

# *List of Discourses*

By Michael R. Nekora



# List of Discourses

By Michael R. Nekora

Atonement in Leviticus 9 (1999)  
Baptismal Discourse (1994)  
Be Not Weary in Well Doing (1998)  
Be Ye Perfect (1971)  
Becoming a Disciple of Christ (1995)  
Blind Spot (1992)  
Blood (2005)  
Circumcision of Christ (2002)  
Deborah (1999)  
Earthen Vessels (1996)  
Exodus (1982)  
Faith and Gold (2001)  
Faith and Works (1995)  
Figs - Olives - Vines (2004)  
Forty, The Number of Probation (1999)  
Gospels [Matthew/Mark/Luke/John— Four talks]  
(1990)  
Habakkuk (1985)  
Hardening of the Arteries (1993)  
Hearing Ears (2003)  
Israel (1991)  
Jacob, Lessons from the Life of (2004)  
Joel, Lessons from the Book of (1975)  
Jude, the Book of (1991)  
Law Covenant (2000)  
Lazarus, the Rich Man and (1977)  
Levites (2002)  
Man of Integrity (2000)  
Mercy (1988)  
New Creature (2003)  
Nicodemus (2001)  
Peter's Last Letter (1991)  
Propitiation (1971)  
Psalms, the Book of (1993)  
Rahab (1997)  
Resurrection of the Dead (2000)  
Revelation 12: The Woman and the Dragon (1963)  
Sacrifice (1994)  
Salt (2002)  
Seed of the Woman (1987)  
Smiting of the Image (1992)  
Stephen (1983)  
The Dead (1975)  
Two Resurrections (1997)  
Two Views of Atonement (1980)  
Vision of Present Truth (1998)  
What Must I Do to be Saved (1994)  
Who Shall be Greatest (1979)  
Wine (1982)

## *Atonement in Leviticus 9*

Opening Hymn: #187 — “Jesus Paid It All”

The Hebrew word #3722 appears in 92 verses of the Old Testament. More than half those verses are in Exodus and Leviticus where in nearly all cases in the KJV it is translated **atonement** (the three exceptions are reconcile/reconciling/reconciliation). In other Old Testament books this Hebrew word is sometimes translated: cleanse, merciful, purge, pardon, forgive, disannul, put it off, pacify.

It is wonderful to see the grand arrangement the Israelites received from God compared to the superstitious Egyptians. He gave them a beautiful place of worship, a priesthood to carry out the duties of worship, and a law or code of conduct that raised them morally and physically above their heathen neighbors. What they probably did not know at the time they received the law was that now they would be constantly reminded how easy it was to disobey God’s law and come under the influence of sin:

Rom. 3:20 By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

How long did it take to construct the Tabernacle? Not very long; in fact, less than a year! When the Israelites left Egypt they were told: "This month shall be unto you the beginning of months" (Ex. 12:2). In the **third** month Moses went up into Mount Sinai to talk with God, to receive the law, and there he received the instructions for the building the Tabernacle. By the end of that first year, it was finished:

Ex. 40:17 And it came to pass in the first month [**second year**] on the first day of the month that the tabernacle was reared up.

Now the people had a **place** to worship God. Next they needed **priests** responsible for the operation of this place and to accept sacrifices and offerings from them. In the 8th chapter of Leviticus we read what happened during a full week of ceremonies that formally inducted Aaron and his sons into the priesthood. (See Lev. 8:33.)

When these ceremonies were over, the people had a place to worship and a priesthood. One legal detail remained: the people had to be purged from sin so that they could have a relationship with God. Of course animal sacrifices could not make them actually perfect. These were only types of what was to come. Once each year, on the tenth day of the seventh month, there was a great Day of Atonement. This is described in Lev. chapter 16, the chapter most Bible students recall when this subject is discussed. But at the end of Lev. chapter 8, we are still in the first month of the year. Must everyone wait six months for THE great Day of Atonement before the people can bring sacrifices? That, of course, was one possibility. But it is not what was done. The first official act of the priests, described in Lev. chapter 9, was to purge the nation from sin--typically, of course:

Lev. 9:7 And Moses said unto Aaron, Go unto the altar and . . . make an atonement for thyself and for the people . . . as the Lord commanded.

These words are almost identical to Lev. 16:24, “[the high priest shall] make an atonement for himself, and for the people.” The ceremonies described in chapter 9 and in chapter 16 of Leviticus were for the express purpose of making atonement for the nation of Israel. If the purpose is the same, then one would expect the ceremonies to be identical. In fact they are not. Depending upon how you compare the two accounts, you might find as many as 20 differences. Why?

Nothing is accidental when God makes a type. If the ceremonies in chapter 9 differ from those in chapter 16 and if both ceremonies bring the nation into a condition of “rightness” with God, there must be a reason for these differences. We suggest it is because the work of atonement is being described from two quite different viewpoints.

Describing one thing from two viewpoints does **not** mean one is describing two **different** things. The work that brought about the typical cleansing of Israel, that made the people “clean” in God’s sight so they could bring gifts and sacrifices to him, is a picture of the Gospel Age. The Millennial Age is typified in what occurred on the other days:

Thus the typical "Day of Atonement" ended; and Israel, thus typically cleansed from sin, was reckoned no longer defiled and separated from God, but now **at one** with him. Justice no longer condemned, but bade them realize God's reconciled presence in their midst, to bless and protect and direct into the Canaan of rest and peace.

The antitype of the "Day of Atonement" is this Gospel age, during which Jesus and "his Body," the Church (by virtue of the redemption and consequent justification), make sacrifice to Justice, in full satisfaction of the Adamic sin. When the work of reconciliation is complete, God will recognize the world of mankind, and place his sanctuary among men. Then will be fulfilled that which was written: "The Tabernacle of God [God's dwelling, the glorified Church] is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be [become] 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 [the reign of Satan, sin and death] are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new."--Rev. 21:3-5

--*Tabernacle Shadows*, page 76

We assert that both Lev. 9 and Lev. 16 describe the Gospel Age, but that this description takes place from two different viewpoints. Lev. 9 gives us a picture of the Gospel Age from our viewpoint, the viewpoint of the church. Lev. 16 offers us a glimpse of how God sees the work of this age. So let us focus on Lev. 9 and see how it beautifully pictures this present Gospel Age from our viewpoint.

### **Who does the sacrificing?**

The 9th chapter opens up with Moses summoning Aaron, his sons, and the elders of Israel. As the chapter progresses we see the sons have a part in the ceremonies:

Lev. 9:9 And the **sons** of Aaron brought the blood unto him.

Of course Aaron represents Christ:

Heb. 5:1,4,5 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 sins. And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was **Aaron**. So also **Christ** glorified not himself to be made an high priest...

Christ is the reality of the high priest in the atonement sacrifices. The underpriests, Aaron's sons, picture those who walk according to the example of Jesus:

1 Peter 2:21 For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps.

**We** see Jesus as our high priest and ourselves as under priests. The "elders" briefly mentioned at the start of chapter 9 might well picture the ancient worthies whose faithfulness we recognize as though they were sacrificing right with us:

Heb. 11:2 For by [faith] the elders obtained a good report. [12:1] Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses.

Notice when we get to chapter 16, Moses, Aaron's sons, and the "elders" of Israel have disappeared.

### **Where did the ceremonies take place?**

In both chapters, animals were killed in the court and parts of the animals were burned on the brazen altar. In both chapters parts of the animals were burned outside the camp. But in the 9th chapter nothing happens in the Holy or Most Holy.

We see each other in the court condition. We understand that the world sees only the stench of the sacrifice "outside the camp." But the incense altar and mercy seat are not a part of chapter 9 because those only God appreciates.

### **What happened to the blood?**

Lev. 9:8,9 Aaron therefore went unto the altar and slew the calf of the sin offering which was for himself. And the sons of Aaron brought the blood unto him and he dipped his finger in the blood and put it upon the horns of the altar and poured out the blood at the bottom of the altar.

Clearly it was the brazen altar which received the blood of the sacrificed sin offering. The brazen altar is cleansed so it is sanctified for use. This altar and its purpose is seen by all who walking in the example of Christ. But in chapter 16 it is the unseen altar, the incense altar, that is sanctified.

### **What types of sacrifices are made?**

Both the 9th and 16th chapters require a sin offering and burnt offering for "Aaron and his house" and a sin offering and burnt offering for "the people." The animals for these four offerings were the same for both sin offerings and for the burnt offering for Aaron

and his house. But in Lev. 9 there is a bullock offered in addition to the Lev. 16 ram as a burnt offering for the people.

We notice that Lev. 9 talks about three offerings never mentioned in Lev. 16:

Lev. 9:17 And he brought the meal offering and took an handful thereof and burnt it upon the altar...

Lev. 9:18 He slew also the bullock and the ram for a sacrifice of peace offerings which was for the people...

Lev. 9:21 And the breasts and the right shoulder Aaron waved for a wave offering before the Lord...

The sin offering was required to effect the atonement. The burnt offering showed God's acceptance of the sin offering. But here we have the meal, peace, and wave offering. These three offerings all show our consecration from three perspectives:

### **MEAL**

The high priest "took a handful and burnt it on the altar" [9:17]. Vs. 4 says it was "mingled with oil." Notice that no measure was specified. Each person gives what's appropriate for him--a handful. The Companion Bible says the meal offering was a present, or gift offering. The oil would represent the Holy Spirit mingled among the kernels of ground wheat which we willingly sacrifice on the altar.

### **PEACE**

The Companion Bible suggests: "The Hebrew word conveys the idea of peace on the ground of perfection of compensation or recompense. Hence connected with the thought of rendering payment of vows or praises because of peace enjoyed."

Rom. 5:1 Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God...

### **WAVE**

There is no instruction about how long Aaron was to wave the breasts and right shoulder. Clearly he was to continue doing so until it was taken from him. So we also must continue to "wave" the choicest portion of the peace offering (or consecration vows) until it is removed from us.

### **Blessing of the People**

We often hear about the special "blessing of the people" after the atonement ceremony was successfully completed. In fact there are two such blessings, but those are only recorded in chapter 9:

Lev. 9:22,23 And Aaron lifted up his hand toward the people and blessed them and came down from offering of the sin offering and the burnt offering, and peace offerings. And Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle of the congregation and came out and blessed the people: and the glory of the Lord appeared unto all the people.

We can appreciate that the world receives a kind of blessing from Jesus and the church class--a so-called "one handed" blessing. "Ye are the salt of the earth" reads Matt. 5:1 But the real blessing comes when the "glory of the Lord" appears unto all the people. Moses with Aaron in Lev. 9 seems to show the law [pictured by Moses] approves since justice is fully satisfied. This occurs only after Aaron goes into the tabernacle [showing a change from the sacrificing to the glorified condition] and comes out again.

### **A Beautiful Picture**

Many may read the 9th chapter of Leviticus and ask why so many animals had to die. Modern man calls it barbaric. But that's not the way it appeared to Paul. Writing in Hebrews he explains the symbolism:

Heb. 9:22-24 And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission. It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself now to appear in the presence of God for us.

Modern man loves the easy way out: no suffering, no sacrifice, no death. But remission of sins--atonement--comes only by the death of the perfect man Jesus. And as a result he has passed into the real Most Holy, the presence of God there to supervise the sacrifice of his body members.

The bullock represents our Lord. If he did not lay down his life in sacrifice, there would never have been a goat to be sacrificed. But his sacrifice has occurred and Paul tells us to obey the picture and willingly accept the ignominy of the way the sacrifice appears to the "world" outside the camp. It was a stench as these others gazed on the sacrifice. That was the way they saw it with our Lord and that's the way they see it with us.

But the result of the sacrificing will be blessing. Hebrews speaks about Jesus being the mediator of a new and better covenant:

Heb. 8:6 But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant which was established upon better promises.

Our commission now is to lay down our lives in sacrifice and help our brethren do the same. Phillips has beautifully translated Heb. 10:19-25 this way:

So, by virtue of the blood of Jesus, you and I, my brothers, may now have confidence to enter the Holy of Holies by a fresh and living way, which he has opened up for us by himself passing through the curtain, that is, his own human nature. Further, since we have a great High Priest set over the household of God, let us draw near with true hearts and fullest confidence, knowing that our inmost souls have been purified by the sprinkling of his blood just as our bodies are cleansed by the washing of clean water. In this confidence let us hold on to the hope that we profess without the slightest hesitation--for he is utterly dependable--and let

us think of one another and how we can encourage each other to love and do good deeds. Let us not hold aloof from our church meetings, as some do. Let us do all we can to help one another's faith, and this the more earnestly as we see the final day drawing ever nearer.

Closing Hymn: #54 — "Once For All"

*[First given in a symposium at the General Convention, July, 1999]*



## *Baptismal Discourse*

Opening Hymn: #14 — “Full Surrender”

One hundred forty years ago there was a terrible battle between Americans who lived in the north and Americans who lived in the south. It was fought in south-central Pennsylvania near the Maryland border about 100 miles from here. The Union forces won that battle, but at great cost: 23,000 soldiers were either wounded, missing, or dead on the fields of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. The 16th president of the United States left the capital in Washington and travelled to Gettysburg to dedicate a national cemetery. It is said he penned his notes on the back of an envelope. His short speech has been known ever since as the Gettysburg Address. In it he said:

“We have come to dedicate a portion of this field as a final resting-place for those who here gave their lives that [our] nation might live. But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate—we cannot consecrate—we cannot hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, HAVE CONSECRATED it far above our poor power to add or detract.”

Stirring words, yet except for Lincoln’s use of it, “consecration” is a word rarely heard today. The dictionary defines it as:

**con·se·crate** to make or declare sacred; set apart or dedicate to the service of the Deity.

**con·se·cra·tion** act of consecrating; dedication to the service and worship of God.

This is a scriptural word. In its various forms the word appears about 40 times but only twice in the New Testament. Most of the time the word appears in connection with the consecration of the priesthood of the Israelites.

The Tabernacle in the wilderness was “church” for the nation of Israel. All the members of the tribe of Levi had no inheritance in the promised land. They were the servants of the Tabernacle. The high priest and the underpriests were taken from this tribe. We read about the special priestly dedication ceremony in Leviticus chapter 8. Here is what it says:

Lev. 8:33 And ye shall not go out of the door of the tabernacle of the congregation in seven days, until the days of your **consecration** be at an end; for seven days shall he **consecrate** you.

In our fellowship, consecration means the complete dedication of oneself to God. At every Memorial service we are reminded of the special relationship we have with the Heavenly Father. As we individually partake of the unleavened bread, we see ourselves broken in the sense that we have given up our own will so we might do God’s will.

Rom. 6:13 (Weymouth) And no longer offer your faculties as instruments of wickedness for sin to use, but rather offer yourselves to God as living men risen from the dead, and your faculties to God as instruments of righteousness.

Prov. 23:26 My son, give me thine heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways.

These scriptures urge us to consecration. They describe far more than a positive “attitude.” Most of us can remember the precise time we made up our minds to dedicate ourselves to God and at that moment took a vow of consecration that His will would become our will.

Psa. 56:11,12 *reflects the attitude of those who accept this offer and who consecrate themselves:* In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me. Thy vows are upon me, O God: I will render praises unto thee.

Many religious groups require emotionalism to convince others to take their “stand” for Christ. Though motivated by stirring eloquence, these souls often drift back to their former habits soon after they leave the meeting.

Consecration is not a trivial matter. It is a lifetime contract. Unlike some “lifetime” vows which are easily broken, the Lord will require us to perform what we have promised.

Ecc. 5:4,5 When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.

If we fully submit our wills, we have the benefit of all God’s promises to watch over us.

Prov. 23:23 Buy the truth and sell it not.

Buy the truth? What does it cost? The Lord gave a parable to impress upon us the necessity of knowing just what is involved if we decide to follow him:

Luke 14:25-31 (Moffat) There were large crowds traveling with him; so he turned and said to them, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate (“love less”—Strong) his father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, 1) **aye and his own life**, he cannot be a disciple of mine; whoever does not 2) **carry his own cross** and come after me, he cannot be a disciple of mine. For which of you wants to build a tower and does not first sit down to calculate the expense, to see if he has enough money to complete it?—in case, after he has laid the foundation and then is unable to finish the building, all the spectators start to make fun of him, saying, “This fellow started to build but he could not finish it.”

God’s word shows that we would not be called to consecrate if it were not possible to “pay” our vows. As our appreciation of God deepens, we begin to see how little it costs. In his letter to the Romans, Paul gives his judgment about the cost:

Rom. 8:18,31 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. What shall we then say to these things? Since God be for us, who can be against us?

John 1:11,12 He came unto his own and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he **privilege** [margin] to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.

We do not consecrate to a person, to a particular work, to a group of people we like, or to any organization. We have no “creed” which must be signed. We consecrate ourselves to God. There are many dedicated people in this world, but they are not dedicated to God. From the moment we give ourselves to God, we must use our best judgment to carry out the terms of this “contract.” We must do what we understand to be the Lord’s will. There will be others, of course, who will try to make our decisions for us, but carrying out our consecration is a personal responsibility!

“We heard recently of a dear couple who have an infant child, which properly they very dearly love. The mother was shocked by some sisters intimating to her that it should be considered a disgrace to be a mother, in view of our expectation of great changes shortly. [this was written in 1913] We believe that those dear sisters made a mistake. They, of course, have a right to **think for themselves** and to **shape their own courses** in life according to they best judgment of the Lord’s will. But they have **no right to censure others** for having a different opinion on the subject. **To his own Master each servant stands or falls.**” (R5353)

The best term to describe our relationship to God after he accepts our consecration is “steward.”

stew'ard one who manages another's property or financial affairs; one who administers anything as the agent of another or others.

We consecrate or give God everything we have, and he gives it back to us, setting us up as stewards. Then he observes how we use what we have in His service. Here is the way that process is described in the parable of the talents:

Matt. 25:14-29 (selectively) For the kingdom of heaven is as a man traveling into a far country, who called his own servants and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability. After a long time the lord of those servants returneth and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five . . . His lord said unto him, “Well done” . . . he also that had received two talents came and said, . . . “Behold I have gained two other talents beside them.” His lord said unto him, “Well done.” . . . And then he which had received the one talent came and said . . . “I was afraid and went and hid thy talent in the earth.” . . . His lord said unto him, “Thou wicked and slothful servant.”

There are many lessons here. Both the one who had been given five talents and the one who had two received the same words of praise. But the failure of the one who had the

least shows how important it is for everyone one of us to do our best even if we think we have so little. Note: the unfaithful servant “hid it in the earth.” He did absolutely nothing with it. The lord himself gained nothing by giving the servant something.

There is no way to measure or compare one sacrifice with another. There is an interesting illustration of this in the offering of incense on the day of atonement:

Lev. 16:12 And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the Lord, and **his hands full** of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the vail; and he shall put the incense upon the fire before the Lord.

How much incense is there in two hands full? We don't know exactly. It depends on the size of one's hands. Each of us offers a different quantity compared to another sacrificer.

Who may consecrate? This privilege is not extended to just anyone:

Heb. 5:4 No man taken this honour unto himself but he that **is called** of God as was Aaron. (*Aaron, of course, was the first high priest.*)

1 Cor. 1:22-26 (Moffatt) Jews demand miracles and Greeks want wisdom, but our message is Christ the crucified—a stumbling block to the Jews, “sheer folly” to the Gentiles, but for those **who are called**, whether Jews or Greeks, a Christ who is the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the “foolishness” of God is wiser than men, and the “weakness” of God is stronger than men. Why, look at your own ranks, my brothers; not many wise men (that is, judged by human standards), not many leading men, not many of good birth, **have been called.**”

The emphasis here is on the calling of God. God's message of truth was hidden from the majority of the Jews at the first advent. It is also hidden now during the time of his second advent. It is hidden from all except the few God calls and to whom he reveals his purposes.

*[Optional parable of the rich young ruler in Matt. 19:16-22, The man was attracted, but thought the “cost” was too much.]*

Those who can see that God has been attracting them to Him are the ones addressed in...

Rom. 12:1,2 (Diaglott) I entreat you, therefore, Brethren, by the tender compassions of God, to present your bodies a living sacrifice holy, well-pleasing to God—your rational religious service. And do not conform yourselves to this age, but transform yourselves by the renovation of your mind, that you may ascertain what is the will of God—the good, and well-pleasing, and perfect.

2 Cor. 9:7 God loveth a cheerful giver. (*Applies to the giving of one's life, not just cash!*)

Those who offer themselves to God possess FAITH:

Heb. 11:6 Without faith it is impossible to please him, for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

And HUMILITY:

Psa. 51:17 The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.

No scripture says how much KNOWLEDGE we need before we can present ourselves in consecration. Some have said that one must read the Bible from cover to cover before one can consecrate; others say we must read and understand all six volumes of *Studies in the Scriptures*. If all of God's children must read the volumes before they God could accept their consecration, how any could consecrate before they were written?

BAPTISM goes hand-in-hand with the topic of consecration. Generally individuals are baptized as soon as possible after they have made a consecration. Baptism is only an outward sign of something that has previously taken place within the heart. Those who will be baptized today did not make up their minds to do so because of something they heard today. They consecrated themselves before coming to this convention and with joy want to acknowledge that step to all the Lord's people gathered here.

There is, of course, no scripture that says one **must** be baptized, but it is highly recommended:

Matt. 3:16,17 (*Baptism of Jesus*) 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.

Acts 9:18 (*Baptism of Paul*) And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized.

Acts 8:35,36 (*Baptism of the Eunuch*) Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture and preached unto him Jesus. And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized.

Acts 2:41 (*Baptism of new converts*) Then they that gladly received his word were baptized.

Baptism is only a symbol of a consecration that has already been made. We keep no written records nor is it necessary for anyone to produce proof of his baptism before being accepted in fellowship by the brethren. Class elections and the celebration of the Memorial are reserved for the consecrated, but it is up to the individual to say whether he is



consecrated or not. Baptism is a matter between the individual and the Lord. Paul gives us a further explanation of this symbol of baptism:

Gal. 3:26,27 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.

Rom. 6:3,5 Know ye not that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.

This scripture shows us that baptism is much more than water immersion.

Consecration is summed up in:

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

It has been termed “reasonable” by Paul, and so we see it to be, for consecration is really the doing of God’s will as we perceive it to be. Since evil now flourishes, it also means persecution, and sacrifice—the sacrifice of earthly advantage, pleasures, opportunities, and especially of life here on earth. That’s why we call this a “high calling.” In return God has promised a special reward for those who give themselves wholly to him. Yet none of us takes this step because we see it as a shrewd trade: our worthless life for something of great value. Regardless what may be given in the future to the consecrated child of God, we know that in this life God gives us a peace, contentment, love and fellowship far beyond what the world offers. Brother Russell has termed this the “present inheritance” of the saints.

Our consecration is only the start of Christian development. We must rededicate ourselves every day.

Psa. 61:5,8 For thou, O God, hast heard my vows: thou hast given me the heritage of those that fear thy name. So will I sing praise unto thy name for ever, that I may **daily** perform my vows.

“My earliest thought I desire shall be, what shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me?”

1 Cor. 15:31 I die daily!

“To fulfill faithfully the duties of your station;

2) to use to the uttermost the gifts of your ministry;

3) to bear chafing annoyances and trivial irritations as martyrs bore the pillory and stake;

4) to find the one noble trait in people who try to molest you;

5) to put the kindest construction on unkind acts and words;

6) to love with the love of God even the unthankful and evil;

- 7) to be content to be a fountain in the midst of a wild valley of stones, nourishing a few wild flowers, or now and again a thirsty sheep;  
 8) and to do this always and not for the praise of man, but for the sake of God; —this makes a consecrated life.” (R3603—F.B. Meyer)

*[Go to front row and introduce the candidates.]*

Will the candidates for baptism please stand. We want to ask a few simple questions:

1. Do you acknowledge your sinful condition from which you cannot save yourself?
2. Do you recognize Jesus Christ as the one who died to redeem mankind and have you personally accepted his sacrifice on your behalf.
3. Having done this, have you presented yourself in consecration to God as a living sacrifice to do His will even unto death?

*[Extend the right hand of fellowship. Give little cards with scriptures.]*

Closing Hymn: #224 — “All of Thee”

*[First delivered at the Florida convention, March, 1994]*

1 John 3:1

Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.

Psalm 121:7,8

The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil: he shall preserve thy soul. The Lord shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore.

Col. 3:23,24

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.

1 Cor. 2:9

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.

Isaiah 54:10

My kindness shall not depart from thee,  
neither shall the covenant of my peace be  
removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy  
on thee.

Numbers 6:24-26

The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: the  
Lord make his face shine upon thee, and  
be gracious unto thee: the Lord lift up his  
countenance upon thee, and give thee  
peace.

1 Samuel 12:24

[Reverence] the Lord, and serve him in  
truth with all your heart: for consider how  
great things he hath done for you.

Psalm 37:4,5

Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he  
shall give thee the desires of thine heart.  
Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also  
in him; and he shall bring it to pass.

Psalm 84:11

The Lord God is a sun and shield: the  
Lord will give grace and glory: no good  
thing will he withhold from them that walk  
uprightly.

Psalm 91:4

He shall cover thee with his feathers, and  
under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth  
shall be thy shield and buckler.

## *Be Not Weary in Well Doing*

Opening Hymn: #270 — “Rest For The Weary”

“On the plains of hesitation bleach the bones of countless millions who,  
on the eve of victory sat down to rest, and resting, died.”

2 Thes. 3:13 Brethren, be not weary in well doing.

On Wednesday evening, October 11, 1916, Brother Russell spoke to the brethren in New York. Although no-one knew it at the time, they were his last words to that ecclesia. Here is how he began:

“There is a natural tendency amongst people to tire of a thing when the novelty wears off. Even the hearing of the truth, strange as it may seem, causes weariness to some after a time. It is the same way with the soldier. It is easy for him to enlist and march forward when the drums are beating and the bands are playing, and enthusiasm runs high; but when the damp, cold weather comes, when ice forms in the trenches, and there is no martial music, he is liable to grow weary. Army life does not seem to be nearly so attractive as it appeared at the first. This is true in our spiritual warfare—in fighting the good fight of faith. There are times when all around seem joyous, when the Christian soldiers are marching, and all are stimulated and encouraged; whereas there are times when the clouds hang low and are dark, chilliness surrounds us, ardor is abated, and we are liable to get discouraged.”—*Reprints 6064*

As I look at myself and most of those around me in our fellowship, it's clear we're all getting older. Old people don't have the energy they once did. They can't see, hear, walk, taste, smell, or do much of anything as well as when they were young. It is hard for them to have much enthusiasm for new ideas because that takes energy and energy is in short supply. This is the time the adversary finds discouragement to be such a powerful weapon against the Lord's people. He tells them to stop running the race, walking in the narrow way, fighting the good fight—that they should sit down to rest. If they do, they die.

Many of our Christian friends think resting is OK. They believe that if you accept Jesus Christ as your personal savior, you are saved. We need not be concerned about doing anything because, after all, it is faith that counts, not works. As the expression has it, “Once in grace, always in grace.”

1 Cor. 9:26,27 I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

If the great apostle Paul, a man who surely could be considered “saved” in every sense of the word, says unless he continues to “run” and to “fight” he might be a castaway, we must conclude that salvation takes more than saying the right words once in our life. If Paul would not let himself become discouraged and give up the good fight of faith, we dare not do so either.

## The Importunate Widow

Luke 18:1-8 (Phillips) Then he gave them an illustration to show that they must always pray and never lose heart [“become discouraged”—become wearied]. Once upon a time, he said, there was a magistrate in a town who had neither fear of God nor respect for his fellow-men. There was a widow in the town who kept coming to him, saying, Please protect me from the man who is trying to ruin me. And for a long time he refused. But later he said to himself, Although I don’t fear God and have no respect for men, yet this woman is such a nuisance that I shall give judgment in her favor, or else her continual visits will be the death of me! Then the Lord said, Notice how this dishonest magistrate behaved. Do you suppose God, patient as he is, will not see justice done for his chosen, who appeal to him day and night? I assure you he will not delay in seeing justice done.

This is a parable people don’t talk much about. Is God like an unrighteous judge who does something only so he won’t be continually bothered? Of course not.

The King James says the judge was unjust (other translations say “corrupt,” “dishonest,” “unrighteous”). The law was clear: the rights of those with no power were to be protected, especially widows and orphans because they became helpless when the man of the house died. Deut. 27:19 says, “Cursed be he that perverteth the judgment of the stranger, fatherless, and **widow**.” This judge didn’t care about what God commands nor about the merits of the cases brought by the people of the town. Although it is a parable, I think the listeners understood that this judge allowed his judgment to be influenced by bribes, something the widow could not afford.

But in spite of that, she did get justice because she never gave up. She kept coming back, and coming back, so that finally the judge settled the case in her favor. Think about the Church in her “widowed” condition and her communion with God. The favor God shows to his elect is so much more than what was shown by the corrupt judge:

Matthew 7:11 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?

If an evil, corrupt judge eventually dispenses justice, “how much more” shall the heavenly Father do the same—even though it might appear that he will tolerate the wrongs taking place around us or that are happening in our individual lives forever. Dare we become weary in well doing? No! Remember the point of the parable: “Then he gave them an illustration to show that they must always pray and never lose heart.” One antidote to weariness is prayer, and we know our prayers go up to the most righteous judge in the entire universe.

The closing words (verse 8) are “Nevertheless, when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” In spite of the faithfulness of God and the positive assurance that he will execute judgment on behalf of his elect, the great danger is that his people will grow weary, that they will lose their faith and stop sending up their prayers to God.



Proverbs 13:12 says, “Hope deferred maketh the heart sick.” Few ever quote the remainder of this scripture: “but a longing fulfilled is a tree of life” (NIV). God’s “chosen” will certainly see the day when their longings are fulfilled.

Let us learn from this parable the lesson that though our prayers might appear to go unanswered, we must persevere and not grow weary in making supplication to God. May we, at the end of our course, be able to say in the words of the apostle Paul, “I have kept the faith” (2 Tim. 4:7).

### Consider Him

In that discourse in New York just three weeks before he died, Bro. Russell asked the question, What shall we do if we get weary and faint in our minds? His answer came from Hebrews 12:

Heb. 12:3 Consider him who endured such contradiction of sinners, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

We are to consider our Lord Jesus and how much he endured without getting faint and weary. The contradiction he felt from sinners is of the kind the footstep followers of Christ will feel as they seek to do the Father’s will.

Heb. 4:15 (NIV) We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.

Surely Jesus was tempted to grow weary and faint in his mind even at the start of his walk in the narrow way. Satan came to him and suggested an easier way than the way of sacrifice. Jesus answered, “Get thee behind me, Satan!” Even though we follow in Jesus’ footsteps we will never endure as much as he did. Here’s more from this last talk of Bro. Russell’s in New York:

“In every congregation there is danger of growing weary in well-doing. Well-doing costs something. It means sacrificing. If you are serving the Lord’s cause, you are denying yourself in some way. The world, the flesh and the adversary are pressing hard to draw us, not exactly from the prize, but from the narrow way that leads to the prize. They would make us faint and cause us to say, “Oh, I am so tired; I cannot do any more!” Doubtless we all have had such experiences. If we get faint in **body**, we can rest. If we get faint in **mind**, it is more difficult to become refreshed.”—*Reprints 6064*

By lifting our eyes to Jesus, by considering him, we see that he was put to death as a malefactor, but God raised him to spiritual life. He will do the same for us: “If we suffer, we shall also reign with him” (2 Tim. 2:12). “Heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together” (Rom. 8:17).

Bro. Russell gave one more suggestion to avoid becoming weary. He said we should live in the future, not in the past. If we live in the past, we will dwell upon our mistakes and shortcomings and that will surely discourage us. But if we contemplate the future and the part we will have in bringing blessings to the world of mankind, we will become enthusiastic and renewed in spirit.

2 Cor. 4:16-18 Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

### The Metaphor of Farming

Galatians 6:9 And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall **reap**, if we faint not.

Farmers know if they are to succeed, they must do more than plow the land and sow the seed. They must not grow weary with the constant need to cultivate, feed and tend the growing plants. I am sure they look forward with joy to the prospect of reaping the fruitage of their efforts, even though reaping is a lot of work. After all, reaping is the whole point of farming.

Proverbs 24:30-34 (NIV) I went past the field of the sluggard, past the vineyard of the man who lacks judgment; thorns had come up everywhere, the ground was covered with weeds, and the stone wall was in ruins. I applied my heart to what I observed and learned a lesson from what I saw: A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest—and poverty will come on you like a bandit, and scarcity like an armed man.

A little sleep, a little slumber . . . a little sitting down to rest . . . and the result may not be poverty for us, but it will be the loss of everything we once thought really mattered. We have made our calling sure. Like good farmers let us apply ourselves each day so that we may make our election sure as well.

Matthew 13:20-22 (NIV) The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away. The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful.

This parable of the sower and the seed teaches that receiving the good news of the gospel and accepting it is only the first step. It does not guarantee fruitage. Allowing trouble, persecution, the worries of this life, or discouragement of any kind to take control of us will mean that we will be found unfruitful, unfaithful.

**“He who hesitates is lost.”**

“On the plains of **hesitation** bleach the bones of countless millions...” The word “hesitate” does not occur in the King James in any form. Yet there is a hint of a hesitancy of spirit in these words from Ecclesiastes:

Eccles. 11:4 He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap.

One can almost see the [unsuccessful] farmer standing in his field saying, “Looks like the wind is coming up. I’d better wait until tomorrow,” or at harvest time saying, “Looks like rain, better wait until tomorrow before cutting the grain.” Even if you’re not a farmer, you can guess what will happen: no crop, no success.

Hesitation is a close friend of weariness. Even if we do not have the strength to get involved with the “sowing” or “reaping” work of others, we all should be able to support those who are doing such work by offering encouraging words and even financial assistance if the Lord has made it possible for us to do so. I don’t think we should be overly concerned about whether one approach or some different approach is the better one to use in holding forth the word of life to the world around us. Just two verses later we read:

Eccles. 11:6 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.

*Manna for December 29:* All of the Lord's people, in proportion as they desire to be the servants of the Truth, should be continually on the alert to note opportunities for service, and should expect to be guided and used of the Lord. Wherever we see evidences of devotion to the Lord and His Word, we should be on the alert to extend a helping hand.

2 Cor. 9:6 But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.

Brethren, let us not become weary in well doing. Let us not become discouraged because things have gone on longer than we think they should, or because our physical and mental strength may not be what it once was. Let us do with our might what our hand finds to do. Let us be counted among those who sow and who reap bountifully.

“On the plains of hesitation bleach the bones of countless millions who, on the eve of victory sat down to rest, and resting, died.”

Closing Hymn: #309 — “To the Work” [long 4-stanza hymn]

*[First given at San Diego, December 1998]*

## Bearing God's Burdens

I long had borne a weary load  
 Along life's rough and thorny road,  
 And oftentimes had wondered why  
 My friend walked burdenless, while I  
 Was forced to carry day by day  
 The cross which on my shoulders lay.

When, lo, one day the Master laid  
 Another cross on me! Dismayed  
 And faint, and trembling and distressed,  
 I cried, "Oh, I have longed for rest  
 These many days. I cannot bear  
 This other heavy load of care.  
 I pray Thee, Lord, behold *this* one—  
 Shall I bear both while he hath none?"

No answer came. The cross was laid  
 On my poor back, and I was weighed  
 Down to the earth. And as I went  
 Toiling along and almost spent,  
 Again I cried, "Lord, have I been  
 Untrue to Thee? Is it for sin  
 That I have done, that I must still  
 Carry this cross against my will?"

"My child," the Master's voice returned,  
 "Hast thou not yet the lesson learned?  
 The burden thou hast borne so long  
 Hath only made thee grow more strong.  
 And fitted thee to bear for Me  
 This other load I lay on thee.

Thy brother is too weak as yet  
 To have a cross upon him set.  
 God's burdens rest upon the strong—  
 They stronger grow who bear them long.  
 And each new burden is a sign  
 That greater power to bear is thine."

So now no longer I repine,  
 Because a heavy cross is mine,  
 But struggle onward with the prayer,  
 Make me more worthy, Lord, to bear!

## *Be Ye Perfect*

Opening Hymn: #167 – “The Beauty of Holiness”

“...love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven. Be ye therefore perfect even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”—Matt. 5:44,45,48

We can all understand the idea of loving our enemies and doing good to those who do evil to us, but how are we suppose to understand how we are to be “perfect”? Is it a prophetic utterance that comes true when faithful Christians receive their heavenly reward? Surely actual perfection as human beings cannot be the thought since the scriptures tell us that there is none righteous, no not one.

Br. Russell suggested that the perfection called for in this scripture means perfection of heart intention. The idea is that we can never be actually perfect in the flesh, but we can desire to do right even if we do not actually do everything perfectly.

The difficulty of actually performing everything perfectly is suggested by James:

James 3:2 If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man and able also to bridle the whole body.

In the eighth verse, James says that no man can tame the tongue ... and to that we must all agree. Thus it would seem that actual perfection is something that James would say is beyond all human beings. What is interesting, however, is that he also says that perfection of a sort is attainable:

James 1:4 But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

Here James seems to say that if we are rightly influenced by our trials and experiences, we will be perfect, and the Greek word is the same one he later uses when he talks about a perfect man being able to control his words.

And what is this Greek word? It is #5046 in Strong’s concordance. It means: complete (in various applications of labor, growth, mental and moral character, etc); completeness. It is translated: of full age, man, perfect. It should be translated “mature.” And that is the way Rotherham (and others) render it:

James 1:4 (Rotherham) But let your endurance have mature work that ye may be mature and complete, in nothing coming short.

That we can understand. If we are told we must become perfect, we would stop before we begin. But if we are told that we must become mature, we would believe it to be attainable. Maturity is everyone’s goal. We all try to achieve it about the same time we learn what the word means.



Phil. 3:14,15 I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect be thus minded.

Here is the same Greek word #5046. Paul includes himself in an “us” class, a class that is perfect. Of course the proper sense of perfection is maturity:

Phil. 3:14,15 (RSV) I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let those of us who are mature be thus minded.

And just what is maturity?

- mature:** 1. complete in natural growth or development, as plant and animal forms, cheese, wine, etc. 3. fully developed in body or mind, as a person.  
4. pertaining to or characteristic of full development.  
5. completed, perfected, or elaborated in full by the mind.

Clearly it is possible for us to attain maturity as part of the new creation of God. Paul tells us that those who join him in this maturity are pressing toward the goal for the prize of the call of God. In fact, the best contrast we have for the fact that maturity is possible, is the scriptures that contrast it with immaturity, or childishness:

Heb. 5:12-14 For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat. For everyone that useth milk is unskillful 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.

The phrase “of full age” is the same Greek word #5046; it means mature:

Heb. 5:14 (RSV) But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their faculties trained by practice to distinguish good from evil.

There is nothing wrong with the milk of the word, but Paul says that after a period of time, sufficient development should take place so one’s diet is not milk alone. Babies can’t handle “meat,” but they can when they mature. Note that development comes “by reason of use.” A child matures because he uses his faculties ... imperfectly at first, but later with skill. If we don’t exercise our spiritual “senses,” maturity will not be ours.

We know that there are some characteristics children possess we should copy. A firm and abiding trust in our Heavenly Father is one example. But maturity means growth in understanding what is expected of us:

1 Cor. 14:20 Brethren be not children in understanding, howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.

The word translated men is Greek word #5046, the same one found in the phrase “be ye perfect.” Earlier in this letter Paul tells the Corinthians that development and growth is natural among humans and is expected to take place in new creatures:

1 Cor. 13:11 When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

What sort of things do you suppose Paul means when he says he put away childish things? If we understand how a child operates, we can contrast it with the behavior of a mature individual.

### **A Child is Self-centered**

A baby thinks it is the only thing in the world and everything exists to serve its needs. It learns that smiling and crying bring attention. Its concern for itself may develop into a problem if another baby arrives a year or two later. The attention that had been exclusive now must be shared. It is a mark of maturity when a child begins to realize that the world does not exist to serve its needs. Doing something for others without expectation of reward demonstrates even greater maturity, and sometimes is never reached at all.

Are we self-centered? Do we believe others exist to serve our needs? Do we ever find ourselves doing something for others with no hope of reward?

Matt. 25:42-45 For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat, I was thirsty and ye gave me no drink, I was a stranger and ye took me not in, naked and ye clothed me not, sick and in prison and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him saying, Lord when saw we thee an hungered, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.

The separation of the sheep and the goats clearly applies to a class of faithful and unfaithful ones at the close of the kingdom. As a consequence we may be inclined to dismiss this indictment as not applying to us. But God’s standards don’t vary. The expected development on the part of the world during a period where righteousness predominates is the same expected of the church during a period when unrighteousness predominates. How do we treat those who have need of spiritual meat and drink? Do we content ourselves with our own affairs, ignoring the “stranger” or the spiritually sick? Around us are those in the vast prisonhouse of death. If we are to be pleasing to our heavenly Father, we will look for ways we can be of service to others.

It is interesting that doing things for others brings more joy to the giver than it does to the receiver. It can be a small thing, a simple “good deed.” A good deed is one you don’t expect to benefit you in any way, not even a gold star. It isn’t that easy to find such a deed, but when you do and follow through you feel so good. It means concentrating your attention on

what's happening around you right now. Don't turn your back when the chance comes your way. You'll feel good you took the opportunity, and you will be growing into a mature Christian.

### **A Child is Weak**

The responsibility of parenthood is great. A child needs constant care, both physically and mentally. He believes anything and may escape into his own make-believe world. His emotions govern his thinking and he is easily led astray. The military loves the 18 to 20 year olds because they think they will live forever. They glamorize circumstances that can mean certain death.

Eph. 4:14,15 (Phillips) We are not meant to remain as children at the mercy of every chance wind of teaching and the jockeying of men who are expert in the crafty presentation of lies. But we are meant to hold firmly to the truth in love, and to grow up in every way into Christ, the head.

Propaganda is the spreading of principles or ideas by an organization with the intent to influence thought. A committee of cardinals established in 1622 by Pope Gregory was called the "College of Propaganda" and was responsible for the training of priests for foreign missions. People are influenced by propaganda and can be controlled by others through it. Paul says that unless we hold firmly to the truth and grow in it, we are subject to external influences that will take us far from the Lord.

A child hates to feel afraid or uncertain. He wants to believe that his dad or mother—his leaders—know everything. It is a good parent who trains his child in growing up so that they do not need to lean on others. Leaders in the church should be dedicated to the growth and development of the entire congregation so that they too can judge things that differ. A tolerance for uncertainty is a mark of maturity. The truth gives us so much. If we aren't satisfied with a particular answer to something, we should put the matter on the shelf for awhile. In time it will be clear. Looking for someone who has all the answers will ultimately prove to be a great disappointment.

### **A Child is Unreliable**

Children are children and that means we can't really trust them. True, we try to develop them into mature individuals where trust is possible, but in the early stages of development their immaturity makes them do foolish things.

Luke 6:38 (Phillips) For whatever measure you use with other people, they will use in their dealings with you.

This lesson is generally hard for a child to learn. He has a ball and wants others to play with him. If a disagreement comes up, the possessor of the "ball" thinks his way should prevail. If it doesn't, he takes his ball and goes home, thinking that he wins. Actually,

everybody loses. In time, the child learns this is no way to solve problems. It is an empty thing to be liked because you have the ball, or whatever it is the others want. When a child meets those who are liked because of their good qualities, he begins to learn about growing up and acting in a responsible way.

If we treat people with tolerance, we will receive it. If we exact an eye for an eye, we will likewise receive that judgment when we least expect it. In our fellowship we say we operate with the spirit of tolerance and good will toward all. But we must develop that spirit in a genuine sense. We are very much on trial when we discuss the truth with those who disagree with us. If we become irritated or annoyed because “they just can’t see it our way,” we are acting childishly. It is like the child who picks up his ball [and his books!] and goes home.

1 Cor. 13:11 [Free translation] When I was a child, I was impetuous and immature. I spoke as a child and said what I pleased. I thought as a child, in an emotional and make-believe world of my own creation. I reasoned as a child in a superficial, self-centered fashion, content with half answers to questions I only partially understood. But when I became a mature man, I put away these childish things.

### The “Perfect” Man

Psa. 37:37 Mark the perfect man and behold the upright, for the end of that man is peace.

This same Hebrew word is used as a descriptor of Job:

Job 1:1 There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright.

The Hebrew word is #8535 and has the same thought as the Greek word we have been studying in the New Testament. It means complete or mature. Clearly it is an appropriate goal for all of us.

We have some helpful guidelines in the scriptures for developing maturity. That we have a responsibility for doing something there can be no doubt:

Philippians 2:12,14 Wherefore my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only [note: *parousia*—hardly his coming!], but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. ... Do all things without murmurings and disputings.

The favor that God has given to us requires great care on our part to follow the example that has been set before us. Working out our own salvation means that we will be held personally accountable for our own growth and development. Paul was a great leader of the brethren, but he taught the brethren they would not get into the kingdom on his coattails. Growth implies growing pains. Perhaps in an effort to avoid such pains, some of our brethren stop developing and take no interest in their own salvation.

The recurring theme of the scriptures is that we should pattern our life after that of our elder brother Jesus:

Heb. 12:1,2 Let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith.

When we look to Jesus, we receive that encouragement to keep striving for the prize of the high calling. Peter could walk on water as long as he kept his eyes on Jesus. But when he took his eyes away, he started to sink. In the same way we can be helped to accomplish impossible things as long as our eyes are fixed on Jesus. But if we look around at our brethren and not Jesus, we will be disappointed, distressed, and possibly led away from the lighted “path of the just.”

Growth and development requires vigilance and activity. It also must influence every facet of our lives.

1 Peter 1:13,15 Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober ... But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation.

Peter is not telling us that we should watch what we say—important as that is—but rather that we should be holy in every phase of our behavior (the real meaning of Greek word #391, rendered here as “conversation”).

We cannot possibly be happy when those around us are not. Therefore we ought to be on the alert to how we can help others, for in so doing we become the beneficiary.

James 3:15-17 (Phillips) If a fellow man or woman has no clothes to wear and nothing to eat, and one of you say, “Good luck to you; I hope you’ll keep warm and find enough to eat,” and yet give them nothing to meet their physical needs, what on earth is the good of that? Yet that is exactly what a bare faith without a corresponding life is like—useless and dead.

Peter points out that the real peril of sustained immaturity is that we might eventually lose our sonship:

2 Peter 3:16,17 (Phillips) There are, of course, some things in [Paul’s] letters that are difficult to understand, and which, unhappily, ill-informed and unbalanced people distort and bring disaster on their own heads. But you, my friends whom I love, are forewarned, and should therefore be very careful not to be carried away by the errors of wicked men and so lose your proper foothold.

If we keep our faith pure and simple and remember that God leads us through His word, we will grow up as fully mature new creatures who will be given an abundant entrance into the heavenly kingdom. And the scriptures are the most important tool in our development:

2 Tim. 3:16,17 All scripture given by inspiration of God is profitable ... that the man of God may be perfect!

When I was a child I thought as a child, but when I became a man I put away childish things.

“Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect!”

Closing Hymn: #296 (only verses 1,3,5 if time is short) – “Search and See”

*[First delivered in Los Angeles, December, 1971]*

## *Becoming a Disciple of Christ*

Opening Hymn: #13—Self-Examination

It's easy to be a Christian in America. This country was established on Christian principles. Most Americans claim to be Christian. It is unthinkable that someone seeking political office would say he is a non-Christian.

It's easy to become a Christian in America. Most Christian tracts generally tell a reader to accept Christ as his personal savior and in that moment he is saved—which is another way of saying he is now a Christian. Where do the writers of such tracts get this idea?

Acts 2:21 [Peter speaks] And it shall come to pass that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. (Joel 2:32)

Acts 16:30,31 [A jailer asks] Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And [Paul and Silas] said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.

Rom. 10:9,10,13 [Paul speaks] If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved (Joel 2:32).

Is it really this simple? What should you say to someone who quotes these scriptures, then says you make discipleship too complicated?

Luke 14:25-27,33 And there went great multitudes with him: and he turned, and said unto them . . . [believe on my name and be saved? No!] . . . If any man come to me, and hate not<sup>1</sup> his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, **he cannot be my disciple**. And [2] whosoever **doth not bear his cross**, and come after me, **cannot be my disciple**. [vs. 33] So likewise, whosoever he be of you that [3] **forsaketh not all that he hath**, he **cannot be my disciple**.

Here was the best time for Jesus to tell everyone how simple it was to be his disciple. But he didn't do it. Was Jesus making the subject of discipleship too complicated? Hardly.

Yes, Joel [2:32] does talk about "calling on the name of the Lord," but Joel does not claim that saying certain words is enough. In verse 13 he tells Israel, "Rend your heart, not your garments." In other words, if you don't change your real self, it has no value in God's sight. Discipleship is **not** about saying the right words. It is **not** about giving God 10% of what you have. It is about giving God everything you have. And few are willing to do that:

---

<sup>1</sup> Jerusalem Bible footnote: "Hebraism: an emphatic way of expressing a total detachment."

Mark 10:17,19-22,26 There came one running, and kneeled to [Jesus], and asked him, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life? [vs. 19] Thou knowest the commandments . . . And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth. Then Jesus beholding him loved him, and said unto him... [believe on my name and you will be saved?] 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. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions. [verse 26: disciples are astonished and ask] Who then can be saved?

Not very many, if salvation means becoming a disciple of the Master. One-third of this globe's billions claim to be Christian. But it is an empty claim:

Matt. 7:14 [Jesus speaks] Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and [billions?] **few** there be that find it.

Luke 12:32 [Jesus speaks] Fear not [big flock?] LITTLE FLOCK, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

Let's return to Acts 16:31 for a moment. The publishers of the Amplified Bible use this text to show why it is necessary to use more than one English word to translate a single Greek word. Here's what they say in their Forward:

"Acts 16:31 reads: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." What does the word "believe" mean? Webster defines it [as] . . . to expect or hope . . . to think or suppose." In this sense, most people believe in Christ—that he lived; that he was a perfect man who sincerely believed himself to be the Son of God, and that he died on the cross to save sinners. But this is by no means the meaning of the Greek word which 22 New Testament versions out of 24 consulted render "believe." They do so because there is no one English word that adequately conveys the intended meaning. Actually, the Greek word used here for believe . . . means "to adhere to, cleave to; to trust, to have faith in; to rely on." Consequently the words, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ ..." really mean *to have an absolute personal reliance upon the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour.*"

An illustration of this kind of "belief" is found in James 2:23 where we read that "Abraham **believed** God and it was imputed to him for righteousness." Abraham had such "an absolute personal reliance upon God" that (as James tells us in vs. 21) he willingly offered his greatly beloved son Isaac on the altar according to God's instruction.

### **Losing One's Salvation**

Why do we never see a tract warning Christians about the possibility they could lose their salvation? Perhaps it's because the churches really think that saying the magic words



guarantees everlasting salvation. But Paul didn't think that. He realized he had to remain faithful to his beliefs for his entire life or he could lose everything:

1 Cor. 9:27 But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

Rom. 11:21 If God spared not the natural branches [*meaning natural Israel*], **take heed** lest he also spare not thee.

Take heed! We should continually sweep out the corrupting influence of old "leaven" from our hearts and minds not just at Memorial time, but every day of the year.

### **The Pearl of Great Price**

One of Jesus' parables illustrates the idea of giving up everything to get something more valuable:

Matt. 13:45,46 The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.

What was the **price** of this costly pearl? The parable doesn't say. All we know is that it required "all that he had." Jesus told the young man in Mark 10 to sell all that he had. And he asks us to do the same. Is this a sacrifice? Would the merchant man of the parable say he made a big sacrifice? No! The pearl is so wonderful that everything he previously thought he wanted, he "sells" because he realizes that in comparison those things were worthless. The apostle Paul had exactly the same perspective as the merchant man:

Phil. 3:7,8 (RSV) But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ.

The young man who wanted to know how to obtain eternal life decides the price is too high. He was unwilling to sell all that he had, take up his cross, and follow the master. He actually "saw" the "pearl of great price," but he would not pay the price to obtain it.

### **Leprosy**

Most students of the Bible agree that leprosy pictures sin.

1. Leprosy disfigures the one who has it. Sin disfigures the perfection of God's creation.
2. Leprosy is progressive and highly infectious. Sin generally starts small, but eventually infects everything it touches.
3. Leprosy is incurable except by God; the effects of sin cannot be erased except by God.

Leviticus 14 describes the rituals required to certify that someone had been cured of leprosy. Was it easy? Did the priest or the leper say a few words and that was that? Not at all. Establishing a relationship with God after one was estranged from Him and His people was complicated. Here is what had to be done:

1. Two birds, cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop are brought. One bird is killed and the remaining bird, cedar wood, scarlet, and hyssop are dipped in its blood.
2. The leper is sprinkled seven times; the live bird is released in a field.
3. Seven days later the leper washes his clothes, shaves his hair, and washes his body.
4. The next day the leper brings to the priest **three** unblemished animals, flour, and oil.
5. One animal is killed. Some of it and the oil are waved. Some blood is placed on the leper's ear, thumb, and toe. Some oil is sprinkled seven times and some placed on the leper's ear, thumb, and toe, and poured on his head.
6. The other two animals are also killed and placed on the altar.

Notice that the leper does not say he believes in God, the great creator of the universe, and then he is saved. In fact he does not **say** anything! He must **do** something (in fact, a lot of "somethings"). Likewise, the process by which we become disciples requires far more than simply confessing our belief in the Lord Jesus. God has established the rules:

Matt 16:24 (NEB) If anyone wishes to be a follower of mine, (1) he must leave self behind; (2) he must take up his cross and come with me.

This text places the emphasis on what one must **do**, not on what one must **say**! Leaving self behind is equivalent to selling all the one has and giving it away. When people saw someone carrying a cross, they knew he was on his way to die. And death is frequently associated with discipleship:

Rom. 6:3,4 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.

