon on the Mount comprising the fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters of Matthew. At the end of this sermon, we read the words of our text:

“And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine; for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.”--Matthew 7:28,29

It would seem that when he started his sermon, only his disciples were present; it was intended for their ears. By the time he had finished, “the people” were there as well. The multitudes sought him out and found him; what they heard of the sermon astonished them.

People are amazed and astonished to this day. Here is a quote from the writings of the eminent psychiatrist:

“If you were to take the sum total of all the authoritative articles ever written by the most qualified of psychologists and psychiatrists on the subject of mental hygiene; if you were to combine them, and refine them, and cleave out the excess verbiage; if you were to take the whole of the meat and none of the parsley; and if you were to have these unadulterated bits of pure scientific knowledge, concisely expressed by the most capable of living poets, you would have an awkward and incomplete summation of the Sermon on the Mount.”--
Dr. James T. Fisher

Doesn't that show a great deal of amazed admiration? In 2,000 years this sermon by Jesus has lost none of its magnificent power and is acknowledged today, even by a worldly psychiatrist, to be a veritable model of sound thinking. Yet they do it only lip service. They do not follow its precepts. Jesus' teachings were directed primarily to his disciples, his footstep followers. His doctrines were of God and ran counter to the ways and wisdom of the world. "The wisdom of this world, is foolishness with God." (1 Corinthians 3:19)

Let us consider some of the doctrines Jesus taught which are strange, astonishing and amazing to the world, yet are the wisdom of God and the very lifeblood of Christian development. Jesus said to his disciples: "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life." (John 6:63) In other words, they are your very breath of life! Jesus was referring to the man of God, the consecrated and spirit-begotten person, when he cited the scripture: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." (Matthew 4:4)

When Jesus delivered his sermon on the mount, he astonished his hearers from --beginning to end. His opening statement, which might be considered the text of his sermon, was a bombshell to them: "Blessed are the poor in spirit [or humble-minded] for theirs is the kingdom of hea--ven." (Matthew 5:3)

Then he said: "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." (Matthew 5:5) They said to themselves:

"What a preposterous thought. Humble-minded indeed! Meek indeed! We are a proud people. We Israelites are God's chosen people. There is nothing humble or meek about the way that God, with a mighty hand and a stretched out arm (Deuteronomy 5:15), delivered our forefathers from Egypt. The cream of Egypt's manhood, the firstborn, was slain for us; the Red Sea was divided in our behalf. We're important! There was nothing meek or humble about Joshua's decisive victories, and the forcible occupation of Canaan by our forebearers. And what about the mighty dynasty of David and the pomp, glory, and riches of Solomon? And it is that same "throne of David" that our Messiah is to restore to us and make worldwide. And now this man, who purports to be the Messiah, talks to us about the humble gaining the kingdom and the meek inheriting the earth!"

Most Did Not Understand

You see why they were astonished at his doctrine! But they did not understand that Jesus was giving natural Israel a chance to become spiritual Israel. In his sermon he enunciated the principles that would transform their characters, cause them to follow in his footsteps, to

be filled with the holy spirit, to become new creatures, to give up their earthly rights, privileges and prospects, to lay down their lives as he was doing, to humbly and meekly submit to the directions and chastenings of the Lord, to be transformed by the renewing of their minds, to be chiseled, polished and fitted as instruments to “bless all the families of the earth” as the spiritual seed of Abraham, the stars of heaven; to become the “sons of God!”

They did not respond to these teachings of Jesus. Instead they were “astonished at his doctrine.” They did not accept and receive the principles of Jesus' sermon. As John so well expressed it:

“He came unto his own, and his own received him not; but as many as received him to them gave he power to become the sons of God.”-
-John 1:11,12

Ah yes! Some did receive him. The disciples accepted Jesus and did seek to conform their lives to the heavenly standards he set for them. They grasped the power or privilege of becoming the sons of God!

Let us come down to the present day, a day described as a time of increased knowledge. (Daniel 12:4) The present time is often referred to as “the Space Age.” Man's horizons have been tremendously widened. At one time, the thought of conquering the whole world was the ultimate in selfish ambition. Greater possession than this earth could not be humanly conceived. “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?” (Matthew 16:26) But now man covets not just the earth, but the heavens as well! Men have already visited the moon. Now space craft are being prepared to visit the other planets of the solar system. Some have even dared to think of visiting other solar systems! A desperate race is now on to see which nation shall be first to claim these heavenly bodies by right of possession--in other words to gain a “kingdom of heaven.” Only a few years ago, such a thought would have been considered fantastically imaginative--pure science fiction. Now in this “space age” hard-headed and practical men are pouring time and treasure into such projects.

Suppose we were to gather together some of these modern “wise men” who think to conquer heaven and earth--political leaders, business tycoons, military strategists, and other intellectual giants--and say to them: “Gentlemen, there is a way you can obtain the kingdom of heaven, and inherit the earth. It is a very simple formula, not classified top secret but openly and plainly stated in a book which has the freest and greatest circulation of any book in history. The formula is this: Blessed are the poor in spirit [or humble-minded] for theirs is the kingdom of heaven; and Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”

What do you suppose their reaction would be? We can imagine the politician saying: “Humility? Meekness? That won't elect anybody! It just isn't realistic, not good politics. You've got to denounce the opposition; build up their shortcomings, play down their successes. Promise anything to get the vote. You don't have to deliver. Once you're in, what can they do about it? Humble? Don't be silly!”

The business man would say: “Blessed are the meek? That's not the way I heard it! Sentiment has no place in business. You've got to be tough-minded and aggressive. Beat the next guy to the punch! To be successful, you must be spurred by self-interest and self-will; push yourself forward, even to the point of belligerence! Shoulder your competitor aside, and grab the business away from them!” An executive vice-president of an advertising agency is quoted as saying in a speech: “In new business, if you engage in anything short of a direct assault on the jugular vein, you're in the Mickey Mouse league.”

The military man would say: “Humility and meekness won't win battles. You've got to get there first with the most, and press every advantage. In the face of a --superior force, you must be cunning and audacious, confusing the enemy; striking unexpectedly where it hurts the most. You must impress them with your fearlessness. When you have gained the advantage, demand unconditional surrender with the alternative of complete slaughter. If you're humble-minded and meek, you're dead!”

Others will say: “Being meek and lowly goes against everything we've been taught about life and character. To be servile, poor in spirit, goes against everything we've been told is right and necessary and great. On the contrary we should be spirited, not poor in spirit. When we say someone has plenty of spirit, it's a compliment. Don't let anybody push you around! Look out for Number One! God helps those who help themselves!” They would go on to say: “If you want others to think well of you, think well of yourself! Brag a little, bluff a little; no one will give you credit for more than you claim; a little haughtiness will impress people; meekness is weakness. What we need in the world today is strength not poor weaknesses! Think highly of yourself!”

Aren't these familiar terms? This is the current pattern offered for success. It was the same in Jesus' day. Do we wonder that they “were astonished at his doctrine” when he told them they could inherit heaven and earth by being poor in spirit, humble and meek? This method did not appeal to them at all; it violated their every standard. This may be what Isaiah meant when he described Jesus prophetically:

“He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him; He was despised and rejected of men.”--Isaiah 53:2,3

His Doctrines Had No “Beauty”

I believe that as a perfect man, Jesus was comely and did have great physical beauty. How could it be otherwise? Is a perfect --human son of God, ugly? Of course not! But it was his teachings, his astonishing --doctrines, that did not conform to their worldly ideas. It was in these that they found no form, nor comeliness, nor beauty nor anything desirable from an earthly standpoint. So they despised and rejected him, hid their faces from him, and esteemed him not. (Isaiah 53:3,4) As Matthew later expressed it: “They were offended in him.” (Matthew 13:57) They simply did not understand. They were only concerned with how they might fill their bellies with food each day. What did they know about inheriting the earth, and the kingdom of heaven? The whole idea was staggering to their minds; it was an incomprehensible mystery!

The disciples were different. They had a hunger and a thirst for what Jesus taught; Jesus promised that they would be filled, that the mysteries would be revealed to them. As Jesus said to his disciples:

“It is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven; but to them, it is not given. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah which saith: By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive; for this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their hearts, and should be converted, and I should heal them; but blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears, for they hear.”--Matthew 13:11,14-16

Blessed indeed! In this astonishing doctrine of humility which the world despises and rejects as ugly, repugnant and worthless, we find a fantastic and soul-satisfying beauty! The child of God experiences the utter joy of being poor in spirit, the powerful, sweet joy of coming to God with nothing at all! Nothing! Coming so poor, so stripped, so without the necessities of spiritual life, that everything you can have, everything you need, everything you want, must come to you as a gift of God, through Jesus Christ! This is a joy the world can never experience, can never understand! It is the joy of giving up everything, counting all things as loss and dross that we may win Christ.

Humility and Meekness in Our Lives

How should humility and meekness be applied continually in our day-to-day lives as Christians? Peter tells us:

“Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility; for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time; casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you. Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist steadfast in the faith.”--1 Peter 5:5-9

We are not to humbly subject ourselves unnecessarily to this world and the evil ones of this world. This would be conforming to this world. We are told: “Be not conformed to this world.” (Romans 12:2) Peter says, “be subject one to another and be clothed with humility one to another.” When he says “one to another,” he is speaking of the brotherhood of the truth, the fellowship of those of like precious faith, “the body of Christ, the church of God.” In the next verse he says: “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God.” Don't humble yourselves to just anybody and under any circumstance, but under the mighty hand of God! We are not to humble ourselves under Satan and the evil men he controls. Peter specifically emphasizes this when he describes Satan as a rampaging, defiant, roaring lion; and adds: “Whom resist steadfast in the faith.” So we are not to be always humble, submissive and meek to any and all persons and conditions. There is a time to resist, a time to fight the good fight of faith, a time to withstand as Paul withstood Peter to the face (Galatians 2:11), a time to earnestly contend for the faith once delivered to the saints. Ah, yes! That is important. Once many years ago when I objected to certain new doctrines being introduced in the church by the Society, I was advised to be humble enough and meek enough to accept what comes from the channel without question. I'm certainly glad I didn't take that advice!

But even when we do not agree with others, we can and should be gentle with them. We don't have to stir up opposition and fan the flames of dissension. As Paul told Timothy:

“The servant of the Lord must not strive, but be gentle unto all men . . . in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves.”--2 Timothy 2:24,25

As representatives of Christ, we must not be servile or slavish, groveling before the world. As the ambassadors we are, we should walk with dignity, with our heads high, befitting our high calling. Herein is another danger. Out of the billions of earth, only a few have been invited to this wonderful calling. We are the light of the world, we are the salt of the earth, we are a most unusual and unique

group. The Lord deals with us in a very special way. Because of this, it is so easy to fall into a self-important and haughty attitude. It may be gradual, and initially imperceptible. It seems so human to think well of ourselves, and we should, to a certain extent. Yes, we should even love ourselves, to a --degree. Jesus said: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." (Matthew 22:39) This certainly teaches that you must love your neighbor, does it not? But how much? To what degree? Why, as much as you love yourself! This is the measure of it. Thus if this teaching of Jesus admonishes us to love our neighbor, it implies that we also love ourselves because we must love our neighbor as ourself. But of course it is not our old, degraded, sinful human selves we are to love, nor our dead bodies, but our new creature selves, the begotten of God. It may be called self-respect as new creatures.

There is a serious danger here, too. This spirit of self-love can be carried too far and can sow the seed of our destruction as new creatures. This is because the next human step is to try to impress others by showing them how great, fine and good we are, even though we know we really are not. Before long we start to believe it ourselves! As Paul said:

"For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith."--Romans 12:3

Yes, we should think soberly, or realistically, of ourselves, not making ourselves something we are not. But at the same time, we should not hide away any small talent we may have which may be used in the Lord's service. Although not thinking of ourselves "more highly than we ought to think," we should, nevertheless, realistically evaluate what abilities the Lord has endowed us with and use them to his glory. Sometimes having too low an opinion of our own abilities may result in our neglecting to use what we can in the Lord's work. A wise man has said: "Use what talents you possess. The woods would be very silent if only the best birds sang."

Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit" or humble-minded. They are blessed indeed. Being humble-minded makes us charitable and forgiving to the faults of others. Because we are humble-minded enough to realize our own unworthiness, we overlook the faults in our brethren. We look for their graces instead, the indications of their development as new creatures. This is not always an easy thing to do. A lecturer once hung a large square of white paper on the blackboard. Then he made a tiny black spot in the center. He asked various ones in his audience what they saw. They all replied, "A black dot." The speaker asked: "Don't any of you see a large square of white?" The blemish, the spot, the defect, even though

exceedingly small, is seen and pointed out. The big white preponderance of lovely graces are ignored. This is a fallen human trait and is unworthy of the consecrated people of God.

Being truly humble-minded makes us merciful, kind, patient, forbearing, forgiving and charitable:

“Put on, therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another. . . . And above all these things, put on charity [or love], which is the bond of perfectness.”--Colossians 3:12,14

Clothed with Humility

These are the things we are to “put on.” The Diaglott says we are to be “clothed” with them, enveloped with them, wrapped up with them. The first quality mentioned associated with humbleness of mind is mercy. If we are humble-minded enough to know how poor we are, how unprofitable we are, how very much we ourselves are in need of mercy, we will be merciful to others. Don't forget that every such act of mercy is noted by the Lord. He uses them as a measure to return mercy to us: “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.” (Matthew 5:7) This is one of the treasures you lay up in heaven.

Those who are most used in the Lord's service are in the most danger. Satan suggests to them that they are doing a great work, and perhaps they are. But the subtle suggestion is that they are doing it by their own strength and they begin to glory in it. How foolish!

“Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? Or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it? As if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up; or as if the staff should lift up itself, as if it were not wood!”--Isaiah 10:15

The humble-minded child of God will yield himself as a tool in God's hand, to be wielded and used by him, but will never presume that any of what is accomplished is by his own merit or strength. “He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.” (1 Cor--inthians 1:31) Yes, in humility our Lord --Jesus is our supreme example. As it is so beautifully stated by Paul:

“Let this disposition be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus; who, though being in God's form, yet did not meditate a usurpation to be like God; but divested himself, taking a bondman's form, having been made in the likeness of men; and being in condition as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even the death of the cross! And therefore, God supremely exalted him, and freely

granted to him that name which is above every name.”--Philippians 2:5-9, Diaglott

We can never attain to this measure of humility, to give such a demonstration of it as this. It is not expected of us. We are not, and have never been, exalted spirit beings from which condition we might humble ourselves as Jesus did. None of us will ever literally be brought so low as to die the death on the cross; such a great humiliation as our Master suffered can never be ours. How then do we walk in his footsteps? Paul explains it in the very beginning of the scripture quoted: “Let this **disposition** be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus,” or as the old familiar King James version has it: “Let this **mind** be in you, which was also in Christ

We must have the same humble mind or disposition as Jesus. As he said of himself: “I am meek, and lowly in heart.” (Matthew 11:29) Paul said: “Now I, Paul, myself beseech you, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.” (2 Corinthians 10:1)

How did Paul know about the meekness and gentleness of Christ? Paul had never met Jesus in the flesh. Ah, but he had savagely persecuted Jesus' followers and had witnessed their reactions under trying circumstances. Just as the chief priests, seeing the boldness of Peter and John, marveled and took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13), Paul had learned of the meekness and gentleness of Christ through his disciples--by their minds and dispositions when he persecuted them, as well as in his later association with them as a brother in Christ.

Jesus also said: “I can of mine own self, do nothing.” (John 5:30) Thus he humbly acknowledged that every one of his mighty miracles--his thousands of healings and all the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth--were really **of** the father and only **through** himself! As he said:

“I have not spoken of myself; but the Father who sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak.”--John 12:49

Think of it! He gave God credit for every word he spoke! He did not take credit for a single original idea. What a flawless example for us to emulate!

Jesus taught other astonishing doctrines which the world does not understand. He taught that men **get by giving**, they **win by losing**, they **live by dying**. Try that on your next door neighbor! Pure nonsense he would say, but to us, the elect of God, these are sublime thoughts. They are precepts worth living by and dying for!

We are all familiar with the golden rule:

“Therefore, all things, whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.” --Matthew 7:12

This has been considered the highest possible standard of human conduct. But for the humble-minded, there is an even grander rule than this. I call it the diamond rule:

“In lowliness of mind, let each esteem other better than themselves!”--Philippians 2:3

Esteem them not as yourself, but better than yourself! This goes beyond the Golden Rule. If you can do this, if you can live this, you are one of the blessed ones that Jesus was talking to on the mount. Yours is the kingdom of heaven. You shall inherit the earth!

The Bible Versus the Evolution Theory

THE theory that man had no designer or creator, but is the product of nature by an evolutionary process, is very generally accepted today as true. It is widely taught in our schools and colleges in contradiction of the Bible statement that man was a direct creation of God. But the evolution of man is only a theory. When logically examined, it is a very unreasonable theory. It not only contradicts the teachings of the Bible, it violates simple common sense.

It must be self-evident to every reasonable mind that effects must be produced by competent causes. Nothing can design and create itself. A thing of beauty, symmetry and intricacy cannot be produced by an --unintelligent blind force termed "nature." The maker must of necessity be superior to the thing made.

Consider the human organism. It is a masterpiece of design and workmanship, combining mechanical, chemical and electrical principles, superbly interrelated and interacting with harmony and precision. It is so complicated that modern science can not explain its every operation. It is obviously beyond human ingenuity. Thus it clearly exhibits the hand of a master --designer and craftsman. In addition to physical attributes, man is endowed with a high degree of intelligence, with moral and ethical qualities, that could not possibly come by chance.

The theory of evolution utterly lacks proof. All about us we see various creatures of fixed natures that do not evolve to higher natures. Although those who hold to this theory have tried repeatedly, they have never succeeded in blending different species, or in producing a new fixed variety. No instance is known where one kind has changed into another kind. Surely if unintelligent nature were the creator, the process would continue and there would be no such thing as fixed species. Without intelligence nothing would arrive at fixed conditions. Evolution would be a fact today and we would still see fish becoming birds and monkeys becoming men. But no "missing link" has ever been found nor will it be found. It does not exist.

Many sincere Christians have attempted to harmonize the theory of evolution with the Bible saying that the Genesis account of the creation of man is merely allegorical, that Adam was not a direct creation of God but was the end result of millions of years of evolution from the ape, that he was in fact a monkey-man. They say that mankind has been evolving upward ever since, steadily developing higher physical and mental qualities until, in the far

distant future, the human family will attain perfection. But besides being contrary to known facts, this idea is diametrically opposed to the Bible. The two cannot be reconciled.

First there is every evidence that man has been degenerating, not advancing, over the centuries. Ancient records prove that men used to have the vitality to live many hundreds of years. Today it is rare for anyone to attain to the age of one hundred.

The most ancient human skulls unearthed show a brain capacity superior to modern man. In art, architecture, sculpture and poetry, nothing today is superior to that of the ancients. The ancient laws of Moses have been a pattern for the laws of all modern civilized nations, and are superior to them in many respects. The upward evolution of man has no basis in fact.

Most important of all, if the evolution theory were correct, there would be no need for Jesus Christ. Why? Because the whole plan of God as revealed in the Bible relates to the fall of man into sin and death, and his salvation therefrom. If there was no fall because man had been evolving upward, where is the need of a Savior? The Bible throughout teaches that there is to be a restitution of mankind, a restoration to a condition previously enjoyed. Every prophet of God spoke of restitution. Peter spoke of, "times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began." (Acts 3:19) If the theory of evolution were correct, restitution would be a great calamity to humankind because it would mean a return to the state of monkey-man.

In contrast with the illogical and unproven theory of evolution, the Bible view is beautiful, reasonable and heart-satisfying. The scriptures teach that there is a --supreme creator, a God of wisdom, justice, love and power that has a grand Plan of the Ages whereby sin and death, which have been permitted for man's experience, will be eliminated. The result will be a perfect race of human beings, living forever in health and happiness in a worldwide garden of Eden. Let us trace this loving plan as taught in the Bible.

After preparing the earth for man's habitation, God proposed to bring into being, as ruler of earth, a noble earthly creature, in his moral likeness, described as "a little lower than the angels." (Psalms 8:5)

"And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion . . . over all the earth. . . . So God created man in his own image; in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them; and God said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish [fill] the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion."--Genesis 1:26-28

We further read in verse 31 that “God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was **very good.**” It was **perfect.** We are told in Genesis 3:22 that Adam was designed with the ability to live forever.

Being created in “the image of God” means Adam was made in the creator's moral and character likeness. Unlike the lower animals with their compelling instincts, Adam was endowed with a moral sense, and a freedom of choice. He was able to reason independently, to reach decisions and to freely act in harmony with them. He was what we call a free moral agent. This is exactly what God wanted--a man capable of making his own decisions who would obey his God and do what is right by freedom of choice, because he wanted to do so, not because he was compelled to do so.

Adam was tested to determine whether he would, of his own free will, obey God's laws and thus be worthy of continued life. The option given to Adam was obey and live, or disobey and die. The test was eminently just and fair. God purposely made it simple and easy. Adam was to abstain from eating the fruit of a certain tree. But Adam failed the test. By the connivance of Satan, Adam deliberately and knowingly disobeyed God. This was the greatest tragedy in the history of the world, this is how sin entered the world and condemned Adam and his entire race to death. Since that time, all have been born sinners, have been born dying. Thus we read:

“Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”--Romans 5:12

This happened a little more than six thousand years ago. Since then mankind, instead of progressing as evolutionists claim, has been degenerating--mentally, morally and physically.

Now we come to the most wonderful part of God's plan. God provided a redeemer for Adam and his entire race.

“God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”--John 3:16

Jesus was born on earth as a perfect, sinless man, not under the Adamic sentence of death. He laid down his unforfeited human life in the place and stead of Adam's forfeited life, as a ransom price; he redeemed Adam and all his race from death.

“For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”--1 Corinthians 15:21,22

For this purpose, a kingdom of God with Christ as king is even now dawning upon the earth. During this kingdom there is to be a

resurrection of the dead. All the willing and obedient will be restored to human perfection to live forever in a worldwide garden of Eden.

The Boy Samuel

AT THE time of our lesson, which was about 1170 BC, there lived in Ramah, in the hill country of Ephraim, a devout man of the tribe of Levi, named Elkanah. He had two wives. The first was Hannah, whom he loved the best, but who had no children. The second was Peninnah, who bore him several sons and daughters.

In those days the Tabernacle of the Lord was located at Shiloh, a few miles north of Jerusalem. The priest in charge was Eli, but being an old man, he had entrusted the work of sacrificing to his two sons.

Elkanah was a godly man, and used to go up to Shiloh every year, taking his entire family with him, to worship and sacrifice to the Lord. On one of these occasions he divided the sacrificial animal, probably a bullock, into several parts, giving a portion to each member of his family for their offering. He gave his wife, Peninnah, and each of her children, equal portions, but, because he loved Hannah the best, and she had no children, it was his custom to give her a double portion to offer. This annoyed Peninnah, and she continually jeered at Hannah, reproaching her for her barrenness. We now read from 1 Samuel 1:6 to 8 [Moffatt]:

“Her rival used to taunt her bitterly, to irritate her. . . . And this went on year after year. Whenever she went up to the house of the Eternal, she taunted Hannah. One day when Elkanah was sacrificing, Hannah wept and would not eat. So her husband Elkanah said to her, Hannah, why are you weeping? Why are you not eating? Why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?”

Although Elkanah's love was a great consolation to Hannah, she so much wanted to have a son. For years she had yearned and longed for one, and she was so tired of being taunted by Peninnah.

Now here she was, at the Tabernacle of God, the place of prayer and sacrifice. So she decided what she would do. She would implore God, with tears, to please grant her heart's desire, and she would make a solemn vow unto the Lord, promising what she would do if her request was granted. We now read from the record, 1 Samuel 1:9-11 [Moffatt]:

“Hannah rose and stood before the Eternal, where Eli the priest was sitting on his chair at the doorposts of the Temple of the Eternal. With a sore heart she prayed to the Eternal, weeping bitterly, and she

made this vow: O Lord of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look upon the plight of thy servant and remember me, and not forget thy servant, but will give thy servant a son, then I will give him to the Eternal for the whole of his life, and no razor shall ever touch his head.”

She repeated this prayer and this vow, with great fervency, over and over again, pouring out her very soul to the Lord. She prayed silently, from the heart, only her lips moving.

Eli was watching her from where he sat. He was accustomed to seeing the women come in, and make short, perfunctory, emotionless prayers, and quickly leave. So he was puzzled at Hannah's actions. He concluded that she was intoxicated, and if so, it was his duty to reprove her and remove her from the sacred premises. So he went to her and reprimanded her for drunkenness. We read:

“And Hannah answered and said, No, my lord, I am a woman of a sorrowful spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but have poured out my soul before the Lord. Then Eli answered and said, Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant thee thy petition that thou hast asked of him. . . . So the woman went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad.”--1 Samuel 1:15,17,18

Although he did not then know the reason for it, Elkanah rejoiced to see the happy change in his beloved Hannah. They got up early the next morning, worshipped once more before the Lord, and then journeyed home to Ramah.

When Hannah knew that the Lord had granted her request, and that she was at last to have a child, her joy knew no bounds. It was natural that she would tell her husband of the vow she had made--to give the child to the Lord for all the days of his life. Elkanah must have rejoiced with her, and given his complete approval.

The Birth of Samuel

In due time Hannah gave birth to a beautiful little boy. How lovingly she must have held and hugged her precious baby, in arms that had been so long empty! She gave the proper credit to the Lord for hearing her prayer, by naming the boy Samuel, which means “Heard of God.” She did not forget her vow. She was determined to keep it.

When the time came for the next annual pilgrimage to Shiloh, Hannah did not go with the rest of the family. We read from the record in 1 Samuel 1:22,23:

“But Hannah went not up, for she said unto her husband, I will not go up until the child be weaned, and then I will bring him, that he may appear before the Lord, and there abide for ever. And Elkanah

her husband said unto her, Do what seemeth good. Tarry until thou hast weaned him.”

When Hannah said she would give Samuel to the Lord when he was weaned, she did not mean weaned from the breast. Rather she meant when he was weaned from his mother, in the sense of being able to get along without her care. This would be when he was ten to twelve years of age. This is confirmed by the Jewish historian Josephus, who says Samuel was twelve when he was given to the Lord. It is interesting to remember that Jesus was twelve when he first presented himself at the Temple in Jerusalem. Also, it is the custom of the Jews to this day, to consider a 12-year-old boy as entering the age of responsibility.

So Hannah loved and enjoyed her little son, Samuel, for many years, telling him that he belonged to the Lord, instructing him in the scriptures, and preparing him for the service of God. So it was no surprise to Samuel when he was finally taken to Shiloh. He had anticipated it, and had eagerly looked forward to it for a long time. We now read from 1 Samuel 1:24 to 28 [Moffatt] regarding Hannah's great sacrifice, which she so willingly gave:

“Then, after weaning him, she took him with her, along with a three-year-old bullock, a bushel of flour, and a bottle of wine. She entered the house of the Eternal at Shiloh, accompanied by the boy. And after the bullock had been slain, she brought the boy to Eli. As sure as you live, sir, she said, I am the woman who stood beside you here, praying to the Eternal. I prayed about this boy, and the Eternal granted me what I asked. So I have lent him to the Eternal. As long as he lives, he is loaned to the Eternal.”

Thus Hannah paid her vow unto the Most High. Eli questioned the handsome lad and found him to be reverential and knowledgeable beyond his years. He gladly accepted him from Hannah. He would be a father to the boy, and Samuel's responsibilities would be that of a dutiful and helpful young son to an aged parent, who was also a High Priest of God. Thus he would be serving God.

The Nazarite Vow

When Hannah first made her vow concerning Samuel, you will remember that she said: “I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.” Why did she vow not to cut his hair? She thus indicated her intention to consecrate Samuel as a Nazarite from his birth, in accordance with the regulations given in the 6th chapter of Numbers. “Nazarite” means “one separated.” It described a person who was bound by a vow of a peculiar kind, to be set apart from others for the service of God, either for life or for a defined time. Besides being forbidden to

cut his hair, he was required to abstain from wine, grapes, and every --intoxicating drink, and he must not approach any dead body, not even of his parents. There were other restrictions also. Some took the Nazarite vow for a limited time, for a specific purpose, but very few took the vow for life. The three Nazarites for life mentioned in the scriptures are Samuel, Samson and John the Baptist.

The question may be asked: "How could Hannah commit Samuel to the Nazarite vow, and consecrate him to the Lord before ever he was born?" It was done by the exercise of parental authority, followed by a careful rearing of the child "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4), so that upon arriving at the age of --responsibility, he would freely accept and ratify the parental decision made on his behalf. This is what Samuel did. He was so reared, that he expected and desired nothing less than to serve the Lord for ever. Such early consecrations are still in order. In this regard Bro. Russell said:

"It is a question with many how early in life a child may give its heart to God, and be fully consecrated to him. But the scriptures make very plain the fact that they may and should be consecrated to the Lord by their parents before their birth, or even their begetting, that thus their pre-natal influences may insure them a mental and spiritual inheritance tending to godliness, and that with the dawn of intelligence, this disposition should begin to be cultivated and warmed into vital, active piety, so that at a very tender age the little ones may intelligently ratify the parental covenant of entire consecration to God. This they should be expected and led to do as early as possible."--Reprints, page 1671.

Of such early consecrations to the Lord, we have many notable examples in the scriptures besides that of Samuel. In Judges 13:5 [Revised Version], we read that the angel of the Lord announced the forthcoming birth of Samson, saying to his mother: "You shall conceive and bear a son. No razor shall come upon his head, for the boy shall be a Nazarite to God from birth." We read in Luke 1:15 the words of the angel to Zacharias, the --father of John the Baptist, regarding John before he was born: "He shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink. And he shall be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb." Thus Samson and John were consecrated to be Nazarites for life, even before their birth.

Another example of pre-natal consecration is the apostle Paul. He said that God had ordained him to preach Christ to the Gentiles even before he was born. We read in Galatians 1:15,16:

“It pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen.”

Paul reminded young Timothy that he had been born with a strong, consecrated faith, and had been reared in the truth. He wrote in 2 Timothy 1:5 and 3:15:

“I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice, and I am persuaded in thee also. . . . And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation, through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”

Moses, too, was consecrated from his birth. His mother, seeing “that he was a goodly child,” defied the law of Pharaoh, and committed his life to the Lord. (Ex. 2:1-9; Hebrews 11:23-28) And Moses was a special instrument of God for as long as he lived.

These and other such examples are --recorded for our admonition, to encourage the Lord's people to devote their children to God. Those thus early devoted to the Lord, and then carefully reared in the truth, escape many a snare of the devil, into which the children of worldlings fall. Just look at the corruption of youth in the world today! How wise is the counsel of Ecclesiastes 12:1: “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not.” Those evil days of bitter disappointment and despair will never come to those who, in youth, commit their ways unto the Lord, and trust him to guide their paths.

Although Hannah loved little Samuel very deeply, she did not give him to the Lord grudgingly and sorrowfully. We know this, because after giving him, she made a wonderful prayer of joy and praise to the Lord, which is given in 1 Samuel 2:1 to 10. Far from expressing sadness, the opening words are: “My heart rejoiceth in the Lord!” This prayer of praise and thanksgiving bears a striking resemblance to that of Mary, mother of Jesus, given in Luke 1:46 to 55, the opening words of which are: “My soul doth magnify the Lord.”

Hannah left little Samuel with Eli, and went home to Ramah. Eli loved the boy, and fitted him with a little linen ephod, like the one he himself wore, thus indicating that the child's service in the Tabernacle had official sanction. We read that “Samuel ministered before the Lord.”

A touching insight into Hannah's continued devotion to her son is given in 1 Samuel 2:19: “His mother made him a little coat, and brought it to him from year to year, when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice.” This indicates that the boy grew up rapidly, since a new and larger coat was necessary every

year. Thus we read in the 21st verse, that “the child Samuel grew before the Lord”--not only physically, but also spiritually, in grace and relationship with the Lord, and also with men. It was similarly said of Jesus, in Luke 2:52 that “He increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man.” The blessing of the Lord was upon Hannah, and she bore other children, three sons and two daughters. These helped to fill the void left by absence of her beloved Samuel.

The Sons of Eli

Eli had two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, who were engaged in priestly functions, but who were not really priests at heart. They were actually, faithless, corrupt men. We are told in verse 12 that “they knew not the Lord.” They used their priestly office for personal profit and immoral gratification. They stole from those who came to offer sacrifices, and verses 15 and 16 indicate that, instead of burning the fat of the sacrifices, as the law demanded, they forcibly took the fat for their own use. Thus they gave a bad name to the Tabernacle services. As a result, honest men began to have a contempt for the holy sacrifices. This situation was very displeasing to God. So we read in the 17th verse: “Wherefore the sin of the young men was very great before the Lord, for men abhorred the offering of the Lord.”

The people complained to Eli. He knew what his sons were doing, and he told them rather mildly to stop their evil practices. But he did not insist upon it. He did not remove them from office, as he should have done. He had more regard for his sons than he had for the law of God. His sons continued their evil course. Then a man of God was sent to Eli with a message telling him that both his sons had been condemned, and would die for their transgressions, and that Eli himself would be removed from the priesthood for his neglect. From then on, the Lord no longer communicated through Eli, neither by vision nor by Urim and Thummim. Thus the Word of the Lord became a rare thing in those days.

Now we come to the charming narrative of how the Lord began to communicate with Israel through the boy Samuel, indicating that he was to be the prophet of God. We read from the Revised Version, starting with 1 Samuel 3:1:

“Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the Lord under Eli. And the word of the Lord was rare in those days. There was no frequent vision. At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim, so that he could not see, was lying down in his own place. The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down within the temple of the Lord, where the ark of God was. Then the Lord called, ‘Samuel! Samuel!’ and he said ‘Here I am!’ And ran to Eli, and said,

'Here I am, for you called me.' But he said 'I did not call, my son, lie down again.' So he went and lay down. And the Lord called again, 'Samuel!' And Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said 'Here I am, for you called me.' But he said 'I did not call, my son, lie down again.' Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. And the Lord called Samuel again, the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, 'Here I am, for you called me.' Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy. Therefore Eli said to Samuel, 'Go, lie down, and if he calls you, you shall say, Speak Lord, for thy servant hears.' So Samuel went and lay down in his place. And the Lord came and stood, calling as at other times, 'Samuel! --Samuel!' And Samuel said, 'Speak, for thy servant hears.'"



A mighty angel appeared before the wondering eyes of Samuel, and then the great God of heaven clothed that little boy with the awesome dignity of a prophet of the Lord, by entrusting him with the final message of condemnation to Eli and his house.

Samuel could sleep no more that night, and the next day he was troubled in mind, as he went about his duties. He loved Eli, and could not bring himself to tell him the Lord's message of

condemnation. But Eli insisted himself upon knowing every word of it. So we read in 1 Samuel 3:18:

“And Samuel told him every whit, and hid nothing from him. And he said, It is the Lord. Let him do what seemeth him good.”



Then we read in the 19th and 20th verses: “And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him, and did let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel, from Dan even to Beersheba, knew that Samuel was established to be a prophet of the Lord.” How very proud his mother must have been of him then!

Hannah and Sarah

Now let us consider some further lessons in the story of the boy Samuel. First of all, there is a striking similarity between the family of Elkanah and that of Abraham. As Hannah was barren, Sarah was

barren. As Elkanah's second wife, Peninnah, who had children, looked with contempt upon the barren Hannah, Hagar who had Ishmael, looked with contempt upon the barren Sarah. Then in due course, both Hannah and Sarah bore dedicated sons of promise, Hannah bearing Samuel, and Sarah bearing Isaac. I think this is more than merely coincidental, especially since the name Elkanah means "God the Creator." We can safely conclude that Elkanah's wives also pictured Covenants, just as Abraham's wives did.

The inability to have children was a special reproach for the women of Israel. There was a very significant reason for this. Every woman in Israel was familiar with the prophecy of Genesis 3:15, that the seed of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent, Satan. Each was familiar with the often repeated promise to Abraham, that in his seed all the families of the earth would be blessed. So every woman who was a descendant of Abraham had the hope of perhaps being the one through whom the Messiah would be born. This would be the greatest honor possible for womankind. This is confirmed by the fact that centuries later, the angel Gabriel greeted Mary, mother of Jesus, with the words found in Luke 1:28: "Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women." So Hannah, too, had this hope. That is why she felt her barrenness so keenly.

To attain her hope, she made it a subject of special prayer, with deep feeling and great fervency, pouring out her heart before the Lord, making a solemn vow, and repeating her prayer and vow over and over again. What can we of spiritual Israel learn from this? We, too, have a hope--a "blessed hope" according to Titus 2:13. It is the hope of being members of the Messiah, the Christ Company, the Body of Christ, to be of the Spiritual Seed of Abraham, which is to bruise the serpent's head, and bless all the families of the earth. It is the hope of glory, honor and immortality. It is a high and rich calling. We read in Ephesians 1:18:

"The eyes of your understanding being enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints."

It is a hope that is mysterious to all except those who have it, as expressed in Colossians 1:26, 27:

"Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to the saints, to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."

It is a sure and positive and oathbound hope, of which we are assured in Hebrews 6:17 to 19:

“Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us, which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil.”

Hannah's Vow Is Like Our Vow

As Hannah made a vow consecrating her son, we, too, make a vow of consecration. We should be as earnest and fervent and persistent as Hannah was, pouring out our souls before the Lord, as she did. Hannah's prayer was heard, and her barrenness was removed. As for us, after naming the various fruits and graces of character likeness to the Lord, we are to develop, the apostle says, in 2 Peter 1:8:

“If these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Before Hannah prayed, she was very sad, and in great turmoil of spirit. She could not eat or sleep. Then she laid her problem before the Lord, crying to him, and telling him her inmost feelings. Then what happened? A great peace descended upon her. We read that she “went her way, and did eat, and her countenance was no more sad.” (1 Samuel 1:18) Why the change? Simply because once she placed it in the Lord's hands, it wasn't her problem any more. Let us learn from this that, once we leave something to the Lord, and ask him to take care of it, we should stop worrying or grieving over it. This is the counsel of 1 Peter 5:7: “Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you.” And Psalm 55:22: “Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee. He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.” The most beautiful assurance of all along this line is found in Psalm 37:

“Delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desire of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord, trust also in him, and he shall bring it to pass.”--Psalms 37:4,5

This is what Hannah did, and this is what we can do.

Hannah paid her vow unto the Lord in full. She willingly and joyfully gave up the dearest treasure of her heart and never --regretted it. This is the way our consecrations should be. In one sense, Hannah never really lost Samuel. Although he was **lent** to the Lord for life, he was still her son. Only, instead of being at home, her treasure was in Shiloh. This is where her heart was. Similarly, although we have given up every earthly thing in consecration, we have a great treasure in heaven. As Jesus counseled us:

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth. . . . But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. . . . For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”--Matthew 6:19-21

“Sell all that thou hast . . . and thou shalt have treasure in heaven.” -
-Luke 18:22

After the boy Samuel had been given to the Lord, his mother regularly supplied him with a little coat. The --Revised Version calls it a “robe” instead of a coat. This suggests to our minds “the robe of Christ's righteousness” with which all those who are consecrated to the Lord, and accepted by him, are clothed.

After the boy Samuel entered God's service, we read that he grew “and was in favor both with the Lord, and also with men.” Similarly, after we commence our consecrated lives, we also should grow. We should: “Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” (2 Peter 3:18) As to our standing among men, we should heed the counsel of Jesus: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16)

The wicked sons of Eli, who were unfaithful priests of Israel, who forcibly took and ate the fat of the sacrifices, pictured the corrupt priests and ministers found among the clergy of nominal spiritual -- Israel. These enrich themselves at the expense of their parishioners without feeding them the spiritual food for which they are starving. I am not suggesting that all the clergy of Christendom are wicked men. I am sure most of them are not, but are sincerely doing the best they know how. But there is a Clergy Class today which is prophetically described in Ezekiel 34:2 to 4:

“Son of man, prophecy against the shepherds of Israel. Prophecy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God unto the shepherds: Woe be to the shepherds; Woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks? Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed; but ye feed not the flock. The diseased have ye not strengthened, neither have ye healed that which was sick, neither have ye bound up that which was broken, neither have ye brought again that which was driven away, neither have ye sought that which was lost, but with force and with cruelty have ye ruled them.”

As a result of such conditions, many decent and honest persons turn away in disgust from all religion, thinking that such men represent God. The language of 1 Samuel 2:17 is again true, that “men abhor the offering of the Lord.” As the unfaithful sons of Eli died in battle because of their sins, the unfaithful shepherds of Babylon will cease to exist as a class when Babylon is utterly --destroyed in “the battle of that great day of God Almighty.” (Revelation 17:14)

Eli's Inconsistent Character

The character of Eli presents some strange contradictions. Although he himself was completely loyal and faithful to God, he was weak in the discipline of his sons along these very lines. Although he had been a poor and permissive father to his own sons, he had, on the other hand, been an excellent foster-father to the child Samuel. Also, although he had been ready to eject Hannah from the Tabernacle because of her supposed drunkenness, yet he permitted his own sons to steal, extort, and commit gross immoralities in the holy place. Again, although he thoroughly disapproved the waywardness of his sons, he failed to vigorously denounce their course, and, if need be, remove them from office. God does not approve of such contradictions of character. The Lord prefers characters that are strong, consistent and positive, uncompromisingly for the right, as our great example Jesus was. There must be no contradictions in our characters, if we would make our calling and election sure. If there are, we, too, will be disapproved by God as was Eli.

Now let us further apply the lesson of Eli, by asking and answering to ourselves, some practical and timely questions. Do we have our children in subjection as instructed in 1 Timothy 3:4? Or are we permissive as Eli was? Do we tolerate servants in the Church who walk disorderly, bringing reproach upon the cause of Christ? Paul said in 2 Thessalonians 3:6:

“Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.”

This is not just a suggestion, it is a command, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul also said in Titus 1:9 to 11:

“Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught. . . . For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers . . . whose mouths must be stopped.”

If unfaithful elders persist in teaching new and strange doctrines, do we content ourselves with mildly remonstrating with them, as Eli did with his sons? Or do we firmly remove them from office, as Eli should have done? We cannot escape responsibility. Remember that Eli, --although personally faithful, was condemned because he did not curb his sons who were unfaithful in the priestly office.

Lessons for Us

Now we come to that part of our lesson where the Lord called the boy Samuel in the night. We are impressed by Samuel's quick and unquestioned obedience. He thought it was Eli calling him. But after the first two times, when Eli denied it was he, it would have been quite natural for young Samuel to think: “There is no one else here.

The poor old man must be calling out in his sleep, without --realizing it. No need for me to respond any more.” But when the third call came, Samuel obeyed instantly. He once more left his warm and comfortable bed, and ran to Eli, saying, “Here am I!” That was the time he got the most important instruction of his life resulting in his becoming that very night a prophet of the most High God. That is when he learned to say to the Lord: “Speak, for thy servant heareth!” Let us also learn this lesson. We, too, are called of God. We are called to a High Calling. Upon hearing the call, our instant response should be: “Speak, for thy servant heareth!” This should be the continual sentiment of every Christian all his life.

God Speaks to Us Through His Word

Although we do not hear the audible voice of the Lord in the night, as Samuel did, the Lord does speak to us in various ways: first of all, he speaks to us through his Word. Studying the Bible, with the helps he has provided, we get to know the Lord. We learn of his glorious attributes of character. We become familiar with his Plan, and his ways. We learn what he approves and what he does not approve. From all the illustrations and examples found in the Bible, we are able to determine what he wants us to do in any given circumstance. We conform ourselves to his Word. Thus God “speaks,” and we “hear.”

God speaks to us through his providences, by what he permits to happen to us, whether good or evil. Yes, he does sometimes permit evil things to happen to us, but they are always for our good, to teach us needed lessons, to show the direction we should be going. Let us be alert to recognize these providences of the Lord, and “hear” what he says.

He speaks to us through our brethren in Christ. He speaks through the talks of the elders, often giving us the answers to our problems. He speaks through the comments of the brethren in study meetings. Also through the experiences of the brethren related in testimony meetings. In this way the humblest sister can often impart a needed lesson to the most mature elder; without even knowing that she is being thus used of the Lord. We should be ready to “hear,” regardless of the humble instrument it may please the Lord to use.

God speaks to us through private conversations with those of like precious faith. In such conversations, the Lord will often permit a brother or sister, without any prompting on our part, to suggest to us the very answer to our problem that we need. If we would be used of the Lord to help others in this way, we must heed the admonition of Ephesians 4:29:

“Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.”

The Lord never uses the lips of gossips to edify his people. But by wholesome, spiritual conversation, the humblest brother or sister can be a channel of God Almighty, to bless or help someone.

One wonders how it was that the Lord took a young boy and endowed him with the dignity of a Prophet of the Most High God. If it were suggested to the President of the United States that he appoint a teenager to be his ambassador, I am sure the response would be: “But he's only a boy!” But God's reasoning is different. He says: “What **kind** of a boy is he?” God looks at the heart, and not at the calendar. Let us learn from this, never to despise the young brethren in our midst. It is the Lord who has selected them.

The message the Lord gave to Samuel was one of condemnation upon Eli and his house. Samuel felt badly about this, because he loved Eli. When morning came, he hesitated to tell Eli what the Lord had said. There is a lesson here, of humility and kindness. Samuel might have felt puffed up that the Lord had spoken to him. He might have felt himself honored above Eli, as indeed he was. Pride might have made him boastful, and inconsiderate of Eli's feelings, so that he would have taken delight in telling him of the calamities to come. But Samuel didn't react that way. He was grieved. He would have preferred not to burden old Eli's heart with the message. Similarly, we should, in humility, be sympathetic toward those whom the Lord has not honored with the privilege of hearing his voice of present truth, and we should prefer not to stress the calamities coming upon the world, but rather, be a comfort to all with whom we come in contact.

At Eli's urging, Samuel reluctantly told him everything the Lord had said. Then Eli responded with the most beautiful expression of submissiveness, “It is the Lord. Let him do what seemeth him good.” With all of Eli's contradictions of character, this is one trait we can emulate. **Let the Lord do what he pleases with us. He knows best.** He has promised that all things shall work together for our good. Let us trust in that promise. In the language of Job 13:15: “Though he slay me, yet will I trust him.”

Hannah's Prayer

Now let us briefly consider Hannah's exultant prayer of joy and praise to God, when she gave little Samuel to the Lord. It is found in 1 Samuel 2:1 to 10. Do you realize that verses 6 to 10 of this prayer contain a prophetic outline of the entire Plan of the Ages? Verse 6: “The Lord kill--eth, and maketh alive. He bringeth down to the

grave, and bringeth up.” We know what that means. God condemned Adam to death, and his entire race followed him into the grave. But God provided a Ransom, to make Adam and his race alive again, bringing them up from the grave in a great resurrection. Verse 7: “The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich. He bringeth low, and lifteth up.” This refers to our Lord Jesus, who, as we read in 2 Corinthians 8:9: “Though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.” Although he was the Logos, he became a man. God permitted him to be brought low, even to the death of the cross, and then lifted him up to the Divine Nature, giving him a name which is above every name. Verse 8: “He raised the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes and to make them inherit the throne of glory.” This describes the Church, the Body of Christ, taken chiefly from the poor of the world. The Lord lifts us up from the “dunghill,” the miry clay, and sets our feet upon a rock. We are set “among princes,” we are to be Kings and Priests, to “inherit the throne of glory,” together with Christ Jesus. Verse 9: “He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness.” This brings the prophecy right down to the present day. We are the “feet of the saints,” the feet members of the Body of Christ. We are “kept by the power of God” (1 Peter 1:5) in this evil day, and the wicked institutions of this world will shortly be destroyed. Verse 10: “The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces, out of heaven shall be thunder upon them.” Is this not a good description of “Jacob’s Trouble,” when the armies from the North are destroyed by the Lord? Next is a prophecy of the Messianic reign of Christ, and the judging of the world in righteousness: “The Lord shall judge the ends of the earth; and he shall give strength unto his King, and exalt the horn of his Anointed.”

There, in a few words, is the entire Plan, from Genesis to Revelation.

The fact that Hannah uttered this prophecy made her one of the prophets. We read in Luke 13:28: “Ye shall see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the Kingdom of God.” Hebrews 11:32 and 39 speaks of the prophets as “having obtained a good report through faith.” This means that Hannah is one of the Ancient Worthies. She will be a PRINCESS in all the earth, together with her beloved son, Prince Samuel.

Now we can better understand what Hannah meant when she said in 1 Samuel 1:28: “I have lent him to the Lord. As long as he liveth, he shall be **lent** to the Lord.” I think she knew that the time would come when she would have her son back again, and that they would serve the Lord TOGETHER throughout eternity!

The Burning Fiery Furnace

“In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, came -- Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, unto Jerusalem, and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim, king of Judah, into his hand.” -- Daniel 1:1,2

AT THIS time Nebuchadnezzar took captive to Babylon the very cream of the Jewish nation. Verse six says: “Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah.” In Babylon the names of these four young Hebrew boys were changed. Daniel was now called Belteshazzar; the other three were named Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

After an intensive course of study in which they greatly excelled they were assigned as advisors of the royal court. Then came the incident of Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the great multi-metallic image, which a stone struck upon the feet and demolished--a picture of the kingdom of God supplanting the kingdoms of this world. By the Lord's intervention, Daniel interpreted the dream which all the wise men of the realm had failed to do. It produced this result:

“Then the king made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon. Then Daniel requested of the king and he set Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego over the affairs of the province of Babylon, but Daniel sat at the gate of the king.”--Daniel 2:48,49

Now let us go forward about fifteen years. Daniel has a very high position in the empire and his three companions are magistrates in the provinces of Babylon. Leeser says that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were “over the public service of the province of Babylon”; Moffatt says they were “in charge of the business of the province.” These three were evidently not only judges and managers in the civil service but auditors as well, supervising business transactions. The king had wisely set them so. He knew of their absolute integrity and honesty because of his previous experience with them. In such positions as these we can well imagine they made powerful enemies of other government functionaries. Especially in eastern governments, graft was and is almost a way of life. Their interrupting or hindering of --dishonest practices and contracts with the government must have been bitterly resented. This, coupled with jealousy and --rivalry for the king's favor, would cause their enemies to conspire to destroy Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. But try as they might, they could find no valid occasion against these men of God whose every act was above reproach. Over the years the frustration of these enemies of the three Hebrews grew and accumulated.

Then King Nebuchadnezzar did something that played right into their hands. He did it with all sincerity and was probably actuated by the highest motives. He still vividly remembered his dream of many years before of the great multi-metallic image and Daniel's interpretation of it. Daniel had said:

“Thou, O king, art a king of kings; for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power and strength, and glory. And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field, and the fowls of heaven, hath he given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. Thou art this head of gold.”--Daniel 2:37,38

After telling him of the arising of other kingdoms inferior to his and how they would all be destroyed, Daniel had said that “the God of heaven shall set up a --kingdom which shall never be destroyed.” More than this, Daniel, who was at Nebuchadnezzar's right hand, had undoubtedly told him of the hope of Israel as embodied in the promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob: “In thee, and in thy seed, shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” Daniel must have related this promise to the kingdom represented by the “stone which smote the image,” and filled the whole earth; embracing and blessing all nations--a universal empire lasting forever. These things would start Nebuchadnezzar thinking. Added to his pride as a powerful and absolute monarch, conquer--or of the world, it would cause him to reason thus:

“The great God of heaven himself considers me a `head of gold.' I am the ornament of the ages. I am the wisest and most capable man in the world. My kingdom is of God. All men, and even the brute creation, have been given into my hands by God. And I already have a universal empire. I am now a king of kings. So why shouldn't my kingdom last forever? Why shouldn't I be the agency to bless the world? As for these promises to Israel, have I not conquered Israel by my great power? I have thus succeeded to all their rights. The promises to them are now mine!”

Do you see how natural it would be for such a man to reach such a conclusion?

Establishing a Common Religion

The next logical step for Nebuchadnezzar to take toward his objective would be to unify his empire which extended over all nations and tongues, having a great variety of cultures, customs and religions. He would want to create a “United Nations” organization, subservient to him. To accomplish this he must find a common --denominator, something upon which all could agree, a force to draw and hold them together in loyalty to him and his empire. After thinking about it and consulting with his wise men, he undoubtedly

reached the conclusion: What greater universal force is there than religion? The faculty of veneration is inculcated in every human being. He must worship something, some god or idol. He cannot help himself in this. It is a compulsion every man has regardless of nation or tongue. This, then, is the force to be harnessed to unify the nations of the world, to give them common ground, to make permanent and peaceful the universal dominion of Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar decided to establish a common religion throughout his realm. You might call it the original ecumenical movement. But acceptance of this new religion was not to be voluntary. The king was practical enough to know that the hundreds of nations and tribes, with their varying languages, customs and cultures, could not be expected to agree on anything voluntarily. Since he was not one to resort to half-measures, he decided to use force of the most savage kind to impose obedience. After all, had he not conquered the world by brute force? This was a proven method that would work.

First it would be necessary to create a suitable symbol of the new, unifying religion. It must be an imposing and spectacular figure that would fascinate and over-awe all who beheld it. Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar considered making an image of the God of Daniel for this purpose. He remembered how, years before, when Daniel had interpreted his dream and given all the credit to the God of heaven, he, the great Nebuchadnezzar, had fallen on his face and said to Daniel: "Of a truth it is that your God is a god of gods, and a Lord of kings!" But there was no image of Daniel's God for him to copy. These Hebrews, with their strange customs, did not make a likeness of their God to bow before it as other people did before theirs. Ah, but there was a god of which he did have a likeness, a god he himself venerated. It was the god Bel-Merodach, to which he attributed all his victories. This was a god that would fitly represent him and his irresistible conquering might. This would be a symbol all would fear and bow down to. This would be the god of nations.

So Nebuchadnezzar made a colossal golden statue of his god, a hundred feet high and ten feet broad:

"Nebuchadnezzar, the king, made an image of gold, whose height was threescore, cubits, and the breadth thereof, six cubits. He set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon."--Daniel 3:1

This image was about the height of a --modern ten-story building. The Statue of Liberty which dominates the New York harbor is about the same size as Nebuchadnezzar's image. Forty people can stand within its head. But the Statue of Liberty is quite a different symbol, a symbol of --enlightenment to the world. I could see it from the window of my room at the Bethel Home many years ago. I used to look at it every evening and see the light of its torch and think

how appropriately it had been placed in such plain view of Bethel. Bethel contained Pastor Russell's study from whence shone the Lord's enlightening truth to the whole world!

The Incredible Image

Nebuchadnezzar's idolatrous image was a most imposing one. We are told it was made of gold. It may not have been of solid gold although the historian Herodotus mentions a statue at Babylon of smaller size that was of solid gold and weighed 43,000 pounds. After all, Nebuchadnezzar the king sent to gather together the "princes, the governors, and the captains, the judges, the treasurers, the counselors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up." All the rulers of his vast empire were summoned to Babylon. What a colorful assembly it must have been! There must have been thousands of them, of all nations, kindreds, and tongues, each one arrayed in his most splendid native robes, to do honor to the great king. The image, so terrible in its dimensions, was probably covered, adding to the air of mystery. This shrouded figure was the first thing they saw when they arrived.

Let us picture the scene. The silent, looming image, draped in black, stood so tall in the center of the parade ground. It dominated everything. Beyond it, against a hillside, an enormous furnace had been constructed. It was burning so furiously that the heat of it could be felt even from that distance. It added a sinister note to the otherwise festive occasion. At the feet of the image a platform had been built upon which was assembled a great orchestra, composed of performers on every kind of musical instrument and of every nation. Before this stood the nobles, rulers and officials of the realm, row after row, the noblest in front, extending backward in decreasing degrees of importance. At one side, and overlooking the entire assembly, there is an elaborately decorated platform upon which is seated King Nebuchadnezzar surrounded by his court. All eyes are fastened upon the huge draped image. It seems to move and writhe as the breeze stirs its covering. There is an awed hum of anticipation from the multitude. Suddenly a herald of the king mounts the platform before the image, and raises his hand for silence. We now read from the account:

"Then an herald cried aloud, to you it is commanded, 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 music, ye fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar, the king, hath set up."

At this point we can imagine that some idolaters in that great crowd would say to themselves, “Why should I worship any god but my own? My god may be offended if I do so. I won't do it!” But then the herald continued:

“And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.”

That did it! All opposition evaporated. Now they understood the significance of the nearby burning furnace.

At a signal from the king, the orchestra played, the drapery fell to the ground, revealing a glorious, glittering golden image, which, as the drapery fell, seemed to soar up to heaven before their eyes. Every man went down before it in a wave, like wheat before a scythe. All, that is, except three men! Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego stood on their feet, heads held high. Actually if all the others had strictly obeyed the king's command, no one would have noticed that the three Hebrews did not obey. One who is prostrate, with his face to the ground, cannot look about him. But Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were under constant observation. Their enemies had been spying on them, day and night, to find some occasion against them. You may be sure one of these spies had been assigned to take up a position near the Jews, to watch them on this occasion. Now at last they had the evidence they needed! For this crime the penalty was a fiery death. How they must have hugged themselves with delight at the way things had turned out!

As soon as the ceremony was over and the king had returned to his palace, satisfied with the success of his plan, they made their move. We now read from the Leeser translation:

“Therefore, at the same time, certain Chaldean men came near, and accused the Jews treacherously. They spake, and said to king Nebuchadnezzar, O king, live forever. Thou, O king, hadst made a decree that every man that should hear the sound of the cornet, flute, guitar, harp, psaltery, and bagpipe, and all kinds of music, should fall down and bow himself to the golden image; and that whoso should not fall down and bow himself, should be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. There are --certain Jewish men whom thou hast appointed over the public service of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. These men, O king, have not paid any regard to thee; thy god they do not worship, and to the golden image which thou hast set up, they do not bow themselves.”

The King is Enraged

The king could hardly believe his ears! It was incredible enough that his beautiful plan involving the eternal rule of Babylon over the millions of people of the whole world should be frustrated by only

three men, but to think that these three were the men he himself had taken up when they were nothing, had favored, exalted and made what they were. These men were, by their example, fostering rebellion against him, their benefactor, using against him the influence of their high positions in which he himself had placed them. **THIS WAS TOO MUCH!**



“Then ordered Nebuchadnezzar, in rage and fury, to bring Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. Then were these men brought before the king.”

The three Hebrews showed no fear when brought before the king, but faced him calmly and serenely.

“Nebuchadnezzar spake and said unto them, Is it out of disrespect, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? My god ye do not worship, and to the golden image which I have set up, ye do not bow yourselves?”

Then seeing their utter lack of fear and --remembering their past fine record of absolute integrity in his service, he thought that perhaps the accusation was not really true. Knowing the penalty of being roasted alive they certainly should be fearful if guilty, he reasoned. So he decided to give them another chance to demonstrate their obedience. He would repeat the ceremony for their benefit.

“Now then, if ye be ready, at the time when ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, guitar, psaltery, and bagpipe, and all kinds of music, to fall down and bow yourselves to the image which I have made, well; but if ye bow yourselves not, ye shall be cast in the same hour, into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.”

He motioned to the furnace, still burning, in plain view from the window. Lest they have some foolish notion of possibly escaping the penalty for disobedience, he arrogantly added:

“And who is the god that can deliver you out of my hand? Then answered Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and said to the king: O Nebu--chadnezzar, we have no need to answer thee a word in this matter. Behold, there is a God whom we worship; he is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace. And out of thy hand, O king, will he deliver us. But if not, then be it known unto thee, O king, that thy god will we not worship, and to the golden image which thou hast set up, will we not bow ourselves.”

In other words:

“We don't have to answer your question as to what God can deliver us out of your hand because you already know the answer. You know the God whom we worship. He is quite able to deliver us from your furnace. But even if he does not, we still will not bow to your god. We would rather die than do so.”

What made them take this stand? These young men knew the commandments of the God of their fathers and took them literally. They were familiar with these commandments:

“Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven --image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them.”--Exodus 20:3-5

“Ye shall make you no idols nor graven image, neither rear you up a standing image.”--Leviticus 26:1

“Thou shalt not bow down to their gods [the gods of the heathen], nor serve them.”--Exodus 23:24

Obedience to God Came First

In obedience to their God, they were willing to lay their lives on the line, defying the decree of the most powerful ruler in the world.

There was nothing for Nebuchadnezzar to do but enforce the penalty. He was playing for exceedingly high stakes, an enduring universal empire, and he was being defied by three of his most trusted governors. This was open rebellion, witnessed by all, and must be ruthlessly dealt with. Leniency would cause the rebellion to spread.

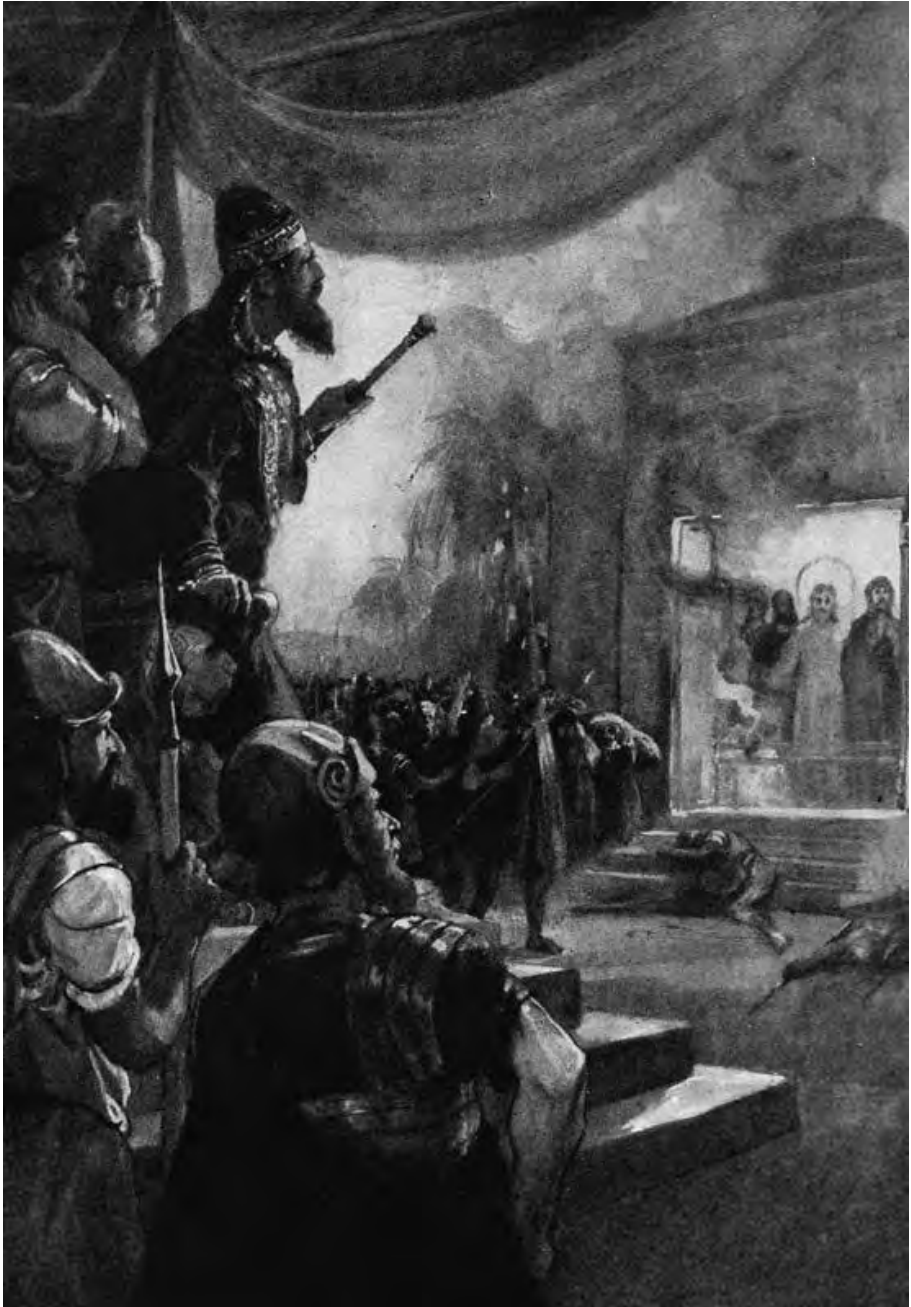
“Then Nebuchadnezzar filled with fury, and the form of his countenance was changed, because of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. And he spake and ordered that they should heat the furnace thoroughly seven times more than it was wont to be heated.”

The use of a furnace to inflict punishment was a custom borrowed from the Persians. We know from other records that Nebuchadnezzar's furnace was built like a brick kiln. It was about forty feet tall and urn-shaped. It had a large arched opening at one side, near the bottom, through which it was stoked, and which also served as an observation window. It tapered to a smaller opening at the top, providing draft to the flame, and through which the victim was inserted. It was built against a hillside to provide greater concentration of heat and to make the top opening easily accessible by a ramp up the hillside. If fueled by naphtha, which was plentiful in that region, and might have been used in this case, the heat of such a furnace could reach thousands of degrees. We can imagine how hot the furnace became when the king ordered it heated seven times more than normal.

Since by this time all would have heard of the rebellious Jews, the king would want all to witness their punishment, to impress upon them the futility of opposing the king's will. So the representatives of every nation and tongue of the empire would again assemble at the king's order, this time facing the furnace. Stocked beyond its utmost capacity, the flames of the furnace probably leaped a hundred feet in the air, illuminating the monstrous image with a flickering, unnatural light, making it appear to live and dance. The king gave an order and the strongest men in the army were summoned. They were giants compared with the three young Hebrews, and could lift them with ease. They seized the young men and trussed them up, fully clothed, with strong ropes. Then, at a signal, they raced up the path on the hillside to the top of the furnace, using the Hebrews as shield against the intolerable heat. As they dropped Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego into the furnace, these mighty men of the army were, for a

moment, enveloped in the flame which soared skyward. They breathed in the flame, their lungs scorched and shriveled, and they died instantly.

“Now, because the king's command was so urgent, and the furnace exceedingly heated, the flame of the fire slew those men that carried up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.”



Because of the brilliant white heat of the furnace, every detail of its interior was --vividly visible through the arched window. Watching intently, the king saw the three young men drop, one after another, into the flames. Then the king saw an astonishing thing which made him rise bolt upright from his chair! He had seen men burn before. In such heat they should be reduced to ashes in seconds. Now he not only saw the three walking alive and unbound in the furnace, he saw another person there walking with them and having such a glorious brightness that it shone even above the incandescent glow of the furnace!

“Then was king Nebuchadnezzar astonished, and he rose up in haste, and said unto his counsellors, Did we not cast three men, bound, into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, Certainly, O king. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men, unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and there is no injury on them; and the appearance of the fourth is like the Son of God!”

The great golden image was forgotten. The grandiose plan for an eternal Babylonian empire was forgotten. The dignity of the kingly office was set aside. Nebuchadnezzar ran to the furnace, approaching as close as the heat would permit. As he did so the fourth person disappeared.

“Then came Nebuchadnezzar near to the door of the burning fiery furnace, and said, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, ye servants of the most high God, step forth, and come hither. Then stepped Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego forth out of the midst of the fire. And the lieutenants, superintendents and governors, and the king's counsellors, being assembled together saw these men over whose bodies the fire had had no power, and the hair of whose head was not singed, whose mantles were not changed and on whom there was not come the smell of fire. Then spake Nebuchadnezzar and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that had trusted in him.”

Without a doubt he caused the great golden image which was no longer of any use, to be broken to pieces. This is implied by these words from Jeremiah:

“Declare ye among the nations, and publish and set up a standard. Publish, and conceal not. Say, Babylon is taken, Bel is confounded, Merodach is broken in pieces; her idols are confounded, her images are broken in pieces.” --Jeremiah 50:2

“And I will punish Bel in Babylon, and I will bring forth out of his mouth that which he hath swallowed up. And the nations shall not flow together any more unto him; yea, the wall of Babylon shall fall.”--Jeremiah 51:44

Lessons for Us

This fascinating account of the three Hebrews and the fiery furnace was recorded for the benefit of the Lord's people as was all inspired scripture. But it is not necessary that we determine this incident to have been a type and look for every feature of it to have an equivalent and connected fulfillment. Without so regarding the account, let us now consider some of the valuable and inspiring lessons it was intended to teach us.

First, let us remember that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were only about fourteen years old when brought to Babylon as captives. They quickly absorbed higher education and at the time of their refusal to worship the image they were young men of thirty-five occupying important positions. What was their secret? They had been reared by godly parents and had never departed from the God of their fathers. In spite of their exalted positions in a heathen government and the temptations inherent in their daily contact with corrupt and crooked idolaters, they strictly adhered to the laws of their God. There was quite a contrast between them and their associates. They stood out as shining examples of good for all to see. Likewise we must maintain Christian integrity in an adverse environment, being:

“Blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life.”--Philippians 2:15,16

We also see in this experience that depth of consecration and godliness is not necessarily a matter of one's age. The young in Christ often overtake and excel in Christ-likeness those who have been much longer in the narrow way. To the young in the Lord I would say in the language of Paul:

“Let no one despise thy youth; but become a pattern of the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.”--1 Timothy 4:12, Dia--glott

Nebuchadnezzar erected a golden image and sought to unify all the families of the earth into one lasting empire under his rule. This aptly illustrates Satan's ambition and constant aim. Just as Nebuchadnezzar coveted the promised kingdom of God and sought to establish it under his own rule, Satan coveted the heavenly Father's rulership, and sought to usurp it:

“Thou hast said in thine heart, 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.”--Isaiah 14:13,14

Satan's Attempt at Unification

Very early in human history, Satan attempted the unification and cementing together of the families of the earth by the erecting of a structure to provide a rallying point. He first suggested this to the minds of men:

“And they said, Go to, let us build us . . . a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.”--Genesis 11:4

The scheme failed. I am sure it is not a coincidence that the name of that place was called “Babel.” From this name would be derived the name “Babylon,” where Satan would make another similar attempt, as we have seen.

He made the same attempt to usurp God's kingdom with every succeeding universal empire: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. Each one failed. He tried it when he sought to obtain Jesus' cooperation and worship by his temptation in the wilderness. Again failure. He almost succeeded with the great Papal system. For a while this monstrosity held absolute sway, crowning and uncrowning kings. As with Nebuchadnezzar, it compelled worship and obedience by the most cruel and savage means. Thousands of so-called “heretics” were tortured to death and some literally burned. This attempt too, eventually failed. Then came the unsuccessful League of Nations followed by the United Nations, which isn't doing too well either. Now we have something else, another image of gold. It is the image of ecumenism. The cry is:

“Why can't we all have one religion? Why have so many church organizations? Let us fuse them, and melt them all into one glorious object we can all bow to. We must present a united front to Communism--one united image. Believe what you please privately, but let the public image be one, beautiful golden image.” This is Satan's latest attempt to unify and consolidate his empire. This too shall fail.

The record nowhere mentions that the three young Hebrews prayed to God when faced with death in the fiery furnace, but we know that they did. How do we know? They claimed and obtained one of the precious promises God had given Israel:

“Thus saith the Lord that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel. Fear not, for I have redeemed thee; I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee. When thou walkest through the fire, thou shall not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee; for I am the Lord thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour.”--Isaiah 43:1-3

I imagine that after their refusal to bow before the image they went to their apartment knowing full well that the king's officers would be there in minutes. I picture them as kneeling before a window open toward Jerusalem, with hands joined, praying to the God of their Fathers. Taking turns they would express their devotion to God, and their determination to keep his statutes at all cost, even unto death. Then they probably said something like this:

“O Lord, Thou hast promised thy --people, through thy prophet Isaiah: `When thou walkest through the fire, thou shall not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.' We claim this promise, if it be thy will. But if our time to die has come, well and good; and we will await thy great resurrection.”

It may have been at this point that there was a loud knock at the door. “Open, in the name of the king!” They went with the --officers and faced the enraged Nebuchadnezzar calmly and serenely because they had placed the matter completely in God's hands. That is why they were able to say to the monarch of the world: “Our God is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and he will deliver us. But whether he does or not, we still will not worship your god, nor bow to the golden image.”

This precious promise from Isaiah is also ours. We too are the Israel of God. We are spiritual Israel. When he says, “I have --redeemed thee,” it refers to the precious blood of Christ first applied on behalf of the church. “Thou art mine,” he says. We also read:

“They shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them.”--Malachi 3:17

God Is With Us in Our Trials

God is speaking to us. He has promised to be with us when we pass through the “waters.” This refers to the present time:

“Upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear.”--Luke 21:25,26

He has promised to be with us in fire also. This does not just refer to the fiery time of trouble through which the world is passing. Each of us individually have “fiery furnace” experiences during our walk in the narrow way, but he has promised: “When thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the fire kindle upon thee.” The Lord knows what each one of us is going through. If he permits fiery trials, it is for our good, for our testing. As Job said:

“But he knoweth the way that I take. When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.”--Job 23:10

Peter expresses it:

“That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.”--1 Peter 1:7

As the three young Hebrews were not alone in the furnace, neither are we. How alone they must have felt when they were the only ones standing, surrounded by thousands who were prostrate before the image. How alone they must have felt when facing a hostile king and court. How alone and helpless when seized and ignominiously trussed up by rough and powerful men. How terribly alone when they were flung into the flames! Ah, but as they dropped into the fire a wonderful thing happened. Their cords instantly burned and fell away from them. They were free! We know this because they were seen walking about in the furnace. Their cords burned but not one hair of their heads was singed! Most wonderful of all, they were no longer alone. A glorious being, luminous even above the flame of fire, greeted them, embraced them, and walked with them. I have no doubt that this was “the bright and morning star,” the Logos, the personal representative of the great Jehovah God, the one of whom it was prophesied, “The people which sat in darkness saw a great light.” (Isaiah 9:1,2; Matthew 4:16) He who is now our Lord Jesus Christ will walk with us too in our fiery furnace. In his company we will receive no injury. No hurt will jeopardize our eternal welfare. Only our cords will be burned away, only the dross will be removed. We shall come forth as gold!

We read of the three Hebrews that in the burning fiery furnace their mantles were not changed nor was even the smell of fire upon them. So with us. As we walk amid the world's time of trouble and as we have our personal fiery experiences, our mantles are not affected. The fire does not kindle upon us. The new creature is not vitally touched. We still retain the mantle or covering of the robe of Christ's righteousness. This can never be taken away from the faithful. When released from the furnace of trials, there will be no burns, no scars, no smell of smoke, no evidence of contamination.

It is significant that the mighty men who threw the men of God into the furnace died in the act. One cannot help but think of the words of Jesus:

“Then said he unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offences will come; but woe unto him through whom they come! It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he be cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones.”--Luke 17:1,2

“And whosoever shall offend [Diaglott: ensnare] one of these little ones that believe in me, it is better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he were cast into the sea.”--Mark 9:42

After their fiery furnace experience we read that the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the kingdom. We too, will be promoted. When our suffering with Christ is finished, our Great King will say to us, “Come up higher!”

The three young Hebrews learned a lesson **they** would never forget, and they taught us a lesson we should never forget. **They believed God absolutely, obeyed him at all cost, and relied on him implicitly.** Because of their supreme faith, they received a miraculous deliverance. They lived in faith all their lives, and they finally died in faith. It was of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, that Paul wrote in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews as he spoke of some “who, through faith . . . quenched the violence of fire.” Because of their faith, they will receive “a better resurrection.” But we, the body of Christ, are assured that God has provided even better things for us! If faithful, we will appoint them to be “princes in all the earth!” (Hebrews 11:40)

We thank God for these inspiring examples of faith and integrity, and of his great power to preserve his people in every situation. May the Son of God walk with us in our fiery furnace so that ultimately we come forth as gold!

The Child Jesus

AFTER it was announced on that tragic day in Eden so long ago that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head, implying that a Saviour would be born who would undo the works of Satan and restore Eden, from that time forward faithful and God-fearing women had a golden hope--to be the mother of that child.

As history advanced and the vague hope given in Eden was augmented and amplified into clear and definite promises and covenants confined to the nation of Israel, every godly woman of Israel nurtured that hope, that she might perhaps be the mother of Messiah, the Anointed. That is one reason it was considered such a reproach in Israel to be barren; to be unable to have children. It was equivalent to being told, "You do not have a chance for the greatest honor possible for womankind, to be the mother of the Christ."

So when the time finally came when, by virtue of the prophecies, men were in expectation of Christ, this wonderful age-long hope to be his mother must have flowed with special fervency in the hearts of the women of Israel of that time. It was the most blessed thing they could think of, an indication of the greatest possible favor of God

With this background in mind we can better appreciate the events which transpired when, as written in the first chapter of Luke,

"The angel Gabriel was sent from God, unto a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin of the house of David, and the virgin's name was Mary."

Mary was a devout young girl, a linear descendant of David, and thoroughly familiar with the hopes and promises of Israel. We may be sure that she too had the hope of perhaps being selected to be the mother of the Holy One who was to sit on David's throne. So we can well imagine her emotions when Gabriel, whose name means "the mighty one of God," appeared to her and said:

"Hail! Thou art highly favored. The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women. And when she saw him she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be. And the angel said unto her: Fear not, Mary; for thou hast found favor with God. And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David. And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end."

To say that Mary was “thrilled” at the prospect of being the mother of Messiah is to use an entirely inadequate expression. She was overwhelmed by the great honor and yet she reacted with humility. The record says that she went in haste to the hill country of Judea to visit her cousin Elizabeth and to tell her the good news. But she didn't have to tell her. As soon as she saw Mary, the holy spirit prompted Elizabeth with prophetic insight to proclaim:

“Blessed art thou among women; and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?”

As soon as she had heard this confirmation, Mary expressed her innermost feelings:

“And Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord; and my spirit hath rejoiced in God, my Saviour; for he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. For, behold, all generations shall call me blessed.”

In due time Jesus was born in Bethlehem and the angelic announcement of his birth was made, not to the proud and haughty leaders of Israel, but to humble shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night. The shepherds lost no time in visiting the babe Jesus lying in a manger. They told Mary what the angel of the Lord had told them. They related how the glory of the Lord shone round about them, that a multitude of the heavenly host had appeared to them praising God and saying: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” Then we read that “Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.”

Praise Came From Many

In due time the babe Jesus was taken to Jerusalem and presented to the Lord as was the custom. In Jerusalem a man named Simeon, who is described as “just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel,” took Jesus in his arms and proclaimed that he was the Christ. In the temple the prophetess Anna also recognized the babe Jesus as the Redeemer. Then we read: “And Joseph and his mother marveled at those things which were spoken of him.” These were more things for Mary to ponder in her heart.

Let us not forget the visit of the wise men from the east. We are informed by the historians Tacitus and Suetonius, and by Josephus, that there prevailed throughout the entire east at that time an intense conviction that before long a powerful monarch would arise in Judea and gain dominion over the world. This conviction was said to derive from ancient prophecies. Virgil, who lived a little before this, says that a child from heaven was looked for who should restore the Golden Age and take away sin. Confucius also had prophesied the appearance of such a deliverer. But the clearest of all these

prophecies was one by Zoroaster. It is claimed that this great Persian religious leader was at one time a disciple of the prophet Jeremiah.

It seems that Zoroaster taught the Persians concerning a coming Christ. He declared that in the latter days a pure virgin should conceive and as soon as the child was born a star would appear, visible even at noonday with undiminished luster. Zoroaster said to his disciples regarding that star:



“You, my sons, will perceive its rising before any other nation. As soon as you see the star, follow it wherever it leads you, and adore the mysterious child; offering your gifts to him with the profoundest humility. He is the almighty WORD which created the heavens!”

We should also remember that Daniel and the three Hebrew children, Hananiah, Mi--shael and Azariah, were princes in Persia and intimates of the wise men of that country which was then the principal --nation of the world. It is easy to see how prophecies

concerning Jesus would be handed down as tradition through that channel also. So Daniel's prophecies respecting the time of Messiah's birth would also be well known to the disciples of Zoroaster, Persia's wise men. Furthermore, there were Jews scattered abroad throughout that country who still, more or less, kept alive the thought of Israel's hope for the great Messiah, the one so long promised of God, prophesied as the bringer of blessings not only to Israel but to all the families of the earth. See Reprints, pages 3703 and 4098.>

After the wise men had followed the star, found and worshipped the babe Jesus, and left their rich gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh, Mary must have pondered this even in her heart too. Then came the frightful repercussions from the visit of the wise men--the necessity to flee to Egypt to escape Herod's pitiless slaughter of the babes of Bethlehem. Then, after the death of Herod, the return from Egypt, and the change of residence to Nazareth or Galilee.

At this point a curtain descends. From this time forward we find no scriptural record of Jesus until he is 12 years of age. There are traditions of course, telling of wonderful and sometimes mischievous miracles supposedly performed by the child Jesus. But we know that these traditions are false because when he changed water into wine at a wedding, after he had begun his ministry, we read:

“This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.”--John 2:11

Mary's Reaction to her Son

We have no record of what transpired during this period of Jesus' childhood. We do not know. But isn't it natural to want to know? It is to me, and I think we can make some reasonable assumptions. I think it is reasonable to assume Mary fully realized that her son was the long-promised Messiah. Why so? Because she had seen and talked with the angel Gabriel face-to-face and was told that her son Jesus would be called the son of God. She had heard a firsthand account of the angel's announcement to the shepherds on the night of Jesus' birth when he was called “a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. She had heard the witness of Simeon and Anna, that Jesus was the Christ and Redeemer. She had seen the wise men of the east fall down and worship Jesus. Now don't you think it is reasonable to assume that Mary, who had pondered and treasured these things in her heart regarding her precious baby, would want to find out all she could about him? Wouldn't you, under the same circumstances? If men were in expectation of Messiah, as we are told they were, she would want to know why. Since they went up to Jerusalem to worship each year, Mary would probably ask the priests respecting

the prophecies concerning Messiah. They would tell her because it was their duty to do so. So I think she accumulated a considerable fund of knowledge about Jesus and his place in prophecy--who he was and what he would do. She certainly knew better than anyone else that he was not begotten of man but was begotten of God, that he was the son of God.

I am sure that Mary felt the responsibilities of her position very keenly. She realized that she had the privilege of rearing a child who actually was the son of the Most High God, to care not only for his physical needs, but to nurture his growing and inquiring mind as well. She must have made it the subject of daily prayer, to be guided in the performance of this important task, to say the right thing, to give the right answer. Jesus was a perfect child with mental and physical endowments far beyond other children his age. All children ask questions. That is how they learn. --Jesus must have started to ask questions at a very early age. What sort of questions do you suppose they would be? One day, when very young, he may have innocently asked, "Mother, why do people stop and point to me, and say, 'What a beautiful child'?" Mary perhaps replied, "It is inner beauty that is the most important, my darling--to be a good boy." Perhaps another day, when older, Jesus may have said, "When I climb the hill with the other children, they quickly tire and want to sit down. Why is it that I do not?" What could Mary do but answer, "Thank God that you are a strong and sturdy child, my son."

Of course Mary and Joseph took the child Jesus to worship regularly. At the synagogue the commandments were recited each sabbath and a portion of holy scriptures read to the congregation. This might have resulted in the child Jesus one day asking his mother, "Why is it that the other children do not remember the scriptures that are read at the synagogue, while I can remember every word I have heard?" It became increasingly hard for Mary to answer questions like these. "Thank God for a good memory, my dear," she would reply. But it was not the whole truth. Jesus was beginning to realize he was, somehow, different.

Mary and Joseph must have been familiar with, and lived by the words of, Deuteronomy 6:4-7:

"Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord. And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."

Supplementing the teachings of the synagogue Mary and Joseph must have diligently taught Jesus the words of the Lord at home also, creating an atmosphere of love and reverence for God. Jesus, with perfect capacity, would heartily respond to this wholesome influence. When Jesus was older, perhaps about ten or eleven, he might say to his mother:

“My mind seems always to turn to thoughts of the great God of our -fathers, the Creator of heaven and earth. I feel a strong tie to Him, a tenderness even greater than I have toward my father Joseph. When I speak of this to my companions, they think it strange. Mother, am I so different from others?”

When Mary heard this question, she knew the time had come to tell Jesus all the things she had pondered and treasured in her heart for so many years. “Yes, Jesus,” she said, “you are different from others. Very different indeed. It is time you knew why. Sit down my sweet son, and I'll tell you all I know, from the beginning.”

Let us listen in on the conversation that might have taken place between Mary and Jesus. To assume the possibility of such a conversation occurring is not irreverent since every aspect of it is scriptural as you will see.

Mary Instructs Her Son

“Jesus,” Mary said, “Do you know that I have seen the mighty angel Gabriel? Many years ago, before you were born, just before I married your father Joseph, Gabriel appeared to me. He was as close to me as you are now. It was the same bright and shining Gabriel that appeared to the prophet Daniel hundreds of years ago.” Jesus' eyes grew wide with wonder. “Did he speak to you, mother?” he asked. “Indeed he did,” Mary answered. “He greeted me very heartily, saying: ‘Hail; you are highly favored; the Lord is with thee.’ I was afraid at first, but he reassured me, saying, ‘Fear not, Mary, for thou hast found favor with God.’ Then Gabriel told me the most wonderful thing! He said that I would have a son by the power of God, and should call him Jesus. Then he said some things about you which I think you are old enough to hear. You asked me if you are different from others. What the angel Gabriel said will answer your question. He said of you: ‘He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest, the Son of God; and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David; and he shall reign over the house of David for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.’ So is it any wonder, my dear son, that your heart and mind always turn to your heavenly Father? It is because you are His son, and not the son of Joseph. And there is much more to tell,” Mary continued. “I have pondered these things in my heart for so long, waiting to tell

you. We have already told you that you were born in Bethlehem when we were there to register for the tax. But we did not tell you of the glorious things that happened the night you were born. Near Bethlehem there were some shepherds, keeping watch over their flock by night. Suddenly, the angel of the Lord shone round about them. They were afraid, of course, just as I was, when Gabriel appeared to me. Then the angel said to them: 'Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people; for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour which is Christ the Lord.' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying: 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.' And the angel told the shepherds exactly where to find you; so they left their flocks and came to see you; and they told me all about what they had seen and heard. That night the angel called you a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."

Jesus was overwhelmed by what his mother told him, but a great peace descended upon him. Now he knew the reason for many things. But he felt very humble, saying: "Mother, is it possible that I shall inherit the throne of David and reign for ever; that I shall be the King of Israel; that I shall be the Saviour, which is Christ the Lord?" "There is no doubt of it, my child," Mary answered. "But let me tell you even more. When you were a little baby we brought you to Jerusalem to present you to the Lord. As far as others knew we were simply doing as the law prescribed for a firstborn son. But to me it was much more than that because, you see, I knew who you really were! When you were presented before the Lord, I said in my heart: 'Lord God, I present to you your own baby son!' Then something else happened. In the temple at Jerusalem there was an old man named Simeon who had been told by the power of God that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Christ. When Simeon saw you he tenderly took you in his arms and, lifting up his eyes, he praised God, and said: 'Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen the salvation which thou hast prepared before the face of all people, a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.' After that the prophetess Anna came in. When she saw you, she thanked God and said to everyone there that you were the one who would bring redemption to --Israel."

"Oh, mother," Jesus said, "These things you tell me are so wonderful, and so great. How can I ever measure up to them? I am but a little child!" "Never fear, my child," Mary answered. "Your Father is the Almighty himself and he will guide his son. You are always under his care. He has already saved you from great danger. Let me tell you about it. When you were a little baby and we were still living in Bethlehem, some prominent wise men came from a far

country in the east. They went to Jerusalem and asked King Herod, 'Where is he that is born king of the Jews?' It seems that a mysterious star had appeared to them, low in the heavens, moving before them, to lead them to a new-born king, the Messiah who will eventually rule the world. The star led them to our nation. They said they had come to worship this new king. Herod and all his court were worried about this news of a new king of the Jews. So Herod called together all the chief priests and scribes, and asked them where, according to the prophet, Christ should be born. They told Herod of the prophecy of Micah: 'But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me, that is to be ruler in Israel whose goings forth have been from old, from everlasting.' Herod intended to kill you because he did not want any other king in Israel. So he sent the wise men to Bethlehem to find you and asked them to let him know when they had done so. Then the star went before them and led them to our very door! I'll never forget that day! A wonderful brilliance permeated everything and this grand oriental caravan stopped right in front of our house. The dignified wise men, in their colorful costumes, dismounted and came to the door. They seemed overjoyed. They pointed to the bright star hanging overhead and said that it meant that the new king was here and that they had come to worship him. We invited them in and when they saw you, those big men fell down before you and worshipped you. They cried in happiness and adoration. 'This is the **WORD** who made heaven and earth,' they said. 'This is the Son of God!' Then they brought in heavy treasure chests and opened them. One chest was full of gold coins, newly minted. Another was full of precious frankincense; another of costly, sweet-smelling myrrh. You laughed merrily as they presented these gifts to you, Tiny as you were, you seemed to thank them with your eyes and smile. They left us as suddenly as they had come and the wondrous light disappeared with them."

"That night we were warned by an angel from God that Herod would try to kill you. We were told to take you and flee to Egypt. We obeyed at once. The gifts of the wise men gave us the means. When Herod's soldiers came for you, they found the house empty. Then Herod was exceedingly angry and did a very wicked thing. He ordered all the children in Bethlehem and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, killed by the sword. We stayed in Egypt until Herod died and we were told by an angel from God that it was safe to return to the land of Israel. Then we came here to Nazareth. So you see, my son, your heavenly Father is caring for you, and you may be sure he will help you fulfill everything that has been prophesied of you."

Jesus was silent for a long time, his head bowed in thought. Then he raised his head. "Mother," he said, "I have heard the book of the

prophet Isaiah read at the synagogue and I know every word of it. Isaiah said in one place, 'The Lord himself shall give you a sign. Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.' (Isaiah 7:14) Was this spoken of you, mother, and of me?" Mary answered, "Yes, Jesus, I think it was." "But you named me 'Jesus' and not 'Immanuel.'" "The name Jesus means Saviour," Mary answered. "God, through Gabriel, said to name you so. The angels said to the shepherds on the night you were born that you would be 'a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.'" "But why did Isaiah say I would be called Immanuel?" "I have wondered about that, too," Mary answered. "Immanuel means 'God with us.' Perhaps the prophet means that God is with us since he has given us his son to be a saviour."

Jesus nodded. "And I remember Isaiah also said, 'For unto us a child is born; unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder; and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom; to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice, from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.' Mother, is it possible this prophecy refers to me and all these titles shall be mine?" "Yes, Jesus," Mary answered, "There is no doubt that you are the son of God. You are the promised Messiah and Saviour." "If that is so," Jesus said, getting up, "should I not be about my Father's business? There is so much to do!" "But you are so young! You are only a child!" "But mother, the prophet Samuel was only a child when he began the service of God in the temple. I feel that I should be about my Father's business!"

Of course this conversation between Mary and Jesus is an assumption, pure and simple. Yet it is useful to bring out the incidents surrounding Jesus' birth and the prophecies relating thereto. Considering the perfect and keenly active mind of the child Jesus, the mental powers far beyond his years when compared to other children, it is certainly not an unlikely assumption. We read in Luke 2:40, "And the child grew and waxed strong, filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was with him." Note that he was "filled with wisdom." Is it not likely that he obtained much of this wisdom from his mother? All the ingredients of such a conversation --existed and it could have taken place. Assuming that it did take place makes subsequent events more meaningful.

The record says that Jesus' parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the Passover. The entire celebration took eight days of which the feast of Passover was one, followed by seven days of unleavened bread. At this particular Passover season, Jesus was

twelve years old. A Jewish boy was considered “a son of the law” when he had attained his twelfth year. He was considered on the threshold of manhood. It was the age of responsibility. He then became responsible under the law and from that age forward was required to keep its festivals and other ceremonials. This particular trip to Jerusalem had special significance for Jesus not only because he could now attend as a participant, but for a deeper reason. He reasoned that since at twelve years of age Jewish boys came under the requirements of the Law Covenant, this arrangement might have been made to indicate his proper course and duty. Perhaps this was the time he was expected to begin some phase of his ministry. He was so anxious to please his Heavenly Father. Even at that age it was his burning desire. He therefore resolved that he would settle this question when he got to Jerusalem. He decided that he would consult the very highest authorities respecting the teachings of the law in this matter. There is no doubt in my mind that he told his mother what he intended to do.

When they got to Jerusalem, he attended the necessary ceremonials with his parents. But as often as he could get away by himself, he sought out eminent teachers of the temple. I am sure that his parents had complete confidence in him and were not worried about him, giving him much freedom of movement. But we can imagine that during most of the Passover feast and the days of unleavened bread the great scholars of the temple were busy with important functions. Waiting to see them, perhaps Jesus had access to some sort of library of scrolls connected with the temple and engrossed himself in the study of these. At any rate, it appears that he did not have an opportunity for a conference with the teachers until the close of the feast.

The Teachers Are Amazed

At this time we can imagine the custodian of the temple entering the private chambers and saying to the teachers and doctors of the law, “There is a boy outside who has been here every day of the feast seeking a conference with you. He says he must have answers to some questions.” “But we can't talk to every boy who has a question. Send him to one of the priests.” “But sirs, this is such an unusual boy. He reasons and talks like a mature man. I have never seen the like of him. And he has a fantastic knowledge of the scriptures. Frankly, I was not able to answer him myself. I do wish you gentlemen would see him.” The teachers sighed and sat down. It was the custom for teachers to sit on benches in a half-circle with the pupils sitting on mats on the floor at their feet. “Send him in,” they said wearily. When the winsome and charming boy Jesus walked in

and respectfully greeted them, they smiled and motioned for him to sit down.

The time came for those who had come to the feast from a distance to leave for home. Different families from the same --locality usually traveled together as one caravan. Jesus' parents, thinking he was in the company of some of their relatives, went a day's journey toward home before they discovered he was not in the company. Then they returned to Jerusalem journeying another day. We can imagine Joseph saying to Mary, anxiously, "Jerusalem is such a big city. Where do you suppose that boy can be?" We can imagine Mary replying, "I think I know just where he is, Joseph." That is why, on the third day, they went straight to the temple. We read:

"And it happened, after three days, they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers; both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all were astonished at his intelligence and replies. And seeing him they were amazed. And his mother said to him, 'Child, why hast thou done thus to us? Behold, thy father and I seek thee sorrowing.' And he said to them, 'Why did you seek me? Did you not know that I must be in the house of my Father.'--Luke 2:46-49, Diaglott

Yes, he had told his mother where he would be in Jerusalem. But she did not expect that his intense interest in the scriptures would cause him to miss the caravan home and completely absorb him for three days.

Jesus apparently received the information he sought, that, although a boy at twelve became amenable to the law, none could enter upon a teaching or preaching service until thirty years of age, the age of a mature man. But I am sure he obtained much more information than that. I am sure Jesus was wise enough not to disclose his identity to the teachers, was respectful enough to his elders not to contradict them in any errors he may have detected, and tactful enough to ask for the information he most wanted without being too insistent. What was the information he most wanted and obtained? It was much of the same information he later gave to his disciples on the way to Emmaus:

"And beginning at Moses, and all the prophets, he expounded unto them, in all the scriptures, the things concerning himself."--Luke 24:27 Knowing he was the son of God, knowing he was the Messiah, what could be more natural, even at twelve, than that he should seek to know from the teachers of the temple what the scriptures said concerning himself. I am sure the teachers told him all they knew. This handsome boy, so earnest in his desire to know the scriptures, and asking such intelligent questions, must have thoroughly captivated them. He drew them out so that they vied with

one another to tell him of the prophecies concerning Messiah. Jesus remembered every word. Jesus left with his parents, and we read:

“He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them. And his mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus advanced in wisdom, and in manliness, and in favor with God and men.”--Luke 2:51,52, Diaglott

Now another curtain descends and there are eighteen years of silence insofar as any specific acts of Jesus are concerned. But that one sentence, “Jesus advanced in wisdom, and in manliness and in favor with God and men,” tells us all we need to know. He advanced in wisdom by contemplating the scriptures and observing his fellow-man. Many of his parables he would later tell were based upon what he observed during this period. Being a carpenter he could speak with authority about a house built upon a rock and a house built upon the sand, and the necessity for counting the cost before building a tower. Having contact with farmers he later told the parable of the sower, the wheat and tares, and the laborers in the vineyard. Knowing the ways of shepherds, he would use the illustrations of a shepherd and the sheep, the lost sheep, and the sheep and the goats. Talking with fishermen he would later speak of the net cast into the sea, and the pearl of great price. We know something else of those years. We know that it was his custom to stand up in the synagogue and read the scriptures aloud to the congregation. This is disclosed by Luke describing his visit to Nazareth after he had begun his ministry:

“And he came to Nazareth where he had been brought up, and as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up for to read.”--Luke 4:16

He remembered every word. These were fruitful years, full of rich experiences he would later draw upon. He advanced in favor with God and men. The Lord loved him, and so did men. Being perfect he must have attracted people to him by wholesome goodness and sheer personal magnetism. But all the while he was counting the days because he knew that David had written of him:

“Lo, I come; in the volume of the book it is written of me; I delight to do thy will, O my God; yea, thy law is within my heart.”--Psalms 40:7,8

He was counting the days until his thirtieth birthday. I think it was on that very day that John the Baptist, waist-deep in the waters of Jordan, looked up and saw the perfect man Jesus coming toward him. He pointed to Jesus and said in a loud voice, for all to hear: “Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29) Jesus eagerly entered the water. Now he could really be about his Father's business!

When he arose out of the water and the holy spirit of God flooded his being, from that time forward he was in direct communication with his heavenly Father--no more necessity to be taught of his mother, to be told who he was, that he was the son of God, or to seek counsel from teachers in the temple. Now he directly heard his heavenly Father's audible voice:

“And, lo, a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”--Matthew 3:17

The Counsel of God

“Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.”--Psalms 73:24

ALITTLE child, mystified about something, says to himself: “I'm going to .ask my dad about that, when he comes home.” Later he asks his question .and listens, wide-eyed, to his father's answer. This is one of the great rewards of parenthood--the little child trusts his father fully and completely. He believes that his father's words are always true and right. His father may actually be an ignorant and unlearned man; but the child values his counsel above that of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. He points his father out to his playmates and says proudly, “That's my dad! He knows everything!”

On one occasion, the disciples came to Jesus and asked: “Who is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” (Matthew 18:1) “And Jesus called a little child unto him.” It seems that the little children were never very far from Jesus. With natural curiosity, and attracted by his warm and loving personality, they got as close to him as they could, so close sometimes that the --disciples felt that they had to shoo them away! So:

“Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them; and said: Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”--Matthew 18:2,3

“Except ye be converted!” That was a strange thing to say! These were his disciples he was talking to--weren't they converted already? In a very important sense they were not. Their very question disclosed their selfishly ambitious state of mind. They wanted to know which of them would be the greatest in heaven, which of them would be higher than the others in heaven! Doesn't that sound familiar? There was a shocking similarity here between their spirit and that of Satan who had said, “I will ascend into heaven; I will exalt my throne above the stars of God.” (Isaiah 14:13) Jesus quickly detected this similarity of spirit and told them plainly that --unless they became as little children, they would not even enter into the kingdom of heaven, much less be the greatest there. They must first be converted, that is, changed in disposition to that of a child.

A little child, before it is exposed to the world, is simple of heart: meek, humble, truthful, free from ambition and rivalry, faithful, trusting, loving. A little child is obedient, teachable, without guile, indifferent to social distinctions and popular notions. Black, white, yellow, rich or poor--these mean nothing. Such are the attributes of

character that Jesus must have had in mind when he said also, on another occasion:

“Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me; for of such is the kingdom of heaven.”--Matthew 19:14

A natural child grows up and, in this evil world, often departs from the counsel of his parents. He seeks and finds other counsel, some good, some bad. But the child of God remains a little child in the sense that he does not depart from the counsel of his Heavenly Father but fully trusting, seeks more and more of that counsel. David wrote:

“When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up.”--Psalms 27:10

Have you ever been lost? One of my most vivid memories is of such an incident, which occurred when I was about three. We lived in the country, and very seldom went to town. On this occasion my father brought me to the city. Holding me by the hand he took me into a large department store, the first one I had ever seen. I was dazzled and enchanted by all the bright and glittering things in the store. I let go of my father's hand to get closer to what I wanted to see. For a few moments I was completely engrossed in some attractive display. When I eagerly turned to talk to my father about it, HE WAS NOT THERE! A moment before I was gay and carefree, full of delight; now I was terror-stricken. I looked wildly about for my father, running here and there, trying to raise myself up on my tiptoes to see farther. Tears filled my eyes and my throat tightened. The beauties of the store were just the same as they were before, but suddenly they were no longer of any interest to me. I wanted just one thing--MY FATHER. I wanted to hold his hand again; nothing else mattered. Never before in my life had I felt so terribly alone, forsaken, and miserable. The whole thing lasted only a few minutes. My father quickly found me. Seeing my confusion and tears he took me in his arms and comforted me. Then we went on again hand in hand. My wondering delight in all the things around me quickly returned; everything was joyful, good, and right once more.

Have you ever felt forsaken? Human parents eventually die and otherwise forsake their children. They let go of their children's hands--it is inevitable. But how fortunate the one whom the Lord takes up --**his hand never fails**; it is always there to hold, to comfort, and to protect. That is what David meant when he said:

“When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up.”--Psalms 27:10

The Lord will never forsake you. He will always guide you with his counsel. How very fortunate the one whom the Lord takes up and guides with his counsel!

Jesus called these child-like ones who seek and delight in the counsel of the Lord, his little ones. Of these it is written:

“Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly; nor standeth in the way of sinners; nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree, planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. The ungodly are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous; but the way of the ungodly shall perish.”--Psalms 1:1-6

“And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water.” How beautiful and refreshing that sounds: drawing abundantly from the water of truth, bearing much fruit, and prospering in the heavenly way.

“Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it out.”--Proverbs 20:5

The water is there, but it is deep. It must be found and drawn out. The scriptures contain “the whole counsel of God.” But, to the uninitiated--to those whose minds have not been illuminated by the holy spirit--these things are too deep.

Finding the Counsel of God

How can a Christian find and avail himself of the counsel of God? He must first learn the basic principles of the truth, which Paul describes as “milk” in Hebrews 5:12. He later must be able to also assimilate the “meat” of the scriptures. Of course when a child is weaned and starts eating meat, he does not entirely stop drinking milk. The wise parent knows there should always be a glass of milk on the table. So to understand the deep things, we must often go back to first principles--to the milk of the word.

How does a Christian find the counsel of God in the maze of scripture provided? We read:

“Whom shall he teach knowledge? And whom shall he make to understand doctrine? Them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts. For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little.”--Isaiah 28:9,10

God has been very gracious to us at this end of the age. Jesus was talking to his disciples about the end of the age and when he would come again. In Matthew chapter 24 he told them to “watch” for his coming (verse 44). It was at this point in his discourse that the relative time of the application of his words was fixed. He promised a faithful and wise servant who would give his household meat in due season. That servant was Pastor Russell. By use of his books, the “keys to the scriptures,” we have been enlightened, and bountifully fed “meat in due season”--present truth.

“Remember the former things of old; for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me; declaring the end from the beginning; and from ancient times the things that are not yet done; saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.”--Isaiah 46:9,10

God's Purpose for the Church

What is God's pleasure? Jesus himself answered this question:

“It is the Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom.”--Luke 12:32

Let us well remember this point--the selection and development of a church class to rule with Christ in his kingdom was not an alternative plan should other plans fail. It was not an afterthought. It was the original purpose and counsel of God! It was his “good pleasure” from the beginning. Paul plainly states this:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ; according as he hath chosen us in him BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD, that we should be holy, and without blame before him in love; having predestinated us, unto the adoption of children, by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will.”--Ephesians 1:3-5

To become a member of this predestinated group of 144,000 kings and priests is a GREAT prize--an exceeding high calling. Paul calls it “the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:14) It is also described as “glory and honor and immortality.” (Romans 2:7) In another place it is called “partaking of the divine nature.” (2 Peter 1:4) It is termed “the crown of life.” (James 1:12) The crown is the highest part of the person. The promised “crown of life” is the highest form of life.

Our poor human minds cannot really grasp the magnitude of this thing. How can we, by using imperfect, earthly language, describe so lofty and glorious a condition? How can we measure the difference

between the human and divine? IT'S IMPOSSIBLE! But we do have a hint in Isaiah where Jehovah God says of himself:

“As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”--Isaiah 55:9

This suggests a measure. But how high are the heavens above the earth? Let us see. Light travels at the speed of 186,000 miles a second. Now suppose that instead of traveling only one second it traveled a whole year at that same rate of speed. Just consider how many seconds there are in one year and allow 186,000 miles for each second. That would be the distance known as one light year. It is difficult for us to grasp the vastness of such a distance. Yet many of the stars of heaven are millions of light years distant from the earth! Now we begin to appreciate how much higher than ourselves God is as indicated by the expression, “As the heavens are higher than the earth.”