Phil. 3:10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, **being made conformable unto his death**.

1 Cor. 4:9 For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were **appointed to death**: for we are made a **spectacle** unto the world, and to angels, and to men.

The Greek word rendered "spectacle" means "theater" and is translated that way in the two other places it appears in the N.T. Criminals "appointed to death" in Paul's day were exhibited as a gazingstock to amuse the people in the amphitheater and were "set forth last" in the show to fight with wild beasts. And this is the idea of Heb. 10:32,33:

Heb. 10:32,33 Call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used.

These are not the images used by our Christian friends when they try to find new converts to Christianity. Yet a disciple is expected to be like his Master. And what can we say about the Master?

Luke 9:57,58 A certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.

Matt. 10:25 It is enough for the **disciple** that he be as his **master**, and the servant as his lord. *If the head of the family is called Beelzebul, the members of the family will be called by even worse names!* [italics—Today’s English Version]

**Adam Clarke on Beelzebul:** “It is supposed that this idol was the same [as] worshipped at Ekron who had his name changed afterwards by the Jews to *Baal zebul*, the dung god, a title expressive of the utmost contempt. It seems probable that the worship of this vile idol continued even to the time of our Lord; and the title, being applied by the Jews to our Lord, affords the strongest proof of their malice.”

The world does not reward anyone for being a disciple of Jesus. If the world thinks well of you, then you must be the disciple of someone else!

### Drinking Blood

John 6:53 Then Jesus said unto them, 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. [vs. 56] He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.

The law was quite clear about “drinking blood.” It was prohibited in all circumstances:

Lev. 7:26,27 Ye shall eat no manner of blood, whether it be of fowl or of beast, in any of your dwellings. Whatsoever soul it be that eateth any manner of blood, even that soul shall be cut off from his people.

Put yourself in the place of those who heard Jesus say this, and ignore that the law said what it did about “drinking blood.” What would your reaction be to such words? Surely we can understand the general reaction:

John 6:60 [Amplified] When his disciples heard this, many of them said, This is a hard and difficult and strange saying—an offensive and unbearable message. Who can stand to hear it?—Who can be expected to listen to such teaching?

Was Jesus making this unnecessarily complicated? Why didn't he simply say, "Just believe in me and you will have life"? Because he wasn't interested in mass conversion. He well knew that many of his "nominal" disciples would no longer follow him (see vs. 66). More than that, he made no effort to attract them back. Why not? He knew there would always be a separation between those **who truly believed** on him and those who did not:

John 6:67-69 Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.

Blood in scripture pictures a life that is poured out, that is sacrificed. Drinking Jesus' blood is a wonderful picture of taking in to ourselves the sacrificed life of Jesus. And we do this in symbol once every year when we "drink the cup":

1 Cor. 10:16 (NIV) Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ?

Rom. 8:17 [We are] joint heirs with Christ if so be that **we suffer with him** that we may be also glorified together.

Acts 14:22 [Paul and Barnabas are instructing the disciples and say] we must through **much tribulation** enter into the Kingdom of God.

## Discipline

One thing that **should** be said about a disciple is that he is disciplined.

**dis·ci·pline** (dɪsˈplɪn) *n.* 2. Controlled behavior resulting from disciplinary training; self-control.

The word "discipline" does not appear in the King James N.T. This is the NIV:

2 Tim 1:7 (NIV) For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love, and of **self-discipline**.

*{Manna for January 2}* "Ye are not your own." [1 Cor. 6:19] ... we are not our own, but belong to another; [we are not] to obey self-will, but on the contrary His will. This means holiness in the most absolute and comprehensive sense of the word (not only separation from sin to righteousness, but **separation from self to the will of God** in Christ).

## Discipleship

Are you a disciple? Do you **really** want to be one? Do you want to be one even if it is hard, even if it means you have to do more than say the right words? If you do, you must see discipleship as a lifelong process:

1 Cor. 9:24,25 (NIV) Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown of laurel that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.

Luke 18:28–30 Then Peter said, Lo, we have left all, and followed thee. And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting.

May you all “run in such a way as to gain the prize” so that in the world to come **you** might receive life everlasting.

Closing Hymn: #183—Watchfulness

*[First given at the Fresno Convention, March, 1995]*

## *The Blind Spot*

Opening Hymn: #183—Watchfulness

Luke 6:41,42 (NIV) Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye, when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

Of course our Lord is not talking about literal sawdust nor does he think anyone is carrying around a literal plank in their eye. But as a figure of speech, this is vivid language. You think you see some small defect in another brother and are eager to correct that condition. However, you don't realize you possess a much greater defect which in comparison to a grain of sawdust is like a plank. How could this possibly be? How can we NOT see defects in ourselves? The condition is called the "blind spot."

The place in the back of your eye where the optic nerve enters the retina is not sensitive to light, yet your brain fills in what it thinks ought to be there. That place is called the blind spot. The dictionary also defines a blind spot as "an area in which one fails to exercise judgment or discrimination." Of course one's brain supplies what is missing so we are not even aware of the failure.

Take a moment and think about yourself. There are things you know about yourself. Others around you also know things about you. There are four possibilities:

*1. Things known by you and others.*

There are facts that everyone knows about you. You may, for example, dress or speak well. You may have a good sense of humor. Your height and weight could be fudged a little, but those facts are reasonably well known. Unless you've lied about it, people generally know your age, your family relatives, your background in the truth, your job. This is the "you" that is your public image.

*2. Things NOT known by either you or others.*

This is not an interesting area because there's nothing we can do about it. There might be a potentially fatal disease at work within your body. You don't know it, neither do others. This area is known only to God and He may or may not choose to reveal it to us.

*3. Things known by you, but NOT by others.*

This is the private "you," the part you've elected to not share with others. You know how devoted you are to the Lord in your heart, but others don't know because they can't read

your heart. You may have be struggling with a particular trial or sin but others don't know because you don't talk about it. Hypocrisy is generally something you know but others don't. That Greek word describes what an actor does. He knows he's acting, but others may not know, particularly if the acting is very good.

When we know something about ourselves that we don't like and keep secret, we still can do something about it if we try. But today we are not talking about sins we know about. It's the sins we don't know about that concern us:

*4. Things known by others, NOT by you.*

And THAT defines your blind spot. It is the unseen "plank"—unseen at least to you—that is in your eye; it is what interferes with your vision as you point out the speck of sawdust that is in your brother's eye. But in this case you don't even know you have a problem. You can't see anything that is in your blind spot. So how can you possibly do anything about it? Answer: you have to reduce the size of that spot.

Luke 6:1,2 (NIV) One Sabbath, Jesus was going through the grainfields and his disciples began to pluck some heads of grain, rub them in their hands, and eat the kernels. Some of the Pharisees asked, "Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?" (i.e. threshing grain)

The Pharisees were quick to point out this minor infraction of the law prohibiting any work on the Sabbath. It was a "speck of sawdust" in their brother's eye. And as for them:

Luke 20:47 (NIV) (The teachers of the law) devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers.

The Pharisees had an enormous blind spot. They could **not** see the "plank" that was in their own eye yet they thought they could clearly see the defects in others. Jesus called them "blind guides" (Matt. 23:24) though that was hardly a characterization they'd apply to themselves. Because we can see it in them, it stands as a warning to us.

Psa. 19:12,13 Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me.

Secret faults are those faults we do not see because they are hidden by our blind spot. David is NOT asking to be cleansed from sins he doesn't know about and that he will never know about. He knows the necessary first step is to make these faults and sins visible. Then he can do something about them and be cleansed. The Pharisees never really saw the prejudice they had against the poor and what favor they had for those of their own class. They appeared to be absolutely blind even though Jesus tried hard to get them to see it.

Once upon a time a wealthy man happened to see a beautiful woman while she was bathing. Even though he was already married, he was so impressed by what he saw that he arranged to meet her; then he slept with her. She became pregnant. This complicated matters because everyone knew her husband was out of the city on an extended assignment for the wealthy man and that he would probably be away for a very long time. So to solve what seemed like a big problem, he arranged to have the husband killed. Then he married the woman.

Do you see anything wrong here? If we were to interview the wealthy man, do you think he would see anything wrong with what he did? We need not guess. This man sees nothing wrong at all. Wealthy, powerful people make their own rules. He has a very large blind spot.

This is not a hypothetical story. All the sordid details are recorded in 2 Samuel chapter 11. The wealthy man is David. The woman is Bathsheba. And he is no ordinary man. He's the king. How would you propose discussing this incident so that he can see this secret sin, secret in the sense that he can't see it? The Lord sends the prophet Nathan to the king with instructions to try an indirect approach. Nathan begins with a story:

2 Sam. 12:1-7 (NIV) "There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb . . . Now a traveller came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveller who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him." David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the Lord lives, the man that did this deserves to die. He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity." Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man!"

Nathan goes on to make it clear: You murdered Uriah, then you took his wife to be your own wife. David is stunned. You can almost see his blind spot disintegrating in an instant. He doesn't know what to do except to confess his great sin: (vs. 13) And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord.

Sometime after this incident David wrote Psalm 51:

Psa. 51:1-3 Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me.

We can commend David's quickness to confess his sin and seek forgiveness. But acts always have consequences. Whether we do wrong blindly or deliberately, eventually there



is a price that has to be paid. David was no exception. Although God did not take David's life following the law's eye-for-an-eye rule, there were consequences from this terrible act:

1. (vs. 10) *You will never live in peace.* David had nothing but trouble from that moment until he died. Bathsheba's grandfather, A-hith-o-phel, one of David's trusted counselors, later worked against him and even told Absalom he would kill David for him (17:2).
2. (vs. 11) *Evil will come out of your own house.* In the next chapter one of David's sons rapes one of his daughters; then the daughter's brother murders the rapist, who is his half-brother. As with David's own sin, sexual immorality is again followed by murder, but this time in **his** own house.
3. (vs. 11) *Your wives will be defiled openly.* In 16:22 his concubines were defiled by his son Absalom as a show of power in front of all Israel.
4. (vs. 14) *Bathsheba 's child shall die.* And it did.

We have all seen people who sow wild oats. How curious that they act so surprised when they get a crop of wild oats. Lie and you will be lied to. Show no respect for others and eventually the others will return the favor.

God does not insulate us from the consequences of our acts. If He did, we would learn nothing from them.

So what's hidden away in your blind spot? You don't know. Without work on your part, you can't know. David didn't see his sin, but Joab certainly knew because he carried out David's orders. Others must have known that Bathsheba had slept with David. But those who know your secret sins—those sins which are hidden from your own view—are not going to tell you. Why should they? You'd probably get mad. Besides you won't believe them anyway.

Most of us have very little trouble giving others good advice. We see exactly what's wrong with them and what they should do about it. We think we see a "speck of sawdust" in their eye and we want to help them get rid of it. So how much good advice do we give ourselves? Very little, probably, mostly because we don't see too much wrong, or that we are inclined to do much about.

Oh that we had as much zeal to correct **ourselves** as we have the fondness to reprove and correct **others**.

How can we correct what we don't know about? We can't. So our first job is to find out what constitutes that "plank" in our own eye.

There is an exercise done with kids to teach self-esteem. Each kid has a piece of blank paper pinned to his back. Other kids write good things they perceive about that person on

the paper. Afterward everyone removes their paper and reads what others had written. Suppose we did that here. How do you think you'd feel if you got to read good things others wrote about you. Would you argue and say they're wrong, that those things weren't true? I don't think so.

Step two, which is almost never taken with kids, goes after the blind spot. Again a blank sheet of paper is pinned to each person's back. But this time everyone writes one thing they think the person does not see in himself. What are some of the things we might write about people we know?

You always interrupt before I can finish expressing my thought.

You talk as if **you** are the final judge about what is and what is not truth.

You are the leader of a clique in this class and I feel excluded.

You belittle women by the way you talk about them.

You insist that things be done your way.

You show jealousy over the good fortune of someone else.

Although you make mistakes, you say it is never your fault.

Now picture yourself removing the paper. Can you stand to read it? Would you argue and say they're wrong, that those things aren't true? Perhaps. Our minds are all too willing to cover up unpleasant truths about ourselves that we really don't want to know about.

The person who is physically blind is deprived of many privileges. Although he can still do many wonderful things, he is restricted. Blind spots in the mind similarly restrict us because they generally produce bad character traits. Like David, we need to pray that these hidden sins be revealed, and that we receive the needed help to cleanse ourselves from them.

Because we don't go around with sheets of paper pinned to our backs, we have no mechanism for knowing just what others see that we don't see. So we must from time to time indulge in self-appraisal.

In most large businesses today, everyone gets an annual performance appraisal. One learns what good things were done and what could be improved. Many managers hate to do appraisals because although they may have complaints, it is not easy delivering them face to face.

So let's face ourselves honestly and give ourselves an appraisal. There is no point in listing all our shortcomings. The best results come from an appraisal that focuses on just one area for improvement during the coming year. What might that be with us?

## Anger

Do you really expect others to control their tempers even as you lose yours? From time to time we hear about brethren, elders even, who are so sure they are right that they lose control of themselves in a fit of anger.

Prov. 27:4 Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous.

If this is you, don't tell us about how in your case your anger is really righteous indignation. If you realize that you have in the past given in to anger and wrath, start to do something about it.

## Partiality

The word "prejudice" is not found in the Bible. But the idea that we like the Pharisees would treat some as first class citizens, others as second class citizens, and maybe a few as tenth class citizens, is definitely condemned in the Bible:

1 Tim. 5:21 I charge thee before God and the Lord Jesus Christ and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality.

James 3:17 The wisdom that is from above is . . . without partiality and without hypocrisy.

If this is you, don't tell us about how the Lord had his favorites within the ranks of the disciples and so it is OK for you to have favorites too. If you realize you have been partial in your dealings with brethren, start to do something about it.

## Envy

Job 5:2 (NIV) Resentment kills a fool, and envy slays the simple.

The Hebrew word rendered envy is #7068. This word is also translated "jealousy." Envy is defined as resentful awareness of an advantage enjoyed by another joined with a desire to possess the same advantage." Generally the next step after envy is to do something to satisfy it. If you're king, you act on your desire and take what you want. David took Bathsheba. Ahab murdered Naboth and took his vineyard (1 Kings 21). If you're not king, you have to do something else. Although you might convince yourself you have no envy, others usually know better by the things you say.

If this is you, don't tell us about how unworthy others are for the good fortune they have and how worthy you are to receive those same favors. If you have feelings of envy, start now to do something about it.

Some say one's character is pretty much established by the age of 30. What you are at that age is generally what you'll be at the age of 60 or 70. But that rule applies to the world. We have to go against the tide. We must try to control and correct our own conduct.

Rom. 12:2 (Phillips) Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold, but let God re-make you so that your whole attitude of mind is changed.

We all know about the narrow way and that few there be that find it. The reason few find it is that so few are interested in walking contrary to the world. If we think that we have no character defects or that we have nothing to correct, we deceive ourselves. We have a very large blind spot.

Eph. 4:22-24 (NIV) You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. (vs. 31) Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger . . . Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

It would be wonderful if we could all listen better. We might learn a lot. If we hear someone suggest how we might be more effective, or do a better job, or be a better Christian, let's pretend it was written anonymously on a piece of paper taped to our back. Let's think about it. We need not defend, or explain how that's not true. Maybe it is true, and our blind spot has kept it from us.

James 1:19 Let every man be swift to **hear**, **slow to speak**, slow to wrath.

There was a poster prominently displayed in a room. Evidently God is speaking:

I never said it would be easy.

I only said it would be worth it.

That's a good description of the narrow way. Let us keep making progress and let us help our brethren who are walking in this same way so that we all may reach the prize for which we seek.

Two hundred years ago, the poet Robert Burns wrote:

Oh that some power the gift would give us

To see ourselves as others see us!

It would from many a blunder free us.

Let us remember and apply David's prayer to ourselves:

Psa. 19:12,13 Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me.

The Lord tells us that the standard we apply to others will be the standard that will be applied to us:

Luke 6:37, 38 (NIV) Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

So let us... 1) pray that the Lord will open our eyes; 2) look at ourselves honestly; 3) listen to what others say. In this way the Lord will help us overcome our secret faults.

Closing Hymn: #322— Heirs With Christ

*[First given at the Seattle Convention, September, 1992]*

## *Blood*

### Opening Hymn: #290 — Cleansing Fountain

There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Immanuel's veins;  
And sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains.

Eighteenth century poet William Cowper ["Cooper"] wrote these words. Our hymn book contains four of his original six stanzas. It omits his final stanza which reads...

Lord, I believe thou has prepared (unworthy though I be)  
For me a blood-bought, free reward, a golden harp for me!  
'Tis strung and tuned for endless years, and formed by power divine,  
To sound in God the Father's ears, no other name but Thine.

Even without the "golden harp" stanza, this hymn has not been one of my favorites. Picture before your mental vision a fountain filled with blood? Can you imagine anyone plunged into it and coming up cleansed? Blood **stains** what it touches, it doesn't cleanse.

Now that I know more about blood, I feel differently. And it is well I do since the Scriptures more frequently use phrases like "**blood** of Christ" or "**blood** of the lamb" than phrases like "cross of Christ" or "death of Christ."

### **Life is in the Blood**

Leviticus 17:14 "The life of all flesh is the blood thereof."

We can live a few weeks without food, a few days without water, and a few minutes without oxygen. Oxygen from the air enters the lungs where it is absorbed by the blood and carried to even the tiniest recesses in the body. The brain has the greatest need for the oxygen carried by the blood. If something should happen to cut off its supply, brain cells begin to die almost immediately. In minutes you can be "brain dead," and incapable of ever living again though some of your body organs might still function. Truly **life** is in the **blood**. Lose one and you automatically lose the other.

I read about a young man who resisted family pressure to become a doctor because he hated the sight of blood. He decided to become a missionary like his father, but his training required some basic health education in a local hospital. He tells of a time when a young accident victim was brought in. Loss of blood had turned her skin so pale she looked like she were made of wax. He could detect no pulse and was sure she was dead. But experienced medical people quickly began transfusing blood into her. Shortly he detected a faint pulse. A pinkness touched her lips. Her eyelids fluttered. Eventually she opened her eyes ... and asked for water. He says this experience so deeply affected him he lost his aversion to blood and changed his career. He entered medical school and became a doctor. (*In His Image*, Dr. Paul Brand, Zondervan, 1984. pp. 53,54)

Blood has always had sacred associations. A person's word might be considered enough to make a contract binding, but an oath really sealed it. Thus we read about the time the daughter of Herodias danced before king Herod. He was so pleased that ...

Matthew 14:7-9 ... he promised **with an oath** to give her whatsoever she would ask. And she, being before instructed of her mother, said, Give me here John Baptist's head in a charger. And the king was sorry: **nevertheless for the oath's sake**, and them which sat with him at meat, he commanded it to be given her.

About the only thing Herod could have done to make his verbal contract more binding would have been to slaughter an animal and walk between its pieces. The shed blood of an animal made a contract absolutely binding.

Jeremiah 34:18 I will give the men that have transgressed my covenant, which have not performed the words of the covenant which they had made before me, when they cut the calf in twain, and passed between the parts thereof ... [I will give them into the hands of their enemies]

God here reminds the people how seriously they treat covenants they sign among themselves when sealed with blood sacrifices. The blood of calves and goats was sprinkled on all the people when God made his covenant with them (see Hebrews 9:19). Shed blood makes a covenant binding. Yet it was the same old story: making a vow is easy; keeping a vow is hard. When the people ignored their vows, God delivered them into the hands of their enemies.

The wonderful covenant God made with Abraham in Genesis 15 was solemnized by the sacrifice of animals. Abraham saw a representation of God as a “smoking furnace and a burning lamp” passing between the pieces of the sacrificed animals. God followed the custom Abraham associated with the ritual that made a contract absolutely binding. In this case God promised to bless Abraham by giving him land and a seed.

There is one place in Scripture where blood became associated with death. It was the first of the ten plagues that came upon Pharaoh to force him to let the nation of Israel go:

Exodus 7:20,21 And [Aaron] lifted up the rod, and smote the waters that were in the river, in the sight of Pharaoh, and in the sight of his servants; and all the waters that were in the river were turned to blood. And the fish that were in the river died; and the river stank, and the Egyptians could not drink of the water of the river; and there was blood throughout all the land of Egypt.

There is a difference of opinion about whether the Nile became real blood. But whether it was literal blood or only appeared blood-red makes no difference. This river could no longer support life and it was dramatic! The Egyptians considered the Nile as their special treasure. Ezekiel 29:3 quotes Pharaoh claiming he made the river himself. This first plague showed the Egyptians that the Nile was not theirs but God's, and he could take away its life-giving properties whenever he pleased.

In the New Testament Jesus' first recorded miracle was turning water into wine. There that blood-red liquid is associated with life and joy: it occurred during a marriage at Cana (John 2: 11).

## Cleansing Blood

Blood as a symbol of a sacrificed life can be seen in the blood applied to the lintel and two side posts of the Israelite houses prior to the passage of the death angel through the land of Egypt. It is also found in various sacrifices associated with the Tabernacle. The first time blood is specifically mentioned as a **cleansing** agent is in Leviticus 14 where the priest performs a ritual for someone whose leprosy has disappeared. The priest kills one bird, dips the second bird in the blood and lets it go. Then...

Leviticus 14:7 He shall sprinkle [the blood of the bird that was killed] upon him that is to be cleansed from the leprosy seven times, and shall pronounce him clean, and shall let the living bird loose into the open field.

Associating blood with cleansing is found in a well-known text about the Great Company:

Rev. 7:14 These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

It's not just robes that are made white in this blood; as we sang in our opening hymn, sinners plunged into this blood lose all their guilty stains.

I'm sure you all knew that blood carries oxygen and nutrients to all the cells in your body, that it provides nourishment for your body. But that's not all it does. Blood also cleanses the body by carrying off toxic wastes like carbon dioxide and uric acid generated by the muscles and other body processes, and brings those toxins to organs that can dump them outside the body. Pump up a blood pressure cuff on your upper arm, and cut off that arm's blood supply. Then use that hand to do something repetitive, like driving staples into paper. It's easy at first but soon the pain becomes so intense you can't continue. Remove the pressure cuff and sweet relief floods your arm as the blood rushes in to carry off the wastes generated by the muscles in that arm. Is there anything comparable to this function in the Body of Christ? There is, and in this case the toxic waste is called "sin."

1 John 1:7 If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son **cleanseth** us from all sin.

What do you think about this Scripture? Is it a one-time thing that happened when you presented yourself in consecration? Perhaps we need to define sin.

Mark 7:21-23 (Phillips) It is from inside, from men's hearts and minds, that **evil thoughts** arise—lust, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, arrogance and folly! All these evil things come from inside a man and make him unclean!

Just because you aren't guilty of every sin listed doesn't mean you're free from sin. Can you honestly say you never have evil thoughts? These make you unclean, a condition that cries out for cleansing.

1 John 1:8 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.



How can we be cleansed from the toxic wastes of sin within our mortal body that are a byproduct of everything we do? Answer: the blood of Christ:

1 John 1:7 [repeating the reading] If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the **blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth** us from all sin. ... [vs. 9] If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Our Lord is ready to cleanse us, but note the important stipulation introduced by the little word “if.” **“If** we confess our sins, he [will] cleanse us.”

Proverbs 28:13 He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.

Rev. 3:4 Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.

The death of Jesus Christ paid the ransom for father Adam and provides us what has been called the “robe of Christ’s righteousness.” As we sojourn in this world, things happen of which we do not approve. These have been called “spots on our robes.” The few in Sardis who did not defile their garments are the real footstep followers of the Master. It is not because they are perfect. They are as imperfect as anyone. But they confess their shortcomings and the cleansing power of the blood restores their robe to sparkling white.

### **“Drinking” Blood**

When Gentiles accepted the gospel message, some claimed they had to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses. This controversy became so divisive it was felt that only the apostles could settle it once and for all. Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem and in Acts chapter 15 we have the account of the proceedings. James stands up and summarizes what they decided. He lists four prohibitions for Gentile Christians, two of which concern matters of blood:

Acts 15:29 (Phillips) ... avoid what has been sacrificed to idols, tasting blood, eating meat which has been strangled, and sexual immorality. Keep yourselves clear of these things and you will make good progress.

Jewish law prohibited eating any meat unless the blood had been thoroughly drained from it. So a faithful Jew would not eat the meat from an animal that died by strangulation, from natural causes, or by a predatory beast. So did the Jerusalem apostles pick and choose among the law’s prohibitions when they said Gentiles should abstain from blood and meat containing blood? Not at all. They were reiterating a rule God gave the entire human race as represented in Noah and his family immediately after the flood:

Genesis 9:3,4 Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you ... But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat.

Remembering how ingrained this rule was within the Jewish community, consider how shocking, almost revolting these words of Jesus would be:

John 6:53-55 Jesus said unto them, 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. Whoso eateth my flesh, **and drinketh my blood**, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and **my blood is drink indeed**. He that eateth my flesh, and **drinketh my blood**, dwelleth in me, and I in him.

No Jew drank blood. Only savages and the uncircumcised did that. For Jesus to say this was too much. In verse 66 we read that after this “many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.” Why did Jesus say this in a way that would offend the largest number of people? Why did he not say, “Eat my flesh and **pour out** my blood,” or “Eat my flesh and **sprinkle** my blood”? That would be compatible to what was done in all the typical sacrifices.

Jesus knew exactly what he was doing: he was transforming the symbol. God said to Noah, “If you drink the blood of a lamb, the life of the lamb enters into you. Don’t do it!” Jesus was saying, “If you drink my blood, my life will enter into you. Do it!” It is not just his past life and death that is so valuable to us; he is the continuing source of our life.

Matthew 26:27,28 He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all, of it; **for this is my blood** ... which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

Later that night he used a different metaphor to show how our life comes from him:

John 15:5 I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

A vine is a picture of our life in Christ. As physical life is sustained by the circulation of blood and a branch lives because of the circulation of sap, our spiritual life survives only if it is constantly nourished by Christ. True, his death was only hours away when Jesus told his closest associates to drink his “blood” from the cup, but a marvelous, spiritual resurrection was just a few days away. Such a spiritual life will be ours also if we are faithful:

2 Tim. 2:11 If we be dead with him, we shall also live with him.

## **Defending the Body**

The job of bringing nutrients to and carting off waste products from the body’s cells is done by the red blood cells. Blood also contains white blood cells and these defend the body against infection. Amazingly they have a kind of “memory” about past enemies and if seen again, they instantly begin to fight them. This is why vaccination is so powerful. If you deliberately infect someone with a benign form of a virus, the body will memorize its structure so it can attack it if necessary in the future. Edward Jenner, in the mid-1700s learned that those who were infected with cowpox never got smallpox, a disease that kills 30% of those it infects. One smallpox-infected wounded warrior from Cortes’ army is said to have been responsible for the death of four million Aztecs over a two-year period. The

last known smallpox death occurred in 1978 and today general vaccination against this disease has stopped. That brings us to the subject of overcoming:

Rev. 12:11 And they overcame him **by the blood** of the Lamb.

If you successfully overcome a disease, your blood changes in subtle ways so it can efficiently fight that disease in the future. Its “memory” is in the form of antibodies and these can be transferred to those who were never infected. This is done by separating the “serum” from whole blood and putting it in the body of a recipient. The new host body begins to duplicate those antibodies and is thus prepared to overcome and survive when assaulted by that disease.

Jesus was tempted by the Adversary to take an easy way to success, power, or the satisfaction of his own human needs. He was frequently tired, frustrated, tempted, and abandoned. But he overcame all of these besetments without using any supernatural power.

Heb. 2:18 (Jerusalem Bible) Because he has himself been through temptation, he is able to help others who are tempted.

Heb. 4:15 (Jerusalem) For it is not as if we had a high priest who was incapable of feeling our weaknesses with us; but we have one who has been tempted in every way that we are, though he is without sin.

When we “drink his blood” at the Memorial celebration, we accept his invitation to share his life, to use his strength as we encounter the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil. He previously overcame these and with his help, we can too. In fact John tells us that because of what is within us, we are overcomers:

1 John 4:4 Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them [false prophets—see vs. 1]: because **greater is he that is in you**, than he that is in the world.

Remember that accident victim who was thought to be dead by the missionary trainee. It was life-giving blood that saved her. Likewise the blood of Christ brings us back from the dead, the dead life we inherited from father Adam:

Col. 2:13 (Jerusalem) You were dead, because you were sinners... He [God] has brought you to life with him, he has forgiven us all our sins.

“Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27). There is no other New Testament picture which expresses this concept so perfectly as does blood. We drink Christ’s blood in symbol at the Memorial.

One of the early church fathers described what Christ has done by saying, “Jesus Christ became what we are ... to make us what he is.” [Barclay, *Letters of John*, p. 9]

Since we all know from whom we have received life, why do we need to have a ceremony? It is a physical expression of a spiritual reality. The ceremony keeps the memory bright. Whenever we partake of the bread and drink of the cup, let us see the spiritual reality of

Christ who energizes us to fight off sins which so easily beset us, who nourishes us, and who purges us of toxic sins. This is “The Mighty to Save” to use Isaiah’s words:

Isaiah 63:1 Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah?  
this that is glorious in his apparel, traveling in the greatness of his strength? I  
that speak in righteousness, mighty to save.

Opening Hymn: #9 — The Mighty to Save

### "The Lamb's Wife"

The Bride of a spotless Lamb to be,  
 Thy Bride with garments clean,  
 From every spot and wrinkle free—  
 Teach me what this doth mean.

The cleansing blood of Calvary  
 Can wash me white as snow;  
 But how can all the wrinkles be  
 Removed, Lord, I would know?

I've seen the linen, Lord, made white,  
 All free from spot or stain  
 And yet, not faultless in Thy sight,  
 For wrinkles still remain.

And 'neath the heated iron,  
 Lord, I've seen the linen made  
 So smooth that ne'er was royal board  
 With choicer linen laid.

Is this the way that I must be  
 Made meet to be His Bride?  
 Cleansed by His blood—from wrinkles freed  
 By furnace heat applied?

Then let pain's furnace fires glow,  
 Let sorrow light her flame,  
 If 'neath the heat and ache below  
 I still may bear Thy Name.

No pain too great if only this  
 The glorious outcome be:  
 We the Lamb's Wife in spotless white  
 Throughout eternity!

—*The Herald*, March 1943 [no author given]

## *The Circumcision of Christ*

Opening Hymn: #215 — “The Cleansing Stream”

Col. 2:11 (NIV) In him you were also circumcised, in the putting off of the sinful nature, not with a circumcision done by the hands of men, but with the circumcision done by Christ.

The first time the subject of circumcision appears in the Bible is Genesis 17 where God speaks to Abram and tells him that he is entering into a covenant relationship with him. He changes Abram’s name to Abraham and he promises all the land of Canaan to him and to his seed after him for an “everlasting possession.” As a proof or token of this special covenant relationship between God, Abraham, and Abraham’s seed, God required that 99-year old Abraham be circumcised, and that every male in his house, whether a member of the family or a slave, also be circumcised. From this point forward every one who entered Abraham’s family, or that of his children, or his children’s children, forever were to follow this ceremony showing that they were a part of this covenant arrangement. The procedure was not optional:

Genesis 17:14 The uncircumcised man child ... shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken my covenant.

Ishmael was 13 years old when he and his father were circumcised. Because of this, Arabs who trace their lineage to Abraham through Ishmael still circumcise their males at the age of 13. However, God said that from that point forward, circumcision was to occur when a male baby was eight days old. So a year later when Isaac was born, he was circumcised on the eighth day. The importance of the eighth day was so great that when Israel received the ten commandments which required that no work be performed on the Sabbath, an exception was made for circumcisions. Jesus used this exception in his answer to the Pharisees who accused him of violating the Sabbath by healing a man:

John 7:22,23 (NIV) Because Moses gave you circumcision (though actually it did not come from Moses, but from the patriarchs), you circumcise a child on the Sabbath. Now if a child can be circumcised on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me for healing the whole man on the Sabbath?

The need for circumcision became an excuse in Genesis 34 when Dinah, a daughter of Jacob by Leah, was “defiled” by Sechem the Hivite. Because Sechem falls in love with Dinah, his father talks with Jacob asking that Dinah be given to his son for his wife. Sechem promises to do anything. Gen. 34:13 says that the sons of Jacob responded deceitfully. They demand that Sechem and all the Hivite males be circumcised. The Hivites suspect nothing. In fact they see great gain in allying themselves with Israel so they readily agree and all the males are circumcised on the same day. We read:

Genesis 34:25 And it came to pass on the third day, when they were sore, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brethren, took each man his sword, and came upon the city boldly, and slew all the males.

In this family there were a lot of half-brothers and half-sisters because Jacob had children by Rachel, Leah, Rachel's maidservant Bilhah, and Leah's maidservant Zilpah. But Simeon and Levi were Dinah's full brothers and for that reason they may have decided it was their job to avenge the outrage they perceived had been done to their sister. They slaughtered all the males and took everything of value in the city as one takes spoils in war. It all happened because of deceit. They said one thing when they knew they would do quite another. Jacob is outraged:

Genesis 34:30 And Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, Ye have troubled me to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites.

Jacob never forgot what they did. In Genesis 49 just before he dies, Jacob gives a blessing to each of his sons. He has nothing good to say about Simeon and Levi:

Genesis 49:5-7 Simeon and Levi are brothers; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations. O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their selfwill they digged down a wall. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel.

The first-born Rueben had already been passed over in earlier verses, so Jacob's full blessing comes to rest on Leah's fourth-born, Judah, the line that brought forth Jesus the Messiah.

### **Moses and Zipporah**

When Moses was 40 years old, he thought he was ready to lead Israel out of Egyptian slavery; instead he was forced to flee for his life. He went into the land of Midian, eventually married Zipporah, and had two sons, Gershom and Eliezer (Exod. 18:3,4). Midian was a son of Keturah and we can be sure Abraham followed the rite of circumcision with the sons he had by Keturah. Yet for reasons that are never explained, in the land of Midian Moses does not circumcise one of his sons. This leads to a quite unexpected event as 80-year-old Moses, Zipporah, Gershom, and Eliezer are on their way to Egypt:

Exodus 4:24-26 And it came to pass by the way in the inn, that the LORD met him, and sought to kill him. Then Zipporah took a sharp stone, and cut off the foreskin of her son, and cast it at his feet, and said, Surely a bloody husband art thou to me. So he let him go: then she said, A bloody husband thou art, because of the circumcision.

Who is the "LORD" [small caps: Jehovah] trying to kill? Many translators think it was Moses so they substitute his name for the pronoun "him." But since God just told Moses

what to say to Pharaoh, it is inconceivable he would now try to kill him. The *Companion Bible* believes it was Moses' son, and this thought appeals to me. The law of circumcision demanded that the uncircumcised person was to be "cut off from his people" (Gen. 17:14), not the father of the son. When Zipporah realizes it is the son who is jeopardy, she knows what must be done and she does it. At whose feet did Zipporah cast the bloody skin? As soon as she does it, we read: "So **he** [the Lord] let **him** [the son] go." Since Zipporah has just saved the life of her son, she is not angry. She casts it at the feet of the angel of the Lord, and she says [according to Rotherham]: "Surely a bridegroom by rites of blood art thou to me." Zipporah does not trace her lineage from Jacob. In Num. 12:1 she is called "an Ethiopian." She is a foreigner in the commonwealth of Israel. But by this act, she claims the right to a covenant relationship with the Lord [through his representative of course].

When this is over, and for reasons that are never explained, Zipporah and her two sons return to her father Jethro's house and they do not go with Moses into Egypt. Later they rejoin him in the wilderness.

### **The Exodus**

Circumcision continued to be practiced when the Israelites were slaves in Egypt. We know this because Joshua 5:5 says that all who came out of Egypt were circumcised. But they stopped circumcising anyone in the wilderness. Why? Because their lack of faith made them reject Joshua and Caleb's favorable report of the promised land, Israel became estranged from God. Although the Scriptures do not say why they stopped circumcising their males, it is probable that God himself prohibited them from enacting this sign of the covenant during the 40-year period of their punishment. When this period ended, God told Joshua to circumcise the people:

Joshua 5:8,9 And it came to pass, when they had done circumcising all the people, that they abode in their places in the camp, till they were whole. And the LORD said unto Joshua, This day have I rolled away the reproach of Egypt from off you.

Israel was now back in a covenant relationship with God. Perhaps the phrase "reproach of Egypt" can be best understood from the words Moses when God threatens to destroy Israel for their wickedness:

Deut. 9:27-28 Look not unto the stubbornness of this people, nor to their wickedness, nor to their sin: lest the land whence thou broughtest us out [*Egypt, of course*] say, Because the LORD was not able to bring them into the land which he promised them, and because he hated them, he hath brought them out to slay them in the wilderness.

There is almost nothing more on this subject in the Old Testament except for a quite unexpected use of the word by Jeremiah:



Jer. 4:4 (NIV) Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, **circumcise your hearts**, you men of Judah and people of Jerusalem, or my wrath will break out and burn like fire because of the evil you have done.

Judah and those of Jerusalem were certainly practicing ordinary circumcision, but this outward act had no value unless they “circumcised their hearts”—a phrase that probably meant nothing to them.

### **Circumcision in the New Testament**

The question of whether to circumcise or not was a heated topic in the early church. Those who were deeply committed to Judaism were sure that Gentile converts had to come into the Jewish covenant to be blessed and that meant they had to be circumcised:

Acts 15:1 And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.

Paul and Barnabas debated this question without success so a delegation was sent to Jerusalem asking the apostles to settle this question once and for all. During that discussion Peter speaks:

Acts 15:8 (NIV) God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted [the Gentiles] by giving the Holy Spirit to them just as he did to us. He made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. [vs. 11] We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.

That was the compelling argument. God had accepted the “uncircumcised” as they were. Why could not everyone else accept them that way as well? They could. James stands up and proposes a draft of a letter to be sent to the distant congregations and it contains not a word about circumcision.

Paul puts this question into the proper perspective:

Romans 2:28,29 For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the **heart**, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

Here is that phrase “circumcision of the heart” that Jeremiah spoke about. It is not the cutting off of skin, but the cutting off of the entire “old nature.” Once that “old nature” is gone, we have something new:

Galatians 6:15 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.

To the Jews circumcision represented the entering into a relationship with God. But the relationship a Christian has with God is different. Our justification comes from faith, not from works. So if circumcision is not appropriate to show our relationship with God, what is?

Col. 2:11-13 In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: **buried with him in baptism**, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses.

Baptism is the symbol for Christians. We are purified, our sins are washed away. We go under the water, are symbolically “buried with him,” and come up alive as a new creature, ready to walk with him in newness of life. Just as circumcision was a kind of initiation into a group possessing certain rights, privileges, and responsibilities, so also is baptism a kind of initiation into a special group with its rights, privileges, and responsibilities. It is a step taken only by those who share the faith demonstrated by father Abraham:

Rom. 4:11,12 (NIV) And [Abraham] received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them. And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

There was another reason for circumcision practiced by the Jews. It set them apart from their heathen neighbors and they knew it. Samson’s parents, for example, could not understand why he wanted a wife from among the “uncircumcised Philistines” (Judges 14:3). Likewise baptism sets us apart from our heathen neighbors. Only Christians practice it, and only a few of them perform full body immersion in water like Jesus:

John 3:22 After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judaea; and there he tarried with them, and **baptized**.

The Greek word translated “baptized” is Strong’s #907, *baptizo*. It means “to make fully wet, to immerse.” Like circumcision, it is only a symbol. That baptism is not required for spirit begetting was demonstrated with the first Gentile convert. In Acts 10 as Peter preaches to Cornelius, the holy spirit falls on these uncircumcised Gentiles. They spoke with tongues and magnified God. The Jews who were with Peter were astonished. Peter speaks:

Acts 10:47 (NIV) Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have. So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

Paul in his letter to the Galatians equates baptism with “putting on” Christ. He writes:

Galatians 3:26,27,29 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. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

This is similar to Paul's words in Romans 13:14 where he writes, "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh." In other words, cut off the flesh; be baptized into Christ and thus become clothed with him. Put on the robe of Christ's righteousness so we may enter a covenant relationship with God, might be his special people.

Just because the Jews circumcised themselves did not guarantee that they would attain the blessings God had for them. The unfaithful circumcised ones all died in the wilderness and never entered the promised land as they expected when they left Egypt. So with us: baptism does not guarantee that we will attain the blessings God has for us. If we are unfaithful, we will die in this "wilderness" and will not enter the promised land as we expected when we left our "Egypt" of sin, sickness, and death. Let us look at Israel's failures and learn lessons we can apply to our daily life.

Heb. 3:12-14 (NIV) See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.

### **The Eighth Day**

There is one detail about circumcision we have not considered. Why did God require that it be done on the eighth day? Although some suggest that certain clotting characteristics of the blood are better in an infant on the eighth day than at any earlier time, it is more likely that there is a lesson associated with the number eight. For example, when the first high priest and the underpriests were inaugurated into office, a seven-day period called the "consecration of the priesthood" occurred (described in Lev. chapter 8). On the eighth day that typical priesthood began to function. The antitypical "priesthood," after its consecration, receives its mark of a "covenant relationship with God," a circumcision made **without** hands, "in putting off the body of sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ" (Col. 2:11). (Anton Frey, *Notes on the Tabernacle*, p. 262.) Then it can begin to function.

There is also a picture at the end of the Millennium age. The close of God's seventh day will be followed by God's great eighth day when the complete cleansing of the flesh will have been accomplished through restitution. Mankind will have attained the perfection that was Adam's when all perfection resided in him. All the obedient of mankind will reach this condition at the close of the Millennium, before they are presented to God by the Christ class whose work will then be finished. They will be purified; the old, sinful, fleshly failings will have been completely cut off and they will have an everlasting covenant relationship with the heavenly father.

### **Conclusion**

God's relationship with his typical people Israel contain lessons which should teach us what we must do to be pleasing to him today. Baptism for the Christian is the equivalent

of circumcision for the Jew. Through baptism we enter into a covenant relationship with God. It is not the water that saves us, it is what Peter calls a “good conscience.” He saw the water which saved Noah and his family by floating the ark as a symbol of a Christian’s baptism:

1 Peter 3:20,21 (NIV) ...in [the ark] only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Baptism isn’t just a one-time ritual which guarantees anything. Jesus asked his disciples:

Mark 10:38 Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of? and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?

They said they could, and they were right. Jesus asks us that same question. By God’s grace and through his strength and power, may we say, “We are able.”

Closing Hymn: #95 — “More Christlike”

### “Are Ye Able?”

Are ye able to walk in the narrow, strait way,  
 With no friend by your side, and no arm for your stay?  
 Can ye bravely go on through the darkening night?  
 Can ye patiently wait 'till the Lord sends the Light?

Are ye able to crush your soul's longing for Love,  
 Will ye seek for no friendship save that from above?  
 Can ye pass through this world, lone, unnoticed, unknown,  
 While your faith faintly whispers, "He knoweth His own"?

Where the feet of the Blessed One stood, can ye stand?  
 Can ye follow His steps to a wilderness land?  
 Are ye able to cast aside pleasure and fame?  
 Can ye live but to glorify His precious name?

Can ye smile as His dear voice says tenderly "No,"  
 When "the field is so white," and your heart yearns to go?  
 Can ye rest then in silence, contented and still,  
 'Till your Lord, the Chief Reaper, revealeth His will?

Are ye able to lay on the Altar's pure flame  
 That most treasured possession, your priceless good name?  
 Can ye ask of your Father a blessing for those,  
 Who see naught in your life but to scorn and oppose?

When the conflict twixt Error and Truth fiercer grows,  
 Can ye wield the strong "Sword" against unnumbered foes?  
 Can ye lift up the "Standard" e'en higher and higher,  
 While His praises ye sing in the midst of the fire?

When ye see the Lord's cause going down to defeat,  
 Will your courage endure in the seven-fold heat?  
 Will your faith keep you steadfast, though heart and flesh fail,  
 As the New Creature passes beneath the last "Veil"?

Ah, if thus ye can drink of the Cup He shall pour,  
 And if never the Banner of Truth ye would lower,  
 His Beloved ye are, and His crown ye shall wear,  
 In His Throne ye shall sit, and His Glory shall share!

—*Poems of Dawn*

*[First given in Los Angeles, April, 2002]*

## *Deborah*

Opening Hymn: #41 — “Awake From thy Sadness”

Heb. 11:6 [NIV] Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

A few special people are named as heroes of faith in Hebrews 11. I think these were people that simply came to Paul’s mind as he wrote this letter. Moses was one, but I’m surprised he names Rahab, not Joshua, when he mentions the destruction of Jericho (he does refer to Joshua earlier in the book). Rahab and Sarah are the two women he names. If he had mentioned no women, I suppose some would argue that women had a less important role to play in the plan of God, or worse, that Paul knew of none that had faith.

In verse 32 he says he doesn’t have time to talk about Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthah. These people belong to the period following the death of Joshua until Saul became the first king of Israel. We call it the period of the judges. It was a long time. Think back to when the pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock in 1620. That was about 375 years ago. The period of the Judges was either 350 years (if you accept the testimony of 1 Kings 6:1 and do the math) or 450 years if you think Paul was making an exact chronological statement in Acts 13:20.

We associate a judicial meaning with the word “judge.” We think of a person who decides questions of right and wrong. Although that is often the sense of the Hebrew word in the Old Testament, in nearly all cases a “judge” in the Book of Judges was a military figure, a deliverer. The Israelites entered the land of Canaan and did not actually conquer the Canaanites; in fact the Canaanites had conquered them. So when God saw they had suffered enough for their apostasy, he did something about it:

Judges 2:16 [NIV] Then the Lord raised up **judges** who saved them out of the hands of these raiders. Yet they would not listen to their **judges** . . . [vs. 19] When the **judge** died, the people returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their fathers . . . They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways.”

2 Chron 22:8 “And it came to pass, that, when Jehu was executing **judgment** [*same Hebrew word*] upon the house of Ahab, and found the princes of Judah . . . he slew them.”

Great leaders lead; people follow. Great leaders die and ... and what? Generally a power struggle takes place. The movement splinters. The vision is lost. People drift away and go back to doing what they were doing before, or perhaps what they always wanted to do.

## Barak and Deborah

I would guess that Barak is the least known of those named in this chapter. Actually it surprises me that he's mentioned at all because when it comes to faith, his partner had more of it than he did. His partner was a woman, Deborah by name. There are differences about when this occurred, but it was certainly before the half-way point in the period of the judges, perhaps around the 200-year mark:

Judges 4:1 [Good News] "After Ehud died, the people of Israel sinned against the Lord again. So the Lord let them be conquered by Jabin, a Canaanite king. The commander of his army was Sisera. Jabin had 900 iron chariots and he ruled with cruelty and violence for 20 years. Now Deborah was a prophet and she was serving as a judge for the Israelites at that time. One day she sent for Barak and said to him, The Lord has given you this command: Take ten thousand men and lead them to Mount Tabor. I will bring Sisera to fight you at the Kishon River and I will give you victory over him. Then Barak replied, I will go if you go with me, but if you don't go with me, I won't go either. She answered, All right, I will go with you, but you won't get any credit for the victory because the Lord will hand Sisera over to a woman. *[They gather for war. Verse 14:]* Then Deborah said to Barak, Go! The Lord is leading you! Today he has given you victory over Sisera."

Sisera's entire army was defeated in the battle, probably because the Kishon River experienced a flash flood and mired the 900 chariots making them useless. Sisera flees on foot in an opposite direction while his army is slaughtered. He accepts an offer of hospitality from Jael, a Kenite woman whose husband is apparently away. He hides in her tent and tells her to say he is not there if anyone should ask:

Judges 4:21,22 [Good News] Sisera was so tired that he fell sound asleep. Then Jael took a hammer and a tent peg, quietly went up to him, and killed him by driving the peg right through the side of his head and into the ground. When Barak came looking for Sisera, Jael went out to meet him and said to him, "Come here! I'll show you the man you're looking for."

So Sisera was handed over to a woman as Deborah predicted, but it was not the woman Barak thought it would be. It was Jael.

Jael has been criticized for violating the Bedouin code: instead of protecting a stranger who accepts her hospitality, she murders him. But lest we forget, this is war and the rules are different. Jael knows who Sisera is, and she could guess why he was all alone. Sisera and King Jabin may have been just as cruel and oppressive to the Kenites as they were to Israel; thus Sisera was an enemy of her people too. It was also the Bedouin code that if a man was found in a woman's tent, both the man and the woman were to be put to death. In Judges chapter 5 Jael is highly praised for what she did (verses 24-27).

But I'm fascinated with Deborah. She is more interesting than Barak. She is a respected woman in the nation. She is a prophetess. She is not really a "judge" in the military sense

of the word, not a deliverer. Barak **is** a “judge” in that sense. Deborah is assumed to be the author of chapter five which contains a poem of unusual Hebrew beauty celebrating the victory God gave them that special day. This battle was so momentous that Barak’s name appears in Hebrews 11 and the battle is also mentioned in a psalm:

Psalm 83:9 “Do unto them as unto the Midianites; as to Sisera, as to Jabin, at the brook of Kishon.”

“And there was peace in the land for forty years.”(Judges 5:31) If Israel had remained faithful to God, the peace would have been a lot longer than 40 years. But they lose the vision of their forefathers and follow their own preferences. Invariably that gets them into trouble. The last verse of the book of Judges seems to offer a weak excuse for what they have done:

Judges 21:25 “In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes.”

One can almost hear the rationalization: “If there were a king in Israel, he would tell us what to do and we would do it.” They had previously accepted Jehovah as their “king,” he had told them what to do, and they didn’t do it. When Samuel grows old and the people come to him and ask that he give them a king like all the other nations, God correctly tells Samuel:

1 Samuel 8:7 “The LORD said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected **me.**”

## **Deborah**

Except for what we have in Judges chapters 4 and 5 we read nothing more about Deborah in the Bible. How did she become so influential in Israel? Of all the people the nation could consult for judgment in Israel, Deborah appears to be the one they want. One day she sends for Barak, and—surprise!—he comes! He wants to believe that the Lord has a message for him, but his faith is not that strong. He wants Deborah at the battle too; only then will he go to war. She has such standing in Israel that her presence makes all the difference to him.

Her position in Israel becomes even more impressive when we think about how patriarchal Israel was under the law. Those who served the tabernacle were all male. The kings were male in Israel though the land of Sheba did have a queen in the time of Solomon. Jewish men had the right to divorce a wife in whom they found no favor, but wives seemed to have no similar right. A woman’s place was supposed to be in the home, raising the children.

But God reaches outside this patriarchal arrangement and picks a woman to speak for him. Deborah is recognized as a prophet in Israel. This is just like God. He does not do the expected thing. When we meet Gideon, the next judge, he says of himself: “My clan is



the poorest in all Manasseh and in all my father's house none counts for so little as I." (Judges 6:15, Knox) Later when we meet Jephthah, we learn he was illegitimate (Judges 11:1). Although we know we cannot judge a book by its cover, most of us do it anyway. God never does.

In New Testament times, the patriarchal system continued. We meet a few exceptional women. At the time of the birth of Jesus, Anna was a prophetess (Luke 2:36). Lydia was a businesswoman, a seller of purple, and evidently the owner of her own home (Acts 16:14,40). Paul said that male/female distinctions among the fellowship were over:

Gal. 3:28 "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."

Really? All one in Christ Jesus? No difference between males and females?

1 Cor. 14:34 "Let your women **keep silence** in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law."

How can Paul say there is no difference in Galatians and a big difference in Corinthians?

### **Women Keeping Silence**

Some may think that this text means exactly what it says and that women should never say anything in any meeting. But do those who think this believe other scriptures mean exactly what they say when they counsel us to wash one another's feet, greet one another with a holy kiss, or lift up our hands when praying? We know that Paul did expect women to participate in the meetings:

1 Cor. 11:5 "But every woman that **prayeth** or **prophesieth** with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven."

These words come from the same letter. He says women may pray or prophesy but only if they have a covered head. We know what it means to pray, though in American ecclesias women are rarely called upon to pray. What does "prophesy" mean? The Greek is Strong's #4395 and means "to speak under inspiration." We see the word again in chapter 14:

1 Cor. 14:29,31 "Let the prophets [Greek: #4396 "an inspired speaker"] speak two or three, and let the other judge. For ye may all prophesy [Greek: #4395 "to speak under inspiration"] one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted."

What did Paul mean when he said that women should be silent? Perhaps we have a clue to what Paul was thinking in the verse preceding the one about silent women:

1 Cor. 14:33 "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints."

Things were different in Corinth. It was an idolatrous city. Women priestesses were associated with heathen temples. Respectable women were generally poorly educated

and completely covered when they went out. Paul was concerned about the witness that would be given to those who visited a Corinthian meeting. Would people speaking gibberish be edifying? No. Would uneducated women acting like heathen temple prostitutes give a good impression about Christianity? No it would not. I believe that's why Paul wrote as he did to this church. Here is what Bro. Russell said:

“It is clear that when Corinthian men became Christians and, disregarding the prevailing public sentiment, brought their wives with them to meetings of the church, the women were very ignorant and lacking in essential decorum, and were inclined to disturb the meetings by asking unprofitable questions, which the Apostle instructed them to inquire of at home of their husbands, who could give them the simple instruction which they needed; for it was an improper thing for those women to speak in the church and to disturb its proper, orderly worship, etc.”— R1551:5

He goes on to say that conditions were quite different among the Roman and Hebrew women which is why the apostle said nothing similar in his letter to the Romans or Hebrews. Bro. Russell quotes from a scholar who said that the Roman wife presided over the whole household and was equally esteemed with her husband. The scriptures show that Hebrew women freely conversed with the Lord and the apostles, and had freedom of expression and movement. Thus Bro. Russell acknowledges the worth of women and their contributions to the body of Christ.