Bearing this in mind, let us now consider a scripture showing the similarity of our glorified Lord Jesus to the Heavenly Father.

“Who, being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person . . . sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.”--Hebrews 1:3

This places the glorified Christ on that same lofty position described by the phrase, “As the heavens are higher than the earth.” This is further confirmed by the scripture that tells us that Jehovah God:

“Raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places; far above all principality and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named.” --Ephesians 1:20,21

Now we quote a scripture that is almost incredible in its implication. It is addressed to the “beloved” of God, the members of his church, to you and to me:

“Beloved; now are we the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is!”--1 John 3:2

There we have it! First Jehovah God, so very high above us--“as the heavens are higher than the earth.” Then Jesus Christ, the express image of his person, on the same plane. Then **WE SHALL BE LIKE HIM!** It sounds impossible doesn't it? It sounds so impossible that some of the Lord's children have said:

“I don't aspire to such glory. I could not. If I can just squeeze, unnoticed, through the side door into heaven, and take a humble place in the Kingdom, a back seat, so to speak; I shall be completely satisfied.”

That attitude does show commendable humility. Our Lord Jesus showed a similar humility. When the bitter cup of an agonizing death was imminent, he prayed to his Heavenly Father:

“I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me, with thine own self, with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.”--John 17:5

God had promised him much greater glory than that, but Jesus would have been content with his previous condition. We read:

“He humbled himself . . . Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow.”--Philippians 2:8-10

We also read that he was “made so much better than the angels.” (Hebrews 1:4) Just as the Heavenly Father gave his son Jesus abundantly more than he asked, so he will do for each of his beloved and faithful children. It must be done; he has promised it. His word does not return unto him void. As the apostle says:

“We shall all be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption; and this mortal must put on immortality.”--1 Corinthians 15:51-53

Glory, honor and immortality! Let us accept the promise with joy and not be overwhelmed by it. As the apostle counsels us:

“Let us hold fast the profession of our faith, WITHOUT WAVERING for he is faithful that promised.”--Hebrews 10:23

So we see that although the reward promised is very high and great, IT IS OBTAINABLE. Not only is it obtainable, God wants us to have it. It is his good pleasure to give it to us. Every necessary facility is furnished us so that we may qualify for the prize.

The Search for God's Counsel

We are counseled and told just what to do as it is written in our text: “Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.” (Psalms 73:24) Someone may say:

“Wonderful! Tell me just where this counsel is found and I will follow it faithfully. I will write it all out in a manual, classify it, and index it. Then I will know the Lord's counsel in every event of life!”

It's not as simple as that. We have to search for this counsel. It is a rare and precious thing, “hid from ages and generations.” (Colossians 1:26) But it can be found because Jesus said: “Seek and ye shall find.” (Matthew 7:7) Just as one may follow a treasure map, there are clues in the Bible. It is a fascinating thing to follow them

and uncover the precepts of God applying to us. Let us follow one of these clues now and see where it leads us.



Instead of a pirate's treasure map we will start with a map of Paul's missionary journeys. Paul stopped at Ephesus on one of these journeys and preached to the ecclesia there. On his next journey he was again in that vicinity. He sent for the elders of Ephesus to come to him, he had a meeting with them, and gave them the benefit of his advice. On this occasion he spoke these words to them:

“I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and in your houses. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock over which the holy Spirit hath made you overseers, to feed the Church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.”--Acts 20:20,27,28

Here we have a hint as to where “the counsel of God” may be found, the counsel that will lead us to glory. Paul told the Ephesians that he had “kept back nothing.” He told the Ephesians he had declared unto them “all the counsel of God.” He told the Ephesian elders to use this “counsel” to “feed the Church of God.”

“Why that's fine,” someone may say. “Now all we have to do is to find out what Paul told the Ephesians! Then we'll have it!” But wait. Paul probably gave many discourses to the brethren at Ephesus. Some of these discourses may have been several hours in length. He had been known to speak all night. Just exactly what he told them we do not know. A word-for-word transcript of these talks would fill

hundreds of pages. But they were never recorded; there were no shorthand writers or tape recorders in those days. Does this mean that all the wonderful things Paul told the Ephesians --“all the counsel of God” he had not shunned to declare, all the precious things of which he “kept back nothing”--were forever lost except for the memories of those who saw him and heard his voice? It does not seem right that this should be so.

Let us follow another clue in the same direction. Paul is in Rome in bonds and is ready to be offered. The time of his departure is at hand. He has fought a good fight, he has finished his course, and he has kept the faith. There is laid up for him a crown of righteousness as he himself said. (2 Timothy 4:6-8) He knows that he must shortly die and then he will be silent. His personal influence for good on the church will be at an end. Chained and immobilized it is only natural that he would think of his missionary journeys and of the many ecclesias he had served--the delights of the service, the dear friends he met, the faith, the zeal, the love, the steadfastness, and the charity he has seen. He looks down at his chains and feels a sudden sorrow: he will never meet these dear ones in the flesh again.

Ah, but though his body is chained, his mind is free! He thinks back. As his thoughts roam from place to place he thinks of the brethren at Ephesus. He wonders if they are still faithful to the counsel of God he had declared to them. He longs to see them, to talk to them again, to remind them of all the precious treasures of truth they have, to stir up their minds and hearts to a keener appreciation of them. Oh if he could only talk to the beloved Ephesian brethren again! Then he realizes there is a way he can talk to them again! He reaches for a piece of parchment and a quill. He begins to write slowly and laboriously with large characters to aid his dimming sight:

Chapter 1

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God; to the saints which are at Ephesus,” he writes. He pauses at this point and thinks: “Those at Ephesus will send this letter to the other churches also --I must greet those dear ones too. And he adds: And to the faithful in Christ Jesus.” This is his salutation and it is the first verse of the first chapter of Ephesians.

What do you suppose he would want to write in a letter like that? Don't you suppose he would want to reiterate to them many of the elements of the “counsel of God” by which they may inherit glory, honor and immortality? Of course he had already given it to them verbally in many discourses, but now when his time of departure had come, he would want to leave them a permanent record--a record in his own hand, which would not later be changed or distorted. Before

his death, which was now so close, he would want to bequeath to them all his spiritual wealth --the heavenly treasures, more precious than gold--“ALL THE COUNSEL OF GOD.” This is just what he did in his letter to the Ephesians: it contains the essence of the counsel of God. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ,” he wrote. (1:3)

His pen scratched on the rough parchment. He wrote steadily and firmly and out of the fullness of his heart. He started with the predestination of the church class, as a class, before the foundation of the world, their redemption through Christ's blood, and “the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of his grace.” He spoke of their knowledge of God's divine plan of the ages in these words:

“Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself.”

He reminded them of the glorious culmination of God's loving plan for mankind, saying: “That in the dispensation of the fulness of times, he might gather together in one, all things in Christ; both which are in heaven and which are on earth; even in him.” (1:9,10) He told them that this was, “According to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.” He beautifully summed up the philosophy of the ransom--the buying back and restoration of Adam and his race--calling it: “The redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.” (1:14) What a lovely expression that is!

Then he spoke of the treasures he wanted them to have here and hereafter, saying that he ceased not to make mention of them in his prayers:

“That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you, the spirit of wisdom, and revelation in the knowledge of him; the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in his saints.”

The Diaglott renders it: “The glorious wealth of his inheritance.” These words apply not only to the Ephesians but to us too--to you and to me. Why? Don't forget that in his salutation he added the words: “And to the faithful in Christ Jesus.” If you are faithful in Christ Jesus, the apostle Paul has prayed for you personally. He has prayed that God may give you the spirit of wisdom and knowledge of him, for you to know the hope of his calling; for you to receive the “glorious wealth” of his inheritance!

But you may say, “How could Paul have prayed for me before I was ever born?” In the same way that Jesus prayed for you when, after

having prayed for his apostles, he said: “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also who shall believe on me through their word.” (John 17:20) Paul also prayed for the Ephesians and for us that we might know and understand, “The exceeding greatness [*of God's power*] which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand, in the heavenly places.”

Paul continues with words that are so powerfully descriptive of Christ:

“Far above all principality and power, and might and dominion, and every name that is named; not only in this world but also in that which is to come; and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.”--Ephesians 1:21-23

This is all in what we call the first chapter of Ephesians. Of course, the letter was not divided into chapters and verses until much later.

Chapter 2

In the second chapter he reminded the Ephesians and us that:

“In time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us; even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ; and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

Lest anyone think they sit together with Christ because of personal worth, he adds:

“For by grace are ye saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God. Not of works, lest any man should boast.”--Ephesians 2:2-9

At the end of the chapter he refers to Jesus as being: “The chief corner stone; in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord.” This suggests a pyramid structure a form that has been so useful in the chart of the divine plan of the ages.

Chapter 3

In the third chapter Paul tells how by God's grace he was made a minister to “Preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.” (3:8) He says that he has asked God, “That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory to be strengthened with might by his spirit, in the inner man.” Do you see how many times

Paul uses the words “riches” and “glory”? These are what he is seeking to bequeath in this letter. He goes on to say:

“That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love; may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge; that ye might be filled with all the fullness of God.”--Ephesians 3:16-19

All the fullness of God! That has a familiar ring. Might it be the same, or the result of, ALL THE COUNSEL of God which Paul had not shunned to declare? I think it may.

How does Paul say it is attained? First, he says that we must be “strengthened with might, by his spirit, in the inner man,” or as the Diaglott renders it, “Powerfully strengthened through his spirit in the inner man.” Someone may say:

“That is what I want to attain! Then I shall indeed be victorious! Tell me what sacrifices I must make, what course of study I must pursue, what deep wisdom I must attain, what expensive offerings I must give, what years of service I must render, what elaborate religious ceremonies I must attend--before I can attain this powerful influx of the holy Spirit--THIS STRENGTHENING OF THE INNER MAN!”

I'm going to answer that by reading Jesus' words:

“I say unto you, ask and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you; for everyone that asketh -- receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. If a son ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? Or, if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or, if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?”--Luke 11:9-13

The Holy Spirit--Yours for the Asking

This is an astonishing thing. The holy Spirit is the most valuable asset of all. It is beyond price. It is the spirit of wisdom which guides us into all truth. It “powerfully strengthens” us in our fight against the world, the flesh and the devil. By the use of it we win the victory and make our calling and election sure. What do we have to do to get it? JUST ASK FOR IT! It is as --simple as that. God earnestly wants you to have it just as much as you want your children to have food! That's what the scripture says!

This is something even the world can understand. This is something even the most degenerate tribes of earth can appreciate. When a child

asks for food, the parent will give it to him, gladly and lavishly if he has it. It delights him to give food to his children. This is a strong and intense quality even in fallen man. "How much more shall your heavenly Father give the holy Spirit to them that ask him?" Do you want to be "powerfully strengthened through his spirit in the inner man"? This is the way--just ask him! Claim the promise and claim it with faith, expecting to receive it. Make room for it and it shall be given you. Ye shall find and it shall be opened unto you!

Starting with the 17th verse of chapter three Paul gives the Ephesians the reasons for their being strengthened by the spirit in the inner man: "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith." If we claim the promise of the holy Spirit with full faith, Christ will dwell in our hearts. We will even have the Heavenly Father in our hearts through his spirit as Jesus himself said:

"If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him; and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."--John 14:23

This is really an overwhelming thought, is it not? Could all the powers of evil, **could Satan and all his demons dare to touch one with whom God and Christ dwell?**

Then Paul wrote those sublime words of praise which the angels must have leaned over his shoulder to read:

"Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the Church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."

Chapter 4

In the fourth chapter Paul exhorts to lowliness and meekness and longsuffering. The Diaglott renders this more clearly as humility and gentleness and patience: "sustaining each other in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." (4:2,3) Then he gives a bit of the counsel of God which, if heeded, could have preserved many who have strayed from the right way: "Ye are called in one hope of your calling!" he said. No earthly calling, no modern worthies, no Jonadabs, just one hope now: "Christ in you, the hope of glory." It is glory, honor, and immortality--the high calling. There is no other calling now! "Ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism." A baptism unto death:

"Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?"--Romans 6:3

There is no other baptism now. Even though 7,000 may be immersed in water at a single convention, there is still no other

baptism! Let us heed well this counsel of God. Here is verse 14 from the Diaglott:

“So that we may be infants no longer; tossed and whirled about with every wind of that teaching which is in the trickery of men, by cunning craftiness, in systematic deception.”--Ephesians 4:14, Diaglott

I don't think any comment is required except to say that it took a great deal of tossing and turning around and juggling of doctrine by tricky and crafty men to cunningly and systematically undermine the truth and lead thousands away from the right path. Paul foresaw it all as his pen slowly scratched its way over the parchment that day so long ago in Rome. Paul ended the fourth chapter by counseling us to:

“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice; and be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God, for Christ's sake, hath forgiven you.”--Ephesians 4:31,32

Chapter 5

There are many rare gems in the fifth chapter. Here are some of them: “Let no man deceive you with vain words.” (5:6) “The fruit of the spirit is in all goodness, and righteousness, and truth; proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.” (5:9,10) “Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.” (5:16) “Giving thanks always for all things, unto God the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (5:20)

Chapter 6

In what is now the sixth chapter of his letter to his beloved Ephesian brethren, Paul starts to write his final bit of counsel, “the counsel of God.” We might imagine at this point that Paul pauses in his writing to look out the window of the house where he is bound as a prisoner. Perhaps he wonders what words he should use as his final exhortation. He looks out. This is Rome the seat of the brutal fourth universal --empire, the iron legs of the image of Ne--buchadnezzar's vision, the unspeakable beast of Daniel's vision. It has the most efficient military organization that has ever existed to that time. Suddenly Paul hears a heavy tread on the street. As he watches a fully armed and armored --Roman soldier strides by--a symbol of Rome's strength and power. Paul picks up his pen. He has found the words he wants:

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole --armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil; for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the

rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore, take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day; and, having done all, to stand. Stand, therefore; having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God.”--Ephesians 6:10-17

What part of this defensive armor is most important? Paul identifies it: “Above all, taking the shield of faith.” (6:16) As we read: “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.” (1 John 5:4) “His truth shall be thy shield and buckler.” (Psalms 91:4) Yes, that is the most important thing--to keep our faith in the truth! This is indeed the counsel of God!

All the armor is defensive “that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day.” There is only one offensive weapon mentioned here: “The sword of the spirit, which is the word of God.” This is the same bright and shining sword that Jesus used when Satan attacked him, after his 40 days fasting in the wilderness. Three times he thrust Satan with this sword. Three times he said **“It is written!”** What happened next? “Then the devil leaveth him, and behold, angels came and ministered unto him.”

If you use this sword faithfully, angels will minister unto you, too!

“For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly, into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”--2 Peter 1:11

The Day of Small Things

“For who hath despised the day of small things?”--Zechariah 4:10

TODAY we are going to consider the tremendous importance and influence of small things. Let us first trace back to the cause of all human misery. It all started with such a little thing--a single forbidden fruit, a thing you could hold in one hand and scarcely feel the weight of it. What a small thing that was! There were literally tons of other fruit. There were thousands of varieties of fruit-bearing trees in Eden. Genesis tells us how much fruit God had made available in that beautiful garden:

“And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth; and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed. To you it shall be for meat.”--Genesis 1:29

This means that every tree in the world bearing wholesome fruit was represented there in Eden. What a wide variety of choice Adam had. If he wanted to, he could eat a different kind of delicious fruit at each meal for a whole year and not have to eat the same fruit twice. So it was indeed a small thing that the fruit of just one tree was prohibited. Thus we read:

“And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden, to dress it and to keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.”--Genesis 2:15-17

Although the forbidden fruit was such a small thing, weighing only a few ounces, the penalty for disobedience in this matter was enormous and frightful. Its effect filled the whole earth. Just for eating that small fruit, 6000 years of sickness, sorrow and pain, of viciousness, violence, and cruelty, of ugliness, degradation and depravity, of decrepitude and old age, and, finally, the supreme penalty: death. All this happened to billions of human beings. That one small thing caused a glorious race of beings--designed to be the kings of earth, created in the image of God with beauty and dignity only a little lower than the --angels, with a magnificent organism designed to live forever in health and happiness--to be stricken down in death like a beast after only a few brief years of miserable life. The earth, too, instead of being made a paradise was polluted and converted into one vast graveyard! The forbidden fruit: a small thing?

Let us digress a little. Although it certainly was not true in the case of Adam, it seems to be a trait of the fallen human nature to especially desire forbidden things. There seems to be a perverse fascination for things forbidden. I remember back on the farm, we had an old cow that always got caught in the barbed-wire fence. She was always trying to reach over and nibble the grass in the next field. It was exactly the same kind of grass, in exactly the same condition. It must have tasted exactly the same. But it seemed more desirable than what she had in her own field because it was fenced off from her. It was forbidden.

Along the same line, former President Herbert Hoover told how he once went fishing but had no luck. On the way home, he met a small boy carrying a fine catch of speckled trout. "Where did you get them?" Hoover asked. "I found the perfect spot," replied the boy. "Just walk down that lane marked PRIVATE PROPERTY, NO ADMITTANCE until you come to a sign saying TRESPASSERS WILL BE PROSECUTED. Just beyond is a stream marked NO FISHING --ALLOWED. That's the place!"

Mark Twain, somewhat irreverently and quite inaccurately, ascribed this trait also to Adam. He wrote:

"Adam was but human. This explained it all. He did not want the --apple for the apple's sake. He wanted it only because it was forbidden. The mistake was in not forbidding the serpent. Then he would have eaten the serpent."

If it weren't so tragic, it would be funny.

This fallen human trait is fostered by Satan to draw men away from the commandments of God to cause them to rebel and go exactly opposite to God's expressed will. This perverse trait is so evident today. It seems to have come to the full; it is the cause of all the civil disobedience and disorder we see about us. Laws enacted for the common good which have been on the books for centuries are now challenged and an exactly opposite course taken. Open anarchy is the result. It is particularly evident among the young. It seems to be a kind of sickness. It has come to such a point that parents are afraid to lay down prohibitions to their children for fear it will prompt the doing of the very thing prohibited. Indeed, this "disobedience to parents" is one of the signs of the times mentioned in 2 Timothy 3:2.

We now return to our subject, "The Day of Small Things." The Great and Almighty God, ruler of heaven and earth, respects small things. He loves and honors small people, those who are small in their own eyes. He tells us this:

"For thus saith the high and lofty One, that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place; with him

also that is of a contrite and humble spirit; to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.”--Isaiah 57:15

“Thus saith the Lord; the heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. . . . For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord. But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.”--Isaiah 66:1,2

Moffatt renders the last phrase: “What I care for are humble, broken creatures, who stand in awe of all I say.”

Do you fit this description? If you do, the Lord cares for you above all others! It is to such who feel small and childlike that the Lord reveals himself and his truth, ignoring those who are great and wise in their own conceits. Thus we read:

“In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said: I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.”--Luke 10:21

God Favors the Small and Humble

This favoring of the small and humble is a fixed principle with God. It was demonstrated in the glorious announcement at the birth of Jesus:

“Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people; for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”--Luke 2:10,11

This announcement was not made to the wise and prudent leaders of Israel--the High Priest, the Scribes and Pharisees, the ones who sat in Moses' seat. They were too wise and too prudent. They would have been skeptical of his word. No, the most important announcement in history was made to poor and humble shepherds who literally trembled at his word, and were “sore afraid.” (Luke 2:9) The Lord had --selected a very humble young maid to be the mother of the Holy Child. Although Gabriel had told Mary, “Thou are highly favored, the Lord is with thee, Blessed art thou among women,” yet in her song of --exultation she humbly said: “He hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden.” (Luke 1:48) Then she cited God's fixed principle of favoring the small and humble, saying: “He hath put down the mighty from their seats, and exalted them of low degree. He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he hath sent empty away!”

This fixed principle of God is incomprehensible to the world. Let us take an illustration from the business world. Suppose there is a seminar for business executives who are studying methods to attain

success. The chairman asks each member to give what, in his opinion, are the most important secrets of success. We can imagine the standard replies:

“Show some ambition. Push yourself forward. Assume more and more responsibility, even if you have to usurp it. Milk the brains of those more knowledgeable than yourself. Be quick to take advantage of the neglect of others to enlarge your own sphere of authority. Get people to work for you. Delegate duties but take all the credit for good results. Act as a boss and some day you'll be boss. Always try to displace the man in the job ahead. Cater and pander to those who are in a position to advance you. Curry favor. Flatter the chief. Play politics, backing the likely winner. Seek social prominence; etc.”

Although not expressed in just so many words, this is the probable sense of their replies. I have attended such seminars. But let us imagine that there is one man who has not replied so the chairman asks him for his secret of success. He gets up and says, “To become the greatest of all, make yourself the smallest of all. Humble yourself.” Can you imagine the scornful laughter that would greet such a reply? Yet this is exactly what the greatest authority in the world taught his disciples. This is the true secret of gaining the highest position in the universe. We read the words of Jesus:

“If any one wishes to be first, he must be last of all and the servant of all.”--Mark 9:35, Weymouth

Jesus also taught that the inverse of this is true: those who seek to exalt themselves will be brought down. He said:

“But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant; and whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.”--Matthew 23:11,12

Jesus illustrated this principle by a parable when he was the guest of honor at a dinner in the home of one of the chief Pharisees. Many other guests, presumably Scribes, Pharisees, and Doctors of the law, were also there. As was the custom, there was a long table. The host and the guest of honor reclined at the head of it; the other guests were seated according to their rank with the most honorable nearest the host. Jesus was a keen observer of human nature and as the guests arrived, he noticed that each one invariably took the highest ranking place available at the table, thus exalting himself above those who might come after him. We now read from the account in Luke:

“And he spoke a parable to those who had been invited, observing how they were choosing out the chief places, saying to them: When thou art invited by any one to a marriage-feast, do not recline in the chief place; lest one more honorable than thou may have been

invited by him, and he who invited thee and him should come and say to thee, Give this man a place and then, with shame, thou shouldst begin to occupy the lowest place. But when thou art invited, go and recline in the lowest place; that when he who invited thee comes, he may say to thee, Friend, go up to a higher place. Then thou wilt have honor in the presence of all those reclining with thee.”--Luke 14:7-11, Diaglott



Then Jesus drove home the lesson of the parable with the words: “For every one who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Contrasting Satan and Jesus

We have a demonstration of this fixed principle of God in Satan and Jesus. Satan sought to exalt himself as we read:

“For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven. I will exalt my throne above the stars of God. I will ascend above the heights of the clouds. I will be like the Most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to the sides of the pit.”--Isaiah 14:13-15

Contrast this with the career of our Lord Jesus who humbled himself and whom we are to emulate:

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus; who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God, the Father.”--Philippians 2:5-11

To us, the followers of Jesus, the apostle says:

“Be clothed with humility; for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.”--1 Peter 5:5,6

God Resists the Proud

“God resisteth the proud!” What chance would we have if God would resist us? How wonderful it is to enjoy the grace of God which he shows to the humble. Do any think they do not need this lesson? Bro. Russell wrote:

“No other lesson requires to be so carefully learned by the Lord's people as this lesson of humility. It has to do with the very humblest of the flock, as well as those who are teachers and elders and pilgrims, etc. But the degree of force that seems to come with the besetment or temptation seems to multiply in proportion to the position and attainments of the individual. Pride and ambition may be in those who have no official position in the Church. Little men, like little ships with broad sails, are in great danger of being capsized if too strong a wind of popularity play upon them.”--Reprints, page 3363.

Isn't that well put? In conformity to his fixed principle, the Lord has always selected for his service men who were small in their own eyes. For example, when the prophet Samuel told Saul that he had been selected to be King of Israel, Saul was very small in his own eyes. We read:

“And Saul answered and said, Am I not a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel: And my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? Wherefore then speakest thou so to me?”--1 Samuel 9:21

When Samuel wanted to present him to the people as their first King, Saul in his humility hid himself. Thus when he considered himself small, he was made great. Later he became proud, haughty and disobedient. When Samuel told him of his rejection by the Lord, he reminded Saul of God's fixed principle:

“And Samuel said, When thou wast little in thine own eyes, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the Lord anointed thee King over Israel?”-- 1 Samuel 15:17

Let us learn well the tragic lesson of Saul. Let us be alert to detect and promptly resist the slightest beginning of pride. Our very lives depend upon it: “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.” (Proverbs 16:18)

The one whom the Lord selected to --succeed Saul was also small, the smallest son of Jesse. David had seven brothers who were superior to him according to human standards. Even the prophet Samuel thought one of David's tall and handsome brothers was the better choice. We read:

“But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him. For the Lord seeth not as man seeth. For man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.”-- 1 Samuel 16:7

The next few verses tell us what happened:

“Again Jesse made seven of his sons to pass before Samuel. And Samuel said unto Jesse, The Lord hath not chosen these. And Samuel said unto Jesse, are here all thy children? And he said, there remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep. . . . And he sent and brought him in. . . . And the Lord said, arise, anoint him; for this is he.”--1 Samuel 16:10-12

Once again, the smallest was chosen. Unlike Saul, David maintained his humility as reflected in the many beautiful psalms he wrote. The Lord loved him and favored him in a most unique manner. The name of David was highly honored and exalted so much so that when Jesus was born on earth, he was called the Son of David; the glorious Messianic Kingdom authority by which he shall rule the world is called the Throne of David.

Another example of this principle is Gideon. When the Lord told him he had been selected to save Israel from the hand of the Midianites, we read that Gideon, small in his own eyes, modestly answered:

“Oh my Lord, wherewith shall I save Israel? Behold, my family is poor in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house.”--Judges 6:15

This was the attitude of mind the Lord could use. One of such a mind would be willing to take instruction, to obey implicitly, to do things the Lord's way not his own. Is not this the meaning of consecration, the ready and willing acceptance of God's will in the place of our own?

In the Christian dispensation we have the outstanding example of the apostle Paul. Brilliant of mind, highly educated, a talented logician and teacher, Paul wrote most of the New Testament. He was mightily used of the Lord to instruct and unify the early Church as well as us at this end of the age. Why do you suppose the Lord selected him to do this work? Why not someone who had been a disciple of Jesus during his earthly ministry? Paul himself gives us the secret of why the Lord could and did use him so extensively when he tells us of his small opinion of himself:

“For I am the least of the apostles, that I am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the Church of God. But by the grace of God, I am what I am. And his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all. Yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.”--1 Corinthians 15:9,10

Do you see Paul's humility of heart? He was really the greatest of them but he considered himself small, the least of the apostles. Then he made himself even smaller than that! He made himself less than the least in the whole Church:

“Unto me who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given; that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.”-- Ephesians 3:8

Let us learn Paul's secret of how the grace of God may be obtained.

Modern-day Examples

We have a refreshing example of humility in more modern times. George Washington Carver was a brilliant Negro scientist who specialized in research on the lowly peanut. He discovered ways of making more than 300 useful products from the peanut ranging from instant “coffee” to soap and ink, all in addition to its use as food. He made the peanut one of the most important crops in agriculture. When asked how he was able to accomplish all this, he used to tell this story about himself:

“When I was young I said to God, ‘Lord, tell me the mystery of the --universe.’ But God answered, ‘That knowledge is reserved for me

alone.' So I said, `Lord, tell me the mystery of the peanut.' Then God said, `Well, now, George, that's more nearly your size.' And he told me.”

Many eminent scientists are humble and God-fearing men. Another such example is Samuel F. B. Morse, inventor of the telegraph, the forerunner of radio and television by means of which the gospel of the kingdom is going forth across the earth in fulfillment of prophecy. Morse wrote of himself:

“When flattering honors came to me from America and Europe on account of the invention which bears my name I never felt I deserved them. I had made a valuable application to electricity, not because I was superior to other men, but solely because God, who meant it for mankind, must reveal it to someone, and was pleased to reveal it to me.”

So it is not surprising that the great inventor's first telegraphic message was, “WHAT HATH GOD WROUGHT!” Even the great Einstein credited his marvelous discoveries to a Higher Power, admitting that he had been granted only an infinitesimal glimpse of the vast mystery of the universe.

We could cite many other such examples, but these will suffice. What a lesson there is here for the Lord's people! If worldly men of brilliant scientific achievement find nothing in which to glory, but ascribe their successes to God, how humble we should be of our modest attainments! How mindful we should be of the fact that we have, and are, nothing at all, except by the grace of God. As we read:

“For who maketh thee to differ from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?”-- 1 Corinthians 4:7

God tells us:

“Thus saith the Lord, let not the wise man glory in his wisdom; neither let the mighty man glory in his might. Let not the rich man glory in his riches. But let him that glorieth glory in this: That he understandeth and knoweth me; that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, saith the Lord.”--Jeremiah 9:23,24

Jesus summed up the important lesson of humility pointing out that no one will ever attain to the Heavenly Kingdom without it:

“At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the Kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him and set him in the midst of them and said, Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the Kingdom of heaven. Whosoever, therefore, shall

humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the Kingdom of heaven.”-- Matthew 18:1-4

Do you want to enter into the Kingdom of heaven? This is the way.

The Truth

The system of belief, Our Most Holy Faith, which we call “The Truth,” is made up of little things, of small fragments of information scattered throughout the Bible. The wonderful Divine Plan of the Ages is not found in the Bible as a consecutively connected narrative. If it were, it would be understood by everyone instead of being a profound mystery to all but the church. This fact is well described in Isaiah:

“For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little.”--Isaiah 28:10

No human mind, entirely by itself was capable of ferreting out all the small “lines” and “precepts,” arranging them in order and forging them into the beautiful and harmonious structure of truth we enjoy today. Only a mind especially guided and enlightened could do so. The Lord did not reveal the truth to the minds of each one of us separately and individually. He could have done so if he had wanted, but this was not his method. Upon his coming he especially enlightened the mind of one man, a Faithful and Wise Servant; we all learned the truth through him. Here is a test of humility and submission. Are we willing to accept this arrangement of the Lord, or do we think so highly of ourselves that we equate our puny minds with that of the Lord's specially chosen instrument?

As the truth is made up of many small parts which, when held together, form a glorious structure, so small and seemingly unimportant departures from the truth, if persisted in, can lead to total loss. I quote from the Sermon Book on the subject “There Is a Sin Unto Death”:

“It is our duty, dear brethren and sisters, to warn those who are still holding fast the precious Word, still trusting in the precious blood, still appreciating the grace of God, and still sanctified, that they take heed against insidious sin, insidious errors, lest by these they should be gradually switched out of the way, and gradually find their course leading farther and farther away from harmony with the Lord, and fellowship with those who are His, in the appreciation of His Word. The switch on the railway track has a very small beginning, but it steadily turns the car aside in a very different direction. And so with our minds, our hearts, our attitude toward the Lord--a little deflection on some point, seemingly not so important, may lead farther off, eventually to alienation from the Lord.”--Sermon Book, page 776.

Bro. Russell ends the sermon with these words, which are especially appropriate today:

“Let us not only be on our guard against the great sins that we have considered, the open enmity against God through wicked works, or through falling away from the doctrines of His grace; but let us remember that it is the little deflections from the Divine Word that lead astray. Let us take heed to our steps lest we be switched off by the great Adversary, who, every here and there along the pathway, is permitted of the Lord to test us, to prove us, and thus if we are faithful to the Lord, to make us more and more strong in faith and in obedience, and more ready for the Kingdom. The least deflections from the teachings of the Word are very sure to bring us into trouble. Let us therefore, take more and more heed to all the jots and tittles of the Master's Word, not only for the exhortations, and instructions given us by Himself, but also those given through the apostles, especially appointed to be our guides in the way to the Heavenly Kingdom. He who is faithful in the little things will be faithful in the great. He who is unfaithful in the little things, and inattentive to the Divine messages will, more than likely, fail to make his calling and election sure.”

This warning by Bro. Russell was not heeded by many. Shortly after he died the little deflections from the truth began. We witnessed it. At first the changes did not amount to much; they weren't vital. There appeared to be nothing to be alarmed about. But as predicted, small departures led to ever more serious departures, with the result that many lost their crowns. Let us learn from this that even the smallest element of truth is vital.

In 1 Kings we read of events that have already started on the earth, leading to the full establishment of the Messianic Kingdom:

“And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind.”--1 Kings 19:11,12

This could refer to the winds of world wars, two of which we have already experienced, rending the mountains or kingdoms of the world. “And after the wind, an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake.” Earthquake is a symbol of revolution. There are many earthquakes, both literal and symbolic in the world today. “And after the earthquake, a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire.” Fire is very destructive, and aptly symbolizes anarchy. This fire has already been ignited. The Lord was not in any of these things in the sense that the world has brought it on themselves.

The “Still Small Voice”

“And after the fire, a still small voice.” According to Leeser's translation: “And after the fire, the sound of a soft whisper.” The chastened and humbled world will be ready to grasp at straws. Their extremity will be God's opportunity. They will eagerly listen to and obey the quiet but firm voice of authority emanating from the Ancient Worthies. The same thought is expressed in Psalm 46:

“Come, behold the works of the Lord; what desolations he hath made in the earth. He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth. He breaketh the bow and cutteth the spear in sunder. He burneth the chariot in the fire.”--Psalms 46:8-10

This seems to describe Jacob's trouble. Then we read: “Be still and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the heathen. I will be exalted in the earth.” The fires of the time of trouble must burn out and the world be still before the voice of God is heard.

On the sea of Galilee when Jesus said, “Peace, be still,” he didn't try to out-shout the storm. He spoke with authority, but quietly. He always spoke that way. It was prophesied of him in Isaiah 42:2, “He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street.” Moffatt renders it, “He shall not be loud and noisy. He shall not shout in public.” We can take an example from this. Quietness is also important in our personal lives. We have to be quiet to hear the voice of God. It is often during periods of quiet meditation that we realize what God's will is regarding some matter that has been troubling us. Meditation upon God's word unlocks the door and gives us access to the wisdom of God. It has been said: When we pray, we speak to God; when we meditate, God speaks to us. Let us not only study the word but let us also study to be quiet and listen.

The value of quietness in finding what we are seeking is illustrated by a story. I don't suppose many of you remember when ice was cut in large blocks from the surface of lakes in the wintertime and stored in thick-walled windowless icehouses for use in summertime. That was the day of pure water. (It would be unthinkable to do this today.) The blocks of ice, piled high in the icehouse, were covered with a thick layer of sawdust to inhibit melting. One day a Vermont farmer was assisting in the seasonal chore of stocking an icehouse when he lost his pocket watch. Loudly bewailing his misfortune, he set about with his lantern and rake, hunting for it in the sawdust on the icehouse floor. His companions joined him in the search, but their clamorous seeking failed to turn up the watch. When the men went away to lunch, a small boy slipped quietly into the icehouse and promptly found the watch! Asked by the astonished owner how he managed to discover it, the youngster explained: “Well, sir, I just lay

down on the sawdust, and kept very still; soon I heard the watch ticking.”

“Who hath despised the day of small things?” Today is “the day of small things.” The Lord has been selecting a “little flock,” a small company of little people. Of these there is now only a small number left upon the earth. The harvest workers, still proclaiming the harvest message, are becoming fewer; their efforts seem ineffective and foolish. Thus this “day of small things” is “despised” by Christendom and the world. But, as expressed in 1 Corinthians 1:21, “It pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe.”

All the wheat will be found and garnered. We are required to be faithful only a little while longer. If we are, we will gain the great prize. Why jeopardize our chances? Why not hold fast to the truth as it was given to us? Why change at this late date? Why risk our crowns? Our glorified Lord, who has gone before, earnestly counsels us, “Hold fast which thou hast; that no man take thy crown.” (Revelation 3:11) Weymouth reads, “Cling to that which you already possess.” It is nothing new; you already have it. This is such a small thing to ask, but if we obey, how very great our reward will be!

The Death and Resurrection of Jesus

“He is risen!”--Matthew 28:6

THE three most important events in history are the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus. Two of these events, the death and resurrection of --Jesus, occurred within a period of three days of each other. A wider diversity of emotion can scarcely be imagined. At the death of Jesus was experienced the greatest possible sorrow and within three days, at the resurrection of Jesus the greatest possible joy.

Today we are going to consider the events culminating in the resurrection of Jesus, from various viewpoints: as the angels of heaven saw these events, as seen by Satan and the fallen angels, as viewed by the Jewish religionists and as they involved the civil authorities, as experienced by the apostles and disciples of Jesus at his first advent, their significance to us the harvest Church at this end of the age, and, finally as seen from God's viewpoint.

When the earth was created, we read:

“The morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.”--Job 38:7

This showed an intense interest by the angelic heavenly host in matters pertaining to this earth. There must have been great delight on their part when the earth was clothed with vegetation and the animal creation brought into being. When one sees the beautiful forms and colorations, the symmetry of the fir tree, the breathless tints of flowers, the form of a bird on the wing, the grace of a deer, and the incredible plumage of the peacock, one wonders if the angels did not have a hand in it! If they were interested before, they must have been utterly fascinated when Adam was created!

Here was an earthly being, functionally similar to the animals, but in mentality and nobility only a little lower than the --angels themselves. They must have felt a warm attachment to Adam, an attachment such as an older brother has to a younger. After all, did they not have the same Heavenly Father? Their delight further increased when Eve was created, a creature of exquisite beauty, such as the earth had never seen. When the test of obedience was applied, there must have been some sober moments in heaven among the angelic host somewhat like the sobering effect upon one whose younger and less experienced brother is taking an examination, the outcome of which his entire future career depends.

There must have been great sorrow in heaven when Adam failed the test particularly because one of their own angelic number was instrumental in causing it. How do we know there was sorrow in heaven? If “there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth” (Luke 15:7), is there not sorrow over a just one who sins? There must be.

When Jesus was born on earth, the angels knew exactly what was happening. There was no secret about it. It was an angel who said:

“Fear not, for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people; for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Saviour which is Christ the Lord.”

You may be sure that the angel did not say this without knowing what it meant. Knowing as we do from the book of Job that there are days when the angelic sons of God come to present themselves before the Lord, I think we can reasonably suppose that God on the occasion of such a gathering would tell his angelic family all about it, telling them of his wonderful plan of redemption, of the necessity for a redeemer, for someone to take Adam's place in death, someone perfectly equivalent to Adam before he sinned, to die as a ransom or corresponding price to release Adam and his race from death. We can imagine the angels looking at one another asking, “Who is able to do this? How?” Then God would tell them that the mighty Logos, the “bright and morning star” (Revelation 22:16), his only begotten son, his instrument in all creation including the angels themselves--their companion and chief whom they knew and loved--had volunteered to be the one to redeem man, to relinquish his high position as the Logos of God, to leave the courts of heaven, to be out of intelligent existence for nine months, to be born as a human baby upon the earth, to there grow up as a perfect man, “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners” (Hebrews 7:26), to become an exact counterpart of the perfect Adam, maintaining a perfectly holy and sinless life. Then he would lay down his perfect human life for Adam's forfeited life, die without deserving to die in the place of Adam who did deserve to die, redeeming the dead Adam and through him his dying race, bringing the entire human family to life again. Then he would make the earth a glorious garden as Eden was!

Can you imagine the joy of the angels at this good news, these “good tidings of great joy”? They must have been bubbling over with happiness and praise of God. They would want a part in it! They would want to announce it! They would want to tell the world about it! That is how it was on that wonderful night near Bethlehem that “suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

This was a spontaneous thing with the angels. They weren't just carrying out --orders. You may be sure they really felt every word of joy and praise they uttered. They knew exactly what they were saying too when they said: "On earth peace." That word peace, according to Dr. Strong, means "to set at one again" which is of course at-one-ment or ATONEMENT.

You may be sure the angels watched every incident of Jesus' career. If we, the Church, are "made a spectacle unto angels" (1 Corinthians 4:9), I am sure Jesus was. The angels intimately followed Jesus' life especially after the start of his ministry. We know that 12 legions of angels, which would comprise 60,000 angels, stood ready to come to his aid. Jesus himself said so in Matthew 26:53. It is also written of Jesus, "He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways." (Psalms 91:11) We often read that the "angels ministered unto him." They certainly must have been his ready instruments in the performance of his many miracles.

The Appointed Time Arrives

As long as Jesus had this angelic protection, his enemies could not harm him. But the time finally came when Jesus must be offered up. His "hour had come," as he himself expressed it. His angelic protection was removed. It was only then that his enemies were able to take him and have power over him. This fact is shown by an incident when Jesus was before Pilate for judgment. Jesus refused to defend himself. He refused to make any statement, "He opened not his mouth," as had been prophesied of him in Isaiah 53:7. We read:

"Then saith Pilate unto him, speakest thou not unto me? Knowest thou not that I have power to crucify thee, and have power to release thee? Jesus answered, Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above."--John 19:10,11

You may be sure the angels felt and sorrowed over every scourging and indignity that Jesus suffered. Seeing him brutally crucified must have moved them deeply. When about the ninth hour he cried with a loud voice, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" how they must have longed to reassure him and minister unto him as they had done so often before, to say to him: "It's all right! It's really all right!" Then Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and a great light went out--the "bright and shining star" was extinguished. We read that "there was a darkness over all the earth." Jesus was dead. His body was laid in a tomb. He was out of existence.

The angelic host waited for parts of three days. They knew he would rise again. God had told them. They were familiar with the prophesies and Jesus himself had said so to his disciples. Then, on the morning of the third day, they witnessed the most magnificent

display of power by the Heavenly Father up to that time. Out of darkness a great light burst forth. Jesus Christ arose with a glorious, immortal divine body, an “express image of the Father’s person.” (Hebrews 1:3)

What a grand reunion there must have been, what mutual rejoicing that the ransom had been provided, that Adam had been redeemed and with him his race, that the “restitution of all things” was now possible! We read:

“In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, to see the sepulchre. And behold there was a great earthquake; for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow. And for fear of him the guards did shake and became as dead men. And the angel answered and said unto the women: Fear not ye, for I know that ye seek Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here, for HE IS RISEN, as he said.”--Matthew 28:1-6

The Viewpoint of Satan

By way of contrast let us consider these events from the viewpoint of Satan and the fallen angels. When Satan deflected from the favor of God and seduced Adam into sin, he made himself the mortal enemy of the Logos, Jesus in his prehuman existence. Very early in his sinful career Satan deduced from the prophecies that someone sent from God, born of a woman, would be his downfall. When the time came that men were in expectation of the Messiah, the Christ, Satan was on the alert. I think he was astonished when he learned that it was the mighty Logos who was to be born a babe in Bethlehem and become the Savior which is Christ the Lord. “What a foolish thing to do!” he must have said to himself, “to give up such a lofty nature and position and come to earth as a mere man!” But what an opportunity it presented to Satan! The earth was his area of operation. To have Jesus come down to earth as a man would give him the chance he wanted, like a man walking into a lion’s den. He had handled men before. They were all alike. He would destroy Jesus and thwart God’s plan of redemption, both at once.

First he suggested to Joseph to put Mary away because, being a virgin, she was with child. But that didn’t work. After Jesus had been born, the wise men from the East arrived inquiring: “Where is he that is born King of the Jews?” Satan now suggested to Herod that a “King of the Jews” would be a threat to the Roman rule over the Jews and he had better do something about it. Herod did. Informing himself from the prophecies that Christ should be born in Bethlehem

of Judea he “slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under.” (Matthew 2:16) That was one of the most Satanic acts ever heard of, but it didn't work either. Joseph and Mary had been warned and had taken the babe to Egypt.

When Jesus came up out of the baptismal of water of Jordan, Satan was there. When he heard the voice from heaven saying, “This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17), he decided to handle the matter personally. After --Jesus had fasted for 40 days, Satan suggested to Jesus that he turn stones into bread and satisfy his hunger. Satan had always been able to corrupt men through their fleshly appetites. It was sure-fire. Jesus did have the power to change stones to bread if he wanted to. He later turn water into wine at Cana. But Jesus refused and quoted scripture. His powers were consecrated and not to be used selfishly. Satan suggested that since God had given the angels charge of his welfare, he ought to test the arrangement by jumping off the pinnacle of the temple. Just try it out, you know! It would also be a spectacular demonstration and draw men to him. But Jesus refused to tempt the Lord quoting scripture again. Then Satan applied his final temptation, which had always succeeded in the past with men: the offer of unlimited wealth and power. He offered Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them if Jesus would worship him. Jesus again refused without the slightest hesitation and Satan left him.

Satan sought to destroy Jesus through the scribes and Pharisees and others, inciting and whipping up their jealous rage. But when they tried to stone him, Jesus evaded them. When they tried to push him over a cliff, he passed through the midst of them.

Satan finally found his perfect foil, a man described as “the son of perdition,” one of Jesus' own disciples. Did you know that Satan sat at the table with Jesus and the others at the last supper? It's true because we read in Luke 22:3 that “Satan entered into Judas,” whereupon he arranged to betray Jesus just before the passover supper which he attended. Yes, this was a job Satan wanted to do personally and not leave to his demons. You may be sure he remained in Judas during the most foul betrayal in history. I think the kiss by which Judas identified Jesus to his enemies was Satan's own idea--a personal touch. It is so much like him!

When Jesus was before Pilate, Satan was worried for a while. He thought the old fool was going to actually release Jesus. But he made Pilate think again by a quick inciting of the mob at just the right moment: “Crucify him, crucify him! If you let him go, you are no friend of Caesar's!” Jesus was soon condemned.

When Jesus on the cross cried out “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Satan was convinced he had triumphed. The Father himself had now abandoned Jesus. Jesus had probably been unfaithful in some respect, Satan thought, and would stay dead. One thing worried him. If after Jesus was entombed his disciples stole his body and then claimed he had been resurrected, as he said he would be, it could be troublesome. So through the chief priests and Pharisees, he arranged to have the tomb sealed and guards posted. Now everything was safe or SO HE THOUGHT! He probably stayed around the tomb just to be sure. Suddenly on Sunday morning there was a blinding flash of light, the guards fainted dead away, and a strong angel descended and rolled away the stone from the door of the sepulchre. Satan, with his powers of a spirit being, undoubtedly saw with dismay THE GLORIOUS RESURRECTED JESUS: and he fled!

Others had seen the resurrected Jesus as well--the fallen angels imprisoned in the atmosphere of this earth. They too had been following Jesus' career on earth with great interest. When they observed Jesus' complete obedience to the Heavenly Father's will, they remembered their own disobedience. When they saw the humiliation of Jesus even to the death of the cross, then saw his glorious resurrection and high exaltation, they wondered about Satan's philosophy of seeking to exalt himself. Thus the life, death and resurrection of Jesus was a powerful sermon to them. Undoubtedly some of them repented. We read in confirmation:

“For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God; being put to death flesh, but quickened spirit; by which also he preached unto the spirits in prison; who sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was preparing.”-- 1 Peter 3:18-20

The Viewpoint of the Authorities

Let us consider these same events as seen by the Jewish religionists and by the civil authorities. When Judas came to the Chief Priests, they were delighted. They had tried so long to take and kill Jesus, but he had always slipped from their grasp. He seemed to lead a charmed life. His healings and other miracles drew an enormous following among the people. This reduced their influence and they were consumed with jealousy. The fact that these miracles proved Jesus to be the promised Messiah did not concern them in the least. The chief priests and Pharisees had been particularly worried when they heard that Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. This was a spectacular miracle. They held a special meeting, a sort of counsel of war.

“Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a counsel; and said, What do we? For this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him; and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation. Then, from that day forth, they took counsel together, for to put him to death.”--John 11:47,48,53

When one of Jesus' own disciples offered to betray him, they were delighted. They quickly agreed on 30 pieces of silver, the current price of a slave. They discussed with Judas the sign by which he would indicate to their officers which one Jesus was. Even they must have been disgusted when Judas said: “Whomsoever I shall kiss, that same is he; hold him fast.” (Matthew 26:48) It is hard to imagine how a man who had intimately associated with the loving and gentle Jesus for so long could do such a thing. Judas earned his 30 pieces of silver right after the passover supper of which he had partaken with Jesus. He gave the “Judas Kiss,” an expression used to this day to denote a foul betrayal of trust.



In the hands of the Jews Jesus was --accused by false witnesses, condemned to death, spit upon, buffeted, slapped and mocked. The next morning he was bound and delivered over to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor. The reason for this was that under Roman rule, the Jews were not permitted to carry out an execution. This must be done by the Roman authorities. The Jews now told Pilate that they had tried Jesus and found him guilty of blasphemy; they requested that he carry out the sentence of death. Pilate tried to question Jesus about it but Jesus would not --defend himself. This pleased the Jews.

He seemed to be playing right into their hands. Pilate was not much impressed by religious disputes and found no fault in Jesus. The record says: "For he knew that for envy they had delivered him." (Matthew 27:18) He wanted to release Jesus. The Jews had foreseen such a possibility and had organized a mob of loud and violent men who now made a great noise shouting: "Crucify him; let him be crucified." The Jewish mob prevailed and Jesus was led away by Roman soldiers to be crucified.

Even when Jesus hung on the cross, they would not let him alone! The record says:

"Likewise also the chief priests, mocking him, with the scribes and elders said: He saved others, himself he cannot save. If he be King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let Him deliver him now, if he will have him; for he said, I am the Son of God."--Matthew 27:41-43

"If he will have him," they said! This was open defiance and an insult to God because they well knew Jesus was from God. God showed his displeasure. We read: "And, behold, the vail of the temple was rent in twain, from the top to the bottom." This vail of the temple was 60 feet long, 30 feet wide and six inches thick. God showed his contempt by ripping it from top to bottom. These wicked men observed the death of Jesus with pleasure. "Now we are rid of him for ever," they probably said among themselves. Jesus truly "came unto his own, and his own received him not." Then the chief priests and Pharisees went even further in their defiance. They requested of Pilate that Jesus' tomb be sealed, and Roman guards be assigned to watch it. If they thus hoped to prevent Jesus' resurrection, how puny and ineffective their efforts were!

The guards were probably napping that Sunday morning and the sharp earthquake awoke them with a start. They saw the mighty angel descend, whose face was like lightning, coming straight at them! Have you ever been near when lightning has struck? I have. The light is so bright that it blinds you temporarily. The brilliant flash of light and the sight of the --angel descending was too much for even those tough Roman guards. The record says, "For fear of him the keepers did shake and became as dead men." They fainted away. Too bad! Had they retained consciousness, they might have witnessed a most stupendous event. They may have seen the resurrection of Jesus Christ!

The Viewpoint of the Disciples

Let us look at these events from the viewpoint of the apostles and disciples of Jesus at that time. When Jesus began his ministry, he was in direct communication with his Heavenly Father. One of the

first things the Heavenly Father did was to --indicate to Jesus just who were to be his apostles and disciples, the ones he had personally selected to be the companions of Jesus. This fact is clearly shown in --Jesus' prayer just before his betrayal. He said:

“I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world; thine they were, and thou gavest them me.”--John 17:6

When we read that Jesus saw certain men and said “Follow me,” this does not imply a haphazard, spur-of-the-moment selection. No! the Heavenly Father had indicated to Jesus the exact individuals. God had previously prepared their minds because when they were invited by Jesus to follow him, they promptly dropped everything and followed him. They were very special people, although in the eyes of the world they were ignorant, rough and uncultured, what we would today call “of the lower strata of society.” But in the eyes of Jesus, these men were true nobility! They were potential kings! This is proved by what he said in Matthew:

“Then answered Peter and said unto him: Behold we have forsaken all and followed thee. What shall we have therefore? And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you that ye which have followed me, in the regeneration, when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon 12 thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel. And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.”--Matthew 19:27-29

The Apostles Loved Their Master

These whom the Father had drawn loved Jesus and were his constant companions. They ministered to his material needs. They were at his side when he healed the multitudes, preached the gospel of the kingdom to them, and spoke to them in parables. They loved it most of all when later he withdrew to the mountain or wilderness where they could be alone with him, sit at his feet, commune with him on a more personal basis, hear the interpretations of the parables he had given to the multitudes, and absorb the unfailing strength, assurance, and love which flowed from him.

Of course they made many blunders. Jesus had to rebuke them on several occasions. For example, they tried to forbid the little children to come to Jesus. On another occasion they wanted the right to sit one on his right hand and another on his left in his kingdom. Once they wanted to call fire from heaven and destroy an inhospitable village. Whenever Jesus rebuked them, he did it patiently and gently, using each occasion to teach them valuable lessons.

Jesus was particularly pleased when, in answer to his question “Whom say ye that I am?” Peter answered, “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.” (Matthew 16:16) Then we read:

“From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples how he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.”--Matthew 16:21

I don't think we can blame the warm and impulsive Peter too much for saying to Jesus, “Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee.” They had learned to depend upon him so much. They were like sheep and Jesus was their shepherd. They could not think of carrying on without him. What can sheep do without a shepherd? They would be lost without him. But Jesus was preparing their minds for future events. He kept telling them that he was going to leave them but they did not understand; they did not understand because they did not want to understand. It was something they did not want to happen so they pushed the thought from their minds. But Jesus kept on telling them; he did not want them to be taken entirely by surprise. When Mary of Bethany poured the very precious ointment upon him, Jesus said, “In that she hath poured this ointment on my body, she did it for my burial.”

After the passover supper we read:

“And when they had sung an hymn they went out into the mount of olives. Then saith Jesus unto them: All ye shall be offended [or stumble] because of me this night; for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered abroad. But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee.”--Matthew 26:30-32

In a few hours it happened. As his disciples slept Jesus endured the anguish of Gethsemane alone. Then came Judas leading the armed multitude of officers from the chief priests and elders. Although -- Jesus was betrayed and arrested, they did not really take him. That armed multitude was not big enough to take him by force. No! He gave himself into their hands, saying:

“Dost thou think that I cannot entreat my Father, and he will send to my relief more than twelve legions of angels?”--Matthew 26:53, Diaglott

Smitten Shepherd--Scattered Sheep

Then we read one of the most tragic sentences in the Bible: “Then all the disciples forsook him and fled.” (Matthew 26:56) They did not really want to. This was their beloved Master whom they loved with all their hearts. They really meant to be loyal. Peter had said to

Jesus just a few hours before, “Though all men shall be offended [or stumble] because of thee, yet will I never be offended.” Peter really meant it with all his heart but the poor, weak, flesh prevailed. They fled! Jesus understood completely. The prophecy: “I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad,” was fulfilled. Jesus endured the ordeal that followed ALONE. I have often thought, “What a pity it was two thieves who were crucified with Jesus; it might have been two disciples faithful to the last!

The bravest of the disciples were the women. They watched from a distance as their Lord was crucified. They watched him die. They saw his side pierced. They waited and watched as his body was taken down from the cross. They followed at a distance to see where it would be laid. Then they went home and prepared spices and ointments for the body of Jesus. Now we read from Luke:

“Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared, and certain others with them. And they found the stone rolled away from the sepulchre. And they entered in, and found not the body of the Lord Jesus. And it came to pass, as they were much perplexed thereabout, behold, two men stood by them in shining garments. And as they were afraid, and bowed down their faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living amongst the dead? He is not here, but is risen. Remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying, The Son of man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again? And they remembered his words, and returned from the sepulchre, and told all these things unto the eleven, and to all the rest. It was Mary Magdalene, and Joanna, and Mary the mother of James, and other women that were with them, which told these things unto the apostles; and their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not. Then arose Peter, and ran unto the sepulchre; and, stooping down, he beheld the linen clothes laid by themselves, and departed, wondering in himself at that which was come to pass.”--Luke 24:1-12

Yes, they “wondered in themselves.” Their hopes had been built up for 3 1/2 years, high hopes of a restored kingdom of Israel with Jesus as king and they themselves reigning with him. Now these hopes had been dashed to the ground.

They were in this frame of mind when two of the disciples decided to walk from Jerusalem to a village called Emmaus. Emmaus means “hot springs” and is about eight miles from Jerusalem. One of these disciples was Cleopas, the other is thought to have been Peter. They probably wanted to get away from the hustle and bustle of the city to a quiet place where they could talk, think, and perhaps understand. Their hearts were heavy and as they walked the record says: “They

talked together of all these things which had happened,” and “they communed together and reasoned.” (Luke 24:15) In other words, they tried to make sense out of the situation, but had difficulty doing so.

Jesus joined them on the road in a form they did not recognize. “And he said unto them, what manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk and are sad?” They must have sensed a sympathetic understanding in this stranger because they poured out what was in their hearts. They told him how their beloved Master whom they described as “a prophet, mighty in deed and word before God, and all the people,” had been delivered up by the chief priests, condemned to death and crucified; how all their high hopes had been shattered. Then they added wistfully, “But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel!” Then we read that Jesus said unto them:

“O foolish and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. Ought not Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into his glory? And, beginning at Moses, and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.”--Luke 24:25-27

What a feast it was for their souls, what a balm for their hearts, torn by grief and confusion! What a thrill, what an exaltation of spirit to see everything fall perfectly into place as he talked, to see the reason for it all and to know it was the truth! Confusion and doubt dissolved and the mystery of recent events became an open book. As they said later after Jesus had manifested himself to them and departed:

“Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?”

These were the things Jesus had not told them before because as Jesus said, “Ye can not bear them now.” When Jesus was with them, his disciples looked for him to set up an immediate earthly government to supplant Roman rule. They stubbornly held to this idea and closed their minds to any other. When Jesus told them of his impending suffering and death they said, “Be it far from thee Lord; this shall not be unto thee.” They simply refused to believe it. Things were going too well for them then. Now it was different. Jesus had indeed suffered, he had indeed died. They had to face this grim reality. As a plow rips deep into the hard subsoil to soften it and prepare it to receive and nurture the seed, so their hearts had been bruised, torn, humbled, and made ready for what was now “meat in due season” for them.

What did he tell them as he walked with them to Emmaus?

“Beginning at Moses, and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.”

These were the “many things” he had to say to them which they could not “bear” before. But they could bear them now! Now it really made an impression, now it was “meat in due season.” It gave them a KEY to the scriptures.

They learned their lesson well. They remembered . After the holy Spirit was given at Pentecost Peter preached to the multitude. We read in Acts the third chapter that he said: “Those things which God --before had showed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer.” Then he pointed to the future, saying:

“When the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; and he shall send --Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you, whom the heavens must retain until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.”--Acts 3:18-21

We are now in those “times.” This was what Jesus had revealed to them on the way to Emmaus!

The Viewpoint of Today's Disciples

Let us consider the significance of these events to us the harvest Church at this end of the age. We are in the most favored --position in the history of God's people because we have the truth at this end of the age. We have a more clear and brilliant view of the Divine Plan of the Ages than all the men of God in the past. They saw dimly and prophetically; we see clearly and unmistakably. We see it actually unfold. We have more light than Moses and all the prophets. We know more about the significance of Daniel's prophecy than Daniel did himself. He earnestly desired to see then, but was told to “Shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end.” (Daniel 12:4) We are in this “time of the end.” Speaking of this glorious plan of redemption which is now so clear to us, --Peter confirms that the prophets wrote for our benefit and did not fully comprehend their own words. Not even the angels then understood as clearly as we do now! He says:

“Of which salvation the prophets have inquired, and searched diligently; who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you; searching what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify; when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow; unto whom it was revealed that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven;

WHICH THINGS THE ANGELS DESIRE TO LOOK INTO.”--1
Peter 1:10-12

The Diaglott makes it even stronger: “Into which things angels earnestly desire to look.” I wonder, sometimes, if we fully -- appreciate this grand privilege, which is ours.

Our Grand Privilege

Let us not forget how this enlightenment came about. It came about quite suddenly, relatively speaking. After the apostles fell asleep in death, the truth gradually became obscured until “darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people” in the Dark Ages. Faithful Christians, seeking to walk in the way of the Lord, were confused and distraught, just like those disciples on the way to Emmaus. Then at the end of the age the Lord returned as he had promised, and a great enlightenment occurred. Through the instrumentality of a Faithful and Wise Servant, Bro. Russell, the Lord joined those in the way and spoke to them. Once again beginning at Moses and all the prophets he expounded unto them all the scriptures. Once again the hearts of these modern disciples burned and glowed as the treasures of the scriptures were opened to them. EVERYTHING FELL PERFECTLY INTO PLACE! As Jesus' words were “meat in due season” for those who walked with him to Emmaus so long ago, those who now sought to walk in his footsteps were supplied the same abundant and soul-satisfying “meat in due season” by our returned Lord.

To us the Gospel Church, the death and resurrection of Jesus are of vital importance. They are the foundation of our most holy faith. Without the death of Jesus there would be no ransom; the fate of mankind would be hopeless. Without the resurrection of Jesus, the ransom could not be implemented. There could have been no gospel message of hope of divine favor through a dead Savior. If Christ had not risen from the dead, who could have established the Millennial Kingdom? Who could have given the church a share in the first resurrection and heavenly glory? Who could call forth from the tomb the sleeping thousands of millions of Adam's race, awakening them to the opportunities of life everlasting?

This is what the apostle calls forcibly and beautifully to our minds when he says:

“And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ; whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised; and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep

in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order. Christ the first-fruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.”--1 Corinthians 15:14-26

Yes, we of the Gospel Church have a deep and personal interest in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Our eternal destiny rests upon it. Our every hope of a future life is based upon it. As Peter expresses it:

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord --Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again unto a living hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead; to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you.”--1 Peter 1:3,4

The Viewpoint of God

How can we possibly know something of God's viewpoint of these events? How can we know the mind of God? Perhaps through reasoning we can have some insight. We humans are created in the image and likeness of God. This means that we have the same basic sensibilities that He has, that we are capable of being moved by the same emotions, except that God's sensibilities are on a vastly higher scale and more refined than ours. This includes his compassion and mercy. He feels things more keenly than we do. He says:

“As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”--Isaiah 55:9

Considering these facts, we begin to appreciate how God viewed these events.

If any of you had a beloved son who was treated as Jesus was treated by his enemies, could you be complacent about it? Could you remain unmoved? So how do you suppose God felt when His beloved and only begotten Son was spit upon, beaten with fists, slapped, cursed, bound, stripped, scourged, crowned with thorns, mocked, hit on the head with a stick, and then nailed through his hands and feet, alive, to a cross? Then, after all this, the necessity of turning his face from his son, for a moment seeming to forsake him, and hearing his tragic cry: “My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?” Do you think God was unmoved by these things? I

don't think so! I think God was deeply moved. I think it HURT God! Perhaps for the three days that Jesus was dead God even felt a certain loneliness. Wouldn't you?

On that Sunday morning when his son rose triumphantly from the grave, I am sure God felt the same joy as the angels felt, as we feel, only more intensely.

Let us not forget that God created angels and men for his own pleasure. He did not need them. He is all-sufficient and self-sufficient. He created them because of the JOY he had in them; in seeing them happy! We know this because it is written of the Logos that he was God's delight.

Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, it is God's joy and delight to have 144,000 joint-heirs with Christ and a race of perfect human creatures to love Him throughout eternity.

The Deliverance of Peter

“The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear -- [reverence] him, and delivereth them.”--Psalm 34:7

WE HAVE taken our lesson today from an event in the experience of the early church, about twelve years after our Lord's crucifixion. The story is related in the 12th chapter of Acts, where we read in verses 1 to 3: “Now about that time, Herod the King stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church. And he killed James, the brother of John, with the sword. And, because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also.”

In order to fully understand what is happening here, let us consider some background. Who was this Herod the king? Herod was a family name. There were several kings by this name that Rome had set over Israel. First, there was Herod the Great, who ruled about the time of our Lord's birth, and who murdered the babes in Bethlehem. Next there was his son, Herod Archelaus, who ruled briefly. He was succeeded by another son of Herod the Great, the infamous Herod Antipas, who murdered John the Baptist and whose soldiers mocked Jesus just before his crucifixion. Then came the Herod of our lesson, Herod Agrippa the First, grandson of Herod the Great. It was he who beheaded the apostle James.

This Herod was not a Jew, but an Edomite, a descendant of Esau. He pandered to Claudius Caesar, the Emperor of Rome, who gave him the rulership of Judea. Although he had no real interest in Israel, he professed an intense devotion to their religion, as a matter of policy. History says of him:

“He curried favor with the Jews in every way. He hung in the Temple, as a votive offering, the gold chain which the Emperor had given him. He lived in Jerusalem, and punctiliously observed the tradition of the fathers. He thus secured the fervent loyalty of the Pharisees.”

Instead of merely tolerating this Herod --because he had been imposed upon them by Rome, the Jews, led by the Pharisees, heartily approved of him as their king, and fully accepted him as such. This was contrary to their law, which stipulated that none but an Israelite should be recognized as a king over Israel. Thus we read, in Deuteronomy 17:14,15 (Leeser):

“When thou sayest, I wish to set a king over me, like all the nations that are round about me; then thou mayest indeed set a king over thee, [but] the one whom the LORD thy God will choose. From the midst of thy brethren shalt thou set a king over thee. Thou mayest not set over thee a stranger, who is not thy brother.”

The Jews had been guilty of violating this law not long before the time of our lesson, as recorded in John 19:14, 15. On that occasion Pilate brought Jesus before them, and said:

“Behold your King! But they cried out, Away with him, away with him! Crucify him! Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your king? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar.”

Thus they acknowledged Caesar, a Gentile stranger, their king, contrary to their law.

Herod Agrippa knew about this provision of the Jewish law and it made him uneasy because he was a stranger--an Edo--mite; so he did some clever stage-acting. History reports:

“At the Feast of Tabernacles, in AD 41, he took the reader's stand, and read the whole book of Deuteronomy aloud, bursting into theatrical tears, as if quite overcome, when he reached the words: thou mayest not set over thee a stranger, who is not thy brother; whereupon the Jews cried out, Do not weep, Agrippa, thou art our brother.”

Do you see what a crafty and unprincipled hypocrite Herod Agrippa was? Now we can better understand his attacks on the early church. The Jews were in violent opposition to the Christians, and he was determined to please the Jews at all cost. So “he killed James . . . and because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded to take --Peter also.”

The murder of James was a great shock to the Church. He was one of the three who usually accompanied our Lord in the most confidential capacity. With his brother John and Peter, he was with the Lord in the Mount of Transfiguration. Also, together with John and Peter, he was present at the awakening of Jairus' daughter. In the same company, he was one of the inner circle of the Lord's friends during the agony of Gethsemane. It was he and his brother whom our Lord surnamed Boanerges, “Sons of Thunder,” because of their eloquence and forcefulness of speech. It was he and his brother, whose mother entreated the Lord that they might sit, “The one on his right hand, and the other on his left, in the kingdom.” On that occasion Jesus asked them, “Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of?” They answered, “We are able.” Jesus replied, “Ye shall indeed drink of my cup.” He must have said this with a certain sorrow because he undoubtedly foresaw what would shortly happen to James. Yes, it was not long after this that James did indeed drink of the cup of death at Herod's hands.

Herod Seizes Peter

With James gone, the Church at Jerusalem depended more than ever upon the leadership of Peter. Then suddenly Herod arrested Peter also, intending to execute him publicly for the pleasure of the Jews. But the execution had to be postponed --because it was the beginning of Passover week. According to Jewish custom, no one could be put to death during those holy days. So Peter was held in prison for the time being. Thus we read in Acts 12:4,

“And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers, to keep him; intending, after Passover, to bring him forth to the people.”

Herod was taking no chances. Sixteen soldiers were assigned to guard Peter day and night. The Knox translation says there was “a guard of four soldiers, relieved four times a day.” The arrest and imprisonment of Peter greatly distressed the church especially because the loss of James was fresh in their minds. It was a severe trial of their faith. They reacted in the only proper way--by resorting to prayer on Peter's behalf. We read, in Acts 12:5, “But prayer was made without ceasing, of the church unto God for him.” The Knox translation says, “There was a continual stream of prayer going up to God from the church on his behalf.”

By this time the numbers of Christians in Jerusalem had increased considerably. They had no church buildings in those days, but gathered in various convenient places, mostly in private homes much as we do today. So in this crisis we can imagine that there were several separate prayer meetings going on simultaneously in different parts of the city. We know of the earnestness of those prayers by the fact that these meetings were kept up all night and evidently throughout the entire week of Peter's imprisonment. What was the burden of their prayers? Well instructed by the apostles, we may be sure they did not ask amiss. They did pray for Peter's deliverance, of course; that he be spared in order to --continue to serve them. But without doubt they added, as their Master had done in the garden, “Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done.”--Luke 22:42

Now let us see what was happening to Peter. Tradition tells us that he was taken to the famous Castle of Antonia, a stone fortress adjoining the Temple area in Jerusalem. It was a Roman military garrison. It is possible that Peter was imprisoned in the very same room in which Jesus was arraigned before Pilate, where he was scourged and mocked by Roman soldiers just before his crucifixion. It was from the stairs of this same castle that Paul, at a later date, addressed the mob that had --assaulted him. That account is in Acts 21:31-40.

Since Peter was arrested at the order of Herod himself, he was considered a very important prisoner. His sixteen guards would be selected with great care. They were undoubtedly powerful men; highly disciplined, callous and ruthless. As an --incentive to their utmost watchfulness, they were bluntly told that if Peter escaped, they would be killed in his place. But no one could imagine how it would be possible for Peter to escape. The castle had walls of stone



ten feet thick. Every room was secured by massive iron gates with heavy locks and bolts. A large garrison of Roman soldiers lived in the castle itself. As is customary in a military establishment, armed sentries were posted outside and regularly made their rounds. It would be absolutely impossible for any unauthorized person to get out or get in. In the actual guarding of Peter within the prison, unusual precautions were taken. The sixteen soldiers took turns watching Peter: four of them being on duty at all times, in six-hour shifts, day and night, 24-hours a day. Chains were fastened to Peter's

wrists and attached to two of the soldiers, one on each side, in such a way that the slightest movement on Peter's part would instantly alert them. Another soldier was posted inside the room, at the iron gateway, and a fourth in the corridor just outside the gate to the room. The chains attached to Peter were long enough for him to sit or stand during the day. At night he lay on the floor to sleep, the soldiers sitting one on each side of him. Could a prisoner ever be made more --secure than that?

This is the situation in which Peter was for about a week. How did he occupy himself? I am sure a man of Peter's hearty and impulsive nature, full of the Lord's spirit, did not pass his time in moody silence and, feeling sorry for himself, sink into depression. On the contrary, the very fact that he was found worthy to be imprisoned in the very room in which his beloved Master had suffered must have been a great joy to him. Thinking back, he would be elated by the Lord's words, quoted in John 15:20,21,

“Remember the word that I said unto you. The servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you. . . . But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake.”

Also, Luke 21:12,13, which fitted his case so well,

“They shall lay hands on you, and persecute you; delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons; being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake. And it shall be to you for a testimony.”

Then he probably remembered the Lord's words given in Matthew 10:17,18, which would strike him with special force:

“They will deliver you up to the councils . . . and ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles.”

Peter Witnesses to the Soldiers

Jesus had spoken of a testimony to the Gentiles! Peter looked around him. Here were four Gentile Roman soldiers, within close hearing distance, and twelve more would take turns guarding him. They couldn't get away any more than he could. What a perfect set-up for witnessing to the truth to a captive audience of sixteen Gentiles. I am sure Peter took advantage of this situation, aren't you?

Now, what do you suppose he said to them? We are not informed directly, but we have a very good way of scripturally reconstructing what Peter may have said to those Roman soldiers based on the tenth chapter of Acts. So he must have started something like this:

“Gentlemen, you probably have orders not to speak to me, nor fraternize with me. But I am not under any such limitation. So, in order to while away the time, I am going to tell you a true story of what happened just a few weeks ago, involving one of your own people. Maybe you know the man. Perhaps you have even served under his command. His name is Cornelius, a captain in the Roman regiment known as the Italian Regiment, stationed in Caesarea, about 70 miles from here, where you have a garrison.”



By this time Peter must have gained the full attention of the soldiers although they gave no sign of it. Then Peter went on to tell them how an angel had appeared in a vision to Cornelius, instructing him to send for Peter from Joppa. He then related his own vision of the sheet-like container of all manner of animals, and of his being told, “What God has cleansed, you must not regard as common or unclean.” Then the lesson he had learned from this, that God had now turned his favor to the Gentiles. He told the soldiers the exciting story of the conversion of their own Captain Cornelius and his household, how the Holy Spirit came upon them, and how they were immersed into Christ. Then he told those Gentile Roman guards that they could, if they would, follow their captain and accept Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord because the way was now open to the Gentiles.

Don't you think Peter told the soldiers those things? I don't see how he could have refrained from it considering that only a very short

time before his arrest he was the one the Lord used to receive the Roman centurion Cornelius, the first Gentile convert, into the Church of Christ. That was a spectacular event. He would still be full of the message; it would be spilling over. He would be like Jeremiah who said: "His word was in my heart as a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay."--Jeremi--ah 20:9

I am sure that the story of the conversion of Cornelius and his household wasn't all that Peter told the soldiers. Without a doubt he also told his small captive audience about the glorious Gospel of the Kingdom which Jesus preached, about the ransom, the resurrection, and the restitution of all things spoken by all the holy prophets since the world began. All this time the soldiers listened in silence. As each watch of four soldiers was relieved by another four, Peter undoubtedly repeated his message until all sixteen had heard it perhaps several times over. How much of it they understood and received in their hearts, we do not know. But unlikely things do happen. The thief on the cross is one example. Perhaps at least one of those soldiers believed. But this we know: in the Millennium sixteen soldiers will come forth and seeing the wonders of the Kingdom, will say, "Saint Peter himself told us about these things!"

Peter's Last Night in Prison

The holy week drew to a close. The Church had spent the whole week in prayer on Peter's behalf and yet the Lord had not delivered him. Each day seemed to add to the urgency and earnestness of the prayers and to the necessity for deliverance. They needed Peter so much. Yet, since the Lord had seen best to permit the death of James, they could not be at all certain that Peter would be spared. So it was an agonizing week; and yet a blessed one. It had drawn them near to the Lord and made them realize their complete dependence on him.

Peter was keeping track of the days too. He knew that on the next day he would be taken out and publicly executed. So what did he do? He did exactly the same as he did on any other night. After a brief prayer committing himself to the care of God, he folded his cloak into a pillow, removed his sandals, loosened his belt, lay down on the floor between two sitting soldiers, and went peacefully to sleep. He slept soundly, so soundly that he did not awaken when a brilliant light flooded the room and an angel of the Lord stood over him. The angel nudged Peter on the side to rouse him and said, "Get up quickly!" As Peter stood up, the chains fell away from his wrists. The soldiers didn't feel a thing. They just sat there staring into space as though made of wood. Then the angel said, "Quick! Tighten your belt, and put on your sandals." When Peter had done this, the angel

said, "Now throw your cloak around you, and follow me." Peter obeyed. All this had happened so fast that Peter was in a daze, not sure it was really happening or just a dream. As Peter and the angel approached the barred and bolted iron gate to the room, it swung open of its own accord and they passed through. The two soldiers guarding the doorway, one on the inside and one on the outside of the room, stood motionless and unseeing, as though they were statues. Hurrying down the corridor, Peter and the angel reached the main doorway of the castle leading to the city. The massive iron gate also opened of itself to let them out.

Did you think that the automatically opening doors we have today are something new? This happened 2000 years ago. How true the wise man's words in Ecclesiastes 1:9,10,

"There is no new thing under the sun. Is there anything whereof it may be said, See this is new? It hath been already of old time, which was before us."

The angel accompanied Peter a distance of one block into the city and then suddenly disappeared without another word. Peter was now fully awake; he had come to his senses. Then we read in Acts 12:11,

"And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod and . . . of the Jews."

We can just imagine Peter's elation at this demonstration of God's special protecting care over him, and his earnest prayer of thanks to the Lord. It was a lesson of divine providential care he would never forget.

It seems that the angel had started Peter in the --direction of the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark, which was not far away. Peter decided to go there, to tell them of his --miraculous deliverance, not knowing that many brethren were gathered there in an all-night prayer meeting on his behalf. It was now a little after three in the morning. The outer gate of Mary's house was locked. Expecting that the household would be asleep, Peter knocked loudly on this gate. The young maid, named Rhoda, heard the knock and without opening the door, asked who was there. Peter responded and Rhoda recognized his voice because he had been a frequent visitor at that home. She became so excited that, for very joy, she did not wait to unbolt the door, but ran in, and announced to the meeting that Peter himself was actually there, standing at the gate. "You must be crazy!" they said. But the girl insisted that it was so. "Then it must be his guardian angel," they said.

Peter kept on knocking. When they at last opened the door and saw that it was really Peter, they were astonished beyond measure. They

would have cried out with joy, but Peter quickly signaled for them to be quiet. He would not come in, but --described the miracle of his deliverance from the prison and asked them to tell the others of the Church. He thanked them for their prayers and concern for him. Then, in order not to further risk the wrath of Herod, he left Jerusalem that very night, and went to another place where he could not be found by Herod.

The Next Morning

At daybreak there was a great commotion at the Castle Antonia. The two guards, who had been chained to Peter, regained consciousness and saw the empty but still locked handcuffs lying on the floor at the end of the chains. They gave the alarm and the commandant of the prison rushed in to investigate the escape of his most important prisoner. The guards at the door had seen nothing. The iron gate to the room and the great iron entrance gate of the castle were still securely locked and bolted. The outside sentry had seen nothing. It seemed that Peter had simply vanished into air without a trace. Our Common Version Bible says in Acts 12:18, "There was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter." Rotherham gives an --additional interesting thought saying, "There was no small commotion among the soldiers, as to what, then, Peter had become." Under the circumstances, the only conclusion those superstitious Roman soldiers could reach was that Peter had become a spirit and passed through the walls.

In the meantime, Herod had made elaborate preparations for Peter's public execution that very morning. The leaders of the Jews had been invited to witness the spectacle. So he sent a summons to the commandant for Peter to be brought to him immediately. We can imagine the fury when informed that Peter had, somehow, escaped. Herod sent his own officers to search the castle and the surrounding area, but without result. He didn't for a moment believe what the guards had said, that they had seen and heard nothing, and that Peter had simply disappeared. Herod was sure that the guards had conspired in a plot to let Peter go. He personally cross-examined them, but they stuck to their ridiculous story. So he ordered them to be executed. Perhaps some of those soldiers faced death with more courage because of having heard of the resurrection of the dead from Peter's lips. I like to think so.

Only a short time later, Herod himself was dead. We are told in Acts 12:23 that, "The angel of the Lord smote him . . . and he was eaten of worms, and he expired."

God's Wonderful Providences

An important lesson we learn from this account of Peter's deliverance, is a realization of the wonderful providences of the Lord; and how futile are the plans of man when the Lord wants to do something. We learn that it is positively and literally true that "the angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that reverence him, and delivereth them." In the case of Peter, the angel was always there with him. He camped there. He wasn't suddenly sent from heaven only when the time came for Peter to be delivered. No! Peter was under his constant watchful eye. He was there when Peter was arrested. He saw them rivet the chains to Peter's wrists. He went with Peter into the castle and stayed with him. He heard and must have enjoyed Peter's witness to the guards. It was at precisely the right moment that he revealed himself in a burst of brilliant light, removed all obstacles, and then led Peter out of his prison. Although he disappeared from Peter's sight, he was still there, watching over him. He went with Peter to the door of Mary's house. Those inside were right when they said, "It is his angel!" He was there as well, standing unseen beside Peter.

What a blessing some of us miss by not fully realizing that we have this self-same protecting care. If we believe this, we will have the calmness and serenity of mind which is so necessary in these distressing times, when violence is rampant in the earth, and men's hearts are failing them for fear.

Why Was Peter Saved?

One naturally wonders why it was that the apostle James was allowed to be killed while the apostle Peter was delivered from death. Didn't James have a guardian angel, too? Of course he did. But when the wisdom of God decided that James had finished his course, his angel acted in a different manner than that of Peter's. In Peter's case, Psalm 34:7 was fulfilled: "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them." But in the case of James, his angel acted in accordance with Hebrews 1:14, "as a ministering spirit sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation." He ministered to James by giving him the reassurance he needed to face his ordeal. He gave him sustaining strength to endure the trial from which he was not to be delivered. As a result, I am sure, James faced his executioner serenely, and without fear. It is recorded in history that many early Christian martyrs were similarly upheld amid torture and flames causing their persecutors to be astonished. One martyr, when tied to the stake and the fire ignited, calmly said, "You are lighting a torch which will never be put out again." Then, as the flames covered him, he sang joyful praises to the Lord.

Actually, the fate of James was better than that of --Peter. Think of this. One brief moment of violence, and he slept; the very next conscious thought was in the year 1878. Then, with great joy, he was gloriously raised to the divine nature and was lovingly embraced by his Lord and Master whom he had missed so much. Peter, on the other hand, delivered from death, was required to spend many long and weary years in the flesh before his course was finished. This leads to the conclusion that the Lord does not necessarily take each one of us home as soon as we have made our calling and election sure. Some he does, as in the cases of Stephen and James, but --others, such as Peter, Paul, and more recently, Brother Russell, are left on earth for many years after they are ready in order to lead, instruct and bless the Church. How God determines who shall be taken and who is left we do not know. But this we may know: What God does is right and our responsibility is to obey. The text of Ephesians 6:13, seems to cover this point. It reads, "Having done all, to stand." The Weymouth translation states it like this: "Having fought to the end, to remain victors on the field." How beautiful and encouraging are these words.

We find in the record that Herod postponed the execution of Peter out of respect for the Passover week. Here we notice a strange contradiction: a mixing of religious formalism with the spirit of murder. Murder was in the hearts of Herod and the Jews, yet they restrained themselves so they could piously celebrate the Passover, a ceremony symbolizing a cleansing of the heart and life, a purification toward God. They are best described in Matthew 15:8, which reads,

"This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me."

Keeping the Heart

The lesson for us is to be on guard lest the outward and formal observances be in --utter contradiction to the real condition of the heart. Outward obedience is required, but more important is the injunction of Proverbs 4:23, which reads, "Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." Let us remember 1 Samuel 16:7,

"The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart."

The persistency of the prayers of the Church on Peter's behalf is worthy of our emulation. If there is a matter dear to our hearts and we know it is right, we are justified in obeying the text of 1 Thessalonians 5:17, which states, "Pray without ceasing." But as in our lesson, the Lord did not immediately answer their prayers for

Peter's deliverance. The Lord sometimes keeps us waiting too. This is often a severe test of faith. But although seemingly delayed, Peter's deliverance came exactly at the right time according to the wisdom of God. Of course sometimes the answer to a request may be "No." We can accept such an answer by the Lord if we have properly prayed, "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done," and really meant it.

Only the Lord's people can understand how Peter was able to sleep soundly under the circumstances. The fact that he was to be executed the next day did not seem to bother him in the least. Even his guards must have been surprised at this. But we know the reason. He had "the peace of God which passeth all [human] understanding." (Philippians 4:7) He had been with Jesus, and learned of Him. He had obtained the promise of Jesus written in John 14:27,

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you. Not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

He knew the scriptures. He knew what David had written in Psalm 3, verses 4 and 5: "I cried unto the Lord with my voice, and he heard me out of His holy hill. I laid me down, and slept." In Psalm 4:8 we read, "I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep; for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety." In Psalm 127:2 we read, "He giveth his beloved sleep." Then Peter might have remembered what the wise man had written, "When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid. Yea, thou shalt lie down and thy sleep shall be sweet."-- Proverbs 3:24

All these wonderful promises belong to us too. What a blessing to entrust to the Lord all of life's affairs. There is no better remedy for nervous insomnia than a full and complete consecration to the Lord. Nothing is more favorable than this, to peace of mind and of heart. Peter himself gave us this lesson which he himself had learned so well, when he wrote, "Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you."--1 Peter 5:7

Peter Knew He Would Not Die Then

Those who were praying for Peter were far more concerned for him than Peter was for himself. One reason for this was that Peter knew something they didn't know. He positively knew that he was not going to be beheaded by Herod. How did he know this? Jesus himself had told him so. When Jesus met with his disciples for the third time after his resurrection, he asked Peter three times, "Lovest thou me?" Peter assured him that he did and Jesus said, "Feed my sheep." Then in John 21:18,19, we read that Jesus told Peter he would live to be an

old man and then would die by crucifixion, not by beheading. Let us read this account from the Revised Version:

“Truly, truly, I say to you, When you were young, you girded yourself and walked where you would; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you, and carry you where you do not wish to go. This he said to show by what death he was to glorify God.”

Peter knew exactly what Jesus meant by this. A footnote in the Diaglott tells us,

“It was the custom in Rome to put the necks of those who were to be crucified into a yoke, and to stretch out their hands, and fasten them to the end of it: and having thus led them through the city, they were carried out to be crucified.”

Regarding this statement, Weymouth comments on the phrase “someone else will gird you”: “This meant the rope which would be put around his waist, to bind him to the cross.” Peter in prison remembered this last conversation with the Lord. Thus, --Peter positively knew he would somehow be delivered from the hands of Herod.

Many years later, when Peter was old, he knew his time was near. Then he recalled what Jesus had told him and wrote, “Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ has showed me.” (2 Peter 1:14) Wey--mouth states it this way:

“For I know that the time for me to lay aside my body is now rapidly drawing near, even as our Lord Jesus Christ has revealed to me.”

Tradition tells us that when Peter was arrested by Nero and knew that he was to be crucified, he rejoiced. Considering himself unworthy to die in exactly the same manner as his Lord, he asked to be crucified head downward. His request was granted.

There is a popular notion that the voice of an angel is always soft and sweet. Thus there is a hymn which starts with the words, “Soft as the voice of an angel.” It is often true, of course, that angels' voices are musical, joyful and exulting. For example, we are told in Job 38:7 that at creation, “The morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy.” We read in Luke 2:13,14, that on the occasion of Jesus' birth there was, “a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” I am sure that the angels who ministered unto Jesus, of which we are told in Matthew 4:11, spoke in soothing tones of comfort and reassurance.

But angels are often brisk and commanding, speaking sharply and urgently. To Lot they said: "Arise! Escape for your life! Haste thee; escape!" (Genesis 19:15,17) To Hagar: "Arise!" (Genesis 21:18) To Balaam: "Go." (Numbers 22:35) To Gideon: "Go, in this thy might!" (Judges 6:14) To Elijah: "Arise, Go." (1 Kings 19:11,15, 20; 2 Kings 1:3,15) To Joseph and Mary: "Arise, flee into Egypt." (Matthew 2:13) To the apostles: "Go!" (Acts 5:20) To Philip: "Arise, and go." (Acts 8:26) In our lesson today the angel nudged Peter on the side and said, "Get up quickly." It wasn't too gentle a nudge, either. He gave him a good poke. The King James version says that "he smote Peter on the side." The Revised Version says he "struck" him. Then the angel briskly said, "Quick! Get up, tighten your belt, and put on your sandals." The angel continued, "Throw your cloak around you, and follow me." Thus, the angel jolted Peter out of his sleep, and imbued him with a sense of urgency, of the necessity for quick action.

Lessons for Us

Now what is our lesson here? Peter, imprisoned by the wicked king Herod, provides a picture of the Lord's people imprisoned in Babylon under Satan, the god of this world. As Peter was handcuffed between two guards, their hands are also tied. They are chained to sectarian systems and are fast asleep within the narrow confines of the creeds of Christendom. As Peter was under condemnation to death, these are perishing for the lack of the truth. As we read in Proverbs 29:18, "Where there is no vision, the people perish." Such are described by Paul in 2 Corinthians 4:3,4,

"But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost [*perishing*, according to the Diaglott]. In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them."

They are asleep, their eyes blinded, but the Lord loves them. They are his people. So just as a bright light shone upon Peter, the Lord lets the glorious Gospel of Christ shine unto these. He sends an angel, or messenger, to them. He brings the truth to their attention. But they are still drowsy and they do not act promptly. So it is often necessary for the Lord to send some drastic experience, to jolt them out of their sleep. At this stage of Christian experience some get a good poke. Saul of Tarsus got one on the road to Damascus. That woke him up!

So we see that God speaks sharply and urgently to some. "Get up quickly," he says. "Get going!" In the language of Revelation 18:4,

he commands, "Come out of her, my people! That ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues."

Miracles Follow Obedience

"Lord, how can I come out? My hands are tied. I am chained, I am closely guarded on every side! Just do as I say, STAND UP!" When God's people obey his command, a miracle happens, just as it did for Peter. Their chains fall away and they are free! When they stand up for the truth, Satan's guards of bondage, who seemed so formidable before, are rendered utterly powerless to do them any real harm. They just sit there. Then Galatians 5:1 is fulfilled in them: "Stand fast therefore, in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." Also, we read in John 8:32,36, "And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."

After telling Peter to stand up and when his chains had fallen away, the angel then said: "Quick! Tighten your belt, and put on your sandals! Wrap your cloak around you, and follow me." You would almost think that the apostle Paul in Ephesians 6:14,15 was echoing what the angel said to Peter when he wrote, "Stand, therefore, having your loins girt about with truth; and having on the breastplate of righteousness, and your feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace." Let us read that last verse from Moffatt: "And your feet shod with the **stability** of the Gospel of peace." This holds a lesson for today. Where there is **[stability]** of doctrine, there is no change.

Peter putting on the cloak and Paul's reference to having on the breastplate of righteousness seem to refer to our justification, that wonderful robe of Christ's righteousness with which we are covered.

Then, as we follow the story of what happened to Peter as he followed the angel through the iron doors and the massive gates as they opened before him, we see this aptly pictures the Christian course. After justification and consecration to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, iron gates of restrictions are removed and doors of -- opportunities of service open to the Lord's people.

Peter went to the home of Mary and they were astonished to see him. This does seem rather peculiar, doesn't it? For days they had been earnestly praying for Peter's deliverance from prison, yet when the Lord did deliver him, they were surprised! They should have remembered the words of Jesus, recorded in Mark 11:22-24,

"Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, that whosoever shall say unto this mountain, be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea, and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall --believe that those

things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore, I say unto you, what things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.”

Jesus was here referring to the obstacles which appear to be as massive and immovable as literal mountains. The deliverance of Peter from sixteen guards in Herod's fortress prison was in this seemingly impossible category. But God easily accomplished it. Do you have a similarly “impossible” request to make, in your prayers? It will be accomplished, if it is the Lord's will. Do not be too surprised if it is.

When Peter showed himself to those assembled at Mary's home, he motioned them to be quiet. Then, when he had told them of the miracle of his deliverance, we read that “he departed, and went into another place.” He quietly left the city that very night. There are some people who, if they had the marvelous experience Peter had, would be so elated that they would have made a great ado about it. They would have boasted far and wide, saying that prison walls, chains, Roman soldiers, and even Herod himself, could not hold them, that these were all powerless against the Lord. Perhaps such would have flaunted themselves publicly, daring the king to arrest them again. But Peter resisted any such impulse if he had any, and took the proper course. He remembered and obeyed the Master's words in Matthew 10:23, “When they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another.” The Lord's people should remember that “the prince of this world” is still a powerful influence. We should expect miraculous deliverances to be the exception rather than the rule, and should act accordingly, prudently obeying the injunction of Romans 12:18, “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.”

Herod was so sure Peter could never --escape from his strong prison. Similarly, when Jesus was crucified and laid in the grave, Satan was so sure he had won out against God. The “seed of the woman” who was to bruise his head was dead. He, too, arranged for a guard of Roman soldiers. But then, with a mighty display of God's power Jesus escaped from the prison-house of death and arose, a mighty, divine being. Satan's rage and frustration must have been very much like that of Herod, when Peter escaped from him.

Restraining the Four Winds

We have left the most important lesson to the last. Right now, we are living in the time of the fulfillment of Revelation 7:1-4. At this very moment, four angels are holding back the four winds of the earth which when loosed, will rush together and produce the great whirlwind, the final, terrible, anarchistic phase of the time of trouble,

hurting the earth and the sea, whipping up the frenzy of the restless masses of humanity. This whirlwind must do its work of utterly destroying Satan's rule of earth, before the Kingdom of God takes complete control, to bless mankind.

Why the delay? Why are the winds being held back? We read in verses 3 and 4 that the four angels were told,

“Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads. And I heard the number of them which were sealed; and there were sealed an hundred and forty four thousand.”

We have now reached the point in history when only one thing remains to be done before the poor groaning creation can begin to receive the blessings of life: the church, the body of Christ, must be completed. The last few members of the 144,000 sons of God must be sealed in their foreheads, be given a mental appreciation of the truth, and conform their lives and characters thereto, be found faithful, and be glorified. This is what the whole creation is longing and waiting for. They are sick and tired of sin and death. They want relief. Without realizing exactly what it is, the thing they really want and eagerly long for is the Messianic rule of Christ, Head and Body, to be manifested. Thus we read:

“We know that the whole creation has been groaning in travail together until now. For the creation waits, and with eager longing, for the revealing of the Sons of God.”--Romans 8:22,19

This is a very critical time in which we are living. The Lord is now speaking urgent-ly to us, the last members of the body of Christ. He is nudging us saying, as he did to Peter, “Get up quickly! Hurry up and make your calling and election sure!” The apostle's admonition in Romans 13:11,12 applies to this very hour:

“And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand.”

The Moffatt translation puts it even more forcibly:

“And then, you know what this crisis means. You know it is high time to waken up; for salvation is nearer to us now than when we first believed. It is far on in the night. The day is almost here.”

So much depends upon the success of the last members of the body of Christ. The whole creation waits upon us. What a sobering thought this is, and what a joyful thought, to realize that, as Peter was delivered from the chains of prison, we will soon be delivered from the fetters of flesh and be free. It was none other than Peter himself who wrote in 2 Peter 1:10,11,

“Give diligence to make your calling and election sure. For 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.”* See Reprints, pages 2139, 3002, and 4346.

The Den of Lions

WE ARE going to consider an episode in the life of Daniel that is more exciting than any fiction story. It concerns the den of lions and is full of lessons for the Christian. At the time it occurred Daniel was an old man after having been brought captive to Babylon when he was only 14. Over the years he had successively held high and important positions in that kingdom and in succeeding governments.

In studying the book of Daniel we cannot help but admire the kings of ancient times. Whatever their other failings we see their willingness to recognize and reward character and merit wherever found. This disposition is conspicuously lacking in modern rulers. For example, judged by present day standards, we are surprised at Nebuchadnezzar's impartial treatment of his Hebrew captives in the selection of Daniel and his companions for special education and advancement to governing positions in the kingdom. Would a modern president do this? Would he select young men from among enemy prisoners of war, train them and elevate them to important government positions? I don't think so. They wouldn't even be considered citizens. They would be of the wrong race, wrong nationality, wrong language, wrong religion, wrong denomination, wrong color, wrong political party, and "unsafe" background. Character, ability and merit now seem to be of secondary consideration.

So we are surprised that Nebuchadnezzar so greatly honored Daniel for his interpretation of a dream. We are surprised that he recognized and respected the integrity of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and advanced them in his empire. We are surprised that Belshazzar took no offense at Daniel's interpretation of the writing on the wall even though it was against him. Instead he highly honored and rewarded Daniel for his faithful, plain, outspoken words. We are still more surprised that King Darius of the Medes and Persians, upon conquering Babylon, did not destroy all the rulers of Babylon including Daniel. Darius apparently spared all except King Belshazzar and gave Daniel a still higher position in the empire. His qualifications were promptly recognized and utilized. By contrast, an enlightened modern president always selects an entirely new cabinet upon taking office.

At the time of our lesson, the new universal empire of the Medes and Persians was in power. It was divided into 120 provinces with 120 princes or governors. Over these governors were three presidents; over the presidents was King Darius; and over him, as chief emperor, was Cyrus. Daniel was one of the three presidents, but was first in

rank. He was so placed because of his recognized integrity and ability. The record reads:

“It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom an hundred and twenty princes, which should be over the whole kingdom. And over these, three presidents, of whom Daniel was first; that the princes might give accounts unto them, and the king should have no damage. Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him and the king thought to set him over the whole realm.”--Daniel 6:1-3

Human nature being what it is, we can immediately realize that this preferment of Daniel would cause difficulty. Jealousies and envyings would be aroused aggravated by the fact that Daniel was a Jew and of a despised race. But there was also another reason why the governors resented Daniel. It was his absolute honesty and integrity. From what we know of the governments of the East, past and present, they have been full of dishonesty--what we today call “graft.” It was a way of life. Public officials expected to take bribes and enrich themselves by virtue of their office. But Darius had wisely arranged that the accounts of his governors must be rendered through Daniel so that the king should suffer no loss. Thus Daniel was in a position to prevent pilfering, dishonest schemes, and the disposing of valuable franchises and privileges for personal profit. He prevented their plunder of the treasury which they considered their right. This caused frustration and rage.

So the 120 governors and the other two presidents got together and decided that “this man has to go.” They must find some fault in his public service that would secure his removal from office. He must be humiliated and discredited. He must have weaknesses and faults. He must be susceptible to bribery. They felt sure of this because they judged him according to the standards of their own hearts. No doubt they first tried to corrupt him with money so that they might be able to prove dishonesty and thus humiliate him. Perhaps they even tried to corrupt him morally. But all their efforts failed. He was loyal to God and did all things as unto the Lord. They could find no fault in him. There was nothing that they could bring against him as a real charge, a crime. But they still hated him because he was honest, sincere, and true, and because the brightness of his character discredited theirs and put them to shame. They hated him without a cause.

“Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find none occasion nor fault, forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him.”--Daniel 6:4

While spying on Daniel and watching his every move to catch him in some irregularity, they had seen something else. They had seen Daniel's unusual devotion to his God. Daniel's house with its living quarters on the ground floor, had an upper chamber with windows facing Jerusalem. Three times a day they saw Daniel ascend to this chamber, open the windows wide, kneel facing Jerusalem, and pray aloud, addressing himself to the God of the Hebrews, the God of his fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, asking for God's blessing and guidance and thanking him for favors. This was Daniel's unfailing custom. He never missed a day. It was a law with him. So the governors and presidents consulted together and formulated a plan of action based on this custom of Daniel's. They could find no other way to touch him.

A Trap Is Set

“Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God. Then these presidents and princes assembled together to the king and said thus unto him: King Darius, live for ever. All the presidents of the kingdom, the governors, and the princes, the counsellors, and the captains, have consulted together to establish a royal statute, and to make a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any god or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions. Now, O king, establish the decree, and sign the writing, that it be not changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not. Whereupon King Darius signed the writing and the decree.”--Daniel 6:5-9

Notice that they started their speech to the king with a lie. They had to. They told the king that “all the presidents of the kingdom” had agreed that the decree should be made but this was not true. Daniel had not agreed to it, and he was the first of three presidents. He had not even been consulted. It is quite obvious why they had to lie. If they had not done so, Darius would certainly have called in Daniel, his chief advisor, and asked his opinion of the law before signing it. But now he assumed it had Daniel's approval and signed the decree. Note that the conspirators had the decree written in legal form ready for the king's signature. They needed to “rush it through.” Perhaps they had arranged for Daniel to be temporarily busy elsewhere. Any delay in getting the king's approval might result in the exposure of their scheme.

To Darius the law did make some sense. All the great kings of ancient times posed as gods or, more properly, as the chief priests and vicegerents of their gods. This touch of divinity gave them dignity and impressed their subjects with a superstitious reverence and a fear of disobeying the king's laws. In the case of Darius, since Babylon

had only recently been conquered, it was logical that these new subjects be taught a proper veneration of their new king. So Darius regarded the law as a piece of statecraft for the good of the empire and, of course, it flattered his vanity. Not for a moment did he think of what might happen to Daniel. Never did he suspect his counselors were seeking to entrap him so they might legally accomplish the death of his most trusted officer.

Daniel probably found out about the decree in the course of his official duties. As first president and chief executive, any new law would routinely be brought to his attention. When he saw the decree, he immediately realized its object and was appalled at the hatred of his colleagues. So what was his reaction? He hastened to lay the matter before the Lord!

“Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being opened in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees, three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.”--Daniel 6:10

Daniel Ignores the Decree

Why did he do that? He could have said to himself, “Prayer is a private matter between me and the Lord. In view of the decree, all I have to do now is shut the door and close the windows.” But he didn't reason that way.

One might wonder why Daniel had adopted the custom of worshipping in such a public manner in the first place, a manner so different from that which our Lord Jesus enjoined upon us:

“But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet [or secret apartment], and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.”--Matthew 6:6

There was a good reason. Daniel was among idolaters, each one of whom publicly worshipped the image of his god. Daniel was looked upon as an example of the Hebrew captives in Babylon. The Hebrews did not have an image of their God. So for Daniel to have worshipped in secret would have been misunderstood to mean that he did not worship at all. Under the circumstances this would have been a reproach to the true God. So he worshipped openly with his face toward Jerusalem, the typical city of God the great king of the universe, and toward the temple, the typical habitation of God. Three times a day he made confession of the only true God before the various nationalities of Babylon. By so doing he was also an inspiration to his own people, the captive Jews in Babylon. He encouraged faithfulness to God and a separation from idolatry.

These were valid reasons for Daniel's public worship. To discontinue the custom because of this new law would be an act of cowardice. It did not even enter his mind. He went to his upper chamber, opened the windows wide, knelt down in full view facing Jerusalem, and prayed aloud, addressing himself to the God of Israel. How well his enemies knew his schedule! A representative group was there under his windows listening, to witness Daniel's violation of the king's decree.

“Then these men assembled and found Daniel praying and making supplication before his God.”--Daniel 6:11

Too bad they didn't have a tape recorder! It would be wonderful to know what Daniel said in that prayer. We can guess that after laying his problem before the Lord and resigning himself completely to the Lord's will, he would pray for the restoration of Israel, calling to mind God's gracious promises respecting the Holy Land toward which he was facing, that it would yet be the center of the whole earth and of God's holy people, that eventually and through these, divine blessings would be extended to every nation, people, kindred and tongue.

Having obtained the evidence they needed, Daniel's enemies lost no time in reporting it to the king. It is interesting to note that this new law was invoked against no one but Daniel, although there must have been numerous other violators among the idolaters of Babylon. Many would bow before their images through sheer force of habit and be guilty; but only Daniel was cited.

“Then they came near and spake before the king concerning the king's decree: Hast thou not signed a decree that every man that shall ask a petition of any god or man within thirty days, save of thee, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions? The king answered and said, The thing is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not. Then answered they, and said before the king, that Daniel, which is of the children of the captivity of Judah, regardeth not thee, O king, nor the decree that thou hast signed, but maketh his petition three times a day. Then the king, when he heard these words, was sore displeased with himself, and set his heart on Daniel, to deliver him, and he laboured till the going down of the sun to deliver him.”--Daniel 6:12-14

The king saw the trap into which he had been deliberately led for the very purpose of destroying his most trusted and valued counselor. The rule of the kingdom was that a sentence must be executed before sundown of the same day it was incurred, but the king tried every way to have the penalty upon Daniel rescinded or suspended.

Ordinarily when kings desired to be released from some decree, they called upon their wise men and magicians who usually were skillful

in suggesting a way out of the dilemma by some technicality. So the king earnestly sought their counsel, telling them of his desire that Daniel be saved from the den of lions in spite of the law he had made. But in this case, there was an alliance of all the wise men of Babylon against Daniel:

“Then these men assembled unto the king, and said unto the king, Know, O king, that the law of the Medes and Persians is that no decree nor statute which the king established may be changed.”-- Daniel 6:15

The king continued his efforts until the last minute, but finally the sun went down and he could delay no longer. The sentence must now be carried out. He called Daniel and talked to him, telling him how he had been ensnared and that he could find no way out. Then he made a statement that was strange for a heathen king to make. He said: “Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee!” How this must have warmed Daniel's heart! Daniel had already resigned himself to the Lord's will and that perhaps the Lord would permit the lions to kill him. After all, he was old in the Lord's service. Perhaps his career should now be terminated. But through the lips of a heathen king and just when he needed it most, he received a message of divine assurance. Today when a judge pronounces the death sentence he says: “And may God have mercy on your soul.” But this statement of Darius was positive: “Thy God ... will deliver thee!”

“Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the den of lions.”--Daniel 6:16

The den of lions of king Darius was a sunken pit similar to those found in modern zoos, except that it was arched over with masonry. There was a large hole at the top through which the lions were fed and from which they could be observed without danger. There were many lions in the den, perhaps fifty, and all were exceptional specimens, large and strong, suitable for the king's menagerie.