Our own society has long been patriarchal just like Jewish society. It was only in the beginning of this century that women gained the right to vote in elections. Only in my lifetime have women been allowed to hold certain jobs. Women now receive equal education with men. Even our own ecclesia has learned that sisters are better at some jobs than brothers. We all want their thoughts, ideas, and questions in our studies.

But is it OK for a woman to write articles that are published in religious journals? What would you think if you saw a woman's name as the author of an article in *The Herald*? What would Bro. Russell think of that?

In fact the first article signed by a women appeared in the January/February 1882 issue of the Watchtower. It was signed “Mrs. C. T. Russell.” Her next article appeared near the end of 1882, and then more frequently after that. I found an article by a “Mrs. L. R. K. Bishop” in April, 1883, and then stopped turning the pages. (I ignored numerous poems written by women that appeared in its pages.) Bro. Russell had no qualms about publishing the thoughts of women, and also giving them appropriate credit. Probably few would agree with his position today.

1 Cor. 14:34 “Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to **speak**.”

Starting in 1 Corinthians 12:30 and extending to 14:39, the word “speak” occurs 14 times and always in connection with speaking in tongues or unknown languages (possible

exception: 14:29 “let the prophets speak”). First Corinthians is the only letter in which Paul discusses speaking in tongues and I believe this is what caused Paul to say what he did. Since neither women nor men speak in tongues in our fellowship today, we can say that our women [and our men too!] do keep silence in the church.

### **Head Coverings**

You may have noticed that Paul said a woman could pray or prophesy if her head were covered. Only in this letter, and only in chapter 11, does Paul say anything about women covering their heads:

1 Cor. 11:5 “But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven.”

Quoting again from Reprint 1551:

“The condition of the Corinthian women also makes very clear the necessity of the Apostle’s instructions in 1 Cor. 11 about the covering of the head which among that people specially was an indication of modesty. To have suddenly disregarded the custom when they began to see the liberty of the gospel would have been misunderstood and would probably have cultivated in them, in their ignorance, a disposition to ignore the headship of man and to become self-conscious and self-assertive.”

There is a difference of opinion among ecclesias world-wide, and even among sisters in the same ecclesia about whether head coverings are a commandment of the apostle that applies today or not. We are reminded that Paul does not say that he is asking women to do this so they wouldn’t stumble the general public who won’t understand the liberty they have in the gospel. At the start of chapter 11 he says it should be done because of the symbolism of the woman finding her glory in the man; the man should have an uncovered head because he finds his glory in God. Speaking personally, I don’t find this a strong argument. And he never made this argument again to any other church. I think he was giving the women in the Corinthian church a reason that was not the real reason. It was, however, a reason they might find acceptable.

Should non-Corinthian Christian women cover their head today? I believe this is something each sister must decide for herself. The wearing or not wearing of a head covering should not be forced on anyone:

1 Cor. 11:16 But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.

### **Conclusion**

We see in Deborah a respected woman in Jewish society. Although no woman was called to wander with Jesus in the highways and byways of Israel as an apostle, they did freely converse with him. On the day of Pentecost when the holy spirit came upon the faithful ones, Peter explains what is happening by quoting from the prophet Joel:

Acts 2:17 “And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons **and your daughters** shall prophesy...”

Clearly the holy spirit had come upon both the males and the females in this group.

Paul mentions a sister who had a valued position within the church: “I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a **servant** of the church which is at Cenchrea. (Rom. 16:1) The word servant is #1248 [dee-ak-on-ee-ah] and is another form of #1249, a Greek word rendered minister or deacon. Phebe was a deaconess in the ecclesia at Cenchrea.

In Deborah we have an outstanding example of a gifted woman. Our sisters today possess gifts, and have a valuable contribution to make within the body of Christ. Let us never say to them—or any other member of the body—“I have no need of you.”

Closing Hymn: #310 — “Triumphant Zion”

*[First given in Fresno, February 1999]*

## *Earthen Vessels*

Opening Hymn: #229—O! To Be Nothing

2 Cor. 4:7 We have this treasure in earthen vessels.

The Bible is filled with symbolism. What is said is not necessarily what is meant. If we want to understand what it teaches, we must study it. This text is a good example.

Earthen vessels are today called stoneware or pottery. Moist clay is formed into a vessel on a potter's wheel. After the clay is baked at high temperatures, a vessel becomes useful. Each one is unique. Scraps of broken, earthen vessels help archaeologists date the time ancient cities were inhabited.

In Old Testament times people put things of importance in earthen vessels. Jeremiah was told to put his deed of purchase for a field in an earthen vessel to protect it. (Jer. 32:14) Treasures like the dead sea scrolls were placed in earthen vessels and remained protected for 2,000 years. But in this text Paul is not saying he and the Corinthians were protecting a literal treasure in literal vessels. What is he saying? First the word "vessel":

Acts 9:15 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:

The Lord speaks to Ananias in a vision and he's talking about Paul. He calls him a "vessel." So a "vessel" in scripture means a human being. And it is an apt symbol because life itself is fragile, easily broken, just like a stone pot. The word "vessel" carries with it the idea of someone the Master can use in his service. That's the thought of words in our opening hymn: "A broken and emptied **vessel**, for the Master's use made meet."

What about the word "treasure"? There can be different ideas about that.

1) Paul was referring to the holy spirit God has given us:

Matthew 25:4 But the wise took **oil** in their **vessels** with their lamps.

In this parable of the wise and foolish virgins, the key difference between the two groups is the presence or absence of oil in the vessels. Oil is a symbol of the holy spirit; the wise virgins were filled with the spirit, the foolish virgins were not.

2) Paul was talking about being ministers of the new covenant (see 3:6). He says that although the ministry of Moses was glorious, the ministry we have is more glorious. Note the preceding verses:

2 Cor. 4:1 Seeing we have this ministry . . . [vs. 5] We preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord.

3) Paul was referring to the truth as a treasure the Lord has given to us:

2 Cor. 4:2 [we do not handle] the word of God deceitfully.

4) Paul was referring to the “new creature.” This new mind now lives within an earthly body until it receives a spiritual body at death. Here’s a verse from the next chapter:

2 Cor. 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.

Bro. Russell most frequently said the treasure was the new creature, although in the fifth volume he said the treasure was the holy spirit (*E245*). It doesn't really matter because that's not the important point. Whatever it is, it is contained in fragile, common people who come from the dust of the earth. You may think you know what "treasure" has been entrusted to you. Do you really think consider it to be a treasure? If you do, you will endure all kinds of trials to keep it safe. Notice the next few verses:

2 Cor. 4:8–10 We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.

Some might think it is not logical for God to use poor, unwise people for anything. But those are just the ones God has always used for His work “that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us” (end vs. 7). Consider the “great apostle Paul.” Great? Not to everyone. Later in this letter he quotes what some of his Corinthian critics say about him:

2 Cor. 10:10 (Living Bible) “Don’t bother about his letters,” some say. “He sounds big, but it’s all noise. When he gets here you will see that there is nothing great about him, and you have never heard a worse preacher!”

Not one person here is impressive by the world’s standards. That’s as it should be. God has always used flawed earthen vessels to represent Him and to deliver His message. Adam Clarke (vol. 6, p. 330) recounts an interesting story:

“The daughter of the emperor addressed Rabbi Joshua: O! how great is thy skill in the law, and yet how deformed thou art! what a great deal of wisdom is laid up in a sordid vessel! The rabbi answered, Tell me, I pray thee, of what are those vessels in which you keep your wines? She answered, They are *earthen vessels*. He replied, How is it, seeing ye are rich, that ye do not lay up your wine in *silver vessels*, for the common people lay up their wine in earthen vessels? She returned to her father and persuaded him to have all the wine put into silver vessels. Then the wine turned acid. When the emperor heard it, he inquired of his daughter who it was that had given her that advice. She told him it was Rabbi Joshua. The rabbi was called and told the whole story. He added this sentence: The wisdom and study of the law cannot dwell in a comely man. The emperor objected: There **are** comely persons who have made great progress in the study of the law. The rabbi answered, Had they not been so comely, they would have made even greater progress; for a man who is comely has not an humble mind, and therefore soon forgets the whole law.”

## A Jar of Oil

Zechariah said we should not despise the day of small things. (Zech. 4:10) We could profitably explore a number of “small things” in the eyes of the world that accomplished great things in the right hands. One small stone from the brook was all it took to kill Goliath. A small jar of oil is the basis of a wonderful story in 2 Kings 4:

2 Kings 4:1-7 (RSV) Now the wife of one of the sons of the prophets cried to Elisha, “Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant feared the LORD, but the creditor has come to take my two children to be his slaves.” And Elisha said to her, . . . “What have you in the house?” And she said, . . . “[Nothing] except a jar of oil.” Then he said, “Go outside, borrow vessels of all your neighbors, empty vessels and not too few. Then go in, and shut the door upon yourself and your sons, and pour into all these vessels; when one is full, set it aside.” So she went from him and shut the door upon herself and her sons; and as she poured they brought the vessels to her. When the vessels were full, she said to her son, “Bring me another vessel.” And he said to her, “There is not another.” Then the oil stopped flowing. She came and told the man of God, and he said, “Go, sell the oil and pay your debts, and you and your sons can live on the rest.”

Matt. 9:29 According to your faith be it unto you.

This woman’s **faith** was on display. Think about her and her two children going house to house to borrow earthen vessels from her neighbors. “Why? What are you going to do with them?” Of course the neighbors knew about her troubles and that she possessed nothing. Her children were all that a creditor could take. But she must have had a marvelous character because although their vessels were valuable, her neighbors did loan their vessels to this woman and her two children. Talk about faith? Someone of less faith might have stopped with one vessel, or at most two. But little faith would mean little blessing.

There is more to this lesson. When you are in distress, when you expect the worst, what do you do? You go to the one who can do something about it, you approach the throne of grace. The woman did that; she sees Elisha as God’s representative. Then what do you do? Do you present God with the **solution** to your problem? That’s a big mistake.

“Selfish prayers are too expensive. Some have gained wealth and lost the truth and its service; some have gained health, only to find that with it they gained other trials no less severe: some have had their dear ones restored to them from the very jaws of death, only to wish afterward that God had not answered their prayers—or, more correctly, to wish that they had accepted the Lord’s wisdom and providences trustfully, contentedly, uncomplainingly.”—*Manna*, February 22

The woman came to Elisha only with the problem: “Help me. I don’t know what to do.” And the solution came from the one thing she did possess—a small pot of oil. Earthen vessels, one after the other, were filled to the brim with oil. You. Me. Every vessel. The Lord can fill

us with his spirit if we come to him emptied of everything else. The filling has no limit. Every vessel can be filled:

“While there was a vessel to fill, there was oil sufficient; it only ceased to flow when there was no vessel to receive it. This is a good emblem of the grace of God. If we find in any place or at any time that the oil ceases to flow, it is because there are no empty vessels there, no soul hungering and thirsting for righteousness.”—Adam Clarke

#### Four Kinds of Vessels [dishes]

The Greek word rendered “earthen” in 2 Cor. 4:7 is found in only one other place:

2 Tim. 2:20,21 (Goodspeed) In any large house there are not only gold and silver dishes, but also wooden and **earthen** ones, some for great occasions and some for ordinary use. So if a man will cleanse himself from these things [*from iniquitous things*—see vs. 19], he will be put to great uses, consecrated and used by the master of the house himself, ready for any good use.

The Greek word rendered “dishes” is the same as “vessels” in 2 Cor. 4:7. So these “dishes” are people divided into two categories: gold and silver, wood and earth. It shows the two phases of the kingdom—heavenly (great occasions) and earthly (ordinary use). If we are faithful to our covenant of sacrifice, we will be used to accomplish great things in God’s house. We will be of the gold [little flock] or silver [Great Company] class. But there is also a “wood” and an “earthen” class. This is the earthly phase. We suggest that the ancient worthies are shown in the wood and the world of mankind as earthen dishes.

This scripture says these vessels will be “ready for any good use.” This is important. We are to fit ourselves not for **honor**, but for **service**. We are to keep ourselves pure, sanctified, and cleansed from every iniquitous thing. Only then will we be ready for the Master’s service whatever He decides it should be.

Romans 9:20,21 (New English) Can the pot speak to the potter and say, “Why did you make me like this?” Surely the potter can do what he likes with the clay. Is he not free to make out of the same lump two vessels, one to be treasured, the other for common use?

Matt. 13:16,17 Blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.

The attitude of our heart should be continual gratitude for the opening of our eyes and the unstopping of our ears so we can appreciate Him and His wonderful plan of salvation.

1 Thes. 4:4 Every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour.



We are earthen, cracked, common vessels. We don't look like much. But let us live a sanctified life so that God, who reads our heart, will one day reward us openly. (Matt. 6:4,6,18)

## Gideon

We know vessels can contain oil a symbol of the holy spirit. Although most unusual, there is one place in the Bible where they also contained light. It was when Gideon took a handful of men to fight the massed armies of 135,000 Midianites and Amalekites (Judges 6:33; 8:10). Gideon sent out a summons for volunteers to fight. 32,000 showed up. But God told Gideon there were too many. If He gave them a victory, they would say their own strength did it. So those who really didn't want to fight were encouraged to leave. 22,000 did. Another test, and after it was over, Gideon was left with just 300. Let's read how this battle was fought:

Judges 7:16-23 (Good News) Gideon divided his 300 men into three groups and gave each man a trumpet and a jar [*an earthen vessel*] with a torch inside it. He told them, "When I get to the edge of the camp, watch me, and do what I do. When my group and I blow our trumpets, then you blow yours all around the camp and shout, For the Lord and for Gideon!" Gideon and his 100 men came to the edge of the camp a while before midnight, just after the guard had been changed. Then they blew the trumpets and broke the jars they were holding, and the other two groups did the same. They all held the torches in their left hands, the trumpets in their right, and shouted, "A sword for the Lord and for Gideon!" Every man stood in his place around the camp, and the whole enemy army ran away yelling. While Gideon's men were blowing their trumpets, the Lord made the enemy troops attack each other with their swords.

No human general would think 300 could prevail against so many. It is another "small thing" used by God to accomplish his good pleasure. Today a company of soldiers follows the sound of a bugle. Then it was a trumpet. When the enemy was awakened from sleep, they heard all these trumpets and saw the trumpeters because of the torches. Naturally they assumed each one was at the head of a separate company. There must be hundreds of separate companies of soldiers. They thought they were doomed. Panic set in and they killed each other in confusion.

Gideon and those associated with him needed faith. And he had faith. His name appears in Hebrews (11:32) as a hero of faith. It takes faith to think there is any value in a trumpet, an earthen vessel, and light.

2 Cor. 4:6 God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shined in our hearts.

We are God's army today. We are such a little company and the enemy is so vast. All we have are a trumpet, our earthen vessel, and light. When we shatter our earthen vessel—

when we make ourself nothing—the light shines forth. Trumpets are associated with messages in the scriptures. This teaches that the light of the gospel and its message do the work God wants accomplished.

### **Conclusion**

God has given us treasure: 1) the holy spirit; 2) allowing us to become His ministers; 3) the truth; 4) made us new creatures. He has done this although He knows we are but fragile, common earthly vessels. "He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust." (Psa. 103:14) It requires faith to believe God would do this, would use us in some way in the outworking of his plan. "Without faith it is impossible to please God." (Heb. 11:6) But **with** faith, anything is possible.

"Despise not the day of small things." This is not the day for big things. Those must wait until the next age. Now we are being prepared. If we are rightly exercised, we will be vessels of honor in God's great house. So when we are in distress, let us go to the throne of grace with our problem, and leave it there. None of us are smart enough to come to the Lord with the solution to our problems.

Like the faithful soldiers who passed all the tests and fought at the side of their leader Gideon, let us break our earthen pitchers and let the light shine forth. The light and the message will scatter all the forces of darkness. Then the world of mankind will be at peace.

### *[closing poem if time permits]*

Closing Hymn: #340—Onward Christian Soldiers

*[First given in Los Angeles, April, 1996]*

### **Gideon's Army in Antitype** (*Poems of Dawn*, p. 127)

Arise! Then, O! Army of Gideon,  
 Let him that is fearful return;  
 Jehovah wants only the zealous,  
 Whose hearts with the love of truth burn.

Ten thousand remain! Still too many;  
 Once more He their loyalty proves,  
 To see who most faithfully serves Him,  
 To see who most fervently loves.

O! ye, who have sworn Him allegiance,  
 Mark well! He is now testing you,  
 With the water of truth He will prove you,  
 To see who is loyal and true.

Look well to your drinking, then, brother,  
That you no impurities trace,  
Take your lamp, your pitcher, and trumpet,  
And stand every man in his place!

Your sword is the “Sword of the Spirit,”  
Your lamp is the light from His Word,  
Your pitcher, this poor earthen vessel,  
You break at the voice of your Lord.

Is your lamp burning bright in your pitcher?  
Doth your trumpet give forth “certain sound”?  
Soon the Sword of the Lord and of Gideon  
The enemy’s host will confound.

For sure is the victory promised,  
And great is the peace He awards—  
Then, “stand” in your place, all ye faithful,  
*The battle’s not yours, but the Lord’s!*

## *Exodus*

Opening Hymn: #32—“The Prospect”

The Hebrew title for the second book of the Bible is “Shemoth,” meaning “Names.” It comes from the opening words of the book. But the Septuagint title more closely conveys what happens in the book: “Exodos” [ending with **-os**] is a Greek word meaning “The Way Out.” Strong says it means “exit.” (In English we change the spelling to **-us**.)

Why does “The Way Out” sound appropriate to us? Because we see the Israelites in slavery to a powerful Pharaoh for hundreds of years. God provides a way out of that condition into a new life which far exceeds their expectations. All that is required is that they exercise faith in Him. It was more than they could do:

Heb. 3:17,19 But with whom was he grieved 40 years? Was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

The Greek word “exodos” appears eight chapters later in Hebrews:

Heb. 11:22 By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing [exodos] of the children of Israel and gave commandment concerning his bones.

There are only two other places in the N.T. where this Greek word appears. Neither instance has anything to do with the Israelites. This lovely Greek word expressing the way out of one condition into another was used by one of the gospel writers to describe how Jesus viewed his death and subsequent resurrection into glory.

### **The Sufferings of This Life**

In the middle of chapter 16 of Matthew, Jesus has a serious talk with his disciples. He asks them who others think he is. He gets a variety of responses. Some think he’s Elijah. The people knew about the “sending of Elijah” spoken by Malachi. Some thought he was one of the prophets. That was understandable since he lived such a simple life. But when Jesus asked them who they thought he was, it was Peter who in a flash of insight gave the right answer:

Matt. 16:16 And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

Now if you were a part of that little band of disciples, and if you really believed that Jesus was the Son of God, what would you expect him to do? You’d probably expect him to take the steps to throw off the Roman yoke of bondage. That would require raising an army or acquiring political power. But Jesus wasn’t doing either of those things. Wouldn’t you begin to have doubts about whether he really was the Son of God? It appears John the Baptist had such doubts. His expectations didn’t agree with what Jesus was doing.

What the disciples did not know was that Jesus was going to suffer and die. He began to explain this for the first time:

Matt. 16:21,22 From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples how that 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. Then Peter took him and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.

Peter's expectations about what Jesus should really be doing with his life are so strong he dares to argue with the Lord. But it is Peter who needs to gain a clearer perspective about what's supposed to be happening in **this** life. Let's pick up this experience in Luke:

Luke 9:23-27 And he said to them all, if any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross **daily** and follow me. For whomsoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged if he gain the whole world and lose himself or be cast away? [vs. 27] But I tell you of a truth there be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the kingdom of God.

This seeing was necessary so they would appreciate that suffering in this life was not all there was to it. The glory to follow would far exceed their expectations.

This prophecy about some seeing the kingdom of God was fulfilled eight days later according to Luke. (Matthew and Mark say six days, but they exclude the day Jesus said it and the day the fulfillment occurred.) Whatever happened to them in that time was not considered important compared to what they had been told and what was to happen to three of them.

### **The Transfiguration**

Luke 9:28-36 And it came to pass about eight days after these sayings, he took Peter and John and James and went up into a mountain to pray. And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered and his raiment was white and glistening. And behold there talked with him two men which were Moses and Elias [Elijah], who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem. But Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep: and when they were awake, they saw his glory and the two men that stood with him. And it came to pass as they departed from him, Peter said unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here. And let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias: [not knowing what he said]. While he thus spake, there came a cloud and overshadowed them: and they feared as they entered into the cloud. And there came a voice out of the cloud saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him. And when the voice was past, Jesus was found alone. And they kept it close, and told no man in those days any of those things which they had seen.

Here was the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy that some would "see" the kingdom of God. This is clearly an important event for it is recorded by three of the Gospel writers. Matthew and Mark both say that Jesus was "transfigured" before them. That's why we call this the "transfiguration scene." Luke doesn't use that word. Let's think back on this reading and try to summarize exactly what happened:

1. Peter/James/John witnessed a spectacular vision [to use the word found in Matthew's account]. They would later remember this for these three were with him when once again he prayed in Gethsemane just before he was taken by force and crucified.
2. This vision was Jesus in glory. Matt. 17:2 says, "And [Jesus] was transfigured before them and his face did shine as the sun and his raiment was white as the light."
3. They saw Moses and Elijah. How did they know? It was all part of this miracle. They were sure who these two people were.
4. They overheard the conversation. And what did these three talk about? Exodos! They talked about the coming death and resurrection, The Way Out. This is one of only three occurrences of this Greek word in the N.T.
5. Peter impulsively suggests they stay right there. In the Mark account, we read that Peter didn't know what to say because they were afraid. Under such circumstances you would have thought Peter would have remained silent. But he didn't.
6. Finally the cloud covered them and the voice of approval has heard by all.

### **The Vision in Detail**

Both Matthew and Mark say the earlier discussion with the disciples about his coming suffering took place near Caesarea Philippi. 14 miles from that place is Mt. Hermon. It's 9,100-feet high. The word "Hermon" means "a consecrated place." This is probably where the vision occurred.

It was a vision and NOT a dream. They were sleepy, of course. They had walked up this mountain and it was night. But all three would hardly dream the same dream. The vision was similar to what John the Revelator experienced on the isle of Patmos. And in many respects, it was similar to the vision Paul received on the road to Damascus.

In this general context, we read about how his **enemies** wanted a supernatural sign:

Mark 8:11 And the Pharisees came forth and began to question with him, seeking of him a sign from heaven, tempting him.

He gave them no sign. But his closest disciples, who thought they needed no special sign, received this very special "sign from heaven."

**Moses and Elijah:** Of course neither of these two were really there. It was a vision. Why these instead of Noah, Daniel, and Job, say? These two were special people in Israel's history, and both were mentioned in the final verses of the old testament:

Mal. 4:4,5 Remember ye the law of **Moses** my servant, which I commanded unto him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments. Behold, I will send you **Elijah** the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.

We note that these two individuals had several experiences in common with Jesus. Both had the experience of fasting for 40 days in a wilderness situation. Both had a very special relationship with God. Both had peculiar deaths. God took Moses after allowing him to see the promised land from the top of Pisgah's mountain. Elijah was caught up in a whirlwind and was seen no more.

The selection of Moses was also related to something Moses said:

Deut. 18:15 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 harken.

There's no question Peter was familiar with these words. He quoted them in Acts 3:22 when he preached to the people of Jerusalem and applied the words to Jesus. The experience of the transfiguration vision, seeing Jesus and Moses together, may have given him this insight.

I think we can see more in the selection of these two, however. This was a vision of the kingdom in its glory. With the glorified Jesus we have two people who represent the two phases of the kingdom. Moses: represents the earthly phase, the one who was a faithful servant. Elijah: represents the heavenly phase, those who are "caught up into heaven" if faithful.

**Exodus:** The use of this Greek word is even a "Moses" subject since it would usually be associated with the exit from Egypt. Note that the subject is specifically the one Peter rebuked the Lord about. "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee." Peter needed a special rebuke and this was it. He needed to understand that it wasn't suffering which led to death for all time. But suffering to learn appropriate lessons, which led to death, then exaltation and glory. It was an "exodos," an exit from one condition into another. Peter never forgot this lesson, as we'll soon see.

**Peter's words:** Peter speaks for the three. He realizes the importance of what has happened and wants to stay there. Some have suggested that it was near the time of the festival of booths [tabernacles] and that he's suggesting that they celebrate it there. But his viewpoint was wrong. We read about the correct viewpoint in...

Heb. 13:13,14 Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.

**The cloud:** This was a symbol of God's presence to the Israelites of old. It was mentioned in the account of Moses receiving God's commandments:

Ex. 24:15,16 And Moses went up into the mount and a cloud covered the mount. And the glory of the Lord abode upon mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days: and the seventh day he called unto Moses out of the midst of the cloud. [34:29]

And it came to pass when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the mount, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone...

So the cloud was appropriate. And the voice approving everything had been heard before:

Mark 1:11 [after coming up from the water] And there came a voice from heaven saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

This was appropriate reassurance. No matter how unexpected Jesus' behavior might be to the disciples, he was doing his heavenly father's will. He was the son of God and he was still pleasing Him. Note also the word of command: "Hear him." Peter wanted to argue with him. In its own way, this was another rebuke. He got the point, for he emphasized it in his first epistle:

1 Peter 1:3-11 [Diaglott] Obtaining the issue of the faith, even your salvation.

Concerning which salvation those prophets, who prophesied concerning the favor towards you, sought out and investigated, examining closely to what things, or what kind of season, the spirit which was in them was pointing out, when it previously testified the sufferings for Christ, and after these the glories.

When this mountain-top experience was over, they descended back down into the valley. Once again they were face-to-face with the world/flesh/devil. Their own sufferings were not over. But they **knew** this was God's will for his son and for them. They had received a glimpse of the coming kingdom's glory. If we had any doubt about this, we need merely turn to Peter's second epistle and read what he thought about it.

### **Peter Remembers**

Peter never forgot this experience. It was indelibly engraved upon his mind, for some 35 years later, when writing his second epistle, he says he saw that glory:

2 Peter 1:16-18 [Diaglott] For we have not been following cunningly devised tales in making known to you the power and appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were beholders of that greatness. For having received from God the Father honor and glory, a voice of this kind was brought to him by the magnificent glory—"This is my son, the beloved, in whom I delight." And this voice which was brought from heaven we heard, being with him on the holy mountain.

All of the things Peter was talking about had been prophesied beforehand. But it was the expectations that were different. The prophecies were not wrong. And this experience of Peter's put God's stamp of approval on the life and ministry of Jesus.

vs. 19 [Weymouth] So we have the word of prophecy confirmed; to which you do well to pay attention—as to a lamp shining in a dark place—until day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.



All these things were important to Peter. He knows what he's talking about because of his first-hand experience. And he wants his readers to keep their faith strong. He knows that if they are faithful, death will lead to glorification. It's a "way out," an "exodos." In fact, in the only other place where this word is used, Peter uses it to describe his own death:

2 Peter 1:15 Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease [Greek: exodos] to have these things always in remembrance.

Peter could have used a perfectly good Greek word for death. But instead he chooses this exceedingly rare word, one which Luke used to describe the conversation between Jesus and the two who were with him in vision. Death was the "way out" from a condition of sin and death—of suffering—into the glories which shall follow. It was very real to Peter and he wanted it to be very real to all the footstep followers of Christ.

### Transfiguration

We noted that both Matthew and Mark say that Jesus was "transfigured." That's how we come to call this the transfiguration scene. This Greek word is also interesting because it is used by Paul to describe what's supposed to happen to us:

2 Cor. 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, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

We get the English word "metamorphosis" from this Greek word. Strong says it means "transform." It was translated "transfigured" in Matthew and Mark, and "changed" in this text.

This text is not very easy to understand. Clearly Paul is thinking about the face of Moses when he came down from the mount. He mentions that in earlier verses. The phrase "open face" should really be "unveiled face," the kind of face Moses had when he talked with God. Moses "mirrored" the glory of God in his face and the people could not look upon him. As we commune with the Lord, the glory we behold should have a transforming influence upon us as we become a copy of that glory. And that is the way the Jerusalem Bible translates the Greek:

2 Cor. 3:18 [Jerusalem Bible] And we, with our unveiled face reflecting like mirrors the brightness of the Lord, all grow brighter and brighter as we are turned into the image that we reflect; this is the work of the Lord who is Spirit.

The transformation of our characters is part of our consecrated walk. The best known consecration scripture is Romans 12:1. The very next verse tells us what we're supposed to do after we present our bodies a living sacrifice:

Rom. 12:2 And be not conformed to this world but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind...

“Transformed” is the same Greek word we’ve been considering. We are changed from the fashion of this world into the fashion of our Lord Jesus Christ. If this transformation does not occur in us, we will not be a part of the body of Christ for we will not be acceptable to God.

Our mountain-top experiences are given to us to increase our faith so that when we come down from the mountain we may be able to continue walking in a narrow way of adversity with full assurance of faith.

*[Read “Common Days” if time permits.]*

2 Peter 1:10,11 Wherefore the rather, brethren, 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.

Closing Hymn: #29 “Dawning Day”

*[First given in Los Angeles, June, 1982. Printed in The Dawn, November 1989]*

## Common Days

One of the chief dangers of life is trusting occasions. We think that conspicuous events, striking experiences, exalted moments have most to do with our character and capacity. We are wrong. Common days, monotonous hours, wearisome paths, plain old tools, and everyday clothes tell the real story. Good habits are not made on birthdays, nor Christian character at the new year. The vision may dawn, the dream may waken, the heart may leap with a new inspiration on some mountaintop, but the test, the triumph, is at the foot of the mountain, on the level plain.

The workshop of character is everyday life. The uneventful and commonplace hour is where the battle is won or lost. Thank God for a new truth, a beautiful idea, a glowing experience; but remember that unless we bring it down to the ground and teach it to walk with feet, work with hands, and stand the strain of daily life, we have worse than lost it, we have been hurt by it. A new light in our heart makes an occasion; but an occasion is an opportunity, not for building a tabernacle and feeling thankful and looking back to a blessed memory, but for shedding the new light on the old path, and doing old duties with new inspiration. The uncommon life is the child of the common day, lived in an uncommon way.

—Selected

## *Faith and Gold*

Opening Hymn: #174 — “My Faith Looks Up To Thee”

The word faith appears only twice in the Old Testament and 229 times in the New Testament. The two Old Testament texts where the KJV has the word faith [Deut. 32:30; Hab. 2:4] come from Hebrew words normally rendered “truth.” I’m intrigued by two texts in the New Testament:

Ephesians 2:8 By grace are ye saved through **faith**; and that not of yourselves: it is the **gift** of God:

Hebrews 11:6 Without **faith** it is impossible to please God.

So what is faith really? The Ephesians text seems to say it is the gift of God, yet in Hebrews we are told if we don’t have it, we cannot please God. How can we reconcile these two scriptures?

My dictionary describes faith is a “belief that does not rest on logical proof or material evidence.” If we have faith in God, we believe him, we have a trusting acceptance of his will for us even though our reasons for doing so may not seem logical to others. So is this kind of faith a gift from God? Yes and no.

Romans 10:17 Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Paul in this chapter tells the Romans that no-one can believe unless they hear, and they cannot hear unless a preacher is sent. So without question the “sent preacher” is a gift from God. Two-thirds of this world is non-Christian and most have never heard of the only name under heaven given among men by which we may receive salvation (Acts 4:12, New English). Does “never hear” seem unlikely because knowledge is so easily obtained today? In fact it is very likely. Having knowledge available is not enough; there must be an eager desire for knowledge before it can be absorbed. How much, for example, do **you** know about Buddha, Confucius, or Mohammed? It is not that you cannot learn about these people and the religious systems they founded. You can, but only if you have a strong desire to do so.

Yet a strong desire to know God and his plan is not enough. Perhaps one of the most incomprehensible statements of our Lord concerns why he would not speak plainly to the people. Certainly his disciples did not understand why he did that:

Matthew 13:10 The disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? [verse 13] I speak to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. [verse 15] For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear.

For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.

Proverbs 20:12 The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the LORD hath made even both of them.

“Blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear.” This truly is a gift from God. But what you do after you see and after you hear is up to you. Many loved the gracious words which proceeded out of the mouth of the Master, but this brought no lasting benefit unless they acted on what they heard. Few did.

Ephesians 2:8 says we are “saved through **faith**; and that not of yourselves: it is the **gift** of God.” Is salvation the gift of God or is it faith? That we are saved from wrath now (Romans 5:9) and that the world of mankind will be saved later is something that comes only by grace; it is God’s unmerited favor. Brother Russell in the *Question Book* said that faith can also be considered a gift from God at least in one sense:

“We have knowledge of God, and this knowledge which is granted us as a grace or favor brings us to the place where we are enabled to exercise faith. Faith in a great measure rests upon knowledge. Knowledge reveals God’s character; the Divine Revelation makes known to us certain facts respecting God’s purposes, and we see the purposes thus outlined to be in harmony with the character of God. This enables one to believe the promises; and believing them, we are enabled to act upon them. This is faith. So our faith, while it is of ourselves in the sense that we must exercise it, is of God in the sense that he supplies the necessary elements from which that faith is to be compounded.”—*Question Book*, p. 267

### The Trial of Our Faith

1 Peter 1:7 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:

The Greek word rendered “trial” appears in just one other place where it is also associated with faith:

James 1:3 Knowing this, that the **trying** of your faith worketh patience.

I never hear other Christians talk about the trying of a Christian’s faith. Perhaps that’s because [whether they say it in so many words or not] most believe that “once in grace, always in grace.” Since they “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,” they are saved. Yet the scriptures tell us we must develop the fruits and the graces of the spirit if we are to make our calling and election sure. Faith is an integral part of both.

Galatians 5:22,23 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, **faith**, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.

2 Peter 1:5-8 And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your **faith** virtue ... knowledge ... temperance ... patience ... godliness ... brotherly kindness ... 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.

James said that the trying of our faith develops patience, and Peter lists patience as one of the graces of the spirit. So we see there is a good reason for our trials. It makes us into something better than we would be without them.

Peter says the trial of our faith is more precious than of **gold** that perisheth though it be tried with fire. Gold is not put into the fire to punish it. It is subjected to fire to purify it, to make it suitable for fashioning into priceless objects of beauty. Gold has a number of interesting characteristics.

## Gold

Gold is not concentrated in just a single region of the earth; both silver and gold are widely dispersed. It is the first mineral named in the Bible. Genesis 2:11 says there is gold in the land of Havilah, and that the gold is good. Since gold is gold, the word “good” probably means it was found densely concentrated in gold nuggets instead of in microscopic particles as is common today. Gold is the most malleable of all metals (silver is the second most malleable). It can be hammered into an extremely thin sheet which we call gold leaf. Just as a potter moulds clay as he pleases, a goldsmith can work gold into whatever he chooses. One gram of pure gold can be drawn into a thread two miles long. If you had a one ounce pure gold coin, think of it as a pie divided into 27 pieces. One gram equals one piece of that gold “pie.” (One gram of silver can be drawn into a thread half as long.) A text in Lamentations equates wrought gold with pottery:

Lament. 4:2 The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter!

Gold is the least chemically active of all the metals which is why it is the metal of choice for dental work. It does not react with anything you eat. One could say it does not react with the things of this earth. Now suppose you had a gold nugget. How would you separate the gold from the rock? Breaking the rock into small pieces is a start, but it is not good enough. You need a fire, a really hot fire. It requires heat of almost 2000° F to melt gold. Could **you** make a fire that hot? Evidently the ancients could because Genesis 13:2 says “Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver, and in **gold**.” Abram lived in the 1900 to 2000 B.C. time frame and was born two years after Noah died.

Gold is a symbol of that which is divine. In the tabernacle only the priests saw the gold. The ordinary people saw only the plain white curtain and the copper altar and laver. We believe gold is also a symbol of the church because the church receives the divine nature. Silver is a symbol of the Great Company. Here are two scriptures:

Malachi 3:3 And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of **silver**: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as **gold** and **silver**, that they may offer unto the LORD an offering in righteousness.

This text equates gold and silver with the “sons of Levi” a group that consisted of a few priests and a lot of non-priests. Numbers 18 says that the Levites had no inheritance in the land; God was their inheritance (vs. 20). Thus the type teaches that both the “gold” and “silver” classes do not receive an earthly inheritance; their reward is in heaven.

Although gold is so highly prized that most of what has ever existed still exists, it is extremely rare. That is what we’d expect of the symbol of the church. A television documentary made the astonishing claim that if all of the world’s gold were to be melted to form a single block, it would form a cube 63-feet on a side, just one-fifth the size of the Washington Monument. [from *L. A. Times* 8/21/01]

2 Tim. 2:20 (New English) In a large house there are dishes and bowls of all kinds: some are made of silver and gold, others of wood and clay: some are for special occasions, others for ordinary use.

The silver and gold refer to classes who have had their faith “tried in the fire” and come forth precious in the sight of the heavenly Father. Thus they receive a place of honor in this “large house.” The wood and clay are precious too, but not to the same degree.

Job 23:10 He knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.

## Developing Faith

When we considered Ephesians 2:8, we saw it was either salvation that was a gift of God, or that the opportunity to develop faith was a gift of God. There another text which implies that faith is something God gives to some but not others:

1 Cor. 12:7-9 But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; to another **faith** by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit ... [other gifts of the spirit are listed]

From this list are we to conclude that only a few body members had faith just as only a few possessed the gift of healing, or of prophecy, or speaking in or interpreting tongues? Yes, in a sense. Just 24 verses later Paul talks about a unique kind of faith:

1 Cor. 13:2 And though I have all **faith**, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing.

Jesus himself used a similar expression about that kind of faith:

Matthew 17:20 And Jesus said unto them, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.

I'm sure we have known of a few body members who have shown that kind of exceptional faith as they follow the leadings of the Lord, but such faith is rare. Yet we all must have some faith when we come to God. Otherwise we could not be pleasing to him. A good start is important but it is not enough. We will be given the experiences we need so that our faith grows.

2 Thes. 1:3 We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, because that your **faith** groweth exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth.

Paul commends the Thessalonians because their faith was growing. In Luke the apostles say to the Lord, "Increase our faith" (Luke 17:5). And that's exactly what he did. At the time of the crucifixion Peter's faith fails him and he denies the Lord three times. By the end of his life, Peter has become strong in the faith because he has been developed by his experiences.

Most of us would probably admit that our faith needs improvement. We believe, yet at times we don't.

Matthew 6:33,34 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.

How much of our time is devoted to "seeking the kingdom of God" and how much of our time is devoted to seeking other things? If we truly believed, if we had a faith that could move mountains, there would be no question about it: we would be "seeking the kingdom of God" all the time and not thinking about the things of tomorrow.

Perhaps the best known definition of faith is found in the first verse of Hebrews 11:

Hebrews 11:1 Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

The New English Bible reads: "What is faith? Faith gives substance to our hopes and makes us certain of realities we do not see."

The remainder of chapter 11 is filled with many Old Testament examples of faith in action. In all instances we see it wasn't just that the named individuals said they believed God. They all did something to demonstrate that belief. Similarly our conduct should demonstrate our faith so that the world will see that we have been with Jesus and learned of him (Acts 4:13).

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Everything we have is a gift from God. The salvation we have received now and the world of mankind receives in the next age is because of God's grace. God has given us opportunities to hear about him through his word and through those who have explained



that word to us. Two-thirds of the world today know nothing about the one through whom salvation has been provided.

Faith is so important that it is impossible to please God unless we have it. Paul wrote that faith comes from hearing, and hearing by the word of God. Our faith starts small but if we are rightly exercised by our experiences it grows. Our faith is said to be tried in the “fire” like gold to make us suitable for a place of honor in God’s house. Gold has many characteristics which make it a fitting symbol of the church which will, after her refining experiences have removed all dross, receive the divine nature. Just as the church is precious to God, so is all mankind. Isaiah tells us a day is coming when Jehovah will consider man more precious than gold:

Isaiah 13:12 I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir.

May we never lose our faith. It is faith that made us acceptable to God, and it is faith that insures our ultimate salvation:

Hebrews 10:38,39 The just shall live by faith: but if any draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.

1 Tim. 6:12 Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and has professed a good profession before many witnesses.

Closing Hymn: #263 — “Simply Trusting”

*[First given at Los Angeles, August, 2001]*

### HE SHALL SIT AS A REFINER

Sometimes as we look on, we gaze in wonder  
Upon the dealings of our gracious God.  
With those whom o'er and o'er his hand afflicted,  
Who pass so often 'neath his chastening rod.  
Pure gold and well refined, to our poor vision  
These loved ones seem; and oft we wonder sore  
Why souls who seem to us each day more saintly  
Should by his hand be chastened more and more.  
But the dear, loving Lord who tries the spirit,  
Sees in them what no human eye can see—  
A further fineness where his gracious dealing  
Has formed the Christ within, in days to be.  
As in a portrait by some cunning artist,  
Which men call perfect—those who praise the skill  
Of him who warms to life dull, senseless canvas,  
Impatient that he labors at it still.  
Labors, because before his inner vision  
There floats an ideal he has not attained,  
And in his heart he holds a steady purpose  
To labor on until that point is gained.  
So with these precious souls. Men see their graces,  
So far exceeding those of common men,  
And wonder why a God of loving kindness  
Should chasten them again and yet again.  
Nor will he stay his hand, though our impatience  
Claim for these souls exemption from the rod,  
Till, polished, perfected, refined, and holy,  
Shines out from them the image of their God.  
Art thou, beloved, one of this tried number?  
Hold still, though furnace fires may hotter grow,  
And when his work in thee is all accomplished,  
The true life "hid with Christ in God" thou'lt know.

—Helen S. Pepper (Reprints page 4571)

## *Faith and Works*

Opening Hymn: #174—My Faith Looks Up to Thee

Rom. 4:4,5 [Phillips] If a man **works**, his wages are not counted as a gift but as a fair reward. But if a man, irrespective of his work, has **faith** in him who justifies the sinful, then that man's faith is counted as righteousness.

There has long been a kind of “tension” between the relative importance of faith and works. This was not true in Old Testament times. There the emphasis was on works. In fact the word “faith” appears only twice in the KJV Old Testament.

Exod. 24:7 And [Moses] took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the Lord hath said will we **do**, and be obedient.

Certainly during the time of the law dispensation **works** did affect how much favor Israel received from God. (See Deut. 11:26-28) Eventually the Pharisees developed a strict set of rules which they thought obligated God to bless them if those rules were carefully followed. How foreign to them would be the idea that anyone could come to God in simple faith. This was the teaching of Paul's letter to the Romans and Paul had himself been a Pharisee.

Martin Luther, the famous sixteenth century reformer, “discovered” in the scriptures the doctrine of justification by faith. The importance of this doctrine in Luther's mind came partially in reaction to the Catholic Church's selling of indulgences—special documents that granted a release from purgatory in exchange for money. These are the words that so influenced him:

Rom. 1:16,17 [NIV] I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by **faith** from first to last, just as it is written, “The righteous will live by faith.”

In his own private wrestling with this scripture Luther was greatly troubled. Who are those who live by faith? Answer: the righteous! Luther felt condemned. He knew he could not live by faith because he was not righteous. It was only later he came to understand that the “righteousness of God” was not something that condemned man, but that offered man a great gift by accepting Christ's righteousness and not counting him as sinful:

Ephes. 2:8 For by grace are ye saved through **faith**; and that not of yourselves: it is the **gift** of God:

Luther's theology students were bewildered when he began to preach this “new” idea. Here's the way it was dramatized in a film on Luther's life:

**Student:** Then man can do nothing about his sinfulness?

**Luther:** Yes

**Student:** God is to do everything?

**Luther:** Yes

**Student:** Then I may do as I please? I can sin as much as I want to. . . makes no difference?

**Luther:** Yes. *[pause]* You may do as you please. Now, tell me, what pleases you?

**Student:** What pleases me?

**Luther:** Imagine it. No more laws, no more punishments. What do you do? Drink yourself senseless? Make faces at the duke?

**Student:** Sir, I don't understand.

**Luther:** Well, you say to me, "You may do as you please." I say to you, "What you do, comes from what you are, what you are in your heart."

**Student:** But Doctor Luther, we **are** taught to do good works. "Every tree that brings not forth good fruit is hewn down and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them."

**Luther:** Is it the apples that make the apple tree? I thought it was the apple tree that made the apples. "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit." That is the line **before** the one you gave me. If you're a good man, you'll do good works . . . not to prove anything, not to gain anything, just because that's how you are, how you are in your heart.

**Student:** Then what does it take to be a good man?

**Luther:** Faith.

**Student:** *[with sarcasm]* Sir, every peasant in Germany has faith!

**Luther:** So?

**Student:** Will heaven be filled with German peasants?

**Luther:** Might be.

**Student:** *[introspectively]* Can't be that easy.

**Luther:** You think faith is easy?

Justification by faith offers the sinner a new standing with God. But faith in what? The scriptures are clear: faith in Jesus Christ that he was the son of God, that he died as a ransom or corresponding price for Father Adam to redeem humanity, and that by accepting this sacrifice as benefiting us personally, we are saved from sin and death.

Gal. 2:16,17 [NIV] A man is not justified by observing the law, but by **faith** in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

“Our faith is an astounding thing astounding that I should believe him to be the Son of God who is suspended on the cross, whom I have never seen, with whom I have never become acquainted.”—**Martin Luther**

Acts 16:30,31 Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And [Paul and Silas] said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.

This was against the teachings of the Pharisees and the law in general. Paul and Silas did not require the keeping of new moons and Sabbaths, circumcision, ritual washing of the hands, fasting—there is nothing here except simple faith. Through faith comes blessings from God for his children, for indeed we become His children through faith:

Gal. 3:26 For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

Heb. 11:6 Without faith it is impossible to please God.

## Works

James 2:20-24 Faith without **works** is dead. Was not Abraham our father justified by **works**, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? <sup>23</sup>And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by **works** a man is justified, and not by faith only.

In Romans chapter four Paul talked about Abraham and said he was **not** justified by works. A casual reader of the Bible might wonder whom to believe. But there is no contradiction. “Abraham **believed** God.” Abraham had faith. How do we know? He showed his faith by his willingness to sacrifice his most precious possession, his son.

Here’s how Bro. Russell described what “belief” means:

“This word **believe** has a most important bearing on the entire matter. If we should say to you that if on your way home today you would stop at a certain house, of a certain number, you would find in a particular corner under the steps a little bag, and that it contained valuable treasure which should be yours—if you believed our words, you would go and get that bag. If you said that you believed us, and then went another way altogether, we would be sure that you had not believed us. Your course [of behavior] would prove it.”—*Our Most Holy Faith*, ppg. 273,274

Are works important? Of course! Each message to the seven churches (Rev. 2 and 3) contains the words, “I know thy **works**.” Works are an indicator of the depth of one’s faith. When to the church at Laodicea we read, “I know thy **works**, that thou art neither cold nor hot” (Rev. 3:15), we automatically know a great deal about that church’s **faith**. The apostle Paul, whose letter to the Romans so inspired Luther, also wrote:

Rom. 2:6,7 [NIV] God will give to each person according to what he **has done**. To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor, and immortality, he will give eternal life.

Hebrews 11 mentions many of the great heroes of faith: Noah, Abraham, Moses, Rahab, and others. All **did** something: Noah built an ark, Abraham left his own country for an unknown one, Moses left the court of Egypt, Rahab protected the spies. Could you imagine anyone being on this list who did nothing? Their faith permitted them to do great things:

Heb. 11:33,34 [They] through **faith** subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.

But the problem with works is that we can so easily deceive ourselves into thinking that God is obligated to reward us because of what we do for him. That seems to be why Balaam offers bullocks and rams on seven altars before seeking a vision from God. He appears to think if he gives God a special gift, surely God will do a little something for him.

In the time of our Lord, the strict, religious moralist was the Pharisee. More than anyone else, he tried to live by an exacting and demanding code. And what happened? Generally he became exceedingly self-righteous:

Luke 18:9-14 [NIV] To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable: Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: "God, I thank you that I am not like all other men—robbers, evil-doers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all my income." But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts him-self will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Jesus once told his disciples that the service they render is like that of a slave who serves an earthly master: whatever we do, it is because it is expected of us. We do not **earn** some special reward:

Luke 17:10 [Weymouth] So you also, when you have obeyed all the orders given you, must say, "There is no merit in our service: we have merely done our duty."

I suspect if we could really look objectively at whatever service we render, there might be some question if we have even done our duty!

**[CAREFUL]** There is a disturbing trend making its way through the world today, a trend that even infects some in our fellowship. It is the emphasis on what we perceive to be our needs and how well other people and other organizations are meeting those needs. Example: if one partner in a marriage perceives his or her needs are not being met, divorce is the usual solution. If one's religious affiliation does not meet one's needs, changing the affiliation is quick and easy. But too often in discussing one's needs, nothing is ever said about one's responsibilities. In fact today it appears that no-one feels responsible for anything. If your spiritual needs are not being met by the studies, what responsibility do you have to do something about it? Few think they have any responsibility.

What "needs" does the slave described by our Lord in Luke 17 have? None! He has a duty to perform and he is expected to do it. Consecration is a serious matter. It's like signing a contract that can't be canceled if we later find we don't like it or that it doesn't satisfy our personal "needs." That's why it is so important to count the cost. Leaving the truth and the brethren in a search for others who understand us, who help us with our problems, who reassure us of our personal worth as individuals, who appreciate us for all we do . . . is like selling our birthright for a mess of pottage.

Eccles. 5:4,5 When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.

I am sad when I see someone leave our fellowship for what they think are "greener pastures" in the nominal systems. I hope they'll eventually reconsider and come back to be with us even if they don't necessarily return to the same ecclesia they were with.

### **The Parable of the Penny**

Matt. 20:1-15 [Phillips] The kingdom of heaven is like a householder going out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. He agreed with them on a wage of a silver coin a day and sent them to work. About nine o'clock he went and saw some others standing about in the market-place with nothing to do. "You go to the vineyard too," he said to them, "and I will pay you a fair wage." And off they went. At about mid-day and again at about three o'clock in the afternoon he went out and did the same thing. Then about five o'clock he went out and found some others standing about. "Why are you standing about here all day doing nothing?" he asked them. "Because no one has employed us," they replied. "You go off into the vineyard as well, then," he said.

When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, "Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last and ending with the first." So those who were engaged at five o'clock came up and each man received a silver coin. But when the first to be employed

came, they reckoned they would get more; yet they also received a silver coin each. As they took their money they grumbled at the householder and said, “These last fellows have only put in one hour’s work and you’ve treated them exactly the same as us who have gone through all the hard work and heat of the day!”

But he replied to one of them, “My friend, I’m not being unjust to you. Wasn’t our agreement for a silver coin a day? Take your money and go home. It is my wish to give the late-comers as much as I give you. May I not do what I like with what belongs to me? Must you be jealous because I am generous?”

Americans have a keen sense of fairness. By law we force employers to pay overtime, give work breaks, and especially not discriminate. Now suppose you were one of those who had worked all day in the hot sun. How would you feel if you saw those who worked just one hour get as much money as you? Do you feel you have grounds for a discrimination suit? What would you say in court? “The vineyard owner is giving away his money and he’s giving more to others than he’s giving to me.”

In Los Angeles the hiring of day laborers occurs on numerous street corners every day. People primarily from Central and South America stand around hoping someone will hire them to do anything. Nannette and I have hired a few from time to time. They never discuss wages, they never try to negotiate any of the terms of employment. They are always grateful that at least for one day, they will have enough to eat.

The basic needs of all mankind are the same: food, clothing, medicine, a warm, dry place to live. That was true of the laborers in this parable. The householder knew this so he gave to each one not according to his **accomplishment**, but according to his **need**. He did it without any injustice or hardship to any of the workers. What a wonderful picture of the benevolent providences of the Heavenly Father.

Some might say (at least to themselves) that this parable teaches that hard work for the Lord will not be specially rewarded. But does anyone serious think there is **anything** they can do for the Lord that obligates him to give them a better reward than someone else? That is what the scribes and Pharisees thought, which is why this parable ends with the words, “So the last shall be first, and the first last.” In other words, those who consider themselves to be first in rank and honor because of what they think they do for God might really be last:

Matt. 7:21-23 Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful **works**? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.



This scripture teaches that no-one will get into the kingdom because of works.

### Lessons for Us

Bible Students need to beware lest their love for study, for understanding the “deep things of the truth,” not be considered as “works” that obligates God to do something for them. “We have the truth! God hears our prayers. We are in covenant relationship to God.” We understand the deep things of the truth.

“What is it that is written in our hearts? Is it the knowledge of chronology? Is it the unraveling of types and shadows? Is it the cracking of hard theological nuts in respect to differently understood passages of scripture? . . . No, it is none of these! We might have all knowledge respecting chronology and history, might be able to quote every text in the Bible, and . . . yet not have the Epistle of Christ written in our hearts.”—*Question Book*, p. 235

Some Bible Student ecclesias in American feel they have a greater commitment to the truth than others. Little is said about faith in these ecclesias, but much is said about which volumes are being studied. Like the Pharisees, it is easy to become self-righteous about our code of conduct compared to others.

Exod. 19:5,6 If ye will **obey** my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people . . . ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.

In the preceding verse, God says he had brought Israel “unto myself.” This is what follows redemption: Fellowship with God. And we retain this fellowship by **obeying his voice**. It is not enough to **know** the will of God. It is not enough to **approve** of His will. It is not even enough to **want** to do His will. We must really **do** it.

In this text God does not ask faith from Israel, though of course faith brought them to the point where they could enter a covenant relationship with Him. He asks for obedience. His will must be done on earth as it is done in heaven. What we do shows whether our whole heart, with all its strength of will, has accepted the will of God, whether we are willing to live it and sacrifice anything to make our own be the doing of His will.

Titus 2:14 A peculiar people, **zealous of good works**.