“And a stone was brought and laid upon the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet, and the signet of his lords, that the purpose might not be changed concerning Daniel.”--Daniel 6:17

I think it was Daniel's enemies who insisted on this sealing procedure because there was a technicality by which Daniel might still be saved. The penalty was simply that he be cast into the den. Suppose the king would then have him immediately drawn out before the lions devoured him? This would frustrate their purpose. So they insisted on the sealing “that the purpose might not be changed concerning Daniel.” **THEY WANTED HIM DEAD.**

Let us try to picture what transpired in the den of lions when Daniel dropped through the opening. Suppose Adam, when he was still in Eden, walked into a den of lions. Would they have hurt him? Of course not. He was their king and benefactor. He had power over them. He was their master. They would have loved his visit. I think it is very likely that God endowed his servant Daniel with this attribute of a perfect man--that of dominion over brute beasts. If so, those



enormous cats must have come to him purring with delight! They must have rolled on the ground, playing at his feet like kittens. Daniel immediately realized that something most unusual was happening, that the angel of the Lord was present with him. Daniel must have at that moment lifted his voice in thanks to God. Later we can imagine that Daniel went to sleep, his head pillowed on the flank

of an erstwhile man-eater, his feet warmed against the back of another, and lulled by the soft purring of them all!

It is greatly to the king's credit that he could not eat nor sleep that night, for worrying about Daniel. He got up early in the morning and hastened to the den of lions.

“And when he came to the den, he cried with alamentable voice unto Daniel. And the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions? Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live for ever. My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me; forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me. And also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt. Then was the king exceedingly glad for him, and commanded that they should take Daniel up, out of the den. So Daniel was taken up, out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God.”--Daniel 6:19-23

Daniel was now a free man. The sentence had been carried out and he had not been harmed. But so great was their hatred of Daniel that his enemies would not give up even then. Josephus tells us something from tradition which may be true. He says that when Daniel was delivered from the lions' den, the conspirators wanted him thrown in again, claiming that someone had fed the lions before he was first cast to them and that they had not hurt Daniel because they were not hungry. This gave the king just the opportunity he wanted. He had bitterly resented their trickery in using him against his most loyal and trusted officer, so he said to them, “Very well, if the lions are not hungry, they won't harm you either,” and he had them all thrown into the den! Now it was a different story. As the enemies of Daniel dropped in, one by one, they didn't even touch the ground alive. The lions leaped up, and with savage blows of their powerful paws, broke their bones to pieces, and devoured them.

The remaining verses of the chapter show what a powerful witness for the true God was given to the entire world by this event in the life of Daniel. King Darius wrote a “tract.”

“Then king Darius wrote unto all people, nations and languages, that dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied unto you. I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom, men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel; for he is the living God, and stedfast for ever.”--Daniel 6:25,26

Then he wrote something that shows Daniel had told him of the future Messianic kingdom of God and that Darius believed in it. He said, in his letter to all the world:

“And his kingdom is that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end. He delivereth and rescueth and he worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth; who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions.”--Daniel 6:26,27

That “tract” had quite a circulation. It was translated into every language of the world. So you see worldwide broadcasts of the truth are not entirely new. The account ends with the words, “So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus, the Persian.”

Lessons for Us

Let us consider some of the valuable lessons taught by this inspiring experience of Daniel. The fact that righteous Daniel was hated by his unrighteous colleagues reminds us of the apostle's testimony:

“Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”--2 Timothy 3:12

Our Lord said:

“If ye were of the world, the world would love its own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.”--John 15:19

Evil men dislike the company of the pure in heart because it continually condemns them. Someone has truly said:

“Whosoever does well, and is faithful and true, while others are dishonest and false, must expect to be opposed and hated. Every effort will be made to injure his character; to drag him into the mire; and to make it appear that he is not better than those who assail him. Envy is sharper than a serpent's tooth, and deadlier than the poison of asps.”

This was exemplified in the case of our Lord. Mark tells us that it was for envy that the Jews delivered him to be crucified. (Mark 15:10) Jesus said he was “hated without a cause.” (John 15:25) This is just what Daniel experienced.

Envy and hatred are set down in the word of God as works of the flesh and of the devil--extremely evil and antagonistic to everything that is good, right and approved by the Lord. Envy must be rooted out of our hearts if we would ever be of the kingdom class. The spirit of envy and hatred cannot abide in a heart in which the spirit of the Lord abides. The two are opposite in every way. You either have one or the other--you cannot have both. The spirit of the Lord is the spirit of love, which thinketh no evil, is not envious, has no hatred. (1 Corinthians 13:4-6)

To implement their scheme to destroy faithful Daniel, his enemies used flattery on King Darius. In effect they said: "You are the most wonderful man in the world. You are a veritable god. Let no one ask anything of any god or any other man, except you, O king!" Flattery is an insidious thing and is often used by the devil for the destruction of the Lord's people. Consider an incident in Acts chapter 14. Paul and Barnabas went to Lystra and Paul began to preach. In the audience was a man who was a hopeless cripple, who had been born so, and had never stood upon his feet nor walked in his life. As Paul preached Christ, this man gave very careful and rapt attention. He seemed to be eating every word. Noticing his faith, Paul paused and pointing to him said in a loud voice: "Stand upright on thy feet!" The man immediately did so and walked, even leaped. The idolaters who composed the audience were astonished at the miracle. "The gods have come down to visit us," they shouted. According to their tradition, the gods Jupiter and Mercury, whom they worshipped, had visited Lystra many years before, in the form of men. In mythology Jupiter was the supreme god of heaven; Mercury was the god of eloquence and the herald of Jupiter. In fact a statue of Jupiter had been erected at the gate of the city. So since Barnabas was the larger of the two men, they concluded he was Jupiter; since Paul was the orator, they took him for Mercury. They enthusiastically spread the word and a large crowd gathered. Soon the high priest of Jupiter appeared with oxen and other paraphernalia, prepared to lead the people in offering worship and sacrifice to Barnabas and Paul. The people crowded around and bowed to them, shouting with joy and praise.

Paul could have been affected by this flattery. He could have reasoned: "Why not let them, for the moment, think we are gods. What harm will it do? In fact they will listen to us and respect our message the more. And in a sense, we are gods! Isn't it written in Psalm 82:6, I have said, ye are gods; and all of you are children of the Most High? Our Lord Jesus himself quoted this scripture (in John 10:34). Did any such thought cross Paul's mind? Let us read the account:

"And they called Barnabas, Jupiter, and Paul, Mercury, because he was the chief speaker. Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people; which, when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran among the people, crying out, and saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you, that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all things that are therein."--Acts 14:12-15

The Lord's people can draw an important lesson from this incident, especially those who are, to any extent, prominent as representatives and teachers of the truth. The truth itself, as the Lord has revealed it to us, is so wonderful, so brilliant, that it naturally reflects some of its brilliancy upon those who represent it. This causes men to marvel and say of such, as they said of Jesus: "Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works?" (Matthew 13:54) In some instances it might lead to an undue deference to such, to an ascribing of undue honor, to a subservience that would not be proper for them to receive. "One is your Master ... and all ye are brethren." (Matthew 23:8) Any put to this test should repudiate and refuse undue honors as promptly and emphatically as Paul and Barnabas did, and not be influenced by flattery, not accept it, nor rationalize that it can be turned to the glory of the Lord. Even more importantly, the brethren should not subject their teachers and leaders to such temptations. There is an entirely proper respect for elders (see 1 Timothy 5:17,18). Everyone needs sincere encouragement and reassurance at times. But undue honor and insincere flattery should be shunned as instruments of the devil which can develop pride, vanity and destroy the new creature.

When Daniel learned that King Darius had signed the decree designed to kill him, he may have momentarily felt a pang of fear. After all, he was human. But I am sure he was not terrified, like Belshazzar when he saw the mysterious hand upon the wall. Belshazzar was really scared: "The joints of his loins were loosed and his knees smote one against the other." (Daniel 5:6) As someone once advised, "If your knees are knocking, kneel on them." Daniel lost no time in going to the Lord in prayer even though by so doing he gave his enemies just the evidence they needed against him. The lesson is that we should never allow anything to keep us from the throne of grace. Prayer should become a fixed habit with us as it was with Daniel, a frequent and joyful interlude when we talk to our heavenly Father, sharing our joys and sorrows; the windows of our hearts open toward Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem; our hopes centered on the kingdom of God to which we aspire.

When Daniel dropped into the den of lions, he was fully reconciled to death. But he was not hurt. As for us, our worst fears often never happen. What a waste of time to worry once you have entrusted a matter to the Lord! There is an old saying: "Fear knocked at the door. Faith answered. No one was there!" God is able to deliver us from every evil. If he permits evil to come upon us, it will be overruled for our good. He has promised this. Faith can firmly trust him, come what may.

Not many of the Lord's people have been cast into dens of literal lions. Yet, at times, quite a good many of them have had experiences

that strongly resemble this. Paul, in recounting his experiences, mentions a variety of perils and then ends by specifying “perils among false brethren.” (2Corinthians 11:26) It is possible for human mouths to do more harm than the mouths of lions. The apostle James points this out:

“How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is an unrighteous world among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the cycle of nature, and set on fire by hell [Gehenna]. For every kind of beast, and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed, and has been tamed by humankind; but no human being can tame the tongue; a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brethren, this ought not to be so!”--James 3:5-10, Revised Version

I have grown old in the truth. I have been in the narrow way since 1914. During this time I have seen many strange things. I have even seen men of God cast to lions and devoured. I have seen faithful elders deprived of their ministries by vicious gossip. As James said: “My brethren, this ought not to be so!” Gossip is never innocent. It is always vicious and reprehensible. We know that the tongue cannot be entirely tamed. We read, “If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man.” (James 3:2) But the tongue can and must be bridled, it must be restrained; control must be exercised. If it is not, we will lose the high calling because James says:

“If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.”--James 1:26

The fact that Daniel was not injured by the lions reminds us of Psalm 34:7: “The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him and delivereth them.” It is significant that the Lord did not keep Daniel from being cast into the den of lions. God does not always protect us from a threatening disaster. He may allow us to be cast to the “lions,” so to speak, but as with Daniel, his angel will be there. No real injury to the new creature will result. We are assured that whatever we experience, no matter how tragic it may seem at the time, will be for our highest, best and eternal spiritual welfare. Those who have the faith to claim this promise will have the “peace of God.” (Philippians 4:7)

In the account we find that those who conspired to have Daniel cast to the lions were themselves cast into the same den. This principle is enunciated in the psalms:

“He made a pit and digged it, and is fallen into the ditch which he made. His mischief shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down upon his own pate.”--Psalms 7:15,16

“In the net which they hid, is their own foot taken. The Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth: the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands.”--Psalms 9:15,16

It is not for us to think of having our enemies devoured when we are delivered. It is not for us to rejoice over their fall. The Lord has said, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay.” (Romans 12:19) Instead of wishing our enemies devoured, we are told: “If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink.” (Romans 12:20) Our attitude should be love and sympathy toward all the world of mankind including those who persecute us, injure us and say all manner of evil against us. Stephen gave a wonderful example of this Christian attitude. While his enemies were killing him, he prayed for them saying, “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.” (Acts 7:60) All judgment and vengeance must be left to the Lord.

In Hebrews chapter 11 Paul tells of worthy men of ancient times, men of great faith, who pleased God. They suffered and endured many things that they might obtain a better resurrection. Verse 33 describes Daniel: “Who, through faith, subdued kingdoms.” He arose to a position of rulership, first in Babylon, then in Medo-Persia. “Wrought righteousness,” or as Moffatt says, “Administered justice.” It was Daniel’s just administration that enraged his enemies. “Obtained promises.” By his steadfast faithfulness, Daniel obtained the promise God made to Israel:

“The Lord shall cause thine enemies, that rise up against thee, to be smitten before thy face. They shall come out against thee one way, and flee before thee seven ways.”--Deuteronomy 28:7

“Stopped the mouths of lions.” What a thrill to think of those great beasts rendered harmless before Daniel, and to realize that the same God is watching over us!

We read, “Instead of thy fathers, shall be thy children, whom thou mayest make princes in all the earth.” (Psalms 45:16) What a wonderful “prince” Daniel will make, with his wisdom, integrity and experience in rulership! Together with other ancient worthies, he will continue to administer justice in that glorious Messianic kingdom for which he looked and told Darius about, and of which it is written:

“Behold the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch; and a king shall reign, and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.”--Jeremiah 23:5

Daniel will feel very much at home in that kingdom!

The Displeasures of Jesus

“When Jesus saw it, he was much displeased.”--Mark 10:14

JESUS has picked some very ordinary men of humble origins and occupations to be his disciples. Now Jesus' great popularity had suddenly thrust these men into positions of prominence. Before Jesus became “despised and rejected of men” there was a period of time when he was immensely popular. It was the result of his mighty miracles. We read:

“His fame went throughout all Syria. ... And there followed him great multitudes of people, from Galilee, and from Decapolis, and from Jerusalem, and from Judaea, and from beyond Jordan.”--
Matthew 4:24,25

There are numerous other texts that tell of the multitudes that followed him everywhere he went. On one occasion the tremendous crowd pressed upon him so closely that he went on a boat and pushed off from the shore to escape for a little while. On another occasion after he had miraculously fed 5,000 persons with five barley loaves and two small fishes, he attained such tremendous popularity they wanted to take him by force to make him a king! (John 6:15)

These humble disciples suddenly became important men. They were now the personal aides and intimate associates of a man recognized by the people as a great prophet, teacher and healer: Messiah, the King of Israel, the most famous personage in the land. The disciples had not yet received the holy spirit. So what was the result of this popularity? It went to their heads. With probably the best of motives they began to assume authority, to decide who should see Jesus and who should not. “After all,” they reasoned, “he is a very busy man; his time and energy should be rationed.” So they presumed to judge certain things as unworthy of Jesus' time and attention. This included the children.

It didn't take the mothers long to realize Jesus loved children. They brought their young children for him to caress and bless. But this seemed highly improper and waste ful of time in the disciples' eyes. In their self-importance they rebuked the mothers and attempted to forbid the children to come to Jesus. The record says “when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased.” (Mark 10:14) He insisted that the children be allowed to come to him. He took that occasion to point out to his disciples that they would do well to emulate the humble, unassuming spirit of little children. It didn't do much good. Feeling

more and more important they even tried to decide who should be healed and who should not be healed.

Once a poor blind beggar on the Jericho Road heard Jesus passing by, accompanied by the usual multitude. He realized that this was the only chance he would ever have to regain his sight. There was no one to help him, to lead him to Jesus. So with every ounce of energy in his being, he cried out, over and over again: "Jesus, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me!" Those who went before Jesus, presumably his disciples, immediately pounced on him, commanding him to be silent. Couldn't he see that the Master was deep in thought? Who was he to interrupt? "Keep still, blind man! Get back where you belong!" But frantic hope knows no reserve. It was the poor fellow's one possible chance. He cared no more for their rebuke than they for his need. Again the shrill, insistent voice: "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus stopped. "Who called my name?" "Nobody, Master; only a poor blind beggar; a worthless fellow; nobody at all." "Bring him here!" Jesus commanded. Trembling with hope, he was guided forward. The deep, rich eyes of the Master looked into those sightless eyes.

"And Jesus said unto him, Receive thy sight; thy faith hath saved thee. And immediately he received his sight, and followed him, glorifying God. And all the people, when they saw it, gave praise unto God."--Luke 18:35-43

Thus the poor, useless blind beggar became a follower of Jesus, and started a chain reaction that caused many other people to praise God. This was the one they tried to keep from seeing Jesus, though with the best of motives and the greatest zeal, I am sure.

Pride Displeases Jesus

Pride feeds on itself. The disciples felt they were great men indeed. Now the time came when they began to squabble about who should be greatest in the kingdom. Two brothers, James and John, sought from Jesus the positions of greatest prominence, saying: "Grant unto us, that we may sit, one on thy right hand, and the other on thy left hand, in thy glory." Jesus patiently explained to them, that there were difficult qualifications to be met and that even then, such an honor was not his to give. Then we read:

"And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John."--Mark 10:37,40,41

Here they were, fighting and bickering over personal advantage when the harvest was so great, there was so much to do, and there was so little time! How sorely it must have tried Jesus' patience!

Then there was the incident that aggravated Jesus the most of all. The disciples now tried to exercise authority over him personally, to deter him from his prime objective. He had come to provide a ransom and this necessarily meant his death. As the time approached, he began to prepare his disciples for the event so they would not be taken completely by surprise. We read:

“From that time forth, began Jesus to show unto his disciples how that he must go into Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes and be killed, and be raised again the third day.”-- Matthew 16:21

This was a rude shock to the disciples; they just couldn't believe it. Their Master had built up great popularity; he had but to give the word to be proclaimed king. With his miraculous powers he could release Israel from Roman rule and re-establish the throne of David in power and glory. They confidently trusted that this was he, which should redeem Israel. (Luke 24:21)

They expected to reign with him. Had he not said that they should sit with him on his throne? So they didn't like hearing what Jesus now told them. He should stop this foolish talk of dying when he had so much to live for! They probably talked it over and made Peter, the boldest among them, their spokesman. He was to take Jesus aside and “straighten him out,” to talk some sense into him! We read:

“Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord. This shall not be unto thee. But he turned and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan; thou art an offence unto me; for thou savorest not the things that be of God, but those things that be of men.”--Matthew 16:22,23

This seemed to be a drastic thing for Jesus to say, to call Peter by the name Satan. Satan is the greatest enemy of God. Peter was his beloved disciple. Why did Jesus use such an expression? I'll tell you why. When Peter tried to deter Jesus from his prime objective of redeeming the world by his death through the suggestion that he could reign without dying, he sounded exactly like Satan, who, we read:

“... taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and saith unto him; all these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down, and worship me.”--Matthew 4:8,9

Jesus saw that Satan was now using Peter to apply the same temptation: “You don't have to die. You can establish your kingdom here and now.” Do you see the similarity, do you see the sameness of the temptation? Jesus did. On that first occasion of his temptation in the wilderness, Jesus had replied: “Get thee hence Satan.” (Matthew

4:10) Now when Peter voiced exactly the same temptation, Jesus saw that it was really the voice of Satan subtly operating through the fleshly minds of his disciples. So when he said, "Get thee behind me, Satan," he was addressing himself not so much to the innocently motivated Peter, as to the real villain behind the scenes: Satan the devil, the great adversary. He called him by name.

Then Jesus used this occasion to teach his disciples one of those divine principles which the world can never understand because it is exactly contrary to the spirit of the world. He said:

"For whosoever will save his life, shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life, for my sake, shall find it."--Matthew 16:25

Although this is illogical and a contradiction of terms to the world, we know how beautifully true it is.

Lessons from these Incidents

These are several occasions where the disciples displeased Jesus. We do not relate these incidents to hold the disciples and early followers of Jesus up to ridicule. We know that the holy spirit had not as yet transformed their minds. Their thought processes were still those of natural men of good will. Considering their backgrounds and the situation in which they found themselves, their reactions are quite understandable. I am sure we would not have done better. But there are lessons to be learned from these accounts. That's why they were recorded and preserved for us; they were written for our admonition. By considering the things which were displeasing to the Lord, perhaps we can learn how to be more pleasing to him. I am sure that is what we all want.

Underlying these displeasing acts was a disposition to take things into their own hands. Without asking Jesus if he wanted to see the little children, they rebuked the mothers who brought them. Knowing that Jesus healed all who asked him, they told the blind beggar to hold his peace. Having been promised thrones by Jesus, they tried to force a decision as to who would occupy the most important ones. When Jesus said that he must die, they attempted to dissuade him from the very purpose for which he came to earth. In other words, instead of following they tried to lead. How short their memories were! What had Jesus said to them when he called them to be his disciples? Only two words, but in each case it brought from them an instant response. The words were FOLLOW ME! Just "Follow me." And they did, leaving everything. They left their net, their ships, their homes: everything! As Peter said to Jesus: "Lo, we have left all and have followed thee." (Mark 10:28) Then they were humble and willing to follow. Now they were important, they were somebody, they wanted to lead. That is why Jesus rebuked them so severely; he

knew that to be faithful unto death, they must continue to follow. That is why, in the very next verse, after he had called Peter “Satan,” he said, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.”--Matthew 16:24

After his glorification he caused the Revelator to write regarding the overcomers: “These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.” (Revelation 14:4) That is what we must do. Jesus himself said, “Narrow is the way which leadeth unto life.” (Matthew 7:14) It is indeed a narrow way, narrow in the sense that straying, even a little, to one side or the other, takes us off the path. The only safe way is to walk right down the middle in the footsteps of Jesus, to follow in his steps.

There is another lesson. Just as the early disciples sometimes reacted improperly in their association with Jesus, some associated with the truth today begin to have “original” ideas. We all do, to a certain extent; and it may be all right to present these ideas as interesting thoughts on a take-it-or-leave-it basis. But some try to lead with these new, and supposedly original ideas, revelations and flashes of new light. Let us learn to follow. Did any of you get the truth by yourself? No! Our Lord revealed the truth to us through his faithful and wise servant whom he made ruler over all his goods, and this means all the beautiful doctrines of the Divine Plan of the Ages. We cannot improve on the Divine Plan of the Ages as that servant saw and taught it. The only things we see more clearly as time goes on, are the fulfillment of prophecies as they occur.

What further lessons can we derive from these incidents that displeased Jesus? In the first incident the disciples, in their misplaced zeal, forbade the children to come to Jesus. These children were drawn to Jesus, they loved him, but they were told they may not come to him: “When Jesus saw it, he was much displeased.” Don't you think he is just as much displeased today when some of God's children are drawn to Jesus, want to come to him, follow in his footsteps, lay down their lives and die with him, and then are told that the door is shut to the high calling? I think he is very displeased!

When the blind beggar on the road to Jericho heard Jesus was near, he tried earnestly to reach him. Being blind, he cried out, and tried to grope his way toward Jesus. Paul perfectly described this scene in his sermon to the Athenians on Mars Hill, when he said of some:

“That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us.”--Acts 17:27

“If haply they might feel after him, and find him” does describe the blind man, does it not? There are some today who are blind to God's plans and purposes, blind to his loving provision for the restoration

of mankind, blind to the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, but who are longing to have their eyes opened; hungering and thirsting after righteousness, who drift from one denomination to another, from one church to another, never completely satisfied. They realize their own blindness but are always searching, groping, crying out in prayer, feeling after the Lord if haply they might find him! Many of the friends in present truth have testified that this was their condition before they found the truth, before their eyes were opened.

Now what happened back there on the road to Jericho, when the poor blind man tried to reach Jesus, when he cried out for mercy? “And they which went before, rebuked him, that he should hold his peace!” (Luke 18:39) Think of it! They repelled him, they pushed him aside, they tried to dash his last hope, to close the door to him! Are there some who are closing the door today, who say to the groping blind man: “You are too late, you may not have your eyes opened, you may not see the deep things of God, you may not run for the prize of the high calling?”

Ah, but there were others there also, other disciples, that day on the Jericho Road. When Jesus heard the blind man, and stood still, and commanded the blind man to be brought to him, these others said to the poor man: “Be of good cheer; rise; he calleth thee.” They led him to Jesus! Jesus asked him, “What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?” (As if he didn't know!) The Lord knows we are blind before we are called but we have to admit our blindness to ourselves and to the Lord before we can be healed of it; we must realize that we are blind and must earnestly want our eyes to be opened. So the blind man answered, “Lord, that I may receive my sight. And Jesus said unto him, receive thy sight; thy faith hath saved thee; and immediately he received his sight, and followed after him.” Thus was demonstrated the verity of Jesus' words which still apply today: “Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out.” (John 6:37) Let us by God's grace be ready to lead the earnestly inquiring blind ones to Jesus, saying as they did so long ago on the Jericho Road, “Be of good cheer! Rise up! He calleth thee!”

Ambition Displeases Jesus

Consider the incident when the two sons of Zebedee sought the honor of sitting one on the right hand and one on the left hand of Jesus in his glory. These two disciples exhibited an ambitious desire to be more important than their brethren, to exercise authority over their brethren. When the ten others heard it, they were much displeased. Jesus must have been displeased, too, and disappointed. But he was very patient and used the occasion to teach them all an important lesson:

“Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them; and they that are great, exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you!”--
Matthew 20:25-27

In other words, earthly rulers do exercise authority over their subjects; they do exalt men to sit at their right and left hands and to compel obedience. **BUT IT SHALL NOT BE SO AMONG YOU.**

A church system may have a Pope, with Cardinals, and Bishops seated on his right and left. He may arbitrarily dictate the beliefs and ceremonials of their adherents. “But it shall not be so among you.” Another complicated organization or society may assume similar dictatorial powers, with some established in positions of superior authority, dictating what its members must believe and teach, what meetings they shall attend, how they shall serve, what hours they must spend in that service, and how they must report their service. Such exercise total spiritual control. “But it shall not be so among you.”

Self-aggrandizement Displeases Jesus

Jesus went on to say, “But whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant.” It is one thing to be called a Company Servant, but in reality be the administrator of the arbitrary rules of a distant headquarters. It is quite another thing to be a servant of an ecclesia and follow the Lord's leading as expressed by the holy spirit through God's word and the members of the ecclesia. There is no excuse for spiritual domination. If any should dominate your faith, wouldn't the apostles be the most appropriate? Paul himself said, “Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy.”--2
Corinthians 1:24

Then there is the time when Peter sought to dissuade Jesus from going to Jerusalem to die. “Be it far from thee, Lord,” he said. Jesus saw the hand of Satan in it. The disciples wanted Jesus to establish his kingdom then and there, and, of course, they expected to reign with him. That's what Satan wanted as well. Satan had openly suggested to Jesus, “Why wait?” After showing him all the kingdoms of the world, Satan had said, “All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them.” (Luke 4:6) Why wait? Why suffer? Why die? Let's get on with the kingdom! Let's start blessing the world! Surely everybody is in favor of blessing the world! Nobody could object to that! That's an old trick of Satan's; he tried it in Paul's time, on the Corinthian brethren. Some of them were already grasping honor and power, imagining that somehow they were

reigning with Christ then. How do we know? Because it was necessary for Paul to rebuke them for it. He said:

“Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us, and I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you!”--1 Corinthians 4:8

Satan tried the same old trick again after the apostles fell asleep. Ambitious leaders of the early church became impatient.

The last words from Jesus, speaking through John the Revelator had been, “Surely I come quickly.” John eagerly responded, “Even so come, Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:20) But he didn't come quickly enough to suit them. What did they do? They hurried things up! They forced the issue. They set up Christ's kingdom for him--an imitation kingdom that became a wicked anti-Christ system. Thus they claimed and received Satan's promise which Jesus had indignantly spurned: “All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them.” They got their power, and their glory; but the earth ran red with the blood of their victims.

Then finally came the end of the age and the joyful message went out that Christ had at last returned and had begun to set up his kingdom. Surely the kingdom must now appear in power and glory! Great expectation centered on the date 1914. But 1914 came and went, and still no visible kingdom. Other dates were set--1918 and then 1925. I know, I was there. Still no visible kingdom. Once again ambitious leaders became impatient. It was the perfect setting for that old trick of Satan's to be repeated. Why wait? Let's get on with the kingdom; let's set up a ruling organization now! I think the lesson is obvious. Just as Peter was mistaken when he thought Christ's kingdom could be established without the necessity of Jesus' death and resurrection, so these are mistaken when they think the Messianic kingdom on earth can be manifest in power and glory before the death and resurrection of the last member of the Body of Christ. Just as Jesus rebuked Peter then, I believe his words of rebuke are applicable now: “Thou art an offence unto me.”

Calling Down Fire from Heaven

Let us consider one more occasion when Jesus was displeased (Luke 9:51-56). I am going to amplify and paraphrase the account. Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem for the last time. He knew that the end of his ministry was near, that he must suffer many things, that he must be offered up. He and his disciples had been walking all day over dusty roads. It was late in the afternoon and they were hot and tired. They saw a village from the top of a hill and it was a welcome sight. They would get food and rest there and continue their journey the next day. Jesus sent two disciples ahead to arrange

accommodations for the night. They sat down to wait. Soon the messengers were seen returning. Even at a distance, it was plain that something was wrong. The two disciples approached with cheeks flushed and voices angry, each anxious to be the first to explode the bad news: the people in the village had refused to receive them!

The indignation of the messengers communicated itself to the others. They could hardly believe their ears! This backwoods Samaritan village refused to entertain the Master? Unthinkable! Jesus was a famous public character, a teacher of renown. He healed the sick, he raised the dead, he fed the multitudes. He was the Messiah, the king of Israel! Such large crowds followed him that even they, his disciples, had become men of importance. Now to have this country village deny them shelter! "Lord, these people are insufferable," one of them cried. "Let us call down fire from heaven, and consume them!" The others joined in with enthusiasm! Fire from heaven! That was the idea! Make them smart! We'll show them! Come Lord, the fire!

Jesus' face showed the strain of the preceding weeks and in his eyes was a foreshadowing of the more bitter weeks to come. He needed that night's rest more than any of them. "But he turned and rebuked them and said, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of. For the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." Then he quietly gathered up his garments and started on, his outraged disciples following. It is easy to imagine his disappointment. He had been working with them for three years, teaching and demonstrating the principles of love and mercy. His time with them was so short. He had come to save mankind yet they wanted him to gratify their personal resentments by burning up a village!

"And they went to another village," says the narrative. Nothing more than that. Simple isn't it? They just went to another village. The village that had refused to admit them required no fire. That village was already dealt with. How? I'll tell you how. No miracles were performed in that village, no sick were healed there, no hungry were fed there, no gospel was preached there, no gracious words were spoken there, no children were blessed there. That was the penalty for its lack of hospitality, and it was quite enough. No fire was needed!

What lesson can we learn from this incident? Of course, in this case the disciples reacted with their fleshly minds in a way typical of the spirit of the world: retaliation and revenge for any offence, leave me alone, and I'll leave you alone, tread on my corns and I'll stamp on yours, enter my gate at your peril, beware of the dog, no trespassing! How different is the spirit of Christ, the spirit of patience, of forgiveness, of making allowance, giving the benefit of the doubt.

The spirit of Christ is the spirit of charity and love, love that suffereth long, that is kind, that envieth not, that vaunteth not itself, that is not puffed up, that is not easily provoked, that does not seek vengeance!

Later the apostle Paul would beautifully summarize it:

“Recompense to no man evil for evil. ... Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves ... for it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink, for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.”--Romans 12:17,19,20

Coals of fire! That's quite another kind of fire, different from what the disciples wanted to call down from heaven upon that village. When you do something good to someone who has injured you, it has an astonishing effect, a powerful, soul-searching effect. You might say that it stops the mouths of lions! Paul knew this principle which is so foreign to the spirit of the world that it is a virtual secret. He said, “Being reviled, we bless.” (1 Corinthians 4:12) And we forgive.

Once there were two houses in the same block, adjoining one another. Both had beautiful lawns and gardens. The man of the world who owned one of the houses put up a sign reading:

“Trespassers will be prosecuted.”

The Christian who owned the other house also put up a sign. It read:

“Trespassers will be forgiven.”

That is the difference between the spirit of the world and the spirit of Christ. The Christian prays, “Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” He practices it to the best of his ability. “If thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink.” “Being reviled, we bless.” The one who is now your enemy may be hungering and thirsting for the truth. You may bless him by feeding him with the word of life and giving him the water of life to drink.

Calling Down “Fire” Today

There is another lesson we can learn from this incident that displeased Jesus. It is a sadder lesson but yet one that cannot be ignored. There are some today, naming the name of Christ and Jehovah God, who, when they “enter a village” so to speak and are not accepted, call down “fire from heaven” upon those who do not accept their message. Those who do not believe their witness are condemned to the eternal fires of the Second Death. This is not to be taken lightly. This is a serious and terrifying thing. The Second

Death is the greatest punishment that God will inflict upon anyone. To use it lightly as a threat is extremely presumptuous. To threaten millions with it shows a callousness of heart beyond belief. In the scriptures the Second Death is called “a fearful thing.” It is called “the blackness of darkness forever.” It is far worse to condemn one to such a fate than to call down literal fire to terminate one's present existence as the early disciples sought to do. If Jesus rebuked those disciples for what they proposed, saying, “Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of,” does not this rebuke apply with more force to these today?

We know the spirit Jesus was referring to. It is the spirit of Satan, the devil, and it is in opposition to the spirit of Christ. “For the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.” Let us do what Jesus did when that village did not accept him. “And they went to another village.” All those who do not accept the truth in this age will have a full and complete opportunity to do so under ideal conditions in the next age. That will be the day of their visitation.

“Whereas they speak against you as evil doers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of their visitation.” --1 Peter 2:12

We can learn from the things that displeased Jesus how we may please him.

Summary

Instead of imposing our wills in opposition to his, instead of trying to lead, we should learn to follow in his steps. We should never attempt to forbid God's little ones from coming to Jesus by closing the door. We should tenderly lead to Jesus the spiritually blind who are “feeling after God, if haply they might find him.” We should not assume authority over one another nor seek to assume or assign positions of power in the kingdom. We should have respect for God's “times and seasons” and wait patiently for the Messianic kingdom to be manifested. Let us not attempt to assume rulership ahead of time. Let our witness to the truth be given humbly, and lovingly, and in the spirit of good will toward all, honoring God. Only the “hearing ears” will hear now; but eventually God “will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.”--1 Timothy 2:4

The Fall of Jericho

“By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.” --Hebrews 11:30

ONE DAY, when Moses was 120 years old, he heard the voice of the Lord. He eagerly responded because conversing with God was the greatest joy of his life. “Here am I!” he said. “Meet me at the top of the mountain,” the familiar and beloved voice of the Lord said. “I want to show you something.”

“And Moses went up from the plains of Moab unto the mountain of Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, that is over against Jericho. And the Lord showed him all the land of Gilead unto Dan, and all Naphtali, and the land of Ephraim, and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah; unto the utmost sea; and the south, and the plain of the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, unto Zoar. And the Lord said unto him, This is the land which I swore unto Abraham, unto Isaac and unto Jacob, saying, I will give it unto thy seed. I have caused thee to see it with thine eyes; but thou shalt not go over thither. So Moses, the servant of the Lord, died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord. And he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, over against Bethpeor; but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day.”--Deuteronomy 34:1-6

Next we read from Joshua 1:1,2,

“Now after the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord, it came to pass that the Lord spake unto Joshua, the son of Nun, Moses' minister, saying, Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, thou and all this people, unto the land which I do give to them, even to the children of Israel.”

When God used the expression “all this people,” he indicated a very large number. We learn from Exodus 12:37 that the Israelites who left Egypt forty years before had numbered 600,000 men, besides children. It has been suggested that this number is too great; that instead of 600 thousand, this scripture should read 600 families. But this interpretation does not seem to be correct because the scripture says “beside children” which Moffatt renders “beside women and children.” If families were meant, women and children would be included and not mentioned separately. Also, in the first two chapters of Numbers a breakdown by tribes is given. The precise total of adult males is shown in Numbers 2:32 as 603,550 excluding Levites. If we calculate five to a family, a not unreasonable assumption for so prolific a people, this would indicate a population of over three million! During their forty years sojourn in the inhospitable wilderness perhaps births did not greatly exceed deaths

and there was no significant increase in the overall total. Nevertheless, we are safe to assume that, at the time of our lesson, Israel numbered at least three million. To better comprehend such a vast number, let us remember that the population of San Francisco is only about 700,000; the Israelites numbered more than four times as much! Now we have a better appreciation of the greatness of Israel and the tremendous area their encampment must have covered. Now we realize the problems involved in supplying and distributing their necessities and what an awesome responsibility of command Joshua was asked to assume when God told him: "Arise, go over this Jordan; thou and all this people."

Lest Joshua be overwhelmed by this great responsibility placed upon him, God gave him a wonderful assurance:

"There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee. I will not fail thee nor forsake thee. Have I not commanded thee? Be strong and of good courage. Be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed; for the Lord thy God is with thee, whithersoever thou goest." --Joshua 1:5,9

Joshua Prepares Carefully

Joshua proceeded to obey God's command, "Arise, go over this Jordan, thou and all this people, unto the land which I do give them." But he did not do so without adequate preparation. The Lord's generous promise that no one would be able to withstand him did not make him proceed recklessly. He realized that the first major problem the children of Israel would have to face after crossing the Jordan, would be the conquest of Jericho. Jericho was a strong city located about five miles from the Jordan and heavily garrisoned by enemy troops. It blocked their way. It would not be possible for the Israelites to even begin the possession of the promised land without first removing this obstacle. Practical man that he was, Joshua sent two trusted men to Jericho disguised as natives to spy out the city so he might have the information necessary to plan his campaign. Details are not given but it is interesting to imagine how this might have been done. Perhaps Joshua sent a squad of commandos across the river and waylaid two natives, hijacking their clothes and camels with which to equip his spies. At any rate the spies successfully gained access to the city and lodged in the house of a woman named Rahab.

Ancient Jericho must have been a beautiful and colorful city. The name Jericho means "place of fragrance." In Deuteronomy 34:3 and in 2 Chronicles 28:15, it is called "the city of palm trees," indicating that it may have been built around an oasis. Apparently it did have an abundance of water and many cultivated gardens of fragrant



Hills and valleys of the Holy Land of Palestine

flowers, shrubs and trees. It was not a large city, but it is described as having been very rich, not only in gold and silver, but also in expensive fabrics, fine clothing, and other luxuries. Excavations show that the city was enclosed with a massive double wall. We know from Joshua 2:15 that this wall was so thick that houses were built upon the top of it. The house of Rahab, where the spies found lodging, was one of these. This was an ideal vantage point for the spies. From this elevated position they could readily observe both the

interior of the city on the one side of the wall and the surrounding terrain on the other side.

The Jerichoites were, of course, aware that the children of Israel were encamped about five miles away on the other side of the swollen Jordan river and were poised to invade their land. After all a nation of three million on the march cannot be hidden. So you may be sure the Jerichoites had their own spies and were keeping the camp of Israel under constant surveillance. They had apparently observed Joshua's spies cross the Jordan and proceed, disguised, to Jericho. Following them they must have seen them enter the house of Rahab. I think this is a reasonable deduction because we read:

“And it was told the king of Jericho saying, Behold, there came men in hither tonight, of the children of Israel to search out the country. And the king of Jericho sent unto Rahab, saying, Bring forth the men that are come unto thee, which are entered into thine house; for they be come to search out all the country.”--Joshua 2:2,3

It is easy to disguise one's appearance but not easy to disguise one's accent. Rahab had undoubtedly known by speaking to them that the men were not natives of the land but were from Israel. Then suddenly she heard a commotion in the city street below her house. There must have been quite a long staircase leading up from the street to her house high on the top of the wall. We can imagine Rahab looking out of a window and seeing a squad of the king's officers ascending the stairs. She immediately surmised their mission and quickly led the two spies to the flat roof of her house, and hid them under a pile of flax. Then she came down and opened the door. When the officers made their demand, Rahab realized that her guests had been seen entering her house and that it would be useless to deny they had come. So she admitted they had been there but said they had left only a little while ago, just before the time of the closing of the city gate. She then urged the officers to pursue immediately and overtake them. She spoke very convincingly and, being in a great hurry to commence pursuit, the officers did not stop to search the house. From her vantage point upon the wall, Rahab saw the king's officers leave the city and saw the city gates close behind them. She saw them ride hurriedly in the direction of the Jordan. Then she went up to the roof and told the two spies what had happened. Now we read from the record:

“And she said unto the men, I know that the Lord hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt.”

Strange that they remembered this! This was something that had happened forty years before, probably before Rahab was born!

“And what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt; neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you. For the Lord your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath.”--
Joshua 2:9-11

This was valuable information, just the kind the spies had been sent to obtain. It disclosed that the inhabitants of the land were in abject terror of the Israelites and on the verge of panic, that they were demoralized and defeated in their minds. Rahab indicated by what she said that she was a convert to the God of Israel, that she believed



Jehovah to be the only true God. She then threw herself upon the mercy of the spies, asking that she and her family might be spared when Jericho would be destroyed as she confidently expected it would be. The spies made a bargain with her. We read in the 14th verse, "And the men answered her, our life for yours." "You save our lives, and we will save yours." Rahab quickly showed her sincerity by proposing a sound plan of escape. She would let them down with a rope through a window which would place them outside of the city wall. Then they must hide in a nearby mountain for three days until their pursuers ended their search and returned to the city. After that they could return safely to the camp of Israel. The plan pleased the spies. For their part, they proposed that when Jericho was attacked, if she and her whole family would gather in her house and stay there, they would all be saved alive.

But how was her house to be identified so that the attacking Israelites would spare it? There were probably many houses built upon the wall and, in the heat of battle, a mistake could easily be made. We can imagine that at this point one of the spies pointed to a red ribbon which adorned Rahab's hair and said, "When the attack begins, tie that red ribbon in the window through which you let us down. That shall be the sign." Our translation of the account calls it a "scarlet thread." But a thread tied in a window perhaps fifty feet above the ground could not be seen from very far away, so it was probably a ribbon. Rahab agreed. She brought a stout rope of flax and fastened it to the window sill. It reached down to the ground outside. The spies slid down the rope and disappeared in the darkness.

It is interesting to note from verse 21 that although Rahab knew that the spies would not return to their encampment for three days and that the attack upon Jericho would probably not be made for some time after that, nevertheless she did not wait; she immediately bound the scarlet ribbon in the window. It was a comfort to her to see it there. It gave her a sense of security and peace, of being under the protection of the great God of Israel.

After hiding three days in the mountains, the spies returned safely and made their report, telling Joshua all that had happened to them.

"And they said unto Joshua, Truly the Lord hath delivered into our hands all the land; for even all the inhabitants of the country do faint because of us."--Joshua 2:24

The People Cross the Jordan

Then followed the stupendous miracle of the drying up of the Jordan river, which was in flood stage at the time, enabling the great host of Israel, led by the ark of the covenant, to pass over without getting

their feet wet. As they went over, a selected representative of each tribe picked up a large stone from the bed of the river and carried it upon his shoulder to the opposite shore: twelve stones, one for each tribe. Leading the host across were 40,000 armed men just in case there should be an enemy attack, which, however, did not occur.

The miracle of the drying up of the Jordan before Israel was observed by enemy spies. One thing must have especially impressed the spies. They saw that ahead of the host of Israel went four men in priestly garments, bearing between them a glistening golden object. As the priests approached the river, the raging waters literally fled before them. It was apparent to the enemy spies that a tremendous power was being exerted by that golden object. The enemy spies quickly conveyed the information to their kings:

“And it came to pass, when all the kings of the Amorites which were on the side of Jordan westward, and all the kings of the Canaanites which were by the sea, heard that the Lord had dried up the waters of Jordan from before the children of Israel, until we passed over, that their heart melted; neither was there spirit in them any more, because of the children of Israel.”--Joshua 5:1

This great demonstration of power brought forcibly to their memories the miracle of the passage of the Red Sea forty years before, when the power of Egypt was broken. Here was the very same Almighty God still strong on behalf of his people. If they were fearful before, as Rahab had told the spies, they were doubly fearful now.

Immediately after crossing the Jordan, the children of Israel went inland toward Jericho. They camped midway between the river and the city, about 2.5 miles from Jericho, in a place called Gilgal. Here they made a monument of the twelve stones taken from Jordan as a memorial of the great miracle that the Lord had performed there. In the crystal-clear air of that region the watchmen on the high walls of Jericho could clearly see the great host of Israel arrive and set up camp nearby. From her house upon the wall Rahab could see them too. A camp of three million persons would cover an enormous area. The inhabitants of Jericho were terrified and they quickly closed and barred the great bronze gates of the city.

“Now Jericho was straitly shut up, because of the children of Israel. None went out, and none came in.”

Here at Gilgal at the command of the Lord, all the males of Israel were circumcised.

“And the Lord said unto Joshua, See, I have given into thine hand Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour.”--Joshua 6:1,2

But how was it to be accomplished? The city was shut up tight. The Israelites were not equipped to besiege a walled city in the conventional way. They had no battering rams to force the gates. They had no catapults to fling huge stones over the walls. They had no great bows with which to shoot flaming arrows to set fire to the city. Wondering how he should proceed against Jericho, Joshua went alone early in the morning to scout the city. As he approached the massive walls a man in shining garments with a glittering sword in his hand stood before him, barring his way. Joshua instantly remembered the Lord's promise, "There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life." He boldly drew his own sword and went up to the man.

"And Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, nay; but as captain of the host of the Lord am I now come."--Joshua 5:13,14

The margin says he was "prince" of the host of the Lord. Perhaps he was the same individual referred to in Daniel 12:1 as "Michael ... the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people," materialized as a man.

"And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my lord unto his servant?"

The angel of the Lord told Joshua just what to do to conquer Jericho. The instructions are given in Joshua 6:3-5, which I will read from the Moffatt translation:

"For six days you, and all your men at arms, shall march round the town once a day, with seven priests carrying seven rams' horns as trumpets in front of the ark. On the seventh day, you shall march round the town seven times, and the priests shall blow a trumpet blast. As soon as they blow a long trumpet blast on the horns, whenever you hear the sound, then all the people must raise a mighty shout; and the wall of the town will fall down flat, till every man of you can march in, straight in front of him."

The Seige Begins

Joshua obeyed promptly. The next morning the watchmen on the walls of Jericho saw an approaching host and gave the alarm. Led by Joshua, the army of Israel marched in front. Next came seven priests in their distinctive garments blowing on rams' horns, then four priests carrying between them with great care a glistening, golden object. As soon as they saw this stark terror filled the hearts of the men of Jericho. This was the same object before the power of which the waters of Jordan had fled! After the ark followed a large representative group of the men of Israel. The defenders of Jericho braced themselves, expecting some kind of action; but nothing

happened. They saw no battering rams or other military machinery. The Israelites marched once around the city and then went straight back to their encampment. This was repeated for six days. Still nothing happened and the inhabitants of Jericho began to relax behind their strong walls. Then on the seventh day the usual procession appeared very early in the morning. As they began their march around the walls, the entire host of Israel silently approached the city and formed a huge ring around it, leaving only enough room for the marchers between them and the wall. The men of Jericho watched with fascination from the top of the high walls. This time the marching Israelites did not stop after one circuit but went around seven times. As they marched they scanned the walls particularly the houses built upon the walls. All windows were heavily shuttered; but in one of the windows of one of the houses, they saw a scarlet ribbon! This was the house of Rahab. The word was passed to the men of war to carefully note that house each time they made a circuit of the city. The order was that all those found in that house were to be spared. Then suddenly at a signal from Joshua, they stopped and the priests blew a long blast upon their horns. Then a deafening shout went up such as was never heard up to that time nor since: three million voices, shouting in unison, with all their might! What an impact of sound that would be!

“And when the people heard the sound of the trumpet blast, and raised a mighty shout, down the wall fell flat, till every man could march in, straight in front of him.”--Joshua 6:20 [Moffatt]

They marched in and took the town. But one section of the wall did not fall. It was that part upon which the house of Rahab stood and in the window of which a scarlet ribbon was tied. We know this because Joshua sent men to her house to bring her safely out, together with all her relatives and property. This was the same Rahab who afterward married into the tribe of Judah and became an Israelite, and who has the honor of being an ancestor of our Lord Jesus. She is listed in Hebrews chapter 11 as one of the faithful ancient worthies.

By the Lord's commandment Jericho was utterly destroyed. Only the metals of the city were saved for the Lord's use.

“And they burnt the city with fire, and all that was therein. Only the silver and the gold, and the vessels of brass and iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the Lord.”--Joshua 6:24

This account of the conquest of Jericho is recorded in the Bible not only as an interesting narrative, which it is, but for a far more important reason. As we are told in 1 Corinthians 10:11, it has a typical significance. It is, “Written for our admonition, upon whom

the ends of the ages are come.” Let us now consider and take to heart some of these admonitions.

Lessons for Us

The name “Joshua” is another form of the name “Jesus” and means “Savior.” It is interesting to note that the career of Joshua is one of the few recorded in some detail without any blemish being imputed. The shortcomings of other patriarchs are frankly stated in the Bible. Noah was drunken. Abraham so conducted himself as to merit the rebuke of Pharaoh in Egypt. (Genesis 12:18,19) Moses struck the rock and was debarred from the land of promise. Samson consorted with sinners. David was guilty of murder. But as far as the record shows, the career of Joshua was blameless. Of course this does not mean he was a perfect man, but it does aptly indicate that he was a type of Christ who was “holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners.”--Hebrews 7:26

Now let us consider that wonderful assurance God gave to Joshua:

“There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days of thy life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee. I will not fail thee nor forsake thee. Have I not commanded thee? Be strong, and of good courage. Be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed; for the Lord thy God is with thee, whithersoever thou goest.”--Joshua 1:5,9

Just imagine God saying that to you, personally! Impossible? Not at all! He is saying it to you. This glorious promise is applicable with equal and greater force to each member of spiritual Israel, to each consecrated child of God. You do not have to be given an important and exalted assignment such as Joshua was given. If you are faithful to the truth and are doing God's will, even in a small way as your hands find to do, you are an heir of this promise! “There shall not any man be able to stand before THEE.” “God will not fail THEE, nor forsake THEE.” The Lord thy God is with THEE, whithersoever THOU goest.” God will not permit any interference by anyone, man or devil, with your development as a new creature, humble as it may be. Opposition against you will not prosper. This grand promise is an heritage of each one of the Lord's faithful people. This is powerfully confirmed by Isaiah:

“No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord; and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord.”--Isaiah 54:17

Let us, as Joshua did, rely on this exceeding great and precious promise and go courageously forward in the strength of it.

The conquest of the sinful city of Jericho provides a general picture of the Divine Plan. In this picture the king of Jericho is Satan, the devil, and the city his worldwide dominion. As Jericho blocked the way to Canaan, the land of milk and honey, Satan's rulership stands in the way of the world's attaining Messianic blessings. As the king of Jericho shut the city up tight so that none came out, we read of Satan that he "opened not the house of his prisoners." (Isaiah 14:17) Joshua represents Jesus Christ and Israel represents his kingdom. After six days [or six thousand years] of seeming inaction against Satan's stronghold, finally comes the seventh day [seventh thousand year]. Then, with a great shout such as never heard before, Satan's dominion collapses and Christ's kingdom takes control following which every vestige of sin is destroyed.

We are now living in the dawn of that seventh day. As the priests blew on their horns, the Jubilee trumpet is now sounding and the final shout signaling the utter collapse of Satan's rulership is very near at hand. Isaiah describes this situation:

"The Lord shall go forth as a mighty man. He shall stir up jealousy like a man of war. He shall cry, yea roar. He shall prevail against his enemies. I have long time holden my peace. I have been still, and refrained myself. Now will I cry like a travailing woman. I will destroy and devour at once."--Isaiah 42:13,14

Also Jeremiah:

"The Lord shall roar from on high, and utter his voice from his holy habitation. He shall mightily roar upon his habitation. He shall give a shout, as they that tread the grapes, against all the inhabitants of the earth. A noise shall come even to the ends of the earth; for the Lord hath a controversy with the nations. He will plead with all flesh. He will give them that are wicked to the sword, saith the Lord."--Jeremiah 25:30,31

But aside from this general application, there is a deeper and more personal lesson for us in the conquest of Jericho which is for our admonition. In this picture Jericho represents our fallen human dispositions, traits of character which are contrary to the spirit of God and which, as 1 Peter 2:11 expresses it, "war against the soul." Jericho represents the selfish and depraved appetites of the flesh. As we read in Galatians,

"For the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh. And these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye cannot do the things that ye would."--Galatians 5:17

Jericho was a rich city with an abundance of expensive fabrics, fine clothing, and other luxuries, and was enclosed by strong walls. The natural man has an abundance of strongly entrenched fallen human

traits and appetites. The natural man esteems the good things of the world to be of paramount importance. But just as the Lord decreed the utter destruction of Jericho, these fallen human propensities must be systematically and thoroughly eliminated by the Christian. We must not allow Jericho to block our way to our promised inheritance. With its thick double walls Jericho looked impregnable. How could it possibly be conquered? The conquering of our fallen human disposition with its established and ingrained habits seems similarly impossible. A wise man has said,

“Habit is like a cable of many strands. We weave a thread of it every day; and at last we cannot break it.”

How about reversing the process? Instead of weaving a thread of it every day, let us break a thread of it every day. Thus a mighty work will be accomplished gradually and we will gain the rule over ourselves. As we read in Proverbs,

“He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.”--Proverbs 16:32

This suggests the conquering of Jericho. We must make every effort to conquer and destroy our personal Jerichos if we are to gain the prize.

“For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die. But if ye, through the spirit, do mortify (put to death) the deeds of the body, ye shall live.”--Romans 8:13

But just as the victory of the Israelites was gained by the power of God, we do not conquer in our own strengths. It would be impossible to do so. As Joshua did not hesitate to obey the command of the Lord to proceed against Jericho, we also should promptly and decisively obey in this regard. As the hearts of the kings of the Amorites melted when the Israelites began the invasion of the land, the promise to the spiritual Israelites is, “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”--James 4:7

The ark of the covenant accompanied the Israelites and from it the mighty power of God emanated. We too enjoy the presence of God and his great power is exercised on our behalf. “All things work together for good.”--Romans 8:28

Before entering the promised land, spies were sent out to determine the cost of conquering it. Similarly in contemplating consecration and attaining the heavenly kingdom, the child of God counts the cost. Blessed is the one who, after counting the cost, lays hold on the Lord's promised “grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16) and says, as Caleb did, “Let us go up at once and possess it, for we are well able to overcome it!”

In crossing over through the bed of the Jordan river, the Israelites were figuratively immersed in its waters. This symbolized consecration which is also pictured by the ceremony of circumcision which immediately followed. It was after this that the children of Israel marched against Jericho. Similarly, it is after consecration that the child of God begins the destruction of the flesh and the development of an acceptable Christlike character.

Rahab's tying of the scarlet ribbon in the window as a token by which she and her house escaped destruction reminds us of the first Passover when each household took of the scarlet blood of the lamb and applied it to the two exterior side posts and on the upper door posts of the house. As a result, they were assured:

“And the blood shall be to you for a token upon the houses where ye are; and when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and the plagues shall not be upon you, to destroy you, when I smite the land of Egypt.”--Exodus 12:13

The faith that Rahab had that the scarlet ribbon would protect her pictures our faith in the precious blood of Christ. As it was a comfort to her, it is a sustaining comfort to us. The Israelites were required to stay in their houses which were marked with blood on Passover night so that the firstborn would escape destruction. Rahab and her family were required to remain in their house which was marked with scarlet. The family of God, the Church of the firstborns, must also remain under the blood by which they are sanctified. As at the first Passover, the alternative is death. We read in Hebrews:

“He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses. Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the spirit of grace?”--Hebrews 10:28,29

Rahab was a Gentile but was because of her faith accepted into the commonwealth of Israel, so we are acceptable as spiritual Israelites by faith in Christ's blood. This is called to our minds in Ephesians:

“Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision, by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that at that time ye were without Christ, and strangers from the covenants of promise; having no hope, and without God in the world. But now, in Christ Jesus, ye who sometimes were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ.”--Ephesians 2:11-13

The marching of the children of Israel around Jericho for six days, blowing trumpets and not attempting any kind of attack, seemed

foolish and pointless to those watching. Similarly nominal Christians do not understand our methods. They say,

“Instead of just walking in the Christian way, you people should make a frontal attack upon the citadel of sin. You should join with us, in our efforts for social uplift, and to convert the world!”

But we are content to be obedient to the Lord's command to simply walk the narrow way. As we go, we blow our trumpets of witness to the truth, giving forth the gospel message knowing full well that it is not now the due time for the blessing of the world. That will come on the seventh day in the Messianic Kingdom when Satan's stronghold will be demolished. It will happen by the Lord's power, not ours.

When the walls of Jericho collapsed, we read that “The people went up into the city, every man straight before him, and they took the city.” (Joshua 6:20) I think there is a lesson here. Let each one attack that part of Jericho which is in front of him. Let each one concern himself with overcoming his own shortcomings and not his neighbor's. Jesus put it so well:

“Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye? ... First cast out the beam of thine own eye.”--Matthew 7:3,5

We will have quite enough to do to conquer our own portion of Jericho. Jericho was destroyed with fire, and we read:

“Only the silver and the gold, and the vessels of brass and of iron, they put into the treasury of the house of the Lord.”--Joshua 6:24

No one is totally depraved. There are some human traits that are good and praiseworthy in every person, especially those who are called of God. Each one has some possessions, talents, abilities and opportunities, that can be turned from sinful and unprofitable uses to the service of God. They can be “put into the treasury of the house of the Lord.” Upon consecration we are appointed the stewards of every good thing we have and are. We are told that, “it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.” (1 Corinthians 4:2) Some are more highly endowed with possessions and abilities comparable to gold and silver. Some of us can offer only brass and iron. But all are acceptable if placed and kept in full consecration, “in the treasury of the house of the Lord.”

Jesus contrasted the things of Jericho in us which are to be destroyed with those things in us which are consecrated and endure in God's treasury:

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. For

where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”--Matthew 6:19-21

This is a picture of our supreme joy when we have finally broken the fetters of flesh and have entered the kingdom of heaven. Jude caught a glimpse of this blessed condition, when he said:

“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory, with exceeding joy; to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power both now and ever. Amen.”--Jude 24,25

The Footsteps of Jesus

THERE are some familiar expressions, descriptive of our Christian course, that we in present truth commonly use. They are beautiful and scriptural expressions but we use them so freely and so often that, I'm afraid, they have largely lost their meaning. They roll off our tongues so easily they have become commonplace and without force. Their lessons, which we need so much, have thus been largely lost.

We say, for example, that we are “following in the footsteps of Jesus.” This is suggested by Peter and by John:

“For even hereunto were ye called; because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.”--1 Peter 2:21

“These are they who follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.”--Revelation 14:4

Every one of us has used the expression “following in the footsteps of Jesus” hundreds of times. But what does it really mean? To a worldly person it might mean that we journey to the holy land and carefully retrace, on foot, the steps Jesus took when on earth, from Bethlehem to Calvary. Some religious fanatics actually do this. Maps are available showing the route to be taken. Is this what the scripture means? Someone might say, “No, it means doing exactly what Jesus did.” Does it? Are we expected to literally turn water into wine, heal the sick, raise the dead, feed the multitude, be betrayed, and finally be nailed alive to a cross? I don't think so. “Walking in the footsteps of Jesus” must have some other, more profound meaning.

Another expression we frequently use is that we are trying to be “overcomers.”

“To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.”--Revelation 3:21

This says that we must overcome, as Jesus overcame. What did Jesus overcome? Did he, as we do, have to overcome the weaknesses of a fallen nature and the sinful propensities of the flesh? No, he had none. He was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners. We are not that way.

We say “we must suffer with him.”

“And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.”--Romans 8:17

Are you suffering, are you in pain? Perhaps some are, but is this what the scripture means? "No," some might say. "We must suffer what Christ suffered." Yes, but what does that mean? Does it mean that we must be literally crucified in order to be glorified?

We have the expression, "bear your cross."

"Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."--Matthew 16:24

"Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple."--Luke 14:27

Does this mean that every Christian is compelled to carry a literal wooden cross like Jesus? If not, what does it mean?

We say "we are not of the world."

"If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."--John 15:19

This expression really mystifies those who are not in the truth.

"If you are not of this world, then where are you from? Mars? A space ship, perhaps? Aren't you human? Don't you eat food, and drink water, and need warmth, and shelter, like the rest of us? Aren't you subject to the laws of the land? Aren't you a citizen? What do you mean, you are not of the world? And who hates you, anyhow?"

Another expression often used without full understanding is "dead with Christ."

"It is a faithful saying; for if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him."--2 Timothy 2:11

What does it mean to be "dead with Christ"? A similar scripture is found in Revelation:

"Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."--Revelation 2:10

To what must we continue to be faithful until we die?

It is important for us to understand the import of these expressions that we so freely and readily use because the lessons they teach are vital for us to make our calling and election sure. We must know what it means to follow Jesus' steps because we must do so to be of the 144,000. (see Revelation 14:3,4) We must know what "overcoming" involves because Revelation 3:21 says only overcomers will reign with Christ. We must know what "suffering with Christ" implies because Romans 8:17 says that without such suffering we cannot be glorified with him. We must know what it

means to “take up our cross” because both Matthew 16:24 and Luke 14:27 state that we cannot be Christ's disciples without so doing. We must know what it means to be “not of this world” because according to John 15:19 only such are chosen members of Christ. Let us consider the meanings of some of these beautiful and descriptive scriptural expressions.

Walking in Christ's Footsteps

Christ has left “us an example, that ye should follow his steps.” (1 Peter 2:21) Mof fatt renders it: “He left you an example, and you must be following his footsteps.”

We read, “He maketh my feet like hind's feet, and setteth me upon my high places.” (2 Samuel 22:34; Psalms 18:33) The hind is a variety of deer whose hind feet step exactly into the tracks of its front feet when it walks without the slightest deviation. One would think from its footprints that a two-legged creature had walked by, so precisely does one footprint fit into the other. Perhaps when the prophets wrote, “he maketh my feet like hind's feet,” they spoke prophetically of the footstep followers of Jesus who by so walking, would attain “high places,” the divine nature.

If we follow in the exact footsteps of another we always arrive at the same destination. If we closely follow Christ's footsteps, we cannot go astray. We will never be lost, we will always be with our Lord, here now, and hereafter in the heavenly kingdom. Jesus said:

“If any man serve me, let him follow me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be. If any man serve me, him will my Father honor.”
--John 12:26

The “honor” spoken of is the divine nature: “glory, honor and immortality.”

When Jesus called his disciples, he said, “Follow me.” He didn't mean merely following or walking behind him. He meant much more than that. He meant that they should follow his precepts, his commandments, his example. These are his steps. Let us now look for his footprints to see how closely we are following them.

The first step of the man Christ Jesus was consecration. Paul says:

“Wherefore, when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared for me ... Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me), to do thy will, O God.”--Hebrews 10:5,7

Have you taken the step of consecration? Have you given up your own will, as Jesus did, substituting for it the will of the heavenly Father? Have you given up all earthly treasures, hopes and ambition,

presenting your body “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service”? (Romans 12:1) If you have, you have followed the most important footstep of Jesus.

When Jesus had taken this first step, he received the holy spirit. Do you have this evidence? Don't be too quick to say No. Consider this: Do you understand the deep things of the plan of God? Do you understand this significance of the fall, the ransom, the coming restitution of all things? Do you appreciate the high calling, your participation in the sin-offering, and in the blessing of all the families of the earth? If you do, you have the strongest possible evidence of the holy spirit:

“God hath revealed them unto us by his spirit; for the spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.”--1 Corinthians 2:10

There are other evidences of the holy spirit. They are the “fruits” of the spirit:

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering [or forbearance], gentleness [or kindness], goodness, faith [or fidelity], meekness, temperance [or self-control].”--Galatians 5:22,23

The possession and development of these qualities are evidences of the holy spirit.

Into the Wilderness

Jesus' next step was his wilderness experience where he meditated upon God's word and was tempted of the devil. Have you been in the wilderness? Following consecration, have you often felt impelled to remove yourself from the distractions of the world to study God's word revealing his plan and your place in it? This was a step of Jesus. Have you taken it? I'm sure you have.

Jesus hungered. Have you ever hungered for righteousness and truth, wishing to be filled with them, longing for the time the whole world will be filled with them?

Jesus was tempted of the devil. The first temptation was that he misuse his spiritual powers to serve his fleshly needs by turning stones into bread. He overcame this temptation, by saying: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” Are you walking in his footsteps by sowing to the spirit instead of to the flesh? Is the truth the most important thing in the world to you, more important than the interests of the flesh?

The next temptation that Satan presented was for Jesus to spectacularly cast himself down from the pinnacle of the temple. Jesus rejected this proposal, saying, “Thou shalt not tempt the Lord

thy God.” Walking in the footsteps of Jesus, we do not seek outward show nor to enhance our earthly reputations. Using the spirit of a sound mind we walk circumspectly and do not take unwise risks expecting God will miraculously preserve us from the consequences of our reckless acts.

“The devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and showeth him all the kingdoms of this world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.”

This was a proposal to change God's plan, and Jesus refused to do it. He knew that what Satan proposed was unscriptural. He knew he had come to die as a ransom, not to reign--his reign would come later. Most importantly, he knew that only God is to be worshipped. To follow this footstep of Jesus we must never compromise the truth nor seek to change God's plan. Jesus said, “Get thee hence, Satan.” He wasn't very polite. He didn't say, “Would you mind very much leaving me now? I wish to be alone, please.” No! He said, in effect, “Get out! Get away from me!” He was firm and positive. He chased Satan out, and Satan went. This was an important step in Jesus' life, a step we must follow. We must resist Satan with all our might. He understands blunt language and a firm stand. “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” (James 4:7)

There is an interesting sequel to the event of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness:

“Then the devil leaveth him, and behold angels came and ministered unto him.”--Matthew 4:11

What delicious and nourishing food they must have served the hungry but triumphant Jesus; far better than the “stones made into bread” that Satan proposed. They gave him food for the soul, as well--news from the heavenly courts and assurances of the love and approval of his heavenly Father.

A most important and comprehensive step is given in Jesus' own words:

“To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth.”--John 18:37

All Bible students follow in this footstep. Upon hearing and comprehending the wonderful divine Plan of the Ages, we cannot help but talk of it to others. Jesus preached the gospel of the kingdom and we do the same. We cannot all do it from the public platform, or by radio or television, but we can all speak as we have opportunity, to neighbors and those we meet. Many have come into the truth and have attained the divine nature because a tract had been placed under their door. These footsteps of Jesus we can follow.

What of the many and mighty miracles of Jesus? He raised the dead, healed the sick, cast out devils, fed the multitudes, changed water into wine, and walked upon the stormy sea. Can we follow these steps? We can and we do. But how, for example, do we raise the dead? By our personal promulgation of the truth and by our support of the harvest work. Men dead in trespasses and sins become quickened and rise up and walk joyfully in newness of life. As we read, "Awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead, and Christ will give thee light." (Ephesians 5:14) This is indeed a raising of the dead. We heal blind eyes when through the telling of the message of truth, we cause the eyes of understanding to be opened, and let the glorious gospel of Christ to shine into the mind. These are footsteps of Jesus we can and do follow. We heal deaf ears when our message finds a "hearing ear," leading someone to appreciate God's wonderful plan of salvation. We cast out devils when we relieve people's minds of the frightful devils of false doctrines, superstitions and fears. The doctrine of eternal torture is one of the tormenting demons we eliminate. We also take this step Jesus took.

We feed multitudes when we support any public witness work that reaches millions of poor, hungry souls, satisfying them with hearty, substantial, nourishing, spiritual food. We also follow Jesus' step in the miracle of changing water into wine. We take the pure water of truth and use it to produce a most excellent wine, the wine of participation and communion in the shed blood of Jesus Christ. Jesus walked upon the stormy sea, and we follow his steps. By the Lord's grace, we walk serenely in a world gone mad, rising above the restless and turbulent conditions of this present evil world because we know the meaning of it all. Considering what these steps are and how we follow them day by day should be reassuring and encouraging to us. Let us never again let the familiar and beautiful phrase "following in the footsteps of Jesus" become trite and meaningless.

There is one footstep of Jesus that no one else has trod. It is the step to Calvary. This step, too, we must take. Thanks to our merciful heavenly Father, we will not suffer a literal "death of the cross," but we must, nevertheless be "obedient unto death" as our Master.

There is a sense in which we have been and are being crucified with Christ now:

"Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed; that henceforth we should not serve sin."--Romans 6:6

"I have been crucified together with Christ; still I live. Yet no longer I, but Christ lives in me; for that life which I now live in the flesh, I am living by that faith of the Son of God, who loved me, even to

delivering himself up on my behalf.”--Galatians 2:20, Diaglott
“They that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts. If we live in the spirit, let us also walk in the spirit.”--Galatians 5:24,25

As we “walk in the Spirit,” we walk in the footsteps of Jesus. Don't forget that if we walk in the exact footsteps of another, we arrive at the same destination. As Jesus himself said:

“In my Father's house are many mansions ... I go to prepare a place for you ... that where I am, there ye may be also ... I am the way.”--John 14:2-4

Overcomers

Another expression we frequently use is that we are “overcomers.” It is important that we fully understand what this means because the promises of Christ to those who overcome are extremely lavish. These promises are in Revelation, the last recorded message of Jesus Christ to the church; they are given for our encouragement. “To him that overcometh, will I give to eat of the tree of life.” (Revelation 2:7) This is clearly a promise of immortality. “He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.” (Revelation 2:11) This ties in with, “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.” (Revelation 20:6) “To him that overcometh, will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.” (Revelation 2:17) Manna was the bread that came down from heaven as a life-sustainer for Israel. It represented the living bread, Christ himself. Overcomers are promised the hidden manna. One characteristic of the golden pot of manna “hidden” in the tabernacle was that it was incorruptible. It well illustrates the immortal, incorruptible, condition promised to the church.

What does the promised white stone signify? In ancient times there was a custom of pledging close and enduring friendship by means of a small white stone. The stone was divided into halves, each person inscribed his name on the flat surface, and the parts were exchanged. In time of need or danger, producing either half brought instant aid from the holder of the other half. The white stone is a symbol of the close individual and personal relationship with the Lord that we enjoy through the sealing of the holy spirit. The “new name” is that of the bridegroom “which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.” In other words, it is an intimate spiritual relationship that the world cannot know nor appreciate. It is a “white stone” arrangement

strictly between the Lord and ourselves, certifying that we belong to God and to Christ. As Paul describes it:

“The spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God, and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.”--Romans 8:16,17

Here is another precious promise to “overcomers”:

“He that overcometh the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.”--Revelation 3:5

The glorified church will not take off the robe of righteousness but will continue to walk in white raiment. In glory it will not be a robe of reckoned righteousness, but a robe of actual righteousness. This ties in with this description of the Lamb's wife: “And it was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white; for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.” (Revelation 19:8)

The promise is that the name of the overcomer will not be blotted out of the Book of Life. There is a definite heavenly record made of each of the Lord's people. If your name is there, you have reason to rejoice greatly. Jesus said, “Rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.” (Luke 10:20) Isn't that a thrilling thought? Your name may not be written on any earthly church membership list, but it is in God's heavenly directory. That is what really counts. If you are an overcomer, the time is not too distant when you will answer the heavenly role call. The signs are now before our eyes:

“And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that same time. And at that time thy people shall be delivered; every one that shall be found written in the book.”--Daniel 12:1

God grant that your name and mine may be written there!

Meeting God Face to Face

Jesus said, “I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.” Can you picture that assembly? All the faithful overcomers are together, clothed with their glorious bodies. Old friends, once parted by death, have been reunited. Many with earthly family ties are together again. It is hard to imagine a more joyful occasion. Jesus is there whom, without actually seeing, we have known so long and loved so well. He embraces each of us. Then Jesus says, “Come, let me introduce you to the Father!” As we come into the presence of the heavenly Father, we behold his glorious majesty which human words are entirely inadequate to describe. He is surrounded by a

multitude of angels. Jesus leads us, one at a time, before the heavenly Father and his angels and introduces us by name. The Father speaks graciously to each of us and we feel his infinite love enveloping us. Our joy is beyond measure. This is the event described in Jude:

“To present you faultless before the presence of his glory, with exceeding joy.”--Jude 24

I think it is this very scene that the prophet David glimpsed when he wrote:

“In thy presence is fullness of joy; and at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore!”--Psalms 16:11

We read in Revelation:

“Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God; and he shall go no more out; and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is New Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God; and I will write upon him my new name.”--Revelation 3:12

This is a description of the consummation of our hopes. The temple, of which we are living stones, is shown as complete; we are a part of the New Jerusalem that will rule and bless the world in the name of Christ.

“To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with my Father in His throne.”--Rec. 3:21

If Christ sits on the throne of God and we are granted to sit on Christ's throne, we will surely have the rulership of all things.

“He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.”--Revelation 21:7

The rewards of “overcoming” are truly stupendous. But that is not the only reason we want to be “overcomers.” We want to become “overcomers” because we know it pleases God and because Christ, our example, has overcome; we want to follow in his steps, we want to be with him, we want to be where he is.

But what, exactly, does it mean to “overcome”? How does one go about it? What does it involve? The word “overcome” is strongly suggestive of a great conflict of war, of powerful opposition, of struggle to gain the victory. It calls to mind the apostle Paul's expressions: “Fight the good fight of faith.” (1 Timothy 6:12) “Endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” (2 Timothy 2:3) “Watch ye; stand fast in the faith; quit you like men; be strong.” (1 Corinthians 16:13) To overcome requires energy and force

of character. It requires perseverance and steadfastness, patient endurance to the very end of the present life.

What is it that we are to overcome? We are to overcome many things; they are all summed up by the general term WORLD.

“For whosoever is begotten of God overcometh the world. And this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”--1 John 5:4

“Know ye not that the friendship of the world, is enmity with God.”--James 4:4

“Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”--1 John 2:15

From these scriptures we should not get the thought that we are to have no worldly people as friends nor to have them consider us as friends. This would imply we were their enemies but we are not to be their enemies. We are to love them. We must if we are to be like our heavenly Father of whom it is written, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16) This seems contradictory to “love not the world” (1 John 2:15) but it really is not when rightly understood. While we must, like our heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus, love the individuals of the world and some day to raise them up and bless them, we are not to love the rulership of the Satanic world, nor the selfish spirit of the world, nor the God-dishonoring religions of the world, nor the corrupt politics of the world, nor the depraved sins of the world. These are the elements of the world we are to hate; these are the elements of the world that hate us.

God loves each individual of the world and will bless each one. It is written that God “will have all men to be saved, and come unto the knowledge of the truth.” (1 Timothy 2:4) Jesus “was the true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.” (John 1:9) In harmony with this, Jesus instructed us:

“I say unto you, love your enemies, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil, and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just, and on the unjust.”--Matthew 5:44,45

The apostle confirmed that this is the proper attitude by saying:

“As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men.”--Galatians 6:10

To love the world as God loves it is not the sentiment against which the apostles warn the church when they say “Love not the world”

and “friendship of the world is enmity with God.” A love like God's is a grand and ennobling love which, without having fellowship with the depraved, pities the fallen and longs for the time when they may be rescued from their degradation. Such love benevolently ignores personal antagonisms and animosities. It overlooks selfish considerations and ignores vengeful feelings. It considers only the possibilities, the ways and means, for peace, reformation and salvation. The love of the world, the friendship of the world, which the apostle condemns is the love of fellowship, implying the partaking of its spirit, its aims, ambitions and hopes, and its methods of pursuing them. If any man love the world in this sense, surely the love of the Father is not in him.

We Are Not of the World

An expression truth people frequently use is that “we are not of the world.”

“If ye were of the world, the world would love its own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.”--John 15:19

Jesus said, “I am not of this world.” (John 8:23) He said of his disciples, “They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” (John 17:14) He said to Pilate, just before his crucifixion: “My Kingdom is not of this world.” (John 18:36)

In one sense we are indeed identified with outer space. Jesus told the Jews, “Ye are from beneath; I am from above.” (John 8:23) He said in several places, “I came down from heaven.” (John 6:38) So we who are in Christ are of a different world. We are a separate nation, living in the midst of the people of this world. We are a peaceful nation. We keep our laws and their laws. The only exception might be where a violation of conscience is involved. We are told to be subject to “the powers that be.” (Romans 13:1) Paul said, “Remind them to be submissive to governments and authorities; to obey rulers.” (Titus 3:1, Diaglott) We realize the Lord has permitted these governments to keep a measure of order in the world. We are protected by the police powers of this world's governmental bodies. This makes possible the peaceful carrying on of the harvest work. We can preach the gospel without hindrance. That is why Paul said:

“I exhort, therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men; for kings and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty.”--1 Timothy 2:1,2

We are not of this world because we are really ambassadors from another government or “world.” The world does not understand us. They do not know that we belong to a different kingdom. But we

understand them. They cannot understand because no man can understand beyond his mental status, so to speak. We, who have been begotten of the holy spirit, still understand natural things, but the natural man does not understand spiritual things.

“The natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual [or spirit-begotten] judgeth all things.”--1 Corinthians 2:14,15

So we, as sons of God, citizens of the heavenly kingdom, dwell in the midst of a perverse race or generation, steeped in sin for 6000 years. That is why our Lord declared, “Ye are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.”

How can we overcome the world so we may inherit all the wonderful promises made to overcomers? By what power do we overcome the world? How do we gain the victory? It must be a tremendous power to overcome the whole world. Here is the answer:

“This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.”--1 John 5:4

The Meaning of Faith

Faith? Faith in what? The word “faith” has two meanings. The primary meaning, according to Webster, is: “Firm and earnest belief, on probable evidence of any kind, especially as a moral truth.” This well describes our firm and earnest belief in God, and his son Jesus Christ, although we have not seen them, our belief that the Bible is the inspired word of God, and true in every respect, and that the Lord is good and will perform all he has promised.

But there is another meaning of the word “faith,” which Webster defines as: “That which is believed; a system of religious belief.” Strong's defines it as “a system of religious truth.” The word is frequently so used in the scriptures:

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour; whom resist steadfast in the faith.”--1 Peter 5:8,9

I think it is so used in the text, “This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.” It refers to “our most holy faith.” The word was used by Paul when he had overcome the world:

“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith.”--2 Timothy 4:7

What must we do to overcome the world? WE MUST STAY IN THE TRUTH. We must retain our faith in the divine Plan of the Ages as the Lord has revealed it to us at this end of the age. We must

remain truth people. This is one of the final tests. Paul had a special revelation about this by inspiration of the holy spirit:

“Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith.”--1 Timothy 4:1

Many have already departed since Brother Russell passed beyond the veil, and there will probably be many more. These will not be overcomers!

It takes strength of purpose, watchfulness and tenacity to be an overcomer. Paul admonishes us:

“Watch ye; stand fast in the faith; quit you like men; be strong.”--1 Corinthians 16:13

Those who do not hold to the truth but cast away their faith will lose the great rewards promised to overcomers:

“Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward; for ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.” --Hebrews 10:35,36

Let us keep our confidence in the truth, our faith, our religion, our system of belief, which God restored to us at this end of the age by a special and honored instrument. This is the same faith the early church enjoyed but which was lost.

“I exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.”--Jude 3

By holding on to our faith in the truth and living according to it we develop as new creatures, we overcome all the evil influences of the world. “This is the victory that overcometh the world, **EVEN OUR FAITH.**”

The word of God has a wonderful transforming influence. It makes the followers of Christ different from others--radically different. It would almost seem they were no longer human and, in a sense, they are not because they are new creatures. In what way are they different? It is said that “self-preservation is the first law of nature.” This is another way of saying that selfishness is the first law of the world. Men will preserve their own lives first. When in danger, they will flee and leave others to fend for themselves. They will even climb over the bodies of their dying companions to escape a calamity.

If there is a scarcity of food or water, the stronger will take from the weaker and let them die. There are some notable exceptions, of course, particularly of parents sacrificing themselves for their children. But the general rule is self-preservation. Evolutionists dignify the term by calling it “the survival of the fittest.” The stronger animal feeds on the weaker and survives. This supposedly

improves the race. This is the law of the world but it is not the law of Christ.

“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.”--Romans 5:7,8

What a contrast this is with the law of the world! This is the spirit we are to emulate. We are to be transformed from the law and spirit of the world. As Christ died for us, we are to be dead with him. There is no self-preservation, no “survival of the fittest” here. It is death, but death for a purpose! It is dying with Christ that we might live with him, that we may have a joyful part in the blessing of the world.

Rejecting the Law of Self-preservation

The Lord's people deny and defy the first law of this world: self-preservation. We follow in the footsteps of Jesus, as Paul exhorts:

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice; holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. And be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind; that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.”--Romans 12:1,2

Instead of conforming to the pattern of this world, we are remodeled or changed to another pattern (Christ). This is accomplished by the transforming influences of the word of God. As we study that word, we absorb God's ways and his wisdom, his spirit. We endeavor to think as Christ thought and do as he did. To the extent we do this, the wisdom of this world is crowded out of our minds and our minds are renewed. This pleases the Lord for we read: “The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.” (1 Corinthians 3:19) Paul describes this important change in us:

“But we all, with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the spirit of the Lord.”--2 Corinthians 3:18

The glory or image of the Lord is reflected by his word. As we study his word we see the grandeur of his character. We see it reflected and exemplified by Christ. In proportion as we appreciate and copy it, we are changed from glory to glory, from one level of character-likeness to a higher one, growing more and more like Christ. Thus we will be overcomers.

“The overcomers must all be proven to be such as would sacrifice every other thing for the Lord; such as would sacrifice the love, and fellowship and approval, if necessary, of every other being, in order to retain the love and favor of the Lord. We believe that this test is

coming daily closer and closer to the Lord's consecrated people, and it behooves every one of us to remember that this is one of the elements of our trial, and to set our affections on the heavenly things accordingly, and to mortify or deaden all such affections toward earthly beings and things as would bring these into competition with our Lord in our affections, service, etc.”--Manna, July 26

We must persevere to the end of our lives. If we do, we will not only overcome the world, we will gain the world. Jesus said:

“He that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to pieces: even as I received of my Father.” --Revelation 2:26,28

Yes, the evil dominion of Satan will be shattered and the faithful overcomers, reigning with Christ, will rule the nations --firmly and justly.

Let us not fail in our determination to overcome the world. Let us go about it enthusiastically and cheerfully in spite of obstacles and opposition. IT CAN BE DONE. Jesus said:

“In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”--John 16:33

He has gone before us. Let us follow in his footsteps!

The Fruit of the Spirit

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love.”--Galatians 5:22

AT ONE time “the earth was without form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep.” There was nothing in this great wide world but a dismal emptiness, a vacuum. The Hebrew dictionary defines this word “void” as bleak, lifeless, dead.

Then we read in Genesis 1:2 that “the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.” As soon as the Spirit of God began to operate, things began to happen--tremendous things; literally world-shaking events. The darkness fled and there was light. There was a separation of night and day. There was a firmament--an atmosphere--where none existed before. Seas and dry land appeared. Vegetation of all kinds and sizes sprang up and flourished. The seas teemed with living creatures, including great whales and monsters. Then other living creatures, in infinite variety, appeared on the land also. All these marvelous things happened, because the Holy Spirit of God moved; and this power of the Spirit is what David described in Psalm 104:30, “Thou sendest forth thy Spirit, they are created; and thou renewest the face of the earth.”

God's Holy Spirit is His power, His influence, His force, His might, the implementing of His will. It cannot be successfully opposed. It makes itself felt. It does exactly what God wills. It gets results. It brings forth fruit.

Now let us cite some instances in the past, of the wonderful power of the Spirit of God.

The Spirit of the Lord came upon Joseph in Egypt and he interpreted Pharaoh's dream regarding the seven years of plenty, and the seven years of famine. “And Pharaoh said unto his servants: Can we find such a one as this; a man in whom the Spirit of God is?” (Genesis 41:38) Then things began to happen in rapid succession, Joseph, the slave of the dungeon, rose up to be the ruler in Egypt.

The Spirit of God came upon Moses, the lowly shepherd of Midian. That meekest of all men who had fled in terror from Egypt went boldly back to Egypt; withstood the mighty Pharaoh to his face; was the Lord's instrument in bringing ten horrible plagues upon Egypt; became the general of the millions of Israel; led them triumphantly out of Egypt; brought them the law from God, out of the mount; established the tabernacle sacrifices; and, finally, shepherded the hosts of Israel to the borders of Canaan. All because the Spirit of God came upon him.

When the time came to build the Tabernacle, and all its furnishings and appurtenances--to the exact and exquisite specifications furnished by God--there was none in Israel capable of it. They didn't have the skill; they were largely brickmakers and stonemasons, and in their bondage, worked in the fields, with rough and callused hands. They were not artists. The scripture says:

“And the Egyptians made the Children of Israel to serve with rigor; and made their lives bitter with hard bondage; in mortar, and in brick, and in all manner of service in the field. All their service, wherein they made them serve, was with rigor.”--Exodus 1:13,14

But whether they naturally had the necessary skill or not, the Tabernacle, with all its symbolic features, must be built, and built exactly right. So what happened? The Lord simply selected a man and said:

“I have filled him with the Spirit of God; in wisdom, and in understanding, and in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship; to devise cunning works; to work in gold, and in silver, and in copper; and in cutting of stones, to set them; and in carving of timber; to work in all manner of workmanship.”--Exodus 31:2-5

That man became superbly capable of doing the job. This is another demonstration of the power of the Spirit of God.

The Power of God's Spirit

We read in Judges 6:34 that “The Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon.” Gideon was only a farmer; a thresher of wheat. But with the Spirit of the Lord moving in him, he took 300 men like himself, and put to complete rout the tremendous military hosts of Midian, and Amalek.

Then let us consider the case of Samson. We read that “the Spirit of the Lord began to move Samson.” This was at a time when the Philistines were oppressing Israel and the wickedness of the Philistines had come to the full. What happened when the Spirit of the Lord moved Samson? “And he smote them hip and thigh, with a great slaughter,” we read in Judges 15:8. On another occasion we read that “the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him,” whereupon “he found a new jawbone of an ass, and put forth his hand and took it, and slew a thousand men therewith.” (Judges 15:14, 15) Then, for a while, he was deprived of the Spirit of God and his great strength failed. But when the Spirit came upon him again, he had the power to push apart the pillars of the great Temple of Dagon, and bring it down to ruin, together with all its occupants. Paul names Samson in Hebrews chapter 11 as one of the Ancient Worthies. He did what he did, by the Spirit of God.

David also is a case in point. Upon his being anointed by Samuel it is written that “the Spirit of the Lord came upon David, from that day forward.” (1 Samuel 16:13) Whereupon the shepherd boy slew the mighty Philistine giant Goliath; became a great and good king of Israel; a prophet, and sweet singer, and psalmist; the progenitor of Jesus in his human existence, who was called the “Son of David” and the originator of the “throne of David” which will rule the world in the Millennium.

The example of Jesus is the greatest example of all. It was prophesied of Jesus in Isaiah 11:1,2,

“And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse; and a Branch shall grow out of his roots; and the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him; the Spirit of wisdom, and understanding; the Spirit of counsel, and might; the Spirit of knowledge, and of the fear of the Lord.”

The Spirit of the Lord did indeed rest upon him, as it is written in Matthew 3:16,

“And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water; and, lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him.”

Later Jesus himself said in Luke 4:18, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me.” Jesus was completely filled with the Spirit. His every thought and act was in accordance with the Spirit of God. It permeated every fiber of his being. John 3:34 tells us that he had the Spirit without measure. How did it manifest itself in Jesus? What fruit did it bear?

Peter sums it up very nicely in his preaching to Cornelius, as recorded in Acts 10:38,39,

“How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth, with the Holy Spirit and with power; who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. And we are witnesses of all things which he did, both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem; whom they slew and hanged on a tree.”

Imbued with God's Spirit, and the power of it, Jesus went about doing good. He preached the Gospel of the Kingdom in spite of the savage opposition of the religionists of his day; and the common people heard him gladly. He performed many miracles of love and compassion, healing all manner of diseases, and even awakening the dead to life. He opened blind eyes; unstopped deaf ears; and made the dumb to speak. He cast out demons. He freely expended his own vitality and energy. He walked on the sea; he stilled a great storm; he fed 5,000 people with five loaves and two fishes; he changed water into wine. He preached a Sermon on the Mount, containing the

essence of the true wisdom of God --and putting to shame all the miserable ethics and practices of the world. He gave many masterful parables, 49 of which are recorded, by which he taught enduring lessons to his disciples. He vigorously and publicly reproved the Scribes and Pharisees, and others who were deceiving the people. He was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners. Then, although fully capable of delivering himself, he voluntarily submitted to betrayal; to a mock trial; to scourgings, and other indignities; and, finally, the agonizing death on the cross.

By his life, during which he kept the law of God perfectly in every detail, and by his death, which he did not deserve to die, he became the ransom or corresponding price for Adam, and his race, redeeming you and me. By his death and resurrection he opened up a new and living way whereby those partaking of his Spirit, and walking in his footsteps of sacrifice and death, may seek for, and attain, glory, honor, and immortality. Here is an example where the Holy Spirit of God had full and complete sway and brought forth fruit supremely.

Power on Pentecost

Then we come to the Day of Pentecost. In obedience to Jesus' commandment in Acts 1:4,5, the disciples were waiting in Jerusalem for the fulfillment of Jesus' promise: "For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit." We read in Acts 2:1-4 that,

"They were all with one accord, in one place. And suddenly, there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues, like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."

One moment they were timid, frightened, afraid; hidden in an upper room; the door closed and locked; keeping as quiet as possible; apprehensive of any footstep on the stairs, lest it be that of a spy, or a Roman officer. Then, suddenly, a sound--not of footsteps, but "as of a rushing mighty wind." Have you ever heard the roar of a hurricane or typhoon?--a mighty wind? It's pretty loud; it pervades everything. "And it filled all the house." The next moment "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit." Then what happened? They began to speak! They began to preach, and in languages other than their own. They must have unlocked the doors, and flung open the windows. They made themselves heard, far and wide; because we read that "this was noised abroad, and the multitude came together, and were confounded [or perplexed] because that every man heard them speak in his own language. And they were all amazed, and marveled."

From then on, the gospel was preached boldly and vigorously. Do you see the transforming and energizing power of the Spirit?

Another good illustration is that of Stephen. We read of him in Acts 6:5 that he was “a man full of faith, and of the Holy Spirit.” We also read in verses 8 and 10:

“And Stephen, full of grace and power, did great wonders, and miracles among the people. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.”

The faithfulness of Stephen made him the first Christian martyr. In a very short time, the infusion of the Holy Spirit had caused him to be full of faith, grace and power. As the stones of the mob rained upon him, he was able, with his final breath to say: “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge!”

Then we have Saul of Tarsus. He had been blinded by a light from heaven on the Damascus Road. He had heard the voice of Jesus, he had caught a glimpse of the glorified Jesus. Then a disciple named Ananias was sent to him. The account is in Acts 9:17. Ananias laid his hands on Saul, whereupon he received his sight and was filled with the Holy Spirit.

Then things began to happen! He was transformed from Saul, the scourge of the Christians, to become PAUL, the foremost of the apostles. As the Lord said to Ananias, in Acts 9:15,16,

“He is a chosen vessel unto me; to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel. For I will show him how great things he must suffer for my sake.”

Later, writing to the Corinthians, Paul told of these sufferings and cares:

“In labors more abundant; in stripes above measure; in prisons more frequent; in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods; once was I stoned; thrice I suffered shipwreck; a night and a day I have been in the deep. In journeyings often; in perils of waters; in perils of robbers; in perils by mine own countrymen; in perils by the heathen; in perils in the city; in perils in the wilderness; in perils in the sea; in perils among false brethren. In weariness, and painfulness; in watchings often; in hunger and thirst; in fastings often; in cold and nakedness. Besides those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily: the care of all the churches.”--2 Corinthians 11:23-28

Filled and impelled by the Holy Spirit, Paul suffered all of these things and he gloried in them:

“But none of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto myself; so that I might finish my course with joy; and the ministry,

which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.”--Acts 20:24

These are some examples of the operation and effect of the Holy Spirit of God. What is common to all of these examples? In each case, as soon as the Holy Spirit began to operate, things began to happen! Its action was fruitful. Results were achieved.

In the beginning, when the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters, the earth brought forth. When the Spirit of the Lord came upon Joseph, he was transformed from a slave to the ruler of Egypt. When the Spirit of God came upon Moses, the meekest of men, he became a mighty leader and law-giver. When a slavish, and clumsy brickmaker was filled with the Spirit of God, he became a superb artist and craftsman, in the gold, silver, copper, precious stones, curtains and wood-carving of the tabernacle in the wilderness. When “the Spirit of the Lord began to move Samson,” he performed the will of God with stupendous strength and zeal. When the Spirit of the Lord came upon David, he became a man after God's own heart. When the Spirit of God came upon Jesus at Jordan, the heavens were opened unto him; he discerned the perfect will of God, and performed it, even to the death of the cross. When those at Pentecost were filled with the Holy Spirit, they were immediately transformed, from fearful, hiding Christians, into preaching and crusading Christians--who spread the Gospel far and wide in every language. When Stephen was filled with the Holy Spirit, he had such eloquence that the people “were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spoke” and he attained such a degree of love that he was able to ask God to forgive those who killed him, while they were killing him! When Saul of Tarsus was filled with the Holy Spirit he was completely changed--from a vicious and sadistic persecutor of the Church, into its foremost apostle and minister, writing most of the New Testament, and literally laying down his life for the Gospel. There is one common result in all these instances--the Holy Spirit always brought forth fruit. It always prospered in the things whereunto it was sent. It always got results. It never failed.

The Holy Spirit and Us

Let us consider an astonishing and sobering thought. This same Holy Spirit, this mighty, irresistible power of God, is used on our behalf also! It operates in us. It dwells in us; it FILLS us (Ephesians 5:18). Galatians 5:25 says “we live in the Spirit” and we “walk in the Spirit.” Romans 8:9 says we are “in the Spirit,” and the “Spirit of God dwells in us.” Romans 8:11 says that “the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwells” in us. Raising Jesus from the dead was a magnificent display of power--and this is the Spirit that dwells in us--that is our Comforter and Helper. Romans 8:14 says

“we are led by the Spirit of God,” and therefore “are the sons of God.” Hebrews 6:4 says we are made “partakers of the Holy Spirit.” Ephesians 1:13 says we are “sealed with the Holy Spirit.” 1 John 5:18 says we are “begotten of God” by the Spirit. Ephesians 3:16 says we are “strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man.” Doesn't that suggest POWER? Philippians 2:13 says, “For it is God who worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”

So this is not a trifling thing, with which we are dealing. We are dealing with the power of God himself. Based on all the testimony we have cited, wouldn't you say that results should be expected? that there should be fruit? There should and there is. Paul confirms this in Romans 8:23 when he says that we “have the firstfruits of the Spirit.”

Now let us see what these fruits are, and let us, for our own encouragement, confirm that we have them or are developing them, and that, therefore, we are indeed “the sons of God.”

“[For] the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God. And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.”--Romans 8:16,17

Galatians 5:22,23 names the fruits of the Spirit:

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering [or forbearance], gentleness [or kindness], goodness, faith [or fidelity], meekness, and temperance [or self-control].”

It will be seen that love leads the list. This is the greatest and foremost. This is the fruit we are going to concentrate on today because all the others derive from it.

The Importance of Love

Someone asked Jesus, “Master, which is the great commandment in the law?” There were 3,600 commandments at that time in the Jewish law and the question they put to Jesus was: “which one is the greatest?” Jesus said unto them: “thou shalt love ...” Doesn't this show that love is the greatest thing in the world? “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first, and greatest commandment!” Then he quoted the one second in importance which was love again: “And the second is like unto it: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”--Matthew 22:36-39

To the Jews, it was the law, a commandment which meant life to them, if kept perfectly, which it was impossible for them to do. But to us, love is the fruit of the Spirit of God, an evidence that we are his children and heirs, members of his household; as it is written in 1

John 4:16: "God is love; and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him." Do you get the full implication of this scripture? If our consecrated lives are motivated and dominated by love, and God is love--we are said to dwell in God! This is confirmed by Paul in Acts 17:28, "In Him we live, and move, and have our being."

But the scripture goes further than that. It says that if we dwell in love, God dwells in us! How can such a thing be? Can the Almighty God dwell in our poor human bodies? Of course not. How then does God dwell in us? The answer is in 1Corinthians 3:16, "Know ye not, that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" It is by his Spirit that God dwells in us, by his holy influence. But we must make room for Him to come in by dwelling in love, by loving Him supremely--our neighbors as ourselves, and our brethren better than ourselves--by enlarging our hearts to fully receive his Spirit of love. Then he will indeed dwell in us.

Love is the principal attribute of God, and it has tremendous power. Paul said, in 2 Timothy 1:7, "For God hath not given us the Spirit of fear, but of power and of love, and of a sound mind." Notice that power and love are associated. Love has power. It has the power of life and death! Let me illustrate.

Many years ago, in New York's Bellevue Hospital, the staff of the children's ward were faced with a tragic fact. They were losing 32% of the children under a year old. That's almost one third. The children were dying mostly through minor ailments. The doctors were dumbfounded. There was no apparent reason for it. The infants were receiving the finest medical care known to science. They had clean, germ-free surroundings. Their diets were carefully formulated, of the best ingredients. Temperatures were properly maintained. Beds were comfortable, everything seemed ideal. Yet the babies were dying. Finally, one of the doctors suggested that the only thing the hospital was not supplying was love. It was a revolutionary idea, but they were desperate. So they sent out a call for love-volunteers--women to come and love babies, so many hours a day. Hundreds of women responded, because they had a need, too--a need for someone to love. They held the babies in their arms; fed them; talked to them; sang them little lullabies; showed them affection--gave them love. The death rate began to plunge immediately. In four months, it was down to almost zero!

This incident demonstrates the power of even the natural love with which God endowed his human creatures--a tremendous power--the power of life and death! How much more power is exerted by the higher form of love, with which God's Spirit has endowed his New Creatures in Christ! The peculiar thing about love is that it is developed by giving. A wise man has said,

“You are born of the qualities you habitually give out. If you give out hate, you become hateful. If you give out criticism, you become critical. If you give out love, you become lovely.”

So just as those women of Bellevue who gave love to the babies, were themselves filled and rewarded by love, we will develop love in ourselves by giving it. We need the spiritual love that each member of the household of God can supply. We must have it lest we die as New Creatures just as those Bellevue babies died. So let us more and more make room in our hearts, to be filled with the Spirit of love, which is the essence of God's character. It has immense power. It will transform us; and it is for us to claim! As we are admonished in 1 Peter 1:22,

“Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit, unto unfeigned love of the brethren; see that ye love one another, with a pure heart, fervently.”

The love mentioned by the apostle is not maudlin sentimentality or romantic attachment; these are things of the natural man. I am not saying these are wrong or sinful, only that they are not what the apostle refers to. The love referred to is immeasurably deeper, and wider and grander. This higher form of love is the most important ingredient of Christian character--the most important fruit of the Spirit.

Jesus made it a condition and proof of discipleship, when he said in John 13:34, 35, “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.” The apostle John emphasizes how essential love for the brethren is when he says: “We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother, abideth in death.” (1 John 3:14) Have we “passed from death unto life”? Are we alive as new creatures? Or are we still dead with the world? Have we passed over the line--from death to life? THIS is the rule! This is the test--love for the brethren!

How to Show Love for the Brethren

In order to test ourselves and “know that we have passed from death unto life”--that there may be no doubt in our minds, that we may be reassured and encouraged --let us now consider some ways in which we can show our love for the brethren.

We can show our love for our brethren by never withholding words of comfort in the midst of trials and trouble. By giving such words of comfort we demonstrate that we are not deficient in the Holy Spirit for the Holy Spirit was given as a Comforter not only of our own

hearts, but of others through us. As it is written in 2 Corinthians 1:3,4,

“Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.”

I'm afraid the attempts of some of the dear friends to comfort others have the opposite effect. For example, if I am suffering, it is not much comfort to be bluntly told: “What did you expect? You knew you were going to have trials, didn't you?” Of course it's true, but not very comforting. How much better to say: “I am sure the Lord loves you, and has something good in mind for you when this is over.” Or perhaps: “Don't forget that He will never permit more trials than you can bear.” Or perhaps, simply, “I'm so sorry. How can I help?” Such statements are both true and comforting.

Sometimes we can show our love for our brethren in a material way. If we have a plenitude of this world's goods and one of the Lord's people is suffering want, it is our privilege to help him. This demonstrates love in a very tangible and practical way. 1 John 3:17 (Diaglott) says:

“But whoever has the goods of the world, and may see his brother have need, and may shut up his compassions from him, how abides the love of God in him?”

Helping Ourselves Helps Our Brethren

But there's another side to this coin. We can also show our love for our brethren by helping ourselves as much as possible, not being burdensome to our brethren. Love is an unselfish desire to do good to others, therefore, we should prefer to assist our brethren, rather than have them bear our burden. Acts 20:35 says: “It is more blessed to give, than to receive.” Paul said in Galatians 6:2, “Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.” But he added in verse 5: “Every man shall bear his own burden.”

We can show our love for our brethren by realizing that they are imperfect, just as we are, by exercising the grace of Christian forbearance toward one another. As Paul admonishes in Ephesians 4:1,2,

“I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you, that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called; with all lowliness, and meekness, with long-suffering; forbearing one another in love.”

If all were perfect in the flesh, there would be no opportunity for the exercise of this grace.

But there may be times when it may be necessary to state some plain truths to those overtaken in a fault; who for a time permit the weaknesses of their fallen flesh to interfere with their welfare as New Creatures or with the welfare of others. At such times we can show our love by speaking kindly, and with a realization of our own weaknesses, so that we, as Paul said in Ephesians 4:15, "Speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ."

There are many times when we can best show our love for an erring brother by quietly overlooking his unintentional faults. Such patient waiting on the Lord for Him to make the correction in His own time and way rather than for us to disturb the peace of the Church--the Lord will count as endured for His body's sake. No matter how hard we try, it will always be true, as long as we are in the flesh, that we will sometimes give offense. James 3:2 says: "In many ways we all offend." We can show our love for our brethren by overlooking and forgiving.

Honest differences of opinion will arise between ourselves and other brethren. If permitted full sway, this can be a root of contention. But we can show our love for our brethren, and for the Church, by making every reasonable effort to avoid expressing differences of opinion on non-essentials--on points which our experience has shown us will engender strife. We should, rather, humbly seek to follow Paul's admonition in 2 Corinthians 13:11 to "Be of one mind; live in peace."

Whatsoever service we render to the brethren, whether spiritual or temporal, we should do with our whole heart as unto the Lord, because it is written in Colossians 3:23,24,

"And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance; for ye serve the Lord Christ."

We can show our love for the brethren by considering it our greatest honor here below to serve those who are the Lord's. We should not be too choosy about the nature of the service. We should be as ready to serve in a lowly capacity, as in a more conspicuous position. Jesus said in Matthew 20:27,28,

"Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant; even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister; and to give his life a ransom for many."

We can show our love for our brethren by doing what we can to build one another up in our most holy faith (Jude 20); and to "edify one another" (1 Thessalonians 5:11); "inciting one another to love and good works." Our love toward the Lord's brethren should be

dignified, simple, pure, and expressed with only such manifestations as would be proper between brethren. This love, when fully developed, will rejoice more in honors coming to another than in honors coming to one's self. As the apostle expresses it in Romans 12:10, "Be kindly affectioned one to another, with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another."

We can show our love for our brethren by making due allowances for individual peculiarities of temperament. We should not force honors upon those who would be injured by them. But on the other hand, we should see that the self-effacing and lowly-minded ones are given the opportunities and recognition that is their due. Loving the brethren in this way, we shall, as stated in 1 John 3:18, "not love in word, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth." The desire to bless the Lord's brethren in every way in our power should become the all-absorbing purpose of life. In this way we will be like Jesus, as it is written in 1 John 3:16, "He laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

We can show our love for our brethren by aiding by precept and example, the faint-hearted, the backward, the timid--those lacking in combativeness and self-esteem. We can help the spiritually weak to gain strength, encouraging them to lay hold upon the Lord's promises; and to trust in His providences in their behalf. Thus, as it is written in 1 Thessalonians 5:14, we will "Comfort the feeble-minded [or timid], support the weak."

With hearts filled with love for the brethren, we will spend so much time attending to our own business we will have no time for busy-bodilying. Those who interest themselves in matters which do not particularly concern them soon neglect their own affairs. They become, as Paul describes them in 1 Timothy 5:13, "not only idlers, but tattlers also and busy-bodies, speaking things which they ought not." People who do this not only injure themselves but also bring reproach upon the cause of Christ. As it is written in 1 Peter 4:15, the Lord would not that any of us should suffer "as a busy-body in other men's matters." If we are tempted to tell another how he should handle matters which are only his own private concern, we should remember the apostle's advice: "Study to be quiet, and to do your own business." (1 Thessalonians 4:11)

Controlling Our Tongue

If we love our brethren as we ought, we shall make great efforts to control our tongue. Of course we shall not be able to do so perfectly for James says, in James 3:8, "The tongue can no man tame." He also said, in James 3:2, "If a man offend not in word, the same is a

perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.” But we must make every effort, nevertheless.

We can show our love for our brethren by being slow to believe evil of one another. In fact, we should be most reluctant to do so, making excuses in our minds as to why a brother might have said or done something which we think was contrary to the Lord's will, always giving him the benefit of the doubt, ascribing good motives, because Paul said that love “thinketh no evil.” (1 Corinthians 13:5)

Knowing the weakness of our fallen flesh, the Lord provided a rule by which slander in the Church may be avoided. It is found in Matthew 18:15,16,

“If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault, between thee and him alone. If he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more; that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.”

It is hard to conceive of one brother in Christ rendering evil to another, and it is still harder to believe that the injured one would render evil in return. But such things have happened. 1 Thessalonians 5:15 says: “See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good.”