“Let us thrust in the sickle of Truth with energy and courage, remembering that we serve the Lord Christ... Let us remember, too, while using all the wisdom we can in this service, that the Lord’s object in giving us a share in His work is not so much what we can accomplish, as in the blessing that the labor will bring upon *us*.”—*Manna*, November 30

“Our faith in Christ does not free us from works, it frees us from **false opinions** concerning works.”—**Martin Luther** (from Henry Gisbrandt)

Notice the words in verse 3 of our closing hymn:

In **work** that keeps **faith** sweet and strong.

Closing Hymn: #312A—Let Me Walk With Thee

*[First give at the Chicago Convention, December 1995]*

## *Figs — Olives — Vines*

Opening Hymn: #331 — “Christ for Me!”—just verses 1 and 2

Habakkuk 3:17 (NIV) Though the **fig tree** does not bud and there are no grapes on the **vines**, though the **olive** crop fails and the fields produce no food ... yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior. **[all texts from the NIV]**

These are the first three agricultural crops mentioned in the Bible. Adam and Eve, when they realized they were naked, sewed **fig** leaves together to make aprons (Gen. 3:7). To know whether the flood waters had abated, Noah sent forth a dove; it returned with the leaf of the **olive** tree in its beak (Gen. 8:11). After he left the ark Noah planted a **vineyard** and became drunk after drinking fermented grape juice (Gen. 9:20,21).

These three were more than just food. Each represents an aspect of natural Israel’s relationship to God. And each contains lessons for us.

### **The Fig [Israel’s NATIONAL privileges]**

Jeremiah 24:1-8 (NIV) The Lord showed me two baskets of figs placed in front of the temple of the Lord. One basket had very good figs, like those that ripen early; the other basket had very poor figs, so bad they could not be eaten. Then the Lord asked me, “What do you see, Jeremiah?” “Figs,” I answered. “The good ones are very good, but the poor ones are so bad they cannot be eaten.” ... [God then says]: “Like these good figs, I regard as good the exiles from Judah, whom I sent away from this place to the land of the Babylonians. My eyes will watch over them for their good, and I will bring them back to this land. I will build them up and not tear them down; I will plant them and not uproot them. I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord. They will be my people and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart.”

[The text continues saying the bad figs are the rest of the nation which God intends to destroy.] This Scripture equates Israel’s national identity with figs. Undoubtedly all the Jews were familiar with this symbolism and thus a parable that might be obscure to us would be easily understood by them:

Luke 13:6-9 (NIV) A man had a fig tree ... and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, “For three years now I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?” “Sir,” the man replied, “leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.”

For three years Jesus had spent his time with Israel expecting to find fruits that would be pleasing to his heavenly Father. And what did he find? Leaves—but no fruit. Why bother with this “tree”? Better to work with something that will reward one’s efforts. But the plea comes: Give it a little more time. Soon the time is up!

Mark 11:12 (NIV) The next day as they were leaving Bethany, Jesus was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to find out if it had any fruit. When he reached it, he found nothing but leaves, because it was not the season for figs. Then he said to the tree, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." [vs. 20] In the morning as they went along, they saw the fig tree withered from the roots. Peter remembered and said to Jesus, "Rabbi, look! The fig tree you cursed has withered!"

According to Matthew this tree was along a public way which meant the fruit was not private property; it could be eaten by travelers. But why did Jesus think he would find something to eat when it "was not the season for figs"? Is that the tree's fault? Unlike all the other miracles of Jesus which were blessings, does no fruit justify a miracle of cursing which kills the tree from the roots up?

Some say Jesus knew it had no figs and wanted to make a picture of what would happen to the Jewish nation. But Mark says Jesus went to the tree because he was hungry. The fig tree differs from other fruit trees in that it puts forth fruit first, then leaves; so one has a right to expect fruit when there are leaves. "...and seeing a fig-tree from afar, having leaves..." [*Rotherham footnote*: and therefore professing to have figs]. Whether it was the season or not, if one professes to have figs, produce them! It was a perfect metaphor for the nation and its leadership:

Matthew 23:3 (NIV) Do not do what [the Pharisees] do, for they do not practice what they preach. [vs. 5] Everything they do is done for men to see...

The disciples marveled at the quick death of the fig tree and said so. Jesus then drew an unexpected lesson:

Matthew 21:21,22 (NIV) If you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, Go, throw yourself into the sea, and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.

The disciples had no interest in rearranging mountains and were not going to order any of them into the sea. But they knew Jesus was not speaking of literal mountains. He was referring to the "mountains" in their lives that were but molehills if they had faith and used prayer appropriately.

What "mountains" do you have? What are you doing about them? If you want to keep them from dominating you, erase all doubt, step out in faith, and pray. Jesus said "you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer"—but of course not necessarily the way you expect that prayer to be answered.

There is one more prophecy concerning the fig tree we should consider because it is being fulfilled before our very eyes:

Luke 21:29,30 (NIV) **Look at the fig tree and all the trees.** When they sprout leaves, you can see for yourselves and know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that the kingdom of God is near.

During this harvest of the Gospel age, we see life returning to the natural “fig tree”—Israel. Perhaps there is no fruit yet, but she is putting forth leaves. And it is not just Israel! It is “all the trees.” And how many might those be? The United Nations currently has 196\* member states, including some you’ve never heard of: Bhutan, Comoros, Guinea-Bissau, Kiribati, Palau, São Tomé and Príncipe, Tuvalu—to name seven.

Jesus told the disciples that if they had faith, they could “move mountains.” In fact everyone has to have faith to have a standing before God. And that brings us to the olive.

### **The Olive [Israel’s RELIGIOUS privileges]**

Romans 11:17 (NIV) If some of the branches have been broken off, and you, though a wild olive shoot, have been grafted in among the others and now share in the nourishing sap from the olive root, do not boast over those branches. [vs. 19] You will say then, Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in. Granted, but they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid. For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either. [vs. 24] After all, if you were cut out of an olive tree that is wild by nature, and contrary to nature were grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much more readily will these, the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree!

Olives were one of the most important crops in Israel because of the oil obtained by pressing the fruit. Mc&S says the Greek word literally means “oil-tree.” When Moses blessed the sons of Israel just before he died, he said of Asher, “Let him bathe his feet in oil” (Deut. 33:24, NIV). Of course this means Asher’s inheritance in the promised land would abound in olive groves, not petroleum deposits—and it did. The Jews used olive oil like we use butter, cream, and edible fats. It was also used as a medicine.

The cultivated olive can reach a height of over twenty feet. It bears in profusion all its life with comparatively little care. Because it is evergreen and can live to more than a thousand years, it is an apt symbol of everlasting life. Among all nations and cultures a dove with an olive leaf in its beak is a symbol of peace. The victor in the Olympic games received a crown of olive twigs, considered a great reward, but we look for something much better:

1 Cor. 9:25 (NIV) Everyone who completes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.

Mc&S says: “Of all the fruit-bearing trees it is the most prodigal of flowers. It literally bends under the load of them. But then not one in a hundred comes to maturity.” That description reminded me of the words of Jesus: “Many are called but few are chosen”

(Matt. 22:14). The Lord is not looking for leaves and flowers. With the fig, olive, and vine he expects fruit.

Olive oil was an integral part of the religious services of Israel. It provided fuel for the lamps of the Tabernacle's candlestick (Exod. 27:20) and it was a component of the holy anointing oil (Exod. 30:24). But did you know that its wood was used in Solomon's Temple? If you had to guess where, you might think about the metaphor Paul gives us in Romans about true Christians being like grafted-in olive branches because as it happens, there was olive wood in the Most Holy of the temple:

1 Kings 6:23 (NIV) In the inner sanctuary he made a pair of **cherubim of olive wood**, each ten cubits high. [vs. 28] He overlaid the cherubim with gold.

Thus in the complete temple picture, the spirit beings [cherubim] in the Most Holy are made of olive wood completely overlaid with gold, a symbol of the divine nature!

### **The Vine [Israel's SPIRITUAL privileges]**

Many Scriptures describe the nation of Israel as a vine:

Psalm 80:8 (NIV) You brought a vine out of Egypt; you drove out the nations and planted it.

The promised land God gave to Israel was ideal for vineyards. When the spies returned from their exploration of the land, they brought back pomegranates, figs, and one branch of a vine bearing a single cluster of grapes. It took two men to carry it on a pole between them (Num. 13:23). This was so great compared to anything grown in Egypt they knew no one would believe them if they described it in words alone. So they brought the real thing as evidence. Mc&S says Palestine has been called a "land of vineyards." A picture of a vine was used on Jewish coins in the first and second centuries before Christ. Today a picture of two men carrying one cluster of grapes hanging from a pole can be seen in many places in Israel, including the labels of some bottles of Israeli wine. Every part of the vine is used. The grapes of course, but prepared properly, the leaves are edible too (think of stuffed grape leaves, a Greek specialty). Even the dead wood is used as fuel (Ezek. 15:4) in a land that has very little fuel.

Yet we plant vines to get grapes. But instead of good grapes, Israel produced sour fruit. Here are some poetic words from Isaiah:

Isaiah 5:1 (NIV) My loved one had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. ... Then he looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad fruit. [vs. 4] What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? [vs. 7] The vineyard of the Lord Almighty is the house of Israel.

Israel squandered the spiritual relationship they should have had with God. It was in the third month after leaving Egypt that God calls Moses up into the mountain and tells him to say these words to “the house of Jacob and the people of Israel”:

Exod. 19:5,6 (NIV) Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me **a kingdom of priests and a holy nation**.

These were Israel’s spiritual privileges. But when God sent his son to them, they killed him. By rejecting God, he rejected them:

Matt. 21:43 (NIV) I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. [vs. 45] When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus’ parables, they knew he was talking about them.

Although the leaders did nothing to change their behavior, for those with hearing ears, with faith and a strong desire to bring forth acceptable fruit, Jesus brought a special offer:

John 15:1 (NIV) I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener. [vs. 4] No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

In the present time—a time we call it the Gospel age—only a few receive the benefits of Christ’s ransom sacrifice. They are the members of Christ’s body (see 1 Cor. 12) and they have been experiencing what the “head” of this body experienced. When this age of sacrificing comes to an end, the completed “head with body members,” “bride and bridegroom,” will together bring blessings to all the world beginning by resurrecting from the dead all who have died in Adam. But no one will be a member of that body unless they “bear much fruit.” Unfruitful branches are destroyed.

### Other Applications

Figs, olives, and vines are used in other contexts besides showing different aspects of Israel’s relationship with God. Here is one of the better known descriptions of the kingdom:

Micah 4:2 (NIV) The law will go out from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. [vs. 4] Every man will sit under his own **vine** and under his own **fig** tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the Lord Almighty has spoken.

This is a figure of speech, not a description of what people will eat in the kingdom. Similar words were used to describe Israel under Solomon:

1 Kings 4:25 (NIV) During Solomon’s lifetime Judah and Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, lived in safety, each man under his own vine and fig tree.

The olive is used as a symbol of peace in the kingdom in a text from Hosea:

Hosea 14:4 (NIV) I will heal [Israel's] waywardness and love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them. [vs. 6] [Israel's] splendor will be like an **olive** tree, his fragrance like a cedar of Lebanon. Men will dwell again in his shade. He will flourish like the grain. He will blossom like a **vine**.

We know the Bible is filled with parables, but there is an interesting one uttered by the youngest and only surviving son of Gideon after Abimelech murdered all his brothers and had himself crowned king over the people of Shechem. Just before escaping for his life, Jotham shouted these words to the people from the top of Mount Gerizim:

Judges 9:8-14 (NIV) One day the trees went out to anoint a king for themselves. They said to the **olive** tree, Be our king. But the olive tree answered, Should I give up my oil by which both gods and men are honored, to hold sway over the trees? Next the trees said to the **fig** tree, Come and be our king. But the fig tree replied, Should I give up my fruit so good and sweet to hold sway over the trees? Then the trees said to the **vine**, Come and be our king. But the vine answered, Should I give up my wine which cheers both gods and men to hold sway over the trees? Finally all the trees said to the thorn-bush, Come and be our king.

Of course the thorn-bush was Abimelech. Jotham meant this to picture what was happening to him and his city at the time, but it also fits the general picture of Israel as a nation. They never truly honored God in their religious relationship shown in the olive, nor their national potential shown in the fig, and they certainly did not attain the prize that could have been theirs spiritually shown in the vine. They went off in a head-strong way to follow their own counsel; they lost everything during a time of disfavor equal to the time when they previously enjoyed favor. Now we see favor returning to them.

In Revelation we see nominal spiritual Israel characterized as a vine. There it is called the "vine of the earth."

Rev. 14:18,19 (NIV) Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine, because its grapes are ripe. The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath.

The great recurring lesson with figs, olives, and vines in the Scriptures is the need for fruit. Jesus consistently condemned words without acts. If the Master sees we have developed nothing at all, or are putting forth only shriveled or sour fruit, we will not be allowed to remain in the garden of the Lord. Paul put it quite explicitly in a text we read previously:

Rom. 11:19-21 (NIV) You will say, Branches were broken off so that I could be grafted in. Granted, but they were broken off because of unbelief, and you stand by faith. Do not be arrogant, but be afraid, for if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either.



But if you and I are faithful, the words Christ speaks to his loved one will be spoken to us:

Song of Solomon 2:10-13 (NIV) My lover spoke and said to me, Arise my darling, my beautiful one, and come with me. See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone. Flowers appear on the earth; the season of singing has come, the cooing of doves is heard in our land. The **fig** tree forms its early fruit; the blossoming **vines** spread their fragrance.

**Arise, come, my darling, my beautiful one, come with me.**

Closing Hymn: #331 — “Christ for Me!”—just verses 3 and 4

*Though vine and fig tree blight assail, the labor of the olive fail, and death o'er flocks and herds prevail...*

*[First given at Fresno, May 2004]*

---

\* AS OF 10 April 2004: Afghanistan | Albania | Algeria | Andorra | Angola | Antigua and Barbuda | Argentina | Armenia | Australia | Austria | Azerbaijan | Bahamas | Bahrain | Bangladesh | Barbados | Belarus | Belgium | Belize | Benin | Bhutan | Bolivia | Bosnia and Herzegovina | Botswana | Brazil | Brunei Darussalam | Bulgaria | Burkina Faso | Burundi | Cambodia | Cameroon | Canada | Cape Verde | Central African Republic | Chad | Chile | China | Colombia | Comoros | Congo | Costa Rica | Côte d'Ivoire | Croatia | Cuba | Cyprus | Czech Republic | Democratic People's Republic of Korea | Democratic Republic of the Congo | Denmark | Djibouti | Dominica | Dominican Republic | Ecuador | Egypt | El Salvador | Equatorial Guinea | Eritrea | Estonia | Ethiopia | Fiji | Finland | France | Gabon | Gambia | Georgia | Germany | Ghana | Greece | Grenada | Guatemala | Guinea | Guinea-Bissau | Guyana | Haiti | Honduras | Hungary | Iceland | India | Indonesia | Iran (Islamic Republic of) | Iraq | Ireland | Israel | Italy | Jamaica | Japan | Jordan | Kazakhstan | Kenya | Kiribati | Kuwait | Kyrgyzstan | Lao People's Democratic Republic | Latvia | Lebanon | Lesotho | Liberia | Libyan Arab Jamahiriya | Liechtenstein | Lithuania | Luxembourg | Madagascar | Malawi | Malaysia | Maldives | Mali | Malta | Marshall Islands | Mauritania | Mauritius | Mexico | Micronesia (Federated States of) | Monaco | Mongolia | Morocco | Mozambique | Myanmar | Namibia | Nauru | Nepal | Netherlands | New Zealand | Nicaragua | Niger | Nigeria | Norway | Oman | Pakistan | Palau | Panama | Papua New Guinea | Paraguay | Peru | Philippines | Poland | Portugal | Qatar | Republic of Korea | Republic of Moldova | Romania | Russian Federation | Rwanda | Saint Kitts and Nevis | Saint Lucia | Saint Vincent and the Grenadines | Samoa | San Marino | Sao Tome and Principe | Saudi Arabia | Senegal | Serbia and Montenegro | Seychelles | Sierra Leone | Singapore | Slovakia | Slovenia | Solomon Islands | Somalia | South Africa | Spain | Sri Lanka | Sudan | Suriname | Swaziland | Sweden | Switzerland | Syrian Arab Republic | Tajikistan | Thailand | The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia | Timor-Leste | Togo | Tonga | Trinidad and Tobago | Tunisia | Turkey | Turkmenistan | Tuvalu | Uganda | Ukraine | United Arab Emirates | United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland | United Republic of Tanzania | United States of America | Uruguay | Uzbekistan | Vanuatu | Venezuela | Viet Nam | Yemen | Zambia | Zimbabwe |

## *Forty—The Number of Probation*

Opening Hymn: #310 — “Triumphant Zion”

Bible students know that numbers in Scripture have both a literal and symbolic significance. The number **7** is the most frequent number in scripture. It is the number of spiritual perfection or completeness. In the first chapter of Genesis we have the seven “days” of creation; at the end of Revelation there are seven angels with their vials containing the last plagues.

What is the second most frequent number in scripture? According to McClintock & Strong (vol. VII, p. 218) it is the number **40**. Here is the first occurrence of 40 in the Bible:

Genesis 7:4 For yet seven days, and I will cause it to rain upon the earth **forty** days and **forty** nights; and every living substance that I have made will I destroy from off the face of the earth.

The Companion Bible suggests that “40 is the number of probation.” Probation is defined as “A process or period in which a person's fitness, as for membership in a working or social group, is tested.” The 40-day rain certainly tested those in the ark. It was more like a judgment upon those outside the ark.

Luke 4:1,2 [NIV] Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the desert, where for **forty** days he was tempted by the devil.

This time immediately following his baptism by John in the Jordan was a testing time for Jesus during which he was tempted by the devil. The prophet Elijah had a similar 40-day experience (1 Kings 19:8). And of course so did Moses:

Exodus 24:18 And Moses went into the midst of the cloud, and into the mount: and Moses was in the mount **forty** days and **forty** nights.

This long absence was not so much a test of Moses, as it was of those who were left behind and did not know what was happening. It was a test they failed:

Exodus 32:7,8 And the LORD said unto Moses, Go, get thee down; for **thy** people, which **thou** broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves: they have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto.

You would think after such a serious failure Israel would be very careful and not allow a lack of faith to interfere with their relationship to God again. But soon afterward we have the incident of the 12 spies who looked over the land:

Numbers 13:25 They returned from searching of the land after **forty** days.

Again the people failed this test of faith:

Numbers 14:6ff And Joshua the son of Nun, and Caleb the son of Jephunneh ... 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 us; a land which floweth with milk and honey. ... But all the congregation bade stone them with stones.

To punish the people for such terrible behavior God invoked another 40:

Numbers 14:32-34 [RSV] As for you, your dead bodies shall fall in this wilderness. And your children shall be shepherds in the wilderness forty years, and shall suffer for your faithlessness, until the last of your dead bodies lies in the wilderness. According to the number of the days in which you spied out the land, forty days, for every day a year, you shall bear your iniquity, forty years, and you shall know my displeasure.

At the time of Israel's first king, there was great tension between the Philistines and Israel. Each had stationed its armed soldiers opposite one another. Every day the same drama was performed:

1 Samuel 17:16 And [Goliath] drew near morning and evening, and presented himself **forty** days.

Here is the number 40 again, and again it is a test—but a test of whom? It was a test of Saul and he failed it miserably. Goliath was “head and shoulders” taller than any other Philistine. Whom did he expect would fight him? Why the one who was “head and shoulders” taller than all the other Israelites and that man was Saul (see 1 Sam. 9:2). But Saul did not want to die at Goliath's hands so he stayed in his tent. The people were terrified.

How long did Saul reign? Exactly the same number of years as David and as Solomon. Because you know the title of this discourse, you know it has to be 40 years. I very much appreciate a thought from Bro. Donald Holliday of England who suggested that each of these kings pictures the events of the world's three major ages. In fact, Bro. Holliday sees even the first dispensation shown in another period of 40 years.

### **The World That Was**

Judges 13:1 And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD; and the LORD delivered them into the hand of the Philistines **forty** years.

Adam and Eve were placed in the garden and given a simple test: obey and live. But they disobeyed; they did that which was evil in the sight of God and they were delivered into the hands of their enemies including the devil, the great adversary of God. Even the earth itself was cursed. The greatest punishment of all was death:

Romans 5:14 Death reigned from Adam to Moses even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression.

## The Jewish Age

Acts 13:21 And afterward they desired a king: and God gave unto them Saul ... by the space of **forty** years.

At the very beginning of Saul's reign he showed great promise. At a wonderful victory over the Ammonites Saul correctly said, "The Lord has wrought salvation in Israel" ( 1 Sam. 11:13). Likewise the Israelites initially started off well. They celebrated the passover, left Egyptian slavery, passed through the Red Sea, and agreed to all the things that God had commanded through Moses. But their continued experiences as God's chosen people put them on trial and, as we have seen, they did not do well. Saul, picturing those of the Jewish Age, started well but he quickly changed.

Why didn't God supernaturally drive out all of Israel's enemies from the land for them?

Judges 3:1,4,7 Now these are the nations which the LORD left, to prove Israel by them ... to know whether they would hearken unto the commandments of the LORD, which he commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses. And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgot the LORD their God.

It is only the second year of Saul's reign when the events of 1 Samuel 13 take place. Saul takes 2000 men and goes one place and does nothing; his son Jonathan takes 1000 men and attacks a Philistine garrison. This enrages the Philistines and we read:

1 Sam. 13:5,6 And the Philistines gathered themselves together to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots, and six thousand horsemen, and people as the sand which is on the sea shore in multitude ... When the men of Israel saw that they were in a strait (for the people were distressed), then the people did hide themselves in caves, and in thickets, and in rocks, and in high places, and in pits.

This abandonment of faith in God on the part of the people and Saul so soon after they had embraced him mirrors the abandonment of faith by the Jews in the time of Moses. This was when Saul made a key error:

1 Sam. 13:8-14 [Saul] tarried seven days, according to the set time that Samuel had appointed: but Samuel came not to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him. And Saul said, Bring hither a burnt offering to me, and peace offerings. And he offered the burnt offering. And it came to pass, that as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might salute him. And Samuel said, What hast thou done? And Saul said, Because I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that thou camest not within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered themselves together at Michmash; Therefore said I, The Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication unto the LORD: I forced myself therefore [!] and offered a burnt offering. And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the LORD thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the LORD have established thy

kingdom upon Israel for ever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the LORD hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the LORD commanded thee.

Who was this “man after God’s own heart” that was destined to be “captain over God’s people”? It was David of course. But the incredible thing is that David would not be born until eight years later. Similarly the period of the unfaithfulness of the Jews would end when the “greater than David” would appear though that was a long time in the future when things looked so bleak.

The unfaithfulness of Saul stands in marked contrast to the faithfulness of his son Jonathan. The Philistines were so much in control that if Israel wanted something made of iron, they had to go to the Philistines to get it. In all of Israel only Saul and Jonathan possessed an iron sword! The weapons of Israel must have been bows and arrows, and slings (which of course David later used to slay Goliath).

Saul appears to have no interest in using his sword. But it is different with Jonathan. He decides that God can save by a few as easily as by many so he and his armor bearer go boldly to the Philistine camp. They slay the first soldiers they meet, 20 in all. Panic seizes the enemy which appears to have been partially induced by an earthquake. Soon the Philistines are slaying each other. It was a wonderful display of faith on Jonathan’s part. Of course he will be numbered among those we call the ancient worthies. In fact in this picture of the Jewish Age, Jonathan pictures the entire class of faithful ancient worthies. Although Jonathan was at least twice David’s age when he died, he had a wonderful respect and love for the one he knew God had chosen to lead the people.

Saul and Jonathan died at the same time. Absolutely nothing had been accomplished. The land was still under the hand of an oppressive foe. Likewise the Jewish Age brought no real benefit to anyone. Sin and death continued to reign and oppress mankind.

### **The Gospel Age**

2 Sam. 5:4 David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned **forty** years.

This brings us to the age when God’s son—the greater than David—and the church (spiritual Israel) are on trial. David had the same faith as Jonathan. The animosity Saul had for David illustrates the hatred the Jewish leaders had for the antitypical David. When the Pharisees [who are pictured by Saul] were confronted with “one after God’s own heart,” they killed him. But we read that the “soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul” (1 Sam. 18:1).

In Acts we read of a 40-day period following the resurrection of Jesus:

Acts 1:3 To whom also he showed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them **forty** days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.

Perhaps this was a kind of testing and training period for the disciples to see if their faith in God would remain strong.

Under King David the grip of Israel's enemies was finally broken. But it is interesting that the actual construction of the temple, the symbol of God's presence with the people, was not done during David's reign. That work was left for the next king under whom Israel enjoyed the most peaceful and prosperous period in their history.

### **The Millennial Age**

1 Kings 11:42 The time that Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel was **forty** years.

Solomon's reign pictures the Millennial Age, a time of peace and great blessing for the people. This is when the Lord's house will be built:

1 Kings 5:3-5 (RSV) [Solomon writes to Hiram] You know that David my father could not build a house for the name of the Lord his God because of the warfare with which his enemies surrounded him, until the Lord put them under the soles of his feet. But now the Lord my God has given me rest on every side; there is neither adversary nor misfortune. And so I purpose to build a house for the name of the Lord my God.

Even though the kingdom age is a time of blessing, resurrected mankind will still be on probationary trial for life. They must learn and practice righteousness. At the very end of the Bible we read what happens to those who learn their lessons well:

Rev. 22:14 Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.

Those who fail their "probation" will not be rewarded with everlasting life. In fact they will be destroyed with the devil and his followers:

Rev. 20:9 And ... fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.

### **Our 40 Years**

How long do brethren live today? To some extent it depends upon where one lives. In Russia the average life expectancy of a male today is only 58 years. That is less than many countries, but it was not too long ago that this was a typical life span. If someone consecrated himself to the Lord in his twenties, he might have at most a 40-year walk in the narrow way. This would be his period of education, testing, and probation. True some today may have more, some less, but we would not be far wrong to say that typically we

have 40 years for our testing and development as new creatures. What progress are we making in our walk along the narrow way so far?

We are in the school of Christ. When we go to school, we are expected to learn. Paul in his second letter to Timothy said there were some, “Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.” (2 Tim. 3:7) Have we grown in faith and trust, or have we allowed something [or someone] to distract us from the special relationship God has permitted us to enjoy? Those in school are always tested to determine how much they have learned. Our consecrated life is a life of probation—“A process in which a person's fitness, as for membership in a group, is tested.”

The calling we have received from God will never be repeated in a future age for anyone else. Let us learn our lessons well so that when we are tested, we, as good stewards, will be found faithful. (1 Cor. 4:2)

2 Sam. 22:1-3 And David spake unto the LORD the words of this song in the day that the LORD had delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies, and out of the hand of Saul: And he said, The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; the God of my rock; in him will I trust: he is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, my refuge, my saviour ...

*[the song continues through subsequent verses]*

At the end of our life, may we like David, sing this song of victory knowing full well that the victories we have enjoyed have been given to us by the Lord.

Closing Hymn: #333 — “God Is With Thee”

*[First given at the Detroit Convention, March 1999]*

## The Gospel of Matthew

Matthew 21:5 Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King...

Each of the four gospel writers describes Jesus from completely different perspectives. Mark sees Jesus as the perfect servant of God, one who acts quickly and has little to say. Luke presents Jesus as a perfect man with love toward all, especially the despised classes of humanity. John describes Jesus as the Son of God, as God's personal representative on earth.

Today we are going to focus on Matthew's gospel. From the very beginning, it appears that this book was a great favorite among the early Christians. There certainly are a great many texts that we all love in this book. It has been termed "first among equals" when comparing it to the other gospels.

Having Matthew as the first book of the New Testament is appropriate. He is the logical "bridge" between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Even though he wrote for a Jewish audience, we will see that he does not tell the Jews what they want to hear. The original text of Matthew is in Greek, but many authorities believe it was originally written in Aramaic and circulated among the Jews in that form.

Matthew presents Jesus as the King of Israel. He is truly the long-awaited Messiah. It is Matthew's gospel that provides the narrative illustrating the kingly nature of the "branch."

### The Branch

The word "branch" or "sprout" is used in the scriptures to show vitality, prosperity, or descendents. Consider these words:

Isa. 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...

David was the descendant of Jesse and was revered by the Jews. But as time passed, David's royal house dried up. It was like the stump of an almost dead tree. These words in Isaiah prophesied that out of the "root" would come a branch, and this "branch" would be glorious. Among other things, he would "slay the wicked" [vs. 4], which to the Jews meant Israel's enemies.

It is interesting to trace the use of the title "branch" in scripture. There are four prophecies that characterize this "branch" from four different perspectives. Each seems to be descriptive of one particular gospel. Let's look at the one corresponding to Matthew.

Jer. 23:5 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.

The context shows that the word "branch" is a title, the name of someone to come. This "someone" is a king. When Matthew writes his gospel, his objective is to show that the lawful heir to David's throne has arrived. This is the one who should be accepted as King. The next "Branch" scripture is descriptive of Mark's gospel.

Zech. 3:8 For behold, I will bring forth my **Servant**, the **Branch**.

This illustrates the presentation we find in Mark's gospel where Jesus is shown to be the perfect servant of God.

Zech 6:12 Behold The **Man** whose name is The **Branch**; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord.

Luke's gospel shows Jesus as the perfect man. Luke describes the perfect humanity of our Lord and emphasizes his love for all mankind, especially the despised elements of Jewish society.

Isa. 4:2 In that day shall the **branch** of the Lord be beautiful and glorious.[40:9] O Zion...O Jerusalem...lift up thy voice with strength...say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!

This is the foundation of John's gospel where Jesus is shown as God's personal representative on earth. It is not "Behold the man" in John's gospel. It is "Behold your God."

We have been referring to the four "gospels." The Greek word *evangelion*, translated *gospel*, means "good news" or "glad tidings." But the English word *gospel* started out as *God's spel* ["spel" is Old English for "word" or "discourse"]. Thus the first four books of the New Testament represent "God's Word" for us as communicated by his only begotten son. That's why these four books are so important to Christians everywhere.

### Jesus as King

Put yourself in the place of Matthew. You are going to write your gospel to prove to your people that Jesus was the Messiah, the long-promised king of Israel. How are you going to do it? How can you make a convincing case? Answer: the same way you try to convince anyone today that your point of view is correct. You quote scripture.

Matthew quotes 54 scriptures from the Old Testament, more than twice the number of the other gospel writers. Of those he quotes, 22 are unique to him. Let's look at a few of the unique ones [your margin will tell you where they are in the Old Testament]:

Matt. 1:22,23 Now all this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet [Isaiah], saying, Behold a virgin shall be with child and shall bring forth a Son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel.

Matt. 2:5,6 Thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem . . . out of thee shall come a governor that shall rule my people Israel.

Matt. 2:15 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.

Matt. 8:17 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities and bare our sicknesses.

Matt. 13:35 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet saying, I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter things which have been kept secret.



Matt. 21:4,5 All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet saying, Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold thy king cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass.

Matt. 27:9 Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, And they took the 30 pieces of silver...

Matt. 27:35 That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots.

There are a great many more scriptures like these, of course. Notice the constant repetition of the phrase “that it might be fulfilled.” This is the way Matthew builds the evidence that Jesus Christ is the one the scriptures predicted. There is one text that is a bit troubling:

Matt. 2:23 And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene.

Where can you find it written in any prophet that “he shall be called a Nazarene”? Your margin will be of no help. One authority says the name Nazareth means “branch town” and thus Matthew is here making reference to the Branch in Isa. 11:1 which we have already considered. But the Companion Bible will have none of that. It says that it was “spoken by the prophets” [plural] and that only Isaiah uses it directly as a prophecy of Jesus. It prefers to say that it Matthew says it was “spoken,” not “written,” so why make a problem for yourself where none exists. Don’t try to find it in written words.

But assuming that Nazareth does mean “branch town,” we have so many scriptures that prophesy of a coming “branch” (and from what better place should he come than “branch town”?) that I’m perfectly happy to accept that our various branch scriptures, and particularly Isa. 11:1 were what Matthew had in mind.

On six occasions Matthew quotes Jesus as reminding his audience that they surely must have read something in their sacred scriptures. He does this more than the other gospel writers combined, probably because his audience is pre-disposed to believe what’s written in their Bible. Here’s one occasion:

Matt. 19:4 And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read that He which made them at the beginning made them male and female?

Without analyzing why Jesus was saying this, we want to emphasize that in this text Jesus was not an evolutionist. He believed our first parents were created. Those who believe that human beings came into existence through a process of evolution do not.

### Jesus Christ

Look at how Matthew opens his gospel:

Matt. 1:1 The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.

The word *Messiah* in the New Testament is simply a Greek transliteration of the Hebrew *Messiah*. In Hebrew the word means “anointed.” As a transliteration, the word *Messiah* is found only twice and only in John. The word *Christ* is a Greek translation of the same

Hebrew word [*Messiah*]. There would be less confusion if the word were always written as *Messiah*. *Jesus* is equivalent to the Hebrew *Joshua* and means “the salvation of Jehovah.” Thus Matthew introduces his subject as Jesus the Messiah.

The word *anointed* is particularly appropriate. In Old Testament times when kings and priests were set apart for their office, they were anointed with oil. The oil used for the high priest was so special that no one could make it or put it on a stranger under penalty of death. (Ex. 30:32,33) “To anoint” means “to consecrate.”

Matthew next mentions “Son of David” even before he mentions Abraham. That’s because he wants his readers to see Jesus as the heir of David, the prophetic “Branch.” Jesus is the prophetic fulfillment of what God said through the prophet Nathan:

2 Sam. 7:12 And when thy days [David’s days] be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. [vs. 16] And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever.

Matthew traces his genealogy from Abraham to Joseph, Mary’s husband. But why do that? Why should anyone care about Joseph? Answer: it was a question of legality. Because Joseph was Mary’s husband, Jesus was legally considered his son. Jesus was thus legally a “son of David” as the Jews reckoned inheritance.

In this genealogy when Matthew comes to David, he adds the words “the king” [vs. 6]. These are important words because he shows Jesus as “the king,” the rightful descendent of David’s royal house. He uses the expression “son of David” as a title for Jesus in his very first verse and eight other times in his gospel. Here’s one, when Jesus was presented to the people as king:

Matt. 21:9 And the multitudes that went before and that followed cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord; hosanna in the highest.

Matthew shows how the scriptures prophesied about Jesus by showing that the words spoken by the people were written in Psa. 118:25,26. The April ‘88 *Bible Review* contains an article on this text. The word *Hosanna* is a pure Hebrew word transliterated into Greek. Even though many translators think it is a cry of praise, the word has nothing to do with praise. It is a cry for help. Consider the psalm:

Psa. 118:25,26 Save now, I beseech thee, O Lord: O Lord, I beseech thee, send now prosperity. Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

*Hosanna* is a pleading cry for help. It may be considered a one-word prayer. And the cry is that the “Son of David” and the “Most High” do the saving. So without going into all the details, let me simply read this text in a new way:

Matt. 21:9 [corrected version] Save, please, O Son of David. Blessed in the name of the Lord is he who comes. Save, please, O Most High.

### The Sermon on the Mount

There are five great discourses by our Lord in the book of Matthew. [5:1 to 7:29; 9:35 to 11:1; 13:1-58; 18:1 to 19:1; 24:1 to 26:2] The longest is in chapters five, six, and seven

and is called “The Sermon on the Mount.” Some of it is contained in Luke, but about 70% is unique to Matthew. Some think Matthew collected the sayings of Jesus given at different times and made it appear as though he said it all at one sitting. Whether or not that is true is really of no concern to us. What interests Bible Students is what Jesus said.

The sermon begins with the Beatitudes. Even though they occupy just ten verses, some think that was all there was in the Sermon on the Mount. Nine times our Lord begins by saying “Blessed.” Strong says the Greek word means “supremely blessed, by extension, fortunate: it is translated blessed, happy.” Think about the word *happy*. What image comes to your mind when you think about someone who is happy? Perhaps a craftsman at his work, a mother with her baby, a Christian in his meditation? What probably does not come to your mind is what the world thinks brings happiness: riches, honor, splendor, or sensual pleasures.

People think the beatitudes are passive and mild because they commend those who are poor in spirit, who mourn, are meek, merciful, peacemakers. But who would you prefer to be with: those with these characteristics or those of an opposite temper—the ones who are proud, the light-hearted bent on pleasure, the aggressors, those who are never criticized because they always “play it safe,” and those who persecute others? The beatitudes are not “weak” at all. They are far superior to the teachings of men. Happiness, you see, comes from within. It is a by-product of a way of life and of worship. Christ fulfilled all of them in his life and we should try to do the same if we claim to be walking in his footsteps.

Luke also records these beatitudes. But the next 30 verses in Matthew chapter 5 are not found elsewhere. Jesus talks about the moral life of the Christian community and specifically says that the righteousness of Christians must exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees. Because he writes for a Jewish audience, Matthew includes these words:

Matt. 5:17 Think not that I came to destroy the law or the prophets: I came not to destroy but to fulfil.

The Jews were born and raised to believe that their law was the basis of their unique relationship to God. Even though they were impressed with the miracles of our Lord, they were concerned about what this meant to their law in the long run. Here Jesus tells them that he is there to give that law a new meaning, one that God had always intended it have. As we know, most of them simply could not accept this. Their strong commitment to their law would cause most of them to stumble:

Rom. 9:31,32 But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone.

Thus we see how something good can be the enemy of something better. The law was good, but it was not good enough to provide justification, to make them right with God. The something better was there, but most of them couldn’t accept it.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus talks about what will happen to those who are angry at their brethren, offenses caused by a “right eye” or “right hand,” he expands the application of various Old Testament laws to Christians, he gives the Lord’s prayer, talks

about laying up treasure in heaven, the good things the Father will give us, the golden rule, the narrow way, and how we must DO his commandments, not just HEAR them. At the end of the Sermon on the Mount we read:

Matt. 7:28,29 And it came to pass, when Jesus ended these words, the multitudes were astonished at his teaching: for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

Adam Clarke says: “So ends a sermon, the most strict, pure, holy, profound, and sublime as ever delivered to man; yet so amazingly simple is the whole that almost a child may understand it.”

### **The Gentiles**

We would not expect Matthew to say anything about the Gentiles since he writes for a Jewish audience. But he does not tell them what they want to hear. Like the other gospel writers, Matthew shows that the love of God is broader than the measure of man’s mind. His book contains strong warnings against a blind trust that a descent from Abraham means automatic acceptance with God:

Matt. 2:1 When Jesus was born in Bethlehem...behold there came wise men from the east.

Matthew describes the revealing of Jesus as the King of the Jews first to non-Jews “from the east,” who [in vs. 12] “departed into their own country another way.” Nothing is said about this knowledge going to the Jews.

Matt. 8:11 And I say unto you that MANY shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven.

Matt. 11:28 Come unto me, ALL ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

These two scriptures could be interpreted to mean only those of the Jewish community. But there is no chance of that interpretation at the very end of this gospel:

Matt. 28:19 [penultimate vs. of Matt.] Go ye therefore and teach ALL nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy spirit.

### **Conclusion**

The gospel of Matthew has been one of the best loved books of the New Testament from the very start of the Christian experience. In it Jesus is portrayed as a king, the long-awaited Messiah of his people. Matthew proves his thesis by constantly quoting from the Old Testament, much more than the other three gospel writers.

Jesus was the fulfillment of the law. In the Sermon on the Mount he gave his followers a new law, one that transcended the letter of the old law and embodied the spirit of the Gospel Age. He taught that by faith anyone could enter into a relationship with the Heavenly Father by believing on him. This was more than most Jews could do.

There is, perhaps, no greater contrast between human philosophies and the teachings of Christ than we have in:

Matt. 11:28-30 Come unto me all ye that labour 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.

Those who have accepted this gracious invitation will say in their hearts, Amen.

## **The Gospel of Mark**

Isa. 42:1 [NIV] Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations.

Each of the four gospel writers describes Jesus from quite different perspectives. Matthew writes for a Jewish audience and presents Jesus as King, their Messiah. Luke presents Jesus as a perfect man, one who loves even the despised classes of humanity. John describes Jesus as the Son of God, God's personal representative on earth.

Today we're going to consider Mark's gospel. Our Isaiah text sets the tone for Mark's presentation of Jesus: "Here is my servant." His gospel is considered the best for young people because it is the shortest and is a book of action. Things are happening all the time. He records few discourses and only four parables. There are four "branch" scriptures in the Old Testament that characterized Jesus in four different ways. Here's the one that describes Mark:

Zech. 3:8 For behold, I will bring forth my **Servant**, the **Branch**.

Scholars like to debate whether one gospel writer copied from another and if so, who wrote first. Some say Mark's gospel was first. But such discussions don't interest us. God gave four perspectives of the ministry of His son for good reason. How many views of a building would you want to see before judging it? Certainly more than one. The four gospels are like four views of the same thing. They have similarities, but they also have differences. The result is a word-picture of Jesus that is life-like and three dimensional.

### **Who was Mark?**

Mark was not an apostle. There is a single Greek word that is translated five times *Mark* and three times *Marcus* in New Testament. It is the name of the same person who, we believe, was the author of the Gospel of Mark. From these eight instances we learn several things.

In addition to the Roman name Mark, he also had the name of John, a Jewish name (Acts 12:25). This was not unusual. Paul is a Roman name, Saul is a Jewish name (Acts 13:9).

Peter was thrown into a Jerusalem prison by Herod and was miraculously released by an angel. Then he went immediately to the house of Mary, the mother of Mark, where a prayer meeting was taking place. (Acts 12:12) This implies that Mary and Mark were early believers in the Gospel. Peter was so impressed with Mark that he called him his "son" (1 Pet. 5:13). This does not mean he was Mark's father by blood, but that he may have been instrumental in bringing him to the Lord through his personal ministry.

Mark accompanied Paul and Barnabas on a missionary journey but left them before the trip was over (Acts 13:13). Later Paul and Barnabas had a "sharp contention" about taking Mark with them a second time (Acts 15:39). Paul was angry because Mark previously left them. Because they could not agree, they separated over this issue: Barnabas went one direction with Mark, Paul went another with Silas.

Barnabas was related to Mark. Col. 4:10 says Mark was "sister's son to Barnabas." The *Diaglott* says Mark was "nephew to Barnabas." But the *Companion Bible* and most translations say he was cousin to Barnabas. Because they were kinsmen, Barnabas might

have taken a more charitable view of Mark. Paul later changed his mind and said Mark was a great help to him (2 Tim. 4:11).

So Mark was someone who had an early knowledge of the truth. Although not an apostle, he may have heard Jesus speak at Jerusalem. His mother was an early Christian. It was probably through the ministry of Peter that the family came into the truth. Some say much of what Mark describes in his gospel probably came from Peter. Certainly Peter would have a great influence on Mark's mind because he could speak from first-hand knowledge. But Mark would also have contact with many others who had first-hand knowledge and who attended the meetings in his mother's house.

### The Gospel Itself

Mark wrote for a Gentile audience. Because genealogies would be of no interest to them, he includes none. Old Testament references are generally what Jesus himself quoted or others quoted when speaking to him. Since he assumes his audience does not know Aramaic words, he often defines them:

Mark 7:11 If a man shall say to his father or mother, It is *Corban*, that is to say, a *gift*. . .

Mark 15:34 And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani*, which is, being interpreted, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?*

In contrast to Matthew who shows Jesus at the highest earthly position [king], Mark shows him at the lowest [servant]. Jesus is, of course, the perfect servant and is the model we must copy. There are no preliminaries in this gospel. Jesus as servant goes about his ministry quickly. In fact, that's a word he uses frequently:

Mark 1:10 And straightway coming up out of the water he saw the heavens opened . . . [vs. 12] And immediately the spirit driveth him into the wilderness.

In Greek Mark uses *straightway* and *immediately* 26 times in connection with Jesus and his acts—that's three times more often than the other gospel writers combined.

Because Mark describes a man of action, his account is the most complete concerning the miracles of Jesus. There are a total of 27 miracles performed by Jesus described in the four gospels. Mark records two thirds of them, six of which are found only in his gospel. One such unique miracle concerns the healing of deafness coupled with a speech impediment:

Mark 7:32-35 [NIV] Some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged him to place his hand on the man. After he took him aside, away from the crowd, Jesus put his fingers into the man's ears. Then he spit and touched the man's tongue. He looked up to heaven and with a deep sigh said to him, "Ephphatha!" (*an Aramaic word*) which means, "Be opened!"). At this, the man's ears were opened, his tongue was loosened, and he began to speak plainly.

There's one important word the other gospel writers use 73 times that Mark avoids completely. That's the title *Lord*. The word does occur twice: once a Gentile woman calls

Jesus Lord (7:28) and once the word appears in the King James but not in the oldest Greek manuscripts (9:24). Because Mark shows Jesus in the special role of servant, it would be inappropriate to show him being addressed as "Lord" by any Jew during his earthly ministry.

### Unique Passages

Much of what Mark describes can be found in the other gospels. He records only four parables, one of which is unique.

Mark 4:26-29 [NIV] This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how. All by itself the soil produces grain—first the stalk, then the head, then the full kernel in the head. As soon as the grain is ripe, he puts the sickle to it because the harvest has come.

In the parable of the sower, the kind of soil determines what happens to the seed. But here the mysterious power of the seed itself is stressed. By this parable Jesus was emphasizing that the gospel message itself [the seed] contained its own power to grow and produce fruit and would eventually result in a time of harvest.

Most Bible Students have marked the last 12 verses of the book as spurious. These are so marked on the authority of Prof. Tischendorf. In the sixth volume (p. 637) Bro. Russell said they were added around the fifth century. But were they?

It's true that these verses are missing from the oldest Greek manuscripts. But the Syriac version dates from 170 A.D. and is older than any of Greek manuscript. It contains the verses. There are Latin and Gothic versions older than any Greek manuscripts and they contain the verses. Why are these verses so controversial?

Most of these verses presents no particular problem. But look at verse 17:

Mark 16:17,18 And these signs shall follow them that believed: In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.

Unfortunately there are those who read these verses and think that if they are true believers, they can claim this promise. So they attempt to speak in tongues, heal the sick, and some even go so far as handle poisonous snakes. But this is NOT authorized by this verse at all. This verse describes what would happen during the establishment of the church not what would happen to believers throughout the Gospel Age.

Heb. 2:3,4 [It] first began to be spoken by the Lord and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him; God also bearing them witness both with signs and wonders and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Spirit according to his own will.

The "them" that heard him were the apostles. They preached what they heard, and their testimony was confirmed by miracles. They spoke with tongues on the day of Pentecost. Paul was not hurt by the bite of a viper [Acts 28:3]. Peter, John, Paul and others were constantly healing the sick. According to what we know not one apostle died because of

poisonous drink. The words in these two verses are very similar to words recorded in Luke:

Luke 10:17 And the seventy returned again with joy saying, Lord even the devils are subject unto us through thy name. [verse 19] Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions . . . and nothing shall by any means hurt you.

Maybe the last twelve verses of Mark are spurious. But they are not embarrassing to us if they are genuine. These verses describe the witness of the spirit that would accompany the message of the apostles. It does not describe our experiences.

### Son of Man vs. Son of God

Whose son was Jesus? There are many correct answers to this question. In Mark 6:3 when Jesus preaches to his neighbors in the synagogue, they are astonished and say, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary." In Mark 10:47 a blind beggar hearing that Jesus is passing by, cries out, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me." In the very first verse of his gospel, Mark says, "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

But none of these is the one that is most used. It is, "Son of Man," a title first used by Jesus of himself in chapter 2:

Mark 2:10 But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins... [he then says to the one sick of palsy...]

The phrase "Son of God" appears only four times in Mark; "Son of Man" occurs 14 times. Matthew and Luke also use these two expressions in about the same proportion; John uses each about the same number of times.\* The phrase "Son of Man" occurs 84 times in the four gospels. Sometimes Jesus almost insists on the title:

Mark 14:61,62 Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed ["*Son of God*" in *Matt. 26:63*]? And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven.

Why does Jesus use this title so much? Do you think of him as the "son of man"—or as the "son of God"? To understand this, let us first look at the title "son of David."

Matt. 1:1 The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.

Matthew uses the title "Son of David" nine times in his gospel and emphasizes it by mentioning it immediately. Why? Because he wants his readers to see Jesus as the heir of David, the prophetic fulfillment of a prophecy God gave to David through Nathan the prophet:

2 Sam. 7:12 And when thy days [David's days] be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall

---

\*Matthew--"of God" 9 times, "of Man" 32 times; Mark--"of God" 4 times, "of Man" 14 times; Luke--"of God" 6 times, "of Man" 26 times; John--"of God" and "of Man" 12 times each.

proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. [vs. 16] And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever.

Matthew's gospel shows Jesus as a king, the rightful descendent of David's royal house. Thus by saying "son of David" Matthew is essentially saying "inheritor of what was David's." David had a dominion. The Jews were living under Roman occupation and certainly knew that dominion had been lost. But they looked for David's heir who would re-establish that dominion.

When God created the first man, he gave him a dominion.

Gen. 1:28 And God said . . . 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.

Psa. 8:4-6 What is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him 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; thou hast put all things under his feet.

Because of disobedience, Adam lost this dominion. Who could claim it, who would be his inheritor? It would be the "son of Adam"—"son of man." In Hebrews chapter 2 the apostle quotes this 8th Psalm and continues:

Heb. 2:8,9 Thou hast put all thing in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.

Jesus as the son of God is the "heir of all things" (Heb. 1:2). As the son of Man he is the heir to the dominion of earth originally entrusted to the first man and forfeited by him. He is the great kinsman of mankind who possesses the ransoming power to redeem them from sin and death. His miracles manifested his divine origins. Yet Jesus stresses his kinship with humanity. When asked if he is the "son of God," Jesus by his answer shows the high priest that what he associates with the "son of God" actually belongs to the "son of man." He echoes the prophetic words of Daniel:

Dan. 7:13 I saw in the night visions and behold one like the son of man came with the clouds of heaven and came to the Ancient of days.

In John 1:14 we read, "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." He did not materialize in a human body as angels had done before him. He was actually flesh because of his human mother yet perfect because his father was God. This way he could inherit Adam's dominion without inheriting the condemnation that passed upon Adam's posterity.

John stresses the importance of acknowledging that Jesus was truly human:

1 John 4:2,3 Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God.

It is amazing that in spite of such clear statements, so many Christians continue to insist that Jesus was really divine because he was part of God and the Holy Spirit in a great mystery called the trinity. He was not divine. He was flesh, human, the son of man. Even though he is now divine, he still retains this title and the dominion to which he is entitled:

Acts 7:56 [Stephen speaks] Behold I see the heavens opened and the son of man standing on the right hand of God.

### Conclusion

The gospel of Mark is one of four views of Jesus and his ministry. It is in this presentation that we see Jesus as the perfect servant of God. We likewise should consider his life a model for our own. Let us, as he did, do all our tasks quickly and without hesitation.

Although the holy spirit bore witness with signs and wonders which accompanied the preaching of the gospel by the apostles, it has not done so since that time. The last 12 verses of Mark should not be seen as descriptive of the church's experience today.

We considered the title "son of man" and learned that it refers to Jesus as the inheritor of Adam, one who is worthy to inherit the dominion lost by the first man. In like manner he is the "son of David" and inherits the throne and dominion of his Father David. But to us, his footstep followers, he is the "son of God." If faithful, we will be with him in heaven as members of his body and joint-heirs in the "all things" that have become his.

May the example given to us in this gospel energize us to greater faithfulness and zeal in the service of our heavenly Father.

## The Gospel of Luke

1 Cor. 15:47 The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven.

Suppose you were a newspaper reporter asking people to list the characteristics of a perfect man. What do you suppose they would say? Their answers would probably sound something like this:

Height: six feet	Weight: 160 pounds
Hair: dark	Eyes: blue
Rich	Single

Now suppose we produced such a man with all of these characteristics. Furthermore we found that the man was so terribly self-centered that he could talk only about himself and had absolutely no interest in anyone else. Clearly such a man would be far from perfect!

### Luke's Portrait

Each of the four gospel writers describe Jesus from completely different perspectives. Matthew describes him as the King of Israel, the Messiah. He mentions the wise men and their expensive gifts (but says nothing about shepherds). Mark sees Jesus as the perfect servant of God, one who acts quickly and has little to say. John describes Jesus as the Son of God, God's personal representative on earth. His is a theological account, not a biological one, and consists mostly of the words Jesus spoke.

But Luke presents Jesus as a perfect man. His is the most comprehensive account comprising a prologue, a growing up period, and including the ascension. He traces his genealogy back to Adam, the first perfect man. In contrast to what people today might think important in a perfect man, Luke does NOT tell us Jesus' height, weight, or the color of his hair and eyes. Money? This perfect man and his family don't have any:

Luke 2:24 [at the circumcision of Jesus Mary offered] a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.

In fact the law said she was to bring a lamb and a turtledove. She could bring two turtledoves only if she was too poor to bring a lamb. [see Lev. 12:8]

Luke's portrait of Jesus as a perfect man emphasizes his relationships with others including his heavenly father. We should study this portrait to see what we can learn from it, to see how we can bring our own lives into conformity with this image. It was Paul who wrote:

Rom 8:29 Whom he did foreknow [and that includes you and me] he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son.

### Relationships with Others

In Luke's portrait Jesus is sympathetic to the poor, the despised, children, women, and even the hated Samaritans. On occasion he does associate with the rich, the powerful, and those of high social status, but he finds few that interest him. We have an interesting insight into why this was the case:

Luke 7:36 [NIV] Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. When a woman who lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. [When Simon, his host, criticizes Jesus in his heart for permitting this to happen, Jesus gives a parable:] [vs. 41] "Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled." "You have judged correctly," [vs 47] Therefore I tell you that her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he loves little who has been forgiven little.

2000 years ago women were almost non-persons. They were rarely educated and had virtually no rights. Then as now those who became prostitutes were labelled sinners. (But of course nothing was said about the men who were their patrons.) At that time the leaders spent their time with other men. Jesus did no such thing. He was as comfortable with women as with men:

Luke 10:38,39 [NIV] As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said.

He was also comfortable with publicans:

Luke 5:29 And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them. But the scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners?

From McClintock and Strong [vol. VIII, p. 769]: "The publicans were hated as the instruments by which the subjection of the Jews to the Roman emperor was perpetuated. They were noted for their extortion and were tempted to oppress the people with illegal exactions so that they might the more speedily enrich themselves. The publicans were regarded as traitors and apostates, defiled by their frequent intercourse with the heathen, and willing tools of the oppressor. They were classed with sinners, with harlots, and with the heathen. The scribes and the people alike hated them." Jesus did not!

Even worse than publicans were the Samaritans. McClintock & Strong [vol. IX, p. 286]: "The Jews would have no dealings with the Samaritans that they could possibly avoid. 'Thou art a Samaritan and hast a devil' was the mode in which the Jews expressed themselves when at a loss for a bitter reproach. The Samaritan was publicly cursed in their synagogues; could not be adduced as a witness in the Jewish courts; could not be admitted to any sort of proselytism; and was thus, so far as the Jew could affect his position, excluded from hope of eternal life."

Jesus refused to accept the ordinary prejudices of those around him. Far from avoiding Samaritans, Jesus praises them. In Luke 10:33 he gives that most loved parable of the Good Samaritan. In Luke 17:16, after curing ten lepers, only one, a Samaritan, returns to give thanks.

The easiest way to live is as those around us are living. But that's not the way a perfect man behaves. We see from Luke's portrait that Jesus considered all human beings to be valuable and worth his time and his attention. He indulged none of the common prejudices of his day. He willingly spent time with women, children, tax collectors, prostitutes, and even non-Jews like the Samaritans.

So how are you and I living today? Do we share the prejudices of those around us? Do we think our time is best spent with others just like ourselves? Or are we willing to follow the example of our Master and witness to the poor, to children, women, and even those who are openly sinful or might be considered unacceptable to the leaders of society? Remember: God has predestinated that we should be conformed to the image of His son.

### Relationship to God

If we didn't know better, we might think a perfect man would have no need for outside support. We would assume he would have inexhaustible energy and could tap his own source of inner strength at any time. But that's NOT Luke's portrait of Jesus. From Jordan to the cross, Luke shows Jesus in prayer on many occasions not mentioned by anyone else:

Luke 3:21 Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened.

The baptism of Jesus is described by others, but the fact that he was praying is mentioned only by Luke. So at the start of his walk as a New Creature, we find him praying to his heavenly father.

Luke 5:15,16 But so much the more went there a fame abroad of him: and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities. And he withdrew himself into the wilderness and prayed.

Time passes and Jesus has great success. But he does not take the credit for himself. He knows that the credit belongs to his father and so he continues to approach Him in prayer.

Luke 6:12,13 He went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles.

Selecting the 12 was a big decision. He did not presume to make that decision without guidance from his Father. So he spent the entire night in prayer. Then the next day he took action.

Luke 9:18 [after the preaching and healing success of the 12] And it came to pass, as he was alone praying, his disciples were with him.

Now the success is of others, not himself. And again he comes to his heavenly Father in prayer, we presume in thankfulness that their ministry has been blessed.

Luke 9:29 And as he prayed, the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistening.

Matthew and Mark both mention the transfiguration scene, but neither say anything about his praying. Here as his three special disciples receive a special vision of the kingdom in glory, he is once again seen praying.

Luke 11:1 And it came to pass that as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray.

His disciples were aware of his constant communication with his father. They knew Jesus had a relationship with God that they did not have. So they asked to be taught how to pray.

Luke 22:41,42 And he was withdrawn from [his disciples] about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed saying, Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.

Here at the close of his earthly ministry, Jesus again comes to the Father in prayer. It is clear that he drew his strength not from within himself, but from his Father. If he or others had success, he prayed about it. If he had a big decision to make, he prayed about it. At his baptism and at the cross, he prayed for insight and guidance. By his example we see how prayer is the foundation of our relationship to God.

### Wealth

Luke believes there is no better test of a man than to look at how he uses his money. We have already observed the poverty of Mary and Joseph. Jesus himself, who was once rich beyond imagining, became poor. [2 Cor. 8:9] Luke is the only one who records a parable that contrasts false riches with the true:

Luke 12:16-21 [NIV] And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink, and be merry.' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' This is how it will be with anyone who stores things up for himself but is not rich toward God."

Clearly this rich man did not understand the difference between earthly riches and true riches. A few verses later Jesus speaks to his followers and builds on the lesson of this parable:

Luke 12:32-34 [NIV] Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Where is your treasure? You will know by looking at where your heart is. It could be your business, your investments, your career, your home, or any of a variety of places where "moth destroys and thieves come near." These words seem to imply that to the degree that we are interested in treasure on earth, to that degree we will have no treasure in heaven.

We commented earlier about Jesus' relationship with Samaritans. In the well-known parable, the Good Samaritan with no hesitation gives of his time and his money to help another person, one he does not know and one who is probably not of his nationality. In Luke's recounting of the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, we see the insensitivity of a rich man who will not do anything to help someone in great need who has been "laid at his gate." [Luke 16:20]

Those with much of this world's goods have a problem. Will they love earthly things so much that they lose an opportunity for spiritual things, or will they willingly sacrifice what they have in the interest of others? No matter what any of us sacrifice it can't compare to what Jesus sacrificed when he gave up what he had in heaven and came to earth to die for us:

Phil. 2:3-8 [Diaglott] Do nothing from party-spirit, or vain-glory; but in humility esteeming others as excelling yourselves; not each one regarding his own interests, but each one also those of others. 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.

### Conclusion

The lasting image of Luke's portrait of a perfect man is God's love for all. The purpose of Jesus' ministry was summarized in:

Luke 19:10 For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.

Luke compiled his account as an historian through interviews with those who were eye witnesses of the events. Throughout his account he emphasizes those events that prove God's love is not limited to the Jews. He quotes Simeon [2:32] that Jesus will be "a light to lighten the Gentiles." He quotes Jesus giving examples of God's favor to non-Jews [4:25-27—a Sidonian widow and Naaman the Syrian]. He quotes Jesus as commending the faith of a non-Jew as exceeding any faith found in Israel [7:9] And just before the ascension, he quotes Jesus as saying:

Luke 24:47 Repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name **AMONG ALL NATIONS**, beginning at Jerusalem.

Why does Luke emphasize these points and the other gospel writers do not? Because unlike the others he is a Gentile, an outsider despised by the Jews. He's a convert to Christianity, one who accompanies Paul in bringing the gospel to other Gentiles. [Proof: Col. 4:10-14 says Aristarchus, Marcus, and Justus are "of the circumcision." Epaphras, Luke, and Demas are not in this category, are not of the circumcision, are not Jews.]

Like Luke, you and I are here because someone has been faithful to the commission to preach the name of Jesus among all nations. Let us draw lessons from Luke's portrait of a



perfect man that apply to our own lives. Since we are to be conformed to the image of our Master, let us:

1. Not draw arbitrary distinctions among ourselves and others based on age, sex, wealth, or social standing.

James 2:5 Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him.

2. Recognize the importance of prayer in our relationship with our heavenly Father. Following the example of Jesus, we should come to the Father in prayer and thankfulness at all times, especially when he grants us success in his service, when he grants success to others, when we must make important decisions, and when we know we must endure some special trial.
3. Pay special attention to the way we use our money. The rich young ruler who wanted to inherit eternal life thought he had been reasonably successful following the commandments. But it was too hard to “sell all that he had and distribute it to the poor.”

Luke 18:24 [NIV] Jesus looked at him and said, “How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God!” [vs. 28] Peter said to him, “We have left all we had to follow you!” “I tell you the truth,” Jesus said to them, “no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life.”

—END—

### ***The Gospel of John***

John 1:18 No man hath seen God at any time.

Even though John says no one has ever seen God, in fact many have seen Him. It was John himself who helped us see God. Of course we’re not saying anyone has actually seen God with natural vision. God exists in a dimension far beyond what earthly minds comprehend. But we have seen God in a very real way:

John 14:8,9 Lord, show us the Father and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father.

Each of the four gospel writers describes Jesus from completely different perspectives. Matthew describes him as the King of Israel, the Messiah. He mentions the wise men and their expensive gifts (but says nothing about shepherds). Mark sees Jesus as the perfect servant of God, one who acts quickly and has little to say. Luke presents Jesus as a perfect man. His account has a prologue, a growing up period, and includes the ascension.

Each of these writers reveal the humanity of our Lord. John is different. He describes Jesus as the Son of God, God’s personal representative on earth. His is a theological account, not a biological one, and consists mostly of the words Jesus spoke. In fact John is

the only one who records the conversations Jesus had with Nicodemus [at night], the Samaritan woman at the well, and Pilate when the two of them were alone.

Each of the gospels can be described by a single L-word:

**Law:** Matthew shows how Jesus was the promised Messiah to the people of the law.

**Labor:** Mark shows Jesus as God’s servant who does things quickly and says little.

**Love:** Luke emphasizes the love of Jesus for all mankind, particularly the poor, the disadvantaged, children, women, and even the hated Samaritans.

**Life:** John uses the word “life” many times more often than the others. Life is the whole point of his gospel:

John 20:31 But these [signs] are written that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.

### **The Word**

John gives us no genealogy and starts at a time earlier than any of the others:

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word [Greek: *Logos*], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

Of course John is describing Jesus. Verse 14 says, “the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us.” Why did he invent this new title, *Logos*? Because he wants to describe the role Jesus has in his gospel. Just as invisible thought is revealed by words, the invisible God is revealed by a living “Word.” We use words to communicate our will; God used a *Logos* to do the same.

John 3:34 For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God.

Heb. 1:1,2 [NIV] In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.

Bible Students don’t like the KJV of John 1:1 because it gives the impression that the *Logos* and God were exactly the same being which is what Trinitarians believe. Years ago I wrote the words “see Diaglott” next to this verse. Here’s the Diaglott’s word-for-word rendering:

John 1:1 [**Diaglott word-for-word**] In a beginning was the Word, and the Word was with the God, and a god was the Word.

I used to think that the Greek text always included the definite article “the” in front of *theos* when Jehovah is meant and that it did not have the article when a lesser deity is meant. I learned to my embarrassment that is just not true.

Some years ago I said what I believed about this scripture in a message sent to some who were discussing Bible subjects. Much to my surprise, some who knew more Greek than I did disputed this assertion:

John 1 [vs. 6] There was a man sent from God. [vs. 12] He gave power to become the sons of God. [vs. 18] No man hath seen God.

These are a few instances where the Greek definite article is **missing**. I was asked if I wanted to substitute the article “a” in front of God in these verses and write it with a little “g”? I did not. And there is also this scripture:

2 Cor. 4:4 In whome THE god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not.

Here is an example where the definite article IS present, and it is not talking about Jehovah God. I now realize that the presence or absence of the article must have a local interpretation to the context. But since that experience, I realize that when we witness we might do a better job if we don't try to go into the details of the Greek language. Perhaps it might be better to first try to establish the relationship between God and the Logos in John's gospel. And what is that relationship? It is God the Father and Jesus His son. When we agree on that, we can then discuss what John 1:1 means.

John 16:28 I came forth from the Father and am come into the world: again, I leave the world and go to the Father.

Jesus is six times more likely to say “My Father” in John's gospel than in the other gospels. You will never find Jesus saying “Our Father” or “Your Father” in John. (These expressions occur 25 times in the other gospels.) John never says Jesus prayed to the Father, though Jesus does so frequently in the other gospels. (The word “pray” does occur in John, but it is a different Greek word with a different meaning.) There is no temptation scene, no baptism, no agony in the garden, and, surprisingly, no parables. (The word “parable” in 10:6 is a different Greek word, one translated *proverb* in the three other places it is used in John.)

John draws a portrait of God from Jesus' life on earth, a portrait that encompasses many themes.

### **Theme 1: Life**

We have already observed that life is the great theme of this book. John uses the word 39 times (it occurs only 17 times in the other gospels). The best known scripture from this gospel is in chapter three:

John 3:16 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.

This scripture emphasizes the Father-Son relationship, and that God's object in giving His son was to give life. This was not life just for Jews or those living at that time. It was “whosoever believeth” regardless of race, age, sex, national origin, or time period. The next verse says that this is so “the world might be saved.” John shows God as someone who is accessible to all.

Recently I heard an observation on this text I appreciated. Question: Why does God love the world when we are explicitly told not to love it in 1 John 2:15? Answer: We are not to love the world the way it is, and God doesn't love it in its present form either. He loves it because he sees the way it will be at the conclusion of his marvelous plan of salvation.

John is the only gospel writer who records the literal gift of life Jesus gave to one of his friends:

John 11:43,44 He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes.

Since John records no parables, it was left to Luke to record the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, a parable that was given a few weeks before Jesus raised his friend Lazarus from the dead.

### **Theme 2: Love**

John is ten times more likely to use the word *love* than the other gospel writers. We have this word three times in a single verse:

John 13:34 A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

Notice that this is a new commandment. We are to love as Jesus loved. And just how did he love? Did he love his neighbor as himself? Certainly. In fact he loved his neighbor **MORE** than himself, because he laid down his life for his fellow man. In this verse he asks us to be ready on all occasions to lay down our lives for each other!

John never refers to himself in this gospel by name. Instead he speaks of himself as the recipient of the Master's love:

John 13:23 Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved.

John returned that love with a single, undivided heart as we see in this gospel, his three letters, and the book of Revelation.

### **Theme 3: Truth**

John uses the words translated “truth, true, or truly” three times more often than the other gospel writers combined.

John 14:6 Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me.

Once again John shows that Jesus is not the Father. He is the one who shows the way to the Father, he speaks the truth about the Father, and offers life to “whosoever believeth.”

The word “verily” is like the word “truly.” John always doubles this word:

John 6:47 Verily, verily I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life.

He does this on 25 occasions. The other writers never do it. Why? One suggestion is that it is to emphasize the greater authority with which our Lord speaks. He speaks for God and thus the words should be considered as having double importance.

John 17:17 Sanctify them through thy truth, thy word is truth.

John introduces Jesus as “the Word.” That makes him an embodiment of the truth, one who is able to sanctify us, to set us apart for his service.

## Theme 4: Light

Light is another theme in this gospel. John wastes no time introducing the themes of light and life:

John 1:2-4 [**Weymouth**] All things came into being through him, and apart from him nothing that now exists came into being. In him was Life, and that Life was the Light of men. The Light shines on in the darkness, and the darkness has never overpowered it. [vs 9] There was the true Light, which lightens every man, coming into the world.

Once again John emphasizes the world-wide scope of the love of God: every person is to be enlightened. We say “to be” because Jesus has not yet enlightened every man. He has certainly not enlightened those who lived and died before he was born. Countless billions have died without hearing a word about the one through whom salvation is possible. This means there must be a future time of resurrection and instruction in righteousness to fulfill this scripture.

John is the only gospel writer who records a particular miracle where Jesus literally gave the gift of light to someone:

John 9:25 [The man born blind] answered and said . . . One thing I know, once I was blind, but now I can see.

## Theme 5: Water

John likes water. He uses the word four times more frequently than the others [they each average six times; he uses it 24 times]. Note these occasions, most of which are exclusive to John:

Turning water into wine at Cana (chapter 2).

Conversation with Nicodemus regarding being born of water (3:5).

Conversation with a Samaritan woman who came to draw water (chapter 4).

Healing the impotent man who could not enter a pool of “troubled” water (chapter 5).

Walking on water (6:19).

There’s a somewhat troubling scripture about water in this gospel. Let’s turn to:

John 7:37,38 In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.

What exactly did Jesus mean by this? He might, of course, be simply repeating publicly what he had already told the Samaritan woman at the well:

John 4:14 But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst: but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.

But these two statements are quite different. In John 4 the water springs up within the one who receives it. In John 7 it flows outward to nourish others.

Jesus could have been referring to that pure river of water of life that flows out of the throne of God and of the Lamb (Rev. 22:1) in the kingdom.

Water is a symbol of truth. Maybe it means that as we have received truth from Jesus, we in turn become conveyors of truth to those with whom we come in contact.

There is, however, one large problem: Jesus says that this occurs “as the scripture hath said.” Where does any Old Testament scripture say that out of a believer’s belly shall flow rivers of living water? None do!

It is possible that Jesus is not talking about believers at all. Rather, he could be talking about himself. We could punctuate and divide the words this way:

John 7:37,38 ...Jesus cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and let him drink he that believeth on me. [end 37, begin 38] As the scripture hath said, out of his [Messiah’s!] belly shall flow rivers of living water [making something available for believers to drink].

By saying “his belly,” he means himself as the source of all spiritual blessings, the source of life available to the believer (as we have already quoted in 6:47). Water is a particularly good symbol because even today, it is critically important for life in Israel. We do have Old Testament scriptures that talk about waters being available to heal. Here’s one example:

Zech. 13:1 In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness.

A final point: John explains what Jesus meant in verse 39. He does NOT say Jesus was speaking of believers. He says he “spake of the Spirit which they that believe on him should receive.” Water is thus a symbol of spirit.

This may also explain what Jesus had in mind when he talked to Nicodemus:

John 3:5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be [begotten] of water and of spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.

At that time water was being used by John the Baptist as a symbol of cleansing the people from their past sins when they repented. But Jesus baptized with the Holy Spirit, of which water was only a symbol. Literal water begets no-one. If there is no begetting of the spirit, there is no new creature, there is no life.

## What is God like?

So what kind of God emerges from the portrait drawn by John?

John 4:24 God is Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.

John 3:33 [**Weymouth**] [those who accept the testimony of Jesus have] solemnly declared that God is true.

1 John 4:16 God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

1 John 1:5 God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.

John's great themes of truth, love, and light as seen in the life of Jesus are actually the characteristics of God himself.

Jesus said, "I and my Father are one." (John 10:30) Because of this "oneness," we see God in the life of Jesus. John records more words spoken by Jesus than anyone else. Especially important to us are the five chapters (13 through 17) that record what was spoken the night before the crucifixion. It was then that Jesus asked his Father that we might share the oneness they had:

John 17:21 [I ask] that they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us.

The next time we discuss John 1:1, we might want to turn immediately to 17:21 and say that we agree that the Logos and God were one, and that we look forward with great anticipation to the time when we will become a part of that oneness as well.

At the end of Matthew's gospel, we learn that "he is risen." (Matt. 28:6) In Mark's gospel, he both rises and ascends. (Mark 16:6,19) In Luke's gospel he rises, he promises the Holy Spirit, and then ascends. John is the one who adds an important promise:

John 14:28 Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you.

This is the promise of his second coming, something we believe has already occurred. However, the world's situation is much like 2000 years ago. We can truly say as did John the Baptist, "there standeth one among you whom you know not." (John 1:26)

3 John 11 [**New English**] My dear friend, do not imitate bad examples, but good ones. The well-doer is a child of God; the evil-doer has never seen God.

The perfect example for us to imitate is our Lord. We are to be "well-doers" and imitate his example to the best of our ability. By keeping our eyes on him, we truly can say that we see God.

Isa. 7:14 The Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

"Immanuel" means "God with us." Because of John's faithfulness in recording his gospel, we can repeat the words of Job [42:5]: "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee."

(—END—)

*[These were written in roughly the 1990 time frame.]*

## *Habakkuk*

Opening Hymn: #145—Keep Me, Lord

Hab. 1:1 The burden which Habakkuk the prophet did see.

“Burden” is an unexpected word at the start of this book. The RSV thinks “oracle” is a better rendering of the Hebrew. Strong says it means an utterance, chiefly a doom. In another place [Prov. 31:1; 31:1] the word is rendered “prophecy.”

But “burden” nicely conveys the prophet’s emotions concerning what he saw and what it all means for Israel. God has granted him a vision of coming judgment upon Israel followed by later punishment upon the heathen who are God’s agencies to execute that judgment. These collected utterances of Habakkuk are definitely a “doom.”

We know almost nothing about this prophet. We don’t know where he lived or for how long, who his parents were, nor can we be sure when he received his prophetic vision of the future. Because of the nature of the prophecy, most scholars place the time just before Nebuchadnezzar marched his armies to take Jerusalem and carry the Jews captive to Babylon. This would make Habakkuk a contemporary of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel.

Conditions in Israel at this time had reached the point where the people were no better than the heathen. They had forgotten all about the covenant and special relationship they had with God.

### **Chapter 1: Habakkuk’s Complaint**

It is easy to understand Habakkuk’s distress. Listen to this:

Hab. 1:2-4 O Lord, how long shall I cry and thou wilt not hear! even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save! Why doest thou shew me iniquity and cause me to behold grievance? for spoiling and violence are before me and there are that raise up strife and contention. Therefore the law is slacked and judgment doth never go forth: for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore wrong judgment proceedeth.

Habakkuk sees nothing but violence, iniquity, and injustice. The wicked oppress the righteous as they’ve done since the time of Cain and Abel. Many of God’s prophets have wondered about this. Job could not understand the ways of the Almighty; his comforters thought they could. They said his misfortunes were punishments from God. Jeremiah also questions this:

Jer. 12:1 Wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper? Why are all they happy that deal very treacherously?

---

The psalmist says there was a time when he wanted the good things the wicked have:

Psa. 73:3 For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.  
[vs. 12] Behold, these are the ungodly, who prosper in the world; they increase in riches.

The opening verses of Habakkuk show that he has been complaining repeatedly about “world” conditions: “Why don’t you do something, God?” God IS about to do something, and he tells Habakkuk all about it:

Hab. 1:6,7 For lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land to possess the dwelling-places that are not theirs. They are terrible and dreadful [and from the margin] From them shall proceed the judgment of these...

The Chaldeans are Babylonians. At the beginning of the book of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar brings his armies against Jerusalem and defeats it. This probably is the fulfillment of Hab. 1:6. Later when Nebuchadnezzar’s son Belshazzar is slain in Daniel 5:30, he is called “the king of the Chaldeans.”

So now Habakkuk has a vision of the future: The Babylonians will destroy everything. He acknowledges in vs. 12 that they are ordained for judgment and correction. But he is more confused than ever.

Hab. 1:13 Wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?

Although some of Israel were wicked, at least in Habakkuk’s eyes they are better than the heathen Babylonians. How can God give a victory to Israel’s enemy when that enemy is worse than Israel? God’s solution appears to create more problems than it solves.

Because he wants to know more, at the start of chapter 2 Habakkuk stands upon his watch to “see what God will say when I am reprov’d.” Another translation suggests the Hebrew should be rendered, “Get back because of my complaint.” But I rather like the King James. Habakkuk has dared to argue with God about God’s solution to his original complaint. He knows he deserves to be reprov’d for this, but he wants to hear the reasons behind what seems to be such a bad idea. And God does explain.

## **Chapter 2: Evil Will Not Really Triumph**

Hab. 2:2,3 And the Lord answered me and said, Write the vision and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak and not lie; though it tarry, wait for it because it will surely come, it will not tarry.

---

What vision is the Lord talking about? What was it that Habakkuk was to write? The answer is the book itself, the “burden” that he SAW. This includes what God told him in chapter 1 and in chapter 2. Furthermore, he is told to write them on tables [Hebrew: clay tablets] and not on perishable parchments using ink. That’s one reason why his prophecy has survived.

There is a verse in chapter one that is quoted in Acts 13:41. Paul uses that verse to emphasize what was happening in their time. That verse contains a wonderful principle:

Hab. 1:5 I will work a work in your days which ye will not believe though it be told you.

If you don’t want to believe something, you can just dismiss it. It is especially easy to not believe a prophecy if its fulfillment takes longer than you think it should. The doom pronounced by God through Habakkuk was definitely like that. Note how similar were the words of the prophet Daniel describing the time in which we are living today:

Dan. 8:17 At the time of the end shall be the vision. [vs. 19] And he said, Behold I will make thee know what shall be in the last end of the indignation: for at the time appointed the end shall be.

Habakkuk never doubted that God’s judgment would come upon Israel, though many in Israel were not so sure. Still the prophet would like to know how God can show favor to a people who are worse than Israel. The question remains: Why does God permit evil? Answer: Although it appears evil is being tolerated, there is an eventual day of reckoning.

The remainder of chapter 2 contains five woes against the invader “whose soul is lifted up” [quotations from the RSV]:

1. [vs. 6] Woe to him who heaps up what is not his own.
2. [vs. 9] Woe to him who gets evil gain for his house.
3. [vs. 12] Woe to him who builds a town with blood and . . . iniquity.
4. [vs. 15] Woe to him who makes his neighbours drink of the cup of his wrath.
5. [vs. 19] Woe to him who says to a wooden thing, *Awake*, to a dumb stone, *Arise!*

Here’s the answer Habakkuk needed. The Chaldeans, the most powerful empire the world had ever seen—pictured by the head of gold on Nebuchadnezzar’s image—would be thoroughly humbled and punished in God’s due time. Mighty Babylon, as Isaiah prophesied, would be completely destroyed:

Isa. 13:19, 20 And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees’ excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation...

---

To this day, only wild beasts live in the ruins of Babylon.

Daniel's prophetic vision was for an appointed time, a time called the time of the end. We see many similarities between what we might call the "typical Babylon" of Habakkuk's prophecy and "antitypical Babylon" during the Gospel Age.

Rev. 17: 5,6 Babylon the Great the mother of harlots, and abominations of the earth. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.

This "Babylon" is not the literal Babylon of Habakkuk's day. That world empire had passed into the pages of history when Revelation was written. This "Babylon" represents another great power that oppresses God's people. Once again the faithful may wonder: Why does God permit such evil? The answer is the same: He will not permit it indefinitely:

Rev. 18:2 Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen. [vs. 8] Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine: and she shall be utterly burned with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her. [vs. 21] Babylon shall be thrown down and shall be found no more at all.

When you think the forces of evil are winning . . . When you think the unjust live better than the just . . . When you think the full establishment of the kingdom is tarrying—remember the prophecy of Habakkuk. The destruction foretold by God did come upon Jerusalem, even though the people didn't believe what they were told. The destruction God said would come upon Babylon, did come to pass. We are sure the destruction upon anti-typical Babylon will also occur, whether the prophecy seems to tarry or not.

But we have no pleasure in destruction. We know that present evil conditions must be destroyed before the blessings of the kingdom can flow to the people. Habakkuk talks about the blessings too:

Hab. 2:14 For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

The proud Chaldeans put their trust in military strength, "they sacrifice unto their net" says Hab. 1:16. A knight of old would take an oath upon his sword, a symbol of his strength. It is said, "Might makes right." But "might" makes no such thing. It is an example of a "god" that has no breath at all. What a contrast with the true God:

Hab. 2:20 But the Lord is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him.



## The Just Shall Live By Faith

The 4th verse of chapter 2 is extremely important. It is one of only two verses in this book that is quoted in the New Testament. This particular verse provided proof to the Apostle Paul for a key doctrine: Justification by faith. The book of Romans has much to say about faith; the word appears 39 times in that book alone. After a few introductory words, Paul quotes his first scripture in:

Rom. 1:17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

Is this true? Don't the UNJUST live as long as the JUST? From the viewpoint of this life, of course they do. But not from God's viewpoint.

Paul raises Habakkuk's words to a higher plane when he showed that the life enjoyed by a just man can only come through belief in and acceptance of Christ. In the preceding verse he says "The gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." This salvation is what constitutes "living" and it is available only to those with faith. In the next few verses he shows how God's wrath is upon those who have no faith.

The Jews thought they earned God's favor by what they did under the law (justification by works). Paul used this Habakkuk text again to prove them wrong:

Gal. 3:11,12 But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident for, The just shall live by faith. And the law is not of faith...

Again Paul uses this Habakkuk text to prove his assertion about the importance of faith compared to works.

## Chapter 3: A Psalm of Salvation

Chapters 1 and 2 of this book contain the "burden" or oracle God gave to Habakkuk. Chapter 3 is something different. It is a psalm beginning with a subscription, containing a body, and concluding with a superscription like a psalm of David. A psalm is a sacred song or poem and it appears this was meant to be sung. In fact the last words say "to the chief singer on my stringed instruments."

We are not going to dwell particularly on this psalm. Some have thought it was a later addition to the book, but I don't think so. When you consider Habakkuk's state of mind with his knowledge that the Chaldeans are going to come in and destroy everything, what, if anything, would you expect him to do? He composes a hymn to sing the praises of when God intervened with special salvation for Israel in the past. Since it is all in poetry, it is not easy to understand the specific references. Here are some examples:

1. [vs. 6] Drove asunder the nations (referring to when they took Canaan).
2. [vs. 10] The deep uttered his voice and lifted up his hands on high (referring to the walls of water when they passed through the Red Sea).
3. [vs. 11] The sun and moon stood still in their habitation (referring to the battle of Joshua at Gibeon).

The thrust of this psalm is summarized in vs. 13: “Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people.” Habakkuk hopes God will not forget his people in the coming time of trouble. Although the wicked Chaldeans may be punished eventually, Habakkuk hopes God will SAVE His people. And we know that’s exactly what He has done.

Habakkuk prays in vs. 16 that he might rest in the day of trouble, referring to the coming trouble upon Israel. Whether this means he wants to be mentally at rest or whether he is praying for a rest in death is not clear. In either case, it is the principle that is important: In the time of trouble our prayer should be that we might be at rest in the Lord.

The next verse may be simply a prediction of the destruction of all food supplies, but viewed as symbolic language, Habakkuk combines three symbols for Israel:

Hab. 3:17,18 Although the **fig tree** shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the **vine**: the labour of the **olive** shall fail . . . Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

Judges the 9th chapter is the only other place we find all three symbols together. The olive signifies Israel’s **religious** privileges; the fig Israel’s **political** privileges; and the vine Israel’s **spiritual** privileges. We have examples of each in the New Testament.

Rom. 11:17 [Religious] If some of the branches be broken off and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree.

Matt. 21:19 [Political] And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away.

John 15:4 [Spiritual] I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit.

### **Lessons For Our Own Time**

If this book were only concerned with the coming destruction upon Israel and the eventual destruction of the Chaldeans, it probably would not have survived. Like all the books of our Bible, it contains lessons on many levels. You may have seen some of these lessons as we’ve gone along. Here are those that appeal to me:

---

1. *“I will work a work which ye will not believe, though it be told you.”*

This is a timeless quotation. Israel should have believed what their prophet was telling them, but few did. Those born under the Jewish law in Paul’s day could not believe God was widening his perspective to include Gentiles. Today? We preach the coming kingdom and the ending of this long night of sin and death. And most people say it is just too good to be true.

2. *God’s way of dealing with a problem is probably not our way.*

How many times do you go to God with a solution to a problem instead of with the problem? Don’t tell him you need better health to serve the brethren, or money to attend a convention, or a new car to take brethren to the meeting. These are all solutions. Who would have thought that God’s solution to the problems in the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society was to abandon it completely, an organization that had been so wonderfully used to preach the truth? I’m sure no-one suggested that solution to Him.

God was not angry with Habakkuk for being concerned. He will never be angry with us when we bring a problem to Him. But let us remember that His ways have always been higher than our ways.

3. *The wicked prosper and it doesn’t mean a thing.*

We all know you can’t judge a book by its cover . . . but we do it anyway. The fact that others may be engaged in sharp practices doesn’t mean we can do the same. Even worldly agencies, other religious groups, or social or political organizations may appear to achieve great advantage for their members. It doesn’t mean a thing.

We have a special relationship with God and our affections must be set on things above. Earthly prosperity is not part of our covenant of sacrifice. The wicked are not in covenant relationship with God. What happens to them in this present evil world should not be a concern of ours.

4. *Why does God permit evil?*

This is perhaps the hardest question Christians face. Habakkuk makes it clear that God has no intention of permitting it indefinitely. He permits evil only so long as it suits his purposes. He stopped the evil of Israel. He stopped the evil of the Chaldeans. And He will stop the evil being done today in the great time of trouble that will soon engulf the world.

Let us use this question and our answer often in our contact with others and share the comfort the truth has given us.

5. *“Oh that I might rest in the day of trouble.”*

We have also been given a great vision of a coming great day of trouble. Do we believe it? Of course we do. That’s why we’re here and why we take every opportunity to witness to the world around us even though none may believe it. The troubles in the world should

---

never affect our mental state or our faith. Like Habakkuk we should rest in the providences of God waiting for our deliverance from this earthly body.

The prophecies of Habakkuk when seen in this light have a contemporary sound to them. May the Lord grant each of us the strength to be faithful to the vision we have received and run with patience the race set before us.

Closing Hymn: #121 — The Lord Will Provide

*[First given in San Diego, December, 1985. Published in The Dawn, January 1987]*

---

## *Hardening of the Arteries*

Opening Hymn: #183—Watchfulness

“If a man thinks he is ‘somebody,’ he is deceiving himself, for that very thought proves that he is nobody. Let every man learn to assess properly the value of his own work and he can then be glad when he has done something worth doing **without depending on the approval of others**. For every man must ‘shoulder his own pack.’ Don’t be under any illusion: you cannot make a fool of God! A man’s harvest in life will depend entirely on what he sows. . . . Let us not grow tired of doing good, for, unless we throw in our hand, the ultimate harvest is assured.” —Gal. 6:3–5,7,9 [Phillips]

These words should cause us to think about what we’re sowing. Paul was not talking to babes who were starting their walk in the narrow way. He was talking to those who had been walking a long time and who might think they had walked long enough. But had they? Paul suggests the possibility that we could deceive ourselves into thinking God will reward us if we have the approval of others, or that even when we are doing what is good in God’s sight, we might stop doing it. And why might we stop? That’s a good question!

Arteriosclerosis was first used in 1829 to describe a condition commonly called “hardening of the arteries.” If a person smokes, has high blood pressure, or eats the wrong foods, his arteries can become constricted. The blood can’t flow as it should and this can cause a heart attack and death. Sometimes arteriosclerosis progresses rapidly with death coming less than a year after the first symptoms. Sometimes there is no progression. Generally the condition gradually worsens over a period of years. But if a person is properly motivated, he can lessen the condition and, as it were, “unharden” his arteries.

Paul saw that some Christians were suffering from a hardening of their spiritual arteries. The word “artery” does not, of course, appear in the Bible. But here’s a text that’s close:

Heb. 3:13–15 But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; 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 steadfast unto the end. While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, **harden not your hearts**, as in the provocation.

“Hard hearted” is a well-known phrase. When the Israelites left Egypt, they were full of enthusiasm. They had seen seven plagues fall upon the Egyptians but not upon them. The greatest plague of all occurred when ALL the firstborn of Egypt died, but none of their own. They were suddenly rich since they were carrying away much of Egypt’s wealth. They saw the Egyptian army destroyed because of supernatural forces that protected them. But how quickly their enthusiasm changed!

1. Just three days into the wilderness they found undrinkable water and complained.
2. A month later they had nostalgia for the flesh pots of Egypt and complained.

3. After a few more weeks they complained again about the lack of water.
4. At the three month mark Moses is gone too long so they force Aaron to make them a golden calf because they wanted to **see** what they worshipped.
5. Finally, they accepted the report of the ten spies who told them they could never take the good land of Canaan because its inhabitants were too strong.

No wonder God called this a provocation. They not only had stiff necks, they had hardened hearts. Whatever God did for them was not enough. They expected all the comforts of their Egyptian home, the freedom to do as they pleased, and a special covenant relationship with God that excluded everyone else. But they could not make a fool of God. They harvested what they had sown and they all died in the wilderness.

1 Cor. 10:5,6 [NIV] God was not pleased with most of [our forefathers], so their bodies were scattered over the desert. Now these things occurred as examples, to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.

The Greek word rendered “examples” means “types.” Paul says the experiences of natural Israel **typify** spiritual Israel. | Did they provoke God? So can we. | Did they suffer from unbelief? So can we. | Did they start well but end badly? So can we.

God has taken each of us out of the land of sin and death, and into a special covenant relationship to be His chosen people. He feeds us with daily heavenly manna. He fights for us against spiritual wickedness in high places. (Eph. 6:12) He is willing to bring us into a blessed land far exceeding anything we can imagine. And what does he expect from us? That we don’t harden our arteries [our heart]. Israel’s history seems to say that’s not so easy.

### **Example**

Throughout the Gospel Age God has used human leaders for His work. Such leaders receive special trials and are held to higher standards:

James 3:1 [NIV] Not many of you should act as teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.

But those whom God does NOT select as leaders also have special trials and tests. This is especially true with those who are close to someone the Lord is especially using:

Num. 12:1,2 And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses . . . and said, Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us? And the Lord heard it.

As sister and brother of Moses, Miriam and Aaron already have more responsibility than almost anyone else, yet they want more. This is called a power play. Power plays occur whenever there are groups of human beings, even Bible Students. Someone wants more power and takes direct action to get it. Sometimes he succeeds, sometimes he doesn’t. Whenever I see a power play among brethren, I wonder what the person will do if he suc-

ceeds. Did Miriam and Aaron think they knew a shorter route into Canaan? Does someone who desperately wants to be an elder think he has unique insights that can only be conveyed in discourses from the platform? I guess the answer is yes. “And the Lord heard it.”

No one talks much about it but the wives of elders have their own special trials. Once in awhile every elder says something or does something that displeases others. No matter who you are, if something you do or say is criticized, take a moment to think about it. Maybe the criticism is constructive. Mature elders do that. What about their wives? This can be a hard trial for them because it appears their “man” is under attack and they leap to his defense. Don’t do it. The Lord is quite able to defend His own.

There’s an interesting experience when David is being severely “criticized” and others leap to his defense. His reaction is instructive:

2 Sam. 16:5ff [NIV] Shimei cursed as he came out. He pelted David and all the king’s officials with stones. As he cursed, Shimei said, “Get out, get out, you man of blood, you scoundrel! . . . You have come to ruin because you are a man of blood!” [vs. 9] Then Abishai said to the king, “Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and cut off his head.” [vs. 11] [David responds] “Leave him alone; let him curse, for the Lord has told him to. It may be that the Lord will see my distress and repay me with good for the cursing I am receiving today.”

Elders might ask themselves how they respond when others “curse” them. Abishai—like wives and others closely associated with a leader—is quick to say “off with his head” even though David certainly knows how to defend himself.

One example of the special trial that comes upon elders’ wives is illustrated by the wife of Bro. Russell. Undoubtedly she was a talented woman. When Bro. Russell was criticized, she made an extensive trip to defend him. She wrote articles that appeared in *The Watchtower* over her own name. One can almost see Miriam when Sr. Russell tried to gain more power and more influence. “Hath the Lord spoken only by my husband? Hath he not also spoken by me?” And the Lord heard it.

Those who already have power frequently want more. In Numbers chapter 16 an ambitious and influential Levite called Korah decides the time has come to execute a power play. He gets the support of the Reubenites, probably by suggesting that under his leadership they’ll inherit the double portion due them as Jacob’s firstborn, something which Moses would not give them. Korah resented how his uncle Amram’s two sons (Moses and Aaron)\* had cornered the nation’s political and religious power for themselves. Although they had the same grandfather, they did not have the same status. Korah plotted his conspiracy carefully, and he had widespread support from nearly all Israel. He did NOT, of course, tell others about his own personal ambition. He DID talk about the general good of all. This is what he says to Moses and Aaron:

---

\* See Exod. 6:18,20,21

Num. 16:3 [NIV] “You have gone too far! The whole community is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is with them. Why then do you set yourselves above the Lord’s assembly?”

Moses left the entire matter in the Lord’s hands. And God becomes angry and threatens to destroy the entire nation. But Moses argues that the problem is with one man, not with everyone (vs. 22). After the Lord shows his leadership choice by causing an earthquake to swallow up the tents of the rebels and fire to consume Korah and the 250 with him who are offering incense, one would have thought His selection was crystal clear. But these are people with very hard hearts:

[vs. 41] The next day the whole Israelite community grumbled against Moses and Aaron. “You have killed the Lord’s people,” they said.

For the second time, God threatens to destroy the entire assembly. Moses and Aaron again intervene to save them, but only after 14,700 had died.

If someone wants power, he never suggests it is because of his own personal ambition. He wants it for YOUR good, or the good of some larger community to which you belong and for which he just happens to be speaking. Be very careful when you hear how bad off you are under present arrangements, and how much better you would be if only you supported someone else. If the Lord is really in charge of our life, our ecclesia arrangements, and our religious activities, He surely can bring down those in power and raise others when it is the right thing to do. Supporting the power plays of others rarely produces good. In Korah’s case, it produced a lot of death.

### **The Man of God**

What should one do when one appears to be receiving conflicting signals? You think you know what is right—what God wants you to do—but along comes someone who claims superior knowledge who tells you something else. Eve in the garden of Eden is an example. She knows God’s will, she’s following it, she’s happy, and yet, when someone claiming superior insight appears, she listens to him. Disaster follows. A similar experience occurred with an unnamed “man of God” following the death of Solomon. The break-away ten-tribe northern kingdom under King Jeroboam was quickly falling into idolatry. The King had established his own ceremonies, priests, and places of worship. When the king himself was offering a sacrifice at Bethel, this man of God appears and cries out against him.

1 Kings 13:4 [NIV] When King Jeroboam heard what the man of God cried out against the altar at Bethel, he stretched out his hand from the altar and said, “Seize him!” But the hand he stretched out toward the man shriveled up so that he could not pull it back. Also, the altar was split apart and its ashes poured out according to the sign given by the man of God by the word of the Lord.”



Naturally the king is shocked about his hand and pleads for healing, which occurs. He then invites the man of God to come to his home for a meal and a gift.

[vs. 8] But the man of God answered the king, “Even if you were to give me half your possessions, I would not go with you, nor would I eat bread or drink water here. For I was commanded by the word of the Lord: ‘You must not eat bread or drink water or return by the way you came.’”

So the man of God returns to Judah by another way. Meanwhile, a certain old prophet living in Bethel hears about these events. He saddles up his donkey and goes off in pursuit. He finds the man of God resting under an oak tree and invites him to return with him for a meal.

[vs. 16] The man of God said, “I cannot turn back and go with you, nor can I eat bread or drink water with you in this place. I have been told by the word of the Lord: ‘You must not eat bread or drink water there or return by the way you came.’” The old prophet answered, “I too am a prophet, as you are. And an angel said to me by the word of the Lord: ‘Bring him back with you to your house so that he may eat bread and drink water.’”

What would you do if you were the man of God? You’ve been under a lot of stress. You’re tired, hungry, and thirsty. And now the Lord speaking through an unexpected channel offers you relief. Do you go? How do you know what to do? The man of God does go back to Bethel, eats and drinks, and during the meal, a sudden prophetic utterance from God proclaims judgment on his great error. He will die before arriving home.

[vs. 23] When the man of God had finished eating and drinking, the prophet who had brought him back saddled his donkey for him. As he went on his way, a lion met him on the road and killed him, and his body was thrown down on the road, with both the donkey and the lion standing beside it. [vs. 28, the Bethel prophet] went out and found the body thrown down on the road, with the donkey and the lion standing beside it. The lion had neither eaten the body nor mauled the donkey.\*

What do you make of this? Does the simple act of eating a meal before returning home justify such drastic punishment? If these experiences were for our learning, what should we learn from this drama that occupies most of chapter 13?

I believe this incident shows the importance God places on obeying Him and not others. Most every one has a pretty good idea what’s right in most situations. The fact that a friend, a relative, or even an elder feels differently doesn’t change that. If we go against our conscience or what we have every reason to know to be true, there will be a price to be paid. Sooner or later we will be sorry.

---

\* Stating what the lion did NOT do clearly showed everyone that this was the hand of the Lord.

I personally know of decisions that were based not on whether it was right but on what someone else thought or what someone else might do. Surely you know when others try to get you to do something they want that you don't think is right. Do you do it anyway? Do you think it doesn't matter? Will you do it again? And again?

There is such a thing as individual responsibility in the sight of God. He expects every one of us to speak up when something is wrong. When Moses was away so long, it was natural for the nation to be concerned. But did no one object when there was a call for the making of a golden calf? If anyone did object, we don't read about it in the scriptures. If a comment is made in a study you think is wrong, speak up. If your spouse or parent wants you to do something you think is not right, speak up. Love or loyalty has nothing to do with it. You will not get into the kingdom based on decisions others make for you! The hardening of one's natural arteries takes place over a long period of time. So does the hardening of one's spiritual arteries.

### **The Lord Wants Your Heart**

Prov. 23:26 My son, give me thine heart.

The brain is never mentioned in scripture. The heart is mentioned 693 times. It is the heart that God wants. In the biblical sense, human life is centered in the heart. The psalmist in a time of great affliction, personifies the drying up of physical strength by saying, "My heart is smitten and withered like grass." (Psa. 102:4)

Our life-sustaining organs are hidden away from ordinary sight. When animals were sacrificed in Israel's Tabernacle arrangement, these organs were sacrificed on the brazen altar. All these special organs are collectively called the "inwards," but not all "inwards" were treated equally.

Lev. 8:16 And he took all the fat that was upon the inwards, and caul *above* [the **liver**], and the two **kidneys**, and their fat, and Moses burned it upon the altar. [vs. 21] And he **washed the inwards** and the legs in water; and Moses burnt the whole ram upon the altar: it was a burnt sacrifice for a sweet savour, and an offering made by fire unto the LORD; as the LORD commanded Moses.

When the liver and kidneys are particularly mentioned, they were never washed. But when no specific inward organ is specified, washing occurs before they are acceptable. This pictures our need for washing before we can be sacrificed.

Psa. 51:6 Behold, Thou desirest truth in the inward parts: . . . [vs. 7] Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. [vs. 10] Create in me a **clean heart**, O God.

The opposite of a clean heart is a hard heart:

Prov. 28:14 [NIV] Blessed is the man who always fears the Lord, but he who hardens his heart falls into trouble.

In Psalm 73 the psalmist becomes aware that the purity of his heart was endangered because he envied those who had so much, those who lived apart from God. He says:

Psa. 73:1,2 Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

It is not just envy that contributes to heart disease. A lack of self-discipline, particularly concerning what comes out of our mouth, can do grave injury to our own heart:

James 1:26 (RSV) If any one thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his heart, this man's religion is vain.

In the seventh chapter of Mark, the Pharisees ask Jesus why his disciples eat food with unwashed hands instead of following the traditions of the elders. Jesus replies:

Mark 7:6,7 [NIV] Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you hypocrites; as it is written: These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

Then he goes on to say that nothing a man eats can defile him (though of course the law had much to say about clean and unclean foods). This was such a hard saying that the disciples considered it a parable and asked for a further explanation:

[vs. 18-23] Don't you see that nothing that enters a man from the outside can make him unclean? For it doesn't go into his **heart** but into his stomach, and then out of his body. . . . What comes out of a man is what makes him "unclean." For from within, out of men's **hearts**, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance, and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man "unclean."

Prov. 4:23 Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.

The Chinese have a proverb conveying this same thought: "Keep a green tree in your heart and perhaps the singing bird will come."

It seems that most brethren [at least in the western countries] live better today than the rich of a century years ago. So prosperity becomes a potential agent in the hardening of one's arteries [one's heart]. Who needs God when you have everything? Moses warned Israel about the need to remember the Lord in a time of prosperity:

Deut. 6:12 [When the Lord brings you into a prosperous land...] Beware lest thou forget the Lord which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.

Brethren, we also have been brought forth out of the house of bondage into a new house, the house of God. Let us guard against all the influences that could affect our hearts and take our affections away from God. If we do anything because we want the approval of a

person, that will harden our heart. If we do anything for personal advantage, that hardens our heart. If prosperity turns us from God, the hardening process could lead to a heart attack and even spiritual death.

Gal. 6:7-9 [RSV] Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption; but he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not grow weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we do not lose heart.

Matt. 5:8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

HEART work is HARD work, indeed!

Closing Hymn: #310—Triumphant Zion

*[first delivered in Los Angeles in August, 1993]*

## *Hearing Ears*

Opening Hymn: #108 — “I Came to Jesus”

I heard the voice of Jesus say, “Come unto me and rest.”

I heard the voice of Jesus say, “Behold, I freely give.”

I heard the voice of Jesus say, “I am this dark world’s Light.”

Matthew 13:16,17 Blessed are your ... ears, for they hear. ... Many prophets and righteous men have desired to ... hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.

As important as the eyes are to all of us, the Scriptures also emphasize the importance of ears. Because we have such ready access to the Bible and we all know how to read, our eyes can teach us so much. But this has not always been true. For most of the Gospel Age copies of the Bible were produced by hand and only the elite of the church had them. The common people worked the land and could not read anything. They knew only what they were told by others. Their learning came through their ears.

And that’s the way it was at the beginning of this age. At the end of Acts chapter one we read of 120 who were convinced by Peter to select a replacement for unfaithful Judas. Their choice was Mathius and he was numbered with the eleven apostles. Chapter two opens on the Day of Pentecost:

Acts 2:1-4 (NIV) When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound [like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven] filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Three and a half years before this John the Baptist said the one who came after him would baptize not with water, but with the holy spirit and with fire (Matt. 3:11). In Acts 1:8 they were told they would receive power when the holy spirit came upon them, but what that meant and when it would happen they did not know. This event was the fulfillment of that promise.

The first part of the miracle was sound: “A sound ... came from heaven and filled the whole house.” It was not wind. We have all experienced sudden, even violent winds caused by natural forces. But the sound duplicating a wind without there being any wind would be awe-inspiring. The second part of the miracle was the tongues of fire. We think of fire as destructive, but it is also a symbol of God’s presence. There was the burning bush from which God spoke to Moses (Exod. 3:2). There was the cloud by day and the “pillar of fire” by night during the wilderness wanderings. In fact the original Day of Pentecost occurred when the law was given at Mt. Sinai, an event associated with both sound and fire:

Exodus 19:18,19 Mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in **fire**: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and

the whole mount quaked greatly. And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a **voice**.

In Acts when these disciples began to “speak with tongues,” it was not for their benefit. It was to witness to the “devout men out of every nation under heaven” (vs. 5) who filled the city. Most who explain the “speaking in tongues” (including Brother Russell) say they began to speak languages they did not know. Certainly there are instances in the New Testament when that kind of miracle happened. But in this case the miracle may have been one of hearing. That’s the way the people described it:

Vs. 6: They were confounded because every man **heard** them speak in his own language.

Vs. 8: How **hear** we every man in our own tongue?

Vs. 11: We do **hear** them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.

In vs. 14 Peter stands up and speaks to them. What language did he speak? If it is one specific language, most of the audience would not understand him. Yet they do, for at the end of his remarks we read:

Acts 2:41 (NIV) Those who accepted his message were baptized and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

And what a miracle this would be to those people. If **you** were in a European crowd where all languages were being spoken, you surely would not be surprised if someone on a street corner began to speak in English. You would assume he learned the language in school. But suppose this same person spoke what was clearly not your language, yet you understood his words as though you were at an International convention wearing ear-phones. That surely would make you excited, so much that others would be attracted and join with enthusiasm. The critics who observed this crowd accused them of drunkenness:

Acts 2:12,13 (NIV) Amazed and perplexed, [the crowd] asked one another, What does this mean? Some, however, made fun of them and said, They have had too much wine.

In verse 15 Peter says “These men are not drunk as you suppose.” He does not say, “**We** are not drunk as you suppose.” This makes complete sense if the miracle was in the hearing.

But how are we to understand the words of verse 4 where those filled with the holy spirit “began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them”? Consider something Jesus said to his disciples:

Luke 12:11,12 (NIV) When you are brought before synagogues, rulers, and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say.

The holy spirit inspired the disciples to go forth and speak about different truths based on recent events as prophesied in the Bible. As those in the crowd circulated from one

disciple to another, they heard in their own language what the NIV calls “the wonders of God.” We have the adjective “silver-tongued” which means “having or exhibiting the power of fluent and persuasive speech; eloquent.” On that Pentecostal day these disciples were “silver-tongued” and it is one of the many miraculous things that happened that day. As always the glory belonged to God:

2 Cor. 4:7 We have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

Using presumably ignorant people like Galileans was just like God. Paul wrote:

1 Cor. 1:27 God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;

We are amazed 3,000 of the devout of Israel were so impressed with Peter’s message that they were baptized. Nothing like that ever happened when Jesus spoke to the multitudes. There is an obscure Pentecostal type that had its antitype on this same day:

Leviticus 23:16,17 Ye shall number fifty days; and ye shall offer a new meal offering unto the Lord. Ye shall bring out of your habitations two wave loaves of two tenth deals: they shall be of fine flour; **they shall be baked with leaven**; they are the firstfruits unto the Lord.

When the holy spirit came upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost, the priest was waving two loaves [see vs. 20] baked with leaven, an exception compared to all the other sacrifices brought to God. There was no leaven in the wave offering of firstfruits and the meal offering during the Feast of Unleavened Bread seven weeks before this. At that time the sinless “head of the body” was accepted by God. But at Pentecost the “body members” who were not sinless were accepted as firstfruits. Having two leavened loaves seems to teach that these would jointly constitute two groups: the Church, and the Great Company (also typified in the underpriests and ordinary Levites). How thrilling to see 3,000 respond to the message of truth and begin their consecrated walk before God.

### **On the Road to Damascus**

The miracle of hearing was used to convert Saul of Tarsus as he was traveling to Damascus expecting to cast Christians into prison. Notice how he describes what happened to him:

Acts 22:6,7,9 It came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. And I fell unto the ground, and **heard a voice** saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? [vs. 9] And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; **but they heard not the voice** of him that spake to me.