If a brother should make a slip, and work injury to himself and others in the Church, our spirit toward him should always be one of brotherly love--to help him regain his balance and his standing with the Lord, having due regard for the fact that we, ourselves, may similarly fall. Galatians 6:1 says,

“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.”

If we do have occasion to reprove or rebuke a brother, we should make sure that it is done only after we have exercised all reasonable patience. Even then, we must be sure that it is done in love. When the brother repents and makes some acknowledgment of his fault, we should be like the father of the prodigal: when we see the repentant one come, in an attitude of humility, we should go part way to meet him.

Forgiving Multiple Times

We can show our love for our brethren by never ceasing to forgive each other. Let us remember what Jesus said to Peter, as recorded in Matthew 18:21,22, when he inquired if he should forgive his brother seven times. “Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, until seven times; but until seventy times seven.” Jesus knew that by the time

Peter had reached the point where he was willing to forgive his brother 490 times, it would have become a settled habit; then he would forget to count. Let us, too, forget to count. Surely the Heavenly Father has forgiven us many more than 490 times, and it will certainly be necessary for us to ask his forgiveness many more times, before our change.

We read in 1 Peter 3:8, “Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another; love as brethren.” We can show our love for our brethren by our efforts to maintain this unity of the Spirit. But in spite of our best efforts, it is inevitable that some will fall away, under tests which the Lord permits. Divisions will take place. This is in accordance with 1 Corinthians 11:19 (Diaglott): “For it is necessary that there should be factions among you, so that the approved may be apparent among you.” But let us not be the cause of these divisions. If they come, let them come from another source.

We can show our love for our brethren by praying for them. When we know they have a special need, we can remember them at the throne of grace, specifically, by name and circumstance. We are assured in James 5:16 that such a prayer, if fervently made, “availeth much.”

We can show our love for our brethren by giving financial assistance to the work in the Lord's vineyard, if we are able. This is another practical and tangible way to show our love; and it permits us to have a real and personal share in the work of the Lord.

The Heavenly Father has a way of revealing those who love him most. He places those who have been begotten of the Spirit where they may have opportunities to meet with one another, or otherwise have contact; and by the interest which they show in each other, and by the efforts which they make to have fellowship with each other, he judges how much of the Spirit of Love for himself they possess. 1John 4:20 expresses it:

“If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother [in other words, does not love him enough to seek personal fellowship with him], he is a liar. For if he loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God, whom he hath not seen?”

We can show our love for our brethren by not being too harsh with them; by not expecting more of them than they can render; by respecting their limitations.

We can show our love for our brethren who occupy positions as elders by avoiding the doing of anything which would injure them as New Creatures. We should especially hesitate to do anything which would curtail or destroy their ministry. The elders are the shepherds of the flock, and the Lord has set them so. They are special targets of

the adversary. The devil would like to see them accused and discredited, and removed from office. With the shepherds out of the way, he can enter in and devour the flock at his leisure. 1 Timothy 5:19 says: "Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses." This should be carefully adhered to.

We can show our love for our brethren by providing for those who properly have a demand upon us. The new creature must learn that it cannot, in all matters, do as it would prefer. We must, in certain matters, be governed by the obligations of the flesh. One of those obligations is the care of those whom the Lord has placed in our charge. We must do this "as unto the Lord" as performed for Him. It is a requirement of our faith. 1 Timothy 5:8 reads,

"But if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel."

We can show our love for our brethren by our zeal to meet with those of like precious faith. We are like coals of fire which, if separated, will tend to cool; but which, if brought together, will tend to increase the fervency of the whole mass. We are encouraged to assemble with those who are, like ourselves, justified, consecrated, who love the Lord, and who believe in Christ's ransom sacrifice. Such meetings greatly assist to the overcoming of the world, and the making of our calling and election sure. When we are in such meetings, we are in good company because Jesus said "There am I in the midst." (Matthew 18:20) There Jacob's ladder touches the earth and the place becomes, as Jacob said in Genesis 28:17, "the gate of Heaven!" So we can show our love for the brethren, by "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another. And so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."

We can show our love for our brethren by living within our means. The Lord's people should not be paupers. Rather, as is written in Romans 13:8, they should "Owe no man anything, but to love one another; for he that loveth another, hath fulfilled the law."

We can show our love for our brethren, and our Lord Jesus, by feeding the Lord's sheep. This is what Jesus told Peter to do to prove his love. Feeding the Lord's sheep is not only the prerogative of elders in the Church; it can be done by anybody by the use of spiritual and profitable conversation at every opportunity, showing that we are thinking of the Lord. Do you realize that God hears and keeps a book of remembrance, of such conversations, that it identifies us as being His? Malachi 3:16,17 says:

"And they that feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened and heard it; and a book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought

upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels.”

Love Brings Peace

When love operates in these ways, it has real power. It provides peace in the Church and peace in our minds. It erects a barrier against the attacks of Satan. It promotes and maintains sound doctrine. It sanctifies us; it makes us Christlike and Godlike. By this power, God takes 144,000 of the foolish of the world, the weak of the world, the base of the world, the despised of the world, those who are nothing, and from being nothing he develops them and elevates them to the very pinnacle of life--to the glorious divine nature. So this is a very real power we have operating within us, a power that is described in Colossians 1:11,12 as a “glorious power ... which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light.”

But in whatever way we may wish to show our love for our brethren, whatever we may wish to do for the members of the Lord's body, this side of the veil, it should be done soon; for they will not be here long. If Mary had waited a week longer before she broke the precious alabaster box upon the Lord's head, she would never have had the opportunity to use it on him. He had then been crucified. It has been said:

“Do not keep the alabaster box of your love and tenderness sealed up until your friends are dead. Flowers on the coffin cast no fragrance backward on the weary road.”

So do not delay. It may be your privilege to do today the last kind act, or to say today the last helpful word, to some member of Christ's body.

Let us more fully yield ourselves to this magnificent power of God working in us and bear much fruit of the Holy Spirit: love.

The Future of the Nation of Israel

TO THE natural man, the situation in which the nation of Israel finds itself today is absolutely hopeless. It may be said that they have the bleakest prospects of any nation in the world, the least chance of survival. Ringed about and outnumbered a hundred to one by ferociously hostile nations--nations who have sworn not merely to defeat them militarily but to exterminate them from the face of the earth, nations who are backed and encouraged by a great power with enormous atomic capability--it seems only a matter of a short time when Israel will be no more.

This is the way it seems to the natural man. But to the un-natural man, the spiritual man, the man whom God has enlightened with his truth, the prospects for Israel are the brightest and most glorious of any nation in the world. They are the heirs of earthly promises of such grandeur and scope as to almost stagger the imagination.

Of heavenly Zion it is said, "Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God!" (Psalms 87:3) These things spoken of Christ and the Church, the heavenly Israel, are surpassingly glorious. The things spoken of natural Israel, the prophecies yet to be fulfilled on behalf of that people, are also very glorious indeed.

First let us assure ourselves that when Jesus sorrowed over Jerusalem saying: "Behold, your house is left unto you desolate" (Matthew 23:38; Luke 13:35), he did not mean that all their earthly promises had failed. How do we know? In the very next verse of both scriptures he said that the time would come when they would "see" or recognize him and would say of him, "Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord." Before declaring their house desolate Jesus said:

"How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, but ye would not."

He was here speaking of the special gathering of the high calling, the wonderful opportunity of becoming spiritual Israel, and their national rejection of it. We read:

"He came unto his own [his own nation], and his own received him not. But as many as received him [individually], to them gave he power [or privilege] to become the sons of God [the Church]."--John 1:11,12

This special privilege is what Israel had missed. Jesus was not speaking of their earthly promises which are still theirs. He did not cast off natural Israel forever.

As proof let us consider the words of the apostle Paul in Romans chapter 11. Some of the Gentiles in the church at Rome thought that God had indeed permanently cast off his people Israel, that the promises were only spiritual and only theirs. Paul uses this entire chapter to disabuse their minds of such a foolish notion. We read:

“I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God hath not cast away his people which he fore-knew.”--Romans 11:1,2

“What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for [that is, the chief blessing, the high calling]; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded.”--verse 7

“I say, then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid. But rather through their fall, salvation is come unto the Gentiles [that is, the high calling was opened to the Gentiles].”--verse 11

“But if their fall is the wealth of the world, and their failure the wealth of the Gentiles, how much more will their full acceptance be?”--verse 12, Diaglott

Note that there is to be a full acceptance, a full receiving back to favor, a full realization and obtaining of all the prophetic promises made to them. Verse 15 is really startling in its implications:

“For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world [that is, to permit the development of the Church for the Messianic rule of the world], what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?”--verse 15

Does this not teach that the resurrection of the dead and restitution will start with the nation of Israel when they have been received back into favor? I think it does.

The apostle then likens the temporary rejection of Israel to the breaking off of the natural branches of an olive tree and the acceptance of the Gentiles to the high calling as the grafting in of wild olive branches. In verses 18 to 21 he admonishes the Gentiles not to boast, not be too proud of this fact, not to say to themselves that the nation of Israel was permanently rejected for their sakes and that all of Israel's earthly promises are forever lost. **DO WE NEED THIS ADMONITION TODAY?** In verses 23 and 24 the apostle positively says that the natural olive branches shall be grafted in again when their unbelief is taken away, that they will return once again to full favor with God.

The apostle persists in his argument. He evidently considered the subject very important and that the church at Rome was making a serious mistake regarding the prospects and future role of the nation of Israel. He must have considered it a vital subject because he spent so much time on it. He no doubt foresaw that the time would come at the end of the age when other Gentiles--even some running for the prize of the high calling--would become similarly conceited with themselves, developing a contempt for Israel and God's promises to that nation. We continue the reading from the Diaglott:

“Brethren, that you may not be conceited with yourselves, I wish you not to be ignorant of this secret; that hardness in some measure has happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles may come in [that is to say, until the full number selected from the Gentiles for the high calling has been completed]. And then all Israel will be saved; as it has been written, The Deliverer [that is, Christ, head and body] shall come out of Zion, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob. And this is the covenant with them from me [the New Covenant], when I shall take away their sins. In relation to the glad tidings [the high calling] indeed, they are enemies on your account; but in regard to the election, they are [still] beloved on account of the fathers, because the gracious gifts and calling of God are things not to be repented of [yes, they still have a calling; a role to play in the blessing of the world. God has not repented and changed his plan in this regard]. Besides, as you [Gentiles] were once disobedient to God, but have now obtained mercy by their disobedience; so also, now, these have disobeyed so that they may obtain mercy through your mercy [that is, at the hands of the glorified Church].”--Romans 11:25-31, Diaglott

Starting with verse 33 to the end of the chapter, the apostle seems to go into ecstasy:

“O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things; to whom be glory for ever. Amen!”

Let us be similarly overwhelmed. Let us not be inclined to begrudge the Jews their precious promises because of their past imperfect performances. Let us remember that we too were totally unworthy of the high calling, that it is only by the grace of God--his unmerited favor--that we have this glorious hope set before us.

As Yet Unfulfilled Promises to Israel

Let us consider some of the unfulfilled promises to the nation of Israel that must shortly come to pass. These prophecies are very numerous and we cannot cover them all. In preparing this lesson I collected over 200 scriptures on the subject and there are many more.

First we should realize that the nation of Israel as presently constituted is not the nation of Israel that God will favor and use in his Messianic Kingdom. The present government of Israel is an interim government organized by men according to the best wisdom of this world. It was necessitated by the regathering of Israel to maintain order and discipline, to exercise police power, to permit an orderly and systematic repossession of the land in fulfillment of prophecy, and to plant and build up the country. It is not in its present form the promised throne of David. No! There is to be a glorious re-birth of the nation of Israel based upon a great conversion. The new government of Israel will not be parliamentary but benevolently autocratic under the rule of The Christ and administered by the Ancient Worthies:

“Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children, whom thou mayest make princes in all the earth.”--Psalms 45:16

Before this happens there must first be a great day, a time of special and intense trouble for Israel. We read:

“Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it. It is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it.”--Jeremiah 30:7

The Attack of Gog

The prophet Ezekiel gives us more detail. In chapter 38 the chief of the forces that will attack Israel is identified as Gog. We read:

“In the latter years thou shalt come into the land that is brought back from the sword, and is gathered out of many people; against the mountains of Israel, which have been always waste; but it is brought forth out of the nations, and they shall dwell safely all of them [this has not yet been completely fulfilled]. Thou shalt ascend and come like a storm. Thou shalt be like a cloud to cover the land, thou and all thy bands, and many people with thee. Thus saith the Lord God, It shall also come to pass, that at the same time shall things come into thy mind, and thou shalt think an evil thought. And thou shalt say, I will go up to the land of unwalled villages. I will go to them that are at rest; that dwell safely; all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates; to take a spoil, and to take a prey. To turn thine hand upon the desolate places that are now inhabited, and upon the people that are gathered out of the nations, which have

gotten cattle and goods, that dwell in the midst of the land. Therefore, son of man, prophesy and say unto Gog, Thus saith the Lord God, In that day when my people of Israel dwelleth safely, shalt thou not know it? And thou shalt come from thy place out of the north parts, thou and many people with thee, all of them riding upon horses [the modern version of the horse in warfare is the tank], a great company and a mighty army. And thou shalt come up against my people of Israel as a cloud to cover the land [this suggests a cloud of war planes in the sky]. It shall be in the latter days, and I will bring thee against my land, that the heathen [or nations] may know me, when I shall be sanctified in thee, O Gog, before their eyes.” --Ezekiel 38:8-12,14-16.

I think we can reasonably identify Gog of the land of the north as Russia together with her allied nations. When they attack Israel, the eyes of the world will be upon them. Every nation will be watching. With modern satellite communication which makes worldwide television possible, this can be literally true. This great attack will happen before the very eyes of the world. Israel will be militarily outmatched and will suffer a great defeat. As we read in Zechariah:

“I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle. And the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished. And half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city.”--Zechariah 14:2

Just when Israel's fate appears hopeless and with all the world watching, a most spectacular event will take place, such as the world has never before seen. The next verse says:

“Then shall the Lord go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle.”--verse 3.

Ezekiel expresses it more eloquently:

“And it shall come to pass at the same time, when God shall come against the land of Israel, saith the Lord God, that my fury shall come up in my face. For in my jealousy, and in the fire of my wrath, have I spoken. Surely, in that day there shall be a great shaking in the land of Israel. And I will plead against him [Gog] with pestilence and with blood; and I will rain upon him, and upon his bands, and upon the many people, that are with him, an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire and brimstone.”--Ezekiel 38:18,19,22

This is symbolic language. The prophet uses the words fury, jealousy, wrath, a great shaking, pestilence, blood, an overflowing rain, great hailstone, fire, and brimstone. These were the most destructive things men knew at that time. Today men consider atomic bombs and the rockets that propel them to be the ultimate in destructive force. Although Gog and his allies will be liberally

equipped with these, they are puny things indeed compared with the power of God. So we do not know and cannot comprehend the exact form in which this tremendous power of God will be expressed against the enemies of Israel. But we do know that it will be demonstrated in a most spectacular manner and that the whole world will witness it, will know that a most unusual thing has taken place-- something that can be attributed only to God. What they see will convince them that it is indeed the Almighty God who is fighting for his people Israel.

Millions of atheists, agnostics and heathen the world over will be instantly converted to God.

“Thus will I magnify myself, and sanctify myself. And I will be known in the eyes of many nations; and they shall know that I am the LORD.”--Ezekiel 38:23

This is confirmed two chapters earlier:

“And I will sanctify my great name, which was profaned among the heathen [or nations]. And the heathen shall know that I am the Lord, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes.”--Ezekiel 36:23

Most important of all this great act in their defense will instantly convert the nation of Israel. Yes, they do need conversion. There are few really believing Israelites among them; they still rely upon their own strength. When it is suggested that the Russians might attack them, they say, “Let them come. We can handle them!” But when they have reached their extremity in Jacob's trouble, been humbled in defeat, and then see the great act by which God delivers them, they will be truly converted.

“I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counsellors as at the beginning. Afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city.”--Isaiah 1:26

It is at this time that the Ancient Worthies will come forth and take control of earth's affairs. We are assured that Israel will recognize them and accept them. How will this be brought about? It seems reasonable to me that the stupendous event of the resurrection of the Ancient Worthies will somehow be tied in with God's great act in the final defense of Israel.

Suppose at the critical moment when Israel is going down in defeat, the Ancient Worthies including King David suddenly appear and assume command. Then with the whole world watching they call down the miraculous destructive forces of God upon the attackers. This would serve two purposes: it would positively identify the Ancient Worthies to the Israelites because of their command of the forces of God, and at the same time it would serve notice upon the

world that God, through Christ, had set his “princes in all the earth” backed by all the power of God to rule and to bless.

Instructed by the Ancient Worthies, Israel will realize that Jesus, whom they rejected and crucified, was indeed the Messiah. It is then that Zechariah 12 will be fulfilled:

“The Lord also shall save the tents of Judah first. ... In that day shall the Lord defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David; and the house of David shall be as God; as the angel of the Lord before them. And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. And 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.”--Zechariah 12:7-10

That will be a sincere and complete conversion. It is then that they will say, “Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.” At long last the prayers of Israel will be answered. For centuries they have prayed so fervently without response. Don't you think they prayed with all their hearts in Hitler's concentration camps? Don't you think they prayed desperately when led to the ovens? Six million Jews went to their deaths praying. But God did not seem to hear them. Then it will be different! We read:

“Then shall ye call upon me; and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.”--Jeremiah 29:12,13

Of that time we read further, in Jeremiah 30:9, 21,22: “They shall serve the Lord their God, and David their king whom I will raise up unto them.” Verse 21 refers to their supreme prince and ruler, the glorified Jesus Christ, who was born a Jew and who is now exalted to the presence of God. The Moffatt translation beautifully brings out this thought:

“Their prince shall be one of themselves. Their ruler shall be native-born. I will grant him access to myself, and he shall enter my presence. For how else could one dare to enter my presence? says the Eternal.”

As Ezekiel says:

“So will I make my holy name known in the midst of my people Israel ... And the heathen [or nations] shall know that I am the LORD, the Holy One, in Israel ... So the house of Israel shall know that I am the LORD their God, from that day forward.”-- Ezekiel 39:7,22

The scriptures clearly teach that the New Covenant will be made with the chastened and converted nation of Israel. This is what Paul says:

“Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant [that is, the Law Covenant], and I regarded them not, saith the Lord.”--Hebrews 8:8-12 [quoting from Jeremiah 31:31-34]

It was the rank and file of Israel who were led out of Egypt and who broke the Law Covenant. The Law Covenant was made with them. The covenant instituted at Mount Sinai was not made with Moses but with the people of Israel. This is clearly shown in the account:

“And Moses called all Israel, and said unto them, Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your ears this day, that ye may learn them, and keep them, and do them. The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. The Lord made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us; even us who are all of us alive here this day.”--Deuteronomy 5:1-3

Notice how positively he emphasizes this fact, stating it in five different ways. We continue the reading in Hebrews:

“For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts; and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people. And they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.”--Hebrews 8:10-12

In Jeremiah regathered Israel is described as the ones with whom the New Covenant is to be made:

“Behold, I will gather them out of all the countries whither I have driven them in mine anger, and in my fury, and in great wrath. And I will bring them again unto this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely.”--Jeremiah 32:37

Then the prophet says:

“And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good. But I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.”--verse 40.

As further proof we cite the words of Ezekiel:

“For thus saith the Lord God; I will even deal with thee as thou hast done, which hast despised the oath, in breaking the covenant.”-- Ezekiel 16:59

This clearly describes unfaithful natural Israel. Then he goes on:

“Nevertheless, I will remember my covenant with thee in the days of thy youth [that is, the Law Covenant], and I will establish unto thee an everlasting covenant. And I will establish my covenant with thee; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord.”--verses 60,62.

Thus the scriptures clearly indicate that under the New Covenant the benefits of the Messianic Kingdom will start with Israel and spread from them to the rest of the world. Israel will be the door to the highway of holiness. This is brought out by Jeremiah speaking definitely of Israel:

“Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the coast of the earth; and with them the blind and the lame. . . . They shall come with weeping, and with supplications will I lead them. I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters [the same river of the water of life mentioned in Revelation 22:1] in a straight way [the highway of holiness mentioned in Isaiah 35:8] wherein they shall not stumble.”--Jeremiah 31:8,9

This harmonizes with Isaiah's words which indicate that Israel will be the gate to the highway of holiness. It was of Israel that he prophesied:

“Go through, go through the gates, prepare ye the way of the people. Cast up, cast up the highway, gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people.”--Isaiah 62:10

Two chapters earlier he said:

“Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night, that men may bring unto thee the forces of the Gentiles [or nations].”--Isaiah 60:11

The Resurrection Starts with Israel

The resurrection of the dead will start with Israel, not just the resurrection of the Ancient Worthies but also the general resurrection. Paul says, “What shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?” (Romans 11:15) Also the words of Ezekiel:

“Ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves.”--Ezekiel 37:13

Physical healing will start with Israel. It was of them that it was said, “Behold, I will bring it health and cure, and I will cure them.”

(Jeremiah 33:6) Moral reform and restitution will start with Israel:

“A new heart also will I give you. And I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them.”--Ezekiel 36:26,27

“I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you. And I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them an heart of flesh; that they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances, and do them. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.”--Ezekiel 11:19.20

The earth will begin to return to Edenic conditions first in Israel.

Referring to the land of Israel Ezekiel says: “They shall say, This land that was desolate is become like the Garden of Eden.” (Ezekiel 36:35) In the psalms: “Then shall the earth yield her increase; and God, even our own God, shall bless us.”--Psalms 67:6

All these wonderful things the rest of the world will see and observe. As we read in Jeremiah:

“It shall be to me a name of joy; a praise and an honour before all the nations of the earth, which shall hear all the good that I do unto them.”--Jeremiah 33:9

It is of such things that the world will hear. They will hear that in Israel the lame man leaps as an hart and the tongue of the dumb sings! They will hear that in Israel men are actually returning to the days of their youth, that their families separated by death, are being reunited, that the land of Israel is full of joy and praise to God.

Thus Israel under the Ancient Worthies will be a showcase nation. It will be a most natural thing that the world will ask: “How can we share in these good things? How can we obtain the same benefits?” They will be in a hurry to act to obtain the same blessings. The scriptures tell us what the other peoples of the world will do. There is no mistaking the clear import of these scriptures:

“Thus saith the LORD of hosts, It shall yet come to pass, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities. And the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts. I will go also! Yea, many people, and strong nations, shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD. Thus saith the LORD of hosts, In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold, out of all languages of the nations; even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you; for we have heard that God is with you.”--Zechariah 8:20-23

“And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow into it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. And he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths. For out of Zion [the heavenly phase of the Kingdom] shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem [the earthly phase of the Kingdom].”--Isaiah 2:2,3

“In the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths.”--Micah 4:1,2

“At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the LORD, and all nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem.”--Jeremiah 3:17

Thus will be fulfilled the prophecy found in Acts:

“Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets, as it is written: After this I will return, and will 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 [all the rest of mankind] might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all his works, from the beginning of the world.”--Acts 15:14-18

We now quote from Reprints page 4575:

“Under the new regime of the New Covenant and its Millennial kingdom (in the hands of the antitypical Moses, the Mediator of the New Covenant), the law will go forth from Mt. Zion (spiritual Israel) and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem (natural Israel). The result will be wonderful blessings--mental, moral, and physical uplift, freedom from pests, the elimination of disease, etc. The start on the highway of holiness will there be made and the blessings of the Lord will fill the whole earth. Many nations will perceive and take note and desire to share those earthly good things with Israel. But the New Covenant will be made only with Israel. And the only way in which the other nations can receive a share of those restitution favors will be by becoming Israelites --coming under the laws, regulations, and disciplines of the New Covenant. ... Thus the highway of holiness will be opened up through Israel through the ancient worthies, through the New Covenant made with them. That highway

of holiness will lead from imperfection to perfection, justification, restitution of all that was lost in Adam and redeemed at Calvary.”

This is what Pastor Russell taught and proved true by the scriptures. This is what I learned when I came into the truth 56 years ago. I have not found the slightest reason to change it. As we see these promises to Israel nearing fulfillment, we are elated. But it also has a sobering effect. We realize how very short the time in which to make our calling and election sure. Jesus said:

“When ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. [Yes, Jacob's trouble is near.] And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh. And he spake to them a parable: Behold the fig tree, and all the trees. When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the Kingdom of God is nigh at hand.”--Luke 21:20,28-31

The Gospel Age Harvest Under Brother Russell's Ministry

THERE are many references to the Gospel Age Harvest in the Bible, but the most concise and connected one is the parable of the wheat and the tares, given by Jesus:

“Another parable put he forth unto them, saying, The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field. But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? From whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn. Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house; and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field. He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man. The field is the world. The good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one. The enemy that sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are the angels [or messengers].”--Matthew 13:24-30,36-39

Let us briefly consider the parable in the light of transpired events which we know to be facts. The good seed was sown by the son of man, Jesus, at his first advent. It was the gospel of the kingdom which he preached. It was the Divine Plan of the Ages, the faith once delivered to the saints, the opening of the scriptures on the way to Emmaus, the enlightenment at Pentecost. It was what we would today call The Truth. This is the seed that produced the true church, the children of the kingdom, the body of Christ, the wheat class of the parable.

This truth of the high calling, the great salvation, was first spoken by the son of man, our Lord:

“How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him.”--Hebrews 2:3

Thus was the good seed sown, and the early Church established.

Then we read that “while men slept,” an enemy, which Jesus identified as the devil, sowed tares in the field. Within a few generations after the apostles fell asleep in death, Satan began the sowing of the tare seeds. He gradually and subtly introduced new and strange ideas into the church. One by one all the beautiful and harmonious doctrines of the Divine Plan so familiar to the early church were subverted, transposed, twisted and corrupted. With each substitution of error for truth, the light became dimmer and dimmer until darkness covered the earth and gross darkness the people. (Isaiah 60:2)

The tare seeds sprouted, flourished, and produced a wonderful crop of imitation wheat; a counterfeit kingdom of God was established that was great and powerful. As always happens when Satan has his way, terror and frightfulness held sway. The Bible was suppressed, the name of God was dishonored and degraded by the doctrines of demons ascribed to him and by the horrors committed in his name. This was the period we call “the dark ages.”

It would seem that Satan had completely triumphed. There was still wheat in the field--there always has been; but the true wheat were so completely surrounded and obscured by the lush crop of tares as to be scarcely noticeable. This condition lasted for many centuries.

We will not go into detail regarding the great reformation, the timely invention of the art of printing, the gradual emerging of the Bible from the obscurity of dead languages, and the ever increasing understanding of it.

In due course in 1799 “the time of the end” arrived, in fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy (Daniel 11), and “the end of the age” approached, when Christ should return. These were times of great expectations among students of the Bible.

Just as some had been in expectation of Jesus before his first advent, it came to pass that in 1844 some students of Bible chronology, called Second Adventists, had expectations of his second advent. But they had a wrong conception of it. They expected that, in 1873 or 1874, Christ would return, visibly and in the flesh, whereupon the world, and all but Second Adventists would be burned up. \$FEditor's Note: The expectation regarding 1874 was held by a small group within the Adventist movements. In the 1860s the Advent Christian segment was more numerous than the Seventh Day Adventists who stopped setting dates in 1844. Some Advent Christians did continue setting dates during the 1850s and 1860s. According to one Seventh Day Adventist source there was a group identified as the 1873 time movement who were expecting the visible return of Christ about

1873. N. H. Barbour may have had some part in that. His book titled "The Lord's Coming in 1873" was published in 1871.

Now let us see what events the Lord was shaping behind the scenes. On February 16, 1852, there was born of consecrated parents a boy named Charles Taze Russell. He was destined for great things. He was without a doubt, as is said of the apostle Paul in Galatians 1:15, set apart from his very birth, by the Lord's grace. He was destined to become the honored servant of the Lord through whom would be restored to the church "the faith once delivered to the saints" (Jude 3), the truth in its purity, and upon whose shoulders would be placed the responsibility to initiate the harvest of the Gospel Age and direct its work for 42 years.

Like the boy Jesus, who sought to be about his Father's business at 12 years of age, young Charles T. Russell consecrated very early in life. We learn from his autobiography in Reprints page 3820 that in the year 1868, when he was only 16 years of age, he had already been a consecrated child of God for some years! This would place the time of his consecration at about 12 years of age.

He early recognized the falsity of the creeds of Christendom as being contrary to reason and to the loving character of God; for awhile his faith wavered. He then re-examined the Bible and realized that the creeds were not a true representation of its teachings. Under the Lord's guidance, he was placed in contact with Adventists and, for awhile, studied with them. Of this period he writes, in his autobiography:

"I soon began to see that we were living somewhere near the close of the Gospel Age, and near the time when the Lord had declared that the wise, watching ones of his children should come to a clear knowledge of his plan. At this time, myself and a few other truthseekers in Pittsburgh and Allegheny, formed a class for Bible study; and from 1870 to 1875 was a time of constant growth in grace, and knowledge, and love of God and his Word."

He was only 18 years old when he formed and led this class of Bible Students! While studying with this class in 1872, exactly 6,000 years from the creation of Adam, the philosophy of the ransom for all and the resulting restitution of all things was revealed to him in all its clarity.

Then young Russell realized that the chronology of the Adventists, showing that the Lord would return in 1874, might be correct. But he also saw that Christ's revelation in the flesh, and the anticipated burning up of the world, was incorrect. Accordingly, in 1872, he wrote a pamphlet entitled "The Object and Manner of the Lord's Return," and circulated 50,000 copies of it. This was certainly "meat in due season."

Now I will read a scripture and let you judge whether or not it fits the case exactly:

“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his Lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when he cometh, shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, that he shall make him ruler over all his goods.”--Matthew 24:45-47

Could it possibly have been anyone else that was here referred to?

After making a thorough review of the time prophecies and minutely examining all the evidence, by 1876 Brother Russell was fully convinced of the Lord's invisible presence since 1874, and that it was then that the harvest of the Gospel Age had begun.

This gave him the greatest thrill of his life. He writes of this time:

“The evidence satisfied me. Being a person of positive convictions, and fully consecrated to the Lord, I at once saw that the special times in which we live have an important bearing upon our duty and work as Christ's disciples; that, being in the time of harvest, the harvest work should be done; and that present truth was the sickle by which the Lord would have us do a gathering and reaping work everywhere among his children. ... The knowledge of the fact that we were already in the harvest period gave me an impetus to spread the truth such as I never had before. I therefore at once resolved upon a vigorous campaign for the truth. I determined to curtail my business cares, and give my time, as well as means, to the great harvest work.”

The returned Lord had found a devoted and enthusiastic servant--ready, able and willing to do what was required, at the time it must be done. Thus began the Gospel Age harvest under Brother Russell's ministry. He was 24 years old!

Brother Russell knew that it had been written that at the time of the harvest, “Judgment must begin at the house of God.” (1 Peter 4:17) Being a person of prompt and direct action, he called a meeting of all the ministers of Allegheny and Pittsburgh among whom were some very prominent clergymen. Astonishingly they all came to the meeting! Do you know of any young man of 25 today who could successfully call a meeting of all the ministers of this city?

This gives us an insight into the force of his personality. The holy spirit gave him an earnestness and fervency that was difficult to resist. He was like another young man named Stephen of whom it is written that “they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.” (Acts 6:10)

Brother Russell showed the assembled ministers the scriptures that indicated our Lord's presence, and urged them to investigate and

proclaim the message. But every one of them refused to believe it. This did not discourage Bro. Russell. On the contrary, he realized that since it was his mind that the Lord had enlightened with this great dispensational truth, it was his responsibility to pursue the work of the harvest.

Realizing that he had been called to a special service, he recognized and applied to himself and his co-workers these words of the Lord:

“Gather the wheat into my barn.”--Matthew 13:30

“Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice.”--Psalms 50:5

“And he shall send his angels [messengers] with a great trumpet [the Jubilee trumpet]; and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven [the ecclesiastical heaven] to the other.”--Matthew 24:31

He resolved to vigorously proclaim to those captive in Babylon the command to.. .

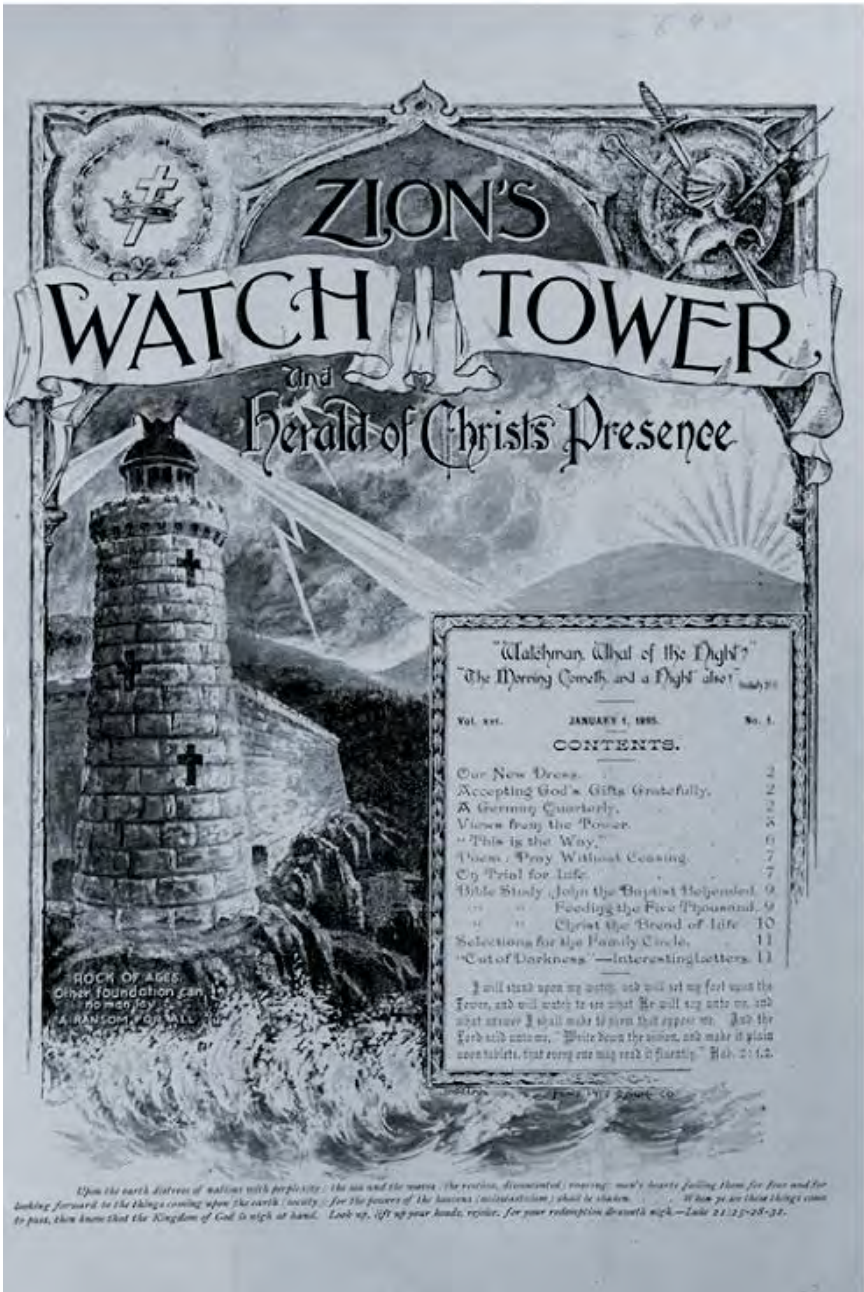
“Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.”--Revelation 18:4

He realized that Christ had returned as a crowned reaper:

“And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out of the temple crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, thrust in thy sickle, and reap; for the time is come for thee to reap.” --Revelation 14:14,15

He recognized that since 1874 Christ was present as King. He knew from Acts 3:21 and other scriptures that because Christ had returned, the “times of restitution” had commenced, that he was then living in the seventh thousand year period of man's history, that the Grand Jubilee, the great millennium of God's kingdom on earth had actually started. In this same year, 1877, Brother Russell gave up all his secular work to devote his entire time and fortune to the harvest work. His fortune was considerable, amounting to about \$350,000 which he had accumulated as a successful merchant. In those days this was an enormous sum. Over the years, he devoted every penny of it to the work.

In July, 1879, Brother Russell at the age of 27 began to publish a journal called “Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence.” He thus placed on record his realization that the Lord's second presence was the very foundation of the truth movement. In his opening remarks of that first issue, he gave the first object of its publication as follows:



“That we are living ‘in the last days’ --‘the day of the Lord’--‘the end’ of the Gospel Age, and consequently, in the dawn of the ‘new’ age are facts not only discernable by the close student of the Word, led by the Spirit, but the outward sins recognizable by the world bear the same testimony; and we are desirous that the ‘household of faith’ be fully awake to the fact that . .

'We are living, we are dwelling
In a grand and awful time;
In an age on ages telling;
To be living is sublime.'

It is also significant that the first article of that first issue was on the subject of our Lord's second advent.

Brother Russell pursued the harvest work with great energy and enthusiasm. In 1881 he wrote a pamphlet entitled "Food for Thinking Christians," and determined to circulate it on three consecutive Sundays to the congregations of all the protestant churches in the United States, Canada, and Great Britain. Do you realize the magnitude of this venture? There was only a small handful of brethren cooperating with him in the harvest work at that time, but the job was done on schedule. He printed 1,400,000 copies and hired telegraph messengers to hand them out, on the appointed Sundays, at church doors. This one grand witness cost him \$40,000, but it was only money.

From a small beginning, the harvest work grew rapidly and was abundantly blessed by the Lord. During his ministry Brother Russell traveled over a million miles all over the world, and this was before the advent of air travel. He delivered 30,000 sermons many of them three hours long. He wrote over 50,000 pages of Bible teachings including six volumes of "Studies in the Scriptures," "Tabernacle Shadows," Tower articles, booklets, and newspaper columns. These writings constituted the harvest message. These were circulated by the millions of copies in many languages throughout the entire world. He produced over 200 tracts, some of which attained a circulation of over 50 million copies. He wrote about a thousand letters a month. Is it any wonder he is referred to as "the man which had the ink-horn by his side"? (Ezekiel 9:2,11) One of my favorite pictures of Pastor Russell shows him at his writing desk with a fountain pen in his hand.

He knew he was that "man." An incident during the early days at Allegheny demonstrated this. An open Bible was to be painted on one of the large front windows of the office. A sign painter not in the truth was hired to do the job. Without instruction from anyone and entirely on his own volition, he painted the Bible open to Ezekiel chapter 9, telling of the man clothed with linen with the writer's ink-horn. When Bro. Russell looked at the finished painting, he turned pale. He recognized it for what it was: a sign from the Lord.

As the work progressed under Brother Russell's direction, there were usually about seventy well-qualified pilgrims on the road, each giving two or more talks a day. In addition there were about 700 part-time pilgrims devoting their weekends to the service. But the branch of

the harvest work nearest Brother Russell's heart was the colporteur service participated in by an army of 800 devoted, self-sacrificing workers. Much of the success of the harvest work in those days was due to the colporteurs.

In those days, before the advent of radio and television broadcasting, the most effective medium of publicity was through newspapers, and magazines. Brother Russell felt it was a duty to take advantage of this, and he wrote "sermons" which were syndicated and appeared in about 4,000 newspapers and magazines, as many as 2,000 at one time. It is estimated that he thus preached to about 15 to 20 million people weekly. That was quite an audience. An editor of that day wrote: "Pastor Russell's writings are said to have a greater newspaper circulation every week than those of any other living man."

There is an interesting anecdote in this connection. We know Brother Russell never took collections nor solicited funds. It had always been a mystery to outsiders where he got the money to carry on a religious campaign of such colossal proportions. So when a young brother called upon a newspaper editor regarding the syndicated sermons, the editor leaned over and asked the question that perplexed everybody: "Tell me, where does the money come from?" The young brother, innocently and quite truthfully, replied: "Oh, his Father is very rich." The secret was out! The editor felt he had the scoop of the season. The paper carried it the next day: His Father Is Rich! How true.

Toward the end of his ministry, in the year 1914 which was the 40th year of the harvest, the "Photo Drama of Creation" was presented to the public. Many felt that this was the most wonderful feature of the harvest work. A brother who was active in the work at that time writes:

"The moving pictures alone were the grandest, most beautiful, as well as the most instructive, of anything ever seen, before or since on the cinema screen. People looked upon these in wonderment. The colorings, to say nothing of the marvels in production, were superb; and all of it was done by consecrated talent. ... While the pictures [moving and slides] were the acme of beauty and charm, and correspondingly entertaining and instructive, I believe the most marvelous part of the whole drama was the lectures on the phonograph. Herein the supreme achievement of the whole endeavor stands out. Brother Russell was recognized as a master of simple, pure, expressive, constructive English, always; but taking these lectures as a whole, they are marvels of conciseness and comprehensiveness. Only a great master could ever have produced such results."

This was done in the era of silent pictures, long before color movies were introduced. At the height of this activity, “The Drama” was shown in 80 cities a day. In a short time, eight million people in the United States and Canada had heard and seen a glorious message from the word of God and in such an impressive way that they would never forget it for the rest of their lives. It was also shown in Great Britain and many European countries.



Brother Russell never claimed divine inspiration in his writings. He did claim, and certainly did have, divine supervision and enlightenment of mind. He wrote:

“Divine Providence has furnished the people of God at this time, an outline of the Divine Plan, and a detail of Bible doctrines, such as God’s people never before had in their possession. Without claiming any inspiration for the Studies in the Scriptures, we surely may claim a Divine supervision in respect to the matter which they contain, and the time of their presentation. Whoever admits that we are in the harvest time at all--that we have been in it since 1875--must acknowledge this also; that the Lord promised that at that time he would cause his people to sit down to a bountiful repast of spiritual food, and that he would be their servant, and bring forth to them `things new and old.’ (Luke 12:37) All who recognize these things must recognize these Studies in the Scriptures as being identified with the fulfillment of that promise.” --Reprints, page 4709.

On the afternoon of October 31, 1916, Ezekiel’s prophecy was fulfilled:

“And behold, the man clothed with linen, which had the ink-horn by his side, reported the matter saying, I have done as thou hast commanded me.”--Ezek 9:11

On that day, with exceeding joy, he met face-to-face his Lord and Master whom he loved so much and served so faithfully. On that day was fulfilled the prophecy of Jesus:

“He that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal; that both he that soweth, and he that reapeth, may rejoice together.”--John 4:36

Did you know that Brother Russell remembered you in his will? Yes, he did. Let me read it to you. Under the heading, Legacy of Love, he said:

“To the dear Bethel family, collectively and individually, I leave my best wishes, in hoping for them of the Lord His blessing, which maketh rich, and addeth no sorrow.”

Then he also left a legacy of love to each one of you gathered here right now. He said:

“The same I extend in a still broader sweep, to all the family of the Lord, in every place--especially to those rejoicing in the harvest truth!”

I think that described this convention.

The Great Hidden Treasure

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure, hid in a field; the which, when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman, seeking goodly pearls; who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.”--Matthew 13:44-46 WHEN Jesus spoke of a “treasure hid in a field,” he used an illustration of great power and appeal to men. Paul used the same illustration when he spoke of Moses, who esteemed “the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt.” (Hebrews 11:26)

Egypt was one of the oldest ruling nations and for thousands of years had been accumulating treasures. As a mighty military power, Egypt conquered and took spoil of hundreds of other nations for centuries. Located at the crossroads of trade between Europe, Asia, and the vast raw resources of Africa, she took tribute of every caravan, and amassed enormous wealth. The pharaohs of Egypt were so rich and had so much treasure that when the Israelites were slaves in Egypt, we read:

“Therefore they did set over them taskmasters, to afflict them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh, treasure-cities, Pithom and Raamses.”--Exodus 1:11

Whole cities had to be built with rows and rows of huge brick buildings to contain the “treasures of Egypt.” When Paul said Moses esteemed “the reproaches of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt,” it was no trifling matter.

There have been other vast accumulations of treasure. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries Genghis Kahn and his Mongolian hordes swept over most of the then known world. He was one of the greatest conquerors the world has ever seen. His armies were victorious from Asia's China Sea to the Dnieper River in Europe. He sacked and looted, and took spoil and tribute. He spared nothing. His armies were likened to locusts, denuding the land. He was called “the scourge of God.” Before he died, he had accumulated treasure beyond calculation.

In the sixteenth century, Pizarro, the Spanish conqueror, marched into Peru. At that time it was the empire of the Incas. (I have taken this from the Encyclopedia Britannica.) Pizzaro forced an audience with Atahuallpa, the Inca emperor. The interview was conducted by Pizarro's priest, Father Galverde, through an interpreter. The priest related briefly and dogmatically the history and teachings of the Roman Catholic faith. He stated categorically that the Pope had

given Peru to the king of Spain. Just imagine! He called upon the Inca to forthwith become Christian and to acknowledge Charles the fifth as his master. The encyclopedia says that to this extraordinary harangue, the Inca emperor vehemently pointed out to the priest certain difficulties in the Catholic religion.

Now, I wonder what these difficulties were. I suspect the doctrine of eternal torment may have been one of them. Nevertheless, the Inca emperor declined to accept either Catholicism or Spanish sovereignty. He then took the Bible from the priest's hands, looked at it, and flung it resentfully to the ground. The priest withdrew and Pizarro immediately gave the signal for attack. The crude weapons of the Inca soldiers were no match for Spanish muskets. There was a great slaughter. The captured emperor offered Pizarro a ransom for his release. He offered to fill the large room in which he was imprisoned with gold. The Spaniard agreed. The Inca fulfilled his promise and the room was filled to the ceiling with ingots of pure gold. Can you imagine the value of such a treasure especially at today's prices?

There is a sidelight to this story. Pizarro took the gold but he did not release the Inca. Instead, he ordered him brought to trial on the charges of murder, sedition and idolatry. It was really a mock trial. The Inca was condemned to death and because he was an idolater, he was condemned to death by fire: to be burned alive! All of Pizarro's officers, hard and cruel men though they were, objected to such a sentence as inhuman. But one man did not object, one man who thought the sentence was just and should be carried out. It was the priest! The Inca emperor was finally executed by strangulation, but by so doing, Pizarro killed the goose that laid golden eggs. That roomful of gold was but a small sample of the total Inca treasure which was then hidden away because of the treachery of the Spaniards.

Here are three examples of enormous treasure in the world. Where are they now? Where are the "treasures in Egypt"? Tombs of the Pharaohs have yielded golden coffins, masks, jewels and other such artifacts, but these amount to very little compared to the total treasures still buried in Egypt, treasures that are hidden. "Hid in a field," as Jesus said.

Where is the treasure of Genghis Kahn --the ransom of Asia and Europe? They say, "you can't take it with you." But in a way, Genghis Kahn did take it with him. He was buried and so was his treasure. "Hid in a field."

Every year expeditions are sent into the jungles of Peru in search of the Inca gold hidden from Pizarro. Many abandoned villages of the Incas have been found, many noble monuments, many evidences of

high civilization, and great intelligence--but no treasure. To this day, it is still hidden. "Hid in a field."

These treasures could be accidentally discovered at any time. A poor Arab farmer, scraping the ground with a wooden plow pulled by a donkey, could stumble upon the "treasures of Egypt." A Russian peasant, deprived of all capitalistic property and working on a collective farm, perhaps digging a well, could unearth the hoarded treasure of Genghis Khan. A highway worker, bulldozing a road through the jungles of Peru could suddenly open the door of a cave filled with hundreds of tons of Inca gold.

Imagine the feelings of those people--to be one moment, poor and discouraged and without prospects, then to suddenly find set before you, within your grasp, a great treasure--riches beyond calculation! Can you imagine the joy?



This is the picture Jesus was creating in the minds of his listeners when he said:

"The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which, when a man hath found, he hideth; and for joy thereof, goeth and selleth all that he hath and buyeth that field."

This brings to mind the statement about Jesus himself:

"Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."--
Hebrews 12:2

Tthe Treasure of the Parable

This suggests the primary meaning of the parable of the “Treasure hid in a field.” Just before Jesus gave this parable to his disciples, they asked him to interpret the parable of the “Wheat and Tares.” He told them, “The field is the world.” (Matthew 13:38) This gives us the clue.

Jesus, in his prehuman existence, saw a great treasure in the world. He saw the potentialities of a Millennial kingdom that would restore the fallen race of mankind to life and harmony with God. He greatly and joyfully desired to possess that treasure. But he had to first buy the “field.” He must pay the ransom price to buy the world of mankind. It cost him everything. He sold all that he had. “Though he was rich, yet ... he became poor.” (2 Corinthians 8:9)

“[He] made himself of no reputation and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross; wherefore, God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow; of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth.”--Philippians 2:7-10

Yes, things BC1under the earth; a “treasure hid in a field.”

The heavenly Father accepted the price that Jesus offered for the “field” which is the world. Jesus now had the right, through the agency of the kingdom of heaven, the Millennial kingdom, to raise the treasure out of the pit, to bring about the resurrection and restitution of mankind.

When a man begins to remove treasure from a field he has purchase to keep it safe, it would be natural for him to remove the most precious things first. The Lord said to Israel:

“Ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me, above all people; for all the earth is mine. And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and an holy nation.”--Exodus 19:5,6

“The Lord hath chosen Jacob for himself, and Israel for his peculiar treasure.”--Psalms 135:4

As spiritual Israel, we are the heirs of these promises. We are the “peculiar treasure” of our Lord Jesus Christ who, by virtue of his ransom sacrifice, bought the world. We are the first to be removed from the evil world:

“Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”--Titus 2:14

The Lord considers his people to be precious gems, a highly valued part of his treasure:

“And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them.”--Malachi 3:17

“Thou shalt also be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord; and a royal diadem, in the hand of thy God.”--Isaiah 62:3

After the Church class, or royal priesthood, have been first taken from among men, then the Millennial blessings will flow to natural Israel and all other nations.

Other Lessons

Although this is the primary application of the parable, there are other beautiful applications as well. The fact that Jesus did not interpret this parable to his disciples seems to indicate that it has several applications which in due time would be revealed by the holy spirit. So let us consider this parable further.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which, when a man hath found, he hideth; and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field.”

This kingdom of heaven is the Millennial kingdom. Its glories and honors, its privileges in connection with the world's restitution, is what constitutes the great treasure or prize of the high calling peculiar to the Gospel Age. This prize, which was first presented to our Lord Jesus, has since been set before us as well. The treasure is, to us, the desirability of obtaining joint-heirship with Christ in his Millennial kingdom. How great a treasure this is, and how hidden! Do you know of any but truth people who believe and teach the pure and unadulterated doctrine of ransom and restitution, of a Millennial kingdom, a kingdom of heaven which, as a result of a ransom for all, will give both the just and the unjust an opportunity to gain life everlasting? There are none! Yet this is a doctrine “which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.” (Acts 3:21) It is indeed well hidden. Together with it is hidden the grand hope for the prize of the high calling, the opportunity to reign with Christ in that “kingdom of heaven” and have a part in administering the Millennial blessings to “all the families of the earth.”

There are comparatively few who have found this “treasure hid in a field.” But to those who have seen it, it has been a message of great joy, satisfying the soul, and revealing God as a just, loving, all-powerful God. It has been a refreshing and delightful thing, compared with the miserable doctrines of the nominal systems. It has been a real treasure, beyond price.

Just as someone who stumbled upon a fabulous earthly treasure would be willing to sell everything he had to obtain it, knowing that the value of the treasure far exceeded everything he might have, those who see God's great divine plan of the kingdom of heaven to bless the world, who see the opportunity to share in it, and who hear the call or invitation to participate in it, are willing and anxious to sell all that they have--consecrate their all--to obtain that treasure. They do it joyfully.

And why shouldn't they? Wouldn't any man pay a dollar for something worth a million dollars? Let us consider this from every viewpoint. How long do you expect to live? Perhaps as much as a hundred years? That cannot be compared with immortality. What pleasures and satisfactions do you expect to enjoy in your brief lifetime, considering the problems of old age and declining health? They are not worthy to be compared with this description:

“In thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”--Psalms 16:11

Do you expect to earn or inherit wealth? That cannot be compared to being “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.” (Romans 8:17) Do you expect to rise to a high position in the world during your short lifetime? That cannot be compared with the promise that we shall be “kings and priests” (Revelation 1:6), and that we shall reign with Christ a thousand years. (Revelation 20:6) Do you expect to attain honor in the world and enjoy a measure of glory? That cannot be compared with the glory, honor and immortality, the divine nature, promised to the faithful.

The suffering and sacrifice of the present life in payment for the “field” is as nothing at all compared to the value of the treasure. As Paul so well expressed it:

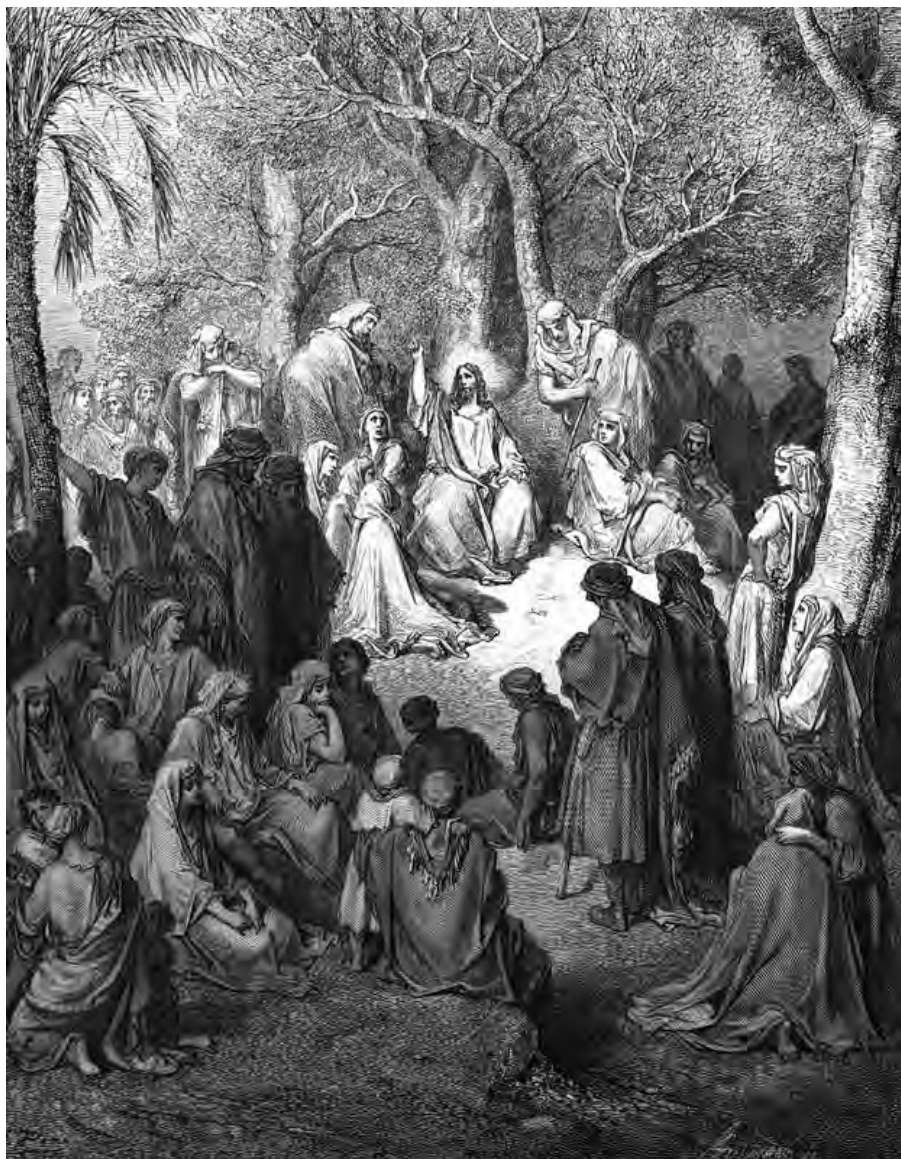
“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”--Romans 8:18

“But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but vile refuse, that I may win Christ, and be found in him.”--Philippians 3:7-9

Paul had found the treasure, and he bought it! It was his. It was on deposit for him, “laid up” for him:

“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, which the Lord the righteous judge, shall give me at that day.”--2 Timothy 4:7,8

Here Paul referred to his great hidden treasure as a “crown of righteousness.” By using a crown as a symbol, he referred to his share in the kingdom of heaven which will rule and bless all the families of the earth.



The Rich Young Ruler

Consider an incident in Jesus' life reported in Matthew 19, Mark 10 and Luke 18. It was after Jesus took the little children in his arms and blessed them. Luke says the young man was a ruler, Mark says he came running and knelt before Jesus. His running would indicate eagerness and enthusiasm; kneeling would show humility and respect. He asked Jesus a question: “Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?” It was a sincere question, not like

those that the Scribes and Pharisees asked Jesus, trying to entrap him. Jesus said that by keeping the commandments of the law he would live.

“The young man saith unto him: All these things I kept from my youth up. What lack I yet?”--Matthew 19:20

“What lack I yet?” This came from the young man's heart. It should be the frequent inquiry of every child of God. When we have done our best and still feel we have come so far short of the perfect standard, let us earnestly ask, “What lack I yet?” At other times, when we are complacent, and are inclined to feel somewhat satisfied with ourselves, let us search our hearts with the question: “Lord, what lack I yet?” The account says: “Then Jesus, beholding him, loved him.” The Lord will love you too if you inquire of him, humbly and sincerely, asking to know what you still lack. He will tell you just as he told the rich young ruler kneeling before him. Now we come to the point:

“Then Jesus, beholding him, loved him; and said unto him, One thing thou lackest. Go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross and follow me.”--Mark 10:21

Jesus must have loved this young man very much indeed because he offered him the greatest treasure in the universe, the treasure “hid in the field,” the kingdom of heaven. Jesus offered him discipleship and he told him what it would cost: Everything --everything the young man had, all his wealth, all his prospects, his position, honors, and reputation. More than that, “Take up the cross, and follow me.” Not only was he to divest and consecrate all his earthly things, but he was to carry the cross showing a daily, sacrificial, ignominious, dying by following Jesus, suffering with him (Romans 8:17) to be glorified with him, to possess that rich “treasure in heaven.”

What followed was tragic: “But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.” What a pitiful thing! By getting up from his knees and leaving, he had bartered away the greatest of treasures, “Eternal in the heavens” (2 Corinthians 5:1), for a few miserable years of earthly advantage. “He went away sorrowful.” How unlike the man of the parable who found the “treasure hid in the field” and who “for joy there of” sold all that he had. This young man had no joy; he “went away, sorrowful.”

The sequel to this incident shows conclusively what the promised treasure was, that it was indeed participation with Jesus in the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom that will bring restitution blessings to the world:

“Then answered Peter and said unto him: Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee. What shall we have therefore?”--Matthew 19:27

In other words, “You promised this young man treasure in heaven if he disposed of everything and followed you. That's just what we've done. What will our reward be?”

“And Jesus said unto them; Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me; in the regeneration [or restitution], when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory; ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.”--Matthew 19:28

Isn't that a perfect description of a participation in the Millennial kingdom which will bless the world?

Jesus promised this treasure of the kingdom to “Ye which have followed me.” He made this promise not only to those who heard his voice that day but also to all who have followed him since, including you and me. We have seen the treasure “hid in a field,” we have “found” it, we have “counted the cost,” we have “for joy thereof” sold all that we had and consecrated our all. We have not “turned away sorrowful.”

Another Example of Poor Thinking

There is another parable of Jesus emphasizing the utter futility of laying up earthly possessions as compared with the eternal riches of God:

“And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do, I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. [continuing from the Diaglott] And I will say to myself, Life! Thou hast an abundance of good things, laid up for many years. Rest, eat, drink and enjoy thyself. But God said to him, Foolish man! This night they will demand thy life from thee. And who then will possess what thou hast provided? This is he who amasses treasure for himself, and is not rich with respect to God.”--Luke 12:16-21

This is what the rich young ruler had done. He also had “great possessions.” He allowed his riches--enjoyable only during his brief lifetime--to influence him when he rejected the greatest invitation anyone can receive: to have a part in the eternal kingdom of heaven. Jesus sums up the lesson:

“But rather seek ye the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added unto you. Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell that ye have, and give alms;

provide yourselves bags [or purses] which wax not old; a treasure in the heavens that faileth not; where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”--Luke 12:31-34

Again we see what the treasure consists of. We are to seek the kingdom of God with as much fervency as a man seeking treasure hid in a field and then, with joy, sell or consecrate our all to obtain it.

How much does our participation in the kingdom of heaven mean to us? Is it really a treasure to us? Is it really precious to us? Is it so highly prized that we will, with joy, sell all we have, to attain it? Let us carefully examine ourselves--our innermost motives--because it is important. Why do we want a part in the heavenly kingdom? Do we want to be kings and priests and heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ, because of a desire to shine, to be above others? Do we run for the prize of the high calling for personal glory, personal honor, personal immortality?

Paul said, “In due season we shall reap, if we faint not.” (Galatians 6:9) What do we expect to reap? Personal exaltation? Is that our total conception of the treasure of the kingdom of heaven? **SATAN HAD THAT MOTIVE!** He said:

“I will ascend into heaven; I will exalt my throne above the stars of God. ... I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High.”--Isaiah 14:13,14

Do you realize how closely this boast of Satan describes what the Lord has promised us? It's a little frightening, isn't it? We, too, expect to “ascend into heaven.” By sharing Christ's throne, we, too, will be exalted “above the stars [or angels] of God.” We, too, “will be like the Most High” in the sense that we will partake of the divine nature. Ah, but there is one tremendous difference between our aspirations and that of Satan. That difference is one of motive. You can see how important motive is. Our motive must not be of selfish ambition as Satan's was. Our motive should be the same as our Master when he saw the treasure hid in a field and with joy, sold all that he had to buy that field, giving his life for the world, purchasing Adam and his race.

Our motive for desiring the kingdom of heaven should only be that we want a part in the work of restitution, lifting up the world of mankind out of the pit of death, and seeing them safely over the great highway of holiness to human perfection and full fellowship with God. We should desire to be kings for one purpose only--so that we may be used of the Lord to rule with equity to help the world. We should desire to be priests for one purpose only--so that we may bless the people. We should desire to be heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ so that we might fulfill God's will in administering “the

times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began,” restoring the earthly inheritance to Adam and his race. We should desire glory, honor and immortality so that we might, by our part in the Millennial kingdom, glorify and honor God, and do so throughout eternity.

The Pearl of Great Price

The same lesson is taught by the second parable, the “Pearl of Great Price.”

“Again the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman, seeking goodly pearls; who, when he had found one pearl of great price [or value], went and sold all that he had, and bought it.”--Matthew 13:45,46

Here the value of a share in the kingdom of God is likened to an unusually choice pearl which a pearl merchant finds and greatly desires to make his own. The parable says that the merchantman had been seeking such a pearl. How well this describes many who for years seek the truth before they find it, going from one church to another, from one denomination to another, finding some pearls which seem to have value but which, upon closer examination, are found to contain flaws, are hollow and worthless. These are the sectarian doctrines lacking in wisdom, justice or love, and dishonoring God. So the seeking goes on and on:

“That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him.”--Acts 17:27

They search desperately and continually; they cannot rest. They do not know exactly what they are looking for, they only know that their longings toward God remain unsatisfied. As a thirsty man seeks water, they continue their search. David expressed it:

“Oh God, thou art my God. Early will I seek thee. My soul thirsteth for thee ... in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is.”--Psalms 63:1,2

What is he thirsting for? The next verse tells us: “To see thy power and thy glory!” In other words, “The kingdom of heaven,” the “pearl of great price.” Those who thus diligently and earnestly seek him, he leads to his truth:

“When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none; and their tongue faileth for thirst; I, the Lord, will hear them; I, the God of Israel, will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys. I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water.”--Isaiah 41:17,18

To the seeking ones, the thirsty ones, God provides fountains, rivers, lakes and seas of the pure water of truth. Thus they find the “pearl of great price.” When they have found it and examined it, they know it is genuine. It is absolutely flawless. It is beautiful and perfect from whatever angle it is viewed. The merchantman realizes his long quest is over at last. He is “lost in wonder, love and praise.” The “pearl of great price” satisfies his longings as nothing else can do. He decides he must have it, he must make it his own. It becomes the most important thing in his life. The parable says he “went, and sold all that he had, and bought it.”

Now let us consider the price that must be paid and what it signifies. In the parable of the “Treasure Hid in a Field,” we see that the man “selled all that he hath.” We quoted Paul as saying, “I have suffered the loss of all things.” Jesus said to the rich young ruler, “sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor ... and follow me.” Peter said, “Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee.” Jesus said to his disciples, “Sell that ye have, and give alms.” Now in this parable of the Pearl the merchantman “went, and sold all that he had, and bought it.” We have mentioned the necessity of consecrating our all to the Lord. Jesus said, “Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:33)

It is important to know exactly what is meant by these expressions. Just as the rich young ruler did not fully understand the requirements of discipleship and “went away sorrowful,” considering the price too high, so some today, drawn to the step of consecration, feel unable to give up everything. After counting the cost, they regretfully turn away. Perhaps if they really understood what is meant by stewardship, they would not turn away but eagerly accept the conditions.

Christian Stewardship

What is Christian stewardship? We have no such position as “steward” in the world today. But in Jesus' day it was an important profession. A steward's office was a confidential one and of wide scope. It was a position of great trust. A steward had complete charge of his master's property. He had the liberty and full authority to do anything and everything the owner himself could do with his goods. He could make presents, cancel debts, or use in any manner he chose the goods under his care. He could not be held responsible as a culprit before the law because the very nature of his office as a steward was such that he fully represented and acted for his employer. Of course he might be discharged for unfaithfulness, but while a steward, he was fully authorized to use his judgment. (See Reprints, page 2715.)

What has this got to do with us? The Lord's consecrated people are called "good stewards of the manifold grace of God." (1 Peter 4:10) The Diaglott says, "the manifold favor of God." This certainly includes all material as well as spiritual blessings. We are called stewards of God and are told, "It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful." (1 Corinthians 4:1,2)

How do we become stewards? Whereas the Jews were required to give a tenth of all their possessions and income to the Lord, we must consecrate our all without the reservation of a single item. After we have covenanted our all to him--our time, money, property, influence, name, earthly hopes and ambitions, family and friends--the Lord, after accepting our full consecration, makes us personal "stewards" of these things. He hands them back to us, so to speak, saying: "All these things are now mine, but I assign them to your care. I appoint you as my steward over them." As his stewards, he permits and commissions us to use our consecrated all for him, to use reasonably and moderately, according to our best judgment of what would honor his name and forward his cause.

He permits us to use some of our consecrated means for our own sustenance and for the care of our families. He not only permits it, he commands it:

"But if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith."--1 Timothy 5:8

We also read about the necessity of "providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men." (2 Corinthians 8:21) However, we are expected to exercise moderation. "Let your moderation be known unto all men." (Philippians 4:5) The use of a reasonable portion of our time, energy and talent in providing for the necessities is expected and approved by the Lord. He does not regard this as a selfish use, but merely a necessary expenditure by his steward. As to the time, energy and talent we devote directly to his cause or on behalf of his people, he leaves this entirely in our hands, saying to us, so to speak:

"You have consecrated everything to me and I have returned it back to you. It is for you to use in my name and to my glory, and to the forwarding of my will in the earth as you understand my will from my word. Go, occupy, use. I will inspect your work later and I will judge of your love and your devotion by the carefulness with which you use your stewardship."--Reprints, page 2542.

What did Jesus mean when he said to the rich young ruler, "Sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come, take up the cross and follow me"? (Mark 10:21) This is a direct statement that the young ruler must dispose of everything.

Of course Jesus meant exactly what he said but I also think Jesus read that young man's heart. He must have seen goodness and nobility there because he loved him. He saw something else as well. He saw that the man was overly fond of his many possessions; they meant too much to him. This was his particular weakness. So Jesus put the matter to him in its fullest, strongest light, without any explanation. It is quite true that the condition of fellowship with Christ in the heavenly kingdom is the consecration of "whatsoever we have." We must sacrifice every earthly interest and even earthly life as well, in his service. Jesus kindly, but plainly told him this. He did not explain stewardship but waited to see if the young man would overcome his weakness of love of money.

Suppose this rich young man instead of going away sorrowful had sat down and counted the cost. Suppose he had consecrated himself and determined to give up all and follow Christ. Then, coming to Jesus, suppose he said:

"Master, I have determined to follow your counsel, to sell all and give to the poor and to follow thee. How and where shall I begin? I have twenty houses and three farms, much cattle and a fleet of fishing boats. Which shall I dispose of first, and how shall I distribute the money?"

That's what Jesus wanted to hear, a willingness to give up everything. Jesus probably would have said to the young man:

"Present all these things unreservedly to God and yield yourself as his servant also, and from that moment consider yourself God's steward, commissioned by him to use all those goods as well as your personal talents to his glory in serving those about you--as a steward who shall give an account. Be neither wasteful nor miserly. Think not of these goods henceforth as your own, and talk not about giving them again to the Lord, for once given they are his forever. Such portions of that consecrated property as you have need of he permits you to use for your personal and family necessities. Use the rest in the work of the Lord."

The young man was "very rich." Had he become a consecrated follower, he might have been kept busy many years disposing of his goods and had much pleasure and satisfaction doing so. There is no reason whatever for supposing that the Lord meant for him to sell his houses and other property at once and throw the money into the street to the multitude. The selling or disposing of that which he had would go on as he found uses for the money in the service of God and as he progressed in that service. (See Reprints, page 855.)

To feed the poor would not necessarily mean to feed the hungry with the bread that perishes. I think it would primarily mean to feed the spiritually hungry with the bread of life. It would mean to spend self

for the highest spiritual good of others, to give them the gospel of Jesus Christ. As Jesus said:

“I am the bread of life. He that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.”--John 6:35

Paul said we are, “stewards of the mysteries of God.” (1 Corinthians 4:1) It is our privilege to tell others of the mysteries of God's divine plan of the ages. These are the lasting and eternal things we have to impart to the spiritually poor, the spiritually hungry, the spiritually thirsty.

Have you found the “treasure hid in a field”? Have you seen it? Has it filled your heart with joy? Have you greatly desired to obtain it, to make it your own? Would you rather have a part in the kingdom of heaven, the “treasure in heaven,” than to possess all the glittering treasures of the world? Have you sold--consecrated--all you have on earth to obtain the heavenly treasure? If you have, you are blessed indeed because you are following in the footsteps of Jesus. It was Jesus who said of you, “The Father himself loveth you.” (John 16:27)

The Greater Works

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.”--John 14:12

LIFE is sweet. Life is dear. It is the greatest gift of God for without life nothing can be experienced, nothing can be enjoyed, nothing can be known, nothing can be hoped for--“For there is no work, nor device nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave.” (Ecclesiastes 9:10) For this reason mankind clings to life very tenaciously. A man will spend his every treasure and whatever he can borrow to regain his lost health, and to prolong his life to the pitiful utmost.

Let there be a rumor that cures have taken place at some remote shrine and thousands of stricken people will journey there--regardless of the cost to themselves of money and pain. People will travel literally around the world on the slim chance that their ailments might be healed and a few more days of life enjoyed. The announcement that a new drug is successful against a disease instantly brings tens of thousands of frantic requests for the medicine.

Man seems to realize instinctively that he was designed to live forever and he protests and struggles against any termination of that life. So powerful is this natural instinct for survival that even the Lord's people who confidently expect that “this mortal must put on immortality,” nevertheless cling tightly to human life. This is entirely appropriate for it is for God to decide the time of our change.

But I remember an old brother, many years ago, when I was a child in the truth. He was crippled and literally bent double with arthritis. He was in constant pain. He had also suffered several heart attacks and always expected that the next one would be fatal. When he came to meetings he inched his way along, slowly and painfully, by the use of two short canes. The burden of his testimonies was always the same:

“Oh, if the Lord would only call me home! I, like Paul, have fought the good fight; I have kept the faith; I have finished my course. If I could only lay down this miserable, misshapen, mortal body in which I am imprisoned, and in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, be clothed with that glorious divine body the Lord has promised me. I can hardly wait for my change to come. Oh, dear friends, it is so hard to wait!”

After a while he would have another heart attack. He would immediately send for the doctor to administer adrenaline or oxygen

or whatever other emergency treatment might be necessary in order to prolong his tortured human existence a little while longer.

I am reminded of Elijah, who sat down under a juniper tree in the desert and wished earnestly to die. Why had he fled to the desert in the first place? Because Jezebel had threatened to kill him. It doesn't make sense except to show that life is sweet and every human instinct makes men cling to it.

Human nature was the same in Jesus' day except that the situation then was much more hopeless. Today modern techniques of medicine and surgery have controlled many diseases. Large research facilities have been set up. Clinics and hospitals are widely available and new cures and wonder drugs are found almost daily. But in Jesus' day medical knowledge was primitive and comparatively ineffective. Sanitation was poor and there were no diagnostic and treatment centers. Some serious diseases were handled by such desperate measures as heartlessly banishing the sufferers into desert or wilderness areas so that others might not be contaminated. So it is reasonable to suppose that the proportion of sick, suffering, crippled and blind was much greater in those days than in civilized countries today.

Under these conditions the Jews, who had the scriptures read to them regularly every Sabbath day, would think with longing on some events in their past history. The sick ones would think of the time the fiery serpents bit the children of Israel so that many sickened and died. But under the Lord's direction, Moses made a brazen serpent, and raised it upon a pole. If any were bitten, they looked upon the brazen serpent and were healed. (Numbers 21:8, 9) "What a wonderful arrangement that was!" they would say. "We, too, have been bitten by sin and disease and death. If only someone like Moses, or greater than Moses, would appear. We could just look to him and be healed!"

There were many lepers in those days. Those having this dreadful disease would remember and say, "Elisha, the prophet of the Lord, healed the leprosy of Naaman, the Syrian. (2 Kings 5:10-27) If only another such prophet of the Lord would come and heal us of our leprosy!"

The poor and needy--those suffering from malnutrition and starvation--would remember the manna and the quails of the wilderness journey. They would also remember how Elisha caused the widow's oil to increase and never fail (2 Kings 4:2-7) and how he made twenty pieces of bread feed a hundred men with some left over (2 Kings 4:42-44). "Oh, Lord, send us bread too" they would pray.

Then there were those who had lost loved ones in death--the cruelest blow of all. They would remember how, when the widow's son had died, Elijah raised him back to life:

“And the woman said to Elijah, now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and that the word of the Lord in thy mouth is the truth.”--1Kings 17:17-24

Yes, they too would be able to recognize a prophet from God and listen to him and believe him--if one would only come healing the sick, feeding the multitude, and raising the dead--as did those prophets of old.

The afflicted ones in Israel would remember other promises too. The psalmist had sung:

“Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction [or death].”--Psalms 103:2-4

Isaiah had spoken of a time when “the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick.” (Isaiah 33:24) Then he had joyfully announced a message from God saying,

“He will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing.”--Isaiah 35:4-6

Malachi had spoken of a mysterious “Sun of righteousness ... with healing in his wings.” (Malachi 4:2) These were the things they looked for, longed for, and hungered and thirsted for.

The Healings Attracted an Audience

There was no telegraph or telephone in those days, no daily newspapers, not even a regular mail service since not many knew how to read or write. But word began getting around, as though by electricity, and rumors started to fly--A NEW PROPHET HAD ARISEN IN ISRAEL! “This man can heal all manner of diseases, even leprosy,” the reports said. “He can cast out demons! He just tells them to leave and they do!”

At first there was disbelief--there had been false prophets before. “Let's not get too excited about this,” someone would say, “probably nothing to it.” Then the next caravan would bring more news--“He is a young man, named Jesus from Nazareth. He has cast out a legion of demons; they entered a herd of swine, and went over a cliff! A touch of his hand, and the blind receive their sight! Even one born blind, without eyeballs, can now see!”

There was still some disbelief--this was just too good to be true. Then came the news that the dead son of a widow at Nain had been actually restored to life by this wonderful young man, and that he had miraculously fed not a hundred as Elisha had done in days of old, but five thousand persons! That was all they needed to know! How could they miss? Here was a man of God who would not only heal their diseases, but if they ran out of money he would feed them as well. So we read, "And there went out a fame of him throughout all the regions round about." (Luke 4:14) Thousands upon thousands of people left their homes and businesses and converged upon the place where Jesus was: the sick, the lame, the blind, the deaf and dumb, and those with mental afflictions. The able-bodied ones carried the disabled ones; those with sight led the blind. All had one purpose--to find this man Jesus and be healed of their diseases.

It was the most natural thing in the world that they should do this. This is what Jesus wanted them to do. He wanted them to come to him. It was ordained that he should be identified in just this manner--by his miracles of healing--and thus to draw men to him. As we read:

"Now when John had heard in the prison the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples, and said unto him: Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another? Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see--the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up and the poor have the gospel preached unto them."--Matthew 11:2-5

Jesus knew that John the baptist was familiar with the old prophecies--he would recognize their fulfillment, he would know from the works of Jesus that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. John did know.

Picture the situation. Suppose it was announced today by reputable eye-witnesses that there was a man lecturing publicly in your city who could heal every disease, regardless how advanced, including cancer and insanity, who could cure every degree of blindness, instantly repair the damage to any organ or limb, and even bring back to life any who had died up to four days before. What would happen? Why there would be the greatest traffic jam in history! Just about everyone would want to see him and hear him. Although many would come out of curiosity, most would come in desperate earnestness--to be healed of their afflictions. Human nature was the same in Jesus' day; the proportion of afflicted ones was much greater.

They came by thousands and thousands, most of them on foot--poor, ill-clothed, dusty, hungry, sick or caring for the sick, weary from

their journey, homesick in strange surroundings, scattered from their homes. Jesus' heart went out to them when he saw them.

“When he saw the multitude he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted and were scattered abroad.”--Matthew 9:36



Many of us do not realize the really magnificent scope of Jesus' healing activities. Some have the impression that he healed only a few people, as a sort of small sample of what would eventually be done in his millennial kingdom. But in fact he gave a most generous sample. He translated his great compassion into great action. As we read:

“And from Jerusalem, and from Idumea and from beyond Jordan; and they about Tyre and Sidon; a great multitude, when they had heard what great things he did, came unto him.”--Mark 3:8

“A great multitude of people, out of all Judea and Jerusalem, and from the sea-coast of Tyre and Sidon, which came to hear him, and be healed of their diseases. And the whole multitude sought to touch him, for there went virtue [power] out of him and healed them all.”-- Luke 6:17,19

A great multitude is a lot of people, and he healed them all--not just one or two, here and there, but all.

“And Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every sickness and every disease, among the people.”--Matthew 9:35,36

Visiting “all the cities and villages and healing every sickness and every disease” covers a lot of territory and a lot of people.

“Now, when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with diverse diseases, brought them unto him; and he laid his hands on every one of them, and healed them. And when it was day, he departed.”--Luke 4:40,42

Note that he seems to have started his healing when the sun was setting, and did not finish until daylight. It took him all night, but he healed “every one of them.”

How else could it possibly be? Could Jesus, with his loving and compassionate heart, turn to his disciples and say, “That is enough, I will heal no more today--maybe some other time?” Ah no! In that great multitude would be those who had traveled long distances to find him and had already waited for days for their turn to see him. Some had reached the limit of their endurance and were faint. The most serious cases of illness would find it the most difficult to approach him. The crowd is described in one place as “An innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trod one upon another.” (Luke 12:1) In their desperation to be healed, the somewhat stronger would push aside the weak, literally treading upon them, so that those who needed healing the most, would be left to the last. So Jesus stayed to the last and healed “every one of them,” even though it took all night! Thus we read:

“He healed all that were sick; that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet saying: Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses.”--Matthew 8:16,17

Jesus' Ministry Cost Him Something

He was “touched with the feeling of our infirmities.” (Hebrews 4:15) “Himself took our infirmities”: what does this mean? It means that Jesus' healing ministry cost him something!

“Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows ... he was wounded [tormented] for our transgressions; he was bruised for our iniquities ... with his stripes we are healed.”--Isaiah 53:4,5

The reference here is not only to his painful death on the cross as a ransom--it included far more than that. His heart ached for every unfortunate person he saw. He was moved with compassion. When he saw someone in pain, he sympathetically felt that pain. When he saw heart-breaking sorrow over the death of a loved one, he wept! He daily bore their griefs, and carried their sorrows. His heart was wounded and bruised by the things he saw--the hopelessness and degradation and despair of the people under their bondage to Satan. He was tormented by the sight of all the suffering he saw.

All this was a drain on his nervous energy. When he healed them, he suffered a further loss--“For there went virtue out of him”--vitality went out of him and he felt the loss of it.

This is revealed by an incident recorded in Mark chapter five. A certain woman had been afflicted by a wasting disease for twelve long years. During this time she had sought help from the physicians and had suffered many things at their hands, but had received absolutely no relief. Going from one doctor to another she had spent everything she had, but instead of getting better she had grown worse. Then she had heard of this wonderful young man named Jesus who was able to heal every disease. Weak as she was, she sought him out. But when she found the crowd around him was so great, she couldn't get the Master's attention. Important things were going on just then--one of the rulers of the synagogue had asked Jesus to heal his dying daughter. Jesus had consented. A great crowd was accompanying him to the ruler's house to see a miracle, so the poor woman knew it would be impossible for her to push her way through that crowd to see Jesus and present her petition. After all, who was she to claim his attention above that of a ruler of the synagogue?

Then, in her humility, she reasoned, “Why should I even take the time to speak to him? He has such a super-abundance of power that if I may only reach out and touch his clothes I shall be whole. He won't miss it, he won't even have to know about it.” So she joined the multitude. As the crowd pressed to the front and sides of Jesus to catch his every word, she slipped up behind him and reaching out, she managed to touch his garment. It was as though she had touched a live wire--she felt a tremendous surge of energy permeate her entire body, and with great exhilaration she knew she had been healed.

“And Jesus, immediately knowing in himself that virtue had gone out of him, turned about in the press and said, Who touched my clothes? And his disciples said unto him, Thou seest the multitude

thronging thee; and sayest thou Who touched me? And he looked round about to see her that had done this thing. But the woman fearing and trembling, knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before him and told him all the truth. And he said unto her, Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague.”--Mark 5:30-34

Yes, Jesus had instantly felt virtue or power go out of him; we can presume that this occurred every time he healed anyone.

Let us try to get the full implication of this. Thousands upon thousands--a very great multitude, from all parts of the country--gathered to see and hear him, bringing all their sick with them. We read:

“And the whole multitude sought to touch him, for there went virtue out of him and healed them all.”--Luke 6:19

If one woman touching the hem of his garment caused a loss of vitality that he could feel, what would the touch of a great multitude do to him? Of course he was a perfect man with an extra-ordinary store of natural vitality and unusual recuperative powers, but we can reasonably conclude that each incident of healing and teaching the multitude left him tired and exhausted physically. He was human after all. As the multitude sought him, he was literally touched with the feeling of human infirmities, he literally bore human griefs and carried human sorrows. He was wounded and bruised and tormented by human sins, yet without sin. When we consider the vast multitudes he contacted during his ministry, we realize that his 3 1/2 years of experience along this line far exceeded a lifetime of ordinary human experience.

Now let us recapitulate for a moment. Jesus had come to offer himself as a ransom for all, but he also came to preach the truth of God's kingdom to Israel--to give natural Israel an opportunity to become spiritual Israel. This is one of his last statements on earth:

“To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world--that I should bear witness unto the truth. Everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice.”-- John 18:37

“Every one that is of the truth.” This means that he had to give the opportunity to all Israel to hear his voice or message, and he was only one man with a few ignorant and unlearned disciples. He had no radio, no television, no microphones, no power amplifiers, no tape recorders, no printing presses, no tracts, no magazines--and his time was very short too--just 3 1/2 years in which to perform a great task.

“Fishing” for Men

What did he do? When he told his disciples that he would make them “fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19), he revealed to them his method. As a fisherman offers the fish a bait, he would offer the people something they wanted very much--and they would come to him. Then he would preach to them the gospel of the kingdom--the good news that they could become the spiritual seed of Abraham, a nation of kings and priests, that they could be used to bless all the families of the earth.

What was the bait? A rich foretaste of the blessings which would, eventually, be to all the families of the earth by his millennial kingdom on earth, when life would be given more abundantly, when there would be no more sickness and pain, when all tears would be wiped away, when there would be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying. (Revelation 21:4) Yes, it was a foretaste of God's kingdom, when the desire of all nations shall come. (Haggai 2:7) This is confirmed by Luke:

“And heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.”-- Luke 10:9

Near the close of his ministry, Jesus commissioned seventy disciples to perform a harvest or gleaning work after him--to go to every city and place and preach the gospel so that no one might be overlooked. He gave these seventy disciples miraculous powers to attract people. He told them that when they entered a city, they should “heal the sick that are therein and say unto them, The Kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.” In other words, “You have tasted in advance the blessings of God's kingdom to come--this is but a sample of what the kingdom of God will eventually do on a vast and worldwide scale.” Jesus' miracles, especially his healings, identified him as the Messiah (Mark 12:37), “and the common people heard him gladly.”

For a while Jesus was the most popular person in the land. On one occasion five thousand banded together and “when they had seen the miracle that Jesus did, said, This is of a truth that prophet (John 6:14) that should come into the world.” They planned to take him and make him a king.

Soon the time came when Jesus had taught his disciples everything their fleshly minds could absorb. They must now wait for the coming of the holy spirit to further enlighten them, to lift them to a higher plane of understanding. On one of his last days on earth Jesus gathered his disciples about him and said, “I have yet many things to say unto you but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit, when the spirit of truth is come it will guide you into all truth.” (John 16:12,13) For 3 1/2 years they had witnessed his mighty works of healing and his other breath-taking miracles. They themselves had been empowered

to perform some miracles in the name of Jesus. So they were thoroughly persuaded that Jesus was indeed the Messiah sent from God. It was on the occasion of this same gathering that Jesus said the words of our text: "Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me; or else believe me for the very works sake." Then he made a surprising statement which has mystified and frustrated Christians for centuries:

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do."-- John 14:11,12

Greater works than these? What an astounding thought! What could be greater than raising the dead, to defy the cruel finality of death as Jesus did, to tell the mourners to stop their lamentations, to tell a heartbroken mother to refrain her voice from weeping, and her eyes from tears (Jeremiah 31:16), to take the cold hand of a little dead child and say "arise," to feel the pulse leap beneath your fingers and see the warm flush of life flood the white cheeks, to see the eyes open and look about with wonder at the strange gathering, to see the mother's tears of hopeless sorrow turn to tears of joy as she clasps her darling in her arms? Greater works than these?

Greater works than these? To have all the sick of the entire countryside assemble before you--sick of every conceivable disease and infirmity--and to take them one after another and to heal every one of them?

Greater works than these? To cause the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the dumb to speak, the lame to leap and run?

Greater works than these? To change water into wine, to feed five thousand persons with five loaves and two fishes, to walk on water, to still a mighty storm?

Greater Works Than These?

Yes, it is true, absolutely true! Greater works than these have been performed and will be performed by the followers of the Master! I am not referring to the tent meetings of so-called healing evangelists where, from among the thousands that come, only a pitiful handful claim to have been helped. I am not referring to the shrines and grottos where purported healings are even less frequent. These are not greater works.

Have you ever seen someone rise from the dead? I have, and it is a most awe-inspiring sight. I have seen men, dead in trespasses and sins become quickened, rise up, and walk joyfully in newness of life. (Ephesians 2:1-5) You have too! Is not this a greater work? Those whom Jesus raised up died again in due course, but these have life

eternal--destined for glory, honor and immortality! In the language of Paul, the two are "not worthy to be compared!" Jesus did not do this greater work at his first advent because it was not yet the due time to do it. He had first to die and ascend to the Father before "the new and living way" could be opened and the greater works be performed.



Have you ever seen the healing of the blind? Of course you have. There is no greater blindness than that of the mind--blinded by Satan, blind to God's mercy and loving-kindness, blind to God's plan of the ages. Spiritual blindness is gross darkness! We have all been blind but now we can see--really see! The blind ones healed by Jesus were able to see the things of earth for a few years--and it was a

wonderful thing. But how much greater the opening of the eyes of the understanding--to have the glorious gospel of Christ shine into the mind, to see the heavenly light, to appreciate the beauties and colorations and marvels of all the facets of the divine plan, and finally to "see Him as He is!" This is indeed a greater work!

The healing of those being tormented by the fevers of worldly ambition, pride or discontent, through the truth, releasing them from the burdensome anxieties and care of this life, just as Peter's wife's mother healed of her fever by Jesus, arose and ministered unto the Master and those with him (Matthew 8:15), so these healed from their feverish lust for riches, and consuming ambition and pride of life, joyfully minister serving the Lord and his brethren. This is a much greater work! Then there is the healing of the loathsome leprosy of sin, bringing about the blessed state of justification, transforming the unclean outcast into a child of God. How much greater this is than the extending of human life for a few brief years!

Changing water into wine? Yes, greater works than this. Taking the clear water of truth and using it to produce the most excellent wine--the wine of participation and communion in the shed blood of Jesus Christ, and the wine of joy which at his invitation we drink with him in his kingdom, at a wedding feast far grander than that at Cana.

Have you seen a multitude of five thousand fed and filled with only five barley loaves and two small fishes that had been blessed by the Lord? You've seen a far greater work than that with very modest resources, aptly comparable to only five loaves and two fishes, but richly blessed by the Lord. A worldwide promulgation of spiritual food has been made to millions of people during this harvest time by the use of tracts, books, newspapers, public meetings, radio, television and personal witness work. Now the brethren in the United States and Canada are taking steps to make the delicious food of the gospel available to the multitudes in Japan. Who knows but that there may be twelve basketsful left over for use in China and elsewhere? Is not this a much greater work?

Have you seen anyone rebuke a mighty storm and create a great calm? Is it possible to perform a greater work than that? Yes it is. Remember there were only a few disciples on the ship that day who were saved from the storm that Satan had brewed. On the other hand, how many thousands of the Lord's people have been caught in Satan's storms of circumstances and have cried, "Master, Master, we perish!" They have heard the Master's "Peace, be still," and have experienced that blessed calmness of mind which comes from a renewed faith that "all things work together for good." As Jesus walked upon the stormy sea, the Christian serenely walks the way he has chosen in a world gone mad, rising above the restless and turbulent conditions of this present evil world. The faith of Jesus'

followers today is stronger than was Peter's who, in attempting to follow Jesus upon the water, sank in panic and cried, "Lord save me!" This too, is a greater work.

Personal Participation in These Works

But in what way do we personally have part in these "greater works"? This is important because Jesus said that those who "believe in him" would do the greater works. First and most important, we individually participate in these "greater works" in the sense that they are done in us, with our cooperation and invitation. We have, as Paul expressed it in Romans 6:19, yielded ourselves as servants to righteousness and holiness. Each consecrated and accepted follower of the Master has been raised from dead works to newness of life. What an exhilarating experience it has been! Just as Lazarus, hearing the voice of Jesus say, "Come forth!" rose up and left the tomb, we too have responded and "passed from death unto life."

The eyes of each one of us have been opened to see the deep things of God, but first it was necessary for us to realize our blindness and earnestly desire to see. There was once a poor blind beggar on the Jericho road who persistently cried out, "Jesus, thou son of David, have mercy on me!" (Mark 10:47) When Jesus stopped and asked him, "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" he eagerly responded: "Lord, that I might receive my sight!" He knew what he wanted! So we too must cooperate and yield ourselves.

Consider the incident when Jesus saw a man who had been born blind. He made clay with his saliva, "and anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay." (John 9:1-25) Then Jesus told him to go to a certain pool of water and wash off the clay. When the man did so, he received his sight. Jesus could have easily healed him without this procedure, but he gave the man an opportunity to cooperate, to yield himself. Blind as he was, he had to travel a certain distance to the pool. It tested his sincerity and his faith. A skeptical man might have said, "What nonsense is this? Will mud cure the blindness I have had from birth?" But this man went and did as he was told. When the splendor of light and sight burst upon his new eyes, he was able to say the words from which a grand old hymn has been composed: "One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind now I see!"

There was an even deeper significance to this peculiar method our Lord used to heal the blind man and it illustrates our part in the "greater works." The secretions of his mouth, representing the spirit of the Lord's lips--his grace and truth--and the soil with which he mixed it, represented the poor, earthly talents of the Lord's people engaged in telling forth the truth as they have opportunity. This

combination has been most effective in opening the eyes of understanding of those whom the Lord has called.

By earnestly desiring these “greater works” to be done in us, by yielding ourselves to their accomplishment in ourselves, and by cooperating with the Lord and our brethren in Christ to apply these works to other called-out ones, we fulfill the prophecy of our text: “And greater works than these shall ye do.” By our efforts and cooperation, feeble but blessed by the Lord, other ears too are unstopped to the truth. The lameness of character in others, as well as ourselves, is overcome, the spiritual palsy, fever and leprosy healed, and the minds, obsessed and sick with doctrines of devils, are made clean and lucid!

The Body of Christ Does These Works

Of course, no one individual does all of these “greater works.” But as members of the Body of Christ, we all share in whatever is accomplished by the whole body. Paul wrote:

“And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee, nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.”--1 Corinthians 12:21,22

Here is the next verse from the Diaglott: “But much more necessary are those members of the Body which are thought to be more feeble.” Isn't that encouraging? We can all take heart from that verse. This means that our humble and feeble efforts, which we think are so futile and so ineffective, are noted by the Lord, and we are reckoned and counted as having a real part in the complete works of the entire body, including the head, Christ Jesus! I continue with the 29th and 30th verses:

“Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?”

The obvious answer is “No.” But each one of us, regardless of our positions in the body, are considered by God as participating in the works of the whole body.

There is an important application of our text which is yet to be fulfilled--more “greater works” to be done--and it is a wonderful and delightful prospect. We are assured that if we are faithful unto death, we shall “live and reign with Christ a thousand years.” The work of that Millennial Kingdom is a work of restitution. We will be the administrative agents of Christ in the performance of that work. At his first advent, by his wonderful works Jesus gave the people a foretaste or sample of that work, and it will be our grand privilege to bring about its complete fulfillment. Instead of a few persons,

temporarily raised, all the dead will be awakened, and, if obedient, will live forever.

Under our administration all the sick will be healed, every physical disability will be eliminated, and the people will stay well. Satan and his angels, with their evil influences, will be removed from the scene to obsess human minds no more. Instead of five thousand, the entire world of mankind--all who have ever lived--will be supplied abundantly with the bread of life. As Jesus gave the bread into the hands of his disciples to distribute to the hungry multitude, it will then be through us that the merit of Jesus' ransom sacrifice will be applied, and "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." (Isaiah 11:9) Then will be completely fulfilled the prophecy of our text: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works than these shall he do."

We thank the Heavenly Father for the great privilege accorded us, to participate in the "greater works" now. May we be prepared for the still greater works of the future!

The Lilies of the Field

ON ONE occasion a very large number of people gathered to hear Jesus preach the gospel of the kingdom and to be healed by him. The account is in the twelfth chapter of Luke. We read in the first verse that “there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trod one upon another.” The Diaglott says that “the crowd ... assembled by tens of thousands so that they trampled on each other.”

But Jesus wanted to especially teach his disciples that day and warn them about something. So after ministering to the crowd, he drew his disciples aside to have an intimate talk with them. The Scribes and Pharisees had been getting particularly vicious of late. Jesus had exposed their evil deeds and they reacted with murderous intent. So he warned his disciples, saying, “Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.” Then he told his disciples not to be afraid of them and assured them of God's particular care saying, in the sixth verse, “Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God?” Matthew 10:29 makes these words of Jesus even more meaningful: “And not one of them shall fall on the ground without your Father.” He went on to say, “But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.”

It was hard for his disciples, and it is hard for us, to conceive of the Almighty God who is so very great taking notice of things as small and insignificant as sparrows, caring whether one of them falls to the ground or not. But it must be so. Didn't he create the sparrow? Didn't he design its organism? Didn't he make its bones hollow and light and at the same time shaped and braced for maximum strength? Didn't he design its wings, and arrange its colorful feathers to permit graceful flight? Didn't he give it a coat of down and higher temperature than other animals to keep it warm? Didn't he put a song in its heart and implant in its little head unerring instincts which rival the highest navigational skills of civilized man? Of course he marks the sparrows fall! He has regard for every living thing that he has made. He loves them all. He himself called them “very good.” (Genesis 1:31) We read of him in Psalm 145:16, “Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.”

Nothing is too small for God to notice. But it is so different in the world. Big important men of the world “can't be bothered” with little things and little people. But the Almighty God, the Creator of heaven and earth, notices and cares. Jesus told us about the sparrows on this occasion to teach us that we, the Lord's people, are his special and particular care, “Of more value than many sparrows.”

Do you realize that to a child of God, nothing happens by accident? This is so, because “all things work together for their good.” As in the case of the sparrow, “Not one of them shall fall ... without your Father!” Every incident in life has meaning for us and is for our good, for our highest spiritual welfare. It is so different with the world in general. With them God permits the wrath of men and of Satan to have free sway, to bring misfortune and calamities without rhyme or reason except as it provides an experience with sin. But the wrath of men and of Satan has no indiscriminate power over us. This is shown by John 19:10,11. Pilate said to Jesus, “Knowest thou not, that I have power to crucify thee?” Jesus replied, “Thou couldst have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above.” Remember that Jesus was not speaking to an insignificant person when he said this. He was speaking to the king, one representing the universal empire of Rome, the highest power in the world at the time. He said that even Pilate had “no power at all” against him unless permitted by God. This was true of Christ and it is true of every member of the body of Christ. We are on an entirely different basis than the world. Every experience we have is permitted and designed by God, to work something good to us. As Paul said, “For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding, and eternal weight of glory.”--2 Corinthians 4:17

Then Jesus said to his disciples, “But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.” This is a beautiful figure of speech showing how intimately God knows us and understands us. He knows all about us. He knows us better than we know ourselves. We do not know the number of hairs upon our heads. David expressed the same thought:

“O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising. Thou understandest my thoughts afar off. Thou compassest my path, and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether.”-- Psalm 139:1-5

Yes, he knows us “altogether” even to the number of hairs upon our heads! I'm going to read the fifth verse from Leiser: “Behind and before, hast thou hedged me in, and thou placest upon me, thy hand.” The Lord has hedged us in--completely surrounded us by his loving providences, and his hand is in all our affairs, small and great.

At this point in Jesus' teaching of his disciples there was an interruption. Apparently, some of the large crowd had followed Jesus and were “listening in” to his instruction. Although Jesus' words to his disciples were sublime words, they did not appeal particularly to others. What did they care about the sparrows and hairs of the head? So one of the crowd interrupted Jesus to present a personal financial

problem which he thought more important. After all Jesus was considered a learned and influential rabbi. So we read, starting with Luke 12:13:

“And one of the company said unto him, Master speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me.”

This man's father had apparently left everything to his brother, perhaps for good reason, but he wanted to get his hands on some of the money.

“And he [Jesus] said unto him, Man, who made me a judge, or a divider over you?”

Then, although he refused to comply with the man's request, he took this opportunity to teach them all, his disciples and the others alike, a valuable lesson of general application.

“And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully; and he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do; I will pull down my barns, and I will build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, drink and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool! This night thy soul shall be required of thee. Then whose shall these things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

Here Jesus reiterated a common fact of life, summed up by the modern expression, “You can't take it with you.” Solomon said the same thing in Ecclesiastes 6:1,2:

“There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is common among men. A man to whom God hath given riches, wealth, and honor, so that he wanteth nothing for his soul of all that he desireth; yet God giveth him not power to eat thereof, but a stranger eateth it. This is vanity, and it is an evil disease.”

By this parable Jesus told the man who coveted his brother's inheritance, and all others who desire wealth,

“It really isn't worth it. It isn't worth all the conniving, all the scheming. It isn't worth the sweat, and toil, and tears. Even if you do amass great wealth, you will never live long enough to enjoy it. After all your labor, you will have to leave it behind. There is much more to life than the feverish ambition for riches.”

As Jesus expressed it: “A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesses.”

Did you know that at the end of the parable he told of a way that you can take it with you? He gave an alternative; he spoke of being “rich toward God.” He thus contrasted the “laying up of treasures on earth,” as the man in the parable had done, with the more excellent way of “laying up of treasure in heaven” and thus being really “rich toward God.” As he had previously told them, in his sermon on the mount, Matthew 6:19-21:

“Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”

Where are our hearts? Our hearts are beyond the veil. We have set our hearts on heavenly things, on the heavenly kingdom, to live and reign with Christ. By our preparation for that kingdom, by the development of the mind of the New Creature, we are laying up in heaven the great treasure of glory, honor and immortality, and the privilege of participating in the kingdom work of blessing the world. Thus we are “rich toward God.”

This teaching of Jesus emphasizing heavenly things and the relative unimportance of earthly things led up to the beautiful lesson of Matthew 6:25-34 which has comforted the hearts and soothed the minds of Christians throughout the centuries:

“Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body more than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your Heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you, by taking thought, can add one cubit unto his stature? And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They toil not, neither do they spin; and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore, take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek); for your Heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.”

These verses written 2000 years ago have astonished modern psychiatrists because they embody principles completely in harmony with the latest scientific findings regarding mental health. Some doctors actually prescribe the reading and memorizing of these verses in the treatment of psychosomatic illnesses. Well they might because the wisdom given here is that of the one who designed and created the human mind. This is the very wisdom of God. All of Jesus' teachings were of God. Jesus told us: "The words that I speak unto you, I speak not of myself, but the Father that dwelleth in me."-- John 14:10

Anxiety kills and incapacitates more people than any other single factor. A large number of diseases are induced by uncontrolled anxiety. But Jesus did not give these teachings to his disciples to cure their illnesses or keep them physically well. They are for our spiritual health. If we appropriate them to ourselves, we will obtain the blessing promised in Philippians 4:7: "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus." We need this "peace of God" so much these days. The present evil world is disintegrating all about us with horrible grinding noise. Masses of humanity are in turmoil and rebellion. Law and order are breaking down. We are living in the days of the fulfillment of Luke 21:25, 26:

"Upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth."

But amid all this the Lord's people are able to enjoy the "peace of God which passeth all understanding." The disciples of old could not understand the peacefulness of Jesus during a storm at sea, related in Mark 4:37-39:

"And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship. And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow. And they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish? And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm."

If we can learn and take to heart the lesson Jesus gave us in Matthew 6:25-34, we too will experience a great calm. The restlessness and storms of the world will no longer affect us.

What Did Jesus Really Mean?

Before we consider what these sayings of Jesus mean, let us first consider what they do not mean. When Jesus said "Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on," he did not encourage us to carelessness or sloth. He did not

mean that we should go to bed without having, to the best of our ability taken thought and made preparation for the morning meal. He did not mean that we should expect clothes to grow upon our backs as feathers do upon sparrows or adornment upon lilies.

How do we know he did not mean this? Because there are many plain scriptures to the contrary. For example, Romans 12:11 admonishes us to be “not slothful in business.” Romans 12:17 says to “provide things honest in the sight of all men.” Ephesians 4:28 advises the man of God to “labour, working with his hands the thing which is good that he may have, to give to him that needeth.” 1 Timothy 5:8 positively states that “if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.”

There is much other scriptural evidence as well. Did not our Lord reprove the idlers in the parable of the vineyard? (Matthew 20:6) Did he not call the slothful servant wicked, in the parable of the talents? (Matthew 25:26) Did he not hold up to scorn the thoughtless builder who began constructing a tower without taking thought whether he could finish it? (Luke 14:28-30) It is written in Proverbs 6:6, “Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways and be wise.” Is it not the ant's custom to lay up provision in advance of necessity? Besides the Creator's method of having a plan and working all things towards its accomplishment certainly does not indicate that he would approve of carelessness, thoughtlessness, improvidence or any such thing.

Let us not suppose that these words of the Master teach that people should not make reasonable provision for their own needs and comfort, and to arrange matters that they might not be dependent upon charity in their old age. Let us not suppose that he meant that parents should be neglectful of their duties toward dependent members of their own families. On the contrary, the entire tenor of the scriptures indicate that God's people are to be frugal, to avoid debts, to be “forehanded,” and to be with some reserve of capital. Economy is a part of the divine arrangement. This was clearly illustrated by our Lord Jesus. Although he had the power to create food for a great multitude, he nevertheless instructed his disciples to gather up the fragments that remained so that they might be utilized for another meal. He thus taught conservation of resources and condemned wastefulness.

Having determined what our Lord did not mean by his reference to the fowls of the air and the lilies of the field, let us now consider what he did mean and avail ourselves of the peace of mind and heart he desired to convey to us by this lesson.

“Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body more than raiment?”

The Diaglott interlinear says more correctly, “Be not over-anxious about your life, what you shall eat ... nor about your body, what you shall wear.”

Jesus knew of the corrosive effect of fear and anxiety upon the mind. He knew that to be overly anxious about earthly things would be a special hindrance to those walking the narrow way. So he told them not to worry unduly about such things. The apostle expresses the same thought in Philippians 4:6 [Diaglott interlinear]: “Be not over-anxious about anything.” As we have seen, this does not refer to a proper care and sense of responsibility regarding our affairs but refers to extreme worry, an anxiety that would rob the soul of rest and peace, indicating a lack of faith in the Lord and in his care for his people. We should always realize that the Lord's care over us is thorough and complete. Psalm 37:23 says that all our steps are ordered of the Lord. Psalm 84:11 tells us that no good thing is withheld from us. This is confirmed by Romans 8:28, that all things are made to work together for our good. We are constantly under the Lord's particular care because 1 Peter 3:12 assures us that the eyes of the Lord are ever upon the righteous and his ears are open to their prayers.

Then Jesus said, “Behold the fowls of the air; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?” Luke renders this text (12:24), “Consider the ravens; for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them. How much more are ye better than the fowls?”

Considering the ravens brings to mind the experiences of Elijah, related in 1 Kings chapter 17. Ahab was an exceedingly wicked king of Israel--the worst one they had ever had. 1 Kings 16:33 tells us that “Ahab did more to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him.” He consorted with Jezebel. He was morally corrupt and led Israel into the most detestable idolatry. As a punishment, God decreed that there should be no dew nor rain upon the land. This was serious because they had no means of irrigation except drawing water by hand from wells. So it would mean a complete crop failure and resulting famine. Elijah delivered the Lord's decree to Ahab and was then directed to flee from the king's vengeance and hide by a certain brook. We read the account from 1 Kings 17:4-6:

“And it shall be that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there. So he went, and did

according unto the word of the Lord; for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith that is before Jordan. And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook.”

Various efforts have been made to discount the miracle implied here but there is no reason to believe that the account is not literally true. To this day the open-air bazaars of the east must always guard against ravens plundering their stalls, and it is very likely that Elijah was thus fed from the bazaars of nearby Jerusalem or Jericho by ravens nesting at the brook by which he hid. In any case the lesson to us is one of divine care and providence over those who are devoted to God's service. We may be sure that he who sustained Elijah can equally sustain us and, if necessary, by means just as unusual and unconventional.

Then Jesus said, “Which of you, by taking thought, can add one cubit unto his stature?” The Diaglott renders it more accurately: “Which of you, by being over-anxious, can prolong his life one moment?” This emphasizes the utter futility and foolishness of worrying about things beyond our control. It is foolish for the world to do so and leads them to nervous breakdowns. It is particularly absurd for the Lord's people to do so, because the things beyond our control are under the complete control and under the firm guiding hand of our loving Heavenly Father. Did not Jesus say in Luke 18:27, “The things which are impossible with men, are possible with God”? In order to attain the rest of soul promised we must learn to develop a complete reliance upon God. If we are faced with a seemingly impossible situation, we should first do all we can and then say to the Lord: “This thing is beyond me. I can do nothing more. Please take over for me, and do what is best.” In this we will comply with Psalm 55:22: “Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee. He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.” Having done this, we should dismiss all anxiety from our minds and completely relax. David did this, as he said in Psalm 3:4,5: “I cried unto the Lord with my voice, and he heard me ... I laid me down and slept.”

The Lord is entirely capable of handling every situation. He is a merciful God and his powers are limitless. Bro. Russell beautifully expresses this thought on page 1560 of the Reprints.

“The Psalmist says, ‘The Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.’ (Psalms 145:9,16) This sweeping statement takes in the utmost bounds of the material universe, and also the humblest, as well as the most exalted, sentient being. The whole creation is his care. Jehovah, our God, is the great Emperor of the whole universe and his wisdom, power, goodness, and benevolence are abundantly equal to all the responsibilities of so exalted an office. The human mind staggers in its efforts to comprehend the

mental resources of a being who is able to assume and to bear such responsibility. Think for a moment of the memory that never fails; of the judgment that never errs; of the wisdom that plans for eternity without the possibility of failure, and that times that plan with unerring precision for the ages to come; of the power and skill which can harness even every opposing element, animate or inanimate, and make them all work together for the accomplishment of his grand designs; of the tireless vigilance that never ceases, nor seeks relief from the pressing cares of universal dominion; whose eye never sleeps, whose ear is ever open, and who is ever cognizant of all the necessities, and active in all the interests of his broad domains. Well has the Psalmist said, in consideration of the immensity and the minutiae of God's providences over all his works: `Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is high; I cannot attain unto it!'-Psalms 139:6”

Now we come to that part of the lesson which is the most beautiful of all. Jesus said,

“And why take ye thought [or, are over-anxious] for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They toil not, neither do they spin, and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?”

Continuing from the Diaglott:

“Therefore, be not over-anxious, saying What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, With what shall we be clothed? [Luke's account adds in 12:29: “And be not in restless suspense.”] For all the nations require these things; and your Heavenly Father knows that you have need of these things. But seek you first his righteousness and kingdom; and all these things shall be super-added to you.”

It is interesting to note that our Lord did not choose a hot-house plant but chose a flower of the field for his illustration. The lily of the field grows under exposed conditions. It thrives under such conditions because the great Creator has arranged for its best interests. This does not mean that the plant is idle. If it were idle, it would die. It is not idle by any means. It continually sends forth roots and absorbs and avails itself of the nourishment provided. But does the lily grow by worrying? No. It merely uses the opportunities that come to it. It reaches out for them. By so doing it develops and matures and blossoms and has an exquisite organism which, even under the microscope, displays a breath-taking beauty. The lesson is obvious. The field is the world. The Lord has placed us in an exposed and seemingly unfavorable environment. Nevertheless his providences are so arranged that his people grow, thrive, and become very

beautiful in the character-likeness of the Lord; in his eyes more beautiful than Solomon in all his glory.

Other Spiritual Lessons

Now let us go back in review and see what further spiritual lessons may be derived from these sayings of Jesus. When Jesus told his disciples, “Therefore, I say unto you, Take no thought for your life,” he referred to life laid down. As he said in John 15:13, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” Jesus did so, as he said in John 10:15: “I lay down my life for the sheep.” We also lay down our lives, with his, as expressed in Colossians 3:3: “For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.” In this sense we should take no over-anxious thought for our human lives which are on the altar of sacrifice. We should say, as Paul did, “Neither count I my life dear unto myself.” (Acts 20:24) Our primary interest should be our spiritual lives, to live and reign with Christ.

Jesus referred to food: “Take no thought ... what ye shall eat.” He spoke of how the Heavenly Father feeds the fowls of the air. For us there is food much more important than bread and meat. Satan tried to over-emphasize the importance of material food, but Jesus replied, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” (Matthew 4:4) As food is scattered for birds to feed upon and satisfy their hunger, ample and rich spiritual food is provided for those who “hunger and thirst after righteousness.”--Matthew 5:6

The food upon which we feed should not be a fluid, changeable thing--this way today, that way tomorrow. This is not conducive to peace of mind. It produces agitation, uncertainty. The real truth is something in which we can become established. The apostle says, “Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things though ye know them, and be established in the present truth.” (2 Peter 1:12) “Remembrance” does not mean something new. We cannot remember what we have never known before. So the apostle does not here speak of new and strange things but old established truths, the same old truths that the Lord completely restored to his Church at this end of the age by the hand of a faithful and wise servant whom he made ruler over all his goods. (Matthew 24:45-47) It is only by holding on to the old truths the Lord has thus given us that peace of mind and heart can be maintained.

Jesus said, “Besides, which of you, by being over-anxious, can prolong his life one moment?” Some today are over-anxious as to when the Messianic phase of the Kingdom will be openly manifested

in power and glory upon the earth. "We have waited 2000 years for the Kingdom to come," they say. "We couldn't bear to have to wait another hundred years!" This is not a valid statement. Nobody has waited 2000 years and no one will have to wait another hundred years. None of us has waited any longer than the few years of his consecrated life and no one will wait a moment longer than the end of his human existence. Let us not be over-anxious about this. The Messianic Kingdom will be openly manifest to the world exactly on time regardless of any anxiety on our part.

Jesus spoke of raiment and how God so splendidly clothed the lilies of the field that they rivaled even Solomon's glory. Then he asked, "Shall he not much more clothe you?" He was referring to more than earthly clothing. He was referring to that glorious robe of Christ's righteousness with which we are arrayed, a robe which covers our imperfections and makes us beautiful indeed, which makes us acceptable to God and enables us to "seek the kingdom of God." Compared to this glorious robe, our human wants are insignificant. God knows all the things we need as natural men. As it is written, "Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of before ye ask him." (Matthew 6:8) Jesus added, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." The Diaglott says "super-added to you," signifying abundance. God is very generous.

Now we come to the final admonition of Jesus on this occasion: "Take therefore no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." The Diaglott reads: "Be not over-anxious, then, about the morrow; for the morrow will claim anxiety for itself. Sufficient for each day is its own trouble."

It is so foolish and inconsistent for the Lord's people to worry about the morrow. It indicates a lack of faith. Worrying about the future is simply a refusal to take God at his word. Has he not said, "I will surely do thee good?" (Genesis 32:12) Are we not told, "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them?" (Psalms 34:7) It is written, "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper." (Isaiah 54:17) Also, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." (Hebrews 13:5) These are definite and positive promises of God. It is written in 1 Kings 8:56, "There hath not failed one word of all his good promise." We should remind ourselves of how the Lord has dealt with us in the past, thinking often of his providential leadings of the past, and remember that he has not changed!

By worrying about the future we bring ourselves down to the level of those described in Luke 21:26: "Men's hearts failing them for fear; and for looking after those things which are coming." We should not

be on this level. On the contrary, our hearts should be full of happy anticipation of good things from our Heavenly Father. We read, "Prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." (Malachi 3:10) We should expect a plentitude of blessing from the Lord, and nothing but good because we are promised that everything is working for our good. Our only concern should be whether we have room enough to receive the abundance of spiritual blessings promised. Make room and they will come.

After all why should we, his children, anticipate evil from God? Has he given us reason to do so? How would you like it if your children always anticipated evil from you? As Jesus put it in Luke 11:11-13:

"If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish, give him a serpent? Or, if he shall ask an egg, will ye offer him a scorpion? If ye, then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children; how much more shall your Heavenly Father."

Do you remember the happy and carefree days of your childhood? Rich or poor, your loving parents supplied everything you needed. Did you have to worry about what you would eat or wear, or whether you would have shelter the next day? No. Such a thought never entered your mind. You would have been surprised if anyone suggested such a thing. You had parents, didn't you? That was enough. Why can't we have the same reliance upon our Heavenly Father, as we did upon our earthly father? He is much more loving and powerful and reliable.

So instead of taking anxious thought, let us joyfully anticipate tomorrow. It is tomorrow when we will gain an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:11) All the good things promised to the poor groaning creation are coming tomorrow. In the world of tomorrow, now so close, physical restitution blessings will flow to the people of the world. Tomorrow death will be abolished. It is tomorrow that Revelation 21:4,5 will be accomplished:

"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new!"

Now the world is filled with fear and fear is contagious; it is catching. We must guard our hearts and minds against the fear that is saturating the world. To do this we must constantly refresh ourselves with God's Word and revealed truth, and keep close to God in prayer. As the apostle sums it up:

“Be not over-anxious about anything; but in everything let your petitions be made known to God, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving. And that peace of God which surpasses all conception, shall guard your hearts, and your minds by Christ Jesus.”--
Philippians 4:6, 7, Diaglott

Let us avail ourselves of this wonderful peace!

The Love and Mercy of God

THE God revealed to us in the Bible is a kind, loving and merciful God. He is the highest embodiment of every virtue. Having created man, he is infinitely nobler than the noblest man. Although he disciplines his human children temporarily for their own good, he is as a loving Father to them. We read of him:

“The Lord is merciful and gracious; slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide; neither will he keep his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.”--Psalms 103:8-14

We are told that “God is love.” (1 John 4:16) Love is a controlling attribute of God's character. Everything he does is influenced by love. He is loving and merciful to all whether they deserve it or not. He is loving even to his enemies. We read the words of Jesus:

“But I say unto you, Love your enemies, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven; for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.”--Matthew 5:44,45

“Love your enemies ... and ye shall be the children of the Highest; for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.”--Luke 6:35,36

Thus we see that God is kind and merciful even to those who are evil, unjust and unthankful.

No other religion than that of the Bible reveals such a God of love and compassion. This is a God we can love, reverence and worship with all our hearts. No other religion than that of the Bible suggests so high a standard of dealing with our fellow men. As we read in Luke:

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself.”--Luke 10:27

This rule of love, which has been called “The Golden Rule,” is positively stated as “All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.” (Matthew 7:12) Probably the closest approach to this sentiment is found in the writings of

Confucius: “Do not do to others what you would not wish them to do to you.” Although this is an admirable rule, there is a vast difference between it and the Bible's Golden Rule. The rule of Confucius is negative, saying, Do not do evil to others. This rule can be obeyed by doing nothing. It is passive. But the Golden Rule of Christ is positive. It says, Do good to others. This calls for love in action; it is what God does. He has planned good things for his human family and he will positively bring them to pass.

There are some who claim the Bible teaches the eternal torment of the wicked in a hell of literal fire. This puzzles many who ask: “If God is loving and merciful, how can he torment anyone?” The doctrine of eternal torment is not taught in the Bible. It is based upon mistranslations and misinterpretations of certain symbolic passages of scripture. It is obviously false since it is entirely contrary to the loving character of God. Since he made us, we know that he is better than we are. Would you torture your child? No matter what he had done, would you, even for a moment, hold his hand over a flame? Would you torture even an animal? Of course not. No sane person would. So eternal torment is a terrible thing with which to charge God and is totally untrue. God is infinitely superior to us. His thoughts and ways are so much higher than ours. If you are kind, loving, merciful and forgiving to your children, he is much more so to his human family. We read in Isaiah:

“Let the wicked forsake his way, and let the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”-- Isaiah 55:7-9

There are several scriptures that tell us plainly that God would not even think of tormenting anyone, that to do such a terrible thing never came into his mind. In ancient times the false gods Baal and Molech were worshipped by the offering of human sacrifices. Little children were burned alive upon the high altars of these gods. The loving God of the Bible considered this an abomination and a sin, totally contrary to his will. Thus we read:

“They have built also the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire for burnt offerings unto Baal, which I commanded not, nor spake it, neither came it into my mind.”--Jeremiah 19:5

“And they built the high places of Baal ... to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my mind, that they should do this abomination.”--Jeremiah 32:35

The penalty for sin is not eternal torment. It is very plainly stated to be death in Genesis 2:17. God said to Adam before he sinned, "Thou shalt surely die." After Adam had sinned, God told him: "Thou [shalt] return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken. For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." (Genesis 3:19) If torment was to be the penalty for sin instead of death, God would certainly have told Adam so before he sinned so he might be forewarned of what to expect. For God to have thus clearly stated the penalty to be death and then, after the sin had been committed, to have changed the penalty to an eternal life of torment, would have been most unjust. It would be deceptive. God is neither unjust nor deceptive.

This is especially important because the penalty did not involve Adam alone but included all his race.

"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."--Romans 5:12

Since God is so loving, merciful and forgiving, will the penalty of death ever be removed? Will it ever come to pass that mankind will continue to live, and not to die any more? The Bible most emphatically teaches that the death penalty will be removed. In fact, the first step has already been taken. We read:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."--John 3:16

Jesus came to earth as a perfect man and died on the cross as a ransom sacrifice for Adam, giving up his unforfeited life in the place and stead of Adam's forfeited life, paying the penalty of death for Adam and all his race. Thus he became the Saviour of all mankind. This provided the basis for God's forgiveness and the removal of the death penalty. God says, "I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more." (Jeremiah 31:34) Paul writes of "Our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death." (2 Timothy 1:10) The kingdom of God on earth, for which we have so long prayed with the words "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven," will soon be manifested. Even those who have already died are not forgotten. God lovingly holds them in his memory and will bring them back to life again. Families, parted by death, will be reunited. You will see your loved ones again. Jesus himself told us:

"Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth."--John 5:28,29

The Multi-Metallic Image

ONE of the most fascinating and inspirational books of the Bible is that of Daniel. No modern literature provides such interesting narrative nor portrays a nobler hero. In addition to the sheer excitement of its adventure the book contains lessons of the highest precepts. It is full of lessons and examples of sublime faith, loyalty, courage, integrity, and complete and absolute devotion to God. It also contains prophecies of tremendous and worldwide importance, presented in the most dramatic manner. Those prophecies which have been fulfilled are seen by Bible Students to have been precisely accurate; those in the process of fulfillment or unfulfilled are the subject of intense interest and anticipation by those acquainted with God's plan.

The book of Daniel was given for us, the last members of the body of Christ, right now. How do we know? Because we are now living in that period of history known as "the time of the end." We are living in "the end of the age," the Gospel age, and the beginning of the Millennial age. We read the words of the Lord:

"And he said, Go thy way, Daniel; for the words are closed up, and sealed, till the time of the end. Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand."--Daniel 12:9,10

So today we are going to consider a small portion of the book of Daniel and see what lessons it has for us. We read from the first chapter:

"In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, came Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, unto Jerusalem, and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim, king of Judah, into his hand."

This was some 20 years before the final destruction of Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar took many captives to Babylon at this time. This was the first captivity and included the very cream of the Jewish nation. We read:

"And the king [Nebuchadnezzar] spake unto Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring certain of the children of Israel, and of the king's seed, and of the princes; children in whom was no blemish, but well-favored, and skillful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science; and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace; and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans."

These are very high and exacting qualifications which king Nebuchadnezzar set. Ashpenaz obeyed him selecting a considerable number of the very elite of the nation: "Now among these were of the children of Judah: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah."

At this time Daniel was 14 years old; the others were probably about the same age. We immediately begin to wonder how a 14-year-old boy could possibly meet the specifications which had been set:

"Skillful in all wisdom, and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science." I think it is obvious that this refers to some sort of qualifying test which was applied similar to our modern IQ test to make the selections. It was a kind of aptitude test that would indicate a person's capacity or potential, whether a person would be skillful in learning wisdom, or cunning in absorbing knowledge, or logical enough to understand science, if these things were taught to him. These boys were also tested for what we would today call the quality of poise. This is indicated by the requirement: "And such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace." After all Nebuchadnezzar ruled the world with force and was greatly feared. Incurring his slightest displeasure meant death:

"All people, nations, and languages, trembled and feared before him. Whom he would, he slew, and whom he would, he kept alive, and whom he would, he set up, and whom he would, he put down."-- Daniel 5:19

For one to stand calmly before such a fearsome monarch and his court required a high degree of self-assurance which, in the case of Daniel and his companions, was based upon faith in God.

We know that they were the children of godly, reverential, parents because of their names. The name Daniel means "God is my judge." Hananiah means "Jehovah is gracious" or "Jehovah has favored." Mishael means "God-like." Azariah means "Jehovah has helped" or "The help of Jehovah." This clearly denotes a God-fearing parentage and upbringing. Today we would say that they were "born and raised in the truth."

There is no doubt that Godly traits can be inherited from Godly parents as well as be inculcated by early training. One such trait is faith. Paul mentions this in his letter to Timothy:

"When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice, and I am persuaded that it is in thee also."--2 Timothy 1:5

Early Child Training Is Important

We read in Proverbs, "Train up a child in the way he should go; and when he is old, he will not depart from it." (Proverbs 22:6) The

training of our children in the precepts of the truth is not only an obligation but a great joy. Our joy in them is supreme should it ever transpire that the Lord calls them and they consecrate to him. But many of us are disappointed in this regard.

It will help us to remember that there are only a limited number of crowns available. The Lord knows how many there are and who should have them, and HE does the calling. But there are some who say, tearfully:

“Something went wrong. I did train up my child in the way he should go, and he did depart from it! In his adolescence and young manhood, he rebelled, and went his own way. What happened? What did I do wrong?”

Let's read the scripture again. It says: “When he is OLD, he will not depart from it.” When he is young, he might. In his adolescence, in the sometimes confused transition from childhood to manhood, he might depart from it. For a while, in his efforts to free himself from parental control, he might seem to depart. But he can't entirely forget his early training, or ignore his inheritance. When he is older, when he has matured, then “he will not depart from it!” I have met a number of second generation, and even third generation, consecrated individuals who have had this very experience. Not that all the children of the consecrated will eventually consecrate but in every case their early training, their Christian upbringing, will make an indelible impression upon their characters leaving a definite mark which will tend to evoke the Lord's blessing in the future.

By common consent Daniel seems to have been the leader and spokesman of the Hebrew boys who had thus been selected for special training in the court of the king of Babylon. It was a sort of royal university with the faculty composed of the wisest men of the realm. It was a three-year course at the completion of which the king himself would give them an examination and from this graduating class the king would draw his assistants and councilors of state for the rulership of the universal empire of Babylon.

What a wonderful opportunity! While studying they would be treated as members of the royal household. So we read:

“And the king appointed them a daily provision of the king's meat, and of the wine which he drank; so nourishing them three years that at the end thereof they might stand before the king.”--Daniel 1:5

Daniel must have been a handsome and personable lad. Even the master of the king's servants, called “the prince of the eunuchs,” whom we might assume from his position of command to be a severe man, was strongly attracted to Daniel. The account is: “Now God had brought Daniel into favor and tender love with the prince of

the eunuchs.” Surely God did not coerce the prince of the eunuchs to love Daniel. He did cause him to observe Daniel's fine qualities and be won over by these. The superior qualities of the boy Jesus at about the same age were similarly noticed because we read:

“And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.”--Luke 2:52

This favor with God and man was not something outside of Daniel himself. I think we can infer that by heredity and by natural training of Godly parents Daniel had a noble, amiable, winsome character, a character that not only prepared him to be the Lord's mouthpiece but that also made him attractive to all with whom he had to do.

There is a lesson here not only for young people but also for the parents who shape them. We should seek to attain characteristics pleasing to God and inoffensive to those about us. We should not be hated except for our loyalty to God and the truth, directly or indirectly. It is only then that we may take satisfaction in it, or think we are suffering for righteousness' sake, or expect to be rewarded for it. The apostle points out some suffer as evildoers and as busybodies in other men's matters. (1 Peter 4:15) Others suffer because of ungentleness, uncouthness or lack of the wisdom of moderation which the Lord counsels. (Philippians 4:5; James 1:5)

Let us contrast, for a moment, the condition of Daniel and his companions before their captivity and after their captivity. In Jerusalem, reared by Godly Hebrew parents, strictly trained in the law and the statutes, they led a sheltered and blameless existence. Suddenly they found themselves among the worst of the heathen where the Hebrew law was totally ignored, where might made right, where moral standards did not exist, where strange and cruel gods were worshiped instead of Jehovah. They were in the household of the king, favored by him and obligated to him for their well-being and future prospects. They were young, and away from parental and religious control. It would have been perfectly natural under these circumstances for them to adopt the ways and customs of their heathen hosts, to lower their standards, to become careless in their conduct, and to say to themselves:

“What's the difference? Who will know? Surely, we must not offend our benefactors by being too different from them? When in Rome, do as the Romans do, or, more correctly, when in Babylon, do as the Babylonians do.”

The Young Hebrews Remain Faithful

Although it would have been quite natural, these young Hebrews were unusual persons. They did not take the lax and easy way, the

natural way. In the very beginning a crisis arose because of their determination to remain faithful to the law of their God. We read:

“But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king's meat, nor with the wine which he drank. Therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.”

The food provided for these college students was good, probably far better and more varied than they had been used to previously. But Israelites, under their law covenant were forbidden to eat certain foods which were in common use among the other nations, food such as pork, rabbit flesh, eels, oysters, etc. Other meats had to be slaughtered in a certain manner to eliminate the blood. There were other regulations regarding the manner of food preparation and combination. If these statutes of the law were violated, the person was considered defiled. Even at his youthful age and in spite of the temptation to eat exotic foods, which probably were most delicious, Daniel was determined to adhere to the law of his God. Instead of the king's food he requested that they be supplied pulse to eat and with water instead of wine to drink. “Pulse” is a term applied to legumes, such as peas, beans, lentils, and perhaps certain grains. The prince of the eunuchs objected fearing the Hebrew boys would appear undernourished and that he would be held responsible. But after a ten-day trial, the young Hebrews were found to be in better condition than those who ate the king's food, so they were allowed to continue on their plain but wholesome diet.

Daniel's determination not to be defiled with certain food reminds us of the words of the apostle: “If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy.” (1 Corinthians 3:17) In one sense of the word, the temple of God is his church. This is borne out by Peter: “Ye, also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house.” (1 Peter 2:5) There is a powerful lesson here. It is brought out by Pastor Russell's comments on Daniel's attitude regarding defiling food:

“Whoever introduces into the church that which is defiling; whoever does injury to any of its living stones; is an evildoer in the highest sense of that term, in that he is defiling and injuring the body of Christ, which is the church. If all could realize this, how careful all would be in respect to the bringing in of different errors, and false doctrines, misinterpretations of scripture, etc. How careful each then would be, to see that he speaks the things which he does know; that he would confine himself to the things written in the word of the Lord. In proportion as those who are right at heart see this, they will be careful that they do nothing to defile or stumble or injure any of the Lord's little ones.”--Reprints, page 3621.

How accurately Bro. Russell described what would happen! He was a very wise man. After his departure evildoers did indeed arise using Bro. Russell's own publishing facilities to introduce false doctrines that stumbled thousands. Many precious truths revealed by our returned Lord were repudiated and replaced by erroneous doctrines that upset and did violence to the plan. Old, well-proven, and precious truths were rudely pushed aside and replaced by so-called "new light." By contrived translations and cunning misinterpretations of scriptures, the faith of many of the Lord's little ones was overthrown. Those responsible were indeed, in the language of Bro. Russell, "evildoers in the highest sense of that term" because Jesus himself said:

"But whoso shall offend one of these little ones, which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea."--Matthew 18:6

May God grant that it never happens again!

Simple Food Represents Truth

Daniel and his companions ate plain and simple food. I think the lesson of simplicity is taught here. Our meetings and worship should be marked by simplicity. All needless ceremony such as practiced by the nominal churches should be shunned. There is a danger that we will lose our simplicity. Most of us came out of the nominal systems or were members of fraternal organizations, and a tendency for ceremony has stuck to us. It has a certain fascination and we are liable to revert to it. That is why Paul said:

"But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtility, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ."--2 Corinthians 11:3

There is another and more important lesson regarding the food of Daniel and his companions. It was plain but nourishing food. The truth is like that. It is not complicated. In its purity it is plain, simple and satisfying. Some needlessly complicate the truth. This causes confusion and sometimes division. "Babylon" means confusion. As Daniel and his companions shunned the exotic and enticing foods of Babylon, the Lord's people will shun confusing doctrines, old and new. The structure of truth is a finely balanced building, one structural member depending upon another for support. Take out one piece or alter its shape and the structure no longer balances; the other pieces no longer fit. If we deny even one essential and well-established doctrine or alter its meaning, even a seemingly unimportant one, we destroy the symmetry and harmony of the truth.

We read of Daniel and his companions after they had eaten simple and wholesome food for ten days:

“And at the end of ten, days their countenances appeared fairer and fatter in flesh than all the children which did eat the portion of the king's meat.”--Daniel 1:15

The plain, clean, unadulterated truth agrees with us. It makes us serene and confident no matter what transpires on the earth. There can be no surprises for us because we know the plan and our place and part in it. This knowledge should show, as with Daniel and his companions it should show in our countenances. The difference should be noticed. The world is in a state of wild-eyed fear:

“Upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth; for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.”--Luke 21:25,26

But our condition is described in Psalm 46:

“God is our refuge and strength; a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea. Though the waters thereof roar, and be troubled; though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.”--Psalms 46:1-3

The knowledge of the pure, plain, wholesome truth should show in our faces and be reflected in our spirits and attitudes. It should daily influence the way we conduct ourselves.

Daniel and his companions were conscientious in their studies. We read of them in verse 17:

“As for these four children, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.”

We are not to understand that this skill and learning were wholly miraculous. The gift of understanding visions and dreams was of course miraculous. Only Daniel had this gift. The general knowledge and skill they achieved was a natural result of aptitude combined with conscientious effort. These were boys who had the strength of character to impose self-denial for righteousness' sake. This showed the stuff they were made of. We would expect them to have courage and strength of character in all other matters including their studies. Their determination in the matter of their food, showing that they would rather deny themselves than violate God's law, is very revealing. It indicated a mental and moral discipline, an attribute that would be helpful in all the affairs of life.

Little Things Do Matter

There is a lesson in this for every Christian. Many are inclined to think of the little things of life as unimportant. But it is a fact that proficiency cannot be attained in any department of life without determined will-power. It is equally true that we cannot show strength of will-power in important things if we are lax and pliable in the small things of life. A Christian who wants to be an overcomer at all must make the effort all along the line, on every point great or small, where conscience and principle are involved. This is a teaching of our Lord:

“He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much.”-- Luke 16:10

The three-year course of study was finally finished. We read:

“Now at the end of the days that the king had said he should bring them in, then the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. And the king communed with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. Therefore stood they before the king. And all matters of wisdom and understanding that the king inquired of them he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm.”

This is somewhat astonishing when we remember the ages of Daniel and his companions. They were now only about 17, yet in wisdom and understanding were ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers in Babylon! This reminds us of Paul's admonition to young Timothy:

“Let no one despise thy youth, but become a pattern of the believers; in word, in conduct, in love, in purity.”--1 Timothy 4:12, Diaglott

We are in a condition similar to that of Daniel and his companions, and our prospects are similar. As they found themselves captives in a strange land, we are strangers and pilgrims in the earth. (1 Peter 2:11) We are in the world but not of the world. As they were enrolled in the royal college, we are in the school of Christ. They were selected for their special schooling because certain potentialities were seen in them. Before the Father draws us to Christ he sees potentialities in us. Rough and poor though our exteriors may be, God looketh on the heart. He never calls one for enrollment in the school of Christ in preparation for the high calling unless he sees in that person the ability to make his calling and election sure, with God's help. This should be very encouraging to us. As Daniel and his companions were being fitted for positions of rulership in the kingdom, we are being prepared to reign with Christ. As they learned all the wisdom of the Chaldeans, we are made “wise unto salvation.”

(2 Timothy 3:15) When their course of study had ended, Daniel and his companions were brought before the king, the king communed with them, and was satisfied with their attainments. As for us when our course is ended, we will appear before the King of kings, and Lord of lords. Our head, Jesus Christ, will present us to God the Father. As Jude expresses it:

“Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy; to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever.”--Jude 24,25

Our great King will commune with us too. We shall see him face to face and hear his “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.” What a thrilling and joyful experience that will be! It is not too distant for some of us. In the words of Psalm 17:

“As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness. I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness.”--Psalms 17:15

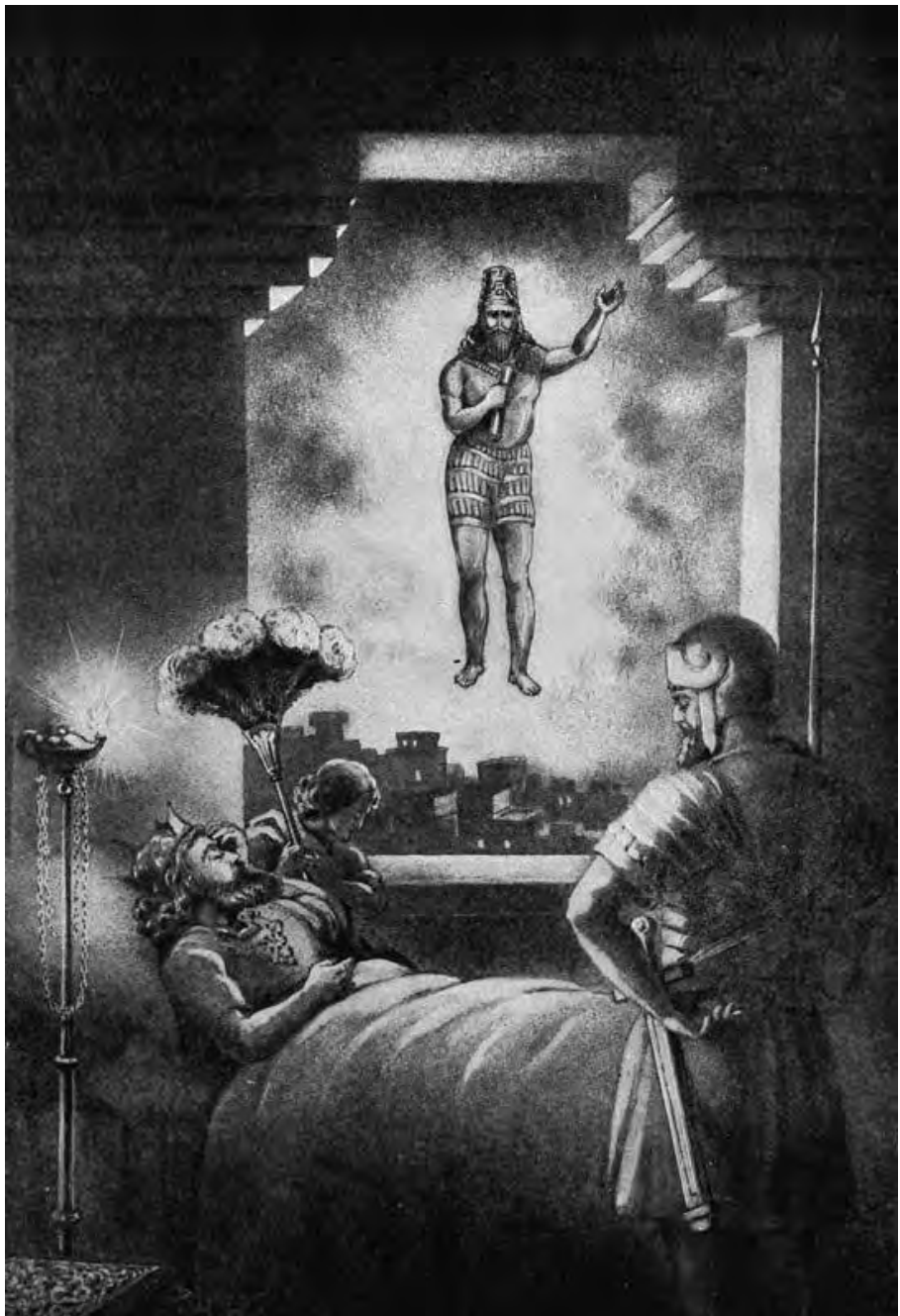
Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, the children of Judah, were now members of a very elite group. Not only were they considered on a par with the group described as “the magicians, and astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans,” but they with other graduates of the royal college formed a sort of executive pool--a pool of talent from which came the magistrates, administrators, and rulers over the provinces of the expanding Babylonian empire. Even though the king had declared them to be “ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers ... in all matters of wisdom and understanding,” it would only be natural that those of more mature age would be first selected. So it might take years for their turns to come. But the Lord had plans for them in Babylon; he had work for them to do, especially Daniel. He did not wait for the normal course of promotion to leisurely operate. He intervened; he speeded things up. It is always true that where the Lord's people and his service are concerned, the principle of Psalm 75 applies:

“For promotion cometh neither from the east nor from the west, nor from the south; but God is the judge; he putteth down one, and setteth up another.”--Psalms 75:6,7

Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

The Lord performed his promotion of Daniel and his companions directly through Nebuchadnezzar the king. Although Nebuchadnezzar was a mighty and willful monarch, conqueror and ruler of the world, the Lord maneuvered him with the greatest of ease to perform his will. At the same time and by the very same occasion he caused to be recorded an astonishing prophecy, a prophecy presented in the most spectacular manner, covering

tremendous events extending from the time it was given until the time of Christ's kingdom, the present time; a prophecy that has proven so precisely accurate in its fulfilled portions as to leave no room for doubt that the God of Heaven rules in the affairs of men, that he indeed has a Divine Plan for the Ages.



The account is in the second chapter of Daniel. King Nebuchadnezzar had retired for the night. It was only natural that affairs of state would crown his thoughts--matters pertaining to his growing empire. Then his thoughts ran to the probabilities of his empire long

enduring. He began to wonder what the future held for him and his kingdom. This we know from what happened afterward. The king fell asleep and began to dream. His dreams were at first disconnected and confused. Then suddenly there burst upon his inner vision a bright and terrible apparition, a dream so vivid and menacing as to bring him instantly awake, trembling with fear. This was no ordinary dream. He had never had one like this before. He knew without a doubt that this dream must have a special and important significance. He arose from his bed and struck a gong. His servants ran in and he commanded them to immediately summon “the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans,” so they might tell him the meaning of his dream. We can imagine that he paced the floor, impatiently waiting for his wise men to arrive. Then he stopped short. A strange thing had happened. He could not recall his dream! So vivid and clear in his mind just a few moments before, it had now completely vanished from his memory, leaving behind a sinister and disturbing void, which only added to his terror.

The Wise Men Are Helpless

When the wise men arrived, the king was in a desperate frame of mind.

“So they came and stood before the king. And the king said unto them, I have dreamed a dream, and my spirit was troubled to know the dream. Then spake the Chaldeans to the king in Syriac, O king, live forever; tell thy servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation.”

The king was frantic. “The thing is gone from me!” he said. “But you must tell me what it was, and give me the meaning of it, at once! This is very important!” He looked from one to another of his wise men, and saw the blankness of their faces. “I’ll tell you, the thing is gone from me!” he said. Then in his anger, he threatened them. “If ye will not make known unto me the dream, with the interpretation thereof, ye shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall be made a dunghill!” But it didn’t help. They just didn’t know. They hung their heads. The king changed his tactics. Now he almost pleaded with them: “But if ye show the dream, and the interpretation thereof, ye shall receive of me gifts, and rewards, and great honor. Therefore show me the dream and the interpretation thereof.” But the wise men still insisted that the king must first tell his dream to them. Then Nebuchadnezzar lost all patience. He accused them of stalling, of trying to gain time, and of being ready to lie to him, and to give him a false interpretation. “There is but one decree for you,” he shouted. “Ye shall be cut in pieces!”

Realizing they were caught in a hopeless situation, and doomed, the spokesman for the wise men said to the king:

“There is not a man upon the earth that can show the king's matter. Therefore there is no king, lord, nor ruler, that asketh such things of any magician, or astrologer or Chaldean. And it is a rare thing that the king requireth; and there is none other that can show it before the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh.”

This was a polite way of saying: “Your majesty, you are being unreasonable.” Then we read: “For this cause the king was angry and very furious, and commanded to destroy all the wise men of Babylon.” Let us not forget that Daniel and his three companions, although they were not then present, were now numbered with the “wise men of Babylon!” At this juncture it looked like a serious calamity for them instead of a step toward advancement. Without any fault on their part they had been condemned to death.

“And the decree went forth, that the wise men should be slain, and they sought Daniel and his fellows, to be slain.”

Arioch, captain of the king's guard was ordered to perform the executions. But he was friendly to Daniel, and warned him. We read the account: “Then Arioch made the thing known to Daniel.” The magicians and the astrologers and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans were called wise men. They were wise after the wisdom of the world, but only Daniel reacted with true wisdom. We read:

“Then Daniel went to his house, and made the thing known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions; that they would desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret--that Daniel and his fellows should not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.”

What did they do? They had a prayer meeting. I picture them on their knees the four of them in a circle clasping each other's hands, together laying the matter before the Lord. They probably took turns praying aloud. I imagine they addressed the Lord as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of Israel, the God of their fathers. They probably recounted, each one of them, all the Lord's providences on their behalf up to that very time, giving thanks for them. Then I think they must have pleaded God's glory saying in effect:

“King Nebuchadnezzar and all his court know that we worship thee, the only true God, the God of Israel. We have kept thy statutes even here in this heathen land before them all. They worship other gods who really are not gods at all. Now, if you permit us to be slain together with these heathen magicians, astrologers, sorcerers and Chaldeans, men will say: They trusted in the God of the Hebrews but

their God was not strong enough to save them from the hand of Nebuchadnezzar. They will say this of you the Creator of heaven and earth. Therefore, for thy name's sake, tell us the king's secret and deliver us out of his hand.”



God Reveals the Dream to Daniel

After this they went to bed and calmly went to sleep. Now we read from the account:

“Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven. Daniel answered and said: Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever; for wisdom and might are his. And he changeth the times and the seasons; he removeth kings, and setteth up kings; he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding. He revealeth the deep and secret things; he knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him. I thank thee and praise thee, O thou God of my fathers, who hast given me wisdom and might; and hast made known unto me now what we desired of thee; for thou hast made known unto us the king's matter!”

Isn't that a wonderful song of praise? Daniel's heart was overflowing with thankfulness and love. No wonder the angel of the Lord, on a later occasion, three times referred to Daniel as “A man greatly beloved!” (Daniel 9:23; 10:11,19) It is a wonderful thing to be greatly beloved of the Lord!

Daniel hurried to Arioch, captain of the king's guard, and said:

“Destroy not the wise men of Babylon. Bring me in before the king, and I will show unto the king the interpretation. Then Arioch brought in Daniel before the king in haste, and said thus unto him: I have found a man of the captives of Judah, who will make known unto the king the interpretation. The king answered and said to Daniel ... Art thou able to make known unto me the dream which I have seen, and the interpretation thereof? Daniel answered in the presence of the king and said, the wise men, the astrologers, the magicians, the soothsayers, cannot show unto the king; but there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days.”

Thus Daniel gave the full credit to God and modestly disclaimed any special wisdom of his own, saying:

“But as for me, this secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than any living.”

Then Daniel related the dream to Nebuchadnezzar. As he talked the king's memory returned with stunning force, vividly corroborating every fascinating detail of the dream he saw that night. He trembled as the description poured from Daniel's lips:

“Thou, O king, sawest, and, behold a great image! This great image, whose brightness was excellent, stood before thee, and the form thereof was terrible. This image's head was of fine gold, his breast

and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, his legs of iron, his feet part of iron, and part of clay. Thou sawest till that stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet, that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshingfloors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them; and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.”



The king was too overcome to say anything, but it was evident from his face that his dream had been accurately described. Daniel continued:

“This is the dream; and we will tell the interpretation thereof before the king. Thou, O king, art a king of kings; for the God of Heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power and strength and glory. And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field, and the fowls of the heaven, hath he given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. Thou art this head of gold.”

Then Daniel went on to say that the image's breast and arms of silver represented another and inferior kingdom which would in time succeed Babylon. Bible Students know it was the universal empire of Medo-Persia. He said there would arise a third kingdom represented by the brass of the image, which we know was Greece, the successor of Medo-Persia. Daniel described a fourth very strong kingdom, represented by the iron legs and feet part of iron and part of clay, which we know as the Roman empire and its remnant kingdoms now upon the earth.

Then Daniel gave the grand climax of the prophecy, the complete fulfillment of which is still future but which is now in progress:

“And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed. [The kingdom has been established.] And the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. Forasmuch as thou sawest, that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter. And the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure.”

The record continues: “Then the king, Nebuchadnezzar, fell upon his face, and worshipped Daniel.” How quickly the situation had changed! A few minutes before this king sat upon his throne in regal splendor, a powerful monarch, with the world in his hands, angry and vengeful, ordering the deaths of the wisest men of the realm. Now a few minutes later that same king lay prone, fallen upon his face! Do you see how easily the Lord maneuvers and manipulates even the mightiest king in the world? Do you see how easy it is for him to intervene to accomplish his will on behalf of his people? We read:

“The king answered unto Daniel, and said, Of a truth it is, that your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings and a revealer of secrets; seeing thou couldest reveal this secret. Then the king made Daniel a great man, and gave him many great gifts, and made him ruler over

the whole province of Babylon, and chief of the governors over all the wise men of Babylon”

At Daniel's request his three companions, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, were raised to positions of great power being set over the affairs of the province of Babylon.

Additional Lessons for Us

Let us go back and consider more of the lessons taught by this incident in Daniel's life that raised him so suddenly from obscurity to greatness. When the Lord first put into motion a series of events leading to the promotion of Daniel and his companions, there was a time when things looked extremely black. They had been condemned to death without fault and without recourse. The Lord's hand seemed to be against them, but they did not yield to discouragement and despair. They took it to the Lord in prayer. Having done so they left the matter in the Lord's hands.

Sometimes we may have discouraging and despairing experiences, times when our very existence as new creatures seems to be threatened, when our service to the Lord appears to be at an end. At such a time let us remember that as in the case of Daniel and his companions, the Lord may permit us to be brought low just before he exalts us, that the humbling experiences are necessary for our advancement. Let us react as Daniel and his companions did, as expressed by Peter:

“Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time; casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you.”--1 Peter 5:6,7

When the crisis is over, when the Lord has seen us through our trying experience, let us like Daniel be quick to thank and praise the Lord for his goodness to us. The Lord, seeing a heart condition similar to Daniel's, will also call us “greatly beloved.” He does so through Paul who said:

“My brethren, dearly beloved, and longed for; my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, dearly beloved.”--Philippians 4:1

There is another lesson we can learn. When the Lord made known to Daniel the king's secret, Daniel's first thought was for others besides himself. He hurried to Arioch and said: “Destroy not the wise men of Babylon.” This showed a largeness of heart that the Lord loved. Let us follow this example too. When we have been favored and prospered of the Lord, let us think of others besides ourselves.

Let God Be Praised

As Daniel gave the full credit to God for the interpretation of the king's dream, let us if we are permitted to know and understand some of the deep and secret things of God's plan, give God all the credit, not thinking we are wise to know these things. Let us apply to ourselves the words of Daniel: "But as for me, this secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than any living." Let us realize that it is only by the grace of God that our minds are illuminated and our hearts filled with this wonderful truth!

As Daniel and his companions were saved from death and exalted to the rulership of Babylon, we if faithful, will live and reign with Christ a thousand years! (Revelation 20:4)

The Mysterious Teachings of Jesus

“It is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. Therefore speak I to them in parables; because they seeing, see not; and hearing, they hear not; neither do they understand.”--Matthew 13:11,13

THE disciples of Jesus asked why he spoke to the multitude in parables, which were often difficult to understand, and he replied: “Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God; but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand.” (Luke 8:10) Thus there are certain teachings of Jesus that can be understood and appreciated only by his true disciples and which make no sense to others. We will now consider some of these mysterious teachings of Jesus.

In Matthew Jesus withdrew from the multitude and sat down with his disciples to teach them certain moral and ethical precepts which were for them alone:

“And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: Blessed [or Divinely approved] are the poor in spirit [humble-minded], for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”--Matthew 5:2,5

Thus Jesus said that a man can gain possession of heaven and earth if he is humble-minded and meek. This is certainly not the way of the world. To be successful in business or politics, a person has to be tough-minded and aggressive, not humble-minded and meek. This illustrates the inability of most people of the world to understand the principles that Jesus taught --the traits of character that will prepare a person for the “great salvation” to gain a heavenly reward and inherit rulership of the earth. Jesus stated this principle directly:

“Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.” --Luke 14:11

We read, “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.” (James 4:6) God does not favor and cannot use an arrogant, self-assertive or vindictive person. He favors and will exalt the gentle, loving, and considerate person, one who is humble enough to be teachable, submitting himself to the rule of God.

“Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted.”--Matthew 5:4

This too seems strange. Is it not more blessed to be happy and rejoice? But there is a deeper, spiritual meaning here. When Jesus

said, "Blessed are they that mourn," he described some who have deep feelings for their fellow man, who have loving and sympathetic hearts touched with pity for the suffering world of mankind--for all the sickness, sorrow, pain and disappointment in the present evil world. Those who are of the "great salvation" or "high calling" feel this way and "they shall be comforted" when they see mankind restored to perfection and happiness on earth in "the times of restitution" and when they themselves have a part in bringing it about.

"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled."--Matthew 5:6

How can it be called blessed to hunger and thirst? Jesus here referred to a hunger and thirst not for food and drink but for "righteousness." Today the world is full of unrighteousness and injustice. Although there is much good in the world, evil greatly predominates. As David said, "I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree." (Psalms 37:35) The wicked seem to prosper without hindrance. They hide behind lies and misrepresentations.

This condition is permitted by the Lord to provide mankind an experience with sin, but those who are aspiring to the heavenly "high calling" are out of harmony with this present situation and long for the coming time when all this evil will be done away with and righteousness and justice will prevail. They "hunger" for the promised time to come, described by Isaiah:

"Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet; and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place."--Isaiah 28:17

When this happens and the world is at last set free from the unrighteousness that has so long prevailed, their "hunger" shall be filled or satisfied.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."--Matthew 5:7

There is not much mercy shown today by anyone, especially in business or war. If a business competitor makes a mistake, he must expect to pay the consequences. In war full advantage is taken of an enemy's weaknesses without mercy. It is considered only natural for men to do so. It may be natural for fallen humanity, but it is not God's way. He is a merciful God. Micah says "he delighteth in mercy." (Micah 7:18) James tells us, "The Lord is very compassionate and of tender mercy." (James 5:11) Jesus said to his disciples, "Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful." (Luke 6:36) So in this way, too--by being merciful to all--those of the "great salvation" are different from the world.

There are many other such teachings of Jesus that are contrary to the spirit of the world and which only those of the “high calling of God” can understand and accept. For example, he said:

“Love your enemies, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven. For he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.”--Matthew 5:44,45

To love one's enemies is not natural or logical to the world, but let us remember that if Jesus had not loved his enemies, we would not be saved at all because it is written that “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8) We read, “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” (John 15:13) But all these things are foolishness to the worldly-minded; they cannot accept them.

“The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him. Neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”--1 Corinthians 2:14

The way to the heavenly kingdom of God is a blessed way, but it is not easy. It is not for everyone. Jesus described it:

“Strait [difficult] is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life; and few there be that find it.”--Matthew 7:14

How does one enter upon this “narrow way”? First there must be a powerful attraction to the precepts of God taught by Jesus some of which we have discussed. As Jesus said, “No man can come unto me except the Father which hath sent me draw him.” (John 6:44) One so drawn accepts Jesus as his personal Saviour. He consecrates his life to the service of God. From then on he is led by the holy spirit of God and becomes a spiritual son of God. As it is written, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.” (Romans 8:14) He develops a new, Christ-like mind, and becomes a new person.

“If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature. Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”--2 Corinthians 5:17

Those called to this “high calling” follow the example of Jesus by laying down their lives as he did and living in accordance with his teachings.

“For even hereunto were ye called; because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.”--1 Peter 2:21

When the “great salvation” of the heavenly calling is complete, which will be soon, the merit of Christ's ransom sacrifice will be

available for all the rest of humankind. Then there will be a resurrection of the dead and a world-wide salvation of all the willing and obedient leading to eternal perfect human life on earth. Those of the heavenly salvation, together with their Lord Jesus Christ, will then rule and bless the world.

The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus

THE parable of the rich man and Lazarus has been seriously misunderstood by many, causing much unhappiness and fear. Its correct interpretation is a wonderful prophecy. Let us first read the parable:

“There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day. And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died, and was buried. And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed; so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot, neither can they pass to us that would come from thence.” --Luke 16:19-26

A common mistake is to accept this account as a literal statement of fact instead of the parable which it is. To take it literally involves several absurdities. Did our Lord mean to imply that all rich people are to spend eternity in misery because they ate regularly and wore purple and fine linen? Surely not. To get into heaven must we be poor beggars with sores licked by dogs, and must we eat crumbs? Nothing is said in this parable about the rich man being wicked or Lazarus being righteous. Isn't character a consideration? Will the rich, tormented in fire, actually see the poor in bliss; and will the honored poor see the rich in eternal misery? Can this really be the arrangement of an all-wise, all-loving creator, one who knew the end from the beginning? Of course not!

It is obvious that the account cannot be literal. It is a parable. In a parable the thing said is not the thing meant. A parable is defined as

“a short narrative in which some important truth is veiled,” or hidden. Let us consider the important truth hidden in this parable.

The Two Men Represent Two Classes

The rich man represents one class of people and the poor man Lazarus another class. The rich man was the nation of Israel which, at the time the parable was given, had been rich in God's special favor. God said of them, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth.” (Amos 3:2) In this sense they “fared sumptuously every day.” It is written of them: “What advantage then hath the Jew? ... Much every way. Chiefly because unto them were committed the oracles of God.” (Romans 3:1,2) They had the promises, the prophets, the blessings and privileges of the law covenant. The organization of their nation as atypical kingdom of God invested them with royalty as shown in the rich man's “purple.” Their typical sacrifices constituted them a holy [righteous] nation, represented by the rich man's “fine linen”--symbolic of righteousness.

Lazarus, the poor beggar of the parable who was laid at the rich man's gate, represents an outcast class, those outside divine favor. It included the “publicans and sinners” of Israel, alienated from God, sin-sick, and hungering and thirsting after righteousness. It also included truth-hungry Gentiles, described as “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope.” (Ephesians 2:12) Those of this class had no fine linen of typical justification but, in moral sickness and sin, were the companions of “dogs,” a term the Jews applied to the heathen. They had no “purple” representing a share in God's favor as part of his kingdom. None of the promises belonged to those outside of Israel. All they could have would be merely such crumbs as might fall from the rich man's [Israel's] table. Such a crumb of favor was the healing of the daughter of the Gentile woman of Canaan. On that occasion Jesus said, “It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord; yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table.” (Matthew 15:22, 26,27)

Now that we know the two classes illustrated by the rich man and Lazarus, we can easily trace the fulfillment of this prophetic parable in history. “The rich man died, and was buried; and in hell [hades, oblivion] he lift up his eyes, being in torments.” After rejecting Jesus as their Messiah and crucifying him, Israel lost the favor of God. Jesus had said of that nation, “Behold, your house is left unto you desolate.” (Matthew 23:38) In AD 70 the sentence was carried out. Israel was destroyed as a nation at the hands of Titus and the Roman army. Thus the rich man died and was buried. Nationally, Israel went into oblivion.

Although nationally dead and buried, the Jews as a people were very much alive, although scattered among the nations of the world, during the next nineteen centuries. They have had much anguish of soul as they have received severe persecutions as, for example, from Hitler during World War II. For the past nineteen centuries Jews have cried out to God, who in the parable is represented as Abraham. In the language of the parable, they have “lifted up their eyes, being in torments.”

What happened to the beggar? As the Jews died to their favor, so the outcast publicans, sinners and Gentiles died to their disfavor. Such of them as desired the favors of God, who were hungering and thirsting for his word of promise, were received by him. The early Christian church was made up of this “Lazarus” class. Instead of being alienated from God, these became the children of God and heirs of his promises. In the parable they are represented as children of Abraham--in his arms. Jesus and his disciples are the spiritual seed of Abraham, received to God's bosom of favor. Thus we read, “If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.” (Galatians 3:29) “There is a great gulf fixed” between Judaism and Christianity--the Gospel Church enjoys free grace, joy, comfort and peace, while the Jew holds to the law covenant which condemns and torments.

This parable does not tell the whole story. It ends with Israel still nationally dead, their national hopes like dried bones in a grave. The happy ending to the prophetic story shows that there is to be a grand awakening, a national resurrection of the nation of Israel:

“Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost. We are cut off for our parts. Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God: Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves; and shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live. And I shall place you in your own land. Then shall ye know that I the Lord have spoken it, and performed it, saith the Lord.”--Ezekiel 37:11-14

Do we not now see the beginning of this before our very eyes in the re-establishment of the nation of Israel? The events of the near future are described by the apostle Paul:

“And so all Israel shall be saved. As it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer [Christ], and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob. For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.”--Romans 11:26,27

The Parable of the Two Sons

“But the father said to his servants: Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.”--Luke 15:22-24

TODAY we are going to consider another instance where David's prophecy in Psalm 76 was fulfilled by Jesus: “Surely the wrath of men shall praise thee.” (Psalms 76:10) The account is found in Luke chapter 15. By way of introduction, verse one of the previous chapter reads: “And it came to pass, as he went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees, to eat bread on the sabbath day, that they watched him.”

Besides the chief Pharisee, there were other Pharisees, lawyers and scribes present. As the scripture indicates, they had invited Jesus so they could watch him, to find occasion against him, to condemn him according to their narrow and heartless interpretation of the law. They had set traps like this for him before. Instead of glorifying God for Jesus' marvelous healing ministry which was bringing hope to the hopeless and joy to the joyless, giving the people a foretaste of God's kingdom on earth, they with bitter jealousy resented the powers and popularity of Jesus and sought to condemn and kill him. According to them, healing was work, hence healing on the Sabbath was a violation of the law. So they laid a trap for Jesus. They invited him to dinner on the Sabbath day and arranged for a poor man, swollen with dropsy, to be there in front of the door. Then they watched Jesus.

Jesus saw the trap instantly and was angered at the hardness of their hearts. He healed the man without the slightest hesitation. Then he boldly entered the house of the chief Pharisee and took his place as invited guest. As a result of the incident at the door he gave them a number of parables, one after another, comprising the entire 14th chapter of Luke.

The parables of Jesus were in themselves intensely interesting stories. Even though his hearers could not appreciate their rich hidden significance, nevertheless they loved to hear the stories because of their sheer human-interest value. The characters in these parables were fascinating. They were drawn from every-day life, familiar to everyone. They lived and breathed! Being a perfect man you may be sure Jesus could relate the stories superbly, with perfect expression and voice, thrilling his hearers.

On this particular occasion, Jesus' parables were aimed primarily at the scribes, Pharisees and lawyers present. But his resonant voice

carried through the open windows and doors. When the publicans and sinners learned that he was there in that house telling parables, they wanted to hear him too, like children wanting to hear stories. So large numbers of them came from far and wide. We can imagine that they stood at the doors and windows, crowding and pushing for a better view to hear every word. They just couldn't keep away from Jesus. This is what we read:

“Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners, for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying: This man receiveth sinners, and [even] eateth with them.”--Luke 15:1,2

It was in answer to this criticism from the Pharisees and scribes that Jesus gave three of his most beautiful and touching parables: the parable of the Hundred Sheep, one of which was lost and then found; the parable of the Ten Silver Coins, one of which was lost and then found; and the parable of the Two Sons, one of which was a prodigal who strayed from his father's house--was lost and was then found. These parables were given by Jesus not only for the edification of the scribes and Pharisees at the table that day, but also for the comfort and encouragement of the eavesdropping publicans and sinners whom the scribes and Pharisees despised. The parable of the Two Sons is a particularly moving study.

“A certain man had two sons; and the younger of them said to his father: Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country; and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat; and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said: How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough, and to spare; and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father; and I will say unto him: Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee; and am no more worthy to be called thy son. Make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran. And the son said unto him: Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants: Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring hither the fattened calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry; for this, my son, was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry. Now his elder son was in the field; and, as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing.

And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him: thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound! And he was angry, and would not go in; therefore came his father out, and entreated him. And he answering, said to his father; Lo, These many years do I serve thee; neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment; and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this, thy son, was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto Him: Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad; for this, thy brother, was dead and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.”--Luke 15:11-32

Powerful Emotions Are on Display

Here is a story that is simple yet tugs at the heartstrings. The strongest of human emotions are skillfully played upon: the love of a parent for his children, a boy's wanderlust with its desire to break parental ties and be on one's own, a parent's worry for the safety of his wandering boy, the boy's disillusionment and homesickness for his father's house, the joyful reunion of father and son, and the older brother's jealousy. These are powerful emotions and you may be sure that every one of those priests, scribes, Pharisees, lawyers, publicans, and sinners who heard Jesus were moved by the story. It was something they could all understand and appreciate. The characters were realistic and convincing.

Let us consider this story. It was the custom of that time and country that the elder son inherit his father's estate if he chose to remain at home with his father. The younger sons, if they wanted it, were usually given some portion and allowed to enter other businesses or professions. This is what the younger son of the parable elected to do. So the father gave him a portion of his means in cash. So that the elder son might not be jealous, he gave him an equal portion at the same time. This does not mean that the father gave his sons everything he had retaining nothing for himself. He merely gave a reasonable individual portion to each son keeping the remainder. Of course if the elder son served his father faithfully until his father's death, he would inherit everything that was left.

As soon as the younger son had received his share, he announced that he was leaving home to go to some far-away place. How typical this is of young people! How anxious and eager they are to break away from parental ties and go their own way! How unmindful of the love, longing and heartbreak they often leave behind! But there is no record that the father made any objection. He must have given his son the best possible advice: to be always upright and honest and

God-fearing; to shun evil companions and not waste his resources; above all, to keep in touch--all of which advice the son proceeded to ignore. Again, how typical! Young people of the world tend to have a contempt for the advice of their parents. With all the profound wisdom of their teen-age years, they know better! Their parents are "square" and they use the word contemptuously. But, do you know? I like being a "square." I'm proud of it! The word "square" is one of the finest words in our language. You give a man a square deal if you are honest. You give him a square meal when he is hungry. You stand four-square for the right as you see it. When you are out of debt, you are square with the world and you can look your fellow-man square in the eyes.

The young son of the parable was a fool. As the saying goes, "A fool and his money are soon parted." In the process of parting with his money, he learned a humiliating lesson. When he had money, he was popular and had numerous friends who flattered him and told him how wonderful he was. As soon as his money ran out, his friends ran out.

For the first time in his life, he knew the pangs of real hunger. When he tried to get a job, he found there was a bad depression. The language of the parable calls it "a mighty famine" which is the same thing. In his desperation, he became a swineherd. For a Jew, this was an especially demeaning occupation--the ultimate degradation. Swine were considered unclean animals not even to be touched. He even got to the same level as the swine. He was so hungry he tried to feed himself with what the swine were eating: slop is what we would call it today. But his boss wouldn't even let him do that: "no man gave unto him" the parable says. How skillfully Jesus wove his story! What a description he gave of total debasement! A starving man is denied even the food of the pigs under his care!

The Prodigal Comes to His Senses

Then "he came to himself." His mind hadn't been functioning very well for a long time. He had been in a dream, a mad whirl, but now he came to his senses. His hunger brought him down to fundamentals. He remembered how it was in his father's house: the lavish plenty, the wonderful table his father set. He fairly drooled when he remembered those sumptuous meals he had enjoyed at home. He also remembered that after the family had eaten, the servants sat down and ate their fill too, of the same delicious food, with even some left over! And here he was, so hungry that he even coveted the husks the swine picked over! **HE DECIDED THAT HE MUST GO BACK!** Then he remembered that he had disgraced himself. He had violated every precept and advice of his father, and he had already received his share as a son. So there was nothing left

for him to go back to. He could not consider himself a son any longer. He said to himself, "If I can't go back as a son, I'll go back as a servant. I'll confess everything I've done to my father; I'll admit I am not worthy to be called his son--that I have forfeited that right--and I'll ask him to just hire me as one of his servants." Having made this decision, he started home immediately.



The way back must have been long and hard. On foot, without shoes, with tattered clothing, he begged his way from that far country. He finally reached his native land and as he approached his father's fields, he probably rehearsed in his mind what he would say to soften the anger he expected from his father. Then we read in the parable: "But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him." Do you realize the full import of this? It means that his father was watching

for him. It means more than that! It means that since the father did not know when his son would return or whether he would return at all--that he had been watching for his son all the time every day--longing for him, wondering where he was, whether he was well, how he was doing, if he was happy. He had been loving him, yearning for him, watching for him. No, it was no accident that he saw him when he was yet a great way off. There was something familiar about that



plodding, ragged figure in the distance, and he had been watching for so long! How his heart must have leaped with joy as he recognized his son COMING HOME AT LAST! He did not wait for his son to

approach, but ran to meet him. He threw his arms around him and kissed him over and over again. The long nightmare was over. The boy clung to his father and with tears streaming down his face he made his carefully prepared speech: "Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight; and am no more worthy to be called thy son." But that's as far as he got. He didn't get the chance to say the rest--"Make me as one of thy hired servants." His father silenced him by saying: "Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry; for this, my son, was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

The Parable's Significance

That is the story. Let us consider the typical significance of the parable. Because of the circumstances under which the parable was given--being addressed to the scribes and Pharisees and overheard by the publicans and sinners--we can expect that it primarily related to these two classes. The father who had two sons evidently represents Jehovah God. The two sons here represented the two general classes into which the Jewish nation had divided itself at that time. The elder brother who stayed at home represented the Pharisees and doctors of the law who outwardly and theoretically were in harmony with God.

Many of these were very conscientious. Paul had been one of this class. He declares that with all good conscience he had served the God of his fathers as a Pharisee. (Acts 26:5; Philippians 3:5) Doubtless there were others of this class whose intentions and desires were to remain loyal and obedient to the Heavenly Father, who sought daily by obedience to the law to remain "at home" with God. Jesus said of these, "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat." (Matthew 23:2) As a class they remained loyal to God in their outward profession at least, and in their endeavors, outwardly, to keep the law.

As the elder son in the parable was the heir of his father and to whom his father said, "All that I have is thine," these Jews endeavoring to keep the law were, up to that time, "the seed of promise." They were heirs of the promise, "In thee, and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

The younger son represented the common people of the Jews--those not so religiously strict as their ideals. This class misused and abandoned their privileges and opportunities as members of the nation of Israel, as beneficiaries of the divine promises. They wandered "afar off" into the ways of sin as publicans and sinners. They wasted their opportunities in self-gratification. They began to lose their identity as Israelites and became more and more like the

pagan Gentiles around them. They thus wasted their inheritance. In the language of the parable they “wasted their substance with riotous living.” As the younger son of the parable, having wasted his substance, was degraded to the feeding of swine, being hungry and ragged, this younger-son class of publicans and sinners felt their degradation just as described in the parable. They were spiritually hungry, they were morally ragged, they were discontented and unhappy, they were despised and repudiated by the Pharisees and doctors of the law who considered them as having forever forfeited the promises, as being dead to the promises, regarding them as prodigals and sinners, worse than the Gentiles. They would not eat with them nor have any dealings with them. They would not greet them on the street. When they saw them coming, they crossed over to the other side. When they met them, they looked right through them. On the other hand, the publicans and sinners realized in large measure their own unworthiness.

These two attitudes are illustrated by another parable of Jesus:

“And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others. Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus: God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are; extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week; I give tithes of all I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven; but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me, a sinner. [Then Jesus gave the moral of the parable.] I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other; for every one that exalteth himself, shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself, shall be exalted.”--Luke 18:9-14

Just as the younger son in the parable of the Two Sons said, “I will arise, and go to my father,” these publicans and sinners felt a longing to be back in God's favor--they were restless in their alienation from God. They felt it. They longed for rest in their father's house, but it was hard for them to find their way back. They needed help to return; they needed direction.

When John came preaching repentance and a cleansing by water immersion, they flocked to hear him. Many were baptized of John. They were powerfully attracted to Jesus who unlike the scribes and Pharisees noticed them, preached to them, talked to them, and ate with them. He encouraged the publicans and sinners to come to him, laden with sins as they were. It was especially to such he addressed these words:

“Come unto me, all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am

meek, and lowly of heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls.”--
Matthew 11:28,29

When Jesus ate with the publicans and sinners, the Pharisees criticized him:

“And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples: Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, they that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.”--Matthew 9:11,12

The Pharisees were theoretically whole. Outwardly they kept the law. They felt no lack, no need of a savior. But Jesus was sent to these who had strayed, to the prodigals, to the lost sheep. As he himself said, “I am not sent, but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” (Matthew 15:24)

He did this as a representative of the Heavenly Father. He told them of the Father's love for them. He revived their hopes. The Father himself had sent him to do this. It was, thus, an act of the Father, welcoming the prodigals of Israel back to his house. Many came to Jesus, repented of their sins, were welcomed back to the household of Israel to the Father's house and were once again in line for the promises given to Israel: “In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” Now we can understand what the parable means when it says:

“And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him: Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight; and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants: bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet; and bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry; for this, my son, was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found!”

This was the high calling of God offered to the humble and contrite Jews, the truly repentant ones, those who yearned for their Father's house, who longed for the Messiah to come. This was the invitation to be transformed from fleshly Israelites to spiritual Israelites.

“He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power, to become the sons of God.”--John 1:11,12

“The best robe” was nothing else but that wonderful Robe of Christ's righteousness: JUSTIFICATION, a covering for their sins and imperfections through Jesus Christ to enable them to run for “the prize of the high calling,” to become the spiritual “seed of

Abraham.” This was the “best” robe. It was the best thing that could possibly be offered to anyone.

“And put a ring on his hand,” the Father said. Do you remember when Pharaoh made Joseph ruler over all the land of Egypt? “And Pharaoh took off his ring from his hand, and put it upon Joseph's hand.” (Genesis 41:42) When the king of Medo-Persia would honor Mordecai, we read that he “took off his ring ... and gave it unto Mordecai.” (Esther 8:2) The ring was the symbol of investiture to office as heirs of God. Being of gold would signify a begetting to the divine nature. It was also a signet of the Father's everlasting mercy, forgiveness and love.

“And put ... shoes on his feet,” the Father said. This is a symbol of peace with God offered by Jesus Christ. As a part of the armor of God Paul says: “And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.” (Ephesians 6:15) Peter described Jesus' ministry as: “The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Christ Jesus.” (Acts 10:36) Jesus himself said:

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you. Not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”--John 14:27

The fatted calf was killed and a feast prepared for the prodigal. For the humble and repentant Jews who accepted Jesus as their Messiah, there was a “feast of fat things.” The majority of our Lord's followers at his first advent and shortly thereafter were of this class. This was the early church. What a rich spiritual feast they received! The Holy Spirit poured out at Pentecost and flowing on to those who followed, opened their minds to all the beauties of God's plan. Let us not forget that a fatted calf is the same as a bullock. The bullock was killed for them--Christ died for them; they partook of Christ. Jesus himself said:

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.”--John 6:53

Now we come to that part of the parable where the elder son, looking in from the outside, sees the feast his father had given to his brother and is offended. We read: “And he was angry, and would not go in. Therefore came his father out, and entreated him.” When the scribes and Pharisees and chief priests saw Jesus extending the Father's favor to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” they objected vigorously. They did not recognize the publicans and sinners as Jews at all. They felt that they and only they should be the favored ones. Just as the elder son of the parable “said to his father, Lo these many years do I serve thee; neither transgressed I, at any time thy commandments,” they felt that their outward keeping of the law should be recognized and rewarded. They overlooked this

admonition: “The Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7) They had no heart, no pity, no forgiveness for their erring brethren, and they resented the Father's mercy and forgiveness offered to them through Jesus Christ. They were consumed with jealousy. We read: “Jealousy is cruel as the grave.” (Canticles 8:6) It was this jealousy-inspired cruelty that made them want to kill Jesus. This jealousy hardened their hearts to Jesus' message and kept them from accepting their Messiah. As the parable says, they “would not go in.” But the humble, penitent, and contrite ones of the publicans and sinners accepted the Father's invitation with joy and went in to the feast.

As the father in the parable rebuked the elder son, saying: “It was proper that we should rejoice and be glad; for this, thy brother, was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found,” the scribes and Pharisees were rebuked by Jesus:

“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.”--Matthew 23:13

As the scribes and Pharisees were not in the right attitude of heart to receive their repentant brethren, neither would they have been in the right attitude of heart to be the Lord's instruments of blessing in his kingdom. He selects for joint-heirs not the self-righteous who despise others but such as are of an humble heart, who love to dispense to others the mercies and favors they themselves have received.

Because the scribes and Pharisees, the leaders of Israel who sat in Moses' seat, rejected Jesus and his message, **THE LORD REJECTED ISRAEL**, casting them off as his spiritual house or nation. Jesus proclaimed this fact when he said:

“Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem ... how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathered her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate!”-- Matthew 23:37,38

Only the earthly promises were left to them.

Other Lessons

This is the primary significance of the parable. But there are many other lessons to be learned from it also. It contains principles which are of general application. Like a window to heaven, it gives us glimpses of our Heavenly Father's glorious character and his mercies to men. Let us consider some of these lessons.

First there is a general outline of the Divine Plan contained in this parable. When the younger son of the parable wanted to leave his father's house, he was permitted to do so--he was a free moral agent. Similarly, Adam was permitted to take the wrong course without coercion by God. As the younger son "wasted his substance with riotous living," Adam, in leaving the garden, dissipated his prospects of living forever. Satan may be said to be the master of the "far country" to which the son went, far from God, his love, protection and care. Satan has degraded men to the level of swine. They are on the level of beasts. As the wise man wrote:

"I said in mine heart, concerning the estate of the sons of men ... that they themselves are beasts. For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts ... As the one dieth, so dieth the other."--Ecclesiastes 3:18,19

Yes, they have become swine under Satan's rule and in his service they starve for any really satisfying portion. They are physically destitute, morally filthy, ragged, spiritually hungry, and facing death. They long for better conditions to somehow return to their father's house. Paul describes this: "that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him." (Acts 17:27) In the millennial kingdom they do come home! They come from the "far country." They come back from death and the grave.

"They shall come again from the land of the enemy ... Thy children shall come again to their own border."-- Jeremiah 31:16,17

As the father welcomed his son, the repentant ones shall be joyfully received, fully and completely forgiven-- provided a "feast of fat things" and restored to earthly sonship. Then will the Heavenly Father say in the words of the parable: "For this, my son [Adam] was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found."

There is another important application to be made of this parable. Fleshly Israel was a type or foreshadowing of spiritual Israel; the harvest of the Jewish Age was a pattern or foreview of the harvest of this Gospel Age. This suggests that the parable may be applied to nominal Christendom and the manifestation of the wheat and tare classes at the harvest time. For instance, there are many noble characters in the world who love to do right: people who are well-born, and well-environed after birth, well educated, honest and sincere in all their dealings, prosperous. Many are faithful church members given to charitable works, workers for peace and to raise the standards of the people. It would seem that these should be the very first ones who would be chosen of God for the high calling to be joint-heirs with his son in the kingdom that is to bless mankind. It would seem that they are already half-trained for such work. But the scriptures make clear that not many of this kind may be expected to

be of the kingdom class. Not that God is unwilling to have them because of their education, wealth, and good morals. But it is these very qualities and the pride they generate that make them less ready to accept God's terms. All are sinners whether they know it or not. All are unworthy. All should be honest enough to confess the fact just as the younger son of the parable said to his father: "I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight; and am no more worthy to be called thy son." God requires this very honesty, this very confession of our need, before that "best robe," the merit of Christ, can be imputed to us, as covering our blemishes.

But the members of this "better" class, represented in the elder brother of the parable, feel important. Like the scribes and Pharisees of old they feel that--in contrast with the lower strata of society--they are perfection itself, that God would be sure to desire them above others. But what did he say? "Not many wise men after the flesh; not many mighty; not many noble, are called." (1 Corinthians 1:26) Then he describes the ones he has called and chosen. See how closely this description fits the younger son of the parable, the one who foolishly wasted his substance: "But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world." The younger son weakly followed evil ways: "And God hath chosen the weak things of the world." He was debased to the level of the swine and despised himself: "and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen." He was finally brought down to nothing and he had nothing: "Yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought the things that are; that no flesh should glory in his presence." It is these humble, repentant younger sons that the Father draws to himself and heartily welcomes and clothes with the "best robe" of justification, grants the gold ring of begetting to the divine nature, shods with peace, and serves them a bountiful feast of spiritual food.

God's Glorious Character

Now we come to the lesson of the parable which I think is the most precious of all because it gives us a glimpse of God's glorious character and his loving and merciful ways. Jesus knew his Father intimately and he skillfully wove into his parable an inspiring insight of the very emotions of God! He conveyed to his hearers what the Heavenly Father is really like using illustrations they could understand. No other scripture than this has been so helpful and encouraging to the poor and needy, the sinful and the weak, the degraded and debased--who, realizing their undone condition, desire to return from the ways of sin, who reach out for something to grasp, to lift them up, to help them return to God and to their Father's house. Reading this parable, such identify themselves with the condition of the younger son--in a far country, his substance wasted,

friends unfaithful, hopes lost, brought down to the level of swine, his highest hopes turned to husks, and denied even these with which to fill his belly. They see themselves in this son! When they read of the son's return and that, "when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him"--they say, "Oh, if God is like that, if he is as loving and kind and merciful and forgiving as that, there is hope for me too!" They say, as the prodigal did: "I will arise, and go to my father!" They start back.

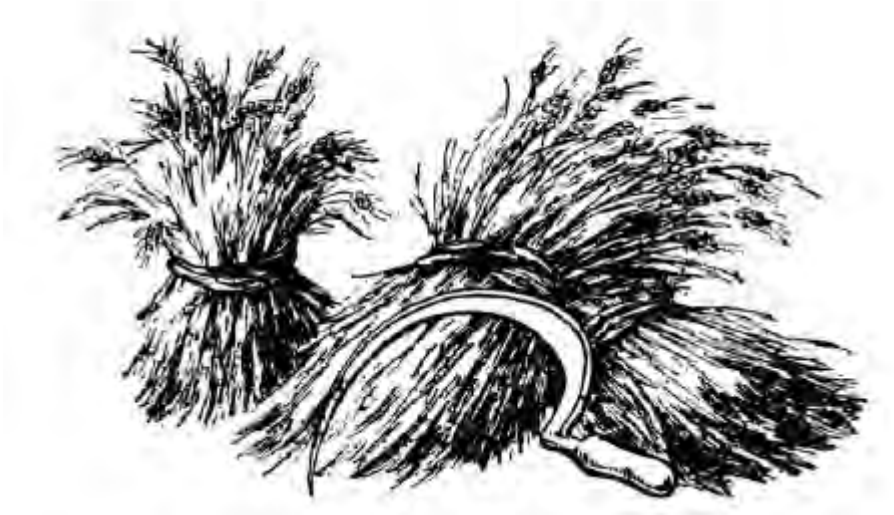
Just before Jesus gave this parable, he gave two others. From the parable of the hundred sheep one of which was lost and then found, he drew the lesson: "Likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance." From the parable of the ten pieces of silver one of which was lost and then found, he drew the lesson: "Likewise I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." These are positive statements. How did Jesus know this? He had been there! He had seen it! He had participated in it! This "joy in heaven" and "joy in the presence of the angels of God," is the joy of God himself! Think of that! God personally rejoices over each sinner that repents. The parable of the two sons confirms this most emphatically.

More than this, as the father in the parable missed his son and longed for him, watched for him so continuously that "when he was yet a great way off" he saw him, the Heavenly Father feels the alienation of the human family he created and greatly desires their return to him. As Job said: "Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee; thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands." (Job 14:15) As the prodigal's sin had not destroyed the father's love for him but rather intensified it, God will love and prize his repentant and returned human family just as the father of the parable embraced and kissed his son who had been lost and was found. Think of this: if there is joy in heaven in the presence of the angels of God, over one sinner that repenteth, just think of the tremendous fullness of joy there will be when in the kingdom billions of sinners repent and return to their Father's house!

The Personal Message for Us

There is a very intimate and personal lesson for the Lord's people in this beautiful parable. Should you ever find yourself alienated from God and feel a cloud of separation between you regardless of the cause, regardless of what you have done, regardless of shortcomings and weaknesses involved, if you ever think of your Father's house, and long to return: go! Do not hesitate for a moment! If you are repentant and say to the Lord, "I have sinned against heaven, and in

thy sight,” you will be heartily and compassionately received. As the father of the parable ran to meet his son, God will meet you more than half way. There will be no reproaches, no rehearsing of the sins of the prodigal, no questions. Only rejoicing that the lost was found. You will feel the forgiving embrace of the Everlasting Arms around you.



The Praise of the Wrath of Men

“Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.”--Psalms 76:10

“For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.” --Hebrews 12:3

ALTHOUGH Jesus went about doing nothing but good and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, the chief priests, elders, scribes and Pharisees wanted to kill him. Jeremiah has said, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” (Jeremiah 17:9) These men truly had deceitful and desperately wicked hearts. To conspire to kill a depraved and sinful man is bad enough. Such an act might be rationalized by saying: “After all, he deserves to die.” But to conspire to kill one who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, who has perfect love, whose every waking hour is spent doing good--that is an evil, and culpable thing.

Yet these evil men, who held such high and honorable positions and wielded such great power in the Jewish nation, in spite of all their efforts, did not seem to succeed in their conspiracies against Jesus. When Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath, we read: “Then the Pharisees went out and held a council against him, how they might destroy him.” (Matthew 12:14) Nothing happened.

On another occasion Jesus told the chief priests and Pharisees the parable of the vineyard. He told them about the wicked husbandman who killed the son and heir. He had read their murderous hearts. They knew he spoke of them and they were highly insulted:

“And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parable, they perceived that he spake of them. But when they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the multitude.”--Matthew 21:45

Again they could do nothing.

Then there was the occasion when Jesus cleansed the temple, casting out them that sold and bought, overthrowing the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold doves. He told them bluntly they had made his father's house a den of thieves. This statement was unpardonable in their eyes. He had not only interfered in a profitable business arrangement of theirs, he had also publicly implied they were thieves. This hurt their dignity so they “sought how they might destroy him.” (Mark 11:18) But they were not able to do it.

On another occasion a helpless cripple, who had been in that condition for 38 years, was made by Jesus to arise, take up his bed and walk. The leaders of the Jews objected. What was so bad about that? It was done on the Sabbath! It did not matter that a poor cripple

had been gloriously healed. Their interpretation of the law had been violated. “Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him.” (John 5:18) This desire to kill was even more than before! But Jesus still lived.

In Nazareth although they tried to throw him headlong over a cliff, something went wrong because, “he, passing through the midst of them, went on his way.” (Luke 4:30) On another occasion they sent a band of hired officers to take Jesus and bring him before the counsel, to be condemned and killed. The officers came back empty-handed, giving as the reason for their failure: “Never man spake like this man!” (John 7:46) Failure again.

One day in the temple the Jews bragged about Abraham being their father. Jesus said, “Before Abraham was, I am.” “Then they took up stones to cast at him.” (John 8:59) Action! Not just scheming, counseling and secret plans to kill Jesus. They had the stones in their hands and Jesus was there before them. They were furious and they were in the mood. But they must have suddenly gotten something in their eyes because they never threw those stones. Jesus simply walked out of the temple.

When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, they got desperate. This was such a mighty display of power. “What shall we do?” they said. “If we let him alone, all men will believe on him.” So we read, “From that day forth, they took counsel together, for to put him to death.” (John 11:53) But their counsel came to nought.

Wickedness Does Not Always Prevail

Why were they always unsuccessful in their plans to kill Jesus? They were crafty men and held high and powerful positions. They were willful men, used to having their own way. They were callused men, utterly devoid of conscience. They saw the good works of Jesus including his healing miracles, yet they sought to kill him simply because he was in their way. They surely had the means to take him. They had their officers and their own private army or police force. Yet Jesus seemed to always slip from their grasp. Why? John gives us the answer. On one occasion Jesus was teaching in the temple. Many accepted him as the Messiah. Some said, “Do the rulers know indeed that this is the very Christ?” How little they knew the kind of men their rulers really were! Because they asked this question, their rulers were consumed with jealous rage.

“Then they sought to take him; but no man laid hands on him, because his hour was not yet come.”--John 7:30

There is the reason. It is repeated in the next chapter. Jesus had publicly rebuked the Pharisees for not acknowledging he was from God. This made them very angry and they longed to kill him, but:

“No man laid hands on him, for his hour was not yet come.” (John 8:20)

What is meant by the statement, “His hour was not yet come”? I believe there are two meanings. Jesus had a specific work to do on earth. When Pilate asked him if he was a king, he said:

“To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice.”--John 18:37

Jesus had come to offer himself as Israel's king, their Messiah, but as a nation, they rejected him. So he turned to individuals--to “everyone that is of the truth.”

“He came unto his own, and his own received him not; but as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God; even to them that believe on his name.”--John 1:11,12

He opened up “a new and living way.” (Hebrews 10:20) He established his church of Israelites indeed--Spiritual Israel. He selected apostles and disciples who would carry on the work after he had left the earthly scene; he glorified God on earth. Until he finished this work, “his hour was not yet come.”

Another meaning is that he had come to offer himself as a ransom sacrifice, to be killed as the antitypical Passover lamb in fulfillment of prophecy at a certain specific time and date, not before. No matter how the chief priests and elders, the lawyers, scribes and Pharisees schemed, no matter how carefully they constructed their plans, no matter how much power they had, it came to nothing because “his hour or time was not yet come.” All the power of Almighty God protected him from harm until it was time. Jesus himself confirmed this directly. He had just been betrayed with a kiss. This time he voluntarily surrendered himself to those whom the chief priests, scribes and elders had sent. One of his disciples, in his zeal, sought to defend him with a sword. Jesus rebuked him saying: “Thinkest thou, that I cannot now pray to my Father and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels”? (Matthew 26:53) Do you know how many angels that is? In those days a Roman legion was 5,000. So 12 legions would be 60,000 angels! These were not human soldiers with fleshly limitations, subject to defeat, but powerful spirit beings with supernatural powers and irresistible strength! Do you fully realize the tremendous potential of even one angel? Moses said:

“And when we cried unto the Lord, he heard our voice, and sent an angel, and hath brought us forth out of Egypt.”--Numbers 20:16

“And the angel of God went before the camp of Israel.”--Exodus 14:19

The might of Egypt was destroyed by one angel!

There is an occasion when the Lord sent a pestilence upon Israel by an angel of the Lord: "And there died of the people, from Dan even to Beersheba, 70,000 men." (See 2 Samuel 24:15,16) Again, this was just one angel!

Then we have the incident in Isaiah chapter 37 when Sennacherib, the Assyrian, sent a profane letter to Hezekiah, king of Judah, demanding surrender and insolently mocking them for trusting Jehovah. Hezekiah did a wonderful thing. He took that letter "and spread it before the Lord, and he prayed. ... Then the angel of the Lord went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians, a hundred and fourscore and five thousand; and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses." 185,000 men died! This was the work of one angel!

You can see how much power is represented in 12 legions (60,000) of angels. Of course the schemes and plans of the enemies of Jesus failed. This also accounts for Jesus' calm assurance throughout his ministry on earth. He knew they were scheming against him. He knew every thought they had and every move they made. He could read them like a book. He had the power to read their minds:

"Jesus perceived their wickedness."--Matthew 22:18

"And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye those things in your hearts?"--Mark 2:8

"Jesus perceived their thoughts."--Luke 5:22

"But He perceived their craftiness."--Luke 20:23

He wasn't fooled a bit. But it means that almost every moment of his ministry he was conscious of plots against his life. He always knew who was plotting, why, and where. I think of the words of the hymn: "I know not what awaits me, God kindly veils mine eyes." And the words, "O blissful lack of knowledge, 'Tis blessed not to know." That applies to us. We don't know and it's better for us not to know certain things so we won't have to worry about them.

Jesus did know. He knew they would eventually kill him and he knew how they would kill him. He knew he would be crucified:

"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die."--John 12:32,33

In Matthew 20:19 and 26:2 he told his disciples plainly that he would be crucified. You may be sure he knew exactly what crucifixion meant. Death by crucifixion was a Roman form of execution. More than once on his journeys he must have passed such victims of Roman "justice"--writhing, tortured beings, nailed alive to crosses and waiting piteously for release in death, a death that

might not arrive for days. But Jesus knew they could do nothing to him before the time, and even then, not unless permitted by his heavenly Father. He knew that 60,000 angels were always available to carry out his Father's will. So he calmly and openly went about his work.

The Father's Protection Is Over Us

Let us see how those things apply to us. Jesus' hour finally came and he was about to leave his beloved disciples. With his heart overflowing with love for them, he prayed a beautiful and inspiring prayer, recorded in John chapter 17. Lifting up his eyes to heaven, he said to his heavenly Father:

“Father, the hour is come. Glorify thy Son, that thy Son may also glorify thee. I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.”

Then he prayed for those the Father had given him. These were his beloved apostles and disciples. But he didn't stop with them; he prayed for some others as well. He prayed for each one of you! “Neither pray I for these alone [that is, his apostles and disciples], but for them also which shall believe on me, through their word.” Isn't that you? Of course it is. Haven't you believed on him through their word? I have.

Let us see what he specifically asked God, on our behalf, and what therefore must be ours. Knowing that in just a few hours he would leave the world in death, he said:

“And now I am no more in the world; but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name, those whom thou hast given me. ... I have given them thy word, and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from evil. ... Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth.”

This prayer contains such marvelous implications as to stagger the imagination. He said, in effect:

“Dear Father, my hour is now come. I have glorified your name on earth, and have finished the work you gave me to do. I am about to leave the world, and come back to you. But these you have given me, these apostles and disciples and those that shall, in the future, believe on me through their word. They will stay in the world after I am gone. The world will hate them just as it has hated me. Although those of the world hated me, they could not touch me because, until now, my hour had not yet come. I always had your complete protection, dear Father, knowing that if I asked, you would send

60,000 angels to my assistance. I won't need this protection any more, but they will because they are staying in the world. Holy Father, keep them through thine own name. I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from evil, just as you kept me from evil.”

Do you see the wonderful thing that is implied here? It would almost seem as if this prayer of Jesus, made just before his death, was a sort of “Last Will and Testament.” He asked the Heavenly Father to give us the same watchcare and protection he himself had enjoyed when on earth. He asked that it pass on to us! This would surely include God's constant leading and direction in every affair of life and, over it all, his loving, protecting care, delivering us from evil. The measure of this protection is the 12 legions of angels should it ever become necessary. Just as Jesus' enemies could not touch him or take his life before his “hour” had come, we have that same protection.

When Jesus was before Pilate, he did not defend himself. “He opened not his mouth.” Pilate was exasperated. He said to Jesus: “Speakest thou not unto me? Knowest thou not, that I have power to crucify thee, and power to release thee?” Jesus calmly answered: “Thou couldest have no power at all against me, except it were given thee from above.” (John 19:10,11) Although Pilate represented all the power of the mighty Roman Empire, he did not have the power to crucify Jesus before his time had come, before his hour had come, before his heavenly Father withdrew his angelic protection and allowed him to be taken. So it is with us as well.

The Wrath of Man Praises God

During his ministry Jesus continually suffered the “wrath of men” and the “contradiction of sinners against himself.” The scribes, Pharisees, elders, doctors of the law, and others hated him, opposed him, attacked him, and tried to discredit him. Our text says, “Surely the wrath of men shall praise thee.” How was God praised by these attacks? “Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself.” What can be gained from such a consideration? It was the attacks upon Jesus that brought forth some of the most precious truths of our Lord's ministry. In this way the wrath of men resulted in the praise of God. Let us now consider two of these attacks and the lessons they taught.

The enemies of Jesus spied on him day and night to find occasion against him. One thing they accused him of, over and over again, was his supposed desecration of the Sabbath. Why do you suppose they emphasized this so much? Was it because they loved God and God's law so much that they felt impelled as God's champions to defend every letter of the law? Or was it because they loved the

people so much that they felt the supposed bad example of Jesus and his disciples should not be permitted to deceive them? If these were their motives, we could respect them for it. Mistaken as they might be, these would at least be honest motives. But they had murder in their hearts. They were not honorable men. What was their overwhelming interest in Sabbath-keeping? Why did they continually accuse Jesus of breaking the Sabbath? The ancient penalty for Sabbath-breaking was death by stoning. (See Numbers 15:32-36.) These wonderful champions of the law wanted to catch Jesus doing something punishable by death. Then they would be rid of him legally, without soiling their hands, so to speak. Of course if all other methods failed, they could still take him with hired killers. But that would only be as a last resort. First they would try finesse.

The Walk Through the Wheat Field

Consider an incident recorded by Matthew, Mark and Luke. We will reconstruct the scene from their brief accounts. One Sabbath morning, as the Pharisees were spying as usual, Jesus and his disciples walked along a path through a wheat field. They were on their way to the synagogue where Jesus would teach. Jesus was deeply engrossed in his thoughts and if he was hungry, he was not conscious of it. His disciples were hungry so they picked stalks of fresh wheat as they walked, rubbed them between their palms to remove the chaff, and ate the grains. The Pharisees immediately pounced upon them! "What you are doing is unlawful," they cried with righteous indignation. Jesus stopped and looked at them. "Why?" he asked. "Your disciples are working on the Sabbath," they said. "How so?" "When they pick the wheat, they are reaping; when they rub off the chaff, they are threshing; when they blow the chaff away, they are winnowing. These are acts of labor and are forbidden on the Sabbath!" Jesus knew their evil motives, but answered them patiently:

"But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did when he was an hungered, and they that were with him? How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests? Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the Sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath [that is, by working] and are blameless? But I say unto you, that in this place is one greater than the temple. But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath Day."-- Matthew 12:3-8

This seemed to silence the Pharisees, not because they agreed with Jesus, but because they knew their position was weak. Undoubtedly

by this time a crowd sympathetic to Jesus had gathered. The scribes and Pharisees had a healthy respect for Jesus' keen mind and had no desire to match wits with him before the people. They always came off second best in such encounters. Anyway, they could not use this incident against Jesus personally. He had not plucked and eaten any wheat and it was Jesus they wanted to entrap and kill. So they retreated for the moment.

There was another reason for their withdrawing. They knew he was on his way to the synagogue and they had set a trap for him there, a trap that would involve Jesus personally. Then they would stone him. They had found a man with a withered hand and stationed him at the entrance to the synagogue. If Jesus healed him on the Sabbath, they would accuse him. They considered such healing a breach of the law which forbade any activity on the Sabbath. There would be plenty of witnesses because a crowd would be waiting, as usual, to accompany Jesus into the synagogue to hear him teach.

This incident is also recorded by Matthew, Mark and Luke. I will read portions from the different accounts. This is from Mark chapter 3: "And they watched him, whether he would heal on the Sabbath day; that they might accuse him." If they had hoped to take Jesus by surprise, they were mistaken. He knew exactly what was happening. The poor man with the withered hand was huddled in a corner. The scribes and Pharisees had probably told him if he stayed there, he would be healed; he trembled in hopeful anticipation. Jesus was angry, not just because the scribes and Pharisees had sought to entrap him, but because they had hypocritically used this poor, innocent man to bait their trap. They had enticed him with the promise he would be healed; yet they fully intended to condemn the Master for healing him! They had hearts of flint! Jesus knew all this, because he knew their thoughts.

We now read from Luke chapter 6:

"But he knew their thoughts, and said to the man which had the withered hand: Rise up, and stand forth in the midst. And he arose and stood forth. Then said Jesus unto them, I will ask you one thing: Is it lawful on the Sabbath days to do good or to do evil? To save life, or to destroy it?"

They dropped their eyes. They could not answer. If they replied that the law forbade a good deed, their answer would be repeated all over town, eagerly passed from mouth to mouth by the common people. It would cast discredit on these proud defenders of the law. So they "held their peace." Then from Matthew's account:

"What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep and if it fall into a pit on the Sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and

lift it out? How much, then, is a man, better than a sheep? Wherefore it is lawful to do well on the Sabbath days.”

They would not answer, so he answered his own question. The crowd was spellbound with the drama being enacted before their eyes. Every eye was upon Jesus, the strong, perfect man, the great teacher and healer, who literally radiated energy; and also on the pale, shrunken man, standing before him, with one good arm and the other a short useless appendage hanging limply at his side. The scribes and Pharisees began to feel nervous. Things were not working out quite as they expected. They sensed that somehow, they themselves were about to fall into a pit they dug for Jesus. We continue from Mark's account:

“And when he had looked round about on them, with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts, he saith unto the man: Stretch forth thine hand. And he stretched it out; and his hand was restored whole as the other.”

Their plot against Jesus had completely collapsed. They had known, of course, that Jesus could heal the man with the withered hand. As soon as he did it, they had intended to loudly accuse him of Sabbath-breaking before all the people. They had expected to harangue and stir up the people against Jesus. They probably had hecklers planted in the crowd who would, at the right moment, cry out: “Stone him! Stone him!” They may even have had stones heaped nearby so before anyone knew what was happening, Jesus would be dead. It was a beautiful plan, but it just didn't work out that way. Something went wrong. Jesus had taken the initiative away from them completely. The crowd now looked on them with hostility and contempt. So they sullenly slipped away. Matthew says: “Then the Pharisees went out, and held a council against him, how they might destroy him.” Mark: “And the Pharisees went forth and straightway took counsel with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him.” Luke: “And they were filled with madness; communed one with another, what they might do to Jesus.” The phrase “filled with madness” certainly describes “the wrath of men.”

The Wrath of Man Educates

Now consider how these instances of the “wrath of men” resulted in teaching us precious truths to the praise of God. The disciples of Jesus plucked and ate wheat while walking through the wheat field on the Sabbath. To interpret this simple act to be reaping, threshing and winnowing, and hence a violation of the Sabbath is manifestly absurd. It was such absurdities that Jesus combated, not the true keeping of the commandment. Jesus himself kept the law in every respect. But over the years Jewish religionists had evolved a long

and tedious list of prohibitions regarding the Sabbath which were ridiculous and burdensome. For example, if a man scratched or hunted for a flea on the Sabbath, he was violating the Sabbath. Why? The man was “hunting” as truly as though it were a buffalo or a lion! It was also argued that if anyone walked upon the grass with nailed shoes on the Sabbath day, he would violate the law because he would inevitably trample out some of the grass seeds. That would be threshing. It was even debated whether or not a fresh egg should be eaten on the first day of the week since it implied work on the part of the hen on the seventh day, the Sabbath. Such ridiculous trivialities irked Jesus. The law says:

“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor and do all the work; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God; in it thou shalt not do any work, thou nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates.”--Exodus 20:8-10

“And [Jesus] said unto them, The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.”--Mark 2:27

The Sabbath Blesses Man

It is clear that the Sabbath was given for the benefit of mankind, for man's physical, mental and moral rest, recuperation and strengthening. A day of rest, whether the seventh day or another day, is absolutely necessary for humankind. After the French Revolution, when a wave of irreligion swept France, they enacted a law abolishing rest on Sunday. “We will accomplish much more without a day's cessation of labor,” they said. After a while, there were wholesale physical and nervous breakdowns among the people and a day of rest had to be restored. So aside from its typical significance, the fourth commandment was an eminently wise law. Originally it was to be purely a day of rest. Now it had become a day of worry over trivialities. They had complicated and perverted it. Instead of relaxing and refreshing them, the Sabbath built up their anxieties. They asked themselves: “Am I, without knowing it, reaping, or threshing, or winnowing, or hunting, or eating an egg produced on the Sabbath?” The time came when it was such a chore to keep the Sabbath with all its formalities and fears, that the people dreaded its coming and were glad when the sun set upon it so they could relax in the normal pursuits of a working day. These were the conditions Jesus found, and combated during his ministry. It was just another case of Satan subtly and gradually perverting the laws of God, holding them up to ridicule.

On this occasion Jesus rebuked the scribes and Pharisees: “But if ye had known what this meaneth: I will have mercy and not sacrifice,

ye would not have condemned the guiltless.” Mercy was something they conspicuously lacked. Jesus brought this out forcibly on the next occasion. Pointing to the man with the withered hand, he said:

“What man, shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the Sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out?”

What an eloquent illustration of mercy! A man has only one sheep, his sole possession. He has no great wealth, not a vast herd--just one sheep. If that one sheep falls into a pit on the Sabbath and cannot get out, and it looks up at its Master and cries piteously, will not the man, out of simple mercy, lift it out, whether it be the Sabbath or not? Or will he, for the sake of the Sabbath, sacrifice the sheep by letting it die in the pit? Jesus gave the answer by quoting his Heavenly Father's words: “I will have mercy and not sacrifice.” Then to the man with the withered hand he said: “How much, then, is a man better than a sheep.”

What a beautiful illustration this is of humankind who, like poor sheep, have fallen into the pit of sin and death. They are utterly unable by their own efforts to raise themselves out. They look up and cry piteously to their Master for help, seeking after God, if haply they might find him, groaning and travailing in pain together. How happy we are for the great mercy that will lay hold on that sheep during the Sabbath Age, the Millennium--and lift it out!

Jesus said, “For the Son of Man is Lord, even of the Sabbath day.” What does this mean? Immediately following the commandment relating to the Sabbath, we read:

“For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day; wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.”--Exodus 20:11

Of course these six days of creation were not 24-hour days; each was thousands of years in length. Having established his human son in Eden as ruler of the earth at the end of the sixth day, Jehovah God rested from work on the seventh day, a period of 7,000 years. To whom then, did he entrust the affairs of humankind? Who became Lord of this seventh day or Sabbath extending 7,000 years from the creation of man to the restoration of man at the end of the Millennial Age? He appointed his son Jesus Christ to be this Lord of the Sabbath, TO CARRY OUT HIS WILL, to redeem and rescue humankind, to select his bride and church, to lay hold of the sheep and raise it out of the pit, to conquer and subdue all evil, and finally present it all faultless to his heavenly Father. As Paul expresses it:

“Then the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and authority

and power; for he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet; and the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death; for he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith All things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son, also, himself be subject unto him that put all things under him; that God may be all in all.”--1 Corinthians 15:24-28

When Jesus told the scribes and Pharisees he was “Lord of the Sabbath,” he did not mean that he had the right to set aside the requirements of the Sabbath. Quite the contrary. He was telling them, although they could not understand it, that his work was in fulfillment of the larger meaning of the Sabbath, that the entire 7,000-year Sabbath was under his control and command.

While the seventh day was beneficial to the Jew as a day of rest, it was given for another very important reason. It was also typical. It typified the Christian's rest of faith, a close heart-relationship to the Lord, a complete and utter reliance on him, a complete love for him. Instead of demanding one day out of seven, as the Jewish law did, the law of love controls and regulates our entire time. Seven days each week we are to love the Lord our God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. Seven days each week we are to love our neighbors as ourselves. Seven days each week we are to rest--rest from our own works, rest by faith in the finished work of Christ, rest in the love of God, rest in the peace of God which passeth all understanding, ruling in our hearts continually. As the apostle explains the matter:

“Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For we which have believed, do enter into rest.. There remaineth, therefore, a rest to the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his. Let us labor, therefore, to enter into that rest.”--Hebrews 4:1,3,9-11

While enjoying this Sabbath of rest in advance, how we long for rest to come to the world, when all cruelty, viciousness, heartbreak, hopelessness, fear and despair will come to an end, when the nobility and dignity of man will be restored, and kindness, helpfulness, love and hope will fill the earth! What joy it brings to know we will have a part in bringing it about!

The Prayer of Hezekiah

“Thus the Lord saved Hezekiah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib the king of Assyria, and from the hand of all other, and guided them on every side.”--2 Chronicles 32:22

HEZEKIAH was king of Judah, and reigned in Jerusalem. He was a good king, and the Lord loved him. It is written of him: “And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that David his father did. He trusted in the Lord God of Israel; so that after him, was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him.”--2 Kings 18:3,5

Hezekiah eradicated idolatry from Judah, breaking the images and cutting down the groves of heathen worship. He went even further than that. Do you remember the times during the wanderings of the Children of Israel, that fiery serpents bit them, and many died? On that occasion, at God's direction, Moses made a brazen serpent and set it upon a pole in the midst of the camp. If anyone was bitten, all he had to do was to look at the brazen serpent and he lived. This, of course, represented Jesus, raised up upon the cross, to whom those bitten by sin and death may look and live. The brazen serpent was a fascinating object. The children of Israel, who had so often turned to idolatry, had done something very characteristic of them. They preserved that brazen serpent over the centuries and at the time of Hezekiah it was enshrined in the temple at Jerusalem. Now that would have been all right if they had merely regarded it as an interesting historical relic. But no! They had to make an idol of it--they had to worship it--right there in the very temple of the Great God of Heaven! They ignored the Creator in His own house and worshipped a piece of brass instead! So we read that Hezekiah:

“Break in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made; for in those days the Children of Israel did burn incense to it. And he called it Nehushtan [a piece of brass].”--2 Kings 18:4

It took a lot of courage to do that. This serpent was a revered object. Destroying it was the breaking of ancient tradition. But Hezekiah's devotion to the Lord was such that he could not tolerate the adoration of this object even though it had been made by the hand of Moses at God's direction. We read of Hezekiah in verses 6 and 7:

“He clave to the LORD, and departed not from following him, but kept his commandments, which the LORD commanded Moses. And the LORD was with him; and he prospered whithersoever he went forth.”

In those days, the king of Assyria was on the march. Assyria was rapidly becoming a world empire. The Assyrian armies, with their expert archers and their chariots and horsemen, had conquered one nation after another. They appeared to be aiming for the conquest of Egypt, but they must first eliminate the nations in the way. Logistics made this necessary. Their supply lines must be protected. So, in the course of their military aggression, they invaded and conquered the northern or ten-tribe kingdom of Israel, which had a separate government from Judah, and they carried the Israelites of those tribes captive to Assyria (verse 11). Now the kingdom of Judah, of which Hezekiah was king, was the last country in the way between them and Egypt. So they marched on and conquered the outlying fenced cities of Judah too. Then they turned their eyes on Jerusalem itself, the capital city of Judah.