In Acts 26:14 he adds the detail that the voice spoke to him in the “Hebrew tongue.” But since his traveling companions heard nothing at all, clearly the fact that Saul heard anything was a miracle. I like to think that from Saul’s perspective if God were going to speak to him, it would certainly be in the Hebrew tongue.

And of course God speaks to us and all who seek him regardless which language we think is “God’s language.” He speaks them all. In fact his word, the Bible, has been translated into all the major languages of this planet, and most of the minor ones as well. And no matter which language is used to pray to him, “he hears” them all.

### **The Importance of Tongues**

God has always used human tongues as the way to call his elect out of the world. Consider the events in Acts chapter 8. A eunuch of great authority was riding in his chariot and reading Isaiah:

Acts 8:29-31 Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot. And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Isaiah, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? [vs. 35] Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.

The eunuch’s words are as true today as they were then: “How can I understand unless some man should guide me.” Some say we follow a man. I once visited a Bible Student-oriented convention and saw a booktable filled with literature I had never seen before. Evidently the convention sponsors felt it was acceptable to follow the guidance of those who had written what was on the table; it was not acceptable to follow what was written by those whose works were not on display.

Romans 10:14 How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and **how shall they hear** without a preacher? [vs. 17] So faith cometh by **hearing**, and hearing by the word of God.

We should all consider ourselves preachers sent out to hold forth the praises of him who has called us out of darkness into his marvelous light.

A great commission was given by the risen Lord to the eleven and to all who would follow after them:

Matthew 28:19 Go ye therefore, and **teach** all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

### **God Hears**

We have talked about how important the sense of hearing is because it has historically been the way the truth has been brought to those who are seeking after God. We have two instances in the wilderness experiences of the Israelites where it is the Lord who is



described as “hearing” what rebellious ones were saying. The first incident was the people:

Numbers 11:1 And when the people complained, it displeased the Lord: **and the Lord heard it**; and his anger was kindled; and the fire of the Lord burnt among them, and consumed them that were in the uttermost parts of the camp.

In the following chapter the ones doing the speaking are Moses’ brother and sister:

Numbers 12:2 And [Miriam and Aaron] said, Hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us? **And the Lord heard it.**

The anger of the Lord was kindled against them and Miriam became leprous. I’m not sure why Aaron was not punished. Some say it was to not contaminate the priesthood. Others think it was really Miriam who was the instigator of this rebellion and Aaron had only a passive role.

These two examples show that God will not tolerate rebellion. He hears and at the appropriate time he acts. So let us be sure our words always bring glory to God because he hears everything:

Malachi 3:16 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.

1 Peter 3:12 The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers.

### **Those who have Ears—Hear!**

Matthew 11:15 He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

Our Lord used this expression on a number of occasions. What does it mean? Can those with ears not hear? Of course. Those who don’t like a message are certainly not going to listen to it. The verse just before the one we quoted at the beginning of this lesson reads:

Matthew 13:15 This people’s heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing.

Personal prejudice affects one’s judgment. If you believe the earth is the center of the universe, you won’t listen if someone tells you the earth moves. This actually happened in the early 1600s when Galileo used the newly invented telescope to prove the earth was not the center of the universe; the Roman Catholic church claimed it was stationary. Church officials refused to even look through the telescope. Galileo was warned to keep his theories to himself, but he didn’t. Eventually he was summoned to Rome by the Inquisition to stand trial for what was called “grave suspicion of heresy.” He was forced to recant and punished by house arrest. (In 1992 a papal Commission formally acknowledged the Vatican’s error.)

Such can happen among Bible Students. Certain “venerable traditions” can be considered sacred and defended as truth without a single scripture offered in support. This can be

especially true when it concerns scientific knowledge. A Seventh Day Adventist might believe the creative days were 24-hours long because the Bible says they were, while others might claim they were 7,000 years long because that's how long the seventh day is and they are all of equal length. Any contrary idea from the scientific community is rejected much like those who refused to look through the first telescopes. The Bible was never given to us to be a scientific textbook. Misusing it this way can only bring discredit to the gospel message.

When our Lord said “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear,” he is saying to those around him that those with an ear to hear **spiritual** things should do more than hear the words—they should obey them. On another occasion he made that point directly:

Luke 8:21 And he answered and said unto them, My mother and my brethren are these which **hear** the word of God, **and do it**.

In the book of Hebrews we are told the gospel or good news proved of no benefit to most of those who came out of Egypt in the exodus because they had no faith:

Hebrews 4:2 For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, **not being mixed with faith** in them that heard it.

So we must hear and we must obey. And this we will do because we have faith in the one who speaks to us.

Hebrews 2:1 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.

The “things which we have heard” are the words of the Lord. May those who have ears to hear, earnestly hear!

Closing Hymn: #164 — “Hear the Call”

### Songs in the Night — October 26

*Ye shall have a song, as in the night when a holy solemnity is kept.—Isaiah 30:29*

It is a fact that those who have tasted that the Lord is gracious, those who have received the joy which no man can take from them, those who have tasted of the grace of God in Christ, will not only rejoice and literally sing musical songs with their lips, but they will also rejoice to have their entire lives a song of praise and thanksgiving unto God. The song will bubble over on every occasion, **wherever hearing ears are found**: so fully will the cleansed, justified, and consecrated heart appreciate God's goodness.

—Z'97-306 R2232:5 (Hymn 179)

*[First given in New York, November 2003]*

## *Israel*

Opening Hymn: #41 — Awake from thy Sadness

How many different meanings do you think are associated with the word "Israel" in scripture? I found six. Perhaps there are more.

#1: There is the literal meaning of the word. It is Hebrew word #3478: "he will rule as God" [Strong's] or "God rules" [Companion Bible].

#2: The name God gave to Jacob, one of Isaac's sons.

[The next scripture is the first occurrence of this word in scripture.]

Gen. 32:28 And he said, "Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel."

#3: The nation formed of 12 tribes headed by Jacob's [Israel's] 12 sons.

Ex. 5:2 And Pharaoh said, Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go?

#4: The 10-tribe northern kingdom (as contrasted with Judah, the 2-tribe southern kingdom) after the kingdom divided following the death of Solomon.

2 Kings 17:21 For he rent Israel from the house of David; and they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king: and Jeroboam drave Israel from following the Lord, and made them sin a great sin.

#5: All 12-tribes following the return of Jews from their exile in Babylon.

Ezra 10:5 Then arose Ezra, and made the chief priests, the Levites, **and all Israel**, to swear that they should do according to this word.

Acts 2:22 Ye men of Israel [NOTE: not "men of Judah"] hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know:

#6: A spiritual "people of God" (as contrasted to natural Israel).

Rom. 9:6 For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel:

Gal. 6:15-16 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

It is entirely appropriate that we as Bible Students emphasize this sixth definition. That's because when God accepts our consecration, we become new creatures and are accepted as His sons. We become part of the "Israel of God" [an expression that occurs only here!] even though we may not necessarily be natural descendants of Jacob. But what about natural Israel? Jesus said unto them [in Matt. 23:38]: "Your

house is left unto you desolate." Does this mean they have no place in the outworking of God's plan? Of course not!

Rom. 11:15 For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?

### **Promises to Israel PRIOR to the Kingdom**

One of the most important promises that Israel received from God has been fulfilled within our very lifetimes. It is that they will be reconstituted a nation and returned to the land from which they were driven out:

Ezek. 37:1-6 The hand of the Lord . . . set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones . . . and, lo, they were very dry. And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, thou knowest. Again he said unto me, Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the Lord. [verse 10] and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army. Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel.

Amos 9:14-15 And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God.

But as remarkable as this regathering has fulfilled the wonderful promise that Israel will once again possess the land of their forefathers, there is one very dark cloud on their horizon. The phrase "Jacob's trouble" describes it, a phrase that occurs only once in scripture:

Jer. 30:3 For, lo, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will bring again the captivity of my people Israel and Judah, saith the Lord: and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it. [verse 7] 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. [verse 11] For I am with thee, saith the Lord, to save thee: though I make a full end of all nations whither I have scattered thee, yet will I not make a full end of thee: but I will correct thee in measure, and will not leave thee altogether unpunished. [verse 14] All thy lovers have forgotten thee; they seek thee not; for I have wounded thee with the wound of an enemy, with the chastisement of a cruel one, for the multitude of thine iniquity; because thy sins were increased.

Note that the Lord here says he is going to make a "full end" of all the other nations. What does this mean? We suggest that it means the arbitrary divisions into nation-states that has produced such rivalry and distress will be dissolved. But interestingly enough, not Israel's. It is as though there will be a continued awareness even into the kingdom of those who are part of the nation of Israel.

This scripture is not yet fulfilled. Israel still has some "lovers," notably the governments of Great Britain and the United States. But this prophecy says that a time will come when these supporters will withdraw their support and Israel will stand alone. It is then that God is able to show his mighty hand and fight for them as He did in days of old:

Ezek. 38:11 And thou [Gog] 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. [vs. 15] And thou shalt come from thy place out of the north parts, thou, and many people with thee, all of them riding upon horses, a great company, and a mighty army: And thou shalt come up against my people of Israel, as a cloud to cover the land; it shall be in the latter days, and I will bring thee against my land, that the heathen may know me, when I shall be sanctified in thee, O Gog, before their eyes. [vs. 21] And I will call for a sword against him throughout all my mountains, saith the Lord God: every man's sword shall be against his brother. And I will plead against him 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. 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.

### **Promises to Israel IN to the Kingdom**

The covenants are important to Bible students. We all know about the original law covenant God made with Israel at Mount Sinai. And we know that Israel agreed to keep their part of it, but they failed. What about the New Covenant? With whom is it made? The scripture is very clear:

Jer. 31:31-33 Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that 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 that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Now in spite of this very clear statement, many of our Christian friends believe that the new covenant is made between God and believers in Christ. They "spiritualize" the word "Israel" [and overlook the word "Judah"]. But that is definitely NOT the correct thought. It was not the Apostle Paul's thought in Romans when he talked about natural Israel and the covenant to be made with them.

Rom. 11:12 Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles [definitely natural Israel, not spiritual]; how much more their fulness? [verse 27] This is my covenant toward them, WHEN I SHALL TAKE AWAY THEIR SINS.

When does the new covenant go into effect? This scripture says when God takes away natural Israel's sins. Has he done that yet? No he has not? But he will do it when the new covenant arrangement is inaugurated with a "better mediator" than Moses, The Christ, head and body.

### **Israel receives kingdom blessings first**

The Bible uses the word Zion and the word Jerusalem to talk about what is to happen in the kingdom. The city of Jerusalem was built on several mountains the highest of which was named Zion. Zion is used as a symbol of the heavenly phase of the kingdom. Jerusalem, however, describes the earthly phase.

| Psa. 2:6 Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion.

Zech. 8:3 Thus saith the Lord; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the Lord of hosts the holy mountain.

Isa. 2:2,3 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 unto 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 shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

The "law" of the kingdom comes from on high—from Zion. It is broadcast to "all nations" from Jerusalem. Whether or not this means the earthly seat of government will be located in the literal city of Jerusalem or not is debatable. I personally think that would be the best place for it to be.

Zech. 8:22-23 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.

The number ten in scripture shows human perfection [or completion]. Examples: ten camels carrying gifts for the bride of Isaac, ten commandments for God's chosen people, a ten-stringed harp, ten virgins, ten servants to whom was delivered ten pounds. In the Zechariah citation, "ten men" represent mankind [complete].

Zech. 14:16-17 And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain.

Almost everyone expects that nations will come up against literal Jerusalem in the final phase of Jacob's trouble. If Jerusalem is literal in the first part of this scripture, then it follows that it would be literal in the second part of the scripture. It is the place where the "word of the Lord" goes forth, where worship is appropriately rendered. Whether or not "rain" means literal rainfall can be argued. Certainly Californians are very much concerned about what no rain may do to their economy and life style. When drought seized the land of Palestine, the people suffered. Thus the lack of rain is an apt symbol of the lack of blessing. There is even a scripture that implies that Israel itself is this "wetness" from heaven:

Micah 5:3 . . . then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel. [verse 7] And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a **dew** from the LORD, as the **showers** upon the grass.

Thus we see that the blessings of the kingdom flow to the world of mankind through the nation of Israel. They are the first to receive these blessings. Here's familiar words from Volume 1, page 297:

"Let us remember that though the future blessings, like the past, will be to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile, it will be in the matter of time only that the Jews will have the precedence to divine favor."

Unfortunately some have overemphasized this phrase "in the matter of time only" that the role of Israel as a conduit of blessing has been minimized. The expression "blessor nation, " to describe their role in the kingdom was once used. But few use the expression today. Although there is no scripture that uses that phrase, there are several that say that is exactly the role Israel has in the kingdom. To be sure, real earthly power will be vested in the Ancient Worthies. It will be the Ancient Worthies who will be "princes in all the earth," will be the leaders of restored Israel. Favor is shown to Israel so that it may flow to everyone else:

Zech. 8:13 And it shall come to pass, that as ye were a curse among the heathen, O house of Judah, and house of Israel; so will I save you, **and ye shall be a blessing**: fear not, but let your hands be strong.

The word "blessing" is Strong's #1293 and means *benediction; by impl. prosperity*. It has been translated *blessing, liberal, pool, and present*. (In Isa. 39:1 the king of Babylon sends letters and a *present* (#1293—blessing) to Hezekiah.) The many scriptures that use this word clearly show that it has the usual meaning we think it has in English.

Isa. 19:24 In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, **even a blessing** in the midst of the land:

The contrast is between the state of Israel and Egypt/Assyria (who jointly picture the other nations of the earth). But notice: it is Israel that is to be the blessing, not Egypt, not Assyria. Here is how Knox translates the Hebrew:

Isa. 19:23-25 [Knox] There will be a high-road, then, between Egypt and the Assyrians; either shall visit other, and Egypt under Assyria be at peace. And with these a third people shall be matched; who but Israel, source of the whole world's happiness? Such blessing the Lord of hosts has pronounced upon it, Blessed be my people in Egypt, and the home I have made for the Assyrian to dwell in; but Israel is the land of my choice.

The Septuagint renders this "Israel, blessed in the land." There is a tremendous difference in meaning between *being blessed*, and *being a blessing*. Each of us must



determine for ourselves just what this scripture really means in the original Hebrew.

Gen. 28:14 [here God speaks to JACOB, not Isaac] And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth **be blessed**.

All the families of the earth are to be blessed in JACOB and JACOB's seed. We all agree that **Isaac** pictures The Christ, head and body. Gal. 4:28 says that we, like **Isaac**, are the children of promise. So whom does Jacob picture? Can we possibly think that he pictures a heavenly seed, the same as Isaac? The numberless "stars of heaven" picture the church and the Great Company "which no man could number." That was God's promise to Isaac. But the numberless "dust of the earth" is something quite different. Jacob pictures the earthly phase of the kingdom. He himself pictures the ancient worthies. "His seed" pictures the literal nation of Israel, Jacob's literal descendants. This promise says that it will be through Jacob and Jacob's seed--the Isaac seed is of course, directing the blessing from heaven—that all the families of the earth will be blessed. This is what makes Israel a blessing nation.

God regathers Israel to her land. He does this to fulfil the promise he made to Abraham that he would give him the land, a promise that had not been fulfilled when Abraham died. Nations come against her with the intent of wiping her off the face of the earth and God fights for her so that his name may be glorified. Then what? Is that the end of it? Not at all. The blessings flow first to Israel, and through Israel to all the families of the earth. The objective is that the entire world joins itself to Israel, becomes part of Israel, and constitutes the numberless earthly seed. All other nations disappear as nations. Only the nation of Israel remains.

Israel's special status is shown in the Chart of the Ages. A large pyramid rests on plane N [real or reckoned perfection] in the Messianic Age. It is the last pyramid on the Chart and represents the completed work of restoration. The two top sections represent the Church and the Great Company. Below that is one section representing restored Israel and, under them, the rest of the world of mankind. The idea that the Gentiles actually become Israelites is well supported in scripture:

Isa. 14:1 For the Lord will have mercy on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land: and the strangers shall be joined with them, and they shall cleave to the house of Jacob.

Isa. 44:5 One shall say, I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel.

It should not be surprising that everyone must give up his own nationality and become an Israelite. That is, after all, exactly what has happened to you and me. Paul used the analogy of taking branches out of a [wild] tree [referring to Gentiles] and making them a part of a good olive tree [Israel's promises]:

Rom. 11:24-26 For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree? For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to [natural] Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all [natural] Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer [The Christ, head and body], and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob [natural Israel].

### Why Israel?

Why has God designed His plan this way? Why should he work exclusively with this one nation instead of with all mankind collectively? One reason is His love for their forefathers (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and His faithful prophets):

Rom. 11:28 As concerning the gospel, they [natural Israel—the Jews] are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes.

His original relationship with Israel was not because they were so much better than others. We know from the record that the vast majority was unfaithful to Him. They were "stiff-necked." But Israel became the instrumentality God used to deal with the wickedness of the other nations:

Deut. 9:5-6 Not for thy righteousness, or for the uprightness of thine heart, dost thou go to possess their land: but for the wickedness of these nations the Lord thy God doth drive them Out from before thee, and that he may perform the word which the Lord sware unto thy fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Understand therefore, that the Lord thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou art a stiff-necked people.

For over 3000 years the Jews have maintained their uniqueness, their separateness based on their law covenant relationship with God. That's probably what non-Jews find so irritating. They want others to conform to their standard, their mode of behavior. Even when Jews try to accommodate to this pressure, they have failed. They are different:

Num. 23:9 For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him: lo, the **people shall dwell alone**, and shall not be reckoned among the nations.

Think of the prejudice that rages around the world: in Northern Ireland the Catholics hate the Protestants; Turks hate the Greeks; Serbs hate the Croats; Azerbaijanis hate the Armenians; but almost everyone hates [or if not hate, certainly resents] the Jews! Prejudice against the Jews exists even in the United States. On rare occasion one may even hear prejudicial words against Jews from one in our fellowship. One of the first lessons to be taught to all nations will be to confront and overcome their prejudice of the Jew. It will be hard. Initially some won't come up, won't come to Jerusalem. And upon those, there will be no "rain." Eventually they will learn that prejudice has no place in a perfected human heart.

Brethren, the Lord is developing us now, in advance of the world. There is no place for prejudice in our characters, whether it be prejudice of Jews or non-Jews, whether it be of anyone in the world or among the brethren. Whenever we see evidence of prejudice in our characters, let us cut it off. Otherwise it may keep us from reaching the prize for which we run.

Isa. 40:1-2 Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

Psa. 122:6 Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee.

Closing Hymn: #267 — The Beauty of Holiness

*[First given at San Luis Obispo, 1991]*

## *Lessons from the Life of Jacob*

Opening Hymn: #63 — “He Will Make It Plain”

The book of Genesis is longer than any book of the Bible except Psalms. And it says more about the patriarch Jacob than anyone else—a lot more than about his father Isaac or grandfather Abraham. Jacob’s experiences occupy the last half of the book. He’s born in chapter 25; he’s buried in chapter 50.

The apostle Paul in 1 Cor. 10:11 says that the experiences of fleshly Israel are meant to instruct us. When we look at this patriarch’s life, we see there are many lessons associated with the one whose name was “Israel,” whose sons became the heads of the twelve tribes of the nation of Israel. Here are some of them.

### **Lesson #1 — God Keeps His Own Counsel**

Romans 9:10-13 When Rebecca had conceived [twins] ... (for the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I **hated**.

Rebecca was experiencing great pains in her womb from what seemed to be fighting between the two boys she was carrying. She could not understand why and so inquired of the Lord. This is what she was told:

Genesis 25:23 Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger.

Nothing is said about God “hating” the elder. In fact Esau becomes the father of twelve sons who are the founders of nations, and he becomes a wealthy man. This is the same “hate” as in Luke 14:26, “If any man come to me, and **hate** [*same Greek word*] not his father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters..” Jesus did not ask us to hate our parents; that would be contrary to the Law which said we should “honour father and mother.” We are to love them less compared to the love we have for him.

Being “loved” by God was not that big a blessing for Jacob. He suffered a lot, often because of his own poor choices. God does not insulate us from the consequences of our actions. He certainly did not do so in the case of Jacob. And as far as Isaac was concerned, he loved Esau:

Genesis 25:28 **Isaac loved Esau**, because he did eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob.

A key lesson is that God can select whom he pleases even before birth. In the case of Jacob God selected the one he wanted for his purposes yet without predetermining Jacob's final destiny. Another example is Paul who said he personally had been selected by God "from my mother's womb" (Gal. 1:15). Why did God select you, and not your brother or sister? This is not a question any can answer because God follows his own counsel, not man's.

The name Jacob (Strong's #3290) means "heel-catcher (i.e., supplanter)." "Supplant" means "to usurp the place of, especially through intrigue or underhanded tactics." Jacob got this name because he took hold of Esau's heel as he came out of the womb. He definitely lived up to his name.

There are some who think the position of the sun, moon, and stars at the moment of birth determines a person's characteristics. My mother sometimes reminded me I was born under the sign of Cancer the Crab and that of course was why I behaved as I did. I wonder how she would explain why Jacob was so vastly different from Esau when both were born simultaneously?

## **Lesson #2 — Do Wrong and There Are Consequences**

Gen. 25:29-34 (NIV) Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. He said to Jacob, "Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I'm famished!" ... Jacob replied, "First sell me your birthright." "Look, I am about to die," Esau said, "What good is the birthright to me?" But Jacob said, "Swear to me first." So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew. He ate and drank, and then got up and left. So Esau despised his birthright.

We don't know exactly when this happened; presumably the boys were in their late teens. Esau makes it sound like he either eats Jacob's stew or he dies. What nonsense! There is no other food in the house? And what about Jacob? He has plenty of stew cooking over a fire and his brother is starving. He won't give him any unless he "pays" for it? What kind of behavior is that? In any event, Jacob considered the birthright valuable, Esau did not. He later regretted this teenage impulsiveness, but it was too late:

Heb. 12:16,17 (NIV) See that no one is ... like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears.

It was more than 50 years later when Isaac decides it's time to give his sons their paternal blessing, he first asks Esau to go hunt some wild game with bow and arrow, then cook it in the style he loves. At this point Esau has been married for 37 years to two Hittite wives. Rebekah overhears the conversation and is sure Isaac will give his best blessing to Esau not Jacob. So she takes matters into her own hands. She conspires to deceive Isaac by having

Jacob impersonate Esau. The details are in Genesis 27. She knows God has said “the elder shall serve the younger” and she wants to do everything she can to guarantee it. Isaac relies on taste, touch, and smell—Rebekah makes sure Jacob is wearing Esau’s clothes—and ignores the sound of a voice he thinks is Jacob’s. At age 137 he is blind. Although this deception is engineered by Rebekah, Jacob’s only worries about whether he’ll get caught or not (27:11,12). The ruse is successful and Jacob steals the blessing Isaac intended for Esau.

When Esau discovers what happened, he bursts out crying, pleading for a blessing from Isaac. He is so mad at Jacob he vows to kill him as soon as his father dies. What no one in the family knew was that Isaac would live 43 more years. Rebekah is so worried Esau and Jacob might actually kill each other, she convinces Jacob to flee, saying that Esau’s Canaanite wives disgust her, and she wants Jacob to marry someone in her family. It’s about time. Jacob is 77 years old and still living at home!

What Rebekah does not know is that Jacob will be gone for 20 years. It is entirely possible she never saw him again. There is no excuse for what she and Jacob did. When God says “the elder shall serve the younger,” he meant it. He didn’t need her help. Thinking the “ends justify the means” has been a trap since the beginning of time. Let us not fall into it. The Lord is in control. He will **not** bless our misguided efforts to lie, cheat, and steal to get what we believe is rightly ours. Rebekah paid a high price for her actions. So did Jacob.

### **Lesson #3 — We Reap What We Sow**

Jacob goes to where his mother was born and raised. At a well he meets Rachel and immediately falls in love with her. He is a strong man for he rolls away a stone from the well’s mouth and single-handedly waters the flock. It turns out Rachel is his cousin; her father Laban is Rebekah’s brother.

Unlike the last visitor from Caanan who came laden with gold and gifts—and left with Rebekah—Jacob is penniless. He has nothing to give Laban for Rachel except his own servitude. A deal is reached: he will serve Laban seven years to win Rachel. Seven years sounds like a long time but not when you’re in love: “Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her” (Genesis 29:20).

Although it does not say so explicitly it appears Laban got Jacob drunk because when he goes into the tent on his wedding night, he is essentially blind. He can rely on smell and touch, but if he heard any voice at all, it was Leah’s, not Rachel’s. Like his father Isaac when Jacob pretended to be Esau, Jacob ignores the voice and consummates the marriage. In the morning Laban’s deception is revealed: Jacob is in bed with Leah, not the greatly beloved Rachel. Laban knows that if he is to retain Jacob, he had better deliver Rachel, and he does so a week later in return for another seven years service contract. The deception practiced by Jacob is returned to him by Laban. We reap what we sow.

Jacob loves Rachel and “hates” Leah, but this is hate in the “love less” sense. If he hated Leah he would not sleep with her, yet she bears him four sons one right after the other. Rachel is jealous and asks Jacob to give her sons using the body of Bilhah her maid servant. This is like Sarah offering her maid servant Hagar to Abraham.

Genesis 30:1 When Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, Give me children [Hebrew: sons, plural], or else I die.

This sounds vaguely like Esau who with similar impulsiveness says he needs Jacob’s lentil stew or he will die. He gets the stew, and Rachel gets sons, but both pay much more than they imagine. In Rachel’s case, she dies when her second son is born.

Rachel’s maid servant produces two sons. Then Leah makes the same suggestion about her maid servant and soon she produces two sons. Everything seems to happen in twos with Jacob. Now he has eight sons. Jacob evidently did stop sleeping with Leah because it appears she has to “buy” a night with him (Gen. 30:16); another son results, and soon another. Finally Rachel bears Joseph and a few years later Jacob decides to go home (Gen. 30:25). He is now in his mid-90s and has eleven sons and one named daughter.

Now it is time for Laban to reap the fruits of deception. Jacob strikes a deal that during a given period of time the colored animals that are born are to be his. God blesses Jacob and the colored cattle multiply greatly. God tells Jacob to get out and he makes plans to do so. Jacob tells his wives that Laban constantly changes whatever deal he makes (“changed my wages ten times” are his words in Gen. 31:7). So with his entire family and his flocks, he makes a break for it while Laban is away shearing sheep, a three-day journey in the opposite direction. It takes seven days before Laban can catch up with the group. He accuses someone of stealing his personal household gods. Laban searches and finds nothing, but it is only because Rachel, pleading her period, asks to not be forced to dismount from her camel. Rachel is sitting on her father’s gods. Laban wanted to take back the flocks and people by force but God warned him not to do Jacob harm. Laban’s treachery has been paid in full. He lost the best shepherd he ever had, his two daughters, his grandchildren, and his gods.

#### **Lesson #4 — Do Your Best, Then Pray**

Jacob remains terrified of Esau all his life. As he is on his way back home, word comes that Esau is approaching with 400 men. Jacob suspects the worst: the men are an army meant to obliterate him (see 32:6). He divides his family into two groups with the thought that if one is smitten, the other can escape. He then picks out 550 animals which will be a gift for Esau.

The family and flocks are sent ahead and Jacob is left alone. He prays claiming the promise God made to him when he said he would bless him and he asks specifically to be saved from the hand of his brother Esau. That night he wrestles with someone he later realizes is a

spirit being (end of Gen. 32). Neither prevail over the other. Just as night was ending Jacob insisted that the man bless him. The blessing was a name change: his new name would be Israel. The wrestler touched Jacob's thigh and put it permanently out of joint. Day broke and with it fresh hope, but the man whose name was now Israel was forced to walk with a limp for the rest of his life.

Jacob the "supplanter" had contended for the birthright, for Isaac's blessing, with Laban ... with everyone. And he succeeded. Now he contends with God—or at least God's representative—and fails. The name Israel means "God commands." The new name reminds him of his need to depend upon God, and the limp makes sure he never forgets it.

Some have questioned whether this being was really a good angel because the experience is at night and the angel disappears at sunrise. But are we to believe Satan's "angel" would change Jacob's name to Israel? This angel was sent to reassure Jacob in his internal, mental "wrestlings" that God was still with him:

Hosea 12:4 Yea, [Jacob] had power over the angel, and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication unto him: he found him in Bethel, and there he spake with us.

When Abram's name is changed to Abraham, the change is permanent. The old name is gone forever. But such is not the case with the Jacob-to-Israel name change. The old name Jacob keeps reappearing. For example, near the end of his life the patriarch moves to Egypt with his family because of the famine in Canaan. God speaks to him:

Genesis 46:2 And God spake unto **Israel** in the visions of the night, and said, **Jacob, Jacob**. And he said, Here am I.

One opinion as to why the name Jacob doesn't disappear is that the name Jacob is used in the account whenever he has doubts and fears, and the name Israel when he has faith and confidence in God's will for him.

As it turns out Esau has come in peace. The people with him show he is now a prosperous man. The twins are now 98 years old. Jacob presents the large number of animals as a gift. Esau tries to refuse claiming he has enough of everything, but Jacob insists. Throughout the entire conversation Jacob employs the language of a servant speaking to his master. If we thought Esau lost tangible wealth when he sold his birthright, surely he more than made up for it with the huge gift he received from Jacob that day. In a way Jacob bought the birthright with considerably more than a dish of lentil stew. As far as we know he received nothing from the estate of Isaac who was still alive. In fact Isaac died 22 years after this meeting.

## **Lesson #5 — Be Careful For What You Pray For**

There are far more experiences in these Genesis chapters than we have time to discuss. You know that Rachel, Jacob's beloved wife, died when Benjamin was born. A year or two later Joseph was sold as a slave. At the time he was 17 or 18 years old; his oldest half-brother



doing the selling was no more than 23 or 24. Deception again occurs when the brothers produce Joseph's blood-drenched coat and say he must have been killed by wild beasts (37:34). And of course we know Joseph became second only to the Pharaoh in Egypt and saved the lives of his family by giving them food during a famine.

Jacob arrives in Egypt as an old man and is presented to the Pharaoh. In Genesis 47:9 Pharaoh asks Jacob how old he is. He says he is 130 years old, and then he adds:

Genesis 47:9 ... few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and [I] have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage.

In fact Jacob has achieved everything he ever wanted: he has the birthright, he got his father's chief blessing, he married the woman he loved, he has lots of sons, and he is wealthy. But one great lesson from a study of Jacob's life is that although he got everything he wanted, none of it happened in the way he wanted. We see him in front of Pharaoh reflecting on a life of far more pain than contentment. Everything has been a struggle. He has wrestled in his lifetime with more than an angel on the night when his name was changed. His story has a happy ending ... yet there is no real feeling of happiness at the end.

Perhaps the lesson for us is that we should be careful about what we ask for. We are not wise enough to ask intelligently for anything other than spiritual gifts. The Manna for February 22 says it best. The text is Hebrews 13:4, "Be content with such things as ye have." The comment:

Some have gained wealth and lost the truth and its service; some have gained health, only to find that with it they gained other trials no less severe: some have had their dear ones restored to them from the very jaws of death, only to wish afterward that God had not answered their prayers--or, more correctly, to wish that they had accepted the Lord's wisdom and providences trustfully, contentedly, uncomplainingly. ... Spiritual Israel's ... petitions should be for spiritual gifts--including patient endurance and heart contentment.

Jacob lives another seventeen years in Egypt and then dies. With great ceremony he is transported from Egypt to the cave of Macpelah where Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, and Jacob's wife Leah were buried.

Just before Jacob dies he gives a special blessing to each of his sons. Joseph somehow anticipates he will do something special for his sons because he takes Ephraim and Manasseh with him (48:1). Jacob blesses these two sons and states that they are to be treated as though they were really his sons, not his grandsons. They become tribal heads in their own right along with the other sons. Thus when Canaan is divided up at a later time, Joseph is not considered a tribe but Ephraim and Manasseh are.

There is an obscure reference to this blessing in Hebrews:

Hebrews 11:21 By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.

At the end of Genesis 47 Jacob asks Joseph to swear that he will not bury him in Egypt. By faith he was sure his progeny would return to Canaan in fulfillment of God's promise to him. The Septuagint of Gen. 47:31 reads like this text: "And Israel bowed down on the head of his staff." That staff was about all he had when he passed over Jordan fleeing from the wrath of his brother after stealing Isaac's blessing; now near death he still has it and so much more. (He blesses Joseph's sons in the next chapter.)

The *Companion Bible* has a totally different explanation of this text: "By faith, Jacob, on his death bed, blessed the two sons of Joseph, basing that decision on the height of his (i.e., Joseph's staff)." Noting, when his sons gathered for their final blessings, that Joseph had the staff of the grand vizier of all Egypt, Jacob concluded that if God had so blessed this son, then he should act in harmony with that blessing by making him the firstborn of his children.

Let us learn from the experiences of Jacob so we can be more pleasing to God. God promised Jacob when he was most afraid that he would never leave him. And God has promised us exactly the same thing:

Hebrews 13:5,6 Be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, I will not fear what man shall do unto me.

Closing Hymn: #114 — I Love Thy Will

[First given in Los Angeles, November, 2004]

### *Companion Bible Chronology*

B.C.	Jacob's Age	
1836	0	Jacob and Esau are born. Isaac is 60.
1821	15	Abraham dies at age 175. Isaac is 75. (Heb. 11:9—Abraham dwells with Isaac and Jacob.)
?	?	Jacob "buys" the birthright from Esau with a dish of lentil stew.
1796	40	Esau marries two Hittite wives.
1759	77	Jacob steals Esau's blessing from Isaac, flees to Padon-Aram. (Esau suffers no real loss.)
1758	78	Jacob's servitude to Laban commences.
1752	84	Jacob marries Leah and Rachel.
1745	91	Joseph is born.
1742	94	Jacob bargains with Laban for cattle.
1739	97	Jacob flees from Padon-Aram.

1738	98	Jacob meets Esau. Gives him 550 animals.
1736	100	Settles in Shechem.
1732	104	Dinah is raped.
1731	105	Jacob settles in Bethel.
1728	108	Rachel dies when Benjamin is born.
1727	109	Joseph is sold at age 18. (His half-brothers are no older than 24.)
1726	110	Jacob joins Isaac at Hebron after a 33 year separation. Isaac will live ten more years.
1716	120	Isaac dies at age 180.
1706	130	Jacob moves to Egypt with his family. Benjamin is 22 and has ten sons (46:21).
1689	147	Jacob dies. Joseph is 56, Benjamin is 39.
1635		Joseph dies at age 110.

## *Lessons from the Book of Joel*

### Opening Hymn: #289 — The Glorious Day

In every car and tractor, in every tank and plane--oil. Behind almost every lighted glass tower, giant industrial plant or little workshop—oil. Behind fertilizers, drugs, chemicals, synthetic textiles and thousands of other products--oil. Few noted that the world's most advanced civilizations depended for this treasure on countries generally considered weak and disunited. Now all that has changed.

--*TIME* (Jan. 6, 1975, on King Faisal)

Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare war, stir up the mighty men. Let all the men of war draw near, let them come up. Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weak say, "I am a warrior."

—Joel 3:9,10 (RSV)

The words of Joel seem quite contemporary. The countries once considered weak are now the main buyers of implements of war. France, the Soviet Union, the United States—all vie for the favors of the oil-rich nations using the latest armaments as an attraction. And then there's India: they of all nations need plowshares and pruning hooks to provide food for their countless millions. But instead they explode a nuclear device in the misguided notion that defense against their enemies is their first priority. It is the day of the Lord and His great army. And that is the message of the prophet Joel!

### **Locusts**

The first chapter and into the second of Joel's prophecy concerns a plague of locusts.

Joel 1:2-4; 2:3-9 (RSV) Hear this, you aged men, give ear, all inhabitants of the land! Has such a thing happened in your days, or in the days of your fathers? Tell your children of it, and let your children tell their children and their children another generation. What the cutting locust left, the swarming locust has eaten. What the swarming locust left, the hopping locust has eaten, and what the hopping locust left, the destroying locust has eaten. (2:3) Fire devours before them, and behind them a flame burns. The land is like the garden of Eden before them, but after them a desolate wilderness, and nothing escapes them. Their appearance is like the appearance of horses, and like war horses they run. As with the rumbling of chariots, they leap on the tops of the mountains, like the crackling of a flame of fire devouring the stubble, like a powerful army drawn up for battle. Before them peoples are in anguish, all faces grow pale. Like warriors they charge, like soldiers they scale the wall. They march each on his way, they do not swerve from their paths. They do not jostle one another, each marches in his path; they burst through the weapons and are not halted. They leap upon the city, they run

upon the walls; they climb up into the houses, they enter through the windows like a thief.

Now the question: Are these literal locusts or is it symbolic of something else?

Commentators on Joel disagree among themselves. Some think it refers to a plague that came upon Israel at the time Joel wrote. Others think Joel is using locusts as an allegory for an enemy that would descend upon the people. I suspect both viewpoints are correct.

Joel starts out by saying, in effect, "You've seen this with your own eyes. It is so significant, it should be passed on from one generation to another." This tends to support the idea that the plague was literal, one of many punishments God permitted upon his disobedient people. But Joel uses this plague as symbolic of the great destruction that will be visited upon the earth in the great time of trouble:

Joel 2:11 The Lord utters his voice before his army, for his host is exceedingly great; he that executes his word is powerful. For the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; who can endure it?

John the Revelator uses the pictorial language of Joel when he describes what happens when the fifth angel sounds his trumpet:

Rev. 9:3,7,9 And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth and unto them was given power as the scorpions of the earth have power. And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle; and on their heads were as it were crowns like gold. ... And they had breastplates as it were breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle.

Now whether you believe the fifth angel sounded sometime in the past or is going to sound sometime in the future, I doubt very much whether you believe literal locusts are going to afflict the earth. No, locusts here properly symbolize a great destructive force. This is especially the case when we see that verse 4 says they were not to hurt grass, trees, or green things -- the very object of a literal locusts attentions. As we examine the message of Joel, we will see that he too is using locusts symbolically. Consider:

Joel 2:20 I will remove the northerner far from you and drive him into a parched and desolate land...

Locusts don't come from the north in middle eastern lands. They come from the south and southeast. But there are many places where the destructive force that comes against Israel in the great time of trouble is said to come from the "north":

Jer. 1:14,15 Then the Lord said unto me, Out of the north an evil shall break forth upon all the inhabitants of the land. For lo I will call all the families of the kingdoms of the north saith the Lord; and they shall come and they shall set everyone his throne at the entering of the gates of Jerusalem and against all the walls thereof round about and against all the cities of Judah.

Ezek. 38:14-16 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, a great company, and a mighty army: and thou shalt come up against my people Israel as a cloud to cover the land; it shall be in the latter days, and I will bring thee against my land...

Just to be certain that we get the point, Joel repeats his message using plain language, and not the symbolism of locusts:

Joel 3:1,2 For behold, in those days and at that time when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem, I will gather all the nations and bring them down to the valley of Jehoshaphat and I will enter into judgment with them there on account of my people and my heritage Israel, because they have scattered them among the nations and have divided up my land.

The word "Jehoshaphat" means "Jehovah judged." There is no other reference to the valley except in the book of Joel. But there are many other references to the great "Day of the Lord" and the battle of that time.

### **Day of the Lord**

Rev. 16:16-18 And he gather them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon. And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air ... and there were voices and thunders and lightnings and there was a great earthquake such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake and so great.

Zech. 12:9,11 And it shall come to pass in that day that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem. In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem in the valley of Megiddon.

This is where we get the expression "the battle of Armageddon." It is the great time of trouble that ends the Gospel age. Joel calls it the "Day of the Lord" and he uses that expression five times in the 73 verses of his book. John uses a similar expression in verse 14 (of Rev. 16) when he says "to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty."

This was a common theme in the Old Testament prophets. Nearly all of them talk about this period of time:

Amos 5:18 Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord! To what end is it for you?  
The day of the Lord is darkness and not light.

Zeph. 1:14,5 The great day of the Lord is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the Lord: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness.

When the disciples asked Jesus what sign to expect that the promised kingdom would be established, they got a rather long answer. A part of that answer included the sign of darkness and clouds of trouble:

Mark 13:24-26 But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars of heaven shall fall and the powers that are in heaven shall be shaken. And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory.

The Lord certainly must be present for it to be "The Day of the Lord." And that is exactly what Jesus is saying in these verses. Similar language is used by John in Revelation when the sixth seal is opened on the scroll:

Rev. 6:12,13,17 And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal and lo, there was a great earthquake and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. For the great day of his wrath is come and who shall be able to stand?

Just before these verses, we read that the souls of them who were slain for the word of God received white robes and were told to rest for a season. This marks a time similar to that in the 14th chapter of Revelation:

Rev. 14:13,15,18,19 And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours and their works do follow them. ... Thrust in thy sickle and reap, for the time is come for thee to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe. ... Thrust in thy sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe. And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God.

John is again using the same pictorial language as Joel to describe the events that close our age:

Joel 3:12-14 Let the nations bestir themselves and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit to judge all the nations round about. Put in the sickle for the harvest is ripe. Go in, tread, for the wine press is full. The vats overflow, for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision!

And it is these multitudes that constitute the Lord's great army.

Joel 2:25 I will restore to you the years which the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army which I sent among you.

Although Joel here says the locusts are the Lord's great army, we realize he is using this plague as an allegory for the multitudes caught up in the battle of Armeggedon. This is made clear in...

Joel 2:2,11 Like blackness there is spread upon the mountains a great and powerful people; their like has never been from of old nor will be again after them through the years of all generations. The Lord utters his voice before his army, for his host is exceedingly great...

It reminds us of the words of Jesus, again in referring to the end of this age:

Matt. 24:21 For then shall be great tribulation such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.

When these multitudes come up against Jerusalem, it is not with the idea of serving God. But it accomplishes His purposes, another illustration of how the wrath of man is used in the outworking of God's plan (Psa. 76:10).

### **Blessings of the Kingdom**

God's plan doesn't end with the destruction of that great day. In fact, it is just beginning. The united testimony of the prophets is that Israel will be restored to a condition of prosperity and blessings will flow to all the world of mankind in the kingdom arrangement. The Battle of Armeggedon humbles the world and does away with human institutions.

Jer. 33:7-9 (RSV) I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel and rebuild them as they were at first. I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me. And this city shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and a glory before all the nations of the earth who shall hear of all the good that I do for them; they shall fear and tremble because of all the good and all the prosperity I provide for it.

Joel also speaks of the blessings of the kingdom.

Joel 3:18 And in that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the stream beds of Judah shall flow with water; and a fountain shall come forth from the house of the Lord.

This pictorial language is picked up again by John in the last chapter of the Bible:

Rev. 22:1,2 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.



"To the Jew first, and also to the Gentile." (Rom. 1:16) This was the principle at the time of Jesus, a time when special blessings were available. We believe it will be the same principle in the kingdom: "To the Jew first, and also to all other nations."

Joel talks about the terrible punishments from the hand of the Lord. But he holds out the hope of escape:

Joel 2:32 And it shall come to pass that all who call upon the name of the Lord shall be delivered...

It is similar to the words of the prophet Zephaniah:

Zeph. 2:3 Seek ye the Lord, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the Lord's anger.

But these scriptures imply more than just a "last resort" call for help. The Pharisees were good at outward appearances when their hearts were far from God. Joel saw the same things in his time, and so he wrote:

Joel 2:12 Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.

As always, it is the true heart attitude that counts with God.

### **Peter at Pentecost**

When the holy spirit came upon the assembled disciples on the day of Pentecost, the people wondered at what was happening. But Peter explained that they were seeing the fulfillment of one of their scriptures. And he quotes five verses from Joel:

Acts 2:1,2,16-18 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. (vs. 16) But 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 of 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.

Many scriptures in the Old Testament have a two-fold fulfillment ... a partial fulfillment at the first advent of Jesus, and a larger fulfillment at our Lord's second advent. This prophecy from Joel is like that.

At Pentecost did God pour out His spirit on all flesh? Of course not. He did pour out His spirit on his servants and handmaidens, however. This was a partial fulfillment of Joel's prophecy and Peter rightly quoted it in support of the miracle they had just received. He goes on to urge repentance, setting the foundation in scripture:

Acts 2:21 And it shall come to pass that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved. (vs. 39) For the promise is unto you and to your children and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

Here Peter gives the first hint that the promise might not be exclusively applied to Jews. Joel and other prophets might not have completely understood that. They had a tendency to look at things strictly from the viewpoint of punishing Israel's enemies while Israel enjoyed God's blessings. And although this is true, God's love is wider than that.

Jesus, when he read from Isaiah 61 in the synagogue at Nazareth, also took a prophecy and showed how it applied to his time, while we understand there is a grander fulfillment in the future:

Luke 4:18,19 The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach an acceptable year of the Lord.

In a small way, one here and there, our Lord did heal and preach. But the grander fulfillment we know takes place in the kingdom when mankind is brought back from the prisonhouse of death, when their eyes will be opened to the truth, and the bruise of sin will be removed. The Isaiah quotation contains more than Jesus quoted:

Isa. 61:2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord and the day of vengeance of our God...

The "day of vengeance of our God" is the same as the "day of the Lord" we've been talking about in Joel. It wasn't the time to proclaim that in Jesus' day, so he didn't read it. But he did give a foretaste of the coming blessings of the kingdom. And the outpouring of the spirit on the disciples at Pentecost was the same thing.

It will be in the Millennial Age that God will pour out His spirit on all flesh. It will be the same spirit, received in the same way as the disciples, and coming from the same source. Dreams and visions were the channel of communication between God and His prophets of old. This symbolizes communication with all mankind in the kingdom, something they've never had before. Then will be fulfilled the "wish" of Moses:

Num. 11:29 And Moses said unto him, Enviest thou for my sake? Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his spirit upon them!

## Key Review Verses

Joel 1:1 The word of the Lord that came to Joel... *Joel's pen but God's words.*

Joel 2:1 Blow the trumpet in Zion, sound the alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble for the day of the Lord is coming, it is near.

Joel 2:12 Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me ... and rend your hearts and not your garments.

Joel 3:10 Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears; let the weak say, "I am a warrior."

Joel 3:14 Multitudes, multitudes, in the valley of decision!

Joel 2:26 You shall ... praise the name of the Lord your God who has dealt wondrously with you. And my people shall never again be put to shame.

Joel 2:28 And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh...

The Day of the Lord and His great army: Punishment, then blessing. This is the theme of the book of Joel. And we see the preparations on every side for this coming great battle. But afterwards, the prophesy of Isaiah will apply:

Isa. 2:4 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.

Closing Hymn: #282 -- Let The King of Glory In

*[First given in Los Angeles, January, 1975]*

## *The Book of Jude*

Opening Hymn: #71—"Guide Me"

Some of the epistles in the New Testament are called "general" epistles because they are written to no specific individual or church. They went to the church in general. The general epistles are James, Peter, 1 John, and Jude. Today we will consider the last of these in our Bible, the epistle of Jude.

### **Who was Jude?**

The name Jude is the Greek form for the Hebrew Judah. The Greek word appears 39 times and is translated Jude, Juda, Judah, and [75% of the time] as Judas.

Matt. 1:2 Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob; and Jacob begat Judas and his brethren.

It was a popular name among the Jews. Two of the 12 disciples of Jesus were named Judah/Judas. We know much about Judas Iscariot, and almost nothing about the other Judas. In fact we hear the other one speak only once:

John 14:22 Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?

According to both Matthew [13:55] and Mark, Jesus had brothers and sisters:

Mark 6:3 Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Judas, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us?

So which Jude/Judas wrote this epistle: (1) the little-known apostle Judas or (2) the Lord's brother? Scholars do not agree, though many pick the Lord's brother. They cite as evidence Jude 17 and 18:

Jude 17,18 Remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ, how that **they** told you ...

Jude does not say "we" and thus include himself in this group. His only self-identification is in verse 1 where he says he is the brother of James. Those who believe that for scripture to be inspired it must come from the pen of an apostle, pick the apostle Judas. (Of course a large fraction of the New Testament came from the pen of non-apostles Luke and Mark.)

It is even possible **BOTH** choices are correct! McClintock and Strong says that the majority of the early church writers thought Alphaeus was Joseph's brother and that he died without issue. So Joseph following the direction of the law [Deut. 25:5] raised up issue with his brother's name: James, Jude, and others. Because James was the eldest, he was designated "son of Alphaeus" because he was the heir. When the mother died, Joseph married Mary.

So who was Jude? You decide: 1) The little-known apostle Judas; 2) A brother of Jesus because his father was Joseph; 3) Both of the above; 4) None of the above.

## **Content**

This epistle covers the same subject matter as the second chapter of 2 Peter. Both contain a torrent of invective against false teachers who infiltrate the church and try to lead it astray. Images and examples tumble one after another. Jude [and Peter] feel strongly about this subject.

The denunciations are so passionate that we may be inclined to distance ourselves a bit from it. How could such things be? Actually it should have been no surprise. Jesus said this would happen:

Matt. 24:11,12 Many false prophets shall rise and shall deceive many. And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.

Acts 20:29 For I [Paul] know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

Jude 16 These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage.

One of the tests that come upon the Lord's people is to be confronted with obvious ungodliness that goes unpunished. We don't have the extreme examples cited by Jude in our fellowship, but we do see countless examples of unscrupulous false teachers who use the name of Christianity to lead others astray. Those with wonderful personalities find it easy to raise large sums of money to fund their own lavish life style. They preach a "feel good" gospel, a "blessings now" message. Centuries ago the Roman Church accepted the notion that the time for sacrifice was over and the time for reigning had arrived.

If you were Jude, how would make a convincing case that there would be a day of reckoning for such ungodliness? Jude cites historical precedent. He reaches back to the Old Testament and selects examples of the ungodly who eventually paid for their disobedience.

### **List #1: The Groups**

*Jude 5: Although the Lord saved many out of Egypt, he destroyed the unbelievers in the wilderness.*

The people had an obviously God-selected leader in Moses. They had seen the sea part for them, their Egyptian enemies perish when the sea covered them, and there was manna six days a week. Yet they seemed all too willing to listen to other leaders who preached a different message. Note how quickly their behavior changed when they thought Moses would not come back down off Mt. Sinai. They forced Aaron to make a golden calf, made

sacrifices to it, said it was the god that led them out of Egypt, and gave themselves over to singing and dancing in front of it. [See Exod. 32.]

*Jude 6: Angels who left their heavenly home are now restrained for a future judgment day.*

This is the next example of disobedient beings who were punished eventually. The Genesis account beginning in chapter 6 says that “sons of God” took wives of mankind. This wickedness went apparently unpunished until the flood swept all the disobedient away. Although we can not see the spirit plane with our natural eyes, we do see that since then these fallen angels can no longer materialize in human bodies. Their power is limited as Jesus showed on many occasions, and we believe that there will be a final judgment upon them. “Know ye not that we shall judge angels?” writes Paul in 1 Cor. 6:3.

*Jude 7: Those in Sodom and Gomorrah are an example of punishment by eternal fire.*

After their cover story on Evil, TIME magazine published a letter from a reader who said: “When the time comes that no one any longer believes in hell, what restraint will there be upon wickedness and evil?” This reader believes the “evil” committed by an all-powerful God in the everlasting torture of people will motivate us to not commit some evil of our own devising. Of course the “eternal fire” is not literal. The parallel chapter in 2 Peter says evil doers will be destroyed:

2 Pet. 2:6 [He turned] the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes . . . [vs. 12] But these shall utterly perish in their own corruption.

Fire did reduce the cities to ashes. The Greek word rendered “utterly perish” means destroy. It does not mean to live a life of agony in hell. We know that it does not even mean these people are everlastingly dead because Ezekiel prophesies about a future time when they will live again:

Ezek. 16:55 When thy sisters, Sodom and her daughters, shall return to their former estate then thou and thy daughters shall return to your former estate.

Clearly the lesson Jude expects us to draw from his examples of faithless Israelites, fallen angels, and the wicked Sodomites, is this: God did not leave the disobedient unpunished in the past and he certainly will not leave them unpunished in the future.

## **List #2: The Individuals**

In verse 11 Jude mentions three individuals as illustrative of the false teachers he has in mind: Cain, Balaam, and Korah. All three deliberately did **NOT** do what God instructed them to do.

Cain was told how to render an acceptable sacrifice. Instead jealousy drove him to murder his brother. When God punished him, he said: “My punishment is greater than I can bear.” (Gen. 4:13) God told Balaam he could not curse Israel. But Balaam was so eager to earn the biggest fee of his career, he conspired with the King of Moab to get the Israelites to bring God's curse on themselves by immoral conduct. That cost Balaam his

life. (Num. 31:8) Korah's rebellion is recounted in Numbers 16. He was a Levite who organized 250 princes to challenge the leadership of Moses. Because it was really rebellion against God and not Moses, the earth opened and swallowed Korah and all his followers. It is almost unbelievable that the very next day many Israelites murmured against Moses claiming that HE had killed "the people of the Lord." (Num. 16:41) God did not wait to deal with that mass rebellion. He immediately sent a plague and 14,700 people died. (vs. 49)

The lesson Jude draws is that false teachers among the flock will be similarly punished. Don't support them. Don't align yourselves with them. They and all their works will perish in God's due time.

### **The Body of Moses**

Jude 9 Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil, disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.

This is the only place in the Bible that describes a contention between the archangel and the devil about the "body of Moses." When did it take place? Here are two suggestions:

#### **#1--It occurred at the death of Moses.**

In the *Question Book* (806:top) Bro. Russell answers this question with words from an eminent [unnamed] authority: "The Lord Himself buried Moses, hiding the place of the sepulchre. The primary reason for this probably was to hinder the Israelites from carrying his corpse as a mummy, which in after time might have become a temptation to idolatry. The passage in Jude 9 . . . is a hint along this line that Satan desired to have the corpse to use it for the further misleading of the people, but that the Lord through Michael the Archangel prevented this and kept the burial place a secret."

#### **#2--It is referring to an experience described in Zechariah.**

Zech. 3:1-4 And he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist [attack or accuse] him. And the [angel of the] Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan . . . Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments . . . Take away the filthy garments . . . I will clothe thee with change of raiment.

The words "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan" are the words used in Jude. Perhaps it is this experience that Jude had in mind. However, in Zechariah the contention between Satan and the angel of the Lord concerns Joshua the high priest, not the "body of Moses."

Perhaps we should be reading "body of Moses" as a symbolic expression.

1 Cor. 12:27 Now ye are the **body of Christ**, and members in particular.

Of course we are not literally the body of Christ [*same Greek word as Jude 9*] but Christ is our head. We were baptized into Christ and became his body members. Likewise, the Israelites through a kind of baptism accepted Moses as their head:

1 Cor. 10:1,2 All our fathers were under the cloud and all passed through the sea, and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.

The Jude 9 reference may refer to the devil's constant attack on Israel (pictured by Joshua) and their simultaneous protection by Michael, the archangel of the Lord. Likewise, the devil contends for you and I who are a part of the antitypical high priest. But our filthy garments are removed and we are given a change of raiment. The Lord protects "his body" using the archangel and his mighty power.

### **Enoch's Prophecy**

We know very little about Enoch. Genesis 5 recounts the chronology from Adam to Noah. Enoch was born 622 years after the creation of Adam. He lived for 365 years and was the father of Methuselah, the one who lived longer than any other human being. We are told that Enoch "walked with God" and that "God took him." (Gen. 5:24) But it was Jude who recorded a prophecy of Enoch:

Jude 14,15 And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.

We do not know how Jude knew about this prophecy. He uses it as another proof that God will execute judgment upon the disobedient. Although it has universal application, I believe it also says something about the wickedness already in the world at the time Enoch lived. No other person in the Gen. 5 chronology is said to have any special relationship to God. But Enoch "walked with God." Enoch lived at about the half-way point between Eden and the flood. His prophecy about God's coming judgment upon the ungodly certainly had, as one application, a fulfillment when the flood ended the lives of all the disobedient.

### **The Conclusion of the Epistle**

After the passionate language of condemnation, Jude tells us what we must do if we are not to perish with those who are bringing destruction upon their heads. He mentions several things:

*#1—[vs. 20] Build yourselves up upon a strong foundation of faith.*

Faith is important, but it is not enough. In 2 Peter, chapter 1, Peter makes a list of what kind of building we are to do. In verse 5 he says we are to add seven things to our faith: fortitude, knowledge, self-control, patience, piety, philadelphia love, and agape love. Then in vs. 10 Peter says, "If ye do these things ye shall never fall." Peter doesn't say



exactly how we make this adding occur, but Jude says we ought to **pray** in the holy spirit.

#2—[vs. 21] *Keep yourselves in the love of God.*

The false teachers do not love God. They love power, wealth, sensual pleasure—almost anything except God. But if we faithfully contend for the “faith which was once delivered unto the saints,” we will remain in that love.

#3—[vs. 22] *“And of some have compassion. making a difference”*

This seems obscure. There appears to be a difference of opinion about what the Greek text says. I prefer the reading of the Jerusalem Bible: “When there are some who have doubts, reassure them.”

Of course we want to build ourselves up. Of course we want to keep ourselves in the love of God. But we do have a responsibility for our brethren. If we see doubts or fears in the hearts of any, we should reassure them and build them up.

#4—[vs. 23] *“And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire.”*

This is more than giving reassurance. It means doing everything we can to save a fellow Christian who has fallen into the “fire.” In the context of this book, Jude is probably thinking about falling under the influence of false teachers. But he recognizes that there is also a danger that in trying to help, we might be contaminated. The Jerusalem Bible makes this distinction very clear and gives a different thought than the King James:

Jude 22,23 [Jerusalem] When there are some who have doubts, reassure them. When there are some to be saved from the fire, pull them out. But there are others to whom you must be kind with great caution, keeping your distance even from outside clothing which is contaminated by vice.

Peter said that if we “do these things (build up all the graces of the spirit upon a foundation of faith) ye shall never fall.” Jude says [vs. 24] that if we follow his advice, we will be presented “faultless” before God. Of course we can't be faultless in the sense of being actually perfect in this life. But the Greek word does **NOT** mean that. It is a technical word in classical Greek designating the absence of anything amiss in a sacrifice or anything that would render it unworthy to be offered. That must be our goal as we look to the Lord for strength and guidance along this narrow way.

Brethren, the devil would like to dispute about your body, your will, your commitment. He has many techniques. Jude emphasizes one: false teachers.

Let us reflect on the lessons in this book. Let us concentrate on building ourselves up upon a foundation of faith through prayer, keeping ourselves in God's love by doing what is pleasing to him, and helping our brethren remain faithful even until the end.

Closing Hymn: #20—“Awake, My Soul”

## *The Law Covenant*

Opening Hymn: #17 — “Moses and the Lamb”

Galatians 3:17 (NIV) The law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise.

Let us look at this “law” that Paul says did “not set aside the covenant [nor] do away with the promise.” We want to examine some of the details associated with the giving of this law, look at why it was given, what were its objectives, and—most importantly—determine when this covenant will come to an end.

### **What Was the Law Covenant?**

When the children of Israel left the land of Egypt under the direction of Moses, they were a nation of slaves and had no experience governing themselves. The customs and practices of the Egyptians were all they knew. But no nation can exist for long without laws since soon there would be nothing but anarchy. So one of the first things God did for them was to give them a number of laws at Mount Sinai.

Deut. 4:13 And he declared unto you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, even ten commandments; and he wrote them upon two tables of stone.

The ten commandments epitomize the foundation principles of this law. How wonderful it would be if everyone today at least tried to live according to these principles. But the law consisted of more than these. The listing of the ten commandments at the beginning of Exodus chapter 20 is immediately followed by many other laws extending through the end of chapter 23. Moses collectively referred to these as “statutes and judgments.”

Deut. 4:8 And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?

Today governments make laws and people decide whether they will obey them or not. Much depends upon how the government enforces its laws. But at Sinai Moses did not bring back the “ten suggestions” from God. As God’s official representative or mediator, he brought the people a formal contract. God called it a covenant:

Exodus 19:5 Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my **covenant**, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people.

The nation readily agreed. They signed this contract and blood validated it:

Exodus 24:7,8 And [Moses] took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord hath made with you concerning all these words.

At this “signing ceremony” Israel agreed to do everything God asked of them. They bound themselves and their children after them to this covenant forever. Undoubtedly they were grateful to God for freeing them from Egyptian bondage and were willing to do anything in return. But they were also afraid because of the lightnings and thunderings. In Exodus 20:19 they asked Moses to speak to them because they were afraid they might die if God spoke to them; they were asking Moses to be their mediator.

What benefits did they expect to get out of this covenant; what was in it for them? Nothing is said about this at the time the law was given. But no matter how sure any Israelite might have been that he could do all these things perfectly, not one thought he would live forever if he actually did so. They expected if they kept their side of the bargain, God would take care of them as he had so far. They were right:

Deut. 28:1,2,5 If thou shalt hearken diligently unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to observe and to do all his commandments which I command thee this day, that the Lord thy God will set thee on high above all nations of the earth: and all these **blessings** shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God. [verse 5] Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store.

Deut. 29:9 Keep therefore the words of this covenant, and do them, that ye may prosper in all that ye do.

Some believe the law promised everlasting life to those who kept it but that no imperfect human being could keep it. Lev. 18:5 does say if a man keeps the Lord's statutes and judgments he shall live in them, but this verse does not say the man will live **forever** in them. Consider also Deut. 4:40.

Deut. 4:40 Thou shalt keep therefore [God's] statutes, and his commandments, which I [Moses] command thee this day, that it may go well with thee, and with thy children after thee, and **that thou mayest prolong thy days upon the earth**, which the Lord thy God giveth thee, for ever.

Moses says obedience will lead to long life, but he does not say it leads to everlasting life. The "earth" or promised land is what God gave to Israel forever. In Romans 7:10 Paul says the commandment (meaning the law) which was ordained to life, he found to be unto death. But in verse 9 he says he was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and he died. When he was "alive" without the law, he surely does not mean he was living forever because he did not have the law. The meaning of the word "life" is as we find it in the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are **Life**, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." The Law granted exactly these rights to the Jews to the degree that they kept it.

Unlike the promise made to Abraham so many years before Sinai, the Law covenant was not unilateral as far as God was concerned. The benefits were Israel's only if they kept their part of the bargain. The covenant also contained penalties for non-performance:

Deut. 28:15 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: [verse 17] Cursed shall be thy basket and thy store.

History confirms this has been their experience. When Israel obeyed God, even imperfectly, God blessed them. When they drifted into idolatry and away from him, God punished them in a variety of ways.

Why would God give them a law they could not keep? First of all, they could keep it to some extent. Whenever they did, they were blessed. They never had to keep it perfectly to get its benefits. God always blessed them when they served him with their whole heart. It was only

when they left him to worship the idols of their neighbors that they were punished because they were not even trying to keep their part of the covenant. There was another reason why God gave them the law:

Leviticus 20:24 But I have said unto you, Ye shall inherit their land, and I will give it unto you to possess it, a land that floweth with milk and honey: I am the Lord your God, which have **separated** you from other people.

God wanted his people to be different from the others. There were perfectly good reasons from a natural standpoint for circumcision, clean and unclean animals, and yes all ten of the commandments. But it was important that Israel see themselves as different from their neighbors. They belonged to God and their behavior would prove it.

To a large extent this covenant has preserved them as a people. They may have been scattered to the four corners of the earth after Titus destroyed the Jerusalem temple in 70 AD, but just as Daniel continued worshipping God in Babylon many Jews continued to follow their Jewish practices as strangers in strange lands. Today the Jew still stands apart. Jews see themselves as a covenant people with a unique relationship to God. The “double” spoken of by Isaiah is over and favor is returning to them:

Isaiah 40:2 Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

One period of 1845 years of what was generally favor began with the death of Jacob and it ended in 33 AD; a double or corresponding period of 1845 years of what was generally disfavor began to count at that time and it ended in 1878—the year Petah Tiqwa was established by the Jews in Israel.

There was one more reason—a most important reason—for giving the law covenant:

Galatians 3:23-29 [Phillips] Before the coming of faith we were all imprisoned under the power of the Law, with our only hope of deliverance the faith that was to be shown to us. Or, to change the metaphor, the Law was like a strict governess in charge of us until we went to the school of Christ and learned to be justified by faith in him. Once we had that faith we were completely free from the governess' authority. For now that you have faith in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God. All of you who were baptized “into” Christ have put on the family likeness of Christ. Gone is the distinction between Jew and Greek, slave and free man, male and female—you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, you are true descendants of Abraham, you are true heirs of his promise.

The Law had a work to do for a certain period of time, but for those who “went to the school of Christ and learned to be justified by faith in him,” they were no longer under the Law. In fact, they were the “true heirs of the promise,” the promise that was made to Abraham so many years before the Law was ever given.

### **When Will the Law Covenant End?**

What relationship does the New Covenant have to the Law Covenant? Answer: the New covenant is the covenant the Lord makes with Israel when their old Law Covenant ends:

Romans 11:25-27 Blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: for this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.

The New Covenant takes the place of the Law Covenant; it is in a sense an antitype to the typical Law Covenant. Thus it is important to know if the Law Covenant has ended because if it has not, then the New [Law] Covenant cannot be operational.

When does the Law Covenant end? When it was given, God did not say it was for a specific time after which it would be null and void. If it had ended at the cross as some believe, there would have been no reason to delay sending the gospel message to the Gentiles for 3½ years since there would no longer be any basis to favor the Jew. Clearly God still considered them as having a special relationship to him because there was a delay. Jesus himself said in Matthew 5:17 that he had not come to destroy the law, but to fulfil it. If the law arrangement really ended at the cross, Jesus did not speak the truth.

Time and time again, Paul describes unbelieving Israel as a nation still under the Law:

Rom. 3:30,31 Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.

1 Cor. 9:20 And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; **to them that are under the law**, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law;

Galatians 4:24,26 Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai [clearly the Law covenant], which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem **which now is, and is in bondage with her children.**

Galatians 5:2-4 If ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that **he is a debtor to do the whole law**. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. *[The law was in effect for the Jew without Christ.]*

Hebrews 8:13 In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old **is ready to vanish away** [it's not gone yet!].

The apostle Paul says Sarah and Hagar were types. Sarah was the wife of Abraham long before there was a Hagar. But Sarah was barren; Hagar as surrogate wife was an interim arrangement. Although it might look as though Hagar's seed would inherit the promises made to Abraham, that did not happen. Hagar and her son were put out into a wilderness condition. But notice: neither Hagar nor her son died. They continue to live. In fact, there is close communication between Isaac and Ishmael because when Abraham died, Ishmael is summoned and is present at the burial:

Genesis 25:9 And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah.

Likewise in the antitype: "Now **we**, brethren, as Isaac was, **are the children of promise**" (Gal. 4:28). That's because we are counted as children of the Abrahamic promise through his true wife Sarah. The Law Covenant is still in force over the unbelieving Jew just as Ishmael continued to live when the promises became Isaac's. In fact for a Jew there is only one way to

escape the Law Covenant: he must die. In Romans Paul makes this point by comparing it to the marriage covenant:

Rom. 7:1,2,4 (NIV) Do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to men who know the law—that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives? For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. [verse 4] So my brother, **you also died to the law** through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God.

Romans 10:4 For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness **to every one that believeth.**

Any Jew who in faith accepts Jesus Christ “dies” to the law. Few have done that. All other Jews remain under the law until they actually die. Then, in the resurrection, they will come back and be blessed under a different covenant, a new covenant arrangement:

Jeremiah 31:31-33 Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that 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 that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake ... I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

But this new covenant cannot be made with the house of Israel and the house of Judah until their old law covenant has ended.

### **Nailing It To His Cross**

Col. 2:14 Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross.

What do these words mean? In spite of the united testimony of the apostle Paul that the unbelieving Jew was still under the Law, many have read these words and said the Law must have ended at the cross. That is not what the apostle is saying.

First, let us consider the word “nailing.” We can’t explore the meaning of the Greek word in other texts because there aren’t any. The Greek word does not mean “cease.” If Paul wanted to say that, he would have used either of two Greek words that are so translated. This Greek word means “nail.” When Martin Luther nailed his “95 Theses” to the church door in Wittenburg in 1517, did he abolish them? No! He publicized them; he displayed them. There was nothing “nailed to the cross” except the man Christ Jesus. In his death on the cross Jesus drew attention to the law. He showed that he as a perfect man could keep it.

The keeping of the law did not give Jesus life any more than the law gave Adam life. Both Adam and Jesus were created perfect; both possessed everlasting life from the start. Although it was something both had, it was also something both could lose by disobedience. No one took Jesus’ life from him. He willingly sacrificed it (see John 10:18).

“All Jews who have not accepted Christ are still bound by every provision and regulations of their Law Covenant, and, as the apostle explains, they can get freed from it only by accepting Christ as the end of the Law—by believing.” (Vol. 6, page 379)

“[Question] Did not the Law Covenant end at the time of our Lord’s death? And if it was a type or a foreshadowing of the New Covenant, would not that be the time for the New Covenant to begin?

[Answer] Many make the mistake of supposing that the Law Covenant ended at the cross. On the contrary, the terms of that covenant are binding upon every Jew from the day in which the covenant was made to the present time. ... For any Jew to get free from the Law Covenant before the inauguration of the New Covenant in the times of restitution, he must die to the law.”

—R4504 [1 Nov. 1909]—short article reproduced on last page)

The Apostle Paul never taught the Jews that they were *free* from the Law—but, on the contrary, that the Law had dominion over each of them so long as he lived. He showed, however, that if a Jew accepted Christ, and became “*dead with him*,” it settled the claims of the Law Covenant upon such Jew, and made him God’s *freeman* in Christ. (Rom. 7:1-4)—Volume 6, p. 229

### What This Means To Us

Because God has opened our eyes, we know what the apostle meant when he said that the promises were made to Abraham and his seed ... “and to thy seed” which is Christ (Gal. 3:16).

Galatians 3:26,27,29 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. [verse 29] And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Romans 4:13-14 For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

Because of God’s grace, we are counted as “children of the promise.” “Sarah” is our mother as she was Isaac’s mother. It may have taken a long time before her “seed” materialized, but in the type she predated Hagar. We are not a product of the Law Covenant. And we are not a product of the antitypical New [Law] Covenant which comes into force when the [Old] Law Covenant ceases.

However, we can learn much from the experiences of Israel. Our covenant, like theirs, is not unilateral: there are conditions attached. The benefits that have been promised to us will be ours only if we remain faithful, if we do our part. As we see from Israel’s history, a good start is not enough. Keeping faithful to God is a life-long challenge and we dare not become complacent. That is the road to death.

Hebrews 10:38 Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.

If we are faithful even unto death, we will receive “the” crown of life, eternal life. As the bride of Christ, we will be associated with him as ministers of the New [Law] Covenant, a covenant that will bring everlasting life to Israel, and through Israel, to the entire world of mankind.

2 Cor. 3:5,6 (RSV) Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God, who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not in a written code but in the Spirit; for the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life.

May we never lose sight of what God has done for us. May we serve him faithfully all the days of our life so that in the future we may dwell in the house of the Lord forever (Psalm 23:6).

Closing Hymn: #54 — “Free from the law”

*[First given at the Phoenix Convention, December 2000]*



Related articles: R4320 [Jan. 17, 1909]—"The Law Covenant was annulled at the cross." Also:

THE ANTITYPE BEGINS WHERE THE TYPE ENDS—R4504 [Nov. 1, 1909]

Did not the Law Covenant end at the time of our Lord's death? And if it was a type or a foreshadowing of the New Covenant, would not that be the time for the New Covenant to begin? If the New Covenant will not be ratified until the last member of the Church of Christ has suffered with the Head, would not that imply a considerable interim between the fulfillment of the type and the coming of the antitype? And has it not been THE WATCH TOWER'S teaching that where the type ceases the antitype surely begins?

As we have already pointed out on previous occasions many make the mistake of supposing that the Law Covenant ended at the cross. On the contrary, the terms of that Covenant are binding upon every Jew from the day in which the Covenant was made to the present time--as St. Paul says, "The Law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth." (Rom. 7:1.) Every Jew to-day is under a death condemnation, by virtue of that Law which he is under, yet cannot keep. There are only two possible ways of his getting free from that bondage:

(1) With the end of this age the great High Priest will antitypically offer the blood of "the Lord's goat" "for the sins of all the people"; and this will include the sins of Israel. And then the blessed opportunities of the New Covenant will be opened to them, as God promised. (Jer. 31:31; Rom. 11:27-31.) Then their eyes will be opened and they will see out of their obscurity and gladly accept the Mediator of the New Covenant and begin at once to share that Covenant's blessings.

(2) For any Jew to get free from the Law Covenant before the inauguration of the New Covenant in the times of restitution, he must die to the Law. As St. Paul declares, "The Law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth." "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the Law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead." (Rom. 7:1,4.) This is in full accord with the Apostle's statement, "Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to every one that believeth"--to the extent of becoming a follower of Christ and consecrating his restitution rights in death, a living sacrifice, following the example of his Redeemer. (Rom. 10:4.) The present being the time appointed of the Father as the "acceptable year of the Lord" (Isa. 61:2), the "acceptable time" when God is willing to receive sacrifices (first the sacrifice of Jesus, and, subsequently, the sacrificing of those justified by his blood, his followers, who present their bodies (Rom. 12:1), the Jews have as good an opportunity of thus entering into joint-heirship with Christ, the Spiritual Seed of Abraham, as have the Gentiles. And they have no better opportunity, because there is no other name and no other manner now open to any to obtain a share in the "high calling" to the divine nature, glory and honor.

St. Paul, in writing to the Galatians, warning them against coming under the domination of the Law, does not at all intimate that the Law Covenant had passed away or become dead. On the contrary, he testified that if any would be circumcised they would become "a debtor to do the whole law." (Gal. 5:3.) In the Epistle of Hebrews St. Paul mentions the fact that the New Covenant was promised and that the very intimation of the word new signified that the Law Covenant had become old, and hence was "ready to vanish away" and lose its force entirely. But he did not say that it had passed away. His plain teaching was that those who by faith accepted the Lord Jesus and became dead with him by baptism into his death were thus made "free from the Law" and were thereafter "not under the Law [Covenant] but under the Grace [Covenant--the Abrahamic Covenant.]"-- Gal. 5:18.

One Scripture more requires to be mentioned on this line: "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was contrary to us (Hebrews), and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross." (Col. 2:14.) This signifies, not that the Law Covenant was abrogated or done away, but that, so far as the Jews who had accepted Christ were concerned, the demands of all of the Law's ordinances were fully met for them by the Lord Jesus when he was nailed to the cross.

Another evidence that the Law Covenant did not cease when Jesus died, and has not yet ceased, is furnished us in the type of Hagar and her son Ishmael. The Apostle tells us that Hagar allegorically represented the Law Covenant and that Ishmael symbolically represented fleshly Israel, the children of that Covenant. He cites the fact that when the heir, Isaac, was born, the son of the Sarah Covenant, God said to Abraham, "Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the free woman." (Gal. 4:30.) This signifies that the Law Covenant and its Jewish children were to be outcast from Divine favor for a time. If Hagar had died at that time, the teaching of the type would have been that the Law Covenant ceased then to exist. But Hagar continued to live, and so the Law Covenant was continued, and still has power over every Jew as long as he liveth. If we trace the type further we find that subsequently Hagar returned and was subject to her mistress, and Ishmael, who represented the Israelites, received later a blessing from Abraham, who represented God.

So then, the Law Covenant did not pass away when our Lord Jesus died, nor when he arose from the dead the antitype of Isaac. Consequently the antitypical New Covenant was not ushered in at that time. Nevertheless, as we have heretofore pointed out, when our Lord presented himself in baptism, saying, "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God" (Heb. 10:7), he set aside the first (the typical) sacrifice that he might establish the second (the antitypical) sacrifice. The three and a half years of his own sacrificial ministry were typified in the killing of the bullock of the day of atonement. Immediately on his ascension, applying his blood on our behalf for our reconciliation to the Father that we might become his joint-sacrificers, he at once began the secondary part of the Day of Atonement sacrifices--the killing of "the Lord's goat" taken "from the people" and whose blood would subsequently be applied "for all the people."

This sacrificing of the Church, in one sense, was done by the great High Priest on the Day of Pentecost. But it has been a progressive work, and all of the sacrifice is not yet accomplished, and will not be until the last member of the Body shall have gone into sacrificial death, in the Redeemer's footsteps. Thus we see that the setting aside of the type and the establishing of the antitype required a long period. And this Atonement Day matter, while all-important, was by no means the only typical feature of the Law Covenant. Did it not foreshadow the coming out of the High Priest in garments of glory and beauty to bless the people? And is not this feature of the Law still unfulfilled? And can it pass away before this fulfillment? We hold that it cannot, and that the instant of its passing away will be the instant in which the New Covenant will come into force with the same people--Israel.

## *The Rich Man and Lazarus*

Opening Hymn: #111 --My Redeemer Lives

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus is not a favorite of Bible Students. It comes closer to supporting the idea of hell fire than almost anything else in the scriptures. When we try to explain it, we may find we're a little unsure of ourselves.

For a long time my favorite explanation came from a commentator whose thought is contained in a footnote in the Diaglott. He notes that it is not directly said that Jesus did use the parable and finds that it is abruptly introduced into the narrative. Another Diaglott footnote says that the Jews have a parable much to the same purpose as this one. I used to like the idea of dismissing the parable by saying it probably was never said by Jesus at all, but now I've changed my mind.

Matt. 13:34 All these things spake Jesus unto the multitude in parables and without a parable spake he not unto them.

Some have pointed out that the parable we're considering in the 16th chapter of Luke is not called a parable. That's true. But neither are the parables that preceded it. Let's take a look at the context of this controversial lesson.

Luke 15:1,2 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 eateth with them.

This was a mixed multitude. So Jesus started out by using the parable of the lost sheep (15:3-7). This one is definitely called a parable. Then he spoke of the lost coin (vs. 8-10) and the prodigal son (vs. 11-32). Neither are called parables.

Let's consider the parable of the prodigal son for just a moment. We have an elder son who stays in his "Father's house" and who despises anything the Father might do for the younger brother. Clearly this was a rebuke to the scribes and Pharisees who objected to any association with "publicans and sinners."

The opening verses of Luke 16 (vs. 1-13) contains the parable of the unjust steward. This is also not called a parable, but it is commonly accepted as one. Note that it starts with the words "a certain rich man", the same words which start the parable we're about to consider. One of the main lessons of the parable of the unjust steward is in...

Luke 16:8 And the lord commended the unjust steward because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than *[those who consider themselves to be]* the children of light.

What had the unjust steward done that was so wise? He reduced the debt owed by others so that he would have an easier time when his circumstances changed. What about the scribes and Pharisees? Did they help the people with their burdens?

Luke 11:46 And he said, Woe unto you also, ye lawyers! for ye lade men with burdens grievous to be borne and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers.

Those who are rich and powerful all seem to have one characteristic in common: they want to keep what they've got. The message of Jesus was not to their liking. If they associated with the poor of Israel, why who knows? Before long, they might be poor also and their power would be gone. Consider an experience shortly after these chapters:

Luke 18:18,22 And a certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me. And when he heard this, he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich.

Now it was necessary for the scribes and Pharisees to find a way around the regulations in the books of Moses, for they were expressly told to care for those less fortunate among them:

Deut. 24:14,17 Thou shalt not oppress an hired servant that is poor and needy whether he be of thy brethren or of thy strangers that are in thy land within thy gates. Thou shalt not pervert the judgment of the stranger nor of the fatherless, nor take a widow's raiment to pledge.

Yet one of the criticisms Jesus directed at the Pharisees was that they "devoured widows' houses" (Luke 20:47).

These teachers of the people developed their own traditions to handle such difficulties. It is said that they taught the people that suffering was permitted by God to develop them. If they were rightly exercised by their experiences, they would be welcomed into the after life with honor. The *Companion Bible* states that at death the Pharisees would say, "This day he sits in Abraham's bosom." But since God was directing the experiences, the Pharisees claimed it would be improper for them to do anything to relieve the suffering because that would be interfering with God. Jesus rightly condemned their traditions:

Mark 7:9 And he said unto them, Full well ye reject the commandment of God that ye may keep your own tradition.

So this was the background of what was happening with the leadership of Israel. They were rich and intended to stay as rich as they could. They had convinced the poor that they should not complain because in the next life they would have it good. And most of the poor believed what they were told. We read of no uprising of the people against those in power. They seem to accept their lot.

### **The Parable Itself**

We're now ready for the parable itself. Verses 16-18 are out of place, and are better placed at the end of the chapter. Let's start at Luke 16, verse 14 and skip 16-18.

Luke 16:14,15,19-31 (Phillips) Now the Pharisees, who were very fond of money, heard all this with a sneer. But he said to them, "You are the people who advertise your goodness before men, but God knows your hearts. Remember, there are things men consider perfectly splendid which are detestable in the sight of God! There was once a rich man who used to dress in purple and fine linen and lead a life of daily luxury. And there was a poor man called Lazarus who was put down at his gate. He was covered with sores. He used to long to be fed with the scraps from the rich man's table. Yes, and the dogs used to come and lick his sores. Well, it happened that the poor man died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried....

Let's stop for a moment. So far there is nothing here that conflicts with the teachings of the Pharisees. The poor man was expected to do the best he can because God is directing his experiences. When he dies the Pharisees would say, "This day he sits in Abraham's bosom." But what's supposed to happen to someone who is not suffering in this life? Suppose you're rich and favored like a Pharisee? What kind of life are you supposed to have in the next life? The Pharisees never talked about that, so Jesus takes their own doctrine and shows the only alternative that could possibly exist. And notice that Jesus himself does not do the preaching; he puts his own words into the mouth of Abraham!

(starting at verse 22) The rich man also died and was buried. And from among the dead he looked up and saw Abraham a long way away, and Lazarus in his arms. 'Father Abraham!' he cried out, 'please pity me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in agony in these flames.' But Abraham replied, 'Remember, my son, that you used to have the good things in your lifetime, while Lazarus suffered the bad. Now he is being comforted here, while you are in agony. And besides this, a great chasm has been set between you and us, so that those who want to go to you from this side cannot do so, and people cannot come to us from your side.' At this he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house for I have five brothers. He could warn them about all this and prevent their coming to this place of torture.' But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets: they can listen to them.' 'Ah no, father Abraham,' he said, 'if only someone were to go to them from the dead, they would change completely.' But Abraham told him, 'If they will not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they would not be convinced even if somebody were to rise from the dead.'

There's lots of interesting things here

**THE RICH MAN:** He has no name. His sin is not that he's rich but that he's indifferent to the needs of those around him. Lazarus wants to be fed with the table scraps, but there is nothing to show that he got any.

**LAZARUS:** This is the only parable where Jesus used a name. Lazarus means "God is my help" which is exactly the way the Pharisees taught it. "God is your help,

not us!” There is another reason for this name, but that will have to wait for a moment or two.

ABRAHAM’S BOSOM: To the Pharisees, this was the special person above all others:

Matt. 3:9 And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father...

John 8:32,33 Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free. They answered him, We be Abraham’s seed, and were never in bondage to any man: how sayest thou, Ye shall be made free?

It’s important to point out that Abraham is not in heaven. Abraham is simply an illustration of what we might call “bliss” because that’s what the Pharisees taught.

John 3:13 No man hath ascended up to heaven but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man.

HELL:(vs. 23) The Greek word is *hades*, the place of the dead. The picture is not pretty. Here’s where a Pharisee might start to feel uncomfortable. If the poor in this life are to be rewarded in the next life, it follows that the rich in this life must be punished in the next. Of course the Pharisees never talked about this. It was the Pharisees that set up the “great chasm” between themselves and the sinners. And there was no contact across this abyss. There’s only one other place outside of this parable where the Greek word rendered “torment” (vs. 23) is used:

Matt. 4:24 And they brought unto him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments.

The absurdity of the situation is shown when the rich man asks merely for the touch of a wet finger on his tongue. Clearly if one is going to get one wish, perhaps one might request a glass of water or even to get out of that unfavorable state. The contrast, of course, is with the crumbs from the rich man’s table.

FIVE BRETHREN: The rich man thinks about his brothers and he’s told they have “Moses and the prophets.” And who did this include? I believe it was the various leadership groups within Israel: Sadducees, doctors of the law, scribes, lawyers, and the like. These were the people who always tried to tempt him by asking for some supernatural “sign”:

Matt. 12:38 Then certain of the scribes and of the Pharisees answered, saying, Master, we would see a sign from thee.

So how did they react when they received signs?

John 5:8,16 Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk ... And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus and sought to slay him because he had done these things on the sabbath day.

Notice that they did **not** believe on him because of the miracle. All they wanted was an excuse to find fault.

John 9:32-34 Since the world began was it not heard that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind. If this man were not of God he could do nothing. They answered and said unto him, Thou wast altogether born in sins and dost thou teach us? And they cast him out. (vs. 28) Thou art his disciple but we are Moses' disciples.

Yes, they had Moses and the prophets but they could not acknowledge what was happening before their eyes. There was absolutely no sign they would ever accept, even if one should rise from the dead!

### **Lazarus of Bethany**

The events of Luke 17 take place, then at the end of chapter 18 Jesus says he's on his way to Jerusalem where he will be put to death. So he know he spoke about the rich man and Lazarus before the events in John chapter 11 take place. Those events are most important in this study:

John 11:43-46 And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus come forth. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave clothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go. Then many of the Jews which came to Mary and had seen the things which Jesus did believed on him. But some of them went their ways to the Pharisees and told them what things Jesus had done.

How do you suppose the Pharisees reacted? Surely this would be the most conclusive "sign" they could ever want. Some of these Pharisees might even have been in the audience when Jesus gave his parable about a poor beggar named Lazarus. Some may have heard that the "five brethren" would never believe anything even if one rose from the dead. And amazingly, here is someone named Lazarus who has returned from the land of the dead. Surely they will believe!

John 12:10,11 But the chief priests consulted that they might put Lazarus also to death because that by reason of him many of the Jews went away and believed on Jesus.

There is no way the chief priests are ever going to believe on Jesus. It really doesn't make any difference what he does.

Another application of this same lesson may be applied to Jesus himself.

Matt. 27:41,42 Likewise also the chief priests mocking him with the scribes and the elders said, He saved others, himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross and we will believe him.

He did precisely that when he rose from the dead three days later. And what reaction did this have?

Matt. 28:11-13 Now when they were going behold some of the watch came into the city and showed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. And when they were assembled with the elders and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night and stole him away while we slept.

They blinded themselves. We surely can understand why Jesus reserved some of his strongest words of condemnation for them:

Matt. 23:33 (Rotherham) Serpents! broods of vipers! how should ye flee from the judgment of *gehenna*?

*Gehenna* is a picture of second death from which there is no resurrection. And it was a place of fire and destruction. Thus the rich man in the parable is shown as in *gehenna* [even though *hades* is the word used in the text].

I believe the Pharisees understood it was **them** he was referring to. They hated him all the more because of it.

### What About Today?

Notice how James puts things into perspective:

James 2:19 Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe and tremble.

...and they remain devils! The scribes and Pharisees said they believed in Moses and in Abraham. But they certainly didn't **do** anything to put those beliefs into practice.

James 2:14-17 What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked and destitute of daily food and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

Supernatural signs may intrigue, terrify, or impress the mind. But they are soon forgotten. When we see the Lord's hand in our lives, we must make our commitment and follow in the footsteps of the master. We can't continue to go about our business as though nothing had happened. Nor can we say after a few years that it was all a mistake.

Heb. 10:35-39 (Phillips) Don't throw away your trust now--it carries with it a rich reward in the world to come. Patient endurance is what you need if, after doing God's will, you are to receive what he has promised. For yet a little while, He that cometh shall come, and shall not tarry. But my righteous one shall live by faith; and if he shrink back, my soul hath no pleasure in him. Surely we are not going

to be men who cower back and are lost, but men who maintain their faith until the salvation of their souls is complete!

Faith is so important the scriptures show that our relationship with God can't even begin without it. Buried within that great "faith chapter" of Hebrews 11 we read:

Heb. 11:6 But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

This belief in God and that it makes a difference whether or not we serve him can only be considered a matter of faith. Most of the people of the world have no interest in God at all. It's just like the days before the flood: they eat, drink, marry and give in marriage. But like Noah, we should remain within our ark of faith.

About the only thing the Pharisees had faith in was in themselves. They believed that all that mattered was the outward appearance and to them that looked good. Jesus taught otherwise:

Luke 12:15 A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.

Perhaps we do well to remind ourselves that the outward prosperity we have been given means nothing in the sight of God. The question is, How do we appear when our hearts are examined?

Near the end of the 10th chapter of Luke, our Lord gave that powerful parable of the Good Samaritan. The Samaritan drew no artificial barriers between himself and someone in need. The same could not be said for the priest and the Levite--they thought they had more important things to do than worry about someone who they didn't even know. Like the Pharisees they may have thought that God had let the poor traveler fall into the experience in the first place, let God get him out of it. But that was not the point of the parable. The whole thing started with the man who asked Jesus, What must I do to inherit eternal life? After the parable, Jesus asks the questioner:

Luke 10:36,37 (New English) Which of these three [the priest, Levite, or the Samaritan] do you think was neighbor to the man who fell into the hand of the robbers? He answered, "The one who showed him kindness." Jesus said, "Go and do as he did."

The rich man had no feelings for Lazarus at his gate. He loved the things that he had and lived as though there would never be a day of reckoning. That was a mistake for the Pharisees who heard these words, and it would be a mistake for us today.

2 Peter 1:10,11 (Weymouth) Brethren, be all the more in earnest to make certain of your calling and election; for, so long as you practice these things, you will never stumble. And so a triumphant admission into the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ shall be accorded to you.



May we all maintain our faith steadfast unto the end!

Closing Hymn: #198—"More Likeness to Thee"

*[First given in Riverside/Upland, December 1977]*

## *The Levites*

Opening Hymn: #275 — “Sweet is the Work”

Numbers 8:18 And I have taken the Levites for all the firstborn of the children of Israel.

When we hear about the Levites, we think about the Tabernacle and the special status this tribe had within the nation. What made them so special? To answer that question we go back to the time when Moses was communing with God in mount Sinai. Because he had been away so long, the people became restless and pressured Aaron to make them a god they could see; the golden calf was the result. God in his displeasure sent Moses down from the mount to deal with the rebellion. Astounded with what he saw, Moses issued this call: “Who is on the Lord’s side? let him come unto me. And all the sons of **Levi** gathered themselves together unto him” (Exodus 32:26). As the “Lord’s army” they went through the nation slaying 3,000 of the worst idolaters.

We don’t know whether they stepped forward because they were truly “on the Lord’s side” or because they thought their kinsman Moses was vulnerable and needed all the help he could get. Certainly they did not flinch when ordered to slay the disobedient among them.

The father of the tribe, Levi himself, was involved in another incident of mass execution, but it wasn’t because of a command from God. In Genesis 34 we read about Dinah, a daughter of Jacob and Leah. Shechem, a local prince in the area, fell so madly in love with her that he said he’d do anything to get her as his wife. He asks his father to talk to Jacob, Dinah’s father, and arrange the marriage. Shechem and his father are told that it can happen only on one condition: he and all the males of the city must be circumcised. They all readily agree and the surgical operation takes place on them all at the same time. Little does Shechem know that this will cause his death:

Genesis 34:25,26 And it came to pass on the third day, when they were sore, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and **Levi**, Dinah's brothers, took each man his sword, and came upon the city boldly, and slew all the males. And they slew Hamor and Shechem his son with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem's house, and went out.

Simeon and Levi were sons of Leah and therefore full brothers of Dinah. They had plotted this treachery from the start. They had no intention of allowing their sister to marry an uncircumcised foreigner. But rather than say so directly, they deceitfully murdered all the men of the city when they were defenseless. When Jacob learns what they’ve done, he says: “You have troubled me to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites” (Genesis 34:30).

Later in Genesis when Jacob prophesied about the future of each of his sons, he said, “Simeon and **Levi** are brothers; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations. O my

soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their selfwill they digged down a wall. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel” (Genesis 49:5-7).

God did not select Israel to be his special people because they were so good. The opposite was true. “The Lord thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou art a stiffnecked people” (Deuteronomy 9:6). Notice that the family of Levi was not selected because it was so wonderful.

Here is what one commentator said about this: “Such was Levi by nature and by practice—self-willed, fierce, and cruel. How remarkable that such an one should be singled out and brought into a place of such high and holy privilege! Surely, we may say, it was grace from first to last. It is the way of grace to take up the worst cases. It stoops to the lowest depths and gathers up its brightest trophies from thence. And, oh, what a marvelous contrast between Levi’s position by nature and his position by grace! between the instruments of cruelty and the vessels of the sanctuary!” (C.H.M., *Notes on Numbers*, ppg. 49, 51.)

Here is a good lesson for ourselves. Some draw back from consecrating because they say they are not “good enough.” Indeed they are not, nor is any fallen human being “good enough” for the Lord. We are no more qualified for God’s service than was Levi. Characteristics of unrighteousness and even cruelty undoubtedly lurk within us all. Such evil traits would corrupt us were it not for the grace of God that has been so lavishly bestowed upon us.

### **The Firstborns**

Although the first-born of Israel did not die the night the avenging angel went through the land of Egypt, God still considered them all to be his special possession. But instead of taking all the first-borns from all the tribes, he exchanged them for the entire tribe of Levi. Levi was the smallest tribe. It had exactly 22,000 males who were at least one month old. There were 22,273 first-born males in all the tribes. The formula of substitution required that five shekels for each of the 273 “unredeemed” be paid (see Numbers 3:42-47). From that time forward this became the standard redemption price for every subsequent first-born that came into a family (Numbers 18:16).

The males of the tribe of Levi did the menial work associated with transport of the tabernacle whenever the cloud covering it moved from one place to another. According to Numbers chapter 4, they served from the age of 30 to 50 as we read: “From fifty years old the Levite retires from the labour of the service, and shall serve no more; but he shall minister with his brethren in the tent of meeting, and keep the charge” (Numbers 8:25,26). Here is an interesting observation from another commentator about this age requirement: “Three different thoughts come before the mind in this connection. **First**, it seems to indicate that Levitical service is to be marked by full competence, and that no feature of decline or decrepitude are to appear in it. It suggests the maintenance of a

high standard of efficiency, in a spiritual sense, as being the only thing suitable in the service of God. **Second**, it conveys an impression of a time limit to active service. We should labor in the sense of this all the time. Even the Lord said, I must work the works of him that has sent me while it is day. The night is coming when no man can work. (John 9:4) Each of us has his 'day' of service; it will soon be over; how important to fill it up rightly! The Levite had the sense all the time that he had a measured period in which to serve, and that the time was coming when it would close . . . Our allotted period of service here in the tent of meeting will soon be over, and we shall never have another opportunity for that service. . . . But a **third** thought seems to be also suggested in this Scripture: namely, that when arduous labor is no longer permitted to the Levite, he retains an honorable place in the ministry with his brethren, and keeps the charge. He is not degraded but rather dignified . . . there comes a time when strenuous toil is no longer possible; it has to be left to younger servants. But how precious is the grace that still permits an aged, and perhaps invalid, Levite--brother or sister--to 'minister with his brethren in the tent of meeting, and keep the charge.'—Coates, *An Outline of Numbers*, p. 110.

Although a man had to be at least 30 years old to have an active part in the service of the Tabernacle, in fact the Levites were inducted into service when they turned 25. We read: "This is it that belongeth unto the Levites: from 25 years old and upward they shall go in to wait upon the service of the tabernacle of the congregation" (Numbers 8:24). However, they could not carry the tabernacle and its furniture until they were 30. Quoting again from Coates: "They had, if we may so say, to serve a five years' apprenticeship in relation to holy things before they were qualified to render the service of which [Numbers] chapter 4 speaks. We must not suppose that a desire or readiness to serve on our part will give spiritual competency. This must be divinely given, and it will be normally in keeping with the spiritual maturity of the servant. A babe in Christ might be fresh in his affections, and fervent in spirit, but something more than this is needed for service of a high order spiritually. The more spiritual any service is, the more does it require spiritual maturity in the one who renders it."—Coates, *An Outline of Numbers*, p. 32.

### **No Inheritance in the Land**

Because they were considered as the Lord's possession, the Levites received 48 cities scattered throughout Canaan but no actual territory when the land was divided up (Numbers 35:7). In fact they were considered to be so devoted to the Lord that when Moses numbered the Israelites to determine how many could go forth to war (Numbers 1:3), the Levites were explicitly excluded (see verse 47).

"[The Levites] were consecrated to the priestly office, which in all countries has been exempted customarily, and in Israel by the express authority of God, from military service. The custody of the things devoted to Divine service was assigned to them so exclusively, that 'no stranger'--i. e., no person, not even an Israelite of any other tribe, was allowed, under penalty of death, to approach these, and hence they encamped

around the tabernacle, that there should be no manifestation of Divine displeasure among the people.”—Jamieson, Faussett & Brown, Commentary on Numbers 1:47-54.

The Levites were excused from military service. But that’s not all. I believe they also escaped the death penalty which fell on Israel after the people agreed with the ten spies who said they could never conquer the land. In Numbers 13 Moses selects 12 representatives and sends them on a spying expedition. Upon their return, ten say they can’t go in because the people are too strong; Joshua and Caleb say, with God’s help, they can. The people agree with the ten and want to stone Joshua and Caleb. For this gross violation of faith and trust in God, a terrible judgment falls:

Numbers 14:29,30 Your carcasses 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, doubtless ye shall not come into the land, concerning which I sware to make you dwell therein, save Caleb the son of Jephunneh, and Joshua the son of Nun.

If you look carefully at the listing of the 12 spies, the tribe of Levi was not represented. Each spy is named in Numbers 13:4-15 and Ephraim and Manasseh, Joseph’s two sons, plus Jacob’s other ten sons **but not Levi** make the number 12. Levi stands apart from what happens. Eleazar and Ithamar, sons of Aaron, had to have been at least 30 years old to “minister in the priest's office in the sight of Aaron their father” (Numbers 3:4). Since their brothers Nadab and Abihu died when they offered strange fire before the Lord, they began their service at the very beginning of the wilderness experience. Eleazar succeeded his father in the priesthood and worked with Joshua after the nation entered Caanan. So Eleazar, like Joshua, Caleb and probably a great many other older Levites, did not die during the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. The Levites had not participated in the spying, in the evil report, and I believe they were also exempt from the judgment of death on those 20 years old and older.

Six Levitical cities had a special function: “And among the cities which ye shall give unto the Levites there shall be six cities for refuge” (Numbers 35:6). “And they appointed [as cities of refuge] Kedesh . . . Shechem . . . and Kirjatharba . . . And on the other side Jordan by Jericho eastward, they assigned Bezer . . . Ramoth . . . and Golan” (Joshua 20:7,8). By selecting Levitical cities for the purpose of refuge, God arranged that all tribal prejudice or bias would be eliminated when someone being pursued should enter the city and ask for asylum. This is the way it worked:

If anyone should accidentally be responsible for the death of another, he was liable to being killed himself by a family member. To save his life he would flee to a city of refuge and ask for protection from those who might kill him. If the authorities hearing the circumstances of the case agreed it was accidental, the person could safely dwell in the city of refuge. In a sense it was a kind of house arrest because if he strayed from the city, he lost the protection it gave him. However, when the high priest died, those in the cities of refuge were emancipated. They could go home and be no longer in danger of death.

These cities of refuge seem to picture what happens to the sinner condemned by divine justice. Where can we flee? Psalms 46:1 reads, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” We “have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us” (Hebrews 6:18). Brother Russell writes:

“From the moment, therefore, that we recognize that we are sinners--that we could not stand approved in the divine presence-- from that moment we realize that the avenger, Justice, is upon our trail, and that it is only a question of time when we will be overtaken and destroyed unless we reach some place of refuge. . . . Christ is the only place of refuge, and to him we have to flee. . . . If we leave the city of refuge, if we abandon our trust in the precious blood which cleanseth us from all sin, we become liable again to the demands of Justice and that without mercy. Divine justice is represented in the avenger, as divine mercy is represented in the city of refuge, and he who would leave the city of refuge necessarily falls into the hands of Justice. . . . We must thus abide ‘until the death of the high priest.’ . . . Soon the entire high priest, its every member, will have died. Then the new dispensation will be ushered in and no longer will we be obliged to own our own imperfection and the need of a covering before justice; from thenceforth having been made perfect by a share in the First Resurrection, having been made like our Lord and Master, we shall be presented before the Father blameless, unreprouvable, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, without any vengeance against us on the part of divine justice. The entire arrangement is of God--Justice is the avenger of sin, and Christ is the refuge and deliverance.”—*Reprints*, p. 3093.

### **Typical Significance of the Tribe of Levi**

The tribe of Levi consisted of two groups: a small number of priests and underpriests, and a great number of non-priests. Only the priests saw the glory and beauty of the inner chambers of the Tabernacle. In fact the priests had to first cover all the articles of furniture before the Kohathite Levites carried them from one place to another (Numbers 4:5-15). Yet both priests and ordinary Levites were treated the same in one respect: none of them received land. Paul writes, “These things occurred to [Israel] typically, and were written for our admonition on whom the ends of the ages have come” (1 Corinthians 10:11, *Diaglott*). If these things happened to them as types, what then might this tribe and its service typify?

“In order to have a full and complete picture of what is typified by the tribe of Levi, we must remember how they came into their position of either being priests or of serving the priests. They were all a part of Israel, but God separated them unto himself; he gave them no inheritance in the land. All their rights were withheld from them and they were made dependent upon the other tribes. Why was this? The answer is that they were taken by the Lord as instead of the ‘firstborn’ of all the tribes of Israel. Thus the tribe of Levi became the typical

‘church of the first-born.’ Then out of this typical ‘church of the first-born’ the Lord selected a priestly family, Aaron and his sons, who typified the royal priesthood, Christ and his church. All of the tribe of Levi represented the church of the first-born and the family of Aaron represented the ‘very elect.’”—*Reprints*, p. 4745.

Paul writes, “To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven” (Hebrews 12:23). The Levites became the first-born in typical Israel because they were substituted for the literal first-borns. We are told in Hebrews they are “written in heaven.” And that is exactly what we should expect since in the type they did not inherit the land. Thus it is in the reality: one high priest and a small number of underpriests (the church with her head Jesus Christ) has a special spiritual role to play, and a Great Company have a secondary position in the plan of God. Yet both have no inheritance in the land. Both groups are in heaven: the church is seated on the throne, the great multitude is before the throne (Revelation 7:9; 19:6).

What did the Levites do once Israel came into the promised land? There was no tabernacle to disassemble, carry, and then reassemble. In fact they rise in importance in the nation. Under King David the Levites are described as “officers and judges” responsible for all the “business of the Lord, and in the service of the king” (2 Chronicles 26:29,30). Under Hezekiah we are told the Levites “taught the good knowledge of the Lord” (2 Chronicles 30:22). In Josiah’s time the teaching function had become a title: “The Levites that taught all Israel” (2 Chronicles 35:3). When Nehemiah reestablished the broken walls of Jerusalem, the Levites “taught the people” (Nehemiah 8:9). So it will be in the kingdom: those who are part of the “church of the first born,” antitypical Levites, will be used by God to teach the people his righteous laws so all may worship him in spirit and in truth (John 4:23,24).

### **A Picture of the Kingdom**

The Levites were divided into three families. Each had a specific responsibility for different parts of the Tabernacle. The **Gershonite** Levites were given two wagons and four oxen to transport the curtains, hangings, etc. (Numbers 3:25,26; 4:24-26; 7:7). The **Merari** Levites were given four wagons and eight oxen to transport the boards, pillars, sockets, cords and pins, etc. (Numbers 3:36,37; 4:31,32; 7:8). But no wagons were given to the **Kohathite** Levites: they carried the sacred articles of the Tabernacle upon their shoulders (Numbers 3:31; 4:6; 7:9).

What is pictured by these three families among which there appears to be a clear status difference? We notice first of all that each of these families camped next to the Tabernacle on the north, west, and south sides. Aaron and his house camped at the entrance to the Tabernacle on the east side. It appears to be a picture of the completed work of the kingdom when “the tabernacle of God will be with men” (Rev. 21:3). When all evil and unrighteousness will have been destroyed, there will be four distinct classes:

1. Jesus Christ and his church on the east side (where camped Moses, Aaron, and the priestly family). It is from the east that the sun comes forth each day to shed its healing beams upon the earth beneath (see Malachi 4:2).
2. The Great Company on the north side (Merari, a name meaning bitter, perhaps indicating it is through bitter experiences that they reach their goal [see Revelation 7:14]). Isaiah 14:12,13 implies that God's throne is in the "north" making that direction synonymous with heaven.
3. The faithful patriarchs and prophets who lived and died before Christ camped on the south side (Kohath is a name meaning allied, perhaps indicating they are allied with the church in heart and mind, though separated in time—Kohath was the grandfather of Aaron and Moses).
4. The entire rescued world of mankind on the west side (Gershon, a name meaning refugees or rescued).

“So, then, first in order as well as in rank amongst these antitypical Levites, or justified ones, will be the Royal Priesthood, to whose care the Millennial Kingdom and every interest will be committed. On their right hand will be the closest of kin--the ancient worthies--whom they shall ‘make princes in all the earth.’ Next on their left will be their faithful brethren of the Great Company. And last of all will be those rescued from sin and death during the Millennium, whose loyalty will have been fully attested in the great trial with which the Millennial age will close. (Revelation 20:7-9)”—*Studies in the Scriptures*, vol. 6, ppg. 128, 129.

Brethren, may we prove faithful in performing our work for the Lord during this age so that in the age to come we may have a part in the great work to bring the world of mankind back to the perfection they lost in Adam so long ago.

Closing Hymn: #309 — “To the Work”

*[First given in Los Angeles, June 2002]*



## *A Man of Integrity*

Opening Hymn: #125—"Trust in Christ"

If you were to select one man from the Old Testament that personified "integrity," whom would it be? My dictionary says:

*Integrity* is moral soundness, especially as it is revealed in dealings that test steadfastness of purpose, responsibility, or trust.

So who would you choose as one possessing "moral soundness, especially as revealed in dealings that test steadfastness of purposes, responsibility, or trust"? My choice is Daniel. Here is a man so morally steadfast that there is not a single flaw, a single fault recorded about him. He has been praised in ways that are almost unique:

- ◆ Three times in the book of Daniel he is called "greatly beloved." This is not said to anyone else in the Bible.
- ◆ Twice in Ezekiel (14:14,20) Daniel is said to be one of three who could "deliver their own souls by their righteousness." (The other two are Noah and Job.)
- ◆ When we think of a really wise man, we think of Solomon. But in Ezekiel 28:3 the prince of Tyrus is described as a man who thinks he is "wiser than Daniel" because he has become so rich.

Most of us know something about Daniel. Let's see if we can find some things you might not know about him.

**What does his name mean?** God must be a part of his name's meaning because of the "-el." Daniel means "God is my judge." We find "-el" in the names Bethel, Gabriel, Ezekiel, Ishmael, Immanuel, Joel, Samuel, [of course] Michael, and Israel. It is also found also as a prefix: Elijah, Elisha, Eldad, Eliphaz, Eleazar. Daniel was his Hebrew name. When he got to Babylon, he was given the name "Belteshazzar" [Dan. 1:7].

**How old was Daniel** when he was carried away as a captive by Nebuchadnezzar's army? Undoubtedly he was in his mid-teens. He was an exceptional young man: "Children in whom was no blemish, but well favoured, and skilful 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."—Dan. 1:4      He probably died at around the age of 100.