Because of their reputation of terror, the Assyrians expected Hezekiah to surrender upon demand, giving them a quick and easy victory. But Hezekiah refused to submit. The scriptures say that “he rebelled against the king of Assyria and served him not.” (2 Kings 18:7) Then, in his effort to avoid war, Hezekiah made a mistake and did a foolish thing. Perhaps he was influenced by his advisors against his better judgment: he offered to pay tribute to Sennacherib, king of Assyria, and he asked the king to name the amount! In effect, he signed a blank check. The king was quick to press his advantage. He demanded 30 talents of gold and 300 talents of silver as his price for not attacking Jerusalem. One talent weighs about 125 pounds. Just imagine the value at today's prices! But according to ancient Assyrian historical records which exist today, written on tablets and cylinders of baked clay, Sennacherib actually got 800 talents of silver or 100,000 pounds in weight, in addition to the gold. This may be correct, because the scripture says:

“And Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the house of the Lord, and in the treasures of the king's house. At that time did Hezekiah cut off the gold from the doors of the temple of the Lord, and from the pillars which Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid; and gave it to the king of Assyria.”--2 Kings 18:15,16

Sennacherib Lies to Hezekiah

In effect, he stripped and robbed the house of God. So what did Sennacherib do as soon as he had gotten this tremendous treasure? He promptly sent a great host against Jerusalem! Do you see how foolish it was for Hezekiah to try to do business with Sennacherib? He paid for peace and got war just the same.

Bro. Russell suggests that there is a lesson in this for us, for spiritual Israel. We should not attempt to negotiate with Satan, to purchase

deliverance and peace with things consecrated to the Lord--to compromise the truth, for instance, if threatened with the disfavor of friends, or neighbors, or others, by taking a more worldly course; taking from our time, influence, or means, which are consecrated to the Lord, any great portions for worldly service, perhaps to secure domestic peace, or social advancement, or earthly prosperity. If the Lord's consecrated people do this, it may well be, as in the case of Hezekiah, that the Lord will permit to come upon them the very difficulties which they, by so doing, seek to avoid.

There is another very encouraging lesson we can learn from this incident too. Serious as his mistake was, the Lord seems to have completely forgiven Hezekiah, and caused to be written of his reign: "And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord." The events transpiring after this incident show the Lord's abundant favor upon him, as proof of his forgiveness. We can take heart from this. If we have been guilty of errors of judgment (and who has not been), even serious and costly blunders, even tending to compromise the truth, and seeing the error of our way, we cry to the Lord for forgiveness, he is willing to forgive completely. Hezekiah knew this; and he himself said, as recorded in Isaiah 38:17,

"Behold for peace I had great bitterness: but thou hast in love to my soul, delivered it from the pit of corruption; for thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back."

Do you know what this means: "For thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back"? It means that when our sins are forgiven, they no longer come between us and God. They are behind his back, not before his face, when he looks upon us. This is a blessed condition. As David put it:

"Blessed is he, whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity."--Psalms 32:1,2

Hezekiah Shows No Fear

When Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib, king of Syria, was determined to fight against Jerusalem, he gathered the people of the city together in a great open-air meeting, and said to them, as recorded in 2 Chronicles 32:7,8:

"Be strong and courageous; be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there is more with us than with him. With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the LORD our God to help us, and to fight our battles. And the people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah, king of Judah."

“For there is more with us, than with him,” Hezekiah said. That was a surprising thing for him to say. The hordes of Sennacherib were like locusts. They covered the earth. Hundreds of thousands of armed men, superbly drilled and disciplined: charioteers, horsemen, lancers, archers, swordsmen, foot-soldiers. Engineers, skilled in laying siege against walled cities with scaling ladders, catapults, battering rams, and enormous bows for shooting flaming arrows--all in charge of proficient and seasoned commanders with decades of successful military campaigns behind them, with a record of no defeats.

On the other hand, there were only a few thousand men in Jerusalem. No standing army, but only a militia of civilians over which some military captains had been hastily set (verse 6). Still Hezekiah could say: “There is more with us, than with him”! What an astonishing thing for him to say! But then, he explained himself in the next verse: “With him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God to help us, and to fight our battles.” Under the circumstances, it took tremendous faith to say that--real faith.

You know, theoretic or untested faith is easy. You sit down, safe and sound, surrounded by every material comfort, and simply use your reason. You say: “God is all-powerful. He made heaven and earth. All things are under his control. No one can successfully resist Him. And I am his child. He has promised help in every time of need. He has said that no evil shall befall me. He has given his angels charge over me. So what have I got to be afraid of?”

That kind of faith is easy, when everything is going reasonably well, when there is no immediate or serious threat. But with Hezekiah in Jerusalem that day, it was different. When he said these words, he could practically hear the tramping feet of hundreds of thousands of approaching soldiers, the neighing of thousands of horses, the rumble of war chariots, the deliberate tread of great war elephants, bringing up the battering rams, the infernal sounds of a frightful military machine, coming closer and closer--all with the object of destroying Jerusalem. He could see their dust and almost smell their sweat. THIS was no time for theorizing. This was IT! This was a test of real faith. Hezekiah proved that he had it. He trusted the Lord completely in the face of real and imminent danger. It made him strong and courageous, so strong and courageous that his speech carried power and conviction. He was able to imbue the people with his own spirit and confidence. We read that “the people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah, king of Judah.” The margin says that they “leaned upon” his words. They believed and depended upon his words and it gave them rest and serenity in the face of great peril. They were ready when the Assyrians (called in 2 Kings 18:17 “a great host”) arrived before Jerusalem.

The Conversation at the Wall

The huge Assyrian army stopped a short distance from the city and three pompous emissaries, generals of Sennacherib, approached the main gate. They called for King Hezekiah but instead of coming out himself, Hezekiah sent three representatives to talk to the Assyrians. Excitement ran high. The men of Jerusalem crowded upon the top of the wall to see and hear the proceedings. I'm going to paraphrase the conversation that took place, from the record found in 2 Kings 18:19 to 35. General Rabshakeh, senior general of the armies, was the spokesman for Sennacherib, King of Assyria. We can imagine that he looked with haughty disdain upon the humble civilian representatives King Hezekiah had sent out to him. Using the Hebrew language, he arrogantly said: "Speak ye now to Hezekiah: Thus saith the great king." Notice he didn't say "Speak to king Hezekiah," but just "Hezekiah." But of Sennacherib he said: "Thus saith the great king, the King of Assyria." Then he quoted Sennacherib, saying in substance,

"Whatever made you think you could rebel against me? In what do you put your trust and confidence? Perhaps you are expecting my enemy, Egypt, to come to your help. But he is like a bruised reed, a stem of grass that has been bent, entirely unreliable. If you put your trust in Egypt's chariots and horsemen to come and help you, I will save you a lot of time and trouble. I'll give you 2000 horses myself, if you have that many men that can ride them, and still I'll defeat you. Why, with your contemptible army, you couldn't whip even one of my captains and his men. But maybe you say to me: 'We trust in the Lord our God.' (2 Kings 18:22) Every one of the hundreds of nations I have conquered trusted in their gods, too. Not one of those gods delivered his country from me. They all fell like rotten apples into my hands."

All the while the men of Jerusalem on the wall were listening. Hezekiah's representatives did not want them to be demoralized by the Assyrian general's speech so they said to the Assyrian, "We understand the Syrian language; speak to us in Syrian instead of Hebrew. There's no need for the men on the wall to hear what we're saying." But General Rabshakeh refused. Raising his voice, he said: "I want them to hear! I was sent to tell them too. They're the ones who will suffer in the siege, dying through lack of food and water." Now he spoke directly to the men on the wall, shouting out his words:

"Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria: Thus saith the king, Let not Hezekiah deceive you: for he shall not be able to deliver you out of his hand. Neither let Hezekiah make you trust in the LORD, saying, the LORD will surely deliver us, and this city

shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria. Harken not to Hezekiah.” (2 Kings 18:28-31)

Then he said, as recorded in 2 Chronicles 32:13-15:

“Know ye not what I and my fathers have done unto all the people of other lands? Were the gods of the nations of those lands any ways able to deliver their lands out of mine hand? Who was there among all the gods of those nations that my fathers utterly destroyed, that could deliver his people out of mine hand, that your God should be able to deliver you out of mine hand? Now therefore, let not Hezekiah deceive you, nor persuade you on this manner, neither yet believe him; for no god of any nation or kingdom was able to deliver his people out of mine hand, and out of the hand of my fathers. How much less shall your God deliver you out of mine hand?”

Then he spoke a big lie, found in 2 Kings 18:25. He said:

“Do you think I have come against Jerusalem without your God's approval? The fact is that your own Jehovah God himself sent me against you. He said to me: `Go up against this land, and destroy it.'”

This lie was calculated to completely demoralize the people of Jerusalem, to knock out the last prop from under them, to destroy their last hope, to get them to rebel against Hezekiah, and to open the gates of Jerusalem to the enemy, to save them the trouble of a siege. (2 Chronicles 32:11) But much to General Rabshakeh's disappointment, the strategy didn't work. We read: “But the people held their peace, and answered him not a word.” (2 Kings 18:36) Seeing this, the three Assyrian generals turned on their heels and returned to their encampment.

Hezekiah's Seeks God's Guidance

When the conversation with the Assyrians was reported to Hezekiah, he reacted with grief and humility. We read:

“And it came to pass, when king Hezekiah heard it, that he rent his clothes, and covered himself with sackcloth, and went into the house of the LORD.”--2Kings 19:1

Isaiah was prophet in those days, and Hezekiah sought his counsel and received his encouragement. Meantime, General Rabshakeh, leaving his troops outside of Jerusalem, reported back to the king of Assyria, saying that Hezekiah still defied him and still trusted in Jehovah God and refused to surrender Jerusalem. This enraged Senna cherib who was busy with other campaigns, and he wrote a railing and insulting letter to Hezekiah in which he reiterated what General Rabshakeh had told him and said:

“Let not thy God in whom thou trustest deceive thee, saying, Jerusalem shall not be delivered into the hand of the king of Assyria. Behold, thou hast heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, by destroying them utterly; and shalt thou be delivered? Have the gods of the nations delivered them which my fathers have destroyed.?”--2 Kings 19:10-12

When the messengers bearing the letter arrived at Jerusalem, tension was running high. The noise from the Assyrian encampment nearby could be heard day and night. Preparations were being made for the siege of Jerusalem. Troops had to be drilled and horses exercised. These sounds were a constant reminder of the presence of the enemy. The messengers of Senna cherib rode up to the gate and demanded to see the King to deliver the letter personally. Then we read in 2 Kings 19, starting with verse 14:

“And Hezekiah received the letter of the hand of the messengers, and read it. And Hezekiah went up into the house of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD. And Hezekiah prayed before the LORD, and said, O Lord God of Israel, who dwellest between the cherubims, Thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; Thou hast made heaven and earth.”

What a beautifully spontaneous gesture this was! The letter was probably written on parchment, and was in scroll form. Hezekiah unrolled it, and spread it before the Lord. Did he have to do that? Don't you think the Lord already knew what was in that letter? Of course he did. Hadn't he seen Sennacherib write it? Hadn't he read the evil thoughts of Sennacherib's mind, even before he wrote it? Was it really necessary for Hezekiah to spread it before Him like this? But by doing so, Hezekiah demonstrated the intensity of his feelings. He showed his nearness to God, the intimacy and reality of his communion with God, enabling him to converse with God on a personal basis, to reason with Him. God invites us to do that: “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord.” (Isaiah 1:18)

So Hezekiah spread the letter out and said, in effect: “Lord, just look at this insulting letter! Just hear the words of that man Sennacherib, reproaching you!” He probably read the letter aloud, tracing the words with his finger. “Look, Lord, what he says here! See what he says about you!” As the record has it:

“LORD, bow down thine ear, and hear; open, LORD, thine eyes and see, and hear the words of Sennacherib, which he hath sent to reproach the living God!”

Then he continued:

“Of a truth, LORD, the kings of Assyria have destroyed the nations and their lands, and have cast their gods into the fire; for they were

no gods, but the work of men's hands, wood and stone; therefore they have destroyed them. Now, therefore, O LORD our God, I beseech thee, save thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the LORD God, even thou only.”

These details of Hezekiah's prayer are given for a purpose. As 1 Corinthians 10:11 says, “They are written for our admonition.” This is a model prayer--a prayer that reached the Lord, and the Lord heard it, was moved by it, and had regard to it. The Lord answered Hezekiah's prayer in a most stupendous and spectacular manner. Listen to 2 Kings 19:35:

“And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the LORD went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand. And when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses.”

The mighty Sennacherib, king of Assyria, conqueror of the world, was utterly defeated, in one night, without a battle because Hezekiah had frankly and openly spread his problem before the Lord.

Bringing Our Problems to the Lord

We can learn an important lesson from this. Do we always spread our problems before the Lord? Do we lay them on the table, so to speak? Do we repeat them and trace them to the Lord when making our requests for help? Or do we say, “Oh, the Lord knows all about it; he knows all the details already”? Suppose Hezekiah had said that? Do you think he would have gotten the spectacular demonstration of power he did? I doubt it very much. So let us learn from Hezekiah's example. Let us lay our problems before the Lord, rehearsing every detail. Let us do so boldly and confidently with faith, believing that the Lord is able and willing to do what is best for us. As Hebrews 4:16 says, “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” David said in Psalm 62:8, “Trust in Him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us.” Pour out your heart! Tell the Lord everything you think and feel and God will be a refuge for you. We read of Jesus in Luke 6:12, “And he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.” All night! Why did it take Jesus so long? Didn't his Heavenly Father know all about it already? Wasn't He always watching over Jesus? Didn't He already know just how Jesus felt? Of course! But Jesus poured out his heart just the same. He probably went over every incident of the day. He spread it all before the Lord.

Someone may say,

“I find it difficult to identify myself with Hezekiah, in this case. When he prayed, he was in real trouble, desperate trouble. A

segment of the mightiest army in the world was marching on him, poised to attack. His own life was in danger, and the life of every man in Jerusalem was threatened. When he prayed, he had tremendous problems to lay before the Lord. Although I, too, have problems, and have requests to make of the Lord, they seem so small and petty. They aren't urgent and desperate and earth-shaking, as Hezekiah's were. The comparison makes me feel ashamed."

To one who feels this way, I would say, Perhaps your petitions to the Lord are more vital and important than you think. I assure you they really are a life-and-death matter. They really do warrant a complete laying before the Lord, just as Hezekiah's did. Let us see why.

Opposing Hezekiah was a great military force, headed by a powerful and wicked ruler, bent on destroying him. As for us, "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against wicked spirits in high places." (Ephesians 6:12)

Knowing that we are so opposed by Satan and his evil forces that our eternal welfare is at stake, should we not make it a subject of the most earnest prayer? Aren't we in deadly danger, too?

Let us carry the comparison still further. The Assyrian army that threatened Hezekiah was noted for its archers and swordsmen. We, too, have archers and swordsmen threatening us. So we can join with the prayer of David:

"Hide me from the secret counsel of the wicked; from the insurrection of the workers of iniquity: who whet their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows, even bitter words: that they may shoot in secret."-- Psalms 64:2-4

"For lo, the wicked bend their bow, they make ready their arrow upon the string, that they may privily shoot at the upright in heart."-- Psalms 11:2

In Psalm 91 David speaks of "the terror by night" and "the arrow that flieth by day." David also said:

"As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me; while they say daily unto me: `Where is thy God?'"--Psalms 42:10

These enemies are Satan and his evil instruments. They shoot us with their arrows, and thrust us with their swords. Bitter and evil thoughts are introduced into the mind. "Where is thy God?" they ask, just as Sennacherib did. In other words, they suggest,

"God isn't dealing with you; he has abandoned you. You are being afflicted and he is not helping you. All things are not working together for your good; therefore you are not one of the called according to his purpose. Where is thy God?"

All the Lord's people are sometimes afflicted with such thoughts. They are dangerous thoughts--a peril to the new creature. So when

we are threatened by these bowmen and swordsmen of the enemy, let us do as Hezekiah did: let us spread the matter before the Lord. How can we do this? We can do it by recalling to the Lord in prayer all his loving providences in our behalf from the beginning of our Christian careers to the present moment, individually and particularly, naming them, and repeating them to the Lord, even though he already knows them all. In this way the sword-thrust of Satan “Where is thy God?” will fail just as the swordsmen of Senna cherib failed against Hezekiah.

Then there were the chariots of Senna cherib, riding against the City of God. We have chariots to contend with too. Bro. Russell suggests that a chariot is a symbol of a worldly organization. We must necessarily live under the rule of earthly governments, but there are many worldly organizations we can and should avoid.

The Assyrian army had tens of thousands of horsemen. Bro. Russell suggests that horses are a symbol of doctrines, particularly false doctrines. Sennacherib's horsemen lay in wait outside of Jerusalem; Paul in Ephesians 4:14 refers to “every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.” The child of God must ever be on the alert against false doctrines, prayerfully seeking the Lord's guidance. Since chariots are pulled by horses, we can combine the two symbols to give us an organization, drawn by false doctrines. All the nominal systems fall into this category, but their doctrines are so obviously false and contrary to God's loving character that the true child of God can hardly be deceived by them. But there is one I particularly have in mind, an organization or society which formerly enjoyed the full light of truth, but which has been pulled aside, and away, by the horsemen of false doctrine. Its doctrines are such an insidious mixture of truth and error that it is a real threat to the children of God, many of whom are imprisoned there. We can pray for these; Jeremiah 51:19,21 encourages us to do so:

“The LORD of hosts is his name. With thee will I break in pieces the horse and his rider; and with thee will I break in pieces the chariot and his rider.”

And we can pray for ourselves, too. Psalm 20:7 expresses our sentiments:

“Some trust in chariots, and some in horses: but we will remember the name of the LORD our God.”

Carrying the picture still further, the besieging Assyrians had flaming arrows to shoot over the walls of Jerusalem and set the city afire. This was a real threat since the water supply was limited and fires on the flat roofs of the city would have to be beaten out by

hand. This was something for Hezekiah to lay before the Lord. We have a similar situation. Paul admonishes us:

“Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.”--Ephesians 6:16

If our faith is weak and sometimes fails causing us to “panic,” so to speak, let us spread our need before the Lord, telling the Lord all about it. The very act of laying everything before the Lord will increase our faith.

Other Lessons from Hezekiah's Prayer

Since the prayer of Hezekiah is a model prayer and is “written for our admonition,” let us consider it further. 2 Chronicles 32:20 tells us that Hezekiah “prayed and cried to heaven.” This shows intensity of feeling, an opening of the heart, an imploring and pleading. We shouldn't be afraid of showing our emotions to the Lord--to cry to the Lord. Then Hezekiah said, as recorded in 2 Kings 19:16: “LORD, bow down thine ear, and hear: open, LORD, thine eyes, and see!”

David, who lived so close to God, expressed a very similar thought:

“The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry. The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles.”--Psalms 34:15,17

“In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried unto my God; he heard my voice out of his temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears. He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from them which hated me: for they were too strong for me.”--Psalms 18:6,16,17

The similarities here are striking. Hezekiah faced a strong enemy. So did David. Hezekiah cried to the Lord. So did David. Hezekiah pleaded for the Lord to see and hear. So did David. Both of them prayed successfully. We can learn from this. After pleading his need, Hezekiah pleaded God's glory. He said:

“Now therefore, O LORD our God, I beseech thee; save thou us out of his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art the LORD God, even thou only.”--2 Kings 19:19

In other words:

“This man, Sennacherib, has classed you in with the idols of the other nations, which are nothing but sticks and stones. He has spoken thus of you, the Creator of Heaven and earth! All the kingdoms of the earth have heard of his defying you; and they are watching. If you will now save us out of his hand, if he fails in his attack on Jerusalem, all nations will know you are the Only True God!”

This is pleading God's glory. David used this plea in a situation very similar to Hezekiah's. As Hezekiah was confronted with Sennacherib and the armed might of Assyria, David faced Goliath and the host of Philistia. Before David faced Goliath he must have privately made a prayer very similar to Hezekiah's. We know, by what happened afterwards, that he laid the matter before the Lord, saying in effect:

“In defying the armies of Israel, this monster, Goliath, is defying you. He is doing it in the name of his god, exalting him above you. He has been defying you for 40 days. All the surrounding nations have heard about it, and are watching. If you will now deliver him into my hands, and let me prevail against the Philistines, every one will know that you alone are God.”

This put the matter completely in God's hands. We know he must have prayed thus and received the assurances of the Lord because, before killing the giant, he boldly said to him:

“Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield; but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of Hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou has defied. This day will the LORD deliver thee into mine hand ... that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and all this assembly shall know that the LORD saveth not with sword and spear; for the battle is the LORD's, and he will give you into our hands.”--1 Samuel 17:45-47

Moses also pleaded God's glory. The account is in Numbers 14:12-16. Because of their constant ingratitude and murmurings and idolatries in the wilderness, even in the face of mighty signs and wonders, the children of Israel provoked the Lord. When they approached Canaan, the land of promise, God suggested to Moses that he was tempted to disinherit and destroy them and, instead of them, make of Moses a mighty nation, mightier than they. On that occasion, Moses pleaded God's glory. We read:

“And Moses said unto the LORD, Then the Egyptians shall hear it, (for thou broughtest up this people in thy might from among them); and they will tell it to the inhabitants of this land; for they have heard that thou, LORD, art among this people, that thou, LORD, art seen face to face; and that thy cloud standeth over them, and that thou goest before them, by day time in a pillar of a cloud, and in a pillar of fire by night. Now if thou shalt kill all this people as one man, then the nations which have heard the fame of thee will speak, saying: `Because the Lord was not able to bring this people into the land which he swore unto them, therefore he hath slain them in the wilderness.’”

Do you see the force of this argument? Joshua used this same argument in Joshua 7:7-9; Elijah used it in 1 Kings 18:32-38; Daniel used it in Daniel 9:15-19; Jehoshaphat used it in 2 Chronicles 20:5-

12. They all pleaded God's glory. God heard and had respect to their prayers. So let us also plead God's glory in our prayers.

How We Can Plead God's Glory

“How can we do this?” someone may ask. “Would it not be presumptuous? Our needs seem to be so insignificant, compared to those ancient men of God.” Let us see if this is so. God is doing a mighty work in the world right now. It is the harvest work. It is so important that Revelation 7:1-3 tells of four angels, holding back the four winds which are to hurt the earth and the sea; and another mighty angel “saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.” These are tremendous events. Whereas, back there, only a few nations were involved when those patriarchs pleaded God's glory, now the entire world awaits its greatest crisis, waiting for just a few more--a very few more--servants of God to be sealed with the truth, and to make their calling and election sure. So our prayers concerning the furtherance of the harvest work are extremely important, and in these prayers we can certainly plead God's glory.

How? For example, God has raised up the radio and television work, a modern miracle, by means of which the truth is made available to millions of people every week, passing through every barrier. When we ask the Lord to bless the brethren carrying on this work, stimulating their minds to present the truth in the proper manner, we can plead God's glory by saying: “Lord, if you do not supervise and overrule and bless the efforts of our brethren, and if confusing doctrines are promulgated, it will bring reproach upon you; because they are doing this work in your name. So let thy pure truth continue to be put forth, so that all that hear may glorify Thee.”

In the same way we can plead God's glory for the other activities of His service, by every class, saying: “Bless their efforts that many may hear of Thy plan, and Thy name may be glorified.”

Much of our prayers are for personal guidance, involving personal problems. In these too we can plead God's glory. We can say, in effect: “Lord if I fail in this, if I do not receive your promised grace to help in every time of need, Satan will gain an advantage over me. And since I am your child, this would be a reproach to you.” Then we can say, in the words of David, “Therefore, for thy name's sake, lead me, and guide me.” --Psalms 31:3

After Hezekiah had spread Sennacherib's letter before the Lord, and prayed over it, and pleaded God's glory, the angel of the Lord “smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand.” As 2 Chronicles 32:21,22 says:

“And the Lord sent an angel, which cut off all the mighty men of valour, and the leaders and captains in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned with shame of face to his own land. ... Thus the Lord saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib the king of Assyria, and from the hand of all other, and guided them on every side.”

What a wonderful expression that is--“and the Lord guided them on every side!” Do you want the Lord to guide you on every side? Then do what Hezekiah did.

As Hezekiah “did that which was right in the sight of the Lord,” let us, in the language of Titus 2:12, “live soberly, right teously, and godly, in this present world,” faithfully maintaining our consecration.

As Hezekiah eradicated idolatry from among the children of Israel, let us as Paul says,

“Cast down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God; and bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.”-- 2 Corinthians 10:5

As Hezekiah trusted in the Lord God of Israel, let us, “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.”-- Proverbs 3:5 As Hezekiah departed not from keeping the Lord's commandments, let us never leave the basic doctrines of the truth for so-called “new light.”

As Hezekiah, in his desperate need, took his problem “and spread it before the Lord,” let us, as Paul said, “Come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.” (Hebrews 4:16) Let us not hesitate to “pour out our hearts before him.”--Psalms 62:8

As Hezekiah pleaded God's glory, let us do so as well.

If we do these things, the Lord will “guide us on every side.” Then will be fulfilled in us the prophecy of Psalm 107:28-30:

“Then they cry unto the LORD in their trouble, and he bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad, because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven.”

The Prophetic Significance of the Miracles of Jesus

ALL those familiar with the Bible know of the miracles of Jesus. A record of them is a prominent part of the four gospels. All who read of Jesus' miracles are impressed by the compassion, love and mercy he exhibited for poor, suffering humanity. His heart went out to all those in bondage to sin, sickness and death, and he used his mighty power liberally on their behalf. Few realize that these miracles had great prophetic significance as well.

The miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead was a prophetic picture or preview of a future general resurrection of all the dead during Christ's kingdom on earth because Jesus said on that occasion:

“I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.”--John 11:25,26

Jesus performed many other miracles that are prophetic of what will come to pass during the kingdom of God, the “times of restitution.” Let us read some of the accounts of the other miracles of Jesus to see how they fit in with the ancient prophecies of restitution. First, we have cases where Jesus healed the blind.

“Two blind men followed him crying and saying, Thou son of David, have mercy on us! Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you. And their eyes were opened.”--Matthew 9:27,29,30

There is a record of two blind men pleading to be healed:

“So Jesus had compassion on them, and touched their eyes; and immediately their eyes received sight.”--Matthew 20:34

There are many other instances where Jesus restored sight to the blind. Jesus also healed the deaf and dumb:

“And they bring unto him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech. ... And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain. ... And they were beyond measure astonished, saying, He hath done all things well. He maketh both the deaf to hear, and the dumb to speak.”--Mark 7:32,35,37

Jesus also healed those with maimed limbs, and who were lame:

“And great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and laid them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them. Insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb to speak, the maimed to be

whole, the lame to walk, and the blind to see. And they glorified the God of Israel.”--Matthew 15:30,31

Let us turn to one of the holy prophets who spoke of conditions during the “times of restitution” and see that all these wonderful miracles of Jesus were samples of what the whole world will then enjoy.

“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing.”--Isaiah 35:5,6

In the kingdom of God on earth not only will literal blindness and deafness be cured, but also blindness and dullness of intellect. People will then learn to do right instead of wrong.

“When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.”--Isaiah 26:9

Mankind is to be restored to mental as well as physical perfection. Here is a summation of Jesus' work on earth:

“The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.”--Matthew 11:5

“Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people.”--Matthew 9:35

Although he healed the people to attract them to him, his mission was to proclaim his kingdom to come when there would be “times of restitution.”

At one time he sent out seventy of his disciples to preach the gospel of the kingdom in every city of the land, telling them to “heal the sick that are therein, and say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.” (Luke 10:9) By this he meant that those miracles of healing were a foretaste of what the kingdom of God will bring. In other words: “When you see them, you have seen in advance what will happen in the wonderful times of restitution to come.” At that time, “The inhabitant shall not say, I am sick.” (Isaiah 33:24) We also read, “Then shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings.” (Malachi 4:2) Mankind will not grow old any more. Although retaining their wisdom, old people will become physically young again. Wrinkles will disappear, strength and beauty of youth will return.

“His flesh shall be fresher than a child's. He shall return to the days of his youth.”--Job 33:25

There will be no more wars or violence of any kind. Men will no longer injure one another. Fear will be a thing of the past. Micah says of Christ who will then be king:

“He shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”--Micah 4:3,4

Then he describes a peaceful time, saying:

“But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the Lord of hosts hath spoken it.”

Nations and peoples of every kind and temperament will live peacefully with each other. Even the lower animals will no longer prey on one another. This is described by Isaiah:

“The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf, and the young lion, and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. . . . They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.”--Isaiah 11:6-9

In those “times of restitution” oppression and exploitation will not be permitted. No one will enrich himself at another's expense. Each man will enjoy the work of his own hands; personal worth and dignity will be restored. Strict justice will prevail. The days of a man's life will never end. The prophet describes it thus:

“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.”--Isaiah 65:21-24

It is to be a time when every problem of mankind will be solved. There is to be a restoration of everything lost by the disobedience of Adam, a “restitution of all things.” Life will be restored in its fullness. Even the dead will return to life. All physical disabilities will be eliminated. There will be freedom from fear and oppression. Peace and plenty will be restored to mankind. All the willing and obedient shall live forever in health and happiness upon the earth.

This has all been assured by the ransom sacrifice of Jesus Christ. He is the king in these “times of restitution.”

“Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that . . . a king shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.”--
Jeremiah 23:5

The king is already here and the benefits of that kingdom of God on earth will soon be manifest to all mankind.

The Secret Place of the Most High

“He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.”--Psalms 91:1

WE ARE living in a terrible time, and yet a wonderful time. It is a terrible time because we see before our very eyes a world collapsing and disintegrating. It is a wonderful time because we are on the very threshold of the mediatorial kingdom of God when all nations shall be blessed. It is a time tersely described in Haggai:

“For thus saith the Lord of Hosts: Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and dry land; and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come.”--Haggai 2:6,7

There will never be another time like this. This is the culmination or focal point of all ages. The fruit of the first age is reaped because the sin of Adam is come to the full; it is as it was in the days of Noah. The fruit of the Patriarchal Age will be reaped by the realization of all the grand and gracious promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, whereby all the families of the earth are to be blessed. The fruit of the Jewish Age will be reaped when, very soon now, upon the completion of the church, the ancient worthies will come forth to take over the visible rule of earth. But the grandest harvest of all is the reaping of the Gospel age, the completion of the church. This is what the whole groaning world has been earnestly waiting for. Without knowing what it is, they have yearned and longed for this event to take place, for the church to be manifested and to bring life to the dying world. It is somehow, subconsciously, expected.

“For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the Sons of God.”--Romans 8:22,19

Soon the two physical blessings of the Millennial Age will begin to flow to the people and, in the words of Daniel, those “that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake.” Then Paradise will be restored.

We are living in the time of the converging of all the ages. It is of us Paul speaks when he used the expression, “Upon whom the ends of the ages are come.” (1Corinthians 10:11) For us it is a joyful time because we know where we are in the plan of God. We know our part in it. We see what is happening. We know the meaning of these events. This gives us a lift as described in the words of Jesus:

“And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh.”--Luke 21:28

Immediately after saying this Jesus told the parable of the budding fig tree which refers to the resurrection of the nation of Israel and is a sure sign of the times. It is a thrilling time for us. We see all our hopes about to be realized.

To the world it is a different time. To them it is a time of worry and terror as they see the clouds of trouble gathering, “a day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness.” (Joel 2:2) Jesus described this time:

“Upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.”--Luke 21:25,26

The “powers of heaven” here referred to are the present ruling powers, civil and ecclesiastical. They are worried and shaken at the possibility of worldwide atomic warfare for which every preparation has been made. They are justifiably fearful because they know that the power to kill every animal on earth is in the hands of a few sinful men. Jesus further described these days:

“For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened there should no flesh be saved.”--Matthew 24:21,22

The prophet Daniel also saw these days:

“There shall be a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation, even to that same time.”--Daniel 12:1

Paul described the present fearful anticipation of imminent destruction and the frantic efforts to establish peace:

“For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.”--1 Thessalonians 5:3

The World Remains in Terror

The present terror of the world reminds one of the legendary story of Damocles. At a grand banquet given in his honor, when everything seemed to be going so well, he happened to look upward and was horrified to see an enormous naked sword suspended over his head by a single hair and liable to fall at any moment. It is indeed ironic that at the time of the greatest increase of knowledge, when giant strides have been made in the arts of medicine, science of all kinds, rapid travel, instant communication, psychology, human relations and statesmanship--skills which one would think would knit the nations closer together--it is ironic that this time of man's greatest

attainment, which normally should result in his greatest security, should precisely be the time of greatest insecurity and fear!

Nothing seems to be working right for the leaders of the world. Old formulae no longer seem to apply. Painstaking plans, based upon the experience of centuries, no longer work as intended but often have the opposite effect. This is true of all the nations of the earth, the old as well as the new emerging nations. It is true of the United Nations.

Although they do not realize it yet, the nations will soon realize that things are as they are because the Lord's hand is in it, that his voice is being heard:

“The Lord shall roar from on high, and utter his voice from his holy habitation; he shall mightily roar upon his habitation. He shall give a shout, as they that tread the grapes, against all the inhabitants of the earth. A noise shall come even to the ends of the earth; for the Lord hath a controversy with the nations. He will plead with all flesh; He will give them that are wicked to the sword, saith the Lord. Thus saith the Lord of hosts, Behold, evil shall go forth from nation to nation, and a great whirlwind shall be raised up from the coasts of the earth.”--Jeremiah 25:30-32

When fear and terror are felt, the first human impulse is to flee, to get away, to find a secure place and hide from the danger. As the time of trouble, which has already started, gets worse, the prophecy of Isaiah will be fulfilled:

“And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth. In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver and his idols of gold; which they made, each one for himself to worship; to the moles and to the bats; to go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the ragged rocks [or, as Leeser renders it, `into the hollows of the cliffs'] for fear of the Lord and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth.”-Isaiah 2:19-21

All this is symbolic language. What does it mean? It means that men will try to find shelter and security in various human cooperative schemes. Mountains are governments; hills are lesser worldly organizations of various kinds. Hosea says, “They shall say to the mountains, Cover us, and to the hills, Fall on us [or over us].” (Hosea 10:8) Jesus repeated this prophecy when he referred to these last days: “Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us.” (Luke 23:30)

The most concise description of these coming days is found in Revelation:

“And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every freeman, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us [or over us], and hide us from the face of him who sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.”--Revelation 6:15-17

This takes in just about everybody. The “kings” are the heads of government. The “great men” are the statesmen, politicians, and religious leaders. The “rich men” are the financiers, the “chief captains” are the military leaders, and the “mighty men” are the military forces. “Bondmen” could refer to union members and “freemen” to non-union workers. Commenting on this scripture, Bro. Russell says:

“As the trouble increases, men will seek, but in vain, for protection in the `dens' and `caves,' the great rocks and fortresses of society: Free-Masonry, Odd-Fellowship, and Trade Unions, Guilds, Trusts, and all Societies, secular, and ecclesiastical, and in the mountains (governments) of the earth.”--Studies in the Scriptures, volume 2, page 139

There Is No Escape

But will they hide successfully, will they find refuge from the Lord's wrath? Jeremiah answers:

“Can any hide himself in secret places, that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord.”--Jeremiah 23:24

No, they will not escape. But we know it is all for a benevolent purpose. All selfish human schemes must be discredited and eliminated to make way for the full establishment of God's glorious kingdom on earth.

The scriptures indicate that the final and most severe phase of the time of trouble will not come until the body of Christ is complete. This is brought out in Revelation:

“And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God, and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads. And I heard the number of them which were sealed; and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand.”--Revelation 7:1-4

This does not mean that we will escape the entire time of trouble. We are in it now and it is worsening every day. But unlike the world, we are not afraid, we are not terror-stricken. We do not frantically seek to hide in the dens and caves of the earth.

Why not? It is because we have a refuge the world does not know about, a safe and secure hiding place which the Lord has provided for us. He invites us to enter into it, particularly at the present time when the old world is being removed to make way for the new, when governments are being shaken and overthrown, when mankind is getting restless and rebellious. Having entered in, we have no fear of what is going on about us.

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof.”--Psalms 46:1-3

Doesn't that describe the present time precisely? Psalm 32 describes our God:

“Thou art my hiding place. Thou shalt preserve me from trouble. Thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance.”--Psalms 32:7

Does this mean that we will be miraculously preserved from every physical aspect of the time of trouble? If there are food shortages, will we have an abundance? If war decrees the restraining of human liberties, will we remain free? If the atmosphere is polluted with atomic and other poisons, will we breathe pure air? Of course not! These things, affecting only the fleshly body, are comparatively inconsequential. It is in the things that really matter that we will be preserved. Even in famine there will continue to be an abundance of spiritual food. It will not be rationed. We will continue to “stand fast ... in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free”--free from human creeds and concepts. (Galatians 5:1)

These are the things that really count. Even in a disordered and disintegrating world, even in lawlessness and anarchy, nothing will be permitted to happen to us that is not for our highest spiritual welfare. Although we walk about and intermingle with our neighbors, sharing their hardships, in reality we will be segregated, in a secret place where no real harm can befall us, where everything we really need is supplied. Psalm 91 beautifully describes this condition:

“He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust. Surely he shall

deliver thee from the snare of the fowler, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day; nor for the pestilence that walketh in darkness; nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday. A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold and see the reward of the wicked. Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the Most High thy habitation; there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling. For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet. Because he hath set his love upon me, therefore will I deliver him: I will set him on high, because he hath known my name. He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him. With long life will I satisfy him, and show him my salvation.”--Psalm 91

Dwelling in the Secret Place

Where is this wonderful “secret place”? It is not a locality, but a condition. It is a relationship, a standing before the Lord, a condition of consecration and acceptance, a condition of justification and spirit-begetting, it is a living with the Lord. Jesus described this condition:

“If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.”--John 14:23

It doesn't make any difference where we live, or where we go--we can still be in that “Secret Place.” David sang of it:

“Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in the grave, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.”--Psalms 139:7-10

No matter where we are physically or geographically, we can still be safe and secure “in the secret place of the Most High.” What a great and unusual privilege this is!

“O how great is thy goodness which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the sons of men! Thou shalt hide them in the secret of thy presence

from the pride of man. Thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues.”--Psalms 31:19,20

“One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life; to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple. For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion; in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me. He shall set me up upon a rock.”--Psalms 27:4,5

This seems contradictory. It seems to say that we are hidden from view in a secret place and yet set up, in full view, upon a rock. But it is all beautifully harmonious to those who understand the symbols. We are members of God's household, of those who are justified and spirit-begotten. This precious relationship is firmly based upon the rock, Christ Jesus. This stone and its power to protect and preserve is referred to as: “Elect, precious; and he that believeth on him should not be confounded.” (1 Peter 2:6) We read of it:

“And upon this Rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”--Matthew 16:18

It is through Jesus, our ransom, Saviour and advocate that a relationship with God is established and maintained. This is how we come into and remain in the “secret place of the Most High.” There is no other sure refuge or defense at this time; it can only be expected from God.

“My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him. He only is my rock, and my salvation; he is my defense; I shall not be moved. In God is my salvation, and my glory; the rock of my strength, and my refuge is in God.”--Psalms 62:5-8

“The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; the Lord is my rock; in him will I trust. He is my shield, and the horn of my salvation; my high tower, and my refuge; my saviour. Thou savest me from violence.”--2 Samuel 22:2,3

Compared with the frantic scurrying of the world to find peace and safety, how wonderfully blessed we are. We are safe and secure in the “secret place of the Most High.”

The Snare of the Fowler

The “snare of the fowler” refers to the deceptions of Satan, that the world is in its present fearful condition and is shaken to its foundations. Isaiah describes this time:

“Fear, and the pit, and the snare are upon thee, O inhabitant of the earth. And it shall come to pass, that he who fleeth from the noise of the fear shall fall into the pit; and he that cometh up out of the midst

of the pit shall be taken in the snare; for the windows from on high are open, and the foundations of the earth do shake.”--Isaiah 24:17,18

How accurately this describes present and impending conditions! Greatly fearing the pit of atomic destruction, the people of the earth feel trapped. Some are ready to accept any solution, any form of government, any tyranny, in an attempt to preserve their lives, to climb out of the pit of destruction. Some carry banners, suggested by a British philosopher, saying “Better Red than dead.” How fortunate we are to be beyond the reach of this snare, safely hidden as we are in the “secret place of the Most High.”

There is, however, another “snare of the fowler” that does endanger us. It is Satan's attempted deception of the Lord's people to draw them from the truth. Paul warned us of this snare and then told us how to keep out of the trap:

“But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived; but continue thou in the things which thou hast learned, and hast been assured of; knowing of whom thou hast learned them.”--2 Timothy 3:13,14

Of whom have we learned the truth? Whose mind did the Lord enlighten at the end of the age to make the truth clear to us? Whose books do we use in our Bible studies? What reprints do we consult? What manna text comments do we read each morning? Peter also warned us:

“There shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction; and many shall follow their pernicious ways, by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.” --2 Peter 2:1,2

These damnable heresies, or unsound doctrines, are what are described as “the snare of the fowler” and “the noisome pestilence.” The Lord's true people are delivered from these because they take Paul's advice: “But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned, and hast been assured of; knowing of whom thou hast learned them.” The truth is our heritage forever; we should never let it go and revert to error. The psalmist expresses our resolve:

“The wicked have laid a snare for me; yet I erred not from thy precepts. Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage forever; for they are the rejoicing of my heart.”--Psalms 119:110,111

Cover Thee with his Feathers

One of the most delightful and heart-warming sights of the animal kingdom is the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings. When

danger impends, the mother hen gives an urgent call, and her chicks run to her. She spreads her wings and makes room for every one of them under her feathers. She is then ready to give her very life for their defense. It is one of the most touching scenes imaginable to see the love and devotion of a mother hen. Jesus used this identical illustration:

“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!”--Luke 13:34



This is the kind of love and devotion which is conveyed by the expression, “He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his

wings shalt thou trust.” The psalmist gives the same thought in a way that is appropriate for the Lord's people in these troublesome times:

“From the end of the earth will I cry unto thee. When my heart is overwhelmed, lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For thou hast been a shelter for me, and a strong tower from the enemy. I will abide in thy tabernacle forever. I will trust in the covert of thy wings.”--Psalms 61:2-4

“Be merciful unto me, O God; be merciful unto me. For my soul trusteth in thee. Yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge.”--Psalms 57:1

These beautiful illustrations are given for our assurance and encouragement during this time of trouble. We should accept them and appropriate them to ourselves. We should enter and dwell in “the secret place of the Most High,” separating ourselves from and rising above the turmoil that is on every side. The Lord invites us to do this:

“Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee. Hide thyself, as it were, for a little moment until the indignation be overpast.”--Isaiah 26:20

How can we do this? There is no literal door to a secret place, no literal fortress, no literal feathers and wings. How, then, do we have access to the secret place of refuge? Is this place purely imaginary, only in the mind? “His TRUTH shall be thy shield and buckler,” the psalm says. This is the key. Do you believe the truth? Do you really believe in the Divine Plan and your place in it? Are you running for the prize of the high calling for which you have given up all earthly hopes? Are you a member of the body of Christ? Are you a new creature? Are you following in the footsteps of Jesus? To sum up: Are you really in the truth and is the truth in you? If yes, “His TRUTH” shall be thy shield and buckler; and to you, the “secret place of the Most High” is a very real, literal, and substantial condition: a condition in which the almighty power of God overshadows you. It is a very real arrangement whereby God's protecting care is a safe refuge for you, like a strong fortress around you; he literally delivers you from the snare of the fowler, Satan, and from the noisome pestilence. If you are in the truth, you truly and actually have the Lord's complete and absolute protection from everything injurious to your highest spiritual welfare. There is nothing imaginary about it. This wonderful condition is a real and tangible thing. We are totally and entirely surrounded by the power of God in this “secret place of the Most High. “Behind and before hast thou hedged me in, and thou placest upon me, thy hand.”--Psalms 139:5, Leeser

Or, as Moffatt renders it: “Thou art on every side, behind me, and before, laying thy hand on me.”

Sometimes we tend to forget that we are in this secret place and become frightened at the uncertain conditions of the world about us. We become panicky like Peter, seeking to walk on the water, who, when he saw the boisterous, wind-tossed sea, began to sink, crying, “Lord save me!” (Matthew 14:30) When this happens to us there IS a door we can use to again enter our secret place.

“But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet [or private room], and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father who seeth in secret, and thy Father, who seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.”--Matthew 6:6

This is like the frightened child who runs to its mother to be enfolded safely in her arms: “The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.” (Deuteronomy 33:27)

Be Not Afraid of the Terror by Night

This “terror by night” is what the world of mankind is experiencing now, in the night just preceding the full dawn of the Millennial Day. We read about this time:

“Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.”--Psalms 30:5

Referring to the final intense phase of the nighttime of trouble, Jesus said, “The night cometh when no man can work.” (John 9:4) We are not to fear this phase of the trouble, but should emulate the example of Jesus, who said: “I must work ... while it is day.” We should work in the Lord's vineyard as long as it is possible. When the time comes to end our work, it will be ended for us. Conditions will be such that it will be no longer possible to give any public witness. Then, and only then, are we to cease our work during this time when “no man can work.”

During the interim, while it is still “called day,” while opportunities for service still exist, we can expect Satan to attack us with his arrows of opposition and false doctrine. Psalm 64:3 calls these arrows “bitter words.” We will not fear these arrows because we have on the whole armor of God, regarding which Paul says:

“Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.”--Ephesians 6:16

No Pestilence, No Destruction

A pestilence is a plague, a wasting disease capable of sweeping away entire populations within a few days. History records a plague in

Rome in 262 AD that killed 5000 persons a day. In the fourteenth century, a plague called the “black death” swept over Europe, killing enormous numbers. But the Lord's people are not promised immunity from literal plagues or pestilences. The reference is to pestilential doctrines, doctrines so subtly deceptive, so gradually introduced, so insidious, that if possible they will deceive the very elect. (Matthew 24:24) Like the virus of a plague, unseen and only recognized after it has done its deadly work, it has caused many thousands to waste away from the truth. That is why the next verse of the psalm says, “A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand, but it shall not come nigh thee. Only with thine eyes shalt thou behold, and see the reward of the wicked.”

I saw this happen. I was there. It is something I have been through. The Lord used Pastor Russell as his instrument to restore to his people at this end of the age the same light of truth enjoyed by the early church. After Pastor Russell died, the pestilence began its destructive work. The very society that Pastor Russell himself organized and used for so long was now used to undermine and pervert the truths he taught. Little by little, persuasively, insidiously, and very gradually, the truth was eroded and thousands fell away. It was a terrible and heartbreaking experience. That is why some of us who witnessed this plague are so vigilant about the old truths and cannot tolerate even seemingly slight deviations. God grant that it not happen again! It could happen again if we are not alert. The virus of this pestilence must be shunned.

Not Come Nigh Thee

This is true only if we have made his truth our shield and buckler. We must not lower the shield, even slightly. In 1911 Brother Russell commented on this part of the psalm with almost prophetic insight:

“Great will be the falling away from the truth, even amongst those who, like ourselves received it once with joy; and who did, for a time, run well.”--Reprints, page 4926.

He saw this test coming and sounded a warning.

Now we come to the most precious and reassuring part of the psalm which speaks personally and individually to each one who has found refuge in the secret place of the Most High:

No Evil Befall Thee

This does not refer to the common, ordinary evils of the “present evil world.” It does not refer to the daily difficulties and annoyances we experience, to which Jesus referred when he said, “Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.” (Matthew 6:34) Such evils do not amount

to much. We can take them in stride and are not entirely shielded from such evils. What then, is this special and serious evil from which we are promised protection? Ask yourself, “What is the greatest possible loss I could sustain? What is the most valuable thing I could lose?” The answer is, of course, THE TRUTH. If we lose the truth and consequently the Lord's approval, there is nothing left. We have lost everything. This would be the supreme evil and it is the evil referred to in the psalm. If you remain in the secret place of the Most High, “There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.” You will stay in the truth! You will not “dash thy foot against a stone.” You will never repudiate the ransom. Jesus will never be “a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence” to you, as he has been to so many.

Treading upon the Adder

Because we are in the secret place of the Most High, because he is our refuge and fortress, because we are under his wings, because he has given his angels charge over us to keep us in all our ways, we shall triumph over every device of Satan, whether it be an attempt to overpower us, or beguile us, whether he goes about as a roaring lion, or whether, snake-like, he stealthily lurks about, to inject his venomous poison. We tread upon him, and trample him! We spurn his devices! We reject him! We also know that soon “the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.” (Romans 16:20)

To this point in the psalm David has been telling us about God and his wonderful provision for us. Now God speaks. He speaks of us but not directly to us. He speaks to another person about us, and what he will yet do for us. The one he is speaking to is undoubtedly his Logos, our Lord Jesus Christ, who has gone before and has himself experienced all these things. What God says here has first applied to him, and now applies to us as members of his body.

The heavenly Father carefully notes the love you have for him. He looks at your heart and knows. Your love for him is like a continuous prayer. It is because of your love and devotion and consecration to him that he says he will “set you on high.” This is the “HIGH Calling!” He will be with you in the trouble of this present life and will finally deliver you and honor you. He will deliver you from “this body of death” (Romans 7:24) and raise you to “glory, honor and immortality; eternal life.” (Romans 2:7)

Satisfying Us with Long Life

To this wonderful promise of immortality we reply, in the language of the psalmist:

“As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness. I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness!”--Psalms 17:15

The Shepherd Psalm

ONE of the most inspiring psalms David wrote is Psalm 23, the Shepherd Psalm. There is something so comforting and reassuring about this psalm that even those who do not understand it, find, in times of danger and stress, just reading it soothes their troubled hearts and restores their courage. Although composed of the simplest words--“shepherd words”--it has a sublime quality, exalting the soul and creating a spirit of calmness, security and peace.

This psalm came from the fullness of David's heart and the wealth of his experience. As he devotedly cared for his sheep, he pitied their helplessness and realized their utter dependence upon him. It was he that provided their food and water, their rest and refreshment, and defended them from their enemies. When they injured themselves, they cried to him and he healed their hurts. He gave special attention and consideration to the weak and to the young. He called them each by name, and they responded to his voice and to no other. His sheep adored him with all the love their little hearts were capable of.

As David mused over these things, he was struck with the similarity between the relationship of a shepherd to his sheep, and that of the Lord God to his people. He had personally tasted of the care and goodness of the Lord, whom he loved with all his soul. Picturing himself as a lamb of God with all the wonderful implications the relationship involved, he wrote with simple beauty:

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, he leadeth me beside the still waters, he restoreth my soul; he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies; thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely, goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

The Lord Is My Shepherd



David's original reference was, of course, to Jehovah God, the Father. Isaiah similarly refers to Jehovah God:

“He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.”--Isaiah 40:11

Ezekiel reveals that God would appoint another shepherd, an under-shepherd, over his flock:

“Therefore will I save my flock, and they shall no more be a prey ... and I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them; even my servant David. And he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd.”--Ezekiel 34:22-25

David is frequently used in the scriptures as a type of Christ, and he is so used here. This is confirmed by the words of Jesus, “I am the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep.” (John 10:11) By virtue of his ransom sacrifice, the Great Shepherd's son, Jesus, has been given full charge of the sheep. Jesus continues:

“I am the Good Shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep.”--John 10:14,15

When the psalm says, “The Lord is my shepherd,” we are entirely justified in understanding it to also mean our Lord Jesus Christ.

The night was a dangerous time for the sheep. It was then that predatory animals were about. Wolves and lions prowled in the darkness, waiting for an opportunity to snatch a lamb. So the shepherd kept vigilant watch at night. Consider the account of Jesus' birth:

“And there were, in the same country, shepherds abiding in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.”--Luke 2:8

The sheep could not always see the shepherd in the darkness, but they knew he was there watching; they felt completely secure. So with us. Just knowing that the Lord is our shepherd, that he is there watching over us in this dark night of sin and death, is such a comfort to us! This is what David described:

“He that keepeth thee, will not slumber. Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is thy keeper. ... The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil; he shall preserve thy soul.”--Psalms 121:3-7

Sometimes a wind arose in the night and the sheep became restless from the strange sound. Then the shepherd spoke to them with his reassuring voice. When we hear the winds of strange doctrines arise, let us too hear the voice of our shepherd--let us consider his word. Instead of being frightened and “tossed to and fro, carried about with every wind of doctrine” (Ephesians 4:14), let us rest securely in the truth that we have.

“The sheep hear his voice; and he calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out. And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him; for they know his voice. And a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him; for they know not the voice of strangers.”--John 10:3-5

I Shall Not Want

The thought is, "I shall have no lack." This is literally true. The child of God shall not want for the temporal necessities of the present life, for light along his pathway, for instruction in the narrow way. He shall not want for care and discipline, for consolation and grace, nor for fellowship and sympathy. He shall not want for the holy spirit as he makes room in his heart to receive more and more of it. As David expressed it:

"No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly."--Psalms 84:11

"No good thing!" What a stupendously bountiful promise! Paul echoed the same thought:

"But my God shall supply all your need, according to his riches in glory, by Christ Jesus."--Philippians 4:19

David had cared well for his flock. He had seen that while his sheep lacked nothing, the wild beasts of the field, who had no shepherd, often went hungry. He related this thought to the Lord's provision for his people:

"O taste, and see that the Lord is good. Blessed is the man that trusteth in him. Oh fear the Lord, ye his saints; for there is no want to them that fear him. The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger; but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing!"--Psalms 34:8-10

As David sometimes stumbled and yet clung to the Lord and his overruling providences, he was able to write out of the richness of his experience:

"The steps of a good man are ordered of the Lord; and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand. I have been young and now am old; Yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread."--Psalms 37:23-25

He Maketh Me to Lie Down in Green Pastures

The sheep is a ruminating animal. After grazing in the rich green pastures it must lie down and chew its cud. The shepherd encourages it to do so since it cannot properly digest its food unless it ruminates. The word "ruminates" also means to meditate. This emphasizes the importance of meditation in our lives. It is only in this way that spiritual food can be properly appropriated by us and become a part of our spiritual make-up, our characters, what we really are. There must be periods of pause, and quietness when we may turn our thoughts to our great heavenly Father, and his holy word, his great

plan, and recount to ourselves all his leadings and providences in our lives. Thus we ascertain what his will is for us individually.

It has been said: "When we pray, we talk to God; when we meditate, God talks to us." David said:

"O, how I love thy law! It is my meditation all the day."--Psalms 119:97

"My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips; when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches."--Psalms 63:5,6

David meditated upon the Lord and his goodness at every opportunity: "all the day" and "in the night watches." In other words, day and night. His meditations were acceptable to the Lord; God loved him for it. His prayer was answered:

"Let the words of my mouth, and the meditations of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer."--Psalms 19:14

Let us consider some ways we can have our meditations acceptable in God's sight and worthy of his love for us. When our eyes open in the morning, after a night's sleep, we can think of the promise, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." (Psalms 30:5) We can be glad that we are alive and thankful for the measure of health we enjoy. These are gifts of God.

Perhaps we will think, "This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice, and be glad in it." (Psalms 118:24) Should the sun stream through the window or the rain beat against it, we will meditate on the unfathomable mercies of God who: "Maketh his sun to rise on the evil, and on the good; and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." (Matthew 5:45) Throughout the day we will meditate particularly on the day's Manna text and its comments. The Lord has mightily used these for the benefit of his people. So many have testified that he has spoken to them, directed them, and touched their hearts, in this way.

The newspaper headlines of wars, will remind us of, "He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire. Be still and know that I am God." (Psalms 46:9,10) We will be still for a few moments and meditate on this sure promise of peace in the world.

When we read the reports of all the violence, cruelty, destruction and ignorance, we will long for the time prophesied: "Violence shall no more be heard in thy land." (Isaiah 60:18) We will meditate on the wonderful Millennial promise: "They shall not hurt, nor destroy, in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." (Isaiah 11:9)

If things seem to go wrong in our affairs and we experience disappointments in our earthly pursuits during the day, we will think of the words of Jesus: "In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." (John 16:33) We will meditate upon the overruling providences of the Lord and recall the many times he has led us in the past, the many times when seeming calamities have turned out to be blessings for us. We will be reminded that this thing also will be for our good. So whether things go well for us or seem to go wrong, we will always, "Know that all things work together for good to them that love God; to them who are the called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28)

Every day of our lives, we will encounter or hear grief and pain. Loved ones snatched away by the great enemy death: babies from their mothers' arms; husbands and wives, fathers and mothers; aged ones, leaning on one another, depending on one another suddenly parted by death; bringing sorrow and crying to the lonely survivor. How appropriate for us, who know the plan of God, who know the reason for it all, to close our eyes and meditate for a moment on that glorious day now near at hand, when, "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying; neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away." (Revelation 21:4)

Whenever we see the lame, the halt, and the blind; those with physical deformities and diseases which Jesus described as those "whom Satan hath bound" (Luke 13:16), we can fervently breathe the prayer, "Thy kingdom come!" knowing that this is the answer to all earth's problems. Perhaps this will lead us to meditate upon the glorious prospect before us, that if we are faithful, we will have a part in the healing of the nations! Think of it! How often, when you have seen sickness, suffering, and deformity, have you longed to have the power to relieve it, to be able to say, "Take up thy bed and walk!"? You will have that power, if faithful, and much more than that: to grant not only physical healing and perfection, but life everlasting to the obedient. That is something to meditate over!

Of course we will not during every minute of every day think only of these things. Attention must be given to our earthly occupations in fulfilling our obligations to our employers or to the care of our families. But the mind of the new creature will so love the things of the Lord that, when it is not otherwise occupied, it will naturally and automatically, as the compass needle turns to the north, swing to godly meditations. This is what Paul meant when he wrote, "Bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." (2 Corinthians 10:5) "Every thought!" This is the antidote for the poisons of the world, the deadly, venomous concepts and ideas abroad in the earth. It's a simple matter of displacement, really. If our minds are

full of good things, there will be no room for unprofitable or evil things. Persistence in good meditations will bring about a change in us, a real change that will be noticed by people, that will show. As Paul said, “Meditate upon these things, give yourself wholly to them, that thy profiting may appear to all.” (1 Timothy 4:15)

When the day is over and it is time to rest, we are told:

“When thou liest down, thou shalt not be afraid. Yea, thou shalt lie down, and thy sleep shall be sweet.”--Proverbs 3:24

“My meditation of him shall be sweet. I will be glad in the Lord.”--Psalms 104:34

He Leadeth Me Beside the Still Waters

Sheep will not drink from rapidly flowing or turbulent waters. Gurgling, noisy waterfalls and streams, with rushing cross-currents, frighten them. So the shepherd leads them to a place where a deep pool has formed, where the water is quiet, softly-flowing, pure and clean. Only then will the sheep satisfy their thirst.

All this is full of meaning for us. Our shepherd has led us to waters or the understanding of doctrines, which satisfies our longings as nothing else can do. It has imbued us with a deep calm, a peace that passeth all understanding. We know we have the truth! Our shepherd has led us away from the troubled and muddy streams which Isaiah says, “Cannot rest; whose waters cast up mire and dirt” (Isaiah 57:20)--the vileness of doctrines of devils such as eternal torment.

There are some in a Society who once enjoyed the still waters as we do--the calm, clean, clear doctrines of the Divine Plan of the Ages as expounded by a faithful and wise servant of the Lord. But they decided the waters were too still, that the light was not advancing fast enough, that the kingdom was not progressing quickly enough. “The waters are getting stagnant,” they said. “They are too quiet, too still. We must continually, with each issue of our magazine, have something new, to tickle our ears.” So they began to agitate and trouble the waters, to push things along more rapidly, to create cross-currents, waves and much gurgling noise, first pushing the water one way, then the other, always changing motion, changing direction, changing doctrine, churning about.

The water began to get muddy. It soon became unfit for the Lord's true sheep to drink. So the sheep, thirsting for the clean, clear, “still waters,” turned away from it. Thank God our great Good Shepherd still leads his sheep “beside the still waters” or, as the margin says, “Waters of quietness.” We have the strength of confidence in our shepherd.

“In quietness and confidence shall be your strength.”--Isaiah 30:15

He Restoreth My Soul

The primary meaning is our justification to life. By faith a complete restitution or restoration of soul is granted to each member of the “little flock,” that he might have something to offer in sacrifice to the Lord, a “living sacrifice,” something “Holy, acceptable unto God.” (Romans 12:1)

But there is another meaning as well. The souls of men have shrunk and shriveled under the reign of sin and death. Generous and unselfish impulses have been ruthlessly exploited so that they are suppressed. Those having such impulses hold them back. Those of gentle nature have been rudely pushed aside. The peaceful soul has been beaten down. Men dare not show friendliness to their neighbors for fear of being misunderstood and rebuffed. Men fear to express the truth because of the vicious opposition of entrenched error. Every good and loving tendency is curbed until it withers and dies. This is how it is under Satan's reign. Thus the “living soul” with which man was created with all its beauty of thought and tenderness of emotion and heart of love, has under Satan's rule been degraded, debased and brutalized. But what happens when one comes into the truth, when one is drawn to Jesus, when one becomes enlightened by the word of God, consecrated, justified, becomes filled with the holy spirit? What does the Good Shepherd do for such an one who thus becomes one of his sheep? “He restoreth my soul!” The shrunken, shriveled, withered, brutalized and fear-filled soul is transformed! It returns to God's original design. It blooms like a flower. It enlarges, expands and grows in love and becomes, once again, the image of God. It is restored.

But there is still more meaning to this phrase. It is a continuous process, an ever-repeating experience. Every time we lie down in the “green pastures” and meditate on the precepts of God, every time we are led “beside the still waters” of truth, we experience a wonderful restoration of soul! We gain strength in the Lord. We become “strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.” (Ephesians 6:10) As we read:

“They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; and they shall walk and not faint.”--Isaiah 40:31

“Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart; wait, I say, on the Lord.”--Psalms 27:14

What is this “waiting on the Lord” from which such restoration can be gained? The psalmist tells us:

“Yea, let none that wait on thee be ashamed. ... Show me thy ways, O Lord; teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth, and teach me; for

thou art the God of my salvation; on Thee do I wait all the day.”--
Psalms 25:3-5

When we “wait upon the Lord,” he shows us his ways, teaches us his paths, and leads us in his truth.

He Leadeth Me in the Paths of Righteousness for His Name's Sake

The shepherd does not simply strike out across country with his flock, not knowing what the terrain is like before him, what pitfalls there may be, or what dens of wild animals he may encounter on the way. No, he does not risk his sheep. He follows carefully laid-out paths, tested, tried and true paths, paths that take the sheep to the green pastures, and the still waters. These are the right paths, the “paths of righteousness.”

But sometimes the sheep tend to wander off the path. They turn a little to the right or to the left. As soon as the shepherd sees this tendency, he calls to them. He calls them back to the right path because he knows that if the sheep continue to stray, even a little, they will eventually be separated from the flock. They will be lost in unfamiliar terrain and be at the mercy of wolves and the lion that “walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” When the sheep hear the voice of their beloved shepherd whose voice they know, they instantly obey and return to walk in the right path.

That is the way it is with the sheep of the Lord's flock:

“And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying: This is the way, walk ye in it; when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left.”--Isaiah 30:21

“Thine ears shall hear a voice behind thee.” Note carefully that it is not a voice before thee, a modern voice of so-called new light or human philosophies. It is a voice behind thee--the old theology with all its old and blessed doctrines of hope through Christ our redeemer, our ransom, our teacher, our example, our leader. It is the voice of the Lord uttered through his inspired apostles and prophets from two to four thousand years ago. It is a voice behind us, revived and re-echoed by “that servant” who brought it to our attention and renewed the old faith, the faith of the early church, “The faith once delivered unto the saints!” Today the voices of false shepherds may be heard from all sorts of directions, but the Lord's true sheep will hear and obey only the voice behind them, the voice that directs and holds them in the right way--the narrow way, the way of sacrifice, of suffering with Christ that we also may be glorified together.

David said, “He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.” It is not because of our own sakes or our own

worthiness, nor because we amount to anything, but through the Lord's grace because we are his, because we trust in his name, in his merit, the merit of his sacrifice.

The Valley of the Shadow of Death

The whole world is walking in “the valley of the shadow of death.” The world fears death, fears what may be in store for them beyond the grave. We were all born in this valley and we shall all die in it. Adam entered this valley 6,000 years ago when he disobeyed God. All his children have been brought forth there in sorrow, in the shadow of death. As soon as he is born, a child begins to die. He is under condemnation; death overshadows him. This is the valley of Satan the Devil who has the power of death. But Jesus became a ransom for Adam and his race, and he will lift the shadow of death in due time. As we read:

“Forasmuch, then, as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same, that through death, he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is the devil.”-- Hebrews 2:14

This merit of Jesus' sacrifice is applied to the little flock now. As Paul expresses it:

“We walk in newness of life.”--Romans 6:4

“There is therefore, now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit.”-- Romans 8:1

In this sense, in the sense of being free from Adamic condemnation, we can say, “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me.” We fear no evil because we know: we know our future and we know the future of the world; we know that redemption has been provided; we know about the first resurrection, and the general resurrection, “When all that are in their graves shall come forth.”

But there is still another meaning to this phrase. There is another “shadow of death” peculiar to the Lord's sheep, the justified ones, those dead with Christ. It is the shadow of second death. This is what Paul had in mind when he said that we stand in jeopardy every hour. (1 Corinthians 15:30) The Diaglott says, “In danger every hour.” Jesus passed through the valley of this shadow of death before us and it was an agonizing experience:

“Who, in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared.”--Hebrews 5:7

This was in Gethsemane just before his crucifixion. Jesus knew if he had failed at any point in his sacrificial work, it would have meant his own destruction. But he had not failed, and the heavenly Father reassured him. While it is not necessary for us to pass through such an agonizing experience, we are nevertheless also under the shadow of the second death.

But “I will fear no evil!” Why is it we do not fear this shadow of death? What comforts us? How are we assured? How do we know the Lord is dealing with us, that we will be of those over which “the second death hath no power”? (Revelation 20:6) It is because “thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.” The rod is for the defense of the sheep. When a lion and a bear sought to take a lamb from David's flock, he slew them with his rod. The sheep saw this happen! They witnessed it. One of the lambs was actually in the mouth of the lion when David's rod descended. One moment he felt the great teeth closing with crushing force. The next moment the blow was struck, and he was released unharmed! So the sheep had complete confidence in the shepherd, that he would defend them.

We, too, have this confidence. We know that all the power of God is exercised in our behalf. “No weapon that is formed against thee, shall prosper.” (Isaiah 54:17) This is a comfort to the Lord's sheep. It is to me because this has been a part of my personal experience. I want to testify that I have been in the mouth of the lion and I have seen the rod of the Lord descend with incredible swiftness in my behalf, and seemingly impossible things happened. I tell you that I shall never doubt again!

The shepherd's staff was also for the comfort and safety of his sheep. It had a large hook at the end. If a lamb stumbled and fell, the shepherd used his staff to lift him up and help him to his feet. Have we not all stumbled at some time; have we not lost our footing, and fallen into the ditch; have we not cried to the Lord and presently felt his staff encircle us, lift us up and restore us to a standing before him? Thinking back on such experiences is a source of great comfort to the Lord's people. These are evidences of the strongest kind that the Lord is dealing with us, that he is with us. We can exclaim with David, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.”

Thou Preparest a Table Before Me

When the Lord prepares a table, we may be sure it will be clean, that it will be good, that it will be orderly, bountiful and beautiful. Our table of spiritual food has been spread by careful hands, hands fully submissive and obedient to the great Head of the house, by the hands

of a “faithful and wise servant, whom his Lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season.” (Matthew 24:45) The “goods” are the glorious and harmonious fundamental doctrines of the Divine Plan of the Ages.

To this faithful steward the Lord said, “Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables that he may run that readeth it.” (Habakkuk 2:2) He obeyed setting it out in an orderly, systematic manner, as Berean Studies and a Chart of the Ages: “that he may run that readeth it,” that he that readeth it may run for the prize of the high calling.

There are many surface truths in the scriptures which all may see and appreciate. But the systematic ordering of the divine plan, much of which was purposely hidden and obscurely expressed, and the bringing out of its wonderful details was left to an appointed time at the end of the age. When the appointed time came, that faithful and wise servant was led to see the systematic harmony of divine truth, not to guess or surmise as some do today. He saw it so plainly he could deftly, logically, and scripturally demonstrate it to others. He made plain to others what the Lord made plain to him. The commission was to “make it plain,” not make it obscure. It is this plain and clear truth that today satisfies our longings as nothing else can do.

When the Lord returned and prepared a table for his people at the hand of his servant, the food was clean. It is still clean. The food was good. It is still good. The table set with a divine plan was orderly, bountiful and beautiful. It is still so. The menu has not changed. Those craving a constant change of menu, or new and fancy dishes, must leave the Lord's table and go elsewhere. Many have done so. Those desiring a sensational and highly-spiced spiritual diet will look for it somewhere else. But they will eventually get indigestion because they are unable to assimilate such food.

As we partake of this beautiful and bountiful table the Lord has prepared, let us determine to keep the table clean! Let none of the consecrated promulgate strange, unproven ideas, becoming stumbling-blocks in the way of others. Be content to spread only the truth you have received and proved true to your thorough satisfaction: good, wholesome food for hungry hearts! Idle speculations are unprofitable and unpalatable. Keep the table clean!

Don't forget that the table is prepared for us in the presence of our enemies. Satan and those under his control are our enemies. They would like to see us leave the Lord's table, to deprive ourselves of the nourishing spiritual food there, to starve us as new creatures. So they offer us tables full of deception, of which James says, “This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.” (James 3:15) The Lord's true people are so completely satisfied with

the table the Lord has prepared before them, that they do not have the slightest interest in any other.

Thou Anointest My Head with Oil

In ancient times when kings and priests were invested with their office, they were anointed with a sweet and fragrant oil. Aaron was so anointed. As the oil ran down to the hem of his garments it typified the liberal anointing of The Christ, head and body, with the holy spirit to office. An anointing to office was a joyful and exhilarating experience. It was a joyful experience for those at Pentecost and it is for us as well as we come under that same anointing. Paul quotes Psalm 45:7, "Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows."--Hebrews 1:9

Let us happily and gladly abide under that anointing until we are actually inducted into office as kings and priests.

My Cup Runneth Over

How eloquently these four words demonstrate a full heart, a heart overflowing with gratitude, love and adoration, a fullness of joy for all the Lord's benefits toward him, an abundance of thankfulness that the Lord is his shepherd, providing green pastures and still waters, restoring his soul, leading him in the paths of righteousness, protecting him from evil in the valley of the shadow of death, comforting him with rod and staff, setting a table before him, anointing his head with oil. The Lord's lavish abundance is described by Jesus as not just full but: "Pressed down, and shaken together and running over!" (Luke 6:38)

These were blessings that even the golden-tongued David could find no words to describe. So he described the effect of the Lord's bounty upon his heart: "My cup runneth over!" This is exactly our reaction. Can we, with sinful lips and imperfect language, thank God adequately for all he has given us, for all that he has done for us? No, we cannot. But we can echo the words of David and God will understand. We can simply say, "My cup runneth over!"

Surely Goodness and Mercy Shall Follow Me All the Days of My Life

"Surely," David says. There is not a shadow of a doubt. God's goodness and mercy shall follow us, or pursue us, as another translation has it. "Always with us, all the days of our life; both this present life and also of that which is to come--eternal life!"

If as obedient sheep we continue to follow our shepherd, we shall eventually dwell in the house of the Lord forever as members of the royal family. Jesus, our great shepherd, said,

“In my Father's house are many mansions ... I go to prepare a place for you ... That where I am, there ye may be also.”--John 14:2,3

What a glorious prospect!

The Story of Esther

THE events of our lesson, found in the book of Esther, took place about 500 years before Christ. The second universal empire, that of the Medes and Persians, ruled the world under king Ahasuerus. This king was the great Xerxes of secular history. The Bible account says that he reigned over 127 provinces, from India to Ethiopia. This comprised the entire civilized world of that time. As was usually the case with ancient heathen kings, Ahasuerus was an absolute monarch, a severe autocrat. His word was law. He had the power of life or death in his hands. He sat upon a magnificent throne in a large and beautiful palace called Shushan.

The king had accumulated great treasures, the best of everything, gathered from all parts of his worldwide kingdom. He was very proud of these possessions. One day he decided to make an exhibition of his treasures. He proclaimed a feast to last 180 days to which he invited all his governors and other public servants from all over the world. Today we would call it a World's Fair or Exposition. Of course, they didn't eat all the time during the 180 days, which is six months. Between feasting we read that “he showed the riches of his glorious kingdom, and the honour of his excellent majesty.” (Esther 1:4)

You can imagine the quantity and variety of the treasures the king had if it took six months to exhibit all of it! It was the cream of the wealth of 127 nations. There must have been innumerable objects of gold and silver, jewelry made from precious stones, carvings of ivory and jade, intricate tapestries and oriental rugs, the royal wardrobe of many gorgeous costumes, pictures and statues by the finest artists and sculptors, the best of the kingdom's crops and produce, exotic flowers, prize animals, both wild and domestic, huge elephants, colorful birds, chariots, catapults, battering rams, and other military equipment, etc. There must have been programs of entertainment, contests of strength and skill, of horsemanship, swordsmanship, archery and military drills, circuses, with all manner of acrobatics, and display of magical tricks, concerts by great

orchestras, elaborate pageants and dramas with beautiful costumes, acting singing and dancing.

When this great “World's Fair” was over, the king gave a special banquet for his princes, governors, and palace staff in the garden of the palace. It was a sort of farewell party, lasting seven days, for those who would be leaving to return to the distant provinces. Here we get another glimpse of the king's great wealth. We read of the furnishings of that banquet, that the colorful draperies were fastened with cords of fine linen and purple, to silver rings and pillars of marble. The couches upon which the feasters sat, were of gold and silver, placed upon a mosaic floor of red, blue, white and black marble. The cups they used during the banquet were of solid gold, each one a work of art, no two alike. There was an abundance of wine of the most excellent quality for anyone who wanted it, but no one was compelled to drink.

The queen, the king's wife, was named Vashti, and she was beautiful. Vashti means beautiful. While the king was having a banquet in the garden for the men, she was having one in her apartment for the women of the royal household.

On the last day of the farewell banquet, the king was in a good mood. Everything had gone well. He had made a fine impression by the display of all his treasures of which he was so proud. Probably because of drinking many farewell toasts to those who would be departing, he had partaken rather freely of wine. The account says that “the heart of the king was merry with wine.” In his expansive mood, a thought came to his mind--what better way to end the celebration, than by showing the assembly the greatest treasure of all--his beautiful queen!

This was his most precious possession. So he commanded the seven chamberlains who waited on him to bring Vashti to them, making sure that she was dressed in her finest gown and had the royal crown upon her head so that all might admire her beauty. Then they eagerly waited for her to appear. In a few minutes the chamberlains returned alone. Vashti had refused to come!

The feasters were stunned! This was unbelievable! To defy the king who ruled the world was a very serious thing. Bad as it was, to do it before the princes and governors of all the provinces and thus put the king to open shame, was unforgivable. The king was angry. He consulted his wise men, the seven top-ranking princes of the realm, about what should be done to the queen for refusing to obey his command. The decision was that because of the bad example Vashti had set in that she had defied her husband's rightful authority before all the people, she should no longer be queen. They recommended that, “Her royal estate let the king give unto her neighbor, who is

better than she.” (Esther 1:19, Rotherham) The king agreed; Vashti was deposed and divorced.

It now became necessary for the king to select another queen. Of course she must be the most beautiful girl in all his worldwide kingdom. So they held a beauty contest. Since the kingdom of the Medes and Persians which Ahasuerus ruled was a universal empire, I think we can correctly say it was the very first Miss Universe beauty contest. Hundreds of pretty girls from every nation of the world were brought to Shushan the palace so that the king might pick out a new queen from among them. Each was assigned a maid. During a twelve month period, each was trained in local customs and language, and furnished all the perfumes and beauty aids she required to prepare herself for the judging.

There was in the palace an Israelite named Mordecai, who was a trusted officer of the king. Years before he had adopted a little orphan girl named Esther, and brought her up as his own daughter. She was now fifteen years old and was exquisitely lovely. So Mordecai entered her in the contest without telling anyone that she was his daughter. Esther was so charming that everyone who saw her, loved her. The Chief Eunuch in charge of the contest arrangements was so captivated by her that instead of only one, he assigned Esther seven maids, especially selected from the palace staff. He provided her every luxury, and arranged for her and her maids to occupy the best apartment in a wing of the palace.

Mordecai knew that Esther, as a devoted daughter, would miss him so every day he would walk in front of the building where Esther lived so that she might see him from her window. Perhaps they had even prearranged a system of signals whereby she could indicate how things were going with her. This is suggested by these words,

“And throughout every day, Mordecai used to walk to and fro before the court of the house of the women, to get to know the welfare of Esther.”--Esther 2:11, Rotherham

Esther Is Presented to the King

After their long preparation and training, the girls were ready to be shown to the king. What a colorful pageant that must have been! Dressed in their daintiest native costumes, adorned with cosmetics, anointed with perfume, and acting their best, they were taken in, one by one, into the king's presence. Each one went in with high hopes of perhaps becoming the queen of the whole world; they came out disappointed and were assigned a secondary place in the household of the king. He gave no special recognition to any of them. Then it was Esther's turn to go in. Verse 15 seems to indicate that she did not depend upon artificial beauty aids as the others had done, but was

her natural, lovely self. This time the king was utterly captivated. “And the king loved Esther above all the women, and she obtained grace and favour in his sight more than all the virgins, so that he set the royal crown upon her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti.”--Esther 2:17

The king did not know that Esther was an Israelite, and he did not care. He loved her for herself alone. The glad news was proclaimed throughout the kingdom and there was great rejoicing. We can just imagine how very proud and happy Mordecai was, that his beloved Esther had been chosen queen. We read in the verse 18: “Then the king made a great feast unto all his princes and his servants, even Esther's feast.” He wanted to proudly show them all the beauty of his new queen. We may be sure that on this occasion Esther did not refuse to come as Vashti had done.

We read of Mordecai that he “sat in the king's gate.” This means that he was responsible for the safety of the king, that no one should enter the palace who might do him harm. He was something like the Secret Service that guards our president's life. One day Mordecai heard of a plot against the king's life. He told Queen Esther about it, who told the king in Mordecai's name. The plotters were arrested and hanged. It was the custom in those days to keep a record of any favor done to the king, so it was written in the royal record book how Mordecai had saved the king's life.

The Villain

Every story has its villain. In the story of Esther it was a wicked man named Haman. We read that he was an Agagite, which means he was a descendant of Agag, king of Amalek. The Amalekites were a depraved race, and were the historic enemies of Israel. Not realizing his wickedness, the king had promoted Haman to be his right-hand man, and set him over all the others in the palace. Whenever Haman came along, the people bowed and even knelt down to him. How he loved it! But there was one man who did not bow or kneel to him, and that man was Mordecai. He knew of Haman's wickedness and refused to show any respect for him. Haman already hated Mordecai because he was a Jew; now he hated him even more because he would not bow down to him. Haman's first impulse was to kill Mordecai, which he had the power to do, but his hatred was so intense that he wanted to kill every Jew in the whole world much like Hitler wanted to do. Haman devised a plan to do this by using the autocratic power of King Ahasuerus, who ruled the whole world. It was a simple and brutal plan. The king trusted him. If, without mentioning Mordecai's name, he could convince the king that all the Jews scattered throughout the world were a dangerous people, a menace to his kingdom, and ought to be exterminated, he would thus

with one stroke not only kill Mordecai, but his entire race as well. However, when Haman made this plan, he was not aware that Queen Esther, whom the king loved so much, was also an Israelite. We now read from the record:



“Then Haman said to king Xerxes, There is one race scattered and separated among the races in all provinces of your kingdom. Their laws are different from those of every other race. They do not obey the king's laws. Therefore it is not proper for the king to tolerate them. If it please the king, let an edict be written for their destruction.”--Esther 3:8-11, Moffatt

To impress the king with his sincerity he offered to pay out of his own pocket an enormous sum to defray the cost of the massacre. We read:

“And I will pay over, four million silver pounds to the royal treasurers for the royal treasury. So the king drew off his signet ring, and gave it to Haman ... the enemy of the Jews. Keep your money, said the king to Haman, and do what you like with the race. They are in your hand.”

The signet ring which the king gave Haman was a signing ring upon which was carved the king's own seal. Haman could now write any law he wished and sign it with the ring in the king's name. Of course the king did not know that he had thus consented to the death not only of his trusted servant Mordecai, but also of his own lovely queen.

Everything was working out as Haman had planned. The law he now wrote and sealed was an extremely wicked one. On a certain specified day, every man, woman and child of the Israelites all over the world should be killed. Then he added a Satanic touch: in order

to provide an incentive for the carrying out of the massacre, anyone who killed a Jew, would be entitled to take over his property as a prize. The law was translated into every language of the world, and sent by swift messengers to the governors of every nation with orders to proclaim it to all their people. We can imagine the vicious result of this proclamation.

The Jews with their talent for accumulating wealth wherever they went had always aroused the envy and covetousness of their Gentile neighbors. Now here was an opportunity for the Gentiles to legally murder the Jews and seize their belongings. Impelled by greed, plans would be made as to which Jewish family would be the most profitable to kill on the appointed day. We may be sure that Haman had earmarked Mordecai as his own personal victim!

The decree of Haman was also published in Shushan, the palace. When Mordecai read it, he was deeply distressed and went into mourning. In this he was joined by all the Jews in the world. We read:

“And in every province withersoever the king's commandment and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews; and fasting, and weeping, and wailing, and many lay in sackcloth and ashes.”--Esther 4:3

Through a servant, Mordecai told Esther what Haman had done. He furnished her a copy of the decree and told her she must go in to the king and appeal to him for mercy on behalf of her people. She sent a messenger back to Mordecai telling him she could not go in to the king because it was the law that anyone entering the king's presence without being called would be instantly put to death, unless the king held out his golden scepter to such. It had been a month since the king had asked to see her.

“Then Mordecai told them to return answer to Esther: Think not that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews; for if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your Father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this? Then Esther told them to reply to Mordecai: Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Shushan, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do. Then I will go to the king, though it is against the law, and if I perish, I perish.”--Esther 4:13-16, Revised Version

Esther Approaches the King

On the third day Esther put on her finest royal gown and went, unbidden, to the king's throne room. She stood at the open door. The

king glanced up and seeing his lovely queen he was charmed. He smiled and extended his golden scepter. With great relief Esther approached the king and touched the top of his scepter. Noting Esther's look of anxiety and realizing she must have something very important in mind to thus risk her life, the king asked, "What is your wish, queen Esther? What is your request? You shall have it, were it half my kingdom." (Moffatt) What a change of atmosphere can take place in just a few seconds! One moment Esther was fearing for her life, the next moment she was offered half of the whole world! But wise Esther did not immediately make her petition to the king. She invited him and Haman to have dinner with her that day. After dinner the king again asked Esther what her request was, and again told her she could have half of his kingdom. Haman heard this and realized the king's great love for his queen. Again Esther did not make her request, but invited the king and Haman to dinner again the following day, promising to tell him at that time.

Haman was very proud of being the only guest invited to have dinner with the king and queen. This high honor went to his head and he felt that he was really somebody. On his way home he passed by Mordecai, sitting at the king's gate. As usual Mordecai refused to bow to him. We now read from the account:

"That day Haman went away, glad and gratified. When he noticed that Mordecai neither rose up nor trembled before him in the king's gate, he was indeed furious with Mordecai. But he restrained himself, and went home. Then he sent for his friends and his wife Zeresh. And Haman recounted to them the vastness of his wealth, the number of his children, all the promotion he had received from the king, and how the king had exalted him over the royal officials and courtiers. Yes, Haman added, And Queen Esther invited no man, except myself along with the king to the banquet she had prepared. And she has invited me again tomorrow along with the king. But all this is no good to me so long as I see Mordecai, the Jew, sitting at the king's gate! Then his wife, Zeresh, and all his friends said to him, Have a gallows made, eighty feet high. Speak to the king tomorrow morning, and let Mordecai be hung on it. Then go into the banquet merrily along with the king. This pleased Haman and he had the gallows erected."--Esther 5:9-14, Moffatt

He just couldn't wait! Although he had arranged for a future date when all the Jews would be exterminated, he just couldn't wait to kill Mordecai!

That night the king couldn't sleep so he had someone read to him from the royal record book including the part where Mordecai had given information which had saved the king's life. When he heard that, the king asked: "What honor and dignity has been conferred on Mordecai for this service?" "Nothing has been done for him," they

said. The king immediately decided that some honor must be given to Mordecai, so he asked: "Who is now in attendance at court?" Not even waiting until morning, Haman had just then come into the outer room to ask the king's permission to hang Mordecai. They told the king that Haman was outside. "Let him come in," the king said.

Haman was feeling very pleased with himself. Because Esther had invited him to her banquets, he felt that he was, next to the king, the most honorable man in the world. When he entered the throne room, the king asked him, "What should be done to the man whom the king delights to honor?" He was sure the king was referring to him, certainly not Mordecai. All he could think of was what he would like done to himself.

"Haman said to himself, Whom would the king delight to honor more than myself? Then said Haman to the king, As for the man whom the king delights to honor, let them bring a royal robe which the king has worn, and a horse on which the king has ridden, with a royal crown upon his head. Let robe and horse be entrusted to one of the king's highest officials, to see that the man whom the king delights to honor is arrayed, and led on horseback through the city square, with the proclamation, This is what is done for the man whom the king delights to honor. And the king said to Haman, Quick, get the robe and horse, as you have said, and do all this to Mordecai, the Jew, who sits at the king's gate. Leave out nothing of what you have proposed."-- Esther 6:6-10, Moffatt

This was a terrible shock to Haman. Here he was about to ask the king to have Mordecai hanged and now he was appointed to dress Mordecai in the king's own robe, put the royal crown on his head, mount him upon the king's own horse, and then, the most humiliating thing of all--to lead the horse through the city square and, with a loud voice, praise Mordecai as "The man whom the king delights to honor!" This placed the hated Mordecai above him. This made him, the great Haman, a mere servant to Mordecai before all the people. It was a crushing blow to his vanity but he had to carry out the king's order. As soon as he had done so, he hurried home. He wanted to hide. He was so ashamed he covered his face as he went. He put a bag over his head so that no one would recognize him. Only one thought consoled him: by a law which could not be changed, all the Jews, including Mordecai, would soon be killed. When he got home, he told his wife and friends what had happened, seeking consolation, but they had none to give him. His wife said, prophetically, "If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, belongs to the Jewish race, you will never succeed against him. You will fail, and fall before him." (Esther 6:13)

Haman hadn't been home long when he was called to the second dinner of Queen Esther. As they ate, everything seemed to be right

between the king and him, and he began to feel better. After dinner the king again asked, "What is your petition, Queen Esther? You shall have it. What is your request? Were it half my kingdom, it shall be done for you." (Esther 7:2) This time Esther told the king what was on her mind. "I'm asking for my life," she said, "and for the lives of all my people!" The king was astonished. "What do you mean?" he demanded. "How is your life threatened?" "I and all my race have been sold, to be massacred," Esther answered. The king arose in anger. "Who is it?" he asked. "Where is the man who has dared to do this?" Esther pointed to Haman. "There is the man!" she said, "this wicked Haman!" Seeing the king's anger, Haman fell



before the queen to plead for his life. This angered the king still more and he said, "Will the man actually violate the queen in my very presence?" He called his servants who immediately covered Haman's face, the signal of condemnation to death. Then a royal chamberlain spoke up and said,

"In Haman's house, gallows are standing, eighty feet high, which he erected for Mordecai, who did good service to the king. Hang him on that! said the king. So they hanged Haman on the gallows which he had erected for Mordecai."--Esther 7:9,10, Moffatt

Then Esther told the king that Mordecai was her father and the Israelites were her people. She begged the king to somehow reverse the law Haman had made to destroy the Jews. The king called in Mordecai and gave him the signet ring which he had taken from Haman. "Write any law you wish, in my name," he told Mordecai, "and sign it with this ring."

Mordecai was a wise man. He knew that no law of the Medes and Persians could be changed and that the wicked law which Haman had

made could not be set aside. Because he knew that on the day set by Haman the Jews would be attacked by their enemies, he wrote a law that all Jews everywhere should arm and barricade themselves and defend themselves on the appointed day. This new law, sealed by the king's ring, was translated into every language and sent to every part of the kingdom. Now the sadness of the Jews turned to joy and celebration. Mordecai was promoted and made a great man, second only to the king. We read that he was "clad in royal robes of violet and white, with a large golden crown, and with a mantle of fine linen and purple." (Esther 8:15)

The day set for the massacre of the Jews came, but they were so well armed and prepared that they won out against their enemies. The fact that the king had promoted Mordecai, the Jew, to great authority in the kingdom, and that the beloved Queen Esther was also a Jew, had a powerfully deterring effect upon many who might have been contemplating harm to the Jews. Thus the wicked plot of Haman to destroy the Jews failed entirely. Haman's vast fortune was turned over to Esther, and she entrusted it to Mordecai. The ten sons of Haman were also executed, and Mordecai greatly prospered in the kingdom.

Lessons for Us

The fact that the story of Esther was recorded in the Bible indicates that there are lessons to be learned from it. That is the purpose of all scripture. Let us consider some of the many lessons in this beautiful story of God's providential care for his people.

The name Ahasuerus means Lion-King. Jesus Christ is designated, "The lion of the tribe of Judah." (Revelation 5:5) Ahasuerus ruled all nations to the uttermost parts of the earth with autocratic power, subduing all opposition. The world was at his feet. Of Jesus it is written:

"Ask of me, and I shall give thee the nations for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession."-- Psalms 2:8,9

"He shall rule them with a rod of iron. As the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers."--Revelation 2:27

"He must reign till he hath put all enemies under his feet."--1 Corinthians 15:25

The name Vashti means Beautiful. The king called for her to appear before him in her royal robe and golden crown. She lost a great opportunity when she refused to obey the king. From this we learn that if the Lord invites anyone to put on the royal robe of Christ's righteousness, wear the golden crown of the divine nature, and

appear before the great king in beauty of character as his bride, such an invitation should not be refused. It should be considered a great honor and be obeyed eagerly and promptly. Those contemplating consecration should think about this.

The decision regarding Vashti was, "Let the king give her royal estate unto her neighbor who is better than she." This reminds us of the case of King Saul who also was disobedient. The decision regarding him was strikingly similar in its words:

"And Samuel said unto him, The Lord hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbor of thine, who is better than thou."--1 Samuel 15:28

Vashti and Saul both lost their crowns. If not obedient, any one of us can be replaced and our crown assigned to a better person. Jesus said, "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown." (Revelation 3:11) There is a very sobering thought here. We can lose our crowns by not holding fast to that which we have, by being disobedient to the truth. This test is even now upon the church.

We read, "The king's daughter is all glorious within." (Psalms 45:13) Vashti was very beautiful, but only on the outside. She did not exhibit the inner beauty that is pleasing to the Lord:

"Your beauty should not be dependent on an elaborate arrangement of the hair, or in the wearing of jewelry or fine clothes; but on the inner personality, the unfading loveliness of a meek and gentle spirit, a thing very precious in the eyes of God."--1 Peter 3:3,4, Weymouth

We want to be beautiful and precious in God's sight who looks not on the outward appearance, but on the heart.

The rejection of Vashti from the chief place in the kingdom of Ahasuerus suggests the rejection of natural Israel from the chief place of favor by our Lord. Although making a beautiful outward profession, their hearts were evil. Jesus told their leaders:

"Ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within, full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also, outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity."-- Matthew 23:27,28

As a nation they were disobedient to the heavenly vision. They missed the opportunity to become Spiritual Israel the Bride of Christ. They rejected Christ and he rejected them. Now we begin to appreciate the significance of the divorce of Vashti and the command of Ahasuerus to call for beautiful virgins from all over the world that he might select a bride from among them. This is the call of the church, the Bride of Christ, the high calling. They come "out of every kindred, and tongue, and people and nation." (Revelation 5:9) Thus we read:

“For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him.”--2 Chronicles 16:9

The virgins had a year of preparation and training before they were ushered into the king's presence. During this time, everything they needed to make them attractive was furnished them. They were given special food from the king's own table and perfume to anoint themselves. They were assigned maids to serve them. This is a good description of the way we are prepared for our high calling. We are in the School of Christ and are given sufficient time to make ourselves ready. We are given everything we need for our spiritual welfare to prepare us for the kingdom. We are abundantly fed with spiritual food from the table of our returned Lord. We are “thoroughly furnished and fitted for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:17) We have the most faithful and efficient servants in the world -- guardian angels and ministering spirits.

Esther left the house of her father and clothed in her finest apparel, she entered into the king's palace. Her beauty completely captivated the king's heart and he placed the crown of gold upon her head. Psalm 45 describes Esther's experience which prefigured ours:

“Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear. Forget also thine own people, and thy father's house. So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty; for he is thy Lord, and worship thou him. The king's daughter is all glorious within, her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework. The virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee. With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought. They shall enter into the king's palace.”-- Psalms 45:10-15

When we consecrate we leave our father's house, the house of Adam, and we leave the things of this world including human relationships, hopes, aims and ambitions. Our heavenly king greatly desires to see beauty of character in us and gives us every facility to develop it. We have needlework to do. We painstakingly add to our robes the beautiful adornments of the Christian graces. Psalm 110:3 refers to these as “beauties of holiness.” Then when we finally enter the king's presence, our clothing is of wrought gold, symbolic of the divine nature, and we receive the golden crown, the crown of life.

In the story of Esther, the virgins who failed to become the bride were not sent home, but were given a secondary place in the king's household. These represent the Great Company, referred to as “the virgins, her companions,” elsewhere termed “foolish virgins.” They will attain the spirit nature and serve before the throne. There will indeed be “gladness and rejoicing” when the great king has selected his bride and the heavenly wedding takes place.

“Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him; for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.”-- Revelation 19:7

After Esther was crowned there was great rejoicing by all the people of the kingdom and we read that “the king made a great feast.”

“And in this mountain [kingdom] shall the Lord of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things; a feast of wines on the lees; of fat things full of marrow; of wines on the lees well refined.”--Isaiah 25:6

This refers to the whole world, feasting upon the rich blessings of the Millennial kingdom.

Haman Pictures Satan

Haman and Satan have many characteristics in common. Haman was inordinately proud and ambitious. Of Satan it is written:

“Thine heart is lifted up, and thou hast said, I am a God, I sit in the seat of God, in the midst of the seas. Yet thou art a man [mortal] and not God, though thou set thine heart as the heart of God.”--Ezekiel 28:2

“Thou hast said in thine heart, 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.”--Isaiah 14:13,14

As Haman loved to be bowed and knelt to, we read that Satan said to Jesus: “All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.” (Matthew 4:9) Every faithful Christian will shun Satan's characteristic of pride and desire to dominate. We must rather cultivate the mind of Christ of whom it is written:

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not meditate a usurpation to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men, and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”--Philippians 2:5-8

As Haman hated the Jews and sought to exterminate them, Satan has always hated the Seed of Promise which God told him was destined to bruise his head. Identifying this seed with Israel, he has always tried to destroy that nation. It was he who inspired Hitler to try to exterminate the Jews of the world, much like Haman. It was he who has surrounded modern Israel with a superior force of bitter enemies, sworn to utterly destroy them. It is he who will propel the Nation of the North against Israel in the final great struggle. Just as under

Haman's order those who killed the Jews might take their property as a spoil, we read of the attack from the north that they will come, "To take a spoil, and to take a prey." (Ezekiel 38:12) Satan has always been the implacable foe of Spiritual Israel also, from the head, Christ Jesus, to the feet members this side the veil. Satan is our Haman.

When Mordecai told queen Esther to see the king about Haman's wicked plot, she at first hesitated to risk her life to do it. Mordecai's reply was, "If you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter. ... And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" What a tremendous faith Mordecai thus exhibited! By a law of the Medes and Persians, which could not be changed, the Jews were to be slaughtered. Yet Mordecai was positive that they would be delivered, if not by Esther's intervention, then by some other means. He encouraged Esther to use her position in the kingdom to accomplish that which he was sure would be done in any event. Esther's reply was, "I will go to the king ... and if I perish, I perish." Bro. Russell comments on this:

"There is a beautiful lesson of faith here that should appeal to all of the Spiritual Israelites. Whatever we have, whatever positions we occupy of influence, or power, or wealth or confidence in the esteem of others, is so much of a stewardship granted to us by the Lord, and respecting which we should expect to give an account. And if the account would be rendered with joy, we must be faithful even to the risking of our lives in the interests of the Lord's people, the Lord's cause. Let us lay this feature of Esther's experience to heart, that we may draw valuable lessons therefrom, helpful to us in the spiritual way. The suggestion that she had not come to a place of honor and privilege by accident, but that the Lord had overruled in the matter, is one that should appeal to all Israelites indeed. Whatever we have is of the Lord's providence. Let us use it faithfully, and as wisely as possible, for him and his. Thus our own blessings and joys will be increased as well as our favor with the Lord."--Reprints, page 3657.

When Esther entered the king's presence unbidden, she was reconciled to death. But what a sudden change occurred! One moment she was fearing for her life, the next she was offered half the world! How quickly the Lord can change our prospects! The things we fear the most often turn out to be our greatest blessings. As the poet has well expressed it: "Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take; the clouds ye so much dread, are big with mercy, and shall break in blessings on your head."

Let us consider two seeming coincidences in the account. On the same night in which Haman built a gallows eighty feet high upon which to hang Mordecai, the king couldn't sleep. He called for the royal record book and was reminded that Mordecai had saved his

life. At the very moment when Haman entered the outer court of the king to ask permission to hang Mordecai, the king had decided to honor Mordecai. He asked Haman what should be done to “the man whom the king delighted to honor?” Do you think that these events were merely coincidental? You know they were not! This was the finger of God. We have the very same supervision of our affairs. Our heavenly Father can control and maneuver every principality and power with the greatest of ease for our benefit. To a child of God, nothing happens by accident. Every event of life is supervised for one's highest welfare. What comfort and assurance this should give our hearts!

Haman's wife said to him, “If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall, belongs to the Jewish race, you will never succeed against him. You will fail, and fall before him.” (Esther 6:13) This prophecy also has a modern fulfillment. Could not these very words be addressed to the Arab nations after the six-day war?

In exposing Haman's wicked plot, Esther told the king: “I and my race have been sold to be massacred.” Similarly, the whole human race was sold into sin and death by Satan's wicked plot. (Romans 7:14) But as Mordecai wrote a new law in the king's name which counteracted and nullified Haman's wicked law of death, there will be a New Law Covenant inaugurated with the House of Israel which will abolish death and bring life to all the world of mankind. As Mordecai was raised up to power in the kingdom and administered that new law of the Medes and Persians, the Ancient Worthies will be raised up to administer the New Covenant during the Messianic kingdom. Just as Haman was hanged upon gallows he had erected for the innocent, Satan will himself receive the penalty of death which he sought to inflict upon Adam and his race.

In the account Haman's vast fortune was given to Esther who turned it over to Mordecai to administer for her. This pictures the transfer of Satan's usurped dominion of the world to the church reigning with Christ, who will be visibly represented by the Ancient Worthies. This will be the fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy:

“And the kingdom and dominion and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.”--Daniel 7:27

Finally Haman's ten sons were executed. This pictures the complete destruction at the end of the Millennium of all Satan's family--all the incorrigibly wicked.

The story of Esther could appropriately end with the phrase: “And they lived happily ever after.” This is how the beautiful story of the

Divine Plan of Salvation ends: “The whole human family will live happily forever after!”

The Temple of God

“And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”--2 Corinthians 6:16

“Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him will God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.”--1 Corinthians 3:16,17

THROUGHOUT the centuries of the Gospel age, many artists and painters have attempted to show what Jesus looked like. Some have claimed to have seen him in visions, whereupon they have risen from their beds and made their sketches while the features were fresh in their minds. Others have patterned their portraits after old mosaics allegedly dating back to the first centuries of the early church. Still others, after reading about him in the scriptures and in the writings of the Early Fathers, have simply used their imaginations. The general result has been that they have pictured Jesus as a thin, pale young man with a tired, discouraged look.

So conditioned are people to this image of Jesus that it seems to them almost irreverent to suggest that he was physically strong. I believe he was. Why do I think so? The fact that he was the physical equivalent of the perfect man, Adam, is enough for me. But there is much other evidence also. Let us look at his first 30 years.

There was no soft bed for his mother on the night he entered this world. He was brought forth in a stable amid animals and the rough men who tended them. When he was still an infant, the incredibly cruel Herod ordered him killed and the family hurried away into Egypt to escape. This was a long and arduous trip. Some years later when Herod was dead, they made the same exhausting trip back. This time he was probably judged old enough to walk and must have trudged, day after day, beside the pack animals. Such things develop hardihood.

Early in his boyhood Jesus worked in the family carpenter shop. Carpentry was not easy in those days. A man who took a contract for a house did the whole job. He had to dig, with primitive hand tools, in the rocky ground for the foundations. There were no modern lumberyards. To get his timbers he went to the forest, felled trees,

and shaped them by hand with an adz. Propping them up, he laboriously sawed them with a hand saw to produce his beams. The finished timbers had to be dragged or carried to the building site. Instead of nails, holes were drilled into which wooden pegs, whittled round by hand, were driven. Joints were secured by mortise and tendon, laboriously carved out. In all these things Jesus participated. It was hard work!

Years later Jesus preached in Galilee from his experience when he spoke of “a wise man who built his house upon a rock,” and “a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand.” (Matthew 7:24,26) It was from his experience the people heard him say, as a building contractor would:

“Which of you intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him; saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish.”--Luke 14:28-30

You may be sure his words carried conviction because they knew he had been reared as a carpenter's son and knew what he was talking about. To be a carpenter, you had to be physically strong.

So we read of Jesus as a boy: “And the child grew, and waxed strong.” (Luke 2:40) The King James says “strong in spirit,” but the words “in the spirit” are spurious and not in the Diaglott. Even here, we see an effort to make him appear puny, but he grew physically strong. He did not receive the strong spirit until he was baptized by John in the Jordan and it came upon him like a dove.

The disciples, when first called, did not have the holy spirit. This is not what primarily attracted them to Jesus. They were attracted and held largely by the sheer strength, personality and magnetism of the man Christ Jesus. He was physically a leader. If they believed--and they did--that he was the one to overthrow the mighty Roman Empire and re-establish the Jewish Nation, it was largely because he looked the part. Prophecy described him as: “Chief est among ten thousand,” and “Altogether lovely.” (Cant. 5:10,16) David says of him, “Thou art fairer than the children of men.” (Psalms 45:2)

But this is not to imply Jesus was not meek. He was. He said of himself, “I am meek and lowly in heart.” (Matthew 11:29) He told his disciples on the mount that to receive the blessed rewards of the kingdom, they must be “poor in spirit” [humble-minded and meek].

These are attributes which we, as his footstep followers, must develop and maintain. We must emulate our master in meekness. But meekness is not weakness. For example, we read that Moses “was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the

earth.” (Numbers 12:3) He was the meekest man in the world, but was it a weak man who killed the Egyptian taskmaster? Was it a weak man who faced and defied the mighty Pharaoh of Egypt? Was it a weak man who led the children of Israel through the sea, who shepherded them in the wilderness for so many years, who faced God himself on the mount and pleaded for Israel, when God would have destroyed them? There was no weakness here; but with his meekness, there was a tremendous strength of purpose and a dedicated will, conformed to God's will.

This is what Jesus had. In fact he was like Moses in this respect because Moses himself said prophetically of Jesus:

“The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet, from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken.”-- Deuteronomy 18:15 “LIKE UNTO ME”--meek but strong, courageous, and absolutely devoted to God.



The Cleansing of the Temple

There is an incident related in each of the four gospels that powerfully illustrates Jesus' courage, strength and fidelity to God's law. It is the account of Jesus cleansing the temple. Because the different narratives vary in some respects, I will combine and paraphrase these accounts. But first let us consider some of the conditions that Jesus found in Jerusalem that day.

The Israelites had always been surrounded by heathen nations, some quite depraved. In fact some of these nations were so depraved God used Israel as his instrument to remove them from the earth before they should become totally depraved and beyond the possibility of redemption in the Millennial Age.

The heathen gods these nations worshipped were demons. They were by nature vindictive, cruel, and vengeful. They had to be appeased by horrible often obscene ceremonies which sometimes involved torture and even human sacrifice. Molech, for example, was represented by a huge, hollow, brazen image, of frightful countenance, with arms extended. A fire was built inside the idol and stoked until the image glowed with incandescent heat. Then a little child was hurled into the idol's arms to roast alive, its agonizing screams drowned out by the chants of the priests. Baal was similarly worshipped:

“They have built also the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire for burnt offerings unto Baal; which I commanded not, nor spake it, neither came it into my mind.”--Jeremiah 19:5

No! Torture by fire never came into Jehovah God's mind. He is not a torment deity, as are Molech, Baal, and others. But there were times the Jews had fallen into idolatry and had actually participated in such abominable ceremonies. As a result, a terrible thing had happened. Led and abetted by Satan, and because of these degrading heathen influences, their true worship of Jehovah God had become tainted. Their temple sacrifices of animals took on a wrong significance. These Jewish sacrifices were originally designed by God to show the necessity for the shedding of blood for the remission of sins prefiguring the ransom sacrifice which Jesus provided. These Jewish sacrifices provided a typical cleansing from sin and a restoration to favor by a loving God. But under Satan's subtle influence, many Jews sacrificed in the temple not with contrition of heart, but as though appeasing a vengeful God--to save their skins, to buy him off! Thus it became just like the heathen sacrifices. It corrupted and debased the motive of the act; it became unacceptable to God. It became hateful to him:

“To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord. I am full of the burnt offering of rams, and the fat of fat beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of the goats.”--Isaiah 1:11

Why was this? The purpose was wrong; the motive was wrong!

What was the result of this debased motive, this compulsion to offer sacrifices to appease a vengeful God? It inevitably brought corruption and commercialization to the temple and to the priesthood. It could have no other effect because it set a price on God's favor and

placed the dispensing of it in fallen human hands. This was the situation at the time of Jesus' ministry.

When Jesus visited the temple at the time of the annual sacrifices, it was crowded with Jews from all parts of the world. Many made long pilgrimages to be in the temple at Jerusalem at this particular time. Let us picture the scene. It is a confusing scene, totally unlike what one would expect on the occasion of the most solemn sacrifices to the Most High God. The air was foul with the smell of animals and humans herded together. At one side of the court were the pens of the cattle; the dove cages were at the other. In the foreground, hard-faced priests and money changers sat behind long tables exacting the utmost price from those who came to buy. All currency, even the local Roman money, had to be changed to the special temple coinage before anything could be purchased. That's why there were money changers. The exchange was at robbers' rates so a poor Jew could lose month's savings to purchase his simple offering. But you might wonder why they didn't they bring their own animals to sacrifice. Sometimes they did. A farmer might bring his own lamb, especially raised with tenderness and devotion for the purpose of sacrifice, only to have it scornfully rejected by the priests as unsound; he had to buy from the dealers. The dealers of course were there by the invitation of the priests. They were essentially concessionaires. So were the money changers. It may safely be assumed that certain priests had an interest in the profits of these operations. Today we would call it a "racket."

One would never imagine that this was a place of worship; yet it was the temple at Jerusalem, the very center of the religious life of the nation. Jesus watched the confused scene with amazement which gradually deepened to anger. As he watched, he picked up a handful of cords from the pavement, and braided them into a stout little whip. He knew what he must do. A woman's shrill voice pierced the air; he turned to see a peasant mother protesting vainly against a ruthless overcharge. "But this is not right!" she cried. "You are taking all I have!" An unruly bullock threatened to break through the bars and the crowd fell back with cries of terror. Clamor and confusion held sway. A money changer, with the face of a pig, leaned gloatingly over his hoard of coins! Jesus could stand it no longer! Suddenly, without a word of warning, he strode to the table where the fat money changer sat and hurled it violently across the court. The startled robber lurched forward, grasped for his coins, lost his balance, and fell sprawling to the ground. Another step, and a second table was overturned; then another, and another. The crowd melted back out of his way, stunned. He strode on looking neither to the right or to the left. He reached the counters where the cages of doves stood. With quick, sure movements, the cages were opened and the birds released. Brushing aside the group of dealers who had

taken their stand in front of the cattle pens, he threw down the bars and drove the bellowing animals through the crowd and into the street, striking vigorous blows with his whip!

The whole thing happened so quickly that the priests were swept off their feet. Now they collected themselves and bore down upon him in a body. Who was he that dared this act of defiance? Where had he come from? By what authority did he presume to interrupt their business? The crowds which only a few hours before had shouted Hosannahs when Jesus rode triumphantly into Jerusalem, now watched with astonished delight. They heartily disliked the corrupt priests and crooked money changers. Jesus stood firmly before the priests, the whip still in his hand. His serene glance swept over their faces, distorted by anger, hate and greed. "This is my authority," he cried. "It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves!" (Matthew 21:13; Luke 19:45; John 2:15) They were infuriated but dared do nothing because of the people. But after this, the narrative says, "the chief priests and scribes ... sought how they might destroy him." Jesus used no supernatural power in this act. There was in his eyes a flaming moral purpose, a look of majestic authority, which they could not withstand. There was also, in my opinion, still another factor. As his right arm rose and fell, striking blows with that little whip, his sleeve must have dropped back to reveal muscles as hard as iron! No flabby priest or money changer cared to challenge this perfect man!

Lessons from Cleansing the Temple

What lessons can we learn from the cleansing of the temple? First, let us consider and apply the circumstances that led to the polluted condition of the temple which Jesus found. The pollution came from the wrong motives and attitudes fostered by contact with idolaters. We too, emancipated as we are, were once influenced by the doctrines of devils. Many of us, before we got the truth, believed God to be a fiend, capable of inflicting eternal torture upon millions of his human creatures. In a sense we, too, served Molech and bowed to Baal. Many of us maintained our religion simply because we feared a vindictive god of torment! Now we see God as he truly is--a God of love; a God that is love. "There is no fear in love ... because fear hath torment." (1 John 4:18)

We have left the fear of torment behind. But have we? Is there still a vestige of the fear of torment within us? Do we render our sacrifices to God with a pure motive because we love him with all our hearts, minds and souls, and because of our desire to "fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ?" (Colossians 1:24) Is our fear a holy fear, the kind Paul spoke of when he said: "Let us therefore fear, lest a promise being left us, of entering into his rest, any of you

should seem to come short of it"? (Hebrews 4:1) Are our sacrifices colored to any degree with the thought of placating God to avoid punishment? Do we ever say, I must not do this or that because if I do, God may punish me for it? Or, I must do this or that service because if I do not, God will punish me? Are we like those of the Society who go out into the service bearing witness to the truth because we fear the everlasting punishment of Second Death? If we do, we are offering a polluted sacrifice.

When we are sick or are experiencing some misfortune which God has permitted for our polishing, do we conclude that God is punishing us for something we have done, that we must perform some special sacrifice so that he may be pacified and desist?

These are searching questions. Our conception of God and our motives for serving him should be much higher than that. If we refrain from sinful acts and from injuring our brothers or neighbors, it should be because we love God and his law is within our hearts. If we do with our might what our hands find to do in God's service, it should be with the pure motive: "What shall I render unto the Lord, for all his benefits toward me?" (Psalms 116:12) When some misfortune is permitted to come into our lives, our reaction should be: "This is for my good, because he has promised that all things shall work together for good; so I will learn from this, whatever lesson he has for me." If it is a chastening we experience, we should only take it as an evidence of our heavenly Father's love:

"For whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth ... If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he, whom the father chasteneth not?"--Hebrews 12:6,7

We Are the Temple of God

Some of the Lord's most faithful and beloved children suffer the most painful afflictions. Let us fully realize that extraordinary afflictions are not always the punishment of extraordinary sins but are rather the trial of extraordinary graces. "Ye are the temple of God," the apostle says. Let the motives, for worshipping God in this, our temple, be pure and holy. "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer." (Psalms 19:14) Let us not, by word, deed or thought, place God in the position of a vengeful deity to be placated as did Israel of old.

What lessons we can learn from the act of Jesus cleansing the temple? Are we authorized to arm ourselves with whips and invade the temples of today's false religions? Must we make a special point of attacking the commercialism in religion today thus inciting their leaders to violent retaliation? Some have taken and are taking this

course, although we are told to “Follow peace with all men.” (Hebrews 12:14) No! The lesson is much deeper and more sublime than that. Let us read our text again:

“Know ye not, that ye are the temple of God, and that the spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.”--1 Corinthians 3:16,17

This scripture has a collective as well as an individual application. The spirit begotten ones, collectively, are the temple class. In confirmation we read:

“Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.”--1 Peter 2:5

The consecrated ones are built up together as a temple of God. When Christ returned in 1874, he provided his consecrated people such brilliant revelation of “present truth” that a great cleansing occurred. There was a cleansing of doctrines, of motives, of attitudes. The eternal torment doctrine was recognized for what it was--ablasphemy of a loving God--and was thrown out. Tracts were free and sermons were “seats free, no collection.” There was no paid clergy--no money changers. The futility of saying masses for departed souls was exposed--no dealers in merchandise. The temple class was cleansed.

This is the primary application but it is not the entire lesson. There is also a more personal application. Each consecrated, spirit begotten person is a temple of God; each of us must cleanse the temple which is himself. What is the pattern laid down by Jesus in our lesson? Jesus drove out the animals with his whip. This means the forceful elimination of selfish and carnal motives, and the spirit of worldliness. As Paul said, “I keep my body under, and bring it into subjection.” (1 Corinthians 9:27) This implies force, a whip.

Jesus opened the cages, and released the birds. We read that Babylon was “a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.” (Revelation 18:2) We eliminate impure principles and doctrines. We abandon the spirit of Babylon completely and refuse to entertain strange new doctrines that fly at us through the air. Lately it seems that the air is full of them. Some even come by airmail! I like Paul's advice to Timothy:

“But evil men, and seducers, shall wax worse, and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned, and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them.”--2 Timothy 3:13,14

Of whom have we learned present truth, by whose hand was it revealed? Who wrote the vision and made “it plain upon tables, that

he may run that readeth it.” (Habakkuk 2:2) Whom did the Lord use to teach us his Divine Plan of the Ages? “Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned, and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them!” This is excellent advice.

Jesus drove out the money changers and the sellers. We must subordinate all ambition for worldly gain to the main purpose which is the spiritual development of ourselves and others. All our assets belong to God. We have consecrated everything and he has made us the stewards of our own goods. All desire for money for its own sake must be vigorously subdued:

“For the love of money is a root of all kind of evil; which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things.”--1 Timothy 6:10,11

In this regard Paul says of himself:

“But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for Whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but vile refuse, that I may win Christ.”-- Philippians 3:7,8

Robbing God

When he had cleansed the temple, Jesus said: “My house shall be called the house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves!” (Matthew 21:13) Is it possible that the temple, which we are, can be a den of thieves? Can God be robbed? Yes!

“Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.”--Malachi 3:8

These words were addressed to ancient Israel. They had agreed to give a tenth of all their substance to God. This was a part of the law that they had agreed to keep. “All these things will we do,” they said. But they failed to keep it. They did not bring the Lord the tenth, or tithe, as they had promised. So the prophet Malachi brought this neglect to their attention and told them of the tremendous blessing they were missing, the blessings they would receive if they would comply with this part of the law:

“Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house; and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it.”--Malachi 3:10

Do you see how foolish the Israelites were? In their greed they withheld even the tenth of their substance which they had promised to God. But if they had they given it, God would have increased their material wealth beyond their wildest imagination! "The windows of heaven" would have been opened to them, to shower blessings upon them. Do you remember what happened the last time "the windows of heaven" were opened? It rained forty days and forty nights. "And the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth; and all the high hills that were under the whole heaven, were covered!" That's the sort of outpouring God was talking about when he referred to "the windows of heaven" being opened; but there would have been the outpouring of blessings instead of water. Oceans of blessings is what they missed! Do you think God really needed their tenth? Would he have gone hungry without it? He says in Psalm 50:

"For every beast of the forest is mine; and the cattle upon a thousand hills. I know all the fowls of the mountains; and the wild beasts of the field are mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee; for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof. Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the Most High."--Psalms 50:10-12,14

Let us apply this to ourselves as consecrated children of God. Although the Jews had agreed to give a tenth of their substance, we have agreed to give all of ours. We have consecrated everything we have and are to the Lord's service; not just a tenth, but all. Although the Jews annually brought their tithes to a storehouse and relinquished control over them, we are appointed stewards over our own substance. We retain control and administer it with our responsibility to God. This becomes a part of our test, our training, our polishing, our being fitted for the kingdom. Of course the Lord recognizes our own material needs and also the necessity to provide decently for those dependent upon us.

It may even be prudent to lay something aside in the event of job insecurity or failure of health. After that, how wise is our stewardship for God? Do you think for a minute that God really needs our money and our poor talents? Of course not! But how we use them as a steward is an accurate indication of the sincerity of our consecration, our love for God, and our thankfulness to him for all his benefits toward us. As the psalmist says: "Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the Most High." (Psalms 50:14) If God, for Israel's fleshly tenth, was willing to open "the windows of heaven" in material blessings in "basket and in store" how much more will he pour upon spiritual Israel his heavenly blessings! "Prove me now herewith, saith the Lord!" Try me! See if I won't do it! What enormous blessings some of us miss by not taking God at his word! We should not think to rob God but should bring everything to the altar and keep everything on the altar in full consecration.

Jesus said: “My house, or temple, shall be called the house of prayer.” If we are the temples of God, how appropriate that we should constantly maintain an attitude of prayer within us. We are told: “Pray without ceasing.” (1 Thessalonians 5:17) Jesus gave a parable on this subject:

“He spake a parable unto them, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; saying, There was, in a city, a judge who feared not God, neither regarded man; and there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not, for a while; but afterward he said within himself: though I fear not God, nor regard man; yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming, she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto Him, though he bear long with them? I tell you he will avenge them speedily.”--Luke 18:1-8

Is it possible that this parable teaches us that simply because we make nuisances of ourselves that our prayers, regardless of merit, will be heard and answered? Certainly not! It was not only the importunity of the widow, her persistence, that caused the judge to grant her request; the widow had a just cause. Instead of saying, “Avenge me of mine adversary,” the Diaglott renders it, “Obtain justice for me from my opponent.”

In our continual attitude of prayer before God we should ask for the right things, things we know are in accordance with God's will--just things. We should ask for them with persistency. “Men ought always to pray, and not to faint,” the parable says, or, as the Diaglott has it: “They ought to pray continually, and not be weary.” This means that if our prayers are not immediately answered, we should not grow weary of asking and relapse into a hopeless and faithless condition. Rather, let us joyfully and hopefully claim the promise of Jesus: “I tell you that he will avenge them speedily!” Let the temple of God, which we are, be indeed “a house of prayer.” These are some of the lessons Jesus taught us when he cleansed the temple at Jerusalem that day so long ago.

Defiling the Temple of God

The latter part of our text contains a grave warning: “If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy.” The Diaglott uses the word “destroy” instead of “defile.” This would make it read: “If any man destroy the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.” Does this refer to suicides? Not necessarily, although I can think of one suicide whom God destroyed: Judas “went and hanged himself.” (Matthew 27:5)

But I believe most suicides are done under such physical and mental stress that the person is not responsible and cannot be held accountable. No, there is a more profound meaning.

How are we constituted the temple of God in the first place? Our text says it is because “the spirit of God dwelleth in you.” This is the essential ingredient of the temples, which we are. If one has been made a partaker of the holy spirit and through the enlightening and guiding influences of that spirit has tasted the good word of God and the powers (the privileges, the divine instruction) of the coming age, and if, after all this, he should stifle all these blessed influences, refusing to be further led of the spirit of God and turn again either suddenly or gradually to the spirit of the world, such an one is destroying his spiritual life--he is destroying the temple of God which is holy and consecrated to God. As Paul says:

“For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit; and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come; if they shall fall away; to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves, the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.”--Hebrews 6:4-6

But Paul is quick to add in verse 8: “But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation.” He says further: “We are not of them who draw back unto perdition, but of them that believe, to the saving of the soul.” (Hebrews 10:39) We certainly cannot judge who will go into second death. Some of the Lord's people are naturally worried about dear ones who have once run well, but seem to have temporarily cooled to the truth. They have not openly repudiated the Lord but seem to be sidetracked. What is the Lord's attitude toward these? What are their prospects? Are they in line for the second death?

To obtain the consolation and hope of the scriptures, let us consider these facts: first, we know that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful. “The Lord is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger and of great mercy.” (Psalms 145:8) Let us never forget that. The wonderful words of Psalm 103 are also given for our encouragement and reassurance:

“The Lord is merciful and gracious; slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. He will not always chide, neither will he keep his anger for ever. He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.”--Psalms 103:8-12

If you are concerned about and pity your children, will the Lord do less? If you know the lapses, weaknesses, and shortcomings of your children and love them just the same, does not the Lord? Is not the Lord more compassionate, more loving, more merciful, that you are--as the heaven is high above the earth, and as far as the east is from the west?

Let us reason together. Jesus said, "No man can come unto me, except the Father, who hath sent me, draw him." (John 6:44) Would a loving and merciful Father draw someone to Jesus, enlighten him with his truth, accept his consecration, endow him with his holy spirit and beget him to a new nature if he did not see in such a one the potentialities of success in making his calling and election sure?

I don't think God draws anyone to the heavenly calling unless they have an excellent chance of success--an abundant chance. Poor and weak as they may be, God is prepared to supply all the helps and providences required. He doesn't want anyone to go into the second death. He is not careless or slack in this regard:

"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish."--2 Peter 3:9

What is our hope for those who, for a time, ran well, but appear to have cooled to the truth, who appeared to have strayed? A beautiful parable of Jesus gives us the answer:

"How think ye? If a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them go astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine, and goeth and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if it be so that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. Even so, it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish."--Matthew 18:12-14

This means that if one of his little ones has strayed, the Lord will seek him out! He will not simply wait for the strayed one to return to him. No! He will make the move. He will go out, seek him, find him, and bring him back! That is what the Lord is like. So let us leave it in the Lord's hands. If we ask in faith, he will do it. When we learn to leave it to the Lord, we will see results.

Let us cleanse the temple of God, which temple we are, offering our sacrifices to God with a pure motive, being enlightened, tasting of the heavenly gifts and the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, knowing that: "He that endureth to the end shall be saved." (Matthew 10:22) Let us be of those described in Revelation:

"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.”--
Revelation 20:6

“The mind grows by what it feeds on.” --J. G. Holland

The Three Ways

THE Bible tells us of three different paths a person may take, three ways in which he may go. Each leads to a different destination. There is a broad way leading to destruction, a narrow way leading to life, and a highway of holiness. We read of these “ways” in Matthew and Isaiah:

“Wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat. Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life; and few there be that find it.”--Matthew 7:13,14

“And a highway shall be there, and a way; and it shall be called the way of holiness.”--Isaiah 35:8

Six thousand years ago in Eden, when Adam disobeyed God and was condemned to death, he started upon this downward road. After 930 years, Adam reached its end--destruction, death. All of Adam's race were born upon this road leading to death and share in Adam's sentence, “Thou shalt surely die.” (Genesis 2:17) As years and centuries have rolled on, the downward path has become more and more smoothly worn, causing the race to speed more rapidly to destruction; daily the way becomes more glazed and slippery with sin. Not only does the way grow more slippery, but mankind daily loses the power of resistance. Today's average length of human life is only a small fraction of Adam's. Men reach the end of the road--destruction--much quicker than the first man.

Cannot one resist the downward, sinful tendency and, by determined effort, escape from this way leading to destruction? Some have tried. During the past six thousand years a comparatively few have tried to change their course and retrace their steps. Though their efforts have been commendable, they have not been successful. It is like a man swimming against a current too swift for him; he is carried downstream in spite of his best efforts. Sin and death have reigned relentlessly over mankind, and driven them down this broad road to destruction.

If no one can escape this way of death by his best efforts, it would seem that the situation is hopeless; all must go to destruction. But

this is not so because a new way has been opened, the “narrow way” that leads to life instead of death. This way has been open for nearly two thousand years, but comparatively few have found it. It is a very exclusive path because a person does not enter it based upon his own worthiness, but by special invitation. This is why it is described as “narrow” or limited, having a “strait” or difficult “gate” which few find and enter.

We are not to think that all except the few who walk the “narrow way” are condemned to everlasting destruction. There is another “way” called “the way of holiness.” (Isaiah 35:8) This is the “highway,” an easier way that all the rest of mankind will eventually take. It also leads to life and will be open to all at a time still future.

Let us consider the very special “narrow way” to which some are now invited, called “a new and living way.” (Hebrews 10:20) Although the “narrow way” and the “highway” both lead to life, the “narrow way” leads to a stupendously higher form of life than the “highway.” The invitation to walk in this way is the most wonderful gift ever offered to anyone. It is to those who are so walking, to the true Christian, that Peter refers when he says that there “are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world.” (2 Peter 1:4) Those who walk this “way” are promised the highest form of life, a spirit life, with immortal divine bodies of the same nature as their Lord. Such are described as those who “seek for glory, and honor, and immortality.” (Romans 2:7) How high an honor this is! We are told, “No man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God.” (Hebrews 5:4)

Is an invitation to walk the way leading to this great reward given only to the wisest, the most important and high-ranking people of the world? Not at all. On the contrary, the apostle Paul tells us:

“Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise.”--1 Corinthians 1:26,27

Consideration is not given to race or nationality. Those who attain the divine nature are selected “out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.” (Revelation 5:9)

The basis of any approach to life is Jesus Christ and this applies to the “narrow way.” Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life.” (John 14:6) When Adam disobeyed God and caused the whole race to enter the broad, downward road to destruction, God did not abandon mankind. Although he permitted evil conditions to prevail for a time to teach valuable lessons, he still loved his human

creation. He loved mankind so much that he provided a redeemer from death.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”--John 3:16

By God's arrangement, Jesus came to earth as a man and gave his life as the ransom price for Adam and his race. This guarantees “that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.” (Acts 24:15)

Those who walk the “narrow way” receive the merit of Jesus' ransom sacrifice beforehand so they may be justified in God's sight. They consecrate to God and become acceptable sacrifices themselves. These are said to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. As we read,

“It is a faithful saying; For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him. If we suffer, we shall also reign with him.”--2 Timothy 2:11,12

The promise to these is, “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.” (Revelation 2:10) When this special church class is complete, the merit of Jesus ransom sacrifice will be applied to all others. Then that third way, the wonderful “highway of holiness,” will be opened. (See Isaiah 35:8-10)

What will that “highway” will be like? We read that “it shall be called the way of holiness.” It is a way that leads to righteousness. It is God's kingdom under Christ, soon to be fully established on earth, that will lead the people to righteousness and human perfection. Then it says, “The unclean shall not pass over it, but it shall be for those.” This means that it is the purpose of God's kingdom to cleanse the unclean, to take away their sins. When the kingdom has done its work, there will be no more sin. No person who remains unclean will pass completely through that kingdom.

Then it says, “The wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein.” Under Christ's benevolent government, the way to righteousness will be made so plain and simple that even those who are foolish and inclined to stray will make no mistake. “No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon.” We read that now “your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” (1 Peter 5:8) In that kingdom this will no longer be the case. Satan will be restrained. His evil influence will not be felt on that “highway.” Neither will the “ravenous beasts” of tyranny, injustice, violence and oppression be found there. Instead there will be peace and tranquility, security and love.

“But the redeemed shall walk there; and the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion, with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads.”

The “ransomed” are those for whom Christ died, and Christ “tasted death for every man.” These are “the ransomed of the Lord” who shall return from the dead in a great resurrection. They will come to “Zion,” which means the heavenly kingdom that will then rule the world. What a time of singing and joy it will be! Families parted by death will be reunited; pain, sickness, sin and death will be no more; happiness will fill the earth. “They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away!”

The Three Worlds

THE “three worlds” are the ones specified in the Bible. They are not different planets; they are three distinct epochs or periods of time in our own earth's history. The first of these “worlds” or epochs is in the past, the second is in the present, and the third is in the future. In each of these “worlds” certain conditions prevail that differ from those of the other “worlds” or periods of time.

Here are the words describing the first “world”: “The world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished.” (2 Peter 3:6) Thus we see that the first “world” extended from the creation of man to the great flood of Noah's day, at which time it perished. The flood brought about a definite end of an age or era in human history. We are told of the devastating result of that flood in these words:

“Every living substance was destroyed which was upon the face of the ground; both man and cattle, and the creeping things, and the fowl of the heaven; and they were destroyed from the earth. And Noah only remained alive, and they that were with him in the ark.”-- Genesis 7:23

The population of earth perished and with it that evil dispensation, that corrupt system regulating human affairs as it existed prior to the flood. This was the “world” that ended.

Some may wonder why that “world” was dealt with so severely and why it was necessary to destroy the entire population. The reason is given in Genesis:

“It came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose. There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters

of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men, which were of old; men of renown.”--Genesis 6:1-4

We are told in Hebrews 2:5, by implication, that the first “world” was under the rulership or supervision of God's angels. These spirit sons of God apparently assumed human form and associated with humankind in their efforts to help the fallen race. But many of these angels, influenced by Satan, fell into a snare. Seeing the beauty of the “daughters of men,” they were enticed and entered into marriage relationships which they had not been authorized to do. The children resulting from these marriages, having angelic fathers, became “giants,” physically stronger than those of purely Adamic stock. They proved to be violent and morally degenerate characters. They quickly gained control of, and tyrannized the human race. They debauched and corrupted humankind until, in the days of Noah, evil had thoroughly saturated the earth.

“The earth was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. And God said unto Noah, the end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them. And, behold, I will destroy them with the earth.”--Genesis 6:11,13

Noah and his family were the only humans saved in the flood that destroyed the first “world.” We read of him:

“Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. ... Noah was a just man, and perfect in his generation; and Noah walked with God.”--Genesis 6:8,9

It would seem that by this time all the families of the earth except Noah's had been contaminated by illicit intermarriage with angelic stock. That is what is implied by the statement that Noah was “perfect in his generation.” Beside this, he was a Godly man. With only Noah and his family being carried over the flood, the earth was repopulated solely with Adamic stock.

After the flood the second “world” began, in which we are now living. Because we are in it, we have first-hand information about what it is like. Although there is much good in it, we all know that evil predominates. Reading history, or even the daily newspaper, indicates this. Crime, injustice and oppression flourish. War, anarchy and violence of every kind abound. Evil men and institutions seem to prosper. That is why it is called, “this present evil world.” (Galatians 1:4) Malachi says of this period:

“Now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered.”--Malachi 3:15

After the flood Satan again gained control of the world.

This present evil “world” is about to end. The Bible, after saying of the first world that it was overflowed with water and perished, describes the second “world” in which we are now living:

“The heavens and the earth which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment.”--2 Peter 3:7

That sounds ominous, but it really is not. Those who understand it will not fear it. Many symbols are used in the Bible. The “heavens and the earth” spoken of are the spiritual and earthly elements of Satan's rulership; “fire” means utter destruction. Thus the scripture simply means that Satan's evil dominion is to come to an end. “Now is the judgment of this world. Now shall the prince of this world be cast out.” (John 12:31) As to the “day of judgment,” it is not something to be feared, but rather to be anticipated with gladness. God's judgment is benevolent and is something to rejoice over. This judgment day will establish God's kingdom on earth which is the third “world.” The psalmist describes it in poetic language:

“Say among the heathen that the Lord reigneth. The world also shall be established that it shall not be moved. He shall judge the people righteously. Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad. Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof. Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein. Then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice before the Lord; for he cometh to judge the earth. He shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth.”--Psalms 96:10-13

This is confirmed by the apostle: “He hath appointed a day in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained,” Jesus Christ. (Acts 17:31) Does that sound like something to fear?

The third “world,” which will soon be fully established, will be a wonderful time for mankind. It is Christ's kingdom. It is the time of which Jesus spoke:

“Marvel not at this, for the hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth.”--John 5:28,29

Isaiah speaks of that happy time: “When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.” (Isaiah 26:9) In contrast with “the present evil world” under Satan in which the wicked prosper, we read that, “In his days shall the righteous flourish.” (Psalms 72:7) This is the new “world,” or world-wide government under Christ, that God has promised and for which we look.

“Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.”--2 Peter 3:13

Unlike the first two “worlds,” the third will never end. We are told that when the God of heaven sets up his kingdom, it shall never be destroyed, but it shall stand for ever. (Daniel 2:44) In that glorious “world” the dead will be raised to life again. Families, parted by death, will be happily reunited. Every man, woman and child will have the opportunity of attaining human perfection without illness, ache or pain. Isaiah says of that time:

“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing.”--Isaiah 35:5,6

Those who are old will become young again: “His flesh shall be fresher than a child's. He shall return to the days of his youth.” (Job 33:25) All the willing and obedient shall live forever upon the earth.

In that third “world” every human problem will be solved. Even the physical earth will be cleansed and perfected, and made into a world-wide Garden of Eden for the eternal enjoyment of mankind. That grand day is already dawning!

The Traditions and Commandments of Men

(The Parable of the Good Samaritan)

“This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines, the commandments of men.” -- Matthew 15:8,9

THE Pharisees were a powerful Jewish sect in Jesus' day. The name Pharisee means “separatist” or “one apart.” Thus they were considered “The Holy People,” superior to ordinary Jews, publicans and sinners. At least this is how they considered themselves.

The fundamental principle of the Pharisees was that there existed an oral law that completed and explained the written law. They believed that Moses received this unwritten law at Sinai, that he delivered it orally to Joshua, that Joshua delivered it to the elders of Israel, that the elders delivered it to the prophets, and the prophets to the men of the Great Synagogue. The Great Synagogue was an assembly or council of 120 members said to have been founded and presided over by Ezra after the return from captivity. Their duties are supposed to have been the collecting and preserving of sacred traditions. All this was done orally and committed to memory so it can well be imagined that the result was of doubtful origin from the beginning. The traditions became further burdened with inaccuracies and spurious material as time went on.

It was not until the second century after Christ that this collection or digest of Jewish traditions and explanations of scripture, known as the Mishna, was finally reduced to writing. The Pharisees of Jesus' day esteemed these “traditions of the elders” to be of equal dignity and authority with the scriptures. In fact, since they purported to be explanations of scripture, they were counted as superior. These traditions are what the Pharisees taught the people in those days. They sought to impose on the people all the nonsensical and burdensome requirements accumulated by centuries of oral handing-down, affected by the additions, detractions, prejudices, and poor memories of each succeeding generation.

It is no wonder Jesus so frequently disagreed with the Pharisees. He warned his disciples about them:

“Then Jesus said unto them; take heed, and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees ... Then understood they, how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.”--Matthew 16:6,12

Leaven is putrefaction, rottenness. That was Jesus' opinion of these rambling traditions and commandments of the elders, so laboriously and ceremoniously handed down for centuries by word of mouth, and esteemed more important than scripture.

“Then came to Jesus Scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying: Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they wash not their hands when they eat bread. But he answered and said unto them: Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? Ye hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying: This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men. And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand; not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man. Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?” -Matthew 15:1-3,7-12

Well, now, that's too bad isn't it? Jesus had offended their tender sensibilities! But Jesus saw the seriousness of substituting rubbish for the word of God. He accused them of “making the word of God of none effect through your tradition.” (Mark 7:13) He saw the hand of Satan in it, the discrediting of the holy scriptures, and he condemned it in no uncertain terms.

May We Call Others Hypocrites?

Let us pause for a moment to consider a lesson. Jesus addressed the Scribes and Pharisees as “Ye hypocrites!” Since Jesus is our example, does that give us the right or the obligation to address the religious leaders of Christendom this way? Certainly not! There is a vast difference between Jesus and ourselves. He could read their hearts and their thoughts. For example in the matter of giving tribute to Caesar, we read, “But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said: Why tempt ye me, ye hypocrites?” (Matthew 22:18) We read of another time: “But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering, said unto them: What reason ye in your hearts?” (Luke 5:22) That's the criterion. If you have the ability to read another man's thoughts and heart, and you see hypocrisy there, then and only then may you call him a hypocrite.

Why do you suppose the Pharisees made such a point of Jesus' disciples eating without washing their hands? Let me quote one of the commandments of men from the traditions of the elders which the Pharisees revered as scripture: “He that eateth with unwashed hands, is guilty of death.” This is given in a footnote on page 63 of the

Diaglott. Although this wasn't in the written law of Moses, it was supposedly handed down orally at Sinai to Moses, to Joshua, to the elders, to the prophets, and to the men of the Great Synagogue. Although it involved the death penalty, not one of these eminent persons had seen fit to write it down! Does that make sense to you? Well, it didn't make sense to Jesus either. As a matter of fact it irked him so much he decided to put it to the test.

Up until now, only his disciples had been accused of the breach of this traditional commandment of men. Now Jesus would involve himself personally and by doing so, teach a valuable lesson to his disciples and others:

“As he spake a certain Pharisee besought him to dine with him; and he went in and sat down at meat. And when the Pharisee saw it, he marvelled that he had not first washed before dinner.”--Luke 11:37

The Diaglott renders it: “And the Pharisee noticing it, wondered that he did not first immerse before dinner.” This was a real fanatic! He believed in total immersion before eating! That's the way he'd heard it. Remember, these traditional commandments were not written but were passed by word of mouth. Like gossip, it grows every time it is repeated. The tradition may have started as a simple requirement to wet the fingertips before eating, then it grew to the washing of the hands, then washing up to the elbows, then the entire arm, then the face also, then, after a few centuries of repetition, total immersion before eating. This was a most impractical and unworkable requirement in a dry region where water was scarce and had to be purchased by measure. The Pharisee wondered why the Lord did not ceremoniously bathe before dinner. This gave Jesus the opportunity he wanted. In fact, he had foreseen this situation. That is why he had accepted the Pharisee's invitation to dine with him. Continuing the account from the Diaglott:

“And the Lord said to him: Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and platter; but your inside is full of extortion and wickedness.”

In other words, you Pharisees are ever so particular about washing the outside; but what are you like inside? What are you really like? What is your character? Your inside is full of extortion and wickedness, he said. Do you know what “extortion” means? It means to obtain money or advantage by force, torture, threat or the like. With all their outward show of holiness, this is what the Pharisees did!

Jesus said that they “devoured widows' houses.” (Matthew 23:14; Mark 12:40; Luke 20:47) When a man died, they systematically robbed his widow and her children in various seemingly legal ways.

This was a most serious offense according to the true written law of Moses:

“Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child. If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry; and my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you.”--Exodus 22:22-24

That's pretty strong! Jesus said that they had “omitted the weightier matters of the law.” (Matthew 23:23) These champions of the traditions of the elders were guilty of extortion, one of the meanest and wickedest of crimes.

Then Jesus said, “Senseless men! Did not he who made the outside, make the inside also?” In other words: “Do you think that by bathing, and merely cleansing yourself on the outside, you will deceive God? He made you and he knows you inside-out!”

Then he said, “But give in alms the things within; and behold, all things are pure to you.” In other words, “If you really want to be clean, instead of extortion, instead of robbery by force, torture, or threat, instead of taking, give! Give alms to the widows and orphans, and give from within! Give from the heart!” As we would say today, “have a heart.” “If you Pharisees do this, you will really be clean!”

“But woe to you, Pharisees! Because you tithe of mint, and rue, and every potherb, but disregard justice and the love of God; these things you ought to practice, and not to omit those.”

Outward Appearance vs. Inward Virtue

These paragons of virtue very carefully observed the outward regulations of the Jewish law, things that showed like tithing. Tithing was a matter of record. It was entered on the books, very much as the income tax is today. They were painfully particular in observing this law. They went to ridiculous extremes to do so, even to paying a tenth of the herbs they grew in their small kitchen gardens. If they drew a pound of mint for flavoring their food, they carefully weighed out exactly one and six-tenths ounces of the tithe. They might actually count the number of cloves and peppercorns, setting aside exactly one in ten, doing them up in little bags, and ceremoniously paying them over for all to see expecting them to say: “How wonderful these Pharisees are; how pious, and faithful, and good”--not knowing that, at the same time, these men were watching the obituaries to see if, perchance, they might have an opportunity to rob a man's widow and orphans. This was total disregard for justice and the love of God. You may be sure they did not disclose and pay a tenth of their loot!

“Woe to you, Pharisees! Because you love the chief seats in the synagogues, and salutations in the public places. Woe to you! Because you are like those concealed tombs, which men, walking over, know not.”

These men considered themselves superior and expected to be so treated. They did not go to the synagogue as equal members of the congregation, sinners in God's sight. They insisted upon special seats, elevated above the others, where everyone could see them: “How wonderful these men are! How Godlike!” When they went out in public, they loved to have the common people bow and greet them reverently, calling them Rabbi or Master. Jesus likened the Pharisees to concealed tombs meaning, if men really knew what they were like inside, others would have no contact with them. These were strong words indeed because the Jews had some very strong prejudices about the touching of graves.

This saying of Jesus was the last straw for a certain lawyer who was present that day. Some of the Pharisees, especially educated, talented and well-versed in the teachings of the law and the prophets, as well as the traditions of the elders were called lawyers. It was one of these who now spoke up: “Then one of the lawyers, answering, said to him: Teacher, in saying these things, thou reproachest us also.” (Luke 11:45) In other words: “We lawyers are Pharisees, too, but we're a superior type of Pharisee. We are highly skilled in the law and traditions. Surely you can't mean us!”

Jesus turned and looked at him, looked into him. He saw a heart of stone. The man felt that look and he suddenly wished he had not spoken. “Woe to you, lawyers!” Jesus said, “for you impose oppressive burdens on men; and yet, you yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers.”

These lawyers had a way of mixing oral tradition with the written law so as to impose heavy financial burdens on the people to enrich themselves. Who was in a position to contradict them? Were they not the experts, the final authorities? They also gave such hard and exacting interpretations of God's laws of conduct and dictated such ceremonies as to discourage the common people. They set before the publicans and sinners standards of excellence and perfection that they themselves would not even think of trying to keep. When their legalistic interpretations caused acute hardship and the oppressed pleaded for relief, the lawyers haughtily refused to lift the burdens in the slightest degree.

Jesus went on to thoroughly expose these Pharisee lawyers, pointing out that they had murder in their hearts as their fathers before them:

“Woe to you! For you build the sepulchres of the prophets, and your fathers killed them. Thus you testify that you approve the acts of your fathers, for they indeed killed them and you build.”

It was on this occasion, during the course of his accusation of the lawyers, that Jesus gave that fearsome prophecy of carnage, the destruction of Jerusalem. He said, “The blood of all the prophets being shed, from the formation of the world, may be required of this generation; from the blood of Abel, to the blood of Zechariah who will perish between the altar and the House. Yes, I tell you, it will be required of this generation.” Within that generation, in AD 70, during the siege of Jerusalem, more than 1,100,000 Jews perished; the lawyer that Jesus addressed that day was probably one of them. Josephus, the Jewish historian, says of this event:

“The misfortunes of all men, from the beginning of the world, if they be compared to those of the Jews, are not so terrible as theirs were.”--Reprints, page 1883.

Thus was this prophecy of Jesus fulfilled.

The “Key of Knowledge”

Then Jesus said to the lawyer: “Woe to you, lawyers! Because you have taken away the key of knowledge, you entered not yourselves, and those approaching you hindered.” What did Jesus mean by that? What was the “key of knowledge” and how had the lawyers taken it away? Paul wrote:

“Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ; that we might be justified by faith.”--Galatians 3:24

Paul was speaking to the Jewish brethren at Galatia when he said this. How was the law a schoolmaster to bring them to Christ? Primarily it showed them they needed a Saviour. Failing to keep its perfect standards, they were dying. It forcibly taught them that they needed help. But in still another important way, the law was designed to lead them to Christ, to reveal Christ to them. It provided an infallible method for their recognizing the true Christ when they saw him! How? Because anyone who could keep the law perfectly, was the Christ, the Saviour! Up to that time many false Christs had arisen. Some had even done miracles and mighty works. But look at them closely. Did they keep the law perfectly in every minute detail? That was the test. That was the key of knowledge of Christ, of recognizing Christ. That was the key the lawyers had taken away. They had so befuddled, befouled and adulterated the genuine written law with their spurious traditions of men, that it could not be used for the purpose intended!

The common people, the publicans and sinners, most of whom could not read, were unable to differentiate between the true and the false law. They thus were deprived of the standard by which they might measure and recognize Christ when they saw him! For example, if they believed, as the Pharisees taught, that washing the hands before meals was a requirement of the law, and they saw that Jesus did not wash his hands, would they not conclude he was not the Christ? Do you see how the mixing of the traditions of men with the law could and did take away the “key of knowledge,” the knowledge of Christ? What a serious thing this was. That is why Jesus condemned it so severely, pointing out the difference between the commandments of God and the commandments of men. “Woe to you, lawyers! Because you have taken away the key of knowledge, you entered not yourselves and those approaching, you hindered.”

“You know better, you lawyers! You know the real law of God. You are in a position to recognize Christ. In fact, you do recognize him. But you won't accept him yourselves, and by your adulteration of the law with your traditions, you hinder those who would come to Christ and accept him.”

All these things have a parallel and for good reason. When a scheme of Satan has worked once, he tries it again and again. By fostering the traditions and commandments of men back then, he prevented countless numbers in Israel from recognizing and accepting their Messiah. As Paul so well expressed it:

“The God of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.”--2 Corinthians 4:4

After the apostles fell asleep in death, the early church began developing their own traditions of men. For example, there were the ridiculous and fantastic traditions regarding the childhood of Jesus, and the miracles he is supposed to have performed as a boy. Instead of a humble fisherman, called to be a fisher of men, tradition made Peter the first pope. Jesus was supposed to have instituted the ceremony of the Mass. Monastic orders were formed, ruled and disciplined by severe commandments of men. Traditional creeds were formulated, including such unscriptural things as the trinity, immortal soul, hell of torment, and purgatory. The sayings and writings of the so-called “Early Fathers” were made equal with the inspired scriptures. Once again, “The god of this world, had blinded their minds.”

After a few generations, “darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people.” With few exceptions this general blindness of mind prevailed until the end of the age. When at the end of the age Christ returned and the brilliant light of the truth began to shine

forth--“The light of the glorious Gospel of Christ,” the same truth the early church had known--it was these same traditions and commandments of men that prevented acceptance by nominal Christians. Although without scriptural foundation, these traditions had become so ingrained, so important, that people actually preferred to believe in eternal torment, angrily rejecting God's loving Plan of the Ages that offers salvation to all through the ransom of Jesus Christ. Satan had once again blinded their minds by perverting the scriptures with the traditions of men.

“And having gone out thence the Scribes and Pharisees began to be extremely angry, and to press him to speak unguardedly on many things; trying to entrap him, and to catch something from his mouth that they might accuse him.”--Luke 11:53,54, Diaglott

The Pharisees Set a Trap

Jesus did not expose the Scribes, Pharisees and lawyers before the people for ridicule. He was too gentle a character for that. But it was his inescapable duty to point out their misdeeds. Why? Because he was offering himself to Israel as their Messiah. He had come to give fleshly Israel the opportunity to become spiritual Israel. The law given back at Sinai was designed as a “key of knowledge” to point him out unmistakably to the people. But the Scribes, Pharisees and lawyers had taken this key away. It was Jesus' duty to restore it to the common people, the publicans and sinners--to give them a chance to accept the Messiah. That is why he had to warn them against “the leaven of the Pharisees.” However, the Scribes, Pharisees and lawyers considered it a personal affront. They had been humiliated before the people. So they became “extremely angry ... trying to entrap him ... that they might accuse him.”

They prepared their trap carefully and cleverly to catch Jesus off his guard, “to press him to speak unguardedly,” as the Diaglott says. How highly they esteemed themselves, thinking they could catch off-guard one who could read their very thoughts! But they tried. Since it was a lawyer who had been stung before, they would use a lawyer to get their revenge on Jesus. They probably selected, with great care, the most brilliant legal mind among them. The question he would ask Jesus would be a most innocuous one, calculated to throw him completely off his guard:

“And behold a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him saying: Master what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”--Luke 10:25

Now, isn't that an innocent and pious question? Who could find fault with it? “What a fine, sincere man,” a hearer might say. “He realizes his sinful and dying condition, he comes to Jesus, and humbly asks what he should do in order to live. How wonderful!”

But Jesus knew exactly what was going on. He knew beforehand when and where the plot was hatched, what it consisted of, and who had been selected to implement it. He knew the “catch” in that question. He saw the trap perfectly and it was this: to his question, “What shall I do to inherit eternal life?” the lawyer expected Jesus to answer: “You must believe that I am the son of God, the promised Messiah. You must accept me as your Saviour. It is only in this way that you can inherit eternal life.” They were certain Jesus would give such an answer and their entire strategy was based upon it.

How could they be so sure? They had been spying on Jesus. They had been taking note of his words to find occasion against him, “To catch something from his mouth,” as the Diaglott puts it. What had they heard? They might have heard him say, “He that believeth on the son hath everlasting life.” (John 3:36) He once said, “For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them, even so the Son quickeneth whom he will.” (John 5:21) He said on another occasion, “For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world.” (John 6:33) He also said, “I am the bread of life.” (John 6:35) “Verily, verily I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.” (John 6:47) They might have heard him say, “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.” (John 10:10) “Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.” (John 11:26) Jesus had said all these things, so they had no doubt what Jesus' answer would be on this occasion. If he answered as they expected, they would have him! They would immediately accuse him before the people of repudiating the law.

They knew, and the people knew, that it is written in the law that the man that doeth the things contained therein shall live by them. (Leviticus 18:5; Nehemiah 9:29; Ezekiel 20:11,13,21) They would loudly announce, “Here is a man who claims to be the Messiah, but he repudiates the law and makes it of none effect! He says he is greater than the law, that he is able to give life which the law has failed to give! He is a false Messiah! Stone him!”

Do you see how cleverly the trap was laid? So the lawyer stood up and, with a voice quavering with false sincerity, asked: “Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” Then he and his confederates eagerly waited for the expected answer from Jesus.

Jesus Gives the Unexpected Answer

But Jesus didn't answer as they expected. He knew their evil intentions. He knew they intended to accuse him about the law, so he neatly turned the question back to the lawyer on the basis of the law. He said unto him, “What is written in the law? How readest thou?” In other words, “You're a lawyer. What does the law say--the written

law, the real law?" The lawyer had an uneasy feeling that he was up against a superior intellect, a premonition that things weren't going quite right with his little scheme. He had not announced himself as a lawyer, yet Jesus seemed to know he was one. He had to answer the question. Everyone was looking at him, waiting for his answer.

"And he answering said: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself."

This was a correct quotation from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18.

"And Jesus said unto him: Thou hast answered right. This do and thou shalt live."

As usual, Jesus had given the perfect answer, and given it out of the lawyer's own mouth. At this point, the carefully laid plan of the Pharisees collapsed. Even though Jesus had come to open up "a new and living way," the high calling to glory, honor and immortality, it was still true that anyone perfectly keeping the provisions of the law would live by them. This is what Jesus reiterated.

Many years before David had prophetically said, "In the net which they hid, is their own foot taken." (Psalms 9:15) The lawyer was caught before he knew it. He knew, and everybody knew, that the people of Israel had been dying for centuries, notwithstanding the law. Yet the Scribes, Pharisees and lawyers were outwardly claiming they were keeping the law. Jesus showed the lawyer out of his own testimony that he was not keeping the law as he pretended to do.

No imperfect, fallen human being can keep the perfect law of God. This put the lawyer in a very uncomfortable position before the people that day. He was probably well known by many there. Perhaps some of them knew of shady practices on his part--of his "devouring widows' houses" without mercy but all quite legally of course. Now he tried to justify himself by intimating that when the law said, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," it didn't mean just anybody, but had some mysterious restricted meaning, a meaning that would permit him to engage in legal robbery without violating the law. So we read, "But he, willing to justify himself said unto Jesus: And who is my neighbor?" He raised a technical point, as lawyers often will. As a matter of fact, there was a difference of opinion among the learned Jews on this question. Some claimed that "neighbor" in the law meant all Jews, and only Jews (certainly not Gentiles and Samaritans). Others claimed that the word meant only those Jews who lived holy lives such as the Scribes and Pharisees. Applying the latter interpretation, they would have plenty of leeway. They could cheat and plunder whoever they pleased, without pity or

mercy, so long as it wasn't a Scribe or Pharisee, and still be keeping the law!

The people were listening to this encounter between the lawyer and Jesus with intense interest. They had resented the superior attitude and oppressive tactics of the Scribes, Pharisees and lawyers, and were delighted to see someone stand up to them as Jesus did. They hung on every gracious word that proceeded out of his mouth (Luke 4:22), realizing that “never man spake like this man.” (John 7:46)

The Good Samaritan

Jesus took this occasion to give one of his most moving parables in answer to the lawyer's question, “Who is my neighbor?” This parable was not particularly for the benefit of the lawyer who was a hardened Pharisee and a tool of the Pharisees. Jesus was not casting his pearls before swine. The parable was chiefly for his disciples, and also for the common people, who were listening with sincere interest.

“And Jesus answering said: A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him; and departed, leaving him half dead. And, by chance, there came down a certain priest that way, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, and went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil, and wine, and set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him: Take care of him, and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three thinkest thou was neighbor unto him that fell among thieves? And he [the lawyer] said: He that showed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go and do thou likewise!”

This parable touched the hearts of all who heard it. To the common people, it restored the “key of knowledge” that the Pharisees had taken away. They had been confused and bewildered at the conduct of these “holy” and “separate” Pharisees, the ones who “sat in Moses' seat.” They could not understand the cruel and oppressive practices these practiced while professing to keep the perfect law of God. But by the spirit of the Samaritan in the parable, Jesus exhibited to the people the real spirit of God of whom it is written: “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands; forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.” (Exodus 34:6,7) “The

Lord is longsuffering and of great mercy; forgiving iniquity and transgression.” (Numbers 14:18) “O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good; for his mercy endureth forever.” (1 Chronicles 16:34) By the characters in the parable, Jesus pointed out the unfaithfulness of their own religious leaders.



Let us consider some features of the parable. After the man had been robbed and beaten unconscious by bandits, and lay bleeding on the ground, who was the first to come by and see him? It was a “certain priest.” Why do you suppose Jesus selected a priest for this part of the story? I think it was because a priest was supposed to be particularly merciful. It was one of the qualifications of a Jewish priest. Paul mentions it:

“For every high priest, taken from among men, is ordained for men in things pertaining to God; that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sin; who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way.”--Hebrews 5:1,2

A priest was ordained “for men”; his life was consecrated for the benefit of men. He must be one “who can have compassion.” But what did this priest do? “And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.” “He saw him.” He saw that the man was wounded, and helpless and bleeding, and yet he passed by!

The next one to come along was a Levite. It was written of them:

“Then the priests the Levites arose and blessed the people; and their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to his holydwelling place, even to heaven.”--2 Chronicles 30:27

That is descriptive of a true Levite, a servant of God, to whom the Lord had regard, whose prayers for pity and mercy God heard. But what did this Levite of the parable do? He “looked on him, and passed by on the other side!” “He looked on him.” He saw that if the man was not helped he would die. Yet he passed by!

There was no mistaking the lesson. This is what the religious leaders of that day were doing. They were “passing by on the other side.” They were ignoring the sufferings and burdens of the people. As Jesus said:

“They bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.”--Matthew 23:4

By pointing out these things to the people, Jesus, by contrast, called attention to his message, to his invitation:

“Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls; for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”--Matt, 11:28-30

Then the parable says: “A certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion on him.” Why do you suppose the Lord selected a Samaritan for the hero of the parable, for the one who showed compassion? The Samaritans were a mixed race, the offspring of Babylonians and apostate Jews, and were hated by the real Jews. The Samaritans were excluded from Jewish favor. They were classed with Gentiles or worse. When Jesus sent forth his twelve disciples to perform miracles and to preach “the kingdom of heaven is at hand,” he “commanded them saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not.” (Matthew 10:5) They were not considered the best of people. But I think one reason why the Lord used a Samaritan for the

merciful one was to show that mercy and pity have nothing to do with race, color or creed; that there is a common human brotherhood among all the children of Adam; that all men are neighbors, one to another; that all are brothers; each is his brother's keeper. Although the Christian is told to do good "especially unto them who are of the household of faith," he must, nevertheless, "do good unto all men." (Galatians 6:10)

There is still another, far more sublime meaning to this parable which the disciples of Jesus could not understand until after they had received the holy spirit at Pentecost. The man who fell among thieves represented Adam and his race. The great thief and robber is Satan, the devil. Is it not written that he sought "by robbery" to be equal with God? (Philippians 2:6) It is Satan that Jesus referred to when he said:

"The thief cometh ... for to steal, and to kill and to destroy. I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."--John 10:10

The thief in the parable "stripped the man of his raiment, and wounded him ... leaving him half dead." Satan caused Adam to sin, robbing him of his raiment, his robe, the robe of righteousness, with which he was clothed as a perfect man. He struck him down, he caused him to fall, he wounded him to the point of death. In the parable, the man was left "half dead." That's a pretty good description of Adam's race, the living dead: "Let the dead bury their dead," Jesus said. "Born in sin, and shapen in iniquity."

The good Samaritan in the parable represented our Lord Jesus Christ. As the Samaritans were a despised race, hated and looked down upon, it is written of Jesus:

"He is despised and rejected of men ... he was despised, and we esteemed him not."--Isaiah 53:3

In the parable, the Samaritan saw the man lying there, on the road, robbed and struck down, wounded and bleeding, half dead, and unable to help himself. Jesus saw Adam and his race in a dead and dying condition--stripped, robbed of righteousness, in a totally helpless condition, on that "broad road to destruction." Jesus "had compassion on him." As it is written of him, "But when he saw the multitude, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted and were scattered abroad." (Matthew 9:36)

In the parable the Samaritan got down from his mount, went to the man, knelt beside him, bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and took care of him. Likewise Jesus, moved with pity and mercy, descended from heaven, humbled himself to the level of man, and by his ransom sacrifice he bound up the wounds of Adam and his race--

took care of him--pouring on the oil of joy and the wine of his blood poured out.

In the parable the Samaritan paid a sum of money to the innkeeper on behalf of the wounded man. Jesus took in his hands to heaven himself, and paid to the Justice of God, the merit of his sacrifice for Adam, the corresponding price, which will insure man's complete recovery and restoration from his terrifying experience with sin and death.

This is how the insistence of the Scribes, Pharisees and lawyers that Jesus keep the traditions and commandments of men resulted in the giving of a beautiful and moving parable, full of goodness and truth. It is another instance when God caused "the wrath of men to praise Him"!

The True and Living God

THERE are many sincere people in the world who do not think of God as a living, spirit being. They regard God as merely a good principle as opposed to an evil principle--without intelligence and personality. Others regard him as a blind force, neither good nor evil, called "nature," which has, without plan, purpose, or intelligence, produced everything that exists by a haphazard process of evolution. Many well-educated people hold such views.

Those who so believe may be sincere, but they are not truly wise. It is written in the Bible that reverence for the Lord, as an intelligent spirit being, is the beginning of wisdom. (Proverbs 9:10)

The fact that there really is an intelligent creator must be evident to all thinking people. Let me illustrate: When you see a beautiful painting of a flower, you know that there must have been a skilled painter with high artistic sense and an appreciation of beauty to produce such a lovely work of art. You would never for a moment conclude that the painting produced itself or just happened by chance. Is it reasonable to conclude that the original flower, the intricacy and beauty of which inspired the artist to paint it, came about by mere chance without a creator? Certainly not. On the contrary, it would mean that the original flower was designed and created by someone much more skillful and artistic than the person who merely copied it. This is the only wise conclusion to draw. It cannot be otherwise.

Every result must be produced by a competent cause. Everything that exists must have been made. If the thing made is more beautiful and intricate in design or greater in power and scope than man can produce, it is obvious that it was made by an intelligent being superior to man. Any other view would be foolish. As we read, "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God." (Psalms 14:1) David also said:

"When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers; the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained; what is man that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that thou visitest him?"--Psalms 8:3,4

David recognized the tremendous power represented in the universe. He was awed by it, and realized the insignificance of mere man in comparison to the great God, the creator and controller of heaven and earth. He reacted with true wisdom:

"The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge."--Psalms 19:1,2

It's true: every sunrise bringing a new day and every sunset bringing another night display God's mighty hand, showing that the earth is revolving exactly on schedule, under the strict control of his immutable laws.

All the precise and invariable laws of nature testify to the wisdom and power of God who established them. It was by learning these laws, depending upon them, and harnessing them that man was able to set foot upon the moon and return to earth. This is true of all the other great accomplishments of man such as the harnessing of the power of the atom. Man really has nothing to boast about in himself.

“Thus saith the Lord, let not the wise man glory in his wisdom; neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches. But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me; that I am the Lord which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, saith the Lord.”--Jeremiah 9:23,24

That is the important thing: to understand and know God, the attributes of his glorious character, and his loving plan for mankind.

The most powerful evidence of the existence of a personal God with a superior intellect is man himself. Since the creator of something must be superior to the thing he has made, the fact that man, with all his intellectual and moral qualities, exists is proof that a creator exists who has vastly greater powers and attainments than man. This is the very thought expressed in the psalm, “He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? He that formed the eye, shall he not see?” (Psalms 94:9) Carrying the thought further, we can reason: He who gave to humans the sense of justice, shall we not consider him the very embodiment of justice? He who gave us the power of sympathy, compassion and love, shall we not consider that he, who is the author of all our powers, possesses these attributes himself and is infinitely superior to us in the exercise of them?

Mankind is endowed with a sense of veneration and worship. This is a God-given quality and is evident in all races of men no matter how primitive and uncivilized. Having created man with this desire to worship God, would it not be reasonable for God to satisfy that desire by revealing himself to man, to show man what he is like and what his plan for mankind is? We find just such a revelation in the Bible. The Bible was written by holy men of old who were moved to write by God's spirit. (2 Peter 1:21) It is God's word. From the Bible we learn what God is really like. It is here that his glorious character and plan are revealed to us. His plan for humankind is entirely in harmony with his character. Every feature of it is wise, just, and loving; and, of course, God has the power to carry it out.

In carrying out his plan, God created the earth for man's eternal habitation. Thus we read: "The heaven, even the heavens, are the Lord's; but the earth hath he given to the children of men." (Psalms 115:16) God already had a heavenly family--angelic children; but he also wanted a human family--human children. So he created his earthly masterpiece, man, and gave him the earth as his dominion. Adam, the first man, was created perfect, in the earthly image of God, and was designed to live forever upon the earth. He was God's human son. He and his wife, Eve, were empowered to bring forth and fill the earth with a perfect human race, God's human family. Thus we read:

"So God created man in his own image; in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them; and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish [fill] the earth; and have dominion."--Genesis 1:27,28

"Thou hast made him [man] a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands."--Psalms 8:5,6

The image of God in which man was created was a character likeness, not a physical likeness. Similar to God, man could reason wisely, reach just and loving decisions, formulate plans based on his decisions, and then use his physical powers to carry them out. All this he could do within the limits of his dominion which was the earth. It is obvious mankind is no longer in the image of God. His actions are not always wise, just and loving. There is much ignorance, injustice, and hate in the world today; but it will not always be so. Mankind is to be restored to the image of God. This is God's plan and must be accomplished. It is here that we see God's wisdom, justice, and love displayed.

First of all, God wisely and lovingly planned a human family, each member of which would love him and be eternally loyal to him. Then he justly put Adam to the test of obedience. When Adam failed the test, he justly condemned him to death. Then he wisely permitted his human family to have an experience with sin and death to teach them the evil consequences of disobedience. Then he lovingly provided a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord, to ransom Adam and his race.

The grand culmination of that plan, the Kingdom of God on earth, is now near when: "There shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust." (Acts 24:15) In that kingdom all evil influences will be restrained. Then all the willing and obedient will be restored to human perfection to live everlastingly upon the earth as God's human family.

The Two Salvations

SOME may be surprised that there are two salvations and may quote Acts 4:12, speaking of Jesus Christ: "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." But we are not suggesting that there is, or could be, any other basis for salvation but Jesus Christ. Both salvations are through him. The Bible teaches that humankind is divided into two general categories of those who will be saved with each receiving a different reward: one will be earthly, the other heavenly.

The primary salvation is an earthly reward or destiny. Adam was never given heavenly prospects, he was never promised a future spirit nature in heaven. On the contrary he was created to live eternally upon the earth. Genesis 3:22 clearly states that he was given the power to "put forth his hand, and take also of the trees of life, and eat, and live forever." Live forever where? Obviously upon the earth; he was told to multiply and fill the earth with a race of perfect human beings like himself. But this privilege required his obedience. The alternative was death, not a continuation of his life as a spirit being either in heaven or a place of torment. In Genesis 2:17 God told Adam plainly that if he disobeyed, he would "surely die." Adam did disobey, and there is no mistaking the sentence God passed upon him, that he would "return unto the ground. For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." (Genesis 3:19) Because of Adam's sin, all mankind were born sinners, and inherited death:

"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."--Romans 5:12

Although the sentence of death was entirely just, the great love of God provided a salvation from death permitting mankind to be restored to perfect life upon the earth such as Adam enjoyed before he sinned. This is what God originally designed should be the eternal destiny of all the obedient of mankind. Thus we read:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."--John 3:16

So we see that what was lost was life on earth, and life on earth is what is to be regained. Thus we read: "For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost." (Matthew 18:11) Jesus came to provide a ransom for Adam. He died without deserving to die, he laid down his perfect life sacrificially giving his unforfeited life in offset for Adam's forfeited life; thus he redeemed or "saved" Adam and all his

race. The result will be that an opportunity for salvation from death will be extended to all mankind.

“For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”--1 Corinthians 15:21,22

Every member of Adam's race will be brought back to life from the dead. Paul says that God “will have all men to be saved [from death] and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” (1 Timothy 2:4) All the willing and obedient will be restored to human perfection on earth. This will be during “the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.” (Acts 3:21) This is the general salvation. It does not change man's earthly nature nor transport him to heaven. Those who attain to this salvation “shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them.” (Isaiah 65:21) That does not describe a spiritual, heavenly state.

Beside this salvation, there is another and greater salvation. It is offered now to a limited number of mankind. Those who partake of this greater salvation will experience a change of nature from human to spirit beings. They will die as humans and be resurrected to the glorious, immortal, divine nature. They will attain to the heavenly kingdom of God. Of such it is written:

“It is sown a natural [human] body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. . . . Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God. . . . We shall all be changed. . . . For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.”--1 Corinthians 15:44,49-51,53

These are the ones to whom Jesus said:

“In my Father's house are many mansions. . . . I go to prepare a place for you. . . . that where I am, there ye may be also.”--John 14:2,3

Both salvations provide a deliverance from sin and death based upon the ransom sacrifice of Jesus. Both lead to perfection and lasting life--one to human life on earth, the other to spirit life in heaven.

Only this greatest salvation, termed in Philippians 3:14, “the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus,” is offered now. Its beginning is referred to as “so great salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him.” (Hebrews 2:3) Our Lord Jesus opened the way which is called “a new and living way” (Hebrews 10:20) by his ransom sacrifice. He became our Saviour from death. It was he who

issued the invitation to the great salvation. Paul refers to God who sent Jesus to be our Saviour:

“Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began; but is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”--2 Timothy 1:9,10

This “great salvation” costs a person everything he has. The living of a good and moral life, although very commendable, is not sufficient to gain this highest prize. There must be a full consecration or dedication of one's self, and everything one has, to the cause of Christ. This is what Jesus meant when he said, “sell all that thou hast.” (Luke 18:22) But to one who does so, nothing is really lost. It is merely exchanged for something of immensely greater value, which Jesus called “treasure in heaven.” This is the “great” salvation, the heavenly inheritance, called “glory and honour and immortality, eternal life.” (Romans 2:7)

The “high calling of God in Christ Jesus” was very real to the apostle Paul. He saw its value. He did not consider the cost too high. He said:

“The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”--Romans 8:18

He willingly exchanged all his earthly prospects for the much more excellent heavenly prospects:

“But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea, doubtless, and I count all things but loss, for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them as vile refuse, that I may win Christ.”--Philippians 3:7,8

He recommended to other believers in Christ that they do the same thing, saying:

“Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. Be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind.”--Romans 12:1,2

Those aspiring to the “great salvation” must not submit themselves to the evil influences of this world, to be shaped by them, but must submit themselves entirely to the will of God. By doing so they will be transformed in mind and character by a heavenly influence, the Holy Spirit, which emanates from the word of God, the Bible.

Those of the “high calling” are under God's special care. We read of such:

“We know that all things work together for good to them that love God; to them who are the called according to his purpose.”--Romans 8:28

Earthly prosperity is not promised, but every good spiritual advantage is assured to these “sons of God.” Blessed are those who hear and obey the call to this special salvation!

Thou Art the Man

“And Nathan said to David: Thou art the man!”--2 Samuel 12:7

WHEN God rejected Saul from being king over Israel, Samuel the prophet mourned deeply for him. He had loved Saul so much. He remembered the day when he had first suggested to young Saul that the Lord had selected him to be king of Israel. Saul had answered with great humility and modesty:

“Am I not a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? And my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? Wherefore, then, speakest thou so to me?”--1 Samuel 9:21

Saul had made himself mighty small that day: the least important family of the smallest tribe. That's about as small as he could possibly make himself. He had done it with complete sincerity. We know this to be true because later when Samuel wanted to publicly proclaim Saul king, they could not find him! They searched and searched, but he could not be found. He was hiding. This was embarrassing. All the people of Israel had assembled before Samuel to see the one on whom the lot had fallen to be their first king, and they were waiting. Finally Samuel had to inquire of the Lord to find where Saul was hiding:

“And the Lord answered; Behold, he hath hid himself among the stuff. And they ran and fetched him thence; and when he stood among the people, he was higher than any of the people, from his shoulders and upward. And Samuel said to all the people: See ye him, whom the Lord hath chosen? That there is none like him among all the people? And all the people shouted, and said: God save the king!”--1 Samuel 10:22-24

Yes, Samuel remembered that day. But after that he had watched Saul's disposition gradually change from a modest, unassuming spirit to one of pride, arrogance and disobedience. This contrary spirit finally culminated in Saul's neglect of the Lord's commandment with regard to the utter destruction of the Amalekites and their substance. He disobeyed the Lord by saving the Amalekite king and the best of the spoil together with the choicest sheep and oxen, presumably to sacrifice to the Lord. This is the excuse he made when Samuel confronted him with his sin:

“And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifice as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou has rejected the word of the Lord, he hath also rejected thee from being king.”--1 Samuel 15:22,23

It hurt Samuel to have to say this to Saul but he did it nevertheless, in the performance of his duty as a prophet.

We can take a lesson from this incident of Saul's disobedience. Some of the Lord's people, anointed to be priests and kings, may indulge a selfish desire to keep the best of the things that the Lord has condemned, rationalizing and excusing themselves that they do it for the Lord's cause. Let us not forget that this is the way Saul lost his crown. As we read in verse 28: "And Samuel said unto him: The Lord hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbor of thine, that is better than thou." This brings to mind the exhortation: "Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown."--Revelation 3:11

Samuel continued to mourn for Saul--this strong, tall, handsome man, head and shoulders above all others in Israel, who so much looked the part of a king.

"And the Lord said unto Samuel: How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? Fill thine horn with oil, and go. I will send thee to Jesse, the Bethlehemite; for I have provided me a king among his sons."--1 Samuel 16:1

The Lord was about to reveal to Samuel the one he had caused Samuel to tell Saul about: the successor of Saul, the "neighbor of thine, that is better than thou."

The Selection of David

The coming of Samuel to Bethlehem caused great excitement and trembling. Samuel was highly revered as God's mouthpiece, and they wondered what his coming might signify. Was he a bearer of bad news? Did he have a message of condemnation, a dire warning of calamities to come?

"And the elders of the town trembled at his coming, and said: Comest thou peaceably? And he said: Peaceably. I am come to sacrifice unto the Lord."--1 Samuel 16:4,5

He did not reveal his entire mission to the elders and the people lest word be carried back to Saul who might do something to impede his mission. He did invite Jesse and his sons to the sacrifice and afterward revealed his mission to them alone.

How proud Jesse must have felt! He had eight splendid sons and he thought they were pretty fine boys. Now he was told by the prophet of God that the Lord had actually selected one of them to be the king of Israel! It was arranged for the sons of Jesse to pass before Samuel, one at a time, from the oldest to the youngest, so that the Lord might indicate his choice.

“And it came to pass, when they were come, that he looked on Eliab, and said, Surely the Lord's anointed is before him.”--1 Samuel 16:6

Eliab must have been a fine looking man with a serene, kingly bearing, tall and commanding, exactly the kind of man Samuel would have selected without divine direction.

“But the Lord said unto Samuel: Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord seeth not as man seeth, for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart. Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. And he said: Neither hath the Lord chosen this. Then Jesse made Shammah to pass by. And he said: Neither hath the Lord chosen this.”--1 Samuel 16:7-9

One after another seven splendid specimens of fine manhood passed before Samuel; seven times the Lord indicated: “It is not he.”

“And Samuel said unto Jesse: ‘Are here all thy children?’ And he said: ‘There remaineth yet the youngest, and behold, he keepeth the sheep.’”--1 Samuel 16:11

What a fine prophetic description of Jesus Jesse thus unwittingly gave: “Behold, he keepeth the sheep.” Isn't that what Jesus does? Jesse said, “There's only my youngest left, the little boy. He isn't really grown up yet. I didn't think you'd want him to be here so I sent him out with the sheep--somebody has to look after the sheep.”

“And Samuel said unto Jesse: Send, and fetch him; for we will not sit down till he come hither. And he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to.”--1 Samuel 16:11,12

David came in haste from the field; just as he was. He had no time to change from the rough leather garments of a shepherd. Deeply tanned by the wind and sun, he must have given a healthy, robust appearance.

“And the Lord said: Arise, anoint him, for this is he. Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brethren. And the spirit of the Lord came upon David from that day forward.”--1 Samuel 16:12,13

Once again the smallest, the least, the most insignificant from the human standpoint had been selected. First it had been Saul, of the least family of the smallest tribe. Now it was David, the youngest of eight sons, the smallest and least of the house of Jesse, only a lad charged with the care of humble and helpless sheep.

There is an interesting sidelight to this account. Each one of Jesse's sons had his hopes raised to the heights as he passed before Samuel only to have them dashed to the ground. Yet I find no indication of

jealousy or resentment on the part of David's brothers because of the Lord's preference for David over them. They seemed rather to have rejoiced with David as he was anointed in their midst. How different from the spirit of Cain who slew his brother because "The Lord had respect unto Abel, and to his offering" (Genesis 4:4) rather than Cain's. How different from the hateful, murderous spirit of the sons of Jacob against their brother Joseph whom their father loved above them.

What can we conclude from this? I think we might conclude that the line of Jesse was a goodly heritage; and that David and his brothers shared naturally noble characteristics. David himself implied this in when he wrote: "Yea, I have a good heritage." (Psalms 16:6) After all, this was the line through which Jesus Christ entered his earthly existence, one of his titles being: "The son of David."

God's Decisions Are Best

There is also an important lesson for us. The Lord has selected certain ones for his service. He has placed them in the body as it pleaseth Him. Some he has placed in more prominent positions than others, for the promulgation of the printed word and a public witness throughout the world--by radio, television, films, etc. These brethren are the Lord's selection. If some among us are inclined to feel that these choices are not good, that others could do better, let them remember the seven superior specimens of manhood whom the Lord passed over to select David. The Lord knew exactly what he was doing.

Jesse had eight sons, all fine men. Eliab, the oldest, was of such a gracious and kingly bearing that Samuel exclaimed when he saw him: "Surely, this is the Lord's anointed!" Yet the Lord passed him by and selected David. Why? Was this choice capricious and without reason? Was it only because David was the youngest and least in the family of Jesse? Of course not! How, then, does God select those whom he will use? Here is the method God uses:

"For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth; to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him."--2 Chronicles 16:9

Consider the astounding implications of this scripture. Through his power and instrumentalities God always knows everything that's going on. He knows the innermost thoughts of every living person every moment of every day. Impossible? It is not only possible but absolutely necessary. If there is to be a resurrection of the dead, if people are to return to this earth the same as they were when they died, the memory of God must hold what they were. What they were

is the sum total of all their experiences, all their thoughts, all their lives.

“For the Lord searcheth all hearts and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts.” --1 Chronicles 28:9

There was nothing capricious or whimsical about the selection of David. The Lord wanted a man of a certain heart condition, a man whose heart was perfect toward him. Out of the hundreds of thousands of Israel he knew just where to find him. He knew just the one:

“He raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom he also gave testimony and said, I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart.”--Acts 13:22

He found one whose heart was “perfect toward him.” David had a perfect love for God. His love was complete and entire; his reliance on the Lord absolute. The Lord was everything to him. He wrote:

“I will love thee, O Lord, my strength, in whom I will trust: my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower. I will call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised!”--Psalms 18:1,2

These are the sublime things, the outstanding things, expressing perfect love and devotion, that the Lord saw in David's heart when his eyes ran to and fro throughout the hosts of Israel. That is why he told Samuel, “I will send thee to Jesse, the Bethlehemite; for I have provided me a king among his sons.”

Just as Samuel anointed David to be a king, passing over those of finer outward appearance, the Lord has drawn us to partake of an anointing to kingship. His eyes have “run to and fro” throughout the whole earth to find us, passing over many more wise, more mighty and more noble than we are. (1 Corinthians 1:26) He has chosen us because of what he has seen in our hearts --the incipient possibilities there. Just as he found in David's heart, in addition to great love, the qualities of faith, meekness, courage, energy and obedience, he looks for the same characteristics in us.

When David was anointed, he was young, inexperienced, untrained and unskilled in the duties of the high office to which he was called. So are we when God first draws us to Jesus. This condition which, in the estimation of men, would be an insurmountable barrier to our high calling is no obstacle in God's sight. God is able to inspire his called ones with his spirit and to arm them with his might. He did with David and he does with us. After his anointing, David's kingdom was not established immediately; neither is ours. We are surrounded by enemies on every side as was David. The whole of our time in the flesh is a continual warfare. But we know that, if faithful, we will gain our crown.

David was a shepherd as a young man during his most formative years. He was a good shepherd. He loved his sheep and was willing to lay down his life for them. He demonstrated this on one occasion by killing a lion and a bear that threatened his flock. As he himself recounted it to Saul:

“And David said unto Saul: Thy servant kept his father's sheep; and there came a lion and a bear and took a lamb out of the flock. And I went out after him and smote him and delivered it out of his mouth. And when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard and smote him and slew him. Thy servant slew both the lion and the bear.”--1 Samuel 17:34-36

It took tremendous courage and devotion to do that. He had no firearms, not even a sword. Only a club and a faith in God as wide as the great outdoors he loved so much, and an intense love for the flock entrusted to his care.

David used his long periods of isolation as a shepherd to think and meditate upon God and his great and loving ways. Some of his most sublime psalms were composed under the stars in the silent watches of the night. His fondness for his shepherd calling naturally made him relate much of his thinking to that vocation. As a result he used many expressions derived from his experiences as a shepherd.

His being entrusted with the kingship of Israel is described in shepherd terms:

“He chose David also his servant, and took him from the sheepfolds, from following the ewes great with young, he brought him to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance. So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them by the skilfulness of his hands.”--Psalms 78:70-72

A Good King Is a Good Shepherd

Here the office of king over Israel is likened to that of a shepherd who faithfully guides and feeds his flock. To be a good king he must lead Israel in the paths of righteousness, in the worship of the true God, and feed them with all his righteous precepts. The phrase, “He took him from the sheepfolds” gives us a sense of contrast, between the humble shepherd and the exalted monarch. It reminds us of the words of Jesus: “He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much.” (Luke 16:10) The eyes of the Lord ran to and fro throughout the whole earth and found David, the humble shepherd boy, devoted to his sheep, willing to lay down his life for them, daring to attack a lion and a bear in their defense. God knew that David would show the same love, zeal, integrity and self-sacrifice as a king over Israel as he did as a shepherd over sheep.

There is a lesson for us. We too are selected to be kings. The Lord's eyes are upon us to mark the degree of our love for his sheep, our brethren, and our sympathy for the poor lost sheep of the world. What will he see? What will he find in our hearts? Will he conclude that we, as David, will be "faithful also in much"?

In addition to being king of Israel, David was one of the foremost of the prophets. He was a talented musician, poet, and composer of psalms. His prophecies are in the form of songs. For example: "I will sing of mercy and judgment, unto thee, O Lord, will I sing." (Psalms 101:1) This psalm contains a prophecy of the great mercy of the Lord in providing a ransom for the human race, that "he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness." (Acts 17:31)

David's heart was full of song; it overflowed with song. He could not refrain from singing God's praises. As he said: "I will sing unto the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being." (Psalms 104:33) This carries a note of exultation, a heart so full of praise that ordinary speech is not sufficient to fully express to the Lord what is in the heart.

The apostle catches the same spirit in his exhortation:

"Be filled with the spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord."--Ephesians 5:18,19

Another of David's songs of exultation and praise is Psalm 105:

"Oh give thanks unto the Lord, call upon his name; make known his deeds among the people. Sing unto him; sing psalms unto him. Talk ye of all his wondrous works."--Psalms 105:1,2

The psalm prophecies of David, which are couched in shepherd terms, are beautifully impressive. The church, following sacrificially in the footsteps of Jesus, is described as a shepherd would see it:

"Yea, for thysake are we killed all the day long. We are counted as sheep for the slaughter."--Psalms 44:22

David loved his sheep and was intimately acquainted with each lamb. Sometimes in spite of all his efforts for the flock's well-being, a lamb would die. This would fill David's heart with grief. Other shepherds may simply leave the dead lamb for wild beasts to devour since it was no longer of value. But David had such a love for it individually, that he dug a grave and tenderly laid the lifeless body in it; he sorrowed over the poor creature thus cut down by death. Later when the holy Spirit impelled him to express a prophecy regarding the sorrowfulness of dying, the prison-house of death, and the joy of the resurrection in the morning of the Messianic age under the dominion of Christ and the church, he wrote from his experience as a shepherd:

“Like sheep they are laid in the grave. Death shall feed on them, and the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning!”--Psalms 49:14

Could it be expressed in a more tender and loving way?

In several of the psalms, David refers to Israel as the sheep of God's pasture. (Psalms 74:1; 79:13) He refers to the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt: “But made his own people to go forth like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock.” (Psalms 78:52) “Thou leddest thy people like a flock, by the hand of Moses and Aaron.” (Psalms 77:20)

When David had been overtaken by grievous sin and felt that the Lord had withdrawn his favor from him, that a cloud had come between him and his God, he thought of the pitiful condition of a sheep gone astray, utterly helpless in the wilderness, whose only hope is in being found again by the shepherd, who longs to hear the voice of the shepherd again. He wrote in agonizing repentance:

“I have gone astray like a lost sheep. Seek thy servant, for I do not forget thy commandments.” --Psalms 119:176

When Nathan had been sent and he had been found again by the Lord and restored to favor, he voiced his grateful adoration. Shepherd words again came to his lips:

“Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand!”--Psalms 95:6,7

King Ahab

By way of contrast let us consider the story of Ahab, king of Israel. The account is found in 1 Kings chapter 21. King Ahab had a large palace surrounded by beautiful grounds. One day he decided that he wanted a vegetable garden, but he didn't want to dig up any of the palace lawns for this purpose. He looked over at a vineyard next to his grounds and thought that it would be just right for his vegetables. He went to the owner of the vineyard, a man named Naboth, and offered to buy or trade for the property. Much to his surprise and disappointment, Naboth refused to sell. This was a blow to Ahab's vanity. Wasn't he the king? He should be able to get what he wanted. So he went back to the palace and pouted just like a spoiled child. The record says: “And he laid him down upon his bed and turned away his face and would eat nobread.” Isn't that a perfect picture of a spoiled child?

When he wouldn't eat, his wife Jezebel became worried and asked him what was bothering him and he told her. She said, in effect: “They can't do this to you! You're the king! I'll see that you get the

vineyard!” So she wrote letters in Ahab's name arranging to have Naboth falsely accused and stoned to death, which was done.

Up to this point Ahab was technically innocent. Jezebel had used Ahab's name without his knowledge. Jezebel was the murderer, not Ahab. Then what happened? The record says:

“And it came to pass, when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab rose up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth ... to take possession of it.”

As soon as he did that he became a murderer, equally guilty with Jezebel. If he had refused to take the vineyard, he would have remained innocent. But his act of taking possession of receiving the fruits of the crime, made him a co-conspirator with Jezebel. “And the word of the Lord came to Elijah, the Tishbite.” The prophet Elijah was told to confront Ahab with his crime at the very moment when Ahab was taking Naboth's vineyard. Elijah obeyed. Ahab was caught red-handed in the act of taking the vineyard. What was his reaction to Elijah's accusation? “And Ahab said to Elijah:Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?” --1Kings 21:20

David's Sin Contrasted with Ahab's

Let us go back to the sin of David. He also was a king of Israel. His sin was almost identical to that of Ahab's. By his orders it was arranged that Uriah, the Hittite, be killed, so that David might possess, not a vineyard, but Uriah's wife, Bathsheba. Do you see the similarity? The record says: “And the Lord sent Nathan unto David.” Nathan was the prophet of God at that time. As Elijah had confronted Ahab, Nathan confronted David with his sin. What was David's reaction to Nathan's accusation? “And David said unto Nathan: I have sinned against the Lord!” (2 Samuel 12:13) Do you see the contrast between the two, the difference in reaction, the difference which reveals the heart condition upon which God looks?

Ahab, addressing the prophet of God, arrogantly said--“Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?” But David humbly said: “I have sinned against the Lord!” What did the Lord's prophet reply to each? Elijah said to Ahab the arrogant: “In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine!” But Nathan said to David, the humble and repentant one: “And the Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die.” That is why David could sing out of the fullness of his heart:

“The Lord is merciful and gracious; slow to anger and plenteous in mercy. He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.

Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him; for he knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust.”--
Psalms 103:8,10-14

These two incidents also point up the vast difference in God's eyes between the sin of being momentarily overtaken in a fault because of fleshly weaknesses and that of sinning deliberately, willfully, with malice aforethought, and without repentance.

David the king, the strong and valiant man of war, showed a meek, lamb-like quality when confronted by Nathan. “I have sinned against the Lord,” he said. He could have retorted: “How dare you accuse the King? The King can do no wrong! I have absolute power over my subjects!”--and sent Nathan away. But no. At heart he was still the same humble shepherd boy that he was the day he was anointed, the least of the house of Jesse. He freely acknowledged his wrong and the Lord was quick to forgive.

Because of his sin, David had been alienated from God. A cloud had come between the Lord and him, hiding the Lord's face from him. His prayers did not seem to ascend as they once did. His keen zest for life was dulled. You may be sure he composed none of his beautiful and lilting psalms during this period. His guilt pressed heavily upon him day and night. He knew the Lord was displeased. He felt that displeasure as keenly and literally as though a millstone was tied around his neck. This separation from God was sheer torment for David, he who was so accustomed to such an intimate fellowship with his Creator.

He actually began to deteriorate physically. He felt the approach of death and the grave. He gave expression to some of his feelings of anguish in the sixth psalm:

“O Lord, rebuke me not in thine anger, neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure. Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am weak. O Lord, heal me, for my bones are vexed. My soul is also sore vexed; but thou O Lord, how long? Return, O Lord; deliver my soul; O save me for thy mercies sake. For in death there is no remembrance of thee. In the grave, who shall give thee thanks? I am weary with my groaning; all the night make I my bed to swim. I water my couch with tears.”--Psalms 6:1-6

Here in four verses he uses the pleading expression “O Lord!” five times. This is the sad state that David was in when Nathan was sent to him. The important point is that the Lord sent Nathan to David. As grievously as David had sinned, the Lord did not abandon him; he did not easily let him go! No! He sought him out, he opened the way, he reached out for him to lift him up, to bring him back! How tenderly and tactfully the Lord dealt with his erring servant David! Nathan was instructed to approach the king at a time when he sat

at judgment hearing the grievances of the people. The account is found in 2 Samuel chapter 12. Nathan spoke as though he had a case for David to hear and render judgment upon. He told of two men in a city, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had great flocks and herds and an abundance of everything the heart could desire.

“But the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up; and it grew up together with him and with his children. It did eat of his own meat and drank of his own cup and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter.”

When David heard this, he immediately gave Nathan his full attention. He had been listening to the wearisome bickerings and disputations of the people all day. Here was something that touched his shepherd's heart. He knew what it was to love a little lamb that had been forsaken by its mother, to wrap it in his own cloak, to feed it at his own table, to let the little creature share the warmth of his bed at night. This was something he could understand! He had done this very thing. It filled him with the nostalgia of his happy shepherd days.

Nathan continued the story. He told how one day a traveler came to the rich man's house and had to be fed. But the rich man, instead of taking a lamb from his own great flock, one that would never be missed, took the poor man's one ewe lamb and killed it to serve the meat to his guest. Don't forget that David thought this was an actual account Nathan was relating so that royal judgment might be rendered.

At this point David must have leaped from his throne in his anger at the cruelty and the callous heartlessness of the rich man:

“And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man. And he said to Nathan: as the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die! And he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity!”--2 Samuel 12:5,6

Thou Art the Man

Nathan lifted his hand and David stopped short. He suddenly realized that what Nathan had related was an allegorical account of his own sin. It dawned on him that by his rendering judgment in the case, he had actually passed sentence on himself: THE SENTENCE OF DEATH! He dropped his head in shame and remorse. Then Nathan said quietly: “Yes. Thou art the man!” Do you see how the Lord touched David's heart so he might bring him back? In his condition a blunt and direct accusation by Nathan might have hardened David's heart causing him to react improperly and drive him farther away from the Lord. So the Lord reached out and found his lost sheep in such a loving and gentle way that it brought out all

the goodness of David's heart, and it led to his forgiveness and recovery to favor. I think it must have been with tears streaming down his face that "David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord! And Nathan said unto David: The Lord also hath put away thy sin; Thou shalt not die." Can you imagine the relief David felt to be at least forgiven, to feel the heavy load he had been carrying for so long, slip from his shoulders, to once more feel that his prayers reached the Lord, to realize that the Lord loved him, to know true happiness once again?

The Lord Does Not Abandon Us

I am sure we have all had the experience at one time or another of feeling estrangement from the Lord. When this has occurred, it has not been the Lord's doing. He has said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." If we ever feel the loss of his favor, it is because of some unfaithfulness or laxity on our part. But the illustration of David shows that the Lord does not abandon us in such a condition. On the contrary, he takes the initiative. He seeks us out. If we respond as David did, he tenderly and lovingly restores us to his favor.

Jesus gave us a beautiful parable teaching this. He had just been telling his disciples how precious the Lord's little ones are in his sight, saying that their guardian angels always behold the face of the Heavenly Father, and how the Father had sent the son, that is, himself, to save that which was lost. Then he said:

"How think ye? If a man have an hundred sheep, and one of them be gone astray, doth he not leave the ninety and nine and goeth and seeketh that which is gone astray? And if it be so, that he find it, verily I say unto you, he rejoiceth more of that sheep, than of the ninety and nine which went not astray. Even so, it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish."--Matthew 18:12-14

Doesn't that touch the heart? He "goeth and seeketh that which is gone astray!" When he has found the lost sheep, he rejoices! I tell you that when the Lord rejoices over us we can feel it. We have a sense of well-being. We know that everything is right again.

When one is temporarily alienated from God, exactly how does the Lord find him and call him back, by what means or instrumentality? To David he sent Nathan, and he will send "Nathan" to us too. Not literally, of course. The Lord does not communicate with us by an audible voice in our ears, or by visions in the night, or by incarnating a prophet to visit us. He speaks to us through his word, through the scriptures. Nathan said to David: "Thou art the man!"

In times of distress when we seek to renew our close communion with the Lord, let us go to the scriptures, applying them to ourselves with these words in mind: "THOU ART THE MAN!" The scriptures are full of examples, pictures, parables and illustrations, bearing upon every human problem and situation. As we read these and find those that fit our particular case, let us say to ourselves, of ourselves: "Thou art the man!" These scriptures were written for you, for your admonition, they speak of you. If any scripture fits your case and fills your need, then "Thou art the man!" As these words brought to David a contrite and penitent spirit, they will have the same impact upon us. As they resulted in David's complete restoration to God's favor, they will do the same for us too.

Events in the world indicate that the time is very short. Let us not spend a minute away from God's full favor. Let us not waste one moment. David said, under inspiration: "Delight thyself also in the Lord, and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart." (Psalms 37:4) He voiced our sentiments exactly when he wrote:

"One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple."--Psalms 27:4

“Thus Saith the Lord”

“Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures; and said unto them, Thus it is written.”--Luke 24:45,46

THE expression, “Thus saith the Lord,” is used over 400 times in the Bible plus many similar expressions such as “It is written,” or “The word of the Lord came unto me,” or “I, the Lord, have spoken it.” They call attention to specific statements, messages and lessons from God. It is as though the prophet, or other spokesman, is telling us:

“Now hear this! What I am going to say now, is not merely my opinion, or of my own wisdom, but thus saith the Lord; it is God speaking; these are his words.”

This is a wonderful expression and full of meaning for Bible Students. We have a reverence for God's word and a “Thus saith the Lord” is the end of all controversy with us.

It seems so very simple, doesn't it? All we have to do is to prove everything by the word of God. All we have to do is to accept what is in harmony with that word and reject that which is not. But it is not as simple as that. If it were, everyone would understand the truth and there would be no false doctrines. But there are false doctrines, hundreds of them. Each one is claimed to rest upon the word of God. For every false doctrine many of which are hideous in the extreme, there is a purported “Thus saith the Lord.”

Let us consider some of these and the scriptural passages which it is claimed support them. Afterward we will prove that these doctrines are indeed scripturally false.

False Doctrines in Christendom

First we have the incredibly cruel and God-dishonoring doctrine of eternal torment. Here are some of the scriptures upon which this repulsive doctrine is based:

“And he shall be tormented with fire, and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb; and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever; and they have no rest day nor night.”--Revelation 14:10,11

“Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” --Matthew 25:41

“And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone ... and shall be tormented day and night, for ever and ever.”--Revelation 20:10

“Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee; it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than, having two hands or two feet, to be cast into everlasting fire. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee; for it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire.”--Matthew 18:8,9

These are perfectly good scriptures--“Thus saith the Lord!”--and they seem to clearly teach eternal torment. But do they? Is that what the Lord is really saying?

Another prominent false doctrine of Christendom is that of the Trinity. God is claimed to be triune, the union of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as three persons in one God. One expression of the creed is this:

“That we worship one God as Trinity, and Trinity in Unity; neither confounding the persons nor dividing the substances; for there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost. But the Godhead of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost is all one; the glory Equal; the majesty Co-eternal.”

All of this double-talk, or triple-talk in this case, is based upon this text:

“For there are three that bear record in heaven; the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one.”--1 John 5:7

“Thus saith the Lord!” say the Trinitarians. As a further proof that Jesus as a member of the Trinity is equal with God, they cite Paul's words:

“Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God.”--Philippians 2:6

“What more proof do you need?” they say. “Thus saith the Lord!”

It is also taught in the nominal churches, in all good conscience, that there is no future probation, that salvation is in this life only, that the world will have no future chance for life. This narrow conception of the plan of God, is based on 2 Corinthians 6:2: “Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.” “Thus saith the Lord!” they say. “It is even repeated for emphasis: `NOW is the accepted time, NOW is the day of salvation.’ Can there be any doubt of what it says? Those who are not saved now are eternally lost.”

These are only three of the hundreds of false doctrines taught today. Each one is conscientiously claimed to be firmly based upon a “Thus saith the Lord!” To one unfamiliar with the divine plan, the claim appears true. But it is not as simple as that. To determine what the Lord is really saying we must often dig beneath the surface. We must analyze, divide, compare, and assemble: “Here a little, and there a

little.” We must interpret and coordinate. We must apply certain inflexible rules and guides. When in doubt, we must consider the preponderance, or weight of evidence. We must also arrange scriptures chronologically and not confuse one age with another. Above all, we must remember that the scriptures declare God's plan. We must learn to think from God's standpoint according to his plan. His plan is not subject to change at our whim:

“The Lord of Hosts hath sworn, saying, surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand.”-- Isaiah 14:24

We must learn to think like he does. “Come now, and let us reason together,” he says. We must be filled with his spirit of truth and approach the scriptures in that spirit --humbly, prayerfully, and reverentially, fearing greatly to misinterpret, and perhaps mislead and stumble others. The penalty for stumbling others is extremely severe. This is the great Creator's word we are dealing with, his sacred word which is not to be handled carelessly and flippantly. This is not for fun; it is serious. As we read in Isaiah:

“Thus saith the Lord: the heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool ... For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord. But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.”-- Isaiah 66:1,2

In order to understand what God is saying, we must study God's word topically, in orderly steps. As we read:

“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. Order my steps in thy word.”--Psalms 119:105,133

God has not given us an understanding of his word to satisfy idle curiosity. It is given to us for a purpose, for the development and completion of the church, the body of Christ. As Paul said to Timothy:

“All scripture given by inspiration of God is profitable ... that the man of God may be perfect [or complete], thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”--2 Timothy 3:16,17

This being the case, we are expected to pursue our studies in a methodical and workmanlike manner to be approved by God as we are told:

“Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”-- 2 Timothy 2:15

The Diaglott says, “Rightly treating the word of truth.” The interlinear is, “Cutting straight the word of truth.” This is what we

must do to ascertain what the Lord is really saying, what he is really telling us, that “Thus saith the Lord!”

A Checklist for Interpreting Scripture

I have formulated a list of tests that may be applied to interpretations of scripture to help determine its real meaning. You may think of other tests also. Does it square with the ransom? Is it in accordance with the divine plan? Is the scripture correctly translated? Is it spurious in whole or in part? Does the proposed interpretation comport with God's character? To what age or time does the scripture apply? To what class of persons does it apply? Is it merely historical, having already had a total fulfillment? If already fulfilled, does it have a secondary application or fulfillment to come? Is it literal or symbolic? Does it have a typical significance? Does its context vary its apparent meaning? Is it intended to be ironic or sarcastic rather than literal? Does it employ an archaic idiom not in use today? Is its correct application suggested by partially fulfilled prophecies? Does it teach something by inference? Is the subject really what it appears to be? Are the events given in correct chronological order or has the order been purposely altered or reversed to prevent understanding before the due time? Does incorrect punctuation alter the true meaning? Does the scripture conflict with other scriptures on the same subject? Is there another scripture, or another witness, to confirm the proposed interpretation?

Let us go back and review the scriptures that were cited to support certain false doctrines. Let us apply some of these tests to determine what the Lord really says. Let us thus prove that these doctrines are not, in fact, supported by a “Thus saith the Lord!,” although they may appear to be.

Eternal Torment

Consider the scriptures that are used to teach eternal torment. Do not think that a study of such scriptures is too elementary. Although convinced the doctrine of eternal torment is false, many mature Bible Students cannot readily explain the scriptures used to support the doctrine. Consider the first:

“And he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb; and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever, and ever; and they have no rest day nor night.”--Revelation 14:10,11

First we ask, “Does the proposed interpretation comport with God's character?” No it does not. There are numerous scriptures which teach that love is one of the principal characteristics of God. Here is just one:

“God is love. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear, because fear hath torment.”--1 John 4:8,18

Because God is love, he is incapable of torment. To torment anyone is entirely foreign to God's character. It is contrary to his thoughts. He simply wouldn't think of it; it is an abomination to him. This is confirmed by Jeremiah where God denounces those who sacrificed their children by fire to pagan gods:

“They have built also the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire for burnt offerings unto Baal, which I commanded not, nor spake it, neither came it into my mind.”--Jeremiah 19:5

“And they built the high places of Baal ... to cause their sons, and their daughters to pass through the fire unto Molech, which I commanded them not, neither came it into my mind, that they should do this abomination.”--Jeremiah 32:35

Eternal torment does not comport with God's character of love.

Another characteristic of God is justice: “Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne” (Psalms 89:14), or as Moffatt renders it: “Thy throne rests upon equality and justice.” Does eternal torment comport with God's character of justice? Is it just to impose an eternity of torment for the sins of only a few brief years of this present life? Is it equitable? Of course it is not! It is a grossly disproportionate punishment.

The penalty for sin was announced at the beginning in Genesis 2:17 as simply death: “Thou shalt surely die” is what God said. This is what Adam was to expect if he sinned: nothing more than death. Would it be just for God to announce the penalty as death, then after the sin had been committed to rudely surprise the sinner by amplifying the penalty to an eternity of torment? Such a thing would be most unjust. Thus it does not comport with God's character in this respect either.

Does the proposed interpretation square with the ransom? It does not. Jesus came as a man to assume the penalty for sin. If the sentence upon Adam was eternal torment and Jesus took Adam's place, Jesus must be tormented forever which we know is false. The sentence for disobedience was simply death; Jesus died to pay the penalty as the ransom.

Is eternal torment in accordance with the divine plan? Emphatically no. The plan provides for the restoration of mankind to perfection and harmony with God. A restitution of all things was spoken by the mouth of all God's holy prophets since the world began. (Acts 3:21) Eternally tormenting a large segment of humanity is incompatible with this. Since we are told that “all the wicked will he destroy” (Psalms 145:20), God will certainly not keep any of the wicked alive

in torment. On the contrary 2 Thessalonians 1:9 says plainly that they “shall be punished with everlasting destruction.”

Now we apply another test which indicates that direction we must take to determine what the scriptures really do teach. “Is it literal or symbolic?” The scripture is obviously highly symbolic. Revelation is a book of symbols. As we read in the first verse of the first chapter, the “things which were shortly to come to pass” were signified, or SIGN-ified, unto John. They were given in signs and symbols. The entire 14th chapter is replete with symbols. There is a “lamb,” a symbol of Christ, standing on “mount Zion,” his heavenly kingdom. There is “thunder,” a symbol of controversy, and the “harps” of Bible testimonies sing a “new song,” harmoniously declaring the glad tidings of restitution. There is a “throne,” a symbol of authority and rulership. There are “beasts” and “elders” and “virgins” and “angels,” all having symbolic significance. Then in verse 8 we are told that “Babylon,” a great city, is fallen. This too is a symbol. “Babylon” means “confusion” and is a symbol of the nominal church as a whole. So the prophecy refers to the time of the Lord's casting off of the nominal systems, removing His favor from them. Then in verse 9 a “beast” and his “image” are mentioned. Bible Students concur that this symbolizes the papal system and a so-called Protestant Federation, Protestants who no longer protest. In regard to this “beast” and its “image” we find a remarkable interpretation of the prophecy written in 1897 by Pastor Russell. It reads as though it were a comment on yesterday's news reports concerning the ecumenical movement. We quote:

“We find in Revelation a prophecy of a special combination of influence by which Protestant denominations will be unified, and, though separate, yet be brought into cooperation with Papacy, in a manner that will give both of them increased powers, and deceive many into supposing that the new combination will be God's instrumentality for doing the work predicted of Messiah; and that it is thus his representative.”\$FStudies in the Scriptures, volume 4, page 581.

With this background we are able to deal with the true meaning of this scripture:

“If any man worship the beast, and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire, and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb; and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever, and ever; and they have no rest day nor night.”--Revelation 14:9-11

Here more symbols are brought into the picture: the “mark” or identification of those in harmony or sympathy with the beast or his image which is applied on the “forehead” indicating a mere intellectual assent, or in the “hand” implying a more active cooperation. These shall drink the “wine of the wrath of God” out of the “cup of his indignation” which indicates that such feel the manifestation of God's displeasure, being compelled to drink a bitter dose. Do you see how full of symbols the book of Revelation is? To take these symbols literally would be extremely foolish. Jesus is not a literal lamb, a literal beast is not worshipped, it does not have a literal image. Literal marks are not made on literal foreheads and hands. These are all symbols which, when correctly interpreted, beautifully represent profound truths and tell of tremendous events to come.

Verses 10 and 11 say that those who worship the symbolic beast and his symbolic image shall drink of the symbolic wine of wrath from the symbolic cup. From this point forward the teachers of eternal torment insist that symbolisms cease and that the remainder of the text must be taken literally, that the words “he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone” and “the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever” is exactly and literally what it says. But is this reasonable? No, it is entirely unreasonable. There is no justification for such a view. On the contrary, a fair and reasonable person must conclude that because of all the other symbols and the highly symbolic nature of the entire book, these expressions must be symbolic and not literal.

Those who insist on a literal interpretation of this portion of the text are in a further difficulty. The text says that the torments takes place “in the presence of the Lamb.” If the torment with fire and brimstone is literal, so must the lamb be also: an animal, the young offspring of a sheep. By what reasoning can you say that the one is literal and the other is not? Both occur in the same sentence. If one is literal, so is the other.

So we have established beyond the shadow of a doubt that the torment by fire and brimstone of the worshippers of the beast and his image is symbolic. What then does it really mean? We turn to Revelation 18:4 which also refers to the fall of Babylon, the nominal church systems of confusion: “Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.” So the scripture under consideration simply means that all who remain in Babylon, either in spirit or in name, are in opposition to the word of God. Those who do not “come out of her” will be subject to torment and vexation so long as they are worshipping creeds, doctrines, and organizations of men. The remembrance of this distress is shown in the smoke of torment and it will never be

forgotten. Those who are finally brought out of these systems will forever remember how they were tormented. They will have learned an everlasting lesson.

The next text cited as a proof of eternal torment is Matthew 25:41: “Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.” This is from the parable of the Sheep and Goats and describes the fate of the disapproved ones at the end of the Millennial age. Is there anything in this scripture to indicate that those in the fire are preserved alive? Have you ever heard of a preserving fire? Of course you haven't. Fire always destroys and consumes. Fire is a symbol of destruction; everlasting fire is a symbol of everlasting destruction, the second death, from which there is no resurrection. Notice that in this case it is fire that is prepared for the devil and his angels. We know exactly what is going to happen to the devil: “That through death, he [Jesus] might destroy him that had the power of death; that is, the devil.” (Hebrews 2:14) This confirms that fire means destruction.

This explanation also applies to Revelation 20:10: “And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone ... and shall be tormented day and night, for ever, and ever.” Brimstone, or sulfur is one of the most destructive elements known. When paired with fire it symbolizes utter destruction. The torment “for ever and ever” means this punishment is everlasting.

Now we consider the next text:

“Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee. It is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than, having two hands or two feet, to be cast into everlasting fire. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee. It is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than, having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire.”--Matthew 18:8,9

These are the words of Jesus. Did Jesus advocate self-mutilation? Obviously not. He healed men, he restored their hands and feet and eyes. We must conclude that symbolic terms are being used here. The scripture simply and powerfully teaches that it is better for a Christian to cut off and eliminate from his life things as dear to him as a hand, foot, or an eye if such things would prevent him from making his calling and election sure. Such eradication would be better than to fail of his calling and lose his eternal existence in the second death.

As we have previously seen, everlasting fire means everlasting destruction. “Thus saith the Lord!” Thus we have determined what the Lord really says. The correct interpretations fully satisfy us. They square with the ransom, they are in full accordance with the divine

plan, and they comport with God's character of justice, wisdom, love and power. They cause us to love and praise God.

The Trinity

Consider the scriptures cited to prove the false and confusing doctrine of the Trinity: that God is three persons yet one God.

“For there are three that bear record in heaven; the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; . . . and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness on earth.”--1 John 5:7,8

This scripture certainly appears to be an unanswerable argument to support the doctrine of the Trinity, but since it is so contrary to reason--and we know God to be eminently reasonable--we suspect something is wrong with the translation. Let us examine the scripture in the original language. The Diaglott is an excellent authority for this purpose. There we find the text omitted and a footnote as follows:

“This text concerning the heavenly witness is not contained in any Greek manuscript which was written earlier than the fifth century. It is not cited by any of the Greek ecclesiastical writers; nor by any of the early Latin fathers, even when the subjects upon which they treated would naturally have led them to appeal to its authority. It is therefore evidently spurious; and was first cited . . . in the latter end of the fifth century; but by whom is of no great moment, as its design must be obvious to all.”

It seems that we must be on the alert for forgeries too! This is not a “Thus saith the Lord.”

Then we have Philippians 2:6 which says of Jesus, “Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God.” This appears to say that Jesus was equal with God and did not consider it wrong to be so, that he did not consider such equality as robbing God of anything. Again we sense something is wrong and ask, “Is this scripture correctly translated?” Going back to the original Greek, we find that the King James Version has added one small word and omitted one small word, completely reversing the meaning of the text. Thus the expression “thought it not robbery to be equal with God,” should read, “thought not by robbery, to be equal with God.” Accordingly, the Diaglott correctly renders the text: “Who, though being in God's form, yet did not meditate a usurpation to be like God.” Here Jesus, the humble and obedient son of God, is contrasted with the arrogant and disobedient Satan, who is quoted as saying:

“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.”--Isaiah 14:13,14

Thus instead of proving the Trinity, the correct translation of Philippians 2:6 disproves it.

Let us get the correct perspective on this subject. Although Jesus did say, "I, and my Father are one" (John 10:30), he prayed on behalf of his disciples, "That they may be one, even as we are one" (John 17:22). How was he one with the Father? He was one with the Father as he wants us to be one with him: one in mind, purpose, sympathy, love, and good works--THE SAME CHARACTER. That's why he could say, "He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father." (John 14:9) In other words, "I am patterned after the Father; I am a model of Him. I have the same characteristics."

Thus understanding the subject of the Trinity we are spared such absurdities as God himself being out of conscious existence at the conception of Jesus, that the child Jesus was God, that the man Jesus prayed to himself, that his agony of prayer in Gethsemane was farcical, that his desperate cry on the cross "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me," was mere play-acting, that God died on the cross, and that he resurrected himself.

Finally the doctrine of the Trinity does not square with the ransom which requires the sacrifice of a perfect human life in the place of Adam. Nor is it in accordance with the divine plan which places Jesus in the future role of mediator between God and man, an impossibility if he is God.

"For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."--1 Timothy 2:5

No Future Probation

Let us consider the scripture upon which is based the false doctrine that there is no future probation, that salvation is in this life only, that the world will have no future chance for life:

"Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."--2 Corinthians 6:2

Here again the interpretation does not square with the ransom. Since Christ died for all, all must have an opportunity for life, all must be saved from death. This is God's provision:

"Who will have all men to be saved, and come unto the knowledge of the truth."--1 Timothy 2:4

In this life only a few have had an opportunity for salvation. Countless millions have lived and died without even having heard the name of Christ. So they must first be saved from death in a resurrection on the earth, then be brought to a knowledge of the truth of God's wonderful provision for them.

Is it in accordance with the divine plan? No, it is not. A future probation is plainly taught by Acts 3:21 which tells of the “times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.” So the interpretation given this scripture is obviously incorrect since it denies the testimony of all God's holy prophets since the world began.

What does it really mean? Again we look closely at the original language and find an error in translation which makes all the difference. Instead of “the” accepted time, and “the” day of salvation, it should read “an” accepted time, and “a” day of salvation. There is a day of salvation now, and a day of salvation to come. These two salvations are contrasted by two scriptures:

“Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life; and few there be that find it.” --Matthew 7:14

This describes the present narrow way of sacrifice taken by the church of Christ. Only a few, a “little flock,” are separated from the world. This class, “by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory, and honor, and immortality, eternal life.” (Romans 2:7) This is a difficult and restricted salvation with the correspondingly high reward of the divine nature. Isaiah tells of the other salvation to be offered to all the remainder of mankind during the Millennial kingdom:

“And a highway shall be there, and a way; and it shall be called, The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those; the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein.”--Isaiah 35:8

This is the way to human perfection and eternal life on earth to all the willing and obedient. It is a different and easier way. What a wonderful plan! Not the gloomy prospect of the vast majority of mankind unsaved and eternally damned, but the delightful prospect of everyone saved from death and then given an opportunity, under ideal conditions to attain restitution, a glorious resurrection. This truly comports with God's character and is in accordance with his plan.

How to Know What's True

We find that it is not always easy to determine whether a certain interpretation of scripture is a “Thus saith the Lord” or not. While most scriptures are plain, many require careful analysis and the application of certain tests before the true word of the Lord on the subject may be ascertained.

There is one quick and easy test that includes and overrides all the others. This test is available only to the initiated, those to whom Jesus referred when he said:

“It is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.”--Matthew 13:11

This comprehensive test is suggested by one of the last acts of Jesus just before his ascension:

“Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures; and said unto them, Thus it is written.”--Luke 24:45,46

How did he “open their understanding”? Did he perform a miracle whereby his disciples automatically understood without the exercise of their reasoning faculties? I don't think so. I think he opened their understanding by opening the divine plan to them. He gave them an outline of God's plan of salvation. He told them of the fall, his death as a ransom, his resurrection, the call of the church, their work of preaching the gospel of the kingdom to come among all nations. This is confirmed by the context. Then and only then could they understand “Thus it is written” or “Thus saith the Lord.” Once they knew the master plan, all the prophetic utterances of the past fell into place. They now fitted, dove-tailed, harmonized, and made sense to the disciples. As Jesus said in verse 44:

“These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you; that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning me.”

What is the supreme and all-embracing test to be applied to scriptural interpretation? It is the question, “Is it in accordance with the divine plan?”

Someone may say, “We seem to be going around in circles. You imply that we must understand the divine plan before we can interpret the scriptures. But how can we understand the plan unless we first interpret the scriptures?” Good question. We answer by asking another question. How did the disciples of Jesus back there know of the divine plan? Jesus told them. “Then opened he their understanding,” the text says. We know of the plan because he has done the same for us. He has also given us, the harvest church at this end of the age, an understanding of the divine plan of the ages. Through his wonderful providences and the rich endowment of the Holy Spirit, the Lord has enlightened and stimulated the minds of certain servants, particularly one special servant. He has caused books to be written which present the plan clearly and accurately. Today there is no excuse for the consecrated to be ignorant of the plan. We have the incomparable, topically arranged, six volumes of *Studies in the Scriptures*; we have the Reprints a veritable treasure-

trove of Bible truth, we have Tabernacle Shadows a dramatic pantomime of the plan, we have the Berean Manual containing Bible comments and teacher's helps which are the very essence of spiritual wisdom. There are other instructive books as well. All these are the Lord's provision. Let us avail ourselves of them fully. To do otherwise would be ungrateful and unthankful.

So let us thus keep the plan always fresh and vital in our minds. What will be the result? If we do this, we will know the divine plan of the ages so thoroughly that any wrong interpretation of scripture will instantly alert us. It will ring a bell. We will recognize it to be false because it is not in accordance with the divine plan of the ages which we have been taught and know so well.

“Thus Saith the Lord!”

Thy Kingdom Come

“After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.”--Matthew 6:9,10

JESUS referred to a kingdom when he taught his disciples to pray. Some doubt whether it really is a literal kingdom of God on earth for which we are to pray. When they read, “the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21), some conclude that the kingdom spoken of is only a condition of heart within a Christian, not a literal kingdom. This is a mistake. A better translation of Luke 17:21 reads, “The kingdom of God is (to be) in your midst,” or “among you.” It is indeed to be a literal kingdom exercising supreme rule upon the earth, with Christ as king, causing God's will to be done on earth.

The conditions we find on earth today are surely not God's will. We know that God is good, but all about us there is every kind of evil. We see selfishness, dishonesty, immorality and hate. There are robberies, murders, and all sorts of violence. Accidents and calamities constantly occur. Many people of the earth face starvation; sickness, suffering and death are everywhere. Over all hangs the threat of atomic war, pollution, and anarchy, causing men's hearts to fail for fear. This seems to be the normal course of events. It is hard to conceive of God's will ever being done on earth.

But at one time there was a kingdom on earth in which God's will was done as it is in heaven. It was many thousands of years ago. God had prepared the earth for man's habitation. He had provided an infinite variety of vegetation, fruits and herbs. By his power, fish, fowl and beasts had been brought forth after their kind. Then God created his earthly masterpiece: MAN, a noble creature, only a little lower than the angels.

“So God created man in his own image. In the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them. ... And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. ... And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.”--Genesis 1:27-31; 2:8

We also read that man was given dominion over the fish of the sea, the fowl of the air, and over every living thing upon the earth. Here in Eden was a little kingdom with Adam as king and Eve as queen. They were blessed of God and had a dominion over the earth. All of it was pronounced by God himself as being “very good.” God's will was indeed done on earth in that kingdom. In reference to this first pair, we read:

“And God blessed them. And God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish [fill] the earth, and subdue it.”--Genesis 1:28

They had been entrusted with the marvelous power of procreation, of creating their own kind. As they would multiply, the garden of Eden would not have been large enough. They would need to push outward. To do this, they would “subdue” the earth and develop it, using the original Eden, that God-given model, as a sample and source of nursery stock for a continued perfect food supply. Thus the boundaries of Eden would be extended until it eventually covered the earth. What a wonderful prospect: a race of perfect human creatures, each one an earthly image of God himself, living forever in happiness upon the earth under ideal conditions. But something happened to change things.

“And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat. But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.”--Genesis 2:16,17

God said, in effect: You must render unto me your full and complete obedience. I could have created you so you had no other choice. I could have made you like the animals with their compelling instincts so that you would obey me by compulsion. But you are my son, made in my own image and likeness, with a free will, with freedom of choice. I want you to always choose the good and right way because you want to. Now I am going to put you to the test, to prove your obedience to me. I have planted in this garden every tree that is good for food. There are endless varieties. Now, “of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.” (Genesis 2:16,17)

This test of obedience was eminently fair. It placed no hardship upon Adam. It did not limit his food supply in the least. The supply remained more than ample and the variety was practically limitless. Of every tree in the world that was good for food, the fruit of only one tree was prohibited.

It may be argued that the penalty for disobedience in such a small matter--death for eating a forbidden fruit--was too severe. But it was not the degree of disobedience, but the simple act of disobedience that was to be punished. God purposely made the test easy so that there would be no excuse on Adam's part. He could not say, “This thing is too hard for me. What you are asking is beyond my capabilities.” God had every right to demand complete obedience from the man he had created. This man was made with the ability to “put forth his hand, and take of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever.” (Genesis 3:22) God cannot tolerate sin forever. By

definition, sin is disobedience to God's law. For continued life, obedience was absolutely essential.

Then occurred the greatest tragedy the world has ever known, a tragedy resulting in the suffering and death of billions of people. In spite of what the Lord had said to Adam, Satan told Eve a great lie, saying: "Ye shall not surely die." (Genesis 3:4) Eve was deceived but Adam was not deceived. He ate of the forbidden fruit deliberately and with full knowledge of the sentence he was incurring; he preferred to die with his wife. Thus Adam failed in the simple test of obedience that God had required, and the penalty must be imposed. God said to Adam:

"In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."--Genesis 3:19

But if it was Adam who was sentenced to death, why do we die also? It is because we have an inheritance of sin and death. All of Adam's children were born after he had sinned, after he was driven from the garden. Thus they were all born imperfect and prone to sin. As it is written, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me." (Psalms 51:5) This includes your ancestors and mine. The death sentence of father Adam passed upon them and has come down to us.

"Wherefore by one man sin entered the world, and death by sin; so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."--Romans 5:12

Although God's justice condemned man to death, God's love provided a way for him to live again. God said, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave." (Hosea 13:14) God sent his only begotten son to earth to lay down his unforfeited life in the place of Adam's forfeited life, to thus redeem Adam and all his race from death. Jesus paid a corresponding price, or ransom, for Adam.

"For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."--1 Corinthians 15:21,22

There will indeed be a literal kingdom of God on earth with Christ as king to not only resurrect the dead, but also to restore all the willing and obedient from the condition of sin and death, bringing them up to human perfection which Adam had before he sinned. The whole earth will be made into a beautiful garden as Eden was for the eternal enjoyment of all mankind. Then the prayer "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven," will be answered.

“Unto Us a Child Is Born”

“For unto us a child is born; unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder.”--Isaiah 9:6

“And there were in the same country shepherds, abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night; and lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them: Fear not; for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people; for unto you is born, this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: Ye shall find the babe, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was, with the angel, a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying: Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.” --Luke 2:6-14

WHEN God began his earthly creation, there was great joy in heaven. Many people think heavenly beings are grim, ghostly creatures, without natural emotion--always serious and somewhat terrifying. They sometimes picture them as avenging angels with fiery swords. If a heavenly being suddenly appeared, it would scare them half to death. The early disciples of Jesus felt the same way because when Jesus appeared to them after his resurrection, “they were terrified, and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit.” (Luke 24:37)

Some nominal Christians, expecting to become angels when they die, try to conform themselves to what they think angels are by becoming dull, emotionless and grim, mistaking this for Godly piety. But when God laid the foundations of the earth, there were great and spontaneous demonstrations of pure joy by all his spirit creation: “When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.” (Job 38:7) Do you want to be like an angel? How long has it been since you shouted for joy? We know the angels of God are happy and joyful creatures. How could it be otherwise? They always behold the face of our great, loving heavenly Father, the one of whom David said: “In thy presence is fulness of joy, and at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.” (Psalms 16:11) When God said, “Let us make man in our image, and after our likeness” (Genesis 1:26), he was describing happy, joyful creatures. He made them thus and placed them in a beautiful garden--a joy to live in and a joy to behold.

How quickly can joy turn to sorrow! The greater the capacity one has for happiness, the deeper the sorrow one can experience. Eve was broken-hearted over what she had done. She had eaten of the fruit of the tree which God had forbidden and she had induced her

husband to eat of it. She had not really meant to do this. She had been outsmarted. It had all happened so quickly.

When God asked her, “What is this that thou has done?” she answered pitifully: “The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.” (Genesis 3:13) In other words: “The serpent fooled me, deceived me, took advantage of my trustfulness and inexperience, posing as a friend, a wise counselor; he promised the reward of a special knowledge of good and evil. He beguiled me!”

Poor woman! She had indeed gained a knowledge of differentiating good from evil. Now she knew that everyone did not tell the truth, that the serpent Satan was a liar. But at what tremendous cost was this knowledge attained! It was indeed merciful that Adam and Eve did not at once realize the full enormity of their loss--the loss of life for themselves and for billions of their descendants--the turning of the world into one vast graveyard. Had they realized it, they would have been overwhelmed.

But the immediate loss of Eden was bad enough, and it hurt. To be driven from an environment of love, beauty and tranquility into a world of hostility, ugliness and turmoil was painful. No one likes to be beguiled or deceived. So Eve quite naturally resented it. She must have been greatly incensed at the serpent, Satan, who had maneuvered her into this situation. It was exactly at this point that God, in his great mercy and wisdom, gave her a ray of hope. It was a faint light, only a glimmer, but at least it was something, something she could lay hold upon and treasure in her heart in the dark days to come. The Lord gave her this ray of hope only indirectly. He was not speaking to her. He was speaking to the serpent, but she overheard it. God said, “I will put enmity between thee and the woman.” Oh yes! Eve already felt that enmity. She was already wondering how she might avenge herself upon the one who had beguiled her.

“I will put enmity between thee and the woman; and between thy seed and her seed. It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” --Genesis 3:15

Yes it was indeed a faint hope, but it was something. Eve hungrily grasped at the promise. Thinking about it later and talking it over with Adam, she understood it to mean that one of her children would, somehow, bruise the head of the serpent, Satan--deal him a mortal wound and perhaps in some way bring about a restoration of that which was lost.

Eve's Children Fuel Her Hopes

One can imagine how eagerly she waited for her first child. When her firstborn son came, Eve thought, “Perhaps this is the one! Perhaps this is the promised seed. Oh, I hope so!” She happily

exclaimed, "I have gotten a man from the Lord!" (Genesis 4:1) In other words: "This is the man the Lord promised, this is the man who shall bruise the serpent's head. Unto us a child is born; unto us a son is given!"

But their firstborn son, Cain, was a cruel disappointment to his parents. Instead of bruising the serpent's head, he "rose up against Abel, his brother, and slew him." (Genesis 4:8) Instead of bringing life, he brought death. They never fully recovered from that disappointment. When during the centuries of their long lives the head of Satan remained unbruised and Eden unredeemed, hope must have dimmed and almost died in their hearts.

They just didn't understand. It was not the due time to understand. They didn't understand that although the promised seed would be the "seed of the woman," it would not be the seed of the man. They didn't understand that the slaying of animals to provide skins for their covering prefigured the death of someone as a corresponding price to cover their sins. They didn't understand that thousands of years would be required to develop and mature the various features of God's plan of redemption before Eve would be avenged and Eden would be reclaimed.

Let us draw the curtain on 4000 years of human experience of human misery, pain, sickness, despair and death with Eve's old enemy, the serpent Satan, reigning as god of this world. Adam and Eve have finally died in disappointment, seeing numerous generations of descendants without having seen the promised seed. In every generation thereafter, for 4000 years men had vainly looked and longed for that seed of promise.

Then one day in the tiny village of Bethlehem, not far from the site of old Eden, a descendant of Mother Eve, a young woman named Mary, delivered her firstborn son. Whereas Eve hoped that her son Cain was the "man from the Lord" sent to save them, Mary knew her son Jesus was "that man." Had not the angel Gabriel told her? Had not the child been supernaturally conceived? Had not the angelic choir joyfully announced him as the "Saviour, which is Christ the Lord"? Had not the shepherds told her all about it? Yes, Eve only hoped but Mary knew!

The Birth of Jesus

The announcement of the birth of Jesus to the shepherds is one of the most hauntingly beautiful accounts ever written. The shepherds near Bethlehem were keeping watch over their flock by night. The night was dark and peaceful. Sheep herding is a lonely occupation and a strenuous one. Grazing sheep range far and wide and need constant watching lest they stray. Being defenseless creatures, they must be

watched over by shepherds, especially at night, lest lions, bears or wolves attack them while they sleep. These shepherds, although humble men, were necessarily rough and tough. They were almost constantly isolated, not used to the stir and excitement of city life. The account says they were “abiding in the field.” This was their home. Their roof was the vault of heaven. They lived under the stars. There was a sameness and monotony in their lives. Every day was the same. They grazed, watered, rested and guarded the sheep. Day in and day out, in silence broken only by the plaintive cries of the sheep, the rustle of the wind in the grass, and the occasional distant howl of the wolf. Nothing exciting ever happened until that night!

Then, suddenly, they saw the most glorious sight that human eyes have ever beheld! “The glory of the Lord shone round about them.” This was no ordinary glory. This was the glory of Jehovah God himself! There is no greater glory.

We do not know the exact form or dimension this glory took, but it was a most magnificent sight! Is it any wonder that “they were sore afraid”? Then came the reassuring voice of the angel of the Lord:

“Fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people; for unto you is born, this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.”--Luke 2:10,11

We may think we have witnessed something wonderful when we have attended a great symphony concert or a grand opera performance, but these pale into miserable insignificance when compared with what followed the angel's announcement that night: “A multitude of the heavenly host praising God!” We sometimes refer to the best music we know as “heavenly music,” but this was really heavenly music with real angelic voices, exquisitely delightful to the human ear. That is what the entranced shepherds heard, men to whom “nothing exciting ever happened!”

One might ask, “Why was all this wasted on simple shepherds? Why was not so glorious an announcement made to the great religious leaders of the day--to the Chief Priests, Pharisees, and Scribes?” It was a fine demonstration of God's established principle: “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.” (James 4:6) These humble shepherds were willing and enthusiastic couriers of the Good News. They didn't waste a moment to visit the child. They said:

“Let us now go, even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass; which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger.”--Luke 2:15,16

The sight of the holy Child had a peculiar effect on these normally silent and taciturn shepherds. Their tongues were loosed. They talked! How they talked! They went about, telling everyone they met the glorious things they had seen and heard, and about the wonderful child to whom they had been led:

“And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.”--Luke 2:17

What was the saying here referred to? What had the angel said? They would never forget that angelic voice and those wonderful words he spoke for as long as they lived: “Fear not; for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born, this day, in the city of David, a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.” In their enthusiasm, the shepherds told many people. The record says that “all they that heard it, wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.” (Luke 2:18) Then it adds, “But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart.” (Luke 2:19) She treasured everything said about Jesus and she would remember them in the days to come.

A Perfect Baby

Every young mother thinks her baby is the most perfect, the most unusual baby in the world. Mary must have thought so too, but unlike all the other mothers in the world, she was right! Her baby was the only perfect baby ever born, and the most unusual baby--the only begotten son of the most high God! Mary had “pondered in her heart” the words of the angel Gabriel to her when he had announced the forthcoming birth of Jesus, saying that her child would “be called the son of the highest, the son of God.” Now she had heard the testimony of the shepherds, that the angel had called her child “a saviour which is Christ, the Lord.” How beautiful, and how natural, that she should ponder in her heart these things about her precious baby.

The account of the events surrounding Jesus' birth are beautifully but cryptically written. All the needful facts are given but the non-essentials are not. This brevity is necessary, of course, otherwise the Bible would be too voluminous and unwieldy. But sometimes I'm a little curious about the details that have been omitted and speculate about how it might have been.

For example, we read that Joseph, accompanied by Mary, journeyed to Bethlehem to be taxed. The Roman decree was that each person must go to his native city, and register for the tax rolls. Though Joseph was a carpenter in Nazareth of Galilee, his native city was Bethlehem. So he went there to be taxed. But that's the last we hear about taxation. Surely sometime soon after Jesus' birth Joseph must

have gone to the government offices in Bethlehem to register and pay his tax. If Mary pondered in her heart the things concerning her child, Joseph must have done so aswell. The record says he was “a just man.” He must also have been loving and kind for the Lord to have selected him as Mary's husband and Jesus' foster-father and earthly protector.

With these things in mind, let us see what might have happened. All new fathers are insufferably proud. As Joseph made his way to register for taxation, his mind was full of the wonderful events surrounding the child's birth. He could not keep the thing to himself. He probably told the man ahead of him in line, as well as the man behind him: “My wife Mary had a baby! A fine boy! A most beautiful child! Absolutely perfect! I've seen many babies, but never one like this. And they predict great things for him too.” The men would laugh, and congratulate him, winking at one another. “That's the way they all feel about the first,” they would say. “But come on, let's keep this line moving.”

Getting to the Roman registrar, Joseph would say: “I'm Joseph, the carpenter of Nazareth, in Galilee. My wife Mary is with me. And there is now another member of the family to register. My wife has just given birth to a boy! A most beautiful and unusual child.” “The child's name, please?” impatiently asked the registrar. “We're going to name him Jesus,” Joseph replied. “But let me tell you some wonderful things about him. Some shepherds in the field ...” “My dear man,” snapped the registrar waving him off, “don't you realize you're delaying Caesar's business?”

How astounded that Roman agent would have been had he realized that this baby he had no time for was the only begotten son of God, God's agent for the whole of creation. “Without him was not anything made that was made.” He was the Saviour of the world and Christ the Lord; Lord of lords, and King of kings; much greater than Caesar. His life, death and influence would shake the mighty Roman Empire to it's foundations and eventually cause its disappearance. He would be the ransom for all mankind. He would be raised from the dead, and be highly exalted to the right hand of God. His teachings would be written down in all the languages of the world and would spread from nation to nation, continent to continent, until it covered the earth. Eventually, together with 144,000 kings and priests, each far greater than the mighty Caesar Augustus, he would establish a kingdom on earth, raise the dead, and bring mankind to perfection and harmony with God!

Isaiah's Prophecy About Jesus' Birth

Centuries before the birth of Jesus, the prophet Isaiah had been allowed to pierce the veil of time and see this happy occasion of the birth of Jesus. Upon seeing it, he wrote with exultation, "Unto us a child is born!" But Isaiah saw still further than that. His prophetic vision leaped another thirty years and he saw, not the babe, but the perfect and mature man Jesus, offering himself as the corresponding price for the perfect man Adam, who had sinned. Isaiah added, almost in the same breath, "Unto us a son is given!" In other words, "This is the son of God, who became the son of man to become the Saviour, which is Christ the Lord."

When the redemptive work of the son is complete, Mother Eve will have had hersweet vengeance, which will be God's vengeance, upon the serpent who beguiled her. It will be the promised seed who will "lay hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan," and bind him for a thousand years (Revelation 20:2); then he will be exterminated. (Revelation 20:10) "Unto us a Son is given."

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."--John 3:16

What a precious gift! What an unspeakable gift! What overwhelming evidence of God's great love for us and for all mankind.

After saying "unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given," the prophet says, "And the government shall be upon his shoulder." There is a great fallacy in the nominal Christian world today. Taking as their authority the mistranslated scripture "The kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21), they teach that Christ rules only in the hearts of men, that when a man accepts Christ, Christ comes to that man; when all men have accepted him, he shall have fully come. They say that will constitute the kingdom of Christ.

Even the pagan Roman ruler, Herod, knew better than that. He was a hard and realistic man. When he heard from the wise men of the East that someone had been born King of the Jews, he gave no mystical meaning to it. He considered it a threat to his physical rulership of one segment of the Roman Empire. Believing in direct and decisive action, he went to the highest Jewish authorities he knew--the Chief Priests and Scribes, and demanded to know where, according to their prophets, this new king should be born. They quoted the prophecy of Micah (5:2):

"And thou, Bethlehem, in the Land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda; for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel."--Matthew 2:6

In other words, "The government shall be upon his shoulder."

Herod did not ascribe some symbolic meaning to this prophecy. He did not limit it to a mere spiritual rulership in the hearts of men. On the contrary, he considered his worst fears confirmed. Here was a definite threat that, unless he acted, the government might be wrested from the Roman Empire and vested in another king.



At that time it was the policy of Rome to rule the Jews as benevolently as possible, with “kid gloves” so to speak. Yet, the cynical Herod was so thoroughly convinced that Jesus imperiled the rule of Rome that, when his efforts to locate the child were

frustrated, he abandoned discretion and brutally “slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under.” (Matthew 2:16) Would he have taken such drastic action if he believed that Jesus was destined to rule only in the hearts of men?

In those days the Jews were in great expectation of their Messiah. They expected him to be a powerful leader who would literally reestablish the throne of David and break the Roman yoke right there in Palestine. They had no spiritual or heavenly hopes.

The early disciples also believed in a literal earthly government headed by Jesus. The only thing they were confused about was the time of its establishment, hoping that it would be immediately inaugurated. Later, when the holy spirit was given, they understood that it was to be in the future. But they still anticipated a kingdom on earth with Christ as king; they hoped to live as spirit beings and reign with him a thousand years. They expected that kingdom on earth to solve all the world's problems. They believed that “there shall be a resurrection of the dead,” and a “restitution of all things,” including the Adamic paradise.

After the death of the apostles and other early disciples, errors began to creep in. Men became increasingly impatient at the delay and sought to establish the kingdom themselves. A false system was set up and under this monstrosity of Satan, the truth of Christ's kingdom on earth all but disappeared. After the reformation there was a tendency to give a purely spiritual connotation to the earthly kingdom promises. It was then that the translation was rendered, “The kingdom of God is within you.” It should have actually read, “God's Royal Majesty is among you.” In other words: “The king is present. Christ is here. He is in your midst!”

At the end of the age, a great light began to dawn. In due time the returned Lord found a watching servant. Under the ministrations of “that faithful and wise servant” the brilliant and pure light of kingdom truth burst upon those who had eyes to see just as the heavenly light shone upon the shepherds near Bethlehem on that night so long ago. Those who had ears to hear appreciated the beautiful and harmonious features of God's divine Plan of the Ages. It was heavenly music to them like that which entranced the shepherds abiding in the field.

We know the full manifestation of God's kingdom is near, a literal and actual kingdom on the earth. The signs are numerous and unmistakable. With the establishment of the nation of Israel, the fig tree is budding. Men's hearts are failing them for fear. There has always been fear, but the prospect of atomic warfare has brought heart-failing fear to men, as they plainly see approaching: “A time of

trouble such as never was.” (Daniel 12:1) False prophets have arisen and deceived many, showing seemingly wonderful accomplishments, such as millions upon millions of books published, tens of thousands of converts to a Society, armies of people baptized. There are many other significant signs:

“When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh.”--Luke 21:28,31

Then he adds:

“When ye see these things come to pass, know ye [absolutely no doubt about it] that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand.”

That government shall be upon his shoulder. It will be a visible government taking strong, physical control of earth's affairs. It will bring such wondrous blessings, such a feast of fat things, that men will say: “This is what we've always wanted!” As Isaiah expresses it:

“It shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”--Isaiah 25:9

“Glad and rejoice,” the prophet said. “Good tidings of great joy,” the angel said that night. When the government, which is to be upon his shoulder, has done its work, it will come to pass “that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow ... and that every tongue should confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God, the Father.” (Philippians 2:10,11)

Living One's Life Over Again

Many years ago someone, out of the longings of his heart, wrote a poem entitled: “In the Land of Beginning Again.” The poet imagined a land where one could start one's life all over again from the beginning, while retaining every memory of the previous life. Thus every mistake of the past could be rectified, every decision that had proved wrong would be reversed. Sins of omission and commission which, in the previous life, had resulted in injury and grief to one's self and others, would be avoided. All the opportunities to bestow love, understanding, and happiness which were missed before could now be grasped. All the pain, heartaches, and regrets could be avoided. In this “Land of Beginning Again” one would know how to live, love and serve God because of the rich experience of the past. Life would be meaningful, full, and satisfying, free of doubt and corroding worry. The way would be clear. No matter what one made of his life before, one would have another chance. All the troubles and tribulations of the past, instead of being worse than useless torments, would be valuable guides. Remembering the lessons of the past, one would walk serenely and confidently in the right way.

I have long since forgotten the words but this is the impression I have of its content. It was a sad poem because it seemed so utterly impossible. It was just a desire, a cry of the soul. Any practical person knew such a thing was impossible. Yet the heart fervently wished it could be true, that it should be true, that the experiences of the present life, the lessons learned at the cost of so much pain and heartbreak, should not be wasted, that these lessons should, somehow, be useful in re-living and re-forming one's life! Death should not be the irrevocable end of human existence; there should be a Land of Beginning Again!

These are universal human longings. How many times have you heard the expression, "If I only had my life to live over again!" Or, "If I only knew then what I know now!" Or the despairing cry, "I know I was wrong; but now it is too late!"

Adam and Eve may have used that very expression: "Oh, to have another chance! Please give me one more chance!" This is a universal desire. The Bible says, "The desire of all nations [or peoples] shall come." (Haggai 2:7) The "Land of Beginning Again" is exactly what the kingdom will accomplish. The permission of evil has been for man's experience. It would have been futile and useless torment unless man were given an opportunity to use his experience. Such is the significance of these words from Job:

"If there be a messenger with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to show unto man his uprightness. Then he is gracious unto him and saith: Deliver him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom. His flesh shall be fresher than a child's. He shall return to the days of his youth."--Job 33:23-25

That will be "The Land of Beginning Again."

"Thus saith the Lord: Refrain thy voice from weeping and thine eyes from tears; for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord, and they shall come again from the land of the enemy."--Jeremiah 31:16

The present evil world under Satan's rule has been "the land of the enemy." The grave to which man's present existence has led is also "the land of the enemy." But they shall return to another land--to God's kingdom on earth under Christ, to the government that shall be upon his shoulder--a Land of Beginning Again!

"Therefore the redeemed of the Lord shall return and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head. They shall obtain gladness and joy and sorrow and mourning shall flee away."--Isaiah 51:11

"And the work of righteousness shall be peace, and the effect of righteousness, quietness, and assurance forever. And my people shall

dwelt in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.”--Isaiah 32:17,18

What a wonderful plan, what “good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people!” It is our high calling to be the administrators of that glorious kingdom!

What Is God Doing in the Earth Today?

[A dialog between Paul and Timothy.]

Timothy: In view of the disturbing things that are happening in the world, this is a good and timely question. Indeed, what is God doing in the earth today? He appears to be doing nothing, even though he is all-powerful. He is a just God, but injustice and oppression are allowed to prevail on every hand. He is all-wise, but stupidity and ignorance are rampant in the earth. He is loving and compassionate, yet calamities, misfortunes, and cruelties are permitted to occur. It would almost seem that God has lost control of earth's affairs. What is the answer, Paul?

Paul: Let me assure you, Timothy, that God has not lost control of earth's affairs. He is very much the master of the situation. According to his plan and under his direction, powerful forces are working behind the scenes for the good of mankind. Wonderful things are about to happen.

Timothy: How can we know what is going on behind the scenes?

Paul: We are given the information in the Bible. Written thousands of years ago by holy men of God, it reveals God's plan of the ages. The Bible foretold centuries ago what is now happening in the earth. It tells of tremendous events that are to come to pass in the near future for the benefit of mankind.

Timothy: Can we be sure that these Bible prophecies refer to the time in which we are now living?

Paul: There can be no doubt about it. One ancient prophecy in particular traces history from the time it was given to the present day, with an uninterrupted sequence of events. There can be no doubt that the yet unfulfilled portion applies now and to the immediate future. This prophecy is so extraordinary that it may be described as history written in advance.

Timothy: This is very interesting! Please tell me about it.

Paul: It is found in the second chapter of Daniel. At that time the kingdom of Babylon ruled the world. It was the first universal empire and Nebuchadnezzar was its king. The king had a remarkable dream one night, and it disturbed him greatly. It was such a vivid dream that he knew it must have an important significance. So he called upon his wise men to interpret the dream for him, but they could not do so. Then God, who had given Nebuchadnezzar the dream, revealed the interpretation to the prophet Daniel, and Daniel went before the king. This is what happened:

“The king said to Daniel ... Art thou able to make known unto me the dream which I have seen, and the interpretation thereof? Daniel answered in the presence of the king, and said, ... There is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days. . . . Thy dream, and the visions of thy head upon thy bed, are these. . . . Thou, O king, sawest, and behold, a great image. ... This image's head was of fine gold, his breast and his arms of silver, his belly and his thighs of brass, his legs of iron, his feet part of iron and part of clay. Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and brake them to pieces. Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken to pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, that no place was found for them. And the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.” --Daniel 2:26-35

Timothy: What an unusual dream! I can well understand king Nebuchadnezzar's anxiety to know its meaning. I, too, would like to know. What did the image represent?

Paul: It represented a succession of universal, or worldwide, empires, of which Babylon was the first. Let us now read Daniel's interpretation. He is speaking to Nebuchadnezzar:

“Thou art this head of gold. And after thee shall arise another kingdom inferior to thee; and another third kingdom of brass, which shall bear rule over all the earth. And the fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron; forasmuch as iron breaketh in pieces and subdueth all things. And as iron that breaketh all these, shall it break in pieces and bruise. And whereas thou sawest the feet and toes part of potter's clay and part of iron, the kingdom shall be divided. But there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, forasmuch as thou sawest the iron mixed with miry clay. And as the toes of the feet were part of iron and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly broken. And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed. And the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. Forasmuch as thou

sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter. And the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure.”--Daniel 2:38-45

Timothy: Daniel told us that the image's head of gold represented ancient Babylon, but the succeeding kingdoms are not named. Are we now able to identify these subsequent world empires?

Paul: DYes, Timothy; we can identify them very accurately. It is a matter of history. After Babylon there arose another universal empire illustrated by the image's breast and arms of silver. This, as history shows, was Medo-Persia. Then Greece, represented by the belly and thighs of copper, conquered Medo-Persia. Then in turn it gave way to Rome.

The Roman Empire, the image's legs of iron, ruled the world at the time of Jesus' birth. It was indeed an iron empire, exceedingly strong and ruthless; and it endured longer than its predecessors. In fact, traces of it still exist in the various governments of Europe. This brings us to modern times without a break in sequence.

Timothy: But what did the stone represent and what was foretold by its striking and destroying the image, then filling the whole earth?

Paul: Just as the various sections of the image represented universal kingdoms, the stone also represents a universal kingdom. As it was hewn without hands, this kingdom is not of human fabrication, but is of divine origin. It arrives and makes itself felt in the days of the kingdoms or governments represented by the ten toes of the image. It strikes and destroys the entire image. This shows that by the setting up of God's righteous government under Christ, every evil rule over mankind must be eliminated. Then the stone becomes a mountain and fills the earth. This is the kingdom for which we are taught to pray, “Thy kingdom come; thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.” This prayer, which has been ascending for twenty centuries, will at last be answered, when God's kingdom takes full control of all earth's affairs. It was foretold that this would happen in what Daniel calls “the time of the end,” or “the latter days.” We are now living in those days. One age is ending, and another is beginning. The great universal kingdom of God is about to manifest itself to the world. There are many other prophecies of similar import. So let us not accuse God of inaction. He is now preparing the earth for his kingdom. He is plowing that he might sow. He is wounding that he might heal. He is making known to those who will hear, the great blessings which are about to come. This is what he is doing in the earth today.

The present calamities and tribulations of men are permitted for their experience so that when the blessings of God's kingdom come, they will be glad and rejoice in its righteousness. "This sore travail hath God given to the sons of man, to be exercised therewith." (Ecclesiastes 1:13) Then, as Isaiah states it,

"It shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation."--Isaiah 25:9

What Is the Soul?

MANY believe that when a man appears to die, he is really changed into a spirit being and continues to live in a higher form. They compare a man's death to a crawling worm which goes to sleep in a cocoon and appears to die, then is transformed into a beautiful butterfly, able to freely navigate the air. They say that every man has within himself an immortal soul that cannot die, and that is released when he seems to die. This soul is supposed to go either to a heaven of bliss or a hell of torment depending upon the man's deeds in his temporary life upon the earth. This is not what the Bible teaches.

The Bible tells us that man was created perfect and that the earth was given to him for his permanent home. We know from Genesis 3:22 that perfect food was provided for him, that he might "put forth his hand, and take and eat, and live forever." He was to live forever upon the earth, to have children, and fill the earth with a perfect human race. When he was put to the test, no heaven was promised for obedience, nor a hell of torment for disobedience. The prospect God presented to Adam was simply that of life or death:

"In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die."--Genesis 2:17

If a hell of eternal torment were the penalty for disobedience, would not this have been the time and place for God to tell Adam about it? Would God not have given Adam prior notice of the penalty he risked receiving? Even after Adam had sinned, God said not a word about a hell of torment awaiting him. When God pronounced sentence upon Adam, he said, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." (Genesis 3:19) The penalty was, simply, death. Many heathen religions teach that every human being has an immortal soul, but not the Bible. The expression "immortal soul" is nowhere to be found in the Bible.

A concise description of the human soul is given when Adam was created:

“And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul.”--Genesis 2:7

God designed the intricacies of the human body and planned all its functions to the minutest detail. Then he formed the body of Adam using the elements of the earth, which the ancient record calls “the dust of the ground.” There it lay, on the green grass of Eden, complete and perfect in every respect. But it did not move. Its eyes did not see. Its ears did not hear. Its heart did not beat. Its brain and nervous system received and transmitted no impressions. It had no thoughts. This body lacked just one thing: the breath of life! It wasn't breathing! So God “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.” God simply inflated the man's lungs with the air necessary for any form of life on earth. Suddenly the body breathed and lived! The heart began to beat, carrying the life-containing blood to all parts of the body. The brain awakened, the eyes opened, and the man became a living soul! What is a soul? A soul is the combination of body and breath; it is a living, thinking creature. Man does not have a soul. Man is a soul.

When a man dies, the process is reversed. Genesis 2:7 describes the beginning of human life by saying that the Lord God “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul.” Psalm 146:4 describes the termination of a man's life: “His breath goeth forth; he returneth to his earth. In that very day his thoughts perish.”

It is just the reverse. We know the soul is not immortal because the Bible plainly states, “the soul, that sinneth, it shall die.” (Ezekiel 18:4,20) We have seen that when a man dies, “in that very day, his thoughts perish.” He is really, he is surely dead. God said to Adam, “Thou shalt surely die.” It was Satan, the father of lies, who first suggested that man has an immortal soul when he said, “Thou shalt not surely die.”

Is there no difference between the death of a man and the death of an animal? There is a great difference. Whereas animals remain dead, men shall live again! God says:

“I will ransom them from the power of the grave. I will redeem them from death. O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction.”--Hosea 13:14

“There shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.” (Acts 24:15) God takes note of the death of every person. He holds them lovingly in his memory. They are ransomed, they are precious in his sight. He will cause them to be restored to life and have an opportunity to live forever. “Ransom” means a “corresponding price,” the price corresponding to the value of the person held for ransom which, when paid, releases the captive.

Suppose a nobleman is convicted of an offense against his king. He is stripped of his estate and condemned for life to a penal colony at hard labor. His wife accompanies him. While he is a convict, he rears a family of children. They share his sentence and are not permitted to leave the penal colony so long as their father is confined there. Many years pass, and hope grows dim. But one day another nobleman, of equal dignity and rank, presents himself to the king. He offers himself and all his earthly goods as a substitute for the first nobleman, volunteering to serve his sentence in his stead, to ransom him. The king graciously accepts the offer and the first nobleman is released and restored to his estate. Because he is now free, the family he reared in captivity is also free. These children, who have never known real liberty because they were born prisoners under their father's sentence, are now redeemed and may leave their prison house and inherit the restored estate of their father together with him.

This is the state of Adam and his posterity. If some qualified person could be found who would offer himself to God as a substitute for Adam, who would willingly assume Adam's sentence of death, giving up his own life for Adam's, someone perfect as Adam was before he sinned and whom God could accept as a corresponding price for Adam, then Adam might be redeemed from death and all his descendants with him. But where could such a person be found? All are born sinners. "There is none righteous, no not one." (Romans 3:10) The situation appeared to be hopeless. It would seem that mankind must continue to go down into the pit of death. Then came to earth the grandest, most joyful and gracious news ever proclaimed among men. A ransom was found! The prophecy of Job was fulfilled:

"Then he is gracious unto him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit. I have found a ransom!"--Job 33:24

A babe was born in Bethlehem. His mother had been told, "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." The angels had announced:

"I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people; for unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord."--Luke 2:10,11

Christ the Lord! The second "nobleman" had at last made his appearance! This was the Logos, the only begotten son of God. He came to earth as a ransom for Adam. He was born a human being. He had a human mother, God was his Father. He was therefore born a perfect human being, inheriting none of the defects of Adamic stock. At this maturity Jesus was the exact and perfect equivalent of Adam before Adam sinned. Jesus was obedient unto death. By laying down his perfect, unforfeited life, Jesus ransomed Adam and his race:

“For as by one man's disobedience, many were made sinners; so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.”--Romans 5:19

With this understanding of the soul and the reality of death, and knowing how a ransom was provided to assure a resurrection for all, we find a new and wonderful significance in that beloved old text:

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son; that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”--John 3:16

What Say the Scriptures About Spiritism?

THROUGHOUT the entire world there is a great deal of interest in Spiritism. Millions of people attempt to communicate through mediums with what they think are the spirits of departed loved ones. They are convinced that they really do so because information known only to the deceased is often imparted using his voice and mannerisms. It is not only the ignorant and superstitious who are convinced. Recently a bishop of very high rank wrote a book about his supposed communications with his dead son. The ancient practice of witchcraft is also being revived. There is even a cult frankly worshipping Satan himself, with priests, altars and obscene ceremonies.

We also find much interest in the supernatural among scientists. Societies of top-ranking intellectuals have been formed for the investigation of what they call “psychic phenomena.” These have demonstrated under conditions which preclude fraud or trickery, that superhuman intelligences do indeed exist and that they do exert supernatural powers.

But there are some peculiarities common to all these spirit communications. The information secured is invariably trivial, inconsistent and unsatisfactory. There are frequent contradictions and even outright lies. Bad advice is given and eventually the spirits exhibit a low morality and make evil suggestions.

What does the Bible say about these things? It teaches that these intelligences that speak through mediums and perform supernatural acts are not the spirits of deceased humans. They cannot be because according to the Bible, there is no consciousness in death. Thus it is written,

“The living know that they shall die; but the dead know not anything. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might;

for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave whither thou goest.”--Ecclesiastes 9:5,10

When Adam disobeyed God, he was condemned to death. God told him the penalty for disobedience plainly in Genesis 2:17 saying, “Thou shalt surely die”--not be kept alive in a spirit form after death. It was Satan, the devil, the father of lies (John 8:44) who said, “Ye shall not surely die.” (Genesis 3:4) Whom should we believe?

The entire human race inherited death from father Adam. Their only hope is in a future resurrection from the dead. That is what a loving God has planned:

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”--John 3:16

“For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.”--1 Corinthians 15:21,22

“Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth.”--John 5:28,29

If the mysterious intelligences who communicate with mankind and perform supernatural acts are not the spirits of deceased humans, who and what are they? The Bible tells us that they are really fallen angels, “angels that sinned.” (See 2Peter 2:4.)

Let us trace the origin of these evil beings. Early in human history before the flood, God permitted the holy angels to come down to earth and, although invisible, to exert a good influence upon the people. This is implied by Hebrews 2:5. Satan suggested to these angels, “You can do much more good to mankind, and have more influence over them, if you will assume human bodies and appear as men among them. You can then be their visible leaders.” God had not authorized the angels to do this. Their estate was spiritual. Their habitation was in heaven but some of the angels listened to Satan, took on human bodies, and appeared among men. Jude 6 refers to these as “the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation.” Peter refers to them as spirits “which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah.” (1 Peter 3:20) Satan suggested to them, “Are not the daughters of men beautiful? Why don't you marry them? Take as many wives as you like. It will increase your influence among men still more.” Thus we read:

“And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all

which they chose. ... And there were giants in the earth in those days, and also after that; when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men, which were of old; men of renown.”--Genesis 6:1,2,4

These unauthorized hybrid offspring of the sons of God and the daughters of men were of unusual strength and vitality. Instead of being an influence for good, these angels now openly allied themselves with Satan. They and their giant offspring tyrannized mankind and saturated the earth with sin and violence:

“And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of the heart was only evil continually. The earth also was corrupt before God; and the earth was filled with violence.”--Genesis 6:5,11

God determined to terminate those conditions. This he did by bringing a great flood of water upon the earth, saving only righteous Noah and his family. All the unauthorized offspring of the angels died in the flood and the earth was cleansed of the violence and corruption which had prevailed under their tyranny.

The angels that sinned did not perish in the flood. When the waters rose, they survived by abandoning their human bodies and again assuming their spirit bodies. So these evil angels, or demons, are very much alive today. In 2 Peter 2:4 we read, “God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell.” The word “hell” is a mistranslation. In the Greek it is “Tartarus,” meaning the atmosphere of this earth. The scripture continues: “And delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment.” So we know who they are and where they are. They still exercise much evil influence over mankind by operating upon their minds and by spirit manifestations of various kinds. They are called in the Bible, “evil spirits,” “lying spirits,” and “seducing spirits.” Any contact with them is prohibited. Much of the wickedness and anarchy in the world today is incited by these evil spirits. Any communication with them is extremely dangerous. Sometimes they invade the minds of those submitting to them and take complete control, driving their victims to insanity. Many thousands in insane asylums today are really spirit obsessed; those who act as mediums are in special danger.

A favorite device of these spirits is to impersonate the dead. By thus making people believe that it is possible to talk with their dead relatives, they perpetuate Satan's lie, “Ye shall not surely die.” It is a cruel and heartless deception.

In league with their chief, Satan, they are the special enemies of those who are trying to follow righteousness, and are in constant warfare with such. Thus it is written:

“We wrestle not against flesh and blood [merely], but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness [or wicked spirits] in high places.”--Ephesians 6:12

The time will soon come when the kingdom of God will eliminate these wicked spirits and all evil from the earth. In the meantime, no prudent person who loves righteousness and values his sanity will have anything to do with spiritism or occultism in any form. These are snares of the adversary and should be shunned by all right-minded people.

Whatever Things

“And be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”--Romans 12:2

“To put off, according to the former course of life, that old man, corrupted by deceitful desires; and to be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and be ye clothed with that new man, who, according to God, has been formed in righteousness, and holiness of the truth.”--Ephesians 4:22-24, Diaglott

BOTH of these texts emphasize the importance of renewing our minds, of changing our thinking. In the Romans text Paul says if we do this we will be “transformed.” In the Ephesians text he says that by so doing we will change our former course of life, and be clothed with a “new man” or character, a character formed in the “righteousness and holiness of the truth.” In other words, we will become a new person; a new creature.

There is a power in thought second to no other power in the universe. The mind is almost powerful instrument. Man can accomplish almost anything he imagines he can. This fact is shown very early in the scriptures. When the world was young, a group of people that today would be called technicians, got their heads together in a place called Shinar. They decided to build a skyscraper, a literal skyscraper. They designed it, assembled the materials, and started construction. The account is in Genesis chapter 11. The Lord didn't want that tower built so he halted the work by confusing their language, by interfering with their cooperation one with another. On that occasion the Lord recognized the tremendous power of the mind, particularly of many minds concentrating on the same objective,. He said:

“And this they begin to do; and now nothing will be restrained ... which they have imagined to do!”--Genesis 11:6

Men have imagined the most fantastic things and by sheer power of mind, have made them come true. They imagined aviation, and we now can fly miles above the earth, even faster than the speed of sound, in luxurious comfort. They imagined radio and television, and these miracles have become so commonplace that we do not give them a second thought. They imagined nuclear fission, the unleashing of the ultimate energy of the universe. Today the world stands in terror of atomic warfare. They imagined space travel, visiting first the moon, then the planets. Today the moon has been visited. Just as those who started the Tower of Babel sought to “reach unto heaven,” these too have their objective of breaching the atmosphere of this earth and wandering at will throughout the universe.

What a man thinks, he does. Well has the wise man said, “As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.” (Proverbs 23:7) Because thought controls such power, it is appealed to on every hand.

A teacher appeals to it. An honest and God-fearing teacher can so direct a young mind that the child grows into an upright and honorable adult, providing the “good ground” in which the seeds of truth can flourish. On the other hand, a cynical and atheistic college professor can poison the mind of a student by subtly injecting ideas of evolution and higher criticism that blinds his mind to God's word.

The politician appeals to the mind by giving bias to the facts, suppressing those that do not serve his purpose and over-emphasizing those that do. He influences thinking, controls votes, and through votes, the destinies of nations.

The communist appeals to the mind. By mouthing high-sounding idealisms that are so contrary to the nature of an imperfect human and impossible to attain, and by contrasting violent actions, he holds entire nations and millions of people in hideous oppression without hope and without God.

The nominal religionist appeals to the mind. Ostensibly using the word of God hemisrepresents God to be a fiend of torment. Through this fear he holds millions of people in bondage and in ignorance of God's glorious character.

The advertising man appeals to the mind. With enticing words and often without regard to the health and welfare of the people, he extols his product, considering only the potential profit. Thousands of pamphlets, books, newspapers, and magazines, published in every land and in every tongue, all appeal to the mind, as do the radio and television programs that are producing a new generation of mentally lazy people who accept without thinking what is poured into their ears day and night.

Thus seen, thinking may be a dangerous matter in the absence of absolute knowledge upon which to base and exercise the reasoning faculties. Anything uttered as truth by someone is contradicted by someone else. "Truth is only relative," they say. They don't recognize it when they see it. As Pilate said to Jesus, "What is truth?" (John 18:38) But we, the Lord's people, do have absolute knowledge. We are blessed indeed. The Lord has protected his faithful children by providing us with his word. God's word gives us the proper basis for reasoning on all subjects, involving our duty to our Creator, to our brethren in Christ, and to our fellow men. The scriptures lay down certain broad lines of absolute certainty, of divine revelation, and invite God's people to reason within these lines of revelation. God said, "Come now, and let us reason together." (Isaiah 1:18) By reasoning thus, we taste and see that the Lord is gracious and good, that he is the embodiment of love; we come to a clearer knowledge of him and a better understanding of his character and plan. Do you see how blest we are? We don't have to listen to every theory and sophistry, or wade through tons of rubbish to find if possible a tiny gem of truth here and there. We have access to the source of pure, unadulterated wisdom, revealed by God, and perfectly suited to our needs from which our spiritual life is derived.

The Importance of the Will

But there must be an act of will. We must desire to be taught of God, to conform our thoughts to his. Thoughts can be controlled, just as words and actions can be controlled. With all the diversions and pre-occupations of life, one's will must be exercised. It must decide which thoughts and sentiments it will entertain and encourage and which it will repel. Our wills must be kept active. It is this to which the wise man refers when he says: "Keep thy heart [will] with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life." (Proverbs 4:23) Keep it active, keep it effective. The will must be used to curb those thoughts that it recognizes to be evil, and to stimulate those thoughts that it recognizes to be good, helpful and beneficial. Our wills must be in harmony with God's will, to think the Lord's thoughts and on his ways and his methods. This is the significance of, "My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways." (Proverbs 23:26) The heart, the will, thus given over to God, seeks to know the divine will, to catch the divine thought, and to obey it in word and act. In proportion as this condition of the new mind is attained, in that same proportion will there begin to be a newness of life in every respect--in ambitions, hopes, sentiments, and efforts. A wonderful transformation of character is thus effected by thinking on those things that have the heights and depths and breadths of the wisdom of God.

Since right thinking is of paramount importance to the child of God, and since we have the power to exercise our wills to control our thoughts to a large extent, should we not expect to find detailed instruction in the word of God telling us what we should think about? I think we should, and we do! Such instructions are found in many places throughout the scriptures. "Precept upon precept, line upon line ... Here a little, and there a little." (Isaiah 28:10) But there is one place where very specific directions are given by one of the most logical minds that ever lived. The apostle Paul, a prisoner in Rome, is at the end of his Christian career. He said he is ready to be offered; the time of his departure is at hand; he has fought a good fight; he has kept the faith; a crown has been reserved for him. (2 Timothy 4:6-8) In the process of completing his Christian career, he has accumulated a tremendous wealth of knowledge and experience in the narrow way. He has used his mind with powerful effect in his ministry. He knows how to think, and what to think about. He imparts to us out of the wealth of his experience, final, specific and detailed instructions. He writes:

"Finally, brethren; whatsoever things are true; whatsoever things are honest; whatsoever things are just; whatsoever things are pure; whatsoever things are lovely; whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things."--Philippians 4:8

Let us consider these things one by one.

Things That Are True

Does this mean to think about anything that is true, any truth at all? There are hundreds of branches of science, each based upon profound truths. Are we to master these, to think on these things? Are we to submerge ourselves in the study of the truths of nuclear science, electronics, astronomy, geology and aerodynamics, to name but a few? Besides such truths as these, there are many unwholesome, scandalous and trivial things that are also true. Are we to fill our minds with these? Of course not. It is evident the apostle's words require some qualification, a "rightly dividing of the word of truth."

When Paul enjoins us to think upon "whatsoever things are true," he is speaking of "the truth" as we use and understand the word--a knowledge of the great Divine Plan of the Ages, the only way of salvation revealing God to be a God of love and compassion and mercy; the philosophy of the ransom whereby Christ died for all, that God "will have all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4); that there will be "times of restitution of all things which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets

since the world began” (Acts 3:21); the great mystery of Christ, the head, and the church, his body (Ephesians 5:32); “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27); the “exceeding great and precious promises” (2 Peter 1:4); the Lord's special care over his church, leading them in the narrow way, polishing them, fitting them and preparing them to make their calling and election sure. As David said:

“Show me thy ways, O Lord; teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth, and teach me; for thou art the God of my salvation. On thee do I wait all the day.”--Psalms 25:4,5

These are the things that are true and upon which we are to think. This is THE TRUTH--present truth--God's word of truth. We are constantly to remind ourselves of these things, and remind each other of them. As the apostle Peter wrote:

“Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth.”--2 Peter 1:12

These are the things truth people must think and talk about:

“Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels.”--Malachi 3:16

If we want to be the precious treasure of the Lord, if we want him to claim us as his own, we must establish habits of thought that will keep the truth fresh, lively and inspiring to us.

But how can this be done? We can do it by using every incident of our lives. Each morning we can greet the new day by thinking, “This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.” (Psalms 118:24) We can regularly at the breakfast table read the manna texts and the inspiring comments by Brother Russell. These contain the essence of truth and often start a train of thought that sets the pace for the entire day. Everything we see during the day can remind us of some feature of truth. If the day is sunny, we will think of “the Sun of Righteousness ... with healing in his wings.” (Malachi 4:2) If it is rainy, we will think of our loving and merciful Heavenly Father who “maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth the rain on the just and on the unjust.” (Matthew 5:45) When we thank the Lord for our food, we will think of Jesus' words: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” (Matthew 4:4)

When we are thankful for shelter, for the house we live in, we will think of him who made himself so poor for our sakes that he said,

“The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.” (Matthew 8:20) On our way to work, if we chance to see some flowers and lawns of grass which are so plentiful and beautiful in California, we will think of Jesus' assurance of God's care over us:

“Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow, they toil not, neither do they spin, and yet I say unto you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven; shall he not much more clothe you?”--Matthew 6:28-30

When seeing the birds flying overhead, we will think of Jesus words so comforting and reassuring:

“Behold the fowls of the air; for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns, yet your Heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?”--Matthew 6:26

If we take some form of rapid transportation to work, it will remind us of the prophecy of Daniel which proves we are now living at “the time of the end”:

“But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book even to the time of the end, many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased.”--Daniel 12:4

When we open our newspapers to the inevitable headlines of wars and rumors of wars, we will think of the words of Jesus:

“And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that ye be not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.”--Matthew 24:6,7

We will also read about food shortages in various parts of the world, as well as epidemics. Earthquakes, too, seem to be on the increase. These items will remind us of the next verse: “And there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in diverse places.”

We may read something about the nominal churches of Christendom trying to unite. This may remind us of, “Associate yourselves O ye people, and ye shall be broken in pieces ... gird yourselves and ye shall be broken in pieces.” (Isaiah 8:9) We will also think of the words of the householder in the parable of the wheat and tares:

“In the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them; but gather the wheat into my barn.”--Matthew 13:30

Instead of saddening us the obituary columns of the paper will make us think joyfully of the time when there will be no more death

notices published daily. This will suggest some of the scriptures promising a resurrection, such as

“As all in Adam die, even so all in Christ shall be made alive.”--1 Corinthians 15:22

“The hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth.”--John 5:28,29

“And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake.”--Daniel 12:2

“And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death; neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away.”--Revelation 21:4

If we pass a hospital and think of all the illnesses and infirmities in the world today, we remember Isaiah's prophecies of that wonderful time when, “the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick,” and that “then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing.” (Isaiah 33:24; 35:5,6)

I could go on and on with such examples but I am sure you get the point. Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are of the truth--what God's word of truth teaches--think on these things! As we thus contemplate the truth and meditate upon it all the day, let us thank God for his Plan of the Ages. Let us especially think of our part in it, if faithful, that we will actually be God's instruments in bringing these things to pass, and thus blessing the world.

Things That Are Honest

This is a basic quality. We cannot even start our Christian course without honesty. Jesus taught this by one of his parables, found in Luke chapter 8. On this occasion Jesus went out of the city into the countryside; the common people who loved him and heard him gladly sought him out until, as the record says, “Much people were gathered together.” (Luke 8:4) Probably seeing many farmers in his audience, Jesus spoke a parable they could appreciate and would remember, even though they did not then understand its full import. Then he added, “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear”--it must have significance. Those who felt a hunger to know had ears to hear. They separated from the others, came close to Jesus and asked: “Master, what does this parable mean?” Of course Jesus had been expecting the question and he commended them for asking it, saying, “Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of God, but to others, in parables.” Then he gave the answer:

“Now the parable is this: The seed is the word of God. Those by the wayside are they that hear. Then cometh the devil and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved. They on the rock are they, which, when they hear, receive the word with joy; [but] these have no root; which for a while believe, and in time of temptation fall away. And that which fell among thorns are they, which, when they have heard, go forth, and are choked with cares and riches and pleasures of this life; and bring no fruit with patience.”

Jesus taught by this parable that it is necessary to have a good and honest heart to first receive the truth of God's word, and that it is necessary to maintain an honest condition of heart to keep the truth.

Paul says, “Let us walk honestly as in the day.” (Romans 13:13) What does he mean by “as in the day”? I think the “day” referred to is the Millennial day. In the one-thousand-year day people will have to walk honestly if they are to receive the earthly blessings of that age. Punishment for dishonesty will be prompt and decisive so people may learn and finally attain human perfection. But we as new creatures have a much higher calling than that. The apostle suggests that we should voluntarily give the same meticulous attention to our conduct now, as we should have to do were we of the earthly class in that day. “Let us walk honestly as in the day.”

The Diaglott renders this part of our text: “Whatsoever things are honorable ... think on these things.” This does not take away the thought of honesty but rather adds to it. An honorable man performs his obligations. We have earthly obligations as well as spiritual or heavenly obligations. For example, we are instructed in Romans 12:17 to “provide things honest in the sight of all men.” Paul makes this very emphatic:

“If any provide not for his own and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel.”--1 Timothy 5:8

This is strong language! But it is reasonable. God provides all things needful for his house, His household of faith, and one who would be God-like is expected to the best of his ability to provide for his own house.

We should be honorable in all our affairs. Professing to be children of God and professing to be walking in the footsteps of Jesus, any dishonorable act of ours will bring dishonor on God's name. Just what is it to be honorable in our affairs? The scope is wide. If employed, we will give our best efforts to our employers--an honest day's work. If in business, we will give full count and full value to our customers. In the ecclesia we will give our best efforts in whatever service we undertake, rightly dividing the word of truth.

The word of God must be handled with absolute integrity and without deceit:

“[We] have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the Word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.”--2 Corinthians 4:2

To the brethren we will give love out of a pure heart, fervently; to our children, a wholesome upbringing, with loving care, training them in the fear and admonition of the Lord. All these things we will do “as unto the Lord,” heartily and in full measure, which Jesus described as “good measure, pressed down, and shaken together and running over.” (Luke 6:38) Thus we will honor our heavenly Father. He has said: “Them that honor me, I will honor.” (1 Samuel 2:30) Therefore, “whatsoever things are honest, or honorable ... think on these things.”

Things That Are Just

That which is just is that which is right. Justice and righteousness are synonymous terms. Our God is a God of rock-like justice and righteousness. Of Him it is written:

“He is the Rock; His work is perfect; for all His ways are judgment. A God of truth and without iniquity; just and right is He.”--Deuteronomy 32:4

“Great and marvelous are thy works Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways thou King of saints.”--Revelation 15:3

“Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne; mercy and truth shall go before thy face.”--Psalms 89:14

What a wide and wonderful scope this gives for our thinking, as wide and as wonderful as God! Note that justice and judgment are coupled with mercy and truth. This describes the character of God and explains his actions.

God required that Adam should be obedient to him to live. This was an entirely just requirement. This was justice. When Adam disobeyed God, judgment followed and Adam died. This could have been the end of the matter if God's only attributes were justice and judgment. But instead mercy immediately followed. A ransom was provided whereby man could live again and justice be completely satisfied as well. This is what is meant by, “The Lord killeth and maketh alive. He bringeth down to the grave and bringeth up.” (1 Samuel 2:6) This is what Paul was referring to when he wrote, “To declare ... at this time His righteousness that He might be just and the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus.” (Romans 3:26) He is called “a just God, and a Savior.” (Isaiah 45:21)

This is the essence of the truth and it epitomizes the Divine Plan of the Ages: "Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne; mercy and truth shall go before thy face." We can think of these things and emulate our God. Although in the present evil world we see injustice on every hand--unjust men and unjust causes prospering--we should not allow our minds to run along lines that would be unjust. We should learn to apply the test of justice to every thought, word and act of ours. In fact we must not stop there. Just as God is also merciful, we must view the conduct of others from the standpoint of mercy, pity, forgiveness and helpfulness. We are not to judge others now. Jesus said: "Judge not, that ye be not judged." (Matthew 7:1) But as for ourselves, we should scrutinize and criticize every thought we entertain, everything we say and write, every plan we mature, that justice be not infringed by us with our heart's consent. It will keep our minds pretty busy, thinking upon "whatsoever things are just." But it will not be burdensome. It will be a constant delight once it becomes a habit of thought.

Things That Are Pure

Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." (Matthew 5:8) The "heart" refers to the intention or will. Purity of intention is essential. Purity of mind and conduct must be developed and established insofar as possible. It must command our best efforts. We must think on these things.

But I think this text also refers to pure doctrine, to the pure message of truth given by the Lord for our enlightenment. There are many scriptures that support this:

"The words of the Lord are pure words; as silver tried in a furnace ... purified seven times."--Psalms 12:6

"The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes."--Psalms 19:8

"Thy word is very pure; therefore thy servant loveth it."--Psalms 119:140

"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure." --James 3:17

We also have Zephaniah's prophecy referring to the pure doctrine the world of mankind will receive in the millennial kingdom: "For then will I turn to the people a pure language." (Zephaniah 3:9) The early church had the pure truth. They had the apostles with them to keep them straight in doctrine. As Paul said, "I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." (Acts 20:27) When the apostles died, the light began to fade. Perverse and impure doctrines were introduced. Paul's prophecy came true:

“For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in . . . speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.”-- Acts 20:29,30

This is exactly what happened. The great anti-Christ system developed and during the Dark Ages, the truth all but disappeared. But the Lord determined to restore the pure doctrine of truth to a household of faith at his second presence by the hand of a faithful servant:

“Who then is a faithful and wise servant whom his Lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when he cometh, shall find so doing. Verily I say unto you, that he shall make him ruler over all his goods.”--Matthew 24:45-47

We believe this prophecy describes the ministry of Brother Russell who was used to revive the great truths, the pure truths, taught by Jesus and the apostles. It was God's due time, the time of Christ's second presence. This very fact further identifies Brother Russell, because our text says: “Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when he cometh, shall find so doing.” Doing what? Giving the Lord's household “meat in due season.” Whom did the Lord find so doing? There was no-one else extensively preaching dispensational truths at the time of our Lord's return. The timing is perfect--it just couldn't be anyone else but Brother Russell.

In this same text we have a statement of tremendous significance: “He shall make him ruler over all his goods.” This means that all the beautiful and harmonious doctrines of the divine plan were restored and dispensed by the ministry of “that servant.” All the basic truths spoken by the mouths of all God's holy prophets since the world began were restored. Brother Russell was a modest man, but he knew he had the truth, He was so certain of it, that his modesty did not forbid him to write the first forty-nine words of his first volume of Studies in the Scriptures, as follows:

“The title of this series of Studies, The Divine Plan of the Ages, suggests a progression in the Divine arrangement, foreknown to our God and orderly.”

Now note what he says:

“We believe the teachings of Divine Revelation can be seen to be both beautiful and harmonious from this standpoint AND FROM NO OTHER.”

These are pure basic truths of the divine plan and are not subject to change. They are eternal truths. Remove one, or tamper with any one of them, and the whole structure is damaged. It is still true, and always will be, that Jesus died for Adam, the just for the unjust; by

this means became the ransomer and Saviour of his race. It is still true, and always will be, that there shall be a resurrection of all the dead, both just and unjust. It is still true, and always will be, that God “will have all men to be saved” from death and be given a real opportunity to “come unto the knowledge of the truth.” These are pure truths worth thinking about, holding to, and fighting for. As Jude says: “[we] should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” (Jude 3) Whatsoever things are pure, the pure truth, think on these things.

Things That Are Lovely

The Diaglott uses the word amiable, which means “worthy of love.” There are so many lovely things we can think about. The Divine Plan of the Ages is lovely. God, the author of the divine plan, is most worthy of love. The beautiful poetry of David expresses it so well:

“Thy mercy O Lord is in the heavens, and thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds. Thy righteousness is like the great mountains; thy judgments are a great deep: O Lord, thou preservest man and beast. How excellent is thy lovingkindness O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasure; for with thee is the fountain of life; in thy light shall we see light. O continue thy lovingkindness unto them that know thee; and thy righteousness to the upright in heart.”--Psalms 36:5-10

An object of great loveliness is Jesus who is called, “altogether lovely.” (Cant. 5:16) We never tire of thinking of him. On the contrary, it stimulates and invigorates our minds to think of Jesus. As Paul said:

“Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith; who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.”--Hebrews 12:2,3

We can also think of that incredible and lovely arrangement that “if we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him.” (2Timothy 2:12) Yes, “whatsoever things are lovely ... think on these things.”

Things That Are of Good Report

I think this primarily refers to the gospel or good news which we are to think about and tell others as we have opportunity. This is the way the scriptures use the word “report.” Referring to Jesus and the fact

that the Jews would reject the gospel of the kingdom that he preached, in spite of his many miracles by the power of God, Isaiah said prophetically: "Who hath believed our report? And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" (Isaiah 53:1)

But there is another very important meaning to this scripture suggested by Paul: "By honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true." (2Corinthians 6:8) An "evil report" about one is that which injures the reputation. This thought is further bolstered by the Diaglott rendition of our text: "Whatsoever things are reputable." The fallen human nature is inclined toward evil. Although we are begotten as new creatures we are still hampered by our fallen human dispositions. Paul refers to this as "the sin which doth so easily beset us." (Hebrews 12:1) One fallen human trait is to believe evil of a person more readily than to believe good of a person. What is worse, the good things we know about a person are often forgotten, but the evil things we think we know are repeated and circulated sometimes with relish. This can have terrible results and seriously hamper a person's usefulness in the Lord's service. It doesn't make any difference whether the evil things are true or not. Just because they are true is no excuse for telling them.

Consider the case of Paul. Suppose everywhere he went on his missionary journeys the friends got their heads together and gossiped. One could say: "Look out for that man. He's a Pharisee from way back! You know what they're like!" Another could chime in: "Remember when they stoned Stephen? Well, this man consented to that stoning! He thought it was a good idea! He actually held their coats while they did it!" Someone else could say quit truthfully: "Yes, and afterwards he breathed out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord. Sounds like a vicious man to me!" And another: "Have you heard that later he actually went to the high priest and got letters to the synagogues giving him the authority to capture those believing in Jesus and to bring them bound to Jerusalem, even the sisters? He would probably have had them stoned like they did Stephen! But the Lord struck him blind, right there on the road to Damascus. He got what he deserved!" Summing up they could say: "What an evil and depraved man Paul is. The Lord couldn't possibly be using him. You can go and hear him speak if you want to, but not me!"

Do you see what I mean? All Paul's faults, all the evils are paraded, but not a word about his virtues: of his humble repentance, of his complete conversion, his zeal for the ministry of Christ, that of the Jews five times he received forty stripes, save one. Thrice was he beaten with rods or clubs. Once he himself had been stoned as was Stephen. In the faithful service of the Lord he had suffered shipwreck and had been a night and a day in the deep. In almost constant

journeyings in the ministry he had been subject to great perils of floods and robbers; in the cities perils from the Jews who were now his enemies; in the wilderness, perils from heathen savages; and always in peril from false brethren, spies from the Jews who sought to kill him. As he himself put it: "In weariness and painfulness; in watchings often; in hunger and thirst; in fastings often; in cold and nakedness." All for Christ's sake. Do you see how vicious and damaging the evil report of gossip can be? Let us try to overcome this natural fallen human trait of believing the worst and instead "whatsoever things are of good [reputable] report, think on these things."

Virtue and Praise

Peter says that we have been called to "glory and virtue." (2 Peter 1:3) To be virtuous is to be praiseworthy. While we should not think to praise ourselves nor strive to obtain praise, yet we should strive to be praiseworthy. The primary reference is to the praise of God. When applied to God, praise means to extol the virtues of God. When we get to know God, to understand something of his glorious character, to see that his every act is motivated by love and that he loves us particularly and individually, our spontaneous reaction is to praise him. David reacted this way:

"Because thy lovingkindness is better than life my lips shall praise thee."--Psalms 63:3

"Praise ye the Lord. O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good; for his mercy endureth forever. Who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord? Who can show forth all his praise?"--Psalms 106:1,2

Praise to God is an acceptable act of worship and calls forth God's love and favor. There is a fine example of this in 2 Chronicles chapter 20. At that time Jehoshaphat was king of Judah. He was told that the combined armies of the people of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir were marching to attack Judah. Jehoshaphat was not prepared for battle. He had no defense. So he turned to the Lord. He proclaimed a fast and all Judah gathered together to ask help of the Lord. Jehoshaphat led them in prayer and praise:

"O Lord God of our fathers, art not thou God in heaven? And rulest not thou over all the kingdoms of the heathen? And in thine hand is there power and might, so that none is able to withstand thee? Art thou not our God who didst drive out the inhabitants of this land before thy people Israel, and gave it to the seed of Abraham, thy friend forever?"--2 Chronicles 20:6,7

This is praise. God knew all these things already, but for Jehoshaphat to remember them and to recount them to the Lord was a pleasing and acceptable act of worship. Then Jehoshaphat went on to state his

problem and to ask God's help. The answer quickly came through God's prophet:

“And he said, Hearken ye, all Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem, and thou king Jehoshaphat; thus saith the Lord unto you. Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's. Ye shall not need to fight in this battle. Set yourselves, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord with you. ... Fear not nor be dismayed ... for the Lord will be with you. And Jehoshaphat bowed his head, with his face to the ground; and all Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell before the Lord worshipping the Lord.”--2Chronicles 20:15-18

Do you see the wonderful power of praise? But that isn't the end of the account. Even after God had heard his prayer and promised him the victory, Jehoshaphat persisted in his praise:

“And the Levites ... stood up to praise the Lord God of Israel with a loud voice on high. And they arose early in the morning and went forth ... And when Jehoshaphat had consulted with the people, he appointed singers unto the Lord, that should praise the beauty of holiness, as they went out before the army, and to say, Praise the Lord, for his mercy endureth forever.”--2 Chronicles 20:19-21

Faith Is an Act of Praise

Can you imagine a singing group marching in front of an army to the battle? By this Jehoshaphat demonstrated his absolute faith in God's promise: “Ye shall not need to fight in this battle.” This faith too was an act of praise. Then we read:

“And when they began to sing, and to praise; the Lord set ambushments against the children of Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir, which were come against Judah; and they were smitten.”--2 Chronicles 20:22

A demonstration of the magnificent power of praise is also given in Acts chapter 16. Paul and Silas had been brutally beaten and confined in the inner prison with their feet in stocks. Then we read:

“At midnight Paul and Silas prayed and sang praises unto God and the prisoners heard them. And suddenly there was a great earthquake so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened and everyone's bands were loosed.”--Acts 16:25,26

Do you want any doors opened? Do you want any bands loosed? Do you want any problems solved? Try praising God! Extol his virtues. In your prayers name and recount every wonderful thing you can remember about him: his personal attributes, his great and marvelous works of creation; his divine plan so just and yet so merciful; the

precious gift of his son, Christ Jesus; his incredible provision that we may be associated with him in his kingdom; his providences in our lives; his exceeding great and precious promises; and many, many more things for which he can be praised. Let us thank him for all these things. This will be a most acceptable act of worship, and will be heard and regarded. “If there be any virtue and if there be any praise, think on these things.”



Where Is the Lamb?

(The Trial of Abraham)

THE Lord God loved Abraham, and called him away from country and kindred. Abraham loved God, and obeyed him in all things, instantly and completely. God made many promises to Abraham and to his seed. These promises were most generous and substantial and of wide scope. They involved such sweeping expressions as: "I will make of thee a great nation." (Genesis 12:2) "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." (Genesis 12:3) "Unto thy seed will I give this land." (Genesis 12:7) "I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth." (Genesis 13:16) "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward." (Genesis 15:1) "Tell the stars, if thou be able to number them; so shall thy seed be." (Genesis 15:5)

Jehovah God and Abraham conversed directly together as intimate friends. They talked freely and frankly and hid nothing. The Lord said on one occasion:

"Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do; Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him."--
Genesis 18:17-19

Yes, they knew each other well. It was a close acquaintance. So it was not altogether surprising that one day, after God had made one of his promises to Abraham, that Abraham frankly said to God, "Lord God; what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless?" (Genesis 15:2) In other words:

"These promises you have so graciously given me presume descendants. How can you make of me a great nation if I have no children? How can my name be great if there is no son to perpetuate it? How can all the families of the earth be blessed in me if there is only my own brief life span in which to accomplish it? My wife, Sarah, is barren and cannot have children. Lord God, what wilt thou give me seeing I go childless?"

Then God told him plainly: "You shall indeed have a child of your own flesh and of Sarah's, and you shall call his name Isaac." Then he gave a most important promise: "I will establish my covenant with him [Isaac] for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him." (Genesis 17:19) Now note this point carefully. The promised seed and all the blessings were to come through Isaac--not through Eliezer, not through Ishmael, but through Isaac.

In due time Isaac was born. He was the only child of Abraham by his beloved wife Sarah. An only child is always very precious, but Isaac

was doubly precious to Abraham and Sarah because he was born in their old age. They had wanted a child for so long and now it was here! They lavished all their love upon him. Hagar and Ishmael were sent away by God's approval, and on that occasion God reiterated his promise: "In Isaac shall thy seed be called."--Genesis 21:12

Abraham's joy was now complete. He now had everything he could possibly desire. The most high God, the Creator and ruler of the universe, was his intimate friend. He had great material wealth of silver and gold, flocks and herds, and servants. He had a devoted wife whom he loved dearly. Now he had a fine son who was the heir of all the wonderful promises that God had made to him, in whom was wrapped up the hope of the world! Isaac grew up to be a handsome lad, a delight to his father and mother, obedient and considerate, fully returning their great love for him. Life seemed perfect.

God Tests Abraham

Then, one day, Abraham heard God's voice calling his name in the old familiar way. He loved these talks they had together. He eagerly answered: "Behold, here I am!" And God said,

"Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of."-- Genesis 22:1,2

Abraham was stunned! He could scarcely believe his ears! This was a terrible thing that God was asking: to kill his own son! How it must have wrenched his heart. All his dreams and plans and high hopes came crashing down upon him. But though he loved his young son as his own soul, he loved the Lord God with all his soul. There was no question about his obeying, no asking why or pleading with God, only prompt and complete obedience.

He probably could not bring himself to tell the boy's mother. He would want to spare her. Why cause her anguish before it and try to dissuade him and that would only make things harder because he could not be dissuaded. After all, she did not have his depth of faith. She could not know the Lord God as completely as he did, he who had frequent conversations with Him.

So Abraham got up early in the morning, probably while Sarah was still asleep, to commence the three-day journey to Mount Moriah. First he cut wood for the sacrifice. Every blow of the axe must have cut his own heart. Then he asked his beloved son Isaac to accompany him on a trip into the wilderness to make a sacrifice to the Lord.

Together with two household servants and a pack animal, they started out.

It must have been a heart-breaking journey for Abraham; his anguish of soul must have shown in his face and manner. It is said that man's greatest love is self-love and his strongest animal instinct is that of self-preservation. But the Bible tells us that a greater love than this is possible: to lay down one's life for a friend. Abraham's love for Isaac was undoubtedly of this superior quality; this high degree of sensitivity would make his suffering even keener. Isaac must have noticed his father's burden and, as a loving and dutiful son, must have been extra solicitous of his welfare, doing little things for his comfort on the journey. Every such act would be like the turning of the knife in Abraham's wound.

But the three days' journey would give Abraham time to meditate, to try to rationalize God's command, to reason things out. Although he was determined to obey without question, he would naturally try to find the answer in his own mind. Again and again he would go over the facts and try to evaluate them. The essential facts were these: God had given him many promises which could be realized only through his seed, or posterity. These promises were given before he had a son. Finally, a son was born to him in a miraculous manner and he was told, by God himself, to name him Isaac. He was told, by God himself, that this same Isaac was the seed through whom the promises must come. God's promises are absolutely certain of fulfillment and they must be fulfilled through Isaac. Now he was told to offer up Isaac as a burnt offering, to kill his own beloved son, lay him on the wood of the altar, set fire to the wood, and burn the fine young body to ashes! To put it very simply, God had said Isaac would live to have children. Isaac did not as yet have children. Isaac was required to die before having children. These were the facts.

Abraham's Startling Conclusion

To one lacking faith they made no sense. But Abraham had faith to a superlative degree. To him there was only one answer and that answer was clear: Isaac was to be raised from the dead!\$FREprints, page 2907:2-6

This was an amazing conclusion to draw. At that time there was no precedent whatsoever. At that time no one had ever been raised from the dead. Now if one had believed such a thing in the days when Elijah awakened the widow's son (1 Kings 17:22) or at the time Elisha awakened the Shunamite's son (2 Kings 4:35), it would have been easier to believe that the dead can live again. Or, if one had seen Jesus take the hand of Jairus' little dead daughter and gently raise her to life (Mark 5:42), it would be a more natural conclusion

to draw. Or if one had been with Jesus that day at Nain when he took compassion upon a poor widow whose only son lay in his coffin: “Weep not,” he said, as he delivered the boy alive into his mother’s hungry arms. (Luke 7:13) Or in Bethany, when this time Jesus himself wept, his tender heart responding to the grief of Mary and Martha, and then, with a mighty display of power, he summoned four-day-dead Lazarus from his tomb! (John 11:44) Or if one had seen Jesus die in agony on the cross and then had the glorious experience of walking and talking with the same Jesus, alive! We can conceive that one who had seen such things could believe that Isaac would be raised from the dead. But Abraham had no such examples to go by! Not one! He trod totally unexplored paths. But by an absolute reliance upon God, by sheer unwavering faith, alone and unaided by any other human, hereached out and grasped beforehand the grandest and most staggering truth: “There shall be a resurrection of the dead!”

On the third day of the journey they came within sight of the spot designated by God for the sacrifice. Halting the caravan and telling his servants to wait for them, Abraham took the bundle of wood he had brought for the burnt offering and loaded it upon the back of his son Isaac. Now here is something which would ordinarily be beyond our understanding. To make young Isaac himself carry the wood by which his own body would be burned is a repugnant idea to us. The only way such an act could be justified is by Abraham’s absolute belief that all would be well, that no permanent harm would come to the boy, that there would be a resurrection, that he would rise again!

Where Is the Lamb?

Then Abraham took a knife and the urn of live coals saved from their last campfire and they started out. They would walk the last few steps alone together. But Isaac had a question to ask his father. (It seems that boys are always asking questions of their fathers.) “Father,” he said, “Here am I, my son,” Abraham answered. Then Isaac said, “Behold the fire, and the wood; but where is the lamb, for a burnt offering?” (Genesis 22:7) Then, with what sounded like an evasive answer, but was really a grand prophecy, Abraham replied, “My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering.” (Genesis 22:8) “So they went, both of them together, and they came to the place that God had told him of.” What was so special about this particular place? Why had the Lord required them to journey three weary days to this wild and remote spot? The answer shows how perfectly God has laid his plans, with what minute detail. He knows the end from the beginning. Long centuries afterwards, in the time of Solomon, this spot became the site of the temple\$FRprints,

page 5180. and this very rock upon which Isaac was bound became the exact location of the brazen altar!



Then we read, (Genesis 22:9) “And Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar, upon the wood.” “Abraham bound Isaac, his son.” At this point Abraham could no longer keep his burdensome secret from Isaac. Why? Because Isaac could not be bound against his will! Let us remember that at this time Abraham was about 125 years old and Isaac was a vigorous young man in his twenties.* But in any event, Abraham would not want to bind Isaac against his will even if he had been physically able to do so. So we see that this was a trial not only of Abraham's faith, but of Isaac's as well. This was Isaac's first recorded opportunity to make a decision for God, to demonstrate his

worthiness to inherit the great promises of God, by his submission to the will of God.

So Abraham undoubtedly revealed to Isaac the commandment he had received to offer him up as a burnt offering, and of course he would also tell Isaac of the wonderful conclusion he had come to, of his unshakable faith that Isaac would be raised from the dead. As a loving, humble, dutiful son, Isaac completely submitted himself to his father's will and allowed himself to be bound upon the wood of the altar. How extremely rare today is such an attitude of submission of under-age children to the will of their parents! Indeed, the lack of it is one of the "signs of the times." Paul said, "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come." (2 Timothy 3:1,2) He cites "disobedience to parents" as one of the obnoxious traits exhibited at this time. Isaac's act of complete submission to his father, even unto death, stands as a brilliant jewel in recorded human experience, a jewel that grows in luster as conditions in this time of the end deteriorate.

Abraham Faces the Supreme Test

Now came the supreme test of Abraham's obedience to God. With the altar made, the wood arranged in order upon it, with Isaac bound and laid upon the wood, the fateful moment could no longer be delayed. "And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife, to slay his son." (Genesis 22:10) From the human standpoint, what tragic words these are! I remember my dear Armenian mother reading this account of Abraham's ordeal to me from the Bible when I was a small child. In the beautiful and richly expressive Armenian language the story is even more moving than it is in English. Imagining myself in the place of Isaac on the altar I would cry with the tragedy of it all. When this verse was read, "And Abraham stretched forth his hand and took the knife to slay his son," my tears would flow most freely. Then mother would read the next three verses and almost instantly my weeping would turn to joy!

"And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said: Abraham, Abraham. And he said: Here am I. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou anything unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me. And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son."

Can you imagine the relief that Abraham must have felt? Even with his amazing faith the sorrowful load on his mind had been continuous and heavy for three days! Now it slipped away and his

heart was flooded with joy! Isaac had been as good as dead. Abraham, instead of getting Isaac back literally from the dead as he had confidently expected to do, got him back figuratively from the dead. As Paul sums it up,



“By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.”--Hebrews 11:17-19

When the ordeal was over the Lord spoke to Abraham again. Even ordinary speech from God is an awesome thing. When after the Exodus God sounded his voice from the mountain, the Israelites were terrified. They begged Moses to talk to God privately, and then speak to them, saying: “But let not God speak to us, lest we die.” (Exodus 20:19) The plain, unadorned, word of God is firm and absolutely sure, and Abraham believed this above all men. It is written in Isaiah 55:11: “So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void.”

But the way God spoke to Abraham now was not with ordinary speech, but was most extraordinary. Why? On this occasion God actually took an oath! How can this be? In our courts of law today, before testimony is taken, a witness is required to take an oath to swear to tell the truth. When he takes this oath, his hand rests upon the Bible, the word of God. Thus even the civil authorities tacitly admit to the absolute truth and trustworthiness of God's word, that there is no higher standard upon which to base an oath. Testimony given after such an oath is considered to be the truth and is recorded. It ends all argument. But if God's plain word is already the perfect standard of truth, why did God on this occasion take an oath to support his word? No one asked him to do so. No one doubted his word. Abraham had amply demonstrated that he believed God. In fact, he believed God so thoroughly that it was “accounted to him for righteousness.” God was so pleased with Abraham, so delighted with his unquestioning obedience which even the perfect man Adam had lacked, so gratified by his unshakable faith maintained under the severest possible test, that he emphasized his word, his promises to Abraham, to the superlative degree by his oath:

“And the angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, and said, By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies. And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.” --Genesis 22:15-18

God's Oath-bound Covenant

Thus we find the great God of Heaven making a covenant, an unconditional, oath-bound covenant, with a man.

There is a lesson here. It is written that without faith it is impossible to please God. (Hebrews 11:6) It follows then that with faith it is possible to please God. With the astounding faith that Abraham displayed, it is possible to please God very much indeed! Not that we

can ever attain the degree of faith that Abraham had, but Paul says that we can follow him in this matter. He says:

“That ye be not slothful, but followers of them, who through faith and patience inherit the promises. For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swear by himself, saying, Surely, blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise, the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath! That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil.”-- Hebrews 6:12-14,16-19

What are the two immutable things here referred to? It is written, “In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.” (2 Corinthians 13:1) Here, the first immutable or unchangeable witness is the sureness of God's plain word because it is impossible for God to lie. The second immutable witness is the confirmation of his word by his oath. Here we have another of those sublime messages from the Lord which seem almost too good, and too great, for us to accept and appropriate to ourselves. What does Paul say was the real reason God swore by himself--took an oath? Listen: “To more abundantly show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel.” Who are these heirs of promise? “If ye be Christ's then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.” (Galatians 3:29)

We who are consecrated belong to the Lord. We have given ourselves to him alone. We have dispensed with all other allegiances. We have become the spiritual seed of Abraham, called in the promise, “The stars of heaven.” It is for us the oath was taken, Paul says, that “we might have a strong consolation ... to lay hold upon the hope set before us.” What strong consolation do we have, what sure and steadfast anchor of the soul entering within the veil? As “heirs of promise” we have given unto us “exceeding great and precious promises that by these we might be partakers of the divine nature.” (2 Peter 1:4) Now we are assured that all of God's exceeding great and precious promises to us have the same force and validity, are just as sure and steadfast, as his oath-bound promise to Abraham! They enter within and beyond the veil with the glorious promise that, if faithful, we shall be partakers of the divine nature.

So let us, as Paul advises, “lay hold” upon this hope set before us. Let us tightly grasp it, fully appropriate it to ourselves. Let it sink into our very souls, filling our conscious and subconscious minds until it anchors us beyond the veil, making our calling and election sure!

Isaac's Question

Now let us go back for a moment to where Abraham and Isaac with their small caravan had reached Mount Moriah. Leaving the caravan, father and son were approaching the spot designated by the Lord for the sacrifice. Then Isaac asked a question: “Father, where is the lamb?” Abraham's reply that “God would provide himself a lamb” did not really answer this question. Neither did the wild ram offered instead of Isaac constitute an answer to this question. For over two thousand weary years this question went unanswered.

During this long interval the descendants of Abraham suffered all manner of hardships because of their sins. Whenever conditions became intolerable, they cried to the Lord in their distress as the Lord said to Moses from the burning bush: “I have heard their cry.” (Exodus 3:7) “The cry of the children of Israel is come unto me.” (Exodus 3:9) They cried to him when they hungered and thirsted in the wilderness. When they gained the promised land and their enemies invaded and oppressed them, they cried to God for help. When they were finally dispersed and banished to Babylon, they cried to God. Of that time it is written in Psalm 137:1: “By the rivers of Babylon there we sat down; Yea, we wept when we remembered Zion.” And then, the bitterest of all--the iron yoke of Rome. Again they cried to God. What was always the burden of their cry? Deliverance! They wanted a deliverer! They wanted THE deliverer God had promised. Jacob had prophesied that Shiloh would come and gather the people for deliverance. (Genesis 49:10) Isaiah had prophesied that a child would be born who would become a wonderful counsellor and a prince of peace, and that the government would be upon his shoulder (Isaiah 9:6), a government not shouldered by Babylon, not by Medo-Persia, not by Rome. Ezekiel spoke of one who would come whose right it is to rule. (Ezekiel 21:27) Jeremiah had prophesied,

“Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous branch, and a king shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days shall Judah be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely.”-- Jeremiah 23:5,6

These were promises of deliverance from bondage and oppression. But they were not saved, they did not dwell safely, nothing good seemed to happen to them. They were oppressed and humiliated,

dispersed, banished, and trodden down! Every time they cried to God to send help they really echoed the question Isaac asked back there in the wilderness. They said in effect, "Where is the lamb?" Where is he that should redeem Israel? Where is he who shall take away our sins and restore us to God's favor? "Where is the lamb?"

This question was originally asked in the wilderness of Moriah. About 2075 years later, in the wilderness of Betha-bara, beyond Jordan, the answer was given. It was answered by the voice of one crying in the wilderness. A man roughly clothed in camel's hair with a girdle of skins (Mark 1:6) suddenly pointed to a handsome young man walking toward him and cried, "Behold the lamb! Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29) The next day John the Baptist again saw Jesus of Nazareth and as though bearing a second witness, repeated for all to hear: "Behold the lamb of God!" (John 1:36) Isaac's question had at last been answered!

This answer to Isaac's question was a golden key. It turned in the lock and opened the door to vast prophetic treasures. Now the significance of Abraham's experience can be appreciated by the Lord's people. Let us use this key, and see what we find.

Jesus Is the Lamb

If Jesus was the lamb figuratively offered up back there by Abraham, Abraham must have represented Jehovah God. As Isaac was the only begotten son of Abraham, Jesus was the only begotten Son of God. The three days journey to the mountain of Moriah must have represented the three years of Jesus' human life which ended on the hill of Golgotha. Abraham accompanied his son Isaac on the journey, being constantly at his side, just as Jesus during his ministry was in constant communion with his Heavenly Father and was always guided and sustained by Him. When the time and place of the sacrifice had been reached, Abraham, with heavy heart, placed upon the back of Isaac the wood of his son's own burning. How do you suppose the Heavenly Father felt when his son Jesus was made to carry the heavy wood of his own cross, when drained of strength and vitality by his life of sacrifice, Jesus fell under the weight of the cross? If the very rock upon which Isaac was bound later became the exact location of the brazen altar of Solomon's Temple, what significance does this have? Later when the fat and vital organs of the bullock, representing the man Jesus, were offered on the brazen altar, it became a parallel picture and comprised another of the necessary two or three witnesses by which every word shall be established. Did not the ram, caught by the horns in a thicket, and which was ultimately sacrificed "typify Isaac--in his stead, his representative, and in that sense, of course, it typified Christ. If Isaac

typifies Christ, then the ram typifies Christ.”\$FQuestion Book, page 557, paragraph 3.

And what was illustrated by the complete submission of Isaac to his father's will, in obeying his request and permitting himself to be bound upon the altar which would mean his death? When Jesus hung, dying on the cross, some wagged their heads and said: “If thou be the son of God, come down from the cross!” (Matthew 27:40) Likewise, the chief priests, scribes and elders said: “He saved others, himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross.” (Matthew 27:42) Don't you think he could have done so if he had wanted to? This was the one who had turned water into wine, healed the ick, raised the dead, cast out demons, walked on water, fed the multitudes, and read the hearts and minds of men. On one occasion there was a great storm at sea. They say that one severe storm can generate more power than a hundred atomic bombs. Yet this man Jesus, who now hung on the cross, had simply rebuked the storm, “and there was a great calm.” (Matthew 8:26,27) Men marveled saying, what manner of man is this that even the winds and the sea, obey him! Of course he could have come down from the cross, in an instant, if he had wanted to! But he didn't. Just as Isaac obeyed his father and voluntarily stayed on the altar of sacrifice, Jesus became “obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” (Philippians 2:8) What a beautiful illustration this is!

We read in Genesis 22:1 “that God did tempt Abraham.” A better translation would be that God tried or tested Abraham in the matter of offering Isaac. It was an extremely severe test, but Abraham passed it successfully, demonstrating his great faith. But Abraham had already demonstrated his great faith before this incident. Paul says,

“By faith, Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith, he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles [or tents].”-- Hebrews 11:8,9

This took faith and it was before he was told to offer up Isaac. Why was his faith further tested?

God Tests Our Strengths

It seems to me that God tries or tests not our weaknesses, but our strengths, not our weak points but our strong points. Isn't this reasonable? A teacher does not test his pupils until they have been instructed and have learned their lessons. The higher the education the more difficult the examination. The greater our strengths, the greater our trials along those lines may be. Abraham was a man of

unusual faith so his faith was tried with unusual severity. The trials we have are evidences that we are making progress, that we have advanced, that God sees in us something worthy of testing and proving. We read in Job 23:10, "But he knoweth the way that I take. When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." Fiery trials do not produce or create the "gold" in our characters. They simply remove the dross and purify and make manifest the golden traits that are already there, that have already been developed. As we read in 1 Peter 1:7, "That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise, and honor and glory." Our trials should encourage and not discourage us.

Yet how small our severest trials are in comparison with the trial of Abraham's faith. How fortunate that the Lord does not ask such stupendous exhibitions of faith from us. How thankful we are that his testings are always just and reasonable, not beyond our ability. We read,

"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man. But God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will, with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it."--1 Corinthians 10:13

The Diaglott uses the word "trial" instead of "temptation." Strange to say, this text has been a source of great discouragement to some in the narrow way because it appears to say that there is a way to escape every temptation. If the Lord has provided a way of escape, surely the child of God will take it. Thus it appears to teach that we should be able to escape every temptation. Naturally, the one who has been tempted and has fallen under the temptation becomes discouraged. Satan, who engineered the temptation in the first place, now subtly suggests to him: "Did not the Lord promise a way of escape? See, he failed you. You cannot rely on his promises." Or Satan may suggest a variation of this: "The Lord has promised his children a way of escape. Since none was provided for you, you are obviously not a child of God."

Let us, as Jesus did, dispose of Satan by citing scriptures. In this case the Diaglott reads:

"No trial has assailed you, except what belongs to man; and God is faithful, who will not permit you to be tried beyond your ability; but with the trial, will also direct the issue, that you may be able to bear it."

There we have it! "He will direct the issue." He will direct that the issue or result will be for our good. When we have failed under a temptation or trial--and which of us has not--and another set of similar circumstances occurs, we are instantly on our guard. This

time we do not fail. With each victory we gain strength and assurance and maturity.

The experience of Peter provides a classic example of this principle. Just before his crucifixion Jesus knew that Satan was going to make an attempt against Simon Peter. Jesus warned Peter, saying, "Simon, Simon; behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat." Then he reassured Peter, saying, "But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not."

Notice here that Jesus did not pray that Peter would successfully resist Satan's temptation or escape it. He knew that Peter would not resist but would fall under that temptation. He told him so, saying, "I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me." (Luke 22:31,32,34) You would think that this forewarning would enable Peter to collect his thoughts, be on the alert, and steel himself with determination not to fail!

But even this forewarning did not provide a "way of escape" for Peter. No "way of escape" was provided. But the Lord did "direct the issue." Jesus knew that Peter's failure would be extremely discouraging to one so fiercely loyal as he was; that he might lose faith in himself and thenceforth consider himself unfit to be a follower of the Master; that Satan would suggest these things to Peter's mind, and seek to sift him out. So Jesus prayed that his "faith fail not." Jesus' prayer was answered. Peter's ignominious failure cut him to the heart. He wept bitterly. Then he felt very humble. He remembered his Master's words: "I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not; and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren." (Luke 22:32) The experience converted this impetuous, reckless and self-assured man into an apostle of meekness and quietness--a tower of strength to the early Church. When the time of martyrdom came for this rugged saint, it is said that he ran to meet his executioner, as if, by this gesture, he might wipe out that act of cowardice so many years before when he ran away!

It was this same Peter who from his wealth of experience wrote to us, to you and to me:

"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you; but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy."--1Peter 4:12,13

Why Does God Permit Evil?

ONE has but to read the daily newspaper to be impressed with all the evil in the world today. We read of widespread crime, violence, corruption and open immorality. Pollution is becoming increasingly serious. There always seems to be a war or revolution going on somewhere. Of course there is also much beauty, goodness and happiness in the world, but evil seems to predominate.

Many thoughtful people are puzzled with this because the prevalence of evil in the world seems inconsistent with the character of God. We know that God is just and good, and hates evil of every kind:

“Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness; neither shall evil dwell with thee. ... Thou hatest all workers of iniquity.”--Psalms 5:4,5

God created the world and man upon it. He is all-powerful and supreme; nothing can successfully oppose his will. We know this because it is written of him:

“Thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth. Thou hast made heaven and earth.”--2 Kings 19:15

In Isaiah God says:

“So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth. It shall not return unto me void; but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.”--Isaiah 55:11

Now for the question that disturbs many people: “If God is all-powerful, if he is good and hates evil, why did he ever permit evil to occur on the earth; why does he not now eliminate it?” Not finding a satisfactory answer to this question, many good people reach the conclusion that there is no God, or that God is dead. “If there is a God,” they say, “he would certainly do something to alleviate present conditions. He would have mercy upon us in our suffering.” What, then, is the answer?

Let me assure you that there is indeed a living God, that he is both good and all-powerful. The evil we see on the earth today is by his permission and will be for the ultimate good of humankind. God has a definite plan and the permission of evil is a part of that plan. By providing mankind an experience with sin and its terrible consequences, the permission of evil will eventually have a good result. As is written: “This sore travail hath God given to the sons of man, to be exercised therewith.” (Ecclesiastes 1:13) When later contrasted with righteousness and its benefits, mankind will want no more of sin and evil.

But it may be argued, "A man does not live long enough to benefit from the lessons he has learned. His life is too short. How can experience with evil be for the good of mankind? How can they benefit by it when they are dead?" This brings us to the most beautiful part of the plan of God concerning mankind. Every descendant of Adam who has ever died is to be brought back to life again and be given an opportunity to live his life on earth under ideal circumstances, in a world filled with righteousness instead of evil. This is guaranteed by the ransom sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

"Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."--1 Corinthians 15:21,22

Jesus gave his perfect human life in offset for Adam's forfeited life. He thus ransomed Adam and all his descendants from death. The prophecy of Hosea must be completely fulfilled: "I will ransom them from the power of the grave." (Hosea 13:14) The ransom price has already been provided. The redeemer, Christ Jesus, has already done his work. This means the time must come when mankind will be actually released from the grave. This should not be surprising. Jesus said:

"Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth."--John 5:28,29

How else can the permission of evil by a loving God be justified? If a man remains dead and never has the opportunity to profit by his experience, what good is that experience? But God's kingdom on earth with Christ as king, will bring to mankind a time of restitution, of restoration, a time of beginning again. Every one will have a fresh start in life--a new life.

A Second Chance

Just think of such a time! By living one's life over again while retaining every memory of the previous life, every mistake of the past could be rectified. Every decision that proved to be wrong in the previous life could be reversed. Sins of omission and commission which, in the previous life, had resulted in injury and grief to one's self and others, could be avoided. All the opportunities to bestow love, understanding and happiness that were missed before could be grasped; all the pain, heartache, and regret could be averted. In that time of beginning again, one would know how to live, love and serve God because of the rich experience of the past. In that wonderful kingdom of God on earth, life will be meaningful, full, and satisfying; it will be free of doubt and corroding worry. The way will be clear. No matter what a miserable failure one made of his life, he will have another chance. All the troubles and tribulations of the past, instead

of being worse than useless torments, will be valuable guides. Remembering the lessons of the past, one will know how to walk, serenely and confidently, in the right way.

Although such a thing seems almost too good to be true, reason tells us that it should be true. It is true because the Bible says so. All the experience of the present life, the lessons learned at the cost of so much pain and heartbreak, will not be wasted. These lessons will be invaluable in re-living and re-forming one's life. Death is not the irrevocable end of human existence. There must and will be a time of beginning again.

This is a universal human longing. How many times has someone said, "If I only had my life to live over again!" Or, "If I only knew then what I know now!" Adam and Eve may have used that very expression after they sinned. They may have pleaded, "Oh to have another chance! Please, God, give me one more chance!" This is a universal desire. The Bible says: "The desire of all nations [or peoples] shall come." (Haggai 2:7) The kingdom of God on earth will give Adam and his race another chance. The permission of evil which has been for man's experience will have been a futile and useless torment unless he is given an opportunity to use his experience.

"If there be a messenger with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to show unto man his uprightness; then he is gracious unto him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit [grave], I have found a ransom. His flesh shall be fresher than a child's. He shall return to the days of his youth."--Job 33:23-25

To return to the days of one's youth, is to begin again. For parents who are grieving over the death of a loved one, it is written:

"Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears; for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord. And they shall come again from the land of the enemy."--Jeremiah 31:16

The present evil world under Satan's rule has been "the land of the enemy." The grave, to which it has led, is also "the land of the enemy," but they shall return to another land--to God's kingdom on earth under Christ--to begin life over again in joy and happiness. Of that time it is written:

"The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs, and everlasting joy upon their heads. . . . And sorrow and sighing shall flee away."--Isaiah 35:10

Having learned their lesson with sin and then being obedient to the rule of righteousness in the earth, mankind will attain continue to live and not die any more.

“For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord.”--Romans 6:23

This is the loving Plan of God for mankind.

The Golden Gate

An angel stood at the Golden Gate, For the password there to the higher state. “I am a Presbyterian,” said one, “My church on earth has its work well done.”

The angel said, “I am sorry to say, That over your name there will be delay. The name you have named I cannot find, Please make room for the man behind.”

“And what is your password, friend,” he said. “I am a Methodist born and bred.” “The Methodist name is not in the book, Here it is for yourself, you can look.”

To the question asked by the angel there, Another said, “I have wrought with care, I am a Baptist through and through. To the testament church I have been true.”

The angel said, “I am sorry, friend, But the Baptist name has not been penned, Perhaps to you the name is clear, But the name you have named is not know here.”

“What is your name?” he said to another. “I am a faithful U.B. Brother.” “The U.B. name may be good on earth, But at this gate it has no worth.”

“I belong to the Lutheran crowd,” Said another man as he stooped and bowed. “Your name is one that I don't recall, And it's not the password after all.”

Another said at the Gate of Gold, “Episcopal is the name I hold.” And he started to pass through the open gate, But the angel said, “You will have to wait.”

“Your name like the others, I do not see, Such names as these mean nothing to me. There is a password for you all, And by that word you stand or fall.”

So one by one they came to the Gate, Seeking a home and a high estate. One by one were the sects arrayed, There at the Gate in a vain parade.

At last the angel spake to the throng, “These names on earth alone belong, But the password here if you enter in, Is the blood of Christ has cleansed from sin.”

“So here to these names you must bid adieu, And all of the company
may pass through.” Then they said the blood it has cleansed from sin,
And the saved and the ransomed entered in.

There is one church in Heaven above, Its password Christ and its
service love. Names are the password of an hour, They are fruitless
words if they have no power.

If they bind not men by the will above, In brotherhood of the Father's
love, If they not journey with another, Heart to heart, and the soul of
a brother.

If they find no center that has sufficed In the family circle of Jesus
Christ, For many creeds like weeds in the sod, And many temples,
but only one true God.

--Kathryn Domingo