**What language** was used to record the words of this book? If you say Hebrew, you're partly right. It was written in Hebrew until 2:4 where the language is Chaldean or Aramaic; at 7:28 it reverts back to Hebrew.

### **Integrity**

Think back to when you were 15 years old. If at that age you were carried off to some foreign land, had your name changed, were forced to learn a new language and new

customs, what, if anything, would you still have that you could call your own? You would have only what we frequently refer to as your “core values.” We need not probe too deeply as to what those might have been when you were 15, but we know from the account that Daniel and three others definitely brought their core values with them.

Daniel 1:5,8,12 The king appointed them a daily provision of the king's meat, and of the wine which he drank. [vs. 8] 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. [vs. 12, Daniel says] Prove thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse [vegetables] to eat, and water to drink.

What was so bad about the “king’s meat”? Probably it included things that were prohibited by Jewish law. It is possible many of the Jewish captives decided that “once in Rome, do as the Romans do” and they ate whatever food was offered to them. But one thing generally does lead to another, and soon it is not a question of what one eats.

Daniel 3:3,5,6 Then ... all the rulers of the provinces, were gathered together unto the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up. [vs. 5 they are told that] at what time ye hear the sound of ... all kinds of musick, fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king hath set up: And whoso falleth not down and worshippeth shall the same hour be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.

We don’t know why Daniel was not present at this special religious ceremony, but the integrity he has for maintaining faithfulness to God is certainly shared by his three companions. They could have said to themselves that what they did outwardly did not matter. God read their hearts and in their hearts they were loyal to God. But they didn’t do this. They were brought before the king, he asked if it was true that they refused to worship his image, and he repeated what would happen to them if they didn’t. He says...

Daniel 3:15-18 [Knox] You are in my power; what God can deliver you? ... There is no need for any answer of ours to that question; thou wilt see for thyself whether the God we worship is able to rescue us from the raging fire, and from thy royal power. But, whether he rescues us or not, be assured, sir king, here are men who do not reverence thy gods, or worship any image of thine.

THIS is integrity. It shows a love for God that transcends a love for life itself. Would we do as well if we had been there? As we go through the experiences of each day, does the love we claim to have for God motivate us to put our lives on the line? How important is it that you live to see tomorrow? You might not say you would do anything to preserve your life, but where would you draw the line? In Rev. 12:11 overcomers are those that... “did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death” [NIV].

Chapter six tells us about Daniel’s position in the government:

Daniel 6:1-3 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.

The king had divided his empire into three regions, each administered by a president. Under these three presidents were princes each with responsibility for a state. But out of all of these people, one stood out above the others: Daniel was preferred because “an excellent spirit was in him.” As we read more, we find that all these presidents and princes hated Daniel. Why? Prejudice runs deep in the hearts of men. Daniel was a Jew, not a Persian. When someone else does better than you, it is easy to hate the person. Prejudice drives the fires of hatred. But there was more than simple prejudice.

The clue is probably in the words “the king should have no damage.” Corruption has always been a part of many governments. If you have power, you have ways to make money often at the expense of the government itself. We have all heard how officials in some countries have siphoned money and deposited it in Swiss bank accounts. It would have been the same in the Babylonian empire except for one man: Daniel. He would have none of it. His integrity was far more important to him than wealth. His core values, his love for God, would not allow him to compromise his principles. So he made it difficult for cheating to take place, or at least to the extent the administrators would have liked. No wonder they hated Daniel. They could be very rich if it were not for him.

Since they could not accuse Daniel directly and make any charge stick, they devised a clever plot. They came before the king and suggested a new law:

Daniel 6:6-8 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.

ALL the presidents of the kingdom? There were only three and Daniel knew nothing about this. But they were hardly going to say, “All the presidents—except Daniel of course because he’s the problem—have consulted together.”

Amazingly the king signs the decree. Why does he do this? Why doesn’t he ask his trusted administrator Daniel for his opinion? Daniel wasn’t there.

## Flattery

There are many ways to manipulate people. One of the most effective is flattery which is excessive or insincere praise, especially to win favor. Everyone likes to hear good things about themselves, and kings are the most vulnerable. These princes were essentially telling the king he should be the “god” of the kingdom. To make his deification official, one needs a decree and here it is, just waiting for his signature. Why shouldn’t the king sign it? He suspects nothing. He has been told that ALL his officials endorse it. Now that one thinks about it, for all practical purposes he IS the “god” of this empire.

Do you use flattery on others to attain goals you think are worthwhile? Can you be manipulated by flattery? Just because you think no-one has tried doesn’t mean you’re right. Your children might have a different opinion. Warning flags should go up when you are told that you are special so you should therefore do this or do that.

Proverbs 28:23 [NIV] He who **rebukes** a man will in the end gain more favour than he who has a **flattering** tongue.

Not in the short run! Think back to someone who in the past told you what you didn’t want to hear. Did you welcome it? Did you thank them for it? Probably not, but perhaps you might now agree that it was much better to hear the truth than to hear only what you wanted to hear.

Suppose a man tells his mother-in-law that he loves her cooking when in fact he despises it. Why does he do this? He might say he does it to protect her feelings, that it makes no sense to say what he really thinks because it would only hurt her. A little flattery never hurt anyone. Really?

Suppose one day the mother-in-law discovers what her son-in-law really thought about her cooking. Will she commend him for “protecting her feelings,” will she be grateful that she was not hurt by what he could have said? I don’t think so. She will feel betrayed and the damage done to their relationship might never be repaired. How could she ever believe another word he utters?

Think twice before you become the bearer of flattering words. Be among those who can honestly say you won’t do it because your personal integrity prohibits it. Paul in fact made such a statement about himself:

1 Thes. 2:4-6 [NIV] We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts. You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness. We were not looking for praise from men, not from you or anyone else.

## Daniel’s Reaction

Once Daniel returns from his business trip and sees what has happened, he must have been overwhelmed by the display of so much hatred. He might have thought that a few would understand that a kingdom run on righteous principles would be good for every-

one. Yet this decree was not the work of a few. It was the work of all of them. They all hated him.

So what did Daniel do? He did not suddenly take another business trip to some distant frontier of the kingdom, one where business would detain him for perhaps 30 days. What he did sealed his death warrant and he knew it.

Daniel 6:10 Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open 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.

Is this “suffering for foolishness’ sake” (which is often said but not a scripture)? Would this be appropriate behavior for a Christian who has, after all, these wise words from the Master himself:

Matthew 6:6 But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, 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.

Why did Daniel do this? I think it was a matter of personal integrity; it was his character. Since the time he had been brought captive to Babylon against his will, he had served his God openly and faithfully. He always knew his relationship with God was a close one. If God had not revealed that dream the king could not remember, Daniel and all the other wise men would have been executed.

But it was not just integrity. Daniel was the highest-ranking Jew in the kingdom. He was a role model for all the other Jews who were there in exile. The non-Jews had their idols which were their gods. The Jews had none. If Daniel shut his doors, it would be equivalent to saying he no longer worshipped at all. If he were ashamed of his God, the others would be too. Just as the three Hebrews were quite willing to die rather than worship some false god, Daniel was willing to die rather than compromise his integrity.

His enemies had what they wanted. Daniel was seized and thrown into the den of lions. I don't know what your mental image is of this event. Here is the way Bro. Seklemian described this event:

“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!”—*Discourses of Robert Seklemian*, p. 289

When Paul makes his list of ancient worthies (Hebrews 11), he doesn't list Daniel directly. But he does list him indirectly just as he says he's running out of time to talk about those who...

Hebrews 11:33 through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, **stopped the mouths of lions.**

It is a fact of life: everybody has influence on everybody else. You are being watched whether you know it or not. Mothers and fathers are painfully aware of this of course. You may be the lowest ranking person in an office, the youngest one in a class, you may be an absolute “nobody”—yet you have influence. What you do, what you say, how you react to the things in your environment affect others. So what kind of role model are you? If you knew that what you did and said today would be written up in the newspapers tomorrow, would you act differently? If the answer is yes, perhaps you ought to act differently without it being written up in the papers.

### **Daniel's Prophecies**

We have not discussed the marvelous prophecies of Daniel. One of everyone's favorites is Daniel 9:25 where we read: “Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times.”

I suspect that this was one of the favorite prophecies even in the time of our Lord for we read that “the people were in expectation of the Messiah” [Luke 3:15]. Why did they think they were living when Messiah would appear? Perhaps it was from Daniel's prophecy. They probably understood the principle that one prophetic day equals one literal year, and thus the fulfillment of that prophecy should occur in their day. It was fulfilled, but not quite as they expected it.

Daniel chapter 11 is a prophecy so precise in its predictions of future events that even critics acknowledge it. Brother David Rice has spoken on this chapter and found little disagreement among scholars about what these verses describe. I recommend his article in the July-August [2000] issue of *The Herald* if you want to know more about this prophecy. One of the many proofs we have for the inspiration of the Bible is the clear, unambiguous descriptions of events before they occur. Daniel's book contains some of the best examples of this.

### **Conclusion**

Just as we are role models for others, Daniel is a role model for us. Paul writes in Rom. 13:1 that we are to be subject to the higher powers, that these are ordained by God. But

in Daniel's life we see that being subject to higher earthly powers is something that has its limits. Our primary allegiance is to God. If the demands of the "higher powers" (earthly governments) conflict with the demands of our God, we will obey our God.

Hebrews 13:14 Here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.

Don't prize your earthly life so much that you lose your integrity. No matter what you do, no matter how many compromises you make with others around you, you will die anyway. But one of the great paradoxes of the Bible is that not trying to save your life will, in fact, preserve it. Jesus himself said,

Matthew 16:25 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.

You will find this statement repeated in exactly this form in all four gospels.

May the Lord help us find the strength to do those things that are right. May we have the integrity of character to say, as did Peter and John:

Acts 4:19,20 [Today's English Version] "You yourselves judge which is right in God's sight, to obey you or to obey God. For we cannot stop speaking of what we ourselves have seen and heard."

Closing Hymn: #186—"All in Thy Hand"

*[First given at the Orlando Convention, March, 2000]*

Psalm 26

O Lord, do thou me try, in pureness I abide;  
I also on thy name rely, nor shall my footsteps slide.  
Examine me, and prove, try thou my reins and heart;  
Before my eyes I set thy love, from truth did not depart.  
I sat not with the vain, nor with the false will meet;  
I shunned the throng of wicked men, with such I will not sit.  
My hands I'll cleanse, O God, so to thy altar go.  
With voice of thanks proclaim abroad, and all thy wonder show.  
I in thy house delight, where is thy honor seen:  
My soul, my life, do not unite with wicked, bloody men.  
Their hands with crimes they fill, their right hands bribes retain;  
But I in all my way shall still integrity maintain.  
Redeem me from distress, thy grace to me afford.  
I stand upon an even place; with saints I'll bless the Lord.



## *Mercy*

Opening Hymn: #160—"Entirely Thine"

Prov. 28:13 He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.

Webster's New World Dictionary defines mercy as "kindness in excess of what may be expected or demanded by fairness; forbearance and compassion." "Kindness" is Strong's definition for two Hebrew words usually translated mercy. He defines the Hebrew word used in Proverbs and the usual Greek words in the New Testament as "compassion."

### **Mercy and God**

Ex. 34:6,7 And The Lord passed by before Moses and proclaimed, 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."

The sentiment of these words in Exodus thrilled the translator Rotherham. In a footnote to these verses he says: "This most gracious proclamation by God of His name and character is . . . worthy to be described as the refrain of the Bible. The devout reader cannot fail to be delighted with reminders of this fundamental revelation which are scattered throughout the Old Testament. Although this paragraph in full may not occur anywhere else, snatches of it abound."

It is only because of God's mercy that you and I are here today.

Rom. 11:30-32 For as ye [Gentiles] in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their [Israel's] unbelief: even so have these also now not believed that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy. For God had concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all.

Paul says we have obtained mercy, meaning "kindness in excess of what may be expected or demanded by fairness; forbearance and compassion." God was under no obligation to extend any special opportunity to us. After Adam and Eve disobeyed, they could have died and that would have been the end of it. There would not have to be any provision under God's justice to change the sentence. There need not be any resurrection of the dead. And certainly a change of nature from human to heavenly need not be granted to anyone.

Paul in the Romans scripture also teaches us that the unbelief of God's original "Chosen People" does not mean they are being consigned to some special punishment, nor are they everlastingly "lost." In spite of their unbelief, God will have mercy on them all.

We know that without God's mercy, we are nothing. We could never save ourselves. We have done nothing whatsoever to deserve favorable treatment from God. "Grace" is another word that is sometimes used to describe what we have received from God. Grace means "unmerited favor."

## How Do We Receive God's Grace?

Although we do not merit God's favor, according to our theme scripture in Proverbs, "whoso confesseth [his sins] shall have mercy." A recurring theme in the scriptures is that confession of sin is absolutely required before God can bless.

Luke 18:10-14 (NIV) Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men--robbers, evildoers, adulterers--or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

David made mistakes, he acknowledged them, and God forgave him. Even in so serious a matter as his adultery with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah, David was quick to acknowledge his error. After the prophet Nathan confronts him with the enormity of his sin, we read:

2 Sam. 12:13,14 And 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. Howbeit, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die.

David's predecessor, Saul, did not have the same attitude. In the 13th chapter of 1st Samuel, Saul waits seven days for Samuel, but when Samuel does not come, he offers the burnt offerings, something he knows he should not do. As soon as he finishes, Samuel appears and asks him what he's doing. After Saul tries to rationalize his behavior, Samuel speaks:

1 Sam. 13:13,14 Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God, which he commanded thee; for now would the Lord have established thy kingdom upon Israel forever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue.

Saul does NOT confess his sin and he is NOT forgiven. Samuel leaves, and Saul continues on with his life. Cain is another example. Cain becomes so angry with his brother that he kills him. When God asks where Abel is, Cain replies "Am I my brother's keeper?" God passes sentence and Cain responds:

Gen. 4:13 And Cain said unto the Lord, My punishment is greater than I can bear. [vs. 16] And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord.

Cain does NOT acknowledge his sin nor does he show remorse. Consequently there is no forgiveness. Even Adam does not acknowledge his sin nor does he show remorse.

Gen. 3:12 And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.

Adam shows no contrition of heart for what he's done. This is a dangerous position for any who expect to maintain a relationship with God since God has made it very clear where he will make his abode:

Isa. 57:15 Thus saith the high and lofty One who inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also who is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.

We are not surprised that God dwells in a high and holy place. But it is surprising that the God of the universe says he also dwells with those who maintain humility and contrition of heart. We can't avoid sin in our lives. But if we have the right heart attitude as shown by acknowledging our shortcomings and failures, we will receive the cleansing we need:

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

We are Christians because we have named the name of Christ. If we have made a consecration to God, we have accepted Christ as our personal savior. But we would never be brought to this position if we did not first confess our sins and acknowledge our need for a redeemer. Those who cannot acknowledge their sinful state cannot accept Christ because they see no reason to do so. [see Reprints p. 2235]

### **What Happens After We've Obtained Mercy?**

Jesus made it abundantly clear that the mercy God grants to us must radiate out toward everyone with whom we come in contact. This is beautifully illustrated in one of the easiest-to-understand parables the Master ever gave:

Matt. 18:21-35 (Goodspeed) Then Peter came to him and said, "Master, how many times am I to forgive my brother when he wrongs me? Seven times over?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times over, I tell you, but seventy-seven times over! For this reason the Kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a king, who resolved to settle accounts with his slaves. And when he set about doing so, a man was brought in who owed him ten thousand dollars. And as he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all he had, in payment of the debt. So the slave threw himself down before him and implored him, 'Give me time, and I will pay you all of it.' And his master's heart was touched, and he let the slave go and canceled the debt. But when the slave went out he met a fellow-slave of his who owed him twenty dollars, and he caught him by the throat and began to choke him, saying, 'Pay me what you owe!' So his fellow-slave threw himself down before him, and begged him, 'Give me time, and I will pay you.' But he refused and went and had him put in prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow-slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went to their master and reported the whole matter to him. Then his

master called him in and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I canceled all that debt of yours when you entreated me. Ought you not to have taken pity on your fellow-slave, as I did on you?' So his master in his anger handed him over to the jailers until he should pay all he owed him.

We don't need anyone to interpret this parable for us. The one who owes \$10-million represents us. We owe all that we have and can never repay it. It is only through the mercy of God, the great king, that this debt is forgiven. Then we become free. Suppose we now encounter someone who is in our debt, perhaps a person who forgot to thank us for some kindness we extended. How do we react? With mercy? If this reaction does not come easily, we must force ourselves to react with mercy. Eventually a merciful reaction will come immediately and willingly. But if we repeatedly fail to exercise mercy, then we will forfeit the mercy the Heavenly Father has already extended to us. Consider the point of the parable as given by Jesus:

[vs. 35] That is what my heavenly Father will do to you [hand you over to the jailers until you pay all you owe] if you do not each forgive your brothers from your hearts!

If we willingly forgive another's fault, sin, or shortcoming, we demonstrate our attitude of mercy. We should do this whether or not the other person asks for our forgiveness because it is our heart attitude that is on trial. The other person has his own relationship to God. Whether or not God forgives him will depend on his heart attitude. We must watch our own heart attitude with great diligence so that we receive forgiveness from God for all our trespasses.

Mark 11:25 And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any, that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.

Notice that it is necessary for us to show mercy by forgiving a brother even if they don't act contrite or ask for our forgiveness. It doesn't even matter whether our complaint against someone else is justified or not. If we are Christians, we must follow the pattern set by our Master. Of course we are not God and cannot erase another's sin. But by showing mercy we can copy this wonderful characteristic of God.

Consider the Lord's model prayer:

Matt. 6:12 (NEB) Forgive us the wrong we have done, as we have forgiven those who have wronged us.

The King James says "forgive us our debts." Of course the word "debts" is not limited to the financial sense of the word. It is any situation where compassion, kindness, yes mercy, would be the appropriate behavior. If we are unwilling to forgive those who have wronged us, there is no point in asking the great king of the universe to forgive us our iniquities. Remember the servant in the parable? He lost the freedom he had gained when he was unwilling to exercise mercy toward his fellow servant.

When he delivered his sermon on the mount, Jesus uttered a series of what we called the beatitudes. This is one of them:

Matt. 5:7 Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

The clear implication is that those who are not merciful, who are unwilling to show “kindness in excess of what may be expected or demanded by fairness,” will themselves not receive mercy from the Heavenly Father. Then Jesus went on to tell his disciples that they must do even more than just forgive someone who wronged them. They had to try to correct a relationship when they realize they have wronged another person. This is what Jesus says:

Matt. 5:23,24 Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother and then come and offer thy gift.

The brother has an ill feeling against us because he has been wronged by us. So when we come to God (here termed “bringing a gift to the altar”) and suddenly remember the brother's justified anger because of what we've done, we must immediately do something about it. We should try to correct the problem and heal the wounds. Then we can come to God.

### **We Must Be Merciful**

Make no mistake about it. The forgiveness God has granted to us from our sins is conditional. If we fail to observe the requirements God has laid down, we will lose even that which we have. The king in the parable never told the slave that he had to be merciful toward others since he had received forgiveness from such an immense obligation. It should have been obvious. From the parable, we see someone so blinded that he loses everything. Remember the principle: if you don't forgive your fellow servants, God won't forgive you.

Micah briefly summarizes the three things God requires of us:

Micah 6:8 To do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.

Do you love mercy? Think about it. Are you still waiting for your brother or sister to come to you and ask your forgiveness for some wrong committed against you? If you are, then you do not love mercy.

Matt. 23:23 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law: judgment, mercy, and faith.

Do you still remember some injustice that has never been corrected by another even while you carefully pay tithes of all you have? If you do, you're like a Pharisee for you have omitted something much more important than a tithe. You have omitted mercy. As bad as it may be to remember another's sins and shortcomings, it is worse to seek

revenge or a way to get even. Such a heart attitude will keep anyone from being a part of the bride of Christ.

Rom. 12:17,19-21 (NIV) Do not repay anyone evil for evil. ... Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge, I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink." ... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

The truth is important, but that's not enough to save us.

Prov. 3:3 Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart.

It is mercy AND truth that we should embrace. Do you feel any responsibility at all to go to another to try to ease the tensions he may feel toward you? Do you, sad to say, even let your mind think about ways to get revenge for something done toward you? If so, then perhaps mercy has forsaken you.

James 2:13 (NIV) Judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!

The concept of forgiveness of others occupied a large part of the teachings of Jesus. He taught that his followers were to overcome evil with good. Whenever evil is committed toward you, welcome it as an opportunity to overcome it by being merciful. In this way you will be growing into the image of the Heavenly Father.

Closing Hymn: #Appendix K—"Take Time to be Holy"

*[First given in Los Angeles, May, 1988. Given at the 1992 Int'l. Convention in Poitiers, France.]*

Antonio foolishly agrees as a co-signer to forfeit a pound of his flesh if he fails to repay a loan taken out by a friend. The friend defaults, Antonio can't pay, and the creditor demands payment of his flesh. Near the end of the court proceedings, Antonio's lawyer, Portia, pleads for mercy. This is what she says:

The quality of mercy is not strain'd;  
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven  
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest:  
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.  
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes  
The throned monarch better than his crown;  
His scepter shows the force of temporal power,  
The attribute to awe and majesty  
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;  
But mercy is above this sceptered sway.  
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings.  
It is an attribute of God himself;  
And earthly power doth then show likest God's  
When mercy seasons justice.

*The Merchant of Venice*  
Act IV, Scene 1

## *The New Creature*

Opening Hymn: #201 — O Glorious Hope

Genesis 2:2 And God ... rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made.

At the end of the creation work described in the first chapter of the Bible, we are told that God “rested” which implies all his creation work was finished. And that was true at least as far as the earth was concerned. But there remained one incredible, creative work God had planned but not yet implemented. That work was a “new creation”—beings that had not existed before.

As popular as the phrase “new creature” is in the Bible Student fellowship, it is a phrase that appears just twice in the King James Bible, both in letters by Paul:

Galatians 6:15 For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a **new creature**.

2 Cor. 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.

If you don't use the King James, you probably won't find the phrase at all. The Diaglott, NIV, Revised Standard, and others all render the Greek in these two texts with the phrase “new creation.”

2 Cor. 5:17 (NIV) If anyone is in Christ, he is a **new creation**: the old has gone, the new has come!

What an astounding thought! Coming into Christ means we leave the old [the earthly, human creation] behind and become a part of something completely new. This new thing is, in the words of Hebrews, associated with “the holiest”:

Hebrews 10:19,20 Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh.

### **The Ransom**

I rarely hear any of our Christian friends talk about “the ransom.” Although the ransom is the foundation of the plan of God as we understand it, the English word “ransom” appears only three times in the **New Testament** (plus ten times in the Old).

Matthew 20:28 Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a **ransom** for many. (*Mark 10:45 is the same*)

1 Tim. 2:6 Who gave himself a **ransom** for all, to be testified in due time.



What does this mean? It means that Father Adam and all the unborn within him were because of disobedience condemned to the prisonhouse of death. There they had to remain forever unless they were redeemed or ransomed. And what was required to pay that ransom? The law called for an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, and a life for a life (Deut. 19:21). God's justice could recognize only one "payment" so to speak: the life of another perfect human being, paid to justice to release the one condemned.

This presented a problem for there was "none righteous, no not one" (Rom. 3:10). The ransom price was the life of a perfect human being, but no perfect human being existed. Still could not God, who created the first man perfect, create a second man equally perfect? Of course he could, but how could one assume a second, newly created man would want to voluntarily give up his life to save someone else? There could be no such assumption, nor could such a thing be asked of another.

### **The Logos**

*Logos* is the name we use to identify Jesus in his pre-human condition. It is a Greek word and is used in the opening verses of John. (The Diaglott explains in a footnote why it leaves the word untranslated in its English translation of the Greek.)

John 1:2-4 (*Diaglott*) In the beginning was the Logos, and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was [a god—*Diaglott word-for-word*]. This was in the beginning with [the] God. Through it every thing was done and without it not even one thing was done which has been done. [*Of course that includes the creation of Adam*]

When sin entered the world and mankind began to die and practice great evil, one can imagine the Logos asking his Father if there was anything that could be done to save them. The Father might explain that the continuation of life was based upon obedience, and man had disobeyed. There could be no righteous basis upon which life could be restored—except if another perfect man were to pay with his own life to ransom the condemned one. But of course it could not happen because there was no perfect man. Even if there were one, it is unlikely he'd be willing to give up his life.

It may have been the Logos himself who suggested that he was willing to die if it would mean life for these condemned humans. If such a conversation occurred, I believe the Father would have said, "If you do this, you will remain dead forever as a human being, but I will give you a life here in heaven." There is evidence such must have been said because Jesus told his disciples that he would die and be resurrected back to life (Matt. 16:2z1); in his prayer at the last supper he seems to specifically claim this promise:

John 17:5 And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.

Yet if justice demands a “life for a life,” how could God raise his son back to life without forfeiting the ransom price? Answer: It was Jesus as a “new creature” who was raised to life.

Acts 13:30,32, 33 [Paul is speaking] God raised him from the dead: And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm [verse 7], Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.

Paul is applying the words of the second psalm to when Jesus was resurrected from the dead, and the context of that psalm shows that is correct because the psalm goes on with the Father telling the son what he has “inherited” now that he has been “birthed.”

When Jesus came to John and was baptized, John saw “the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him” (John 1:32). This was the start of Jesus’ new life as a new creature. It was this “new creature” that God raised to life in heaven. The “man Christ Jesus” remained dead according to the life-for-a-life rule; his earthly life was the ransom for Adam. The condemned prisoner Adam was now free to leave the prisonhouse of death and in the plan of God, it was Jesus as a resurrected new creature who became Adam’s new “owner.” Jesus would supervise what would happen to Adam and the race when they were brought forth out of the prisonhouse of death.

## **The Church**

The remarkable thing about the “new creation” is that it consists of more than just Jesus alone. As Paul says in Romans 8:29 he was to be the “first born among many brethren.” The special life Jesus received would be given to others who, like him, voluntarily gave up their earthly, human life in consecration to do the will of the heavenly Father. Although the word “new creature” is not found in most translations of the Bible, the idea is frequently expressed by Paul. Here are three examples:

Col. 3:1 Seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. [vs. 10] Put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:

Romans 6:4 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.

2 Cor. 4:16 Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.

“Putting on the new man,” “walking in newness of life,” and “renewing the inward man” are phrases describing a process that happens in our minds. The first step to becoming a new creature is consecration and it is described in the well-known words of Romans 12:

Rom. 12:1,2 (*Amplified*) I appeal to you therefore, brethren, and beg of you in view of [all] the mercies of God, to make a decisive dedication of your bodies—presenting all your members and faculties—as a living sacrifice, holy (dedicated, consecrated) and well pleasing to God, which is your reasonable (rational, intelligent) service and spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world—this age, fashioned after and adapted to its external, superficial customs. But be transformed (changed) by the [entire] renewal of your mind—by its new ideals and its new attitude—so that you may prove [for yourselves] what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God, even the thing which is good and acceptable and perfect [in his sight for you].

We become new creatures by offering ourselves in sacrifice to God and then under his direction we change our minds from a conformity to what this present evil world considers acceptable, and start to do and say only those things that are considered good and acceptable by God. Although never part of the sinful world, Jesus did more than just offer his life as a ransom for Adam. He completely sacrificed his own will in favor of his heavenly father’s will. Here is what the psalmist says of him:

Psalm 40:7,8 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.

### **Does the “New Creature” Sin?**

1 John 3:9 Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

How do we harmonize this with John’s words in chapter one—“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8,9). Do we, as new creatures, sin or don’t we?

Observation teaches that everyone sins. None of us would dare to say that WE have no sin. But how then are we to understand that those born of God—those who are new creatures—do not commit sin?

Would you agree that dead people do not sin? That insight may supply the answer to our question. Let us turn to Romans chapter 6 and begin reading selectively from verse one (these words are from the Goodspeed translation):

Are we to continue to sin to increase the spread of mercy? Certainly not! When we have died to sin, how can we live in it any longer? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into union with Christ Jesus have been baptized into his death? Through baptism we have been buried with him in death ... [vs. 7] **For when a man is dead he is free from the claims of sin.** ... [vs. 11] So you also must think of yourselves as dead to sin but alive to God, through union with Christ Jesus.

When John [in 1 John 1:8] says “if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves,” he is speaking from the standpoint of our sinful flesh. Our sinful flesh is like a millstone hung around our new creature’s neck all the days of our human life. From the moment we become new creatures, we must fight against the flesh—as well as the world and the devil—to show we are not in harmony with its sinful cravings. We must confess our sins and then we will be cleansed from them. This is illustrated by the wearing of a beautiful “wedding garment” over one’s filthy “street clothing,” a wedding garment provided by the “king” (see Matt. 22:11,12).

The new creature does not sin, the flesh does. And if the flesh gains the ascendancy to the point where it chronically, habitually, and enthusiastically practices sin, one can only conclude that the new creature is dead.

Hebrews 10:26-29 If we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. 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?

What is a “sorer punishment” than death? Answer: Death without the possibility of a resurrection, the “second death.” And that is what happens when the new creature dies.

### **The “Closing of the Door”**

The opportunity to present ourselves as “living sacrifices” and become “new creatures” is for the express purpose of being joined with Jesus Christ to bring blessings to all the families of the earth in the kingdom. Thus there is a specific start time and stop time for the creating of this new creation. The first member of this new creation was our Lord:

Col. 1:18 He is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.

When will the opportunity for anyone to become a “new creature” cease? In 1909 someone asked Bro. Russell about this. The question was framed in the context of the closing of the door so foolish virgins could not enter and specifically whether that door would close soon. This was Brother Russell’s reply:

“In the parable of the “Wise and Foolish Virgins,” the Wise Virgins followed Him and then went in with Him and the door was closed; then followed the Foolish Virgins and knocked at the door, saying, “Lord, Lord, open unto us,” but the door was shut. That is the door through which the Bride-class will enter, and when it is shut, it will never open again. That door the King will close when the last member of the Body of Christ shall have finished his sacrifice, and gone beyond the veil, the complete number will be gathered and enter into glory. When that will be, I do not know.”—Q74

Two years earlier in 1907 someone asked, “Is it not reasonable to suppose that we may expect in due time an announcement through the TOWER that the door of opportunity for consecration is closed?” His reply: “I think not.” Yet after his death, others thought they knew what he did not. Those with the Layman’s Home Missionary Movement share our beliefs on almost everything except this one doctrine: they believe there is no more opportunity to become new creatures and receive a heavenly reward if faithful. They teach that only life on earth is available to those who present themselves in consecration to God now. That is also the view of the Jehovah’s Witnesses. How, then, can **we** be so sure the door to the high calling remains open? Brother Russell wrote this in the third volume in 1890:

“There are three ways in which the closing of this door might be indicated: 1) by a definite Bible statement of the exact date; 2) by such a reversal of public sentiment with reference to the truth, that fidelity and zeal in its service would no longer meet with opposition, and when suffering with Christ for the truth’s sake would be no longer possible; or 3) by such a condition of affairs obtaining in the world that all opportunity for such service would be effectually obstructed, thus leaving no opportunities for candidates to enter into the work and to develop and prove their love and faithfulness by their activity and endurance. Though we are definitely informed that the door will be shut sometime within this harvest period or end of the age, the Bible does not give the exact date; and, although after the great time of trouble there will be a grand reversal of public sentiment in favor of truth and justice, we have no intimation whatever that such a condition of affairs will obtain until after the harvest period is fully ended. But we have a clear intimation that the door will be shut in the manner last named; for, before the Millennial day breaks, we are forewarned of a dark night wherein no man can labor.”—C207,208

Since we still have every opportunity available to us to witness to the truth worldwide, let us continue to do so with enthusiasm.

“The opportunity to walk in this narrow way of self-sacrifice for the truth’s sake is the grandest privilege that was ever offered to any creature. The privilege of suffering with Christ and in his cause, after first recognizing him as our Redeemer, is therefore the door, and the only door of opportunity, by which the glory to follow, as the bride and joint-heir of Christ, can be reached.”—C207

1 Peter 1:3-5 (NIV) Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

May the Lord help us all to make our calling and election sure so that we may participate in that great work of blessing all the families of the earth in the kingdom.

Closing Hymn: #58 — Zion’s Glorious Hope

*[First given in Los Angeles, February, 2003]*

## "ARE YE ABLE?"

Are ye able to walk in the narrow, strait way,  
With no friend by your side, and no arm for your stay?  
Can ye bravely go on through the darkening night?  
Can ye patiently wait till the Lord sends the Light?  
Are ye able to crush your soul's longing for Love,  
Will ye seek for no friendship save that from above?  
Can ye pass through this world, lone, unnoticed, unknown,  
While your faith faintly whispers, "He knoweth His own?"  
Where the feet of the Blessed One stood, can ye stand?  
Can ye follow His steps to a wilderness land?  
Are ye able to cast aside pleasure and fame?  
Can ye live but to glorify His precious name?  
Can ye smile as His dear voice says tenderly "No,"  
When "the field is so white," and your heart yearns to go?  
Can ye rest then in silence, contented and still,  
Till your Lord, the Chief Reaper, revealeth His will?  
Are ye able to lay on the "Altar's pure flame?"

That most treasured possession, your priceless good name?  
Can ye ask of your Father a blessing for those,  
Who see naught in your life but to scorn and oppose?  
When the conflict twixt Error and Truth fiercer grows,  
Can ye wield the strong "Sword" against unnumbered foes?  
Can ye lift up the "Standard" e'en higher and higher,  
While His praises ye sing in the midst of the fire?  
When ye see the Lord's cause going down to defeat,  
Will your courage endure in the seven-fold heat?  
Will your faith keep you steadfast, though heart and flesh fail,  
As the **New Creature** passes beneath the last "Veil?"  
Ah, if thus ye can drink of the Cup He shall pour,  
And if never the Banner of Truth ye would lower,  
His Beloved ye are, and His crown ye shall wear,  
In His Throne ye shall sit, and His Glory shall share!

## *Nicodemus*

Opening Hymn: Appendix K — “Take Time to be Holy”

The name Nicodemus means “conqueror among his people.” Although the name was relatively common in Israel, a person with this name appears only in the gospel of John. This truth-seeking Pharisee comes on the scene in chapter 3:

John 3:1,2 There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: the same came to Jesus by night . . .

Later references to him in chapters 7 and 19 both identify him as the Nicodemus who came to Jesus by night. Most commentators think he came at night because he feared what others on the Sanhedrin would think of him spending time with Jesus, a man who in their collective view was a false teacher. If that was his reason, we would surely not criticize him. Paul wrote, “What for you is a good thing must not become an occasion for slanderous talk” (Rom. 14:16, New English).

I think there was a different, even more likely reason for the night visit. The end of chapter 2 says that Jesus was in Jerusalem at the time of passover. The city would be teeming with people. Jesus always attracted crowds and no one could have had a private conversation with him during the day. At night the people returned to their homes. It was much more likely Jesus would be available then and that’s why Nicodemus came at night. The Jews were always asking Jesus for a “sign” of his authenticity, conveniently ignoring the many miracles Jesus did every day. It was these miracles that impressed Nicodemus. His first words are, “Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him” (John 3:2). Later in John 10:38 Jesus urged the Jews to believe his works even if they couldn’t believe in him. That was what Nicodemus was doing. And because he did it, we have a description of spirit begetting from Jesus himself we might not otherwise have had.

### **Born Again**

The conversation begins in verses 3 and 4:

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born [*gennao*] again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born [*gennao*] when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born [*gennao*]?

In the first chapter of Matthew we see one man named as the father of the next man on the list. The Greek word used is *gennao* and it is correctly translated “begat.” But note what we have in Matthew 1:16, “Jacob **begat** [*gennao*] Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was **born** [*gennao*] Jesus, who is called Christ.” The



same Greek word is translated by two different English words. A man's role in bringing forth new life is that of begetting; a woman's role is the delivery or birthing process.

Jesus begins by saying a person must be "*gennao*-ed" again. But since he does not mention the operative agent, Nicodemus thinks he's talking about a woman bringing forth a baby at birth. Naturally he is confused. So Jesus continues by saying...

Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born [*gennao*] of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born [*gennao*] of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born [*gennao*] of the Spirit is spirit.

Now that Nicodemus hears that the operative agent is "of water and of the Spirit" he undoubtedly understood that this ambiguous Greek word was referring to spirit begetting, not spirit birth.

We can all understand the necessary role of God's holy spirit in begetting a new life within a believer, but why water? Jesus is not talking about literal water. Water in Scripture symbolizes truth, and truth comes from God through his son Jesus.

James 1:18 Of his own will **begat he us with the word of truth**, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

Jesus used the phrase "rivers of living water" as a metaphor for truth in John 7:

John 7:37,38 In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.

John follows this quotation with a parenthetical thought (verse 39): "But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive, for the holy spirit was not yet given because Jesus was not yet glorified."

This text presents a problem. As it appears in the King James, it is out of the belly of the believer that rivers of living water flow, and that this is spoken of in "the scripture." And which scripture might that be? There is none. The Companion Bible suggests that Jesus is really saying that the "rivers of living water" come from him. Faulty punctuation hides the true meaning of his words. It should be rendered...

Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and let him drink, he that believeth on me. [*end verse 37, begin verse 38*] As the scripture hath said, out of his [*the giver—Messiah—not the receiver*] belly

shall flow rivers of living water [*which become available for believers to drink*].

With this corrected understanding we turn to Zechariah for confirmation:

Zech. 13:1 In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness.

Jesus is that “fountain.” We must drink or appropriate the “living water” which comes from him and receive God’s holy spirit if we are to ever have life on the spirit plane.

### **Going and Coming Like the Wind**

John 3:7,8 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born [*gennao*] again.

The **wind** bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born [*gennao*] of the Spirit.

Most Bible Students believe this text applies to spirit beings, those who were not just begotten of the spirit, but who were also born of the spirit. That’s because you and I who have been begotten of the spirit do not “go and come like the wind.” Yet there is nothing in the Greek to suggest that Jesus was shifting the meaning of the ambiguous word *gennao* from begettal to birthing. It is far more likely he used *gennao* to mean begettal during his entire conversation with Nicodemus.

But if this is so, how can we say spirit begotten ones go and come like the wind? We can’t, and this is not what the text is saying. The problem is with the word “wind.” Consider:

John 6:18 And the sea arose by reason of a great **wind** that blew.

This Greek word is *anemoz*, Strongs #417. It appears 31 times in the New Testament and is always translated wind(s). But in John 3:8 the Greek word is *pneuma*, Strongs #4151. It appears 385 times and is always translated spirit (or ghost as in “holy ghost”) with one exception—here in John 3:8 where *pneuma* is translated wind. Surely if Jesus was talking about the wind we would find the word *anemoz*. But instead we find *pneuma*, not just once, but twice in the same sentence: “The wind [*pneuma*] bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is [begotten] of the Spirit [*pneuma*].”

In fact it is the **spirit** that “breathes where it pleases” which makes it consistent with the other 384 times *pneuma* appears in the New Testament. Here is Rotherham:

John 3:8 The spirit where it pleaseth doth breathe, and the sound thereof thou hearest; but knowest not whence it cometh and whither it goeth. [*also Diaglott*]

Nicodemus was being touched by the spirit—he heard its voice through the words of the Master. Did he respond appropriately when it touched him? I think he did because at the death of Jesus, he comes forward boldly during the daylight hours with Joseph of Arimathaea and willingly defiles himself by touching Jesus' dead body to bury it:

John 19:39 There came also Nicodemus, which at the first came to Jesus by night, and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about an hundred pound weight. Then took they the body of Jesus, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury.

### **The Conversation Continues**

John 3:9-13 [Weymouth] “How is all this possible?” asked Nicodemus. “Are you,” replied Jesus, “the Teacher of Israel, and yet do you not understand these things? In very truth I tell you that we speak what we know, and give evidence concerning what we have witnessed, and yet you all reject our evidence. If I have told you of things on earth and none of you believe me, how will you believe me if I tell you of things in heaven? There is no one who has gone up to heaven except One who has come down from heaven, namely the Son of Man whose home is in heaven.”

Nicodemus is hearing what he has never heard before. Surely this was not something taught by the Pharisees. Yet it should not be a completely new idea to him. Consider this prophecy from Ezekiel:

Ezekiel 36:25,26 Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. 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.

Nicodemus asks, “How is all this possible?” How is it that God sent his son with the water of truth which combined with the operation of the holy spirit causes a begetting process to begin within those who are rightly exercised by it? The answer is in verse 16, perhaps the best known and greatly beloved texts in the Bible:

John 3:16 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.

“God gave.” This new arrangement is possible because it is a gift from God. Jesus repeated this answer when he spoke to the Samaritan woman at the well in the next chapter in John:

John 4:10 Jesus answered and said unto her, If thou knewest the **gift of God**, and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water.

Jesus again speaks of himself as the source of the life-giving waters of truth by which we are begotten to the spirit nature; if faithful, we will one day be born on the spirit plane.

Incidentally, why does God love the world when he specifically tells us to not love the world?

1 John 2:15 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.

God loves the world because he knows its condition when his plans and purposes have been fully accomplished, when it will have been brought back to perfection and harmony with him. He does not love the world in its sinful, depraved condition and neither should we.

### **Moses and the Serpent**

John 3:14,15 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

Those who study the Bible know that the Old Testament contains types and pictures of what would occur in New Testament time periods.

1 Cor. 10:6 [Diaglott] Now these things were made **types** for us in order that we might not be cravers after evil things even as they craved.

In his conversation with Nicodemus Jesus identifies as a type an experience the Israelites had in the wilderness. After a particular egregious lack of appreciation for what God had done for them, the Israelites were plagued with fiery serpents and many died. Moses was told to make a copper-colored serpent and place it on a pole so any who looked upon it would live and not die (see Numbers 21:4-9). This, Jesus tells Nicodemus, pictured himself. He would be “lifted up” on a “pole” and those who looked to him would live and not die. Later in this gospel John quotes Jesus as saying this even more directly to a wider audience:

John 12:32,33 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.

As is always the case with a type, the Old Testament experience is much inferior to the glorious antitype. True, “bitten” Israelites who would quickly die if they did nothing, were able to live if they looked at that which had been lifted up for their salvation. But of course they did die eventually. There was nothing they could do to stop the dying process which sooner or later culminated in their certain death. Only when we see Jesus do we appreciate the far grander antitype. Looking to Jesus, and him crucified, brings life, and not just life for a few years, but everlastingly.

### **God is Light**

John 3:19,20 Light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd.

Light is a word John uses more than the other gospel writers. In 1 John 1:5 he says “God is light.” We know Jesus is the embodiment of God. Water is a symbol of truth and so is light. Jesus was like a light shining in a dark room making visible all the imperfections.

What do we do when a shaft of bright light pierces a darkened room and we see all the dust and imperfections we never saw before? We have three choices:

1. Ignore what we see and accept the imperfections as they are;
2. Correct the imperfections now that we are aware of them;
3. Turn out the light and pretend everything is just fine.

Those with the power within the Jewish Sanhedrin preferred choice #3. So they plotted to destroy Jesus and effectively “turn out the light.”

John 11:49,50,53 Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. Then from that day forth they took counsel together for to put him to death.

It is easy to criticize the Pharisees for blinding themselves to the obvious truths being delivered to them on an almost daily basis. Surely we would never be so blind. But is that true? How do we react when someone “turns on the light” regarding our personal behavior, our class policies, or whatever else in our environment is defective but of which we prefer to stay blissfully ignorant? Trying to turn out the light, or killing the messenger, or otherwise trying to silence the critic who says what we don’t like is hypocrisy.

The only other place where Nicodemus is mentioned is in John 7 where the Sanhedrin tries to silence an unexpected critic in their midst:

John 7:45-52 Then came the officers to the chief priests and Pharisees. They said unto them, Why have ye not brought him? The officers answered, Never man spake like this man. Then answered them the Pharisees, Are ye also deceived? Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him? But this people who knoweth not the law are cursed. Nicodemus saith unto them, (he that came to Jesus by night, being one of them,) Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth? They answered and said unto him, Art thou also of Galilee? Search, and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet.

The Pharisees conveniently ignore the prophet Jonah who was from Gath-hepher (see 2 Kings 14:25) a village in Galilee, but clearly Nicodemus would hardly want to debate this point with them.

### **Conclusion**

May we all praise God for what he through the spirit has done for us. May we rejoice that his spirit has touched one here and one there, and opened our eyes to see and our ears to hear. Jesus performed many great miracles during his earthly ministry, but just as types are inferior to antitypes, so his miracles are so much less than what will occur in the future. If we are faithful unto death, we will have the privilege of performing even greater miracles in the kingdom.

John 14:12 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.

Closing Hymn: #238 — “Heavenly Truth”

*[First given in Los Angeles, December, 2001]*

I WILL LEAD THEM IN PATHS WHICH THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN (Isa. 13:16)

A time there was when we in man-made ways  
Walked blindly on, not knowing where they  
led,  
Unconscious of the light of Truth, whose rays  
Were ever shining brightly overhead.

Then came Thy call, and as we listening stood,  
New light fell on the perils of our way,  
And what we deemed desirable and good  
Were now but lures to lead our feet astray.

All wondering we turned to Thee and cried,  
"We have been led astray like foolish sheep;  
Take Thou our trembling hand, be Thou our  
guide,  
And in Thy paths our erring footsteps keep."

And thou hast led us on in paths that we  
Had never known before, so richly fraught  
With joy and peace, that as we followed Thee,  
Each step we took fresh life and blessing  
brought.

Before us spread in one harmonious whole  
Thy perfect plan, wherein no room was found  
For creeds vindictive, which oppress the soul  
And keep mankind in chains of error bound.

We saw, instead, the riches of Thy grace,  
So lavishly displayed to all mankind,  
That every member of our fallen race,  
Eternal life and happiness may find.

All worldly wisdom we esteemed but dross,  
Earth's wealth and pleasure and its vain  
display,  
And bore with joy the consecrated Cross,  
To win the Crown that fadeth not away.

When wearied with the struggle Thou didst  
bring  
Our feet into a sweet and peaceful vale,  
Where we forget our toil and suffering,  
And where no foes could harm or cares assail.

Still guided by Thy wise and loving hand,  
With eager feet we climbed a mountain slope,  
And from the crest beheld a glorious land,  
The goal of all our striving and our hope.

Enraptured with the sight and gazing long,  
We seemed, like John, to see the city fair,  
And hear the music of the angel's song,  
Which filled us with a longing to be there.

And now, dear Lord, with patience we await  
Thy call to enter on the final stage,  
The path of glory, which shall terminate  
The toil and sorrow of our pilgrimage.

And though it leads to Jordan's rolling tide,  
We will not on the bank reluctant stand,  
For through the flood Thou wilt with us abide,  
And bear us safely to the Promised Land.

—Martin Mitchell, *Poems of the Way*, p. 47

## *Peter's Last Letter*

Opening Hymn: #266—"Soldiers of Christ"

Sometimes I've heard the hypothetical question, "If you knew your next talk to the brethren would be the last you would ever give, what subject or topic would you use? What would be some of the points you would cover?"

This is, of course, somewhat artificial since no one knows when a discourse may be his last one. But that was not true of Peter. When he writes what we call his second epistle, he seems to know this will be his last one:

2 Pet. 1:13-15 [Weymouth] I think it right, so long as I sojourn in this body, to arouse you by such reminders. **For I know that soon my body must be laid aside**, as indeed our Lord Jesus Christ revealed to me. So on every occasion I will also do my best to enable you to recall these things after my departure.

Since he believes this will be his last letter to the brethren, what did Peter think he should talk about? The first observation we can make is that he did NOT give a "public discourse." The opening verse says he is writing "to them that have obtained like precious faith with us." We also notice he was not interested in presenting new truths. What he did was remind them of what they already knew. These are his main points:

1. Hold fast to the word of God as given through His prophets.
2. Beware of false teachers who would lead you astray.
3. Don't weaken your faith by confusing God's patience with slowness.

### **Chapter 1: Encouragement**

You might think the word "divine" would be a common word in the New Testament. But the English word appears only in 2 Pet. 1:3,4\*. The **Greek word** translated "divine" in 2 Peter does appear in one other place: Acts 17:29 where it is rendered "Godhead" (KJV).

In verses 3 and 4 Peter refers to "divine power" [the power of God] and "divine nature" [the nature of God]. When we read "that ye might be partakers of the divine nature," many Bible Students think of some future reward, when we will receive immortal life if found faithful. Of course such a reward will be given to the faithful footstep followers of the Master. But it is possible that is **not** what Peter is thinking about. The text reads:

2 Pet. 1 :4,5 [NIV] He has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness...

---

\* In Heb. 9:1 the word "divine" is translator supplied even though it's not in italics--the Greek is the same as 9:6 where it reads "service of God").



Have you “escaped the corruption that is in the world” now or are you expecting that you will escape it after you die? In fact you have escaped the “corruption that is in the world” now if you are a new creature and are walking according to the Spirit. The eighth chapter of Romans begins by saying there is “no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” That chapter continues by contrasting the fleshly, carnal walk with those who walk after the Spirit, who are the sons of God. If we have then escaped the corruption in the world, Peter says we are “partakers of the divine nature.” The implication is that we partake of that nature now, not later. The Greek word translated “nature” describes the attributes and characteristics of someone or something. That Greek word is used twice in...

Rom. 11 :24 For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by **nature**, and wert grafted contrary to **nature** into a good olive tree...

What is the nature of God? Virtuous, knowledgeable, disciplined, patient, morally good, loving. ... Once we start it's hard to know where to stop. These are not arbitrary characteristics pulled out of the air. These are the ones Peter selects:

2 Pet. 1:5 For this very reason [much better translation than “And beside this”] add to your faith virtue...

Essentially Peter is saying that if we are partakers of God's nature, we ought to be copying his attributes and characteristics. He then mentions seven things that are to be added to faith. Peter assumes that we already possess faith since he addressed this letter to those who “have obtained like precious faith with us.”

This list is sometimes called the “graces of the spirit.” In Gal. 5:22 Paul lists what he calls the “fruit of the spirit” [love, joy, peace, longsuffering, etc.]. Often we say we have to develop the fruits AND graces of the spirit so we don't appear to be playing favorites with Paul's list rather than Peter's. But the objective of both lists is fruitage.

Following the list of characteristics we are to develop, Peter says:

2 Pet. 1:8 For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor **unfruitful**...

An old, unfruitful tree is a sad sight, and is usually the result of neglect. You can't stick a baby apple tree in the ground, walk away from it, and then come back later expecting to find a lot of apples. The tree goes to wood making if left to its own devices. It must be pruned, fertilized, and be kept clear of the weeds that take the resources it needs to make fruit. An unfruitful tree is no good to anyone and is a good example of what we as Christians must avoid.

Peter calls his list of seven attributes that we are to add to our faith as “these things,” a phrase he uses five times in verses 8 through 15. Notice his comments about “these things”:

The phrase is first found in vs. 8: Having them makes you fruitful.  
Next verse (9): Not having them makes you “blind.”  
Next (10): Doing them gives you an abundant entrance into the kingdom.  
Verse 12: I’m only reminding you about what you already know.  
Finally vs. 15: But don’t forget it even when I’m gone.

The idea of being or not being blind concerns one’s vision or perspective. Here’s a clever story about this subject:

In the center of a great forest a bird perched on the topmost branch of a tall tree is singing with all his might. A fox at the bottom of the tree asks what he is singing about. The bird says he cannot help but sing because the view is so wonderful. “What do you see?” asks the fox. “I see mountains and meadows, a great dome of blue sky and the sea far away.”  
“I don’t believe a word of it,” said the fox. “I don’t see anything but these trees. In fact there isn’t anything else to be seen!”

Those who lack “these things” lack spiritual vision and cannot see beyond the “trees” of the present, temporal world.

Peter has supervised the instruction of those of like precious faith and he tells them they are “established in the **present truth**” [vs. 12], an expression we all love but is found only here. Of course he’s talking about the truths of the new Gospel dispensation as contrasted to the truths of the old Jewish dispensation. Although they are established in present truth, what is going to happen to them when he dies? That’s what worries him.

The problem gets down to a question of faith. What do you believe and why do you believe it? If you believe something for the wrong reason, you might find your faith shaken. So Peter first says what they have **not** done: “We have not followed cunningly devised fables” (vs. 16). In the next few verses he recounts his own personal experience on the mount of transfiguration when he had a glimpse of the future. And he uses that experience as an example of the importance of what previously was delivered by God through his prophets.

2 Pet. 1:19-21 [New English] All this only confirms for us the message of the prophets, to which you will do well to attend. ... But first note this: no one can interpret any prophecy of Scripture by himself. For it was not through any human whim that men prophesied of old; men they were, but, impelled by the Holy Spirit, they spoke the words of God.

At the end of chapter one Peter clearly states that those of “like precious faith” must look to God’s word for their guidance. That means what has been transmitted through the Old Testament prophets and—when he makes this point again at the start of chapter 3—“the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour” (2 Pet. 3:2).

## Chapter 2: Beware of False Teachers

Yes, there were holy men who spoke the words of God. But Peter reminds us that there were others also. He begins the second chapter by pointing out the obvious: “But there were false prophets **also** among the people.” Peter is not guessing that perhaps history will repeat itself in his day. He knows it will. By the force of their authority, he and the other apostles were able to restrain the influence of false prophets. But the apostles were dying and soon he would be dead too. What would happen then? That’s his main concern: he fears the havoc that can occur because of false teachers who can spin “cunningly devised fables.” Notice the force of the New English translation of...

2 Pet. 2:3 [New English] In their greed for money they will trade on your credulity with sheer fabrications.

Can such things be true? We haven’t seen any examples of this in the last couple of years, but we don’t have to go back very far to observe the unbelievable credulity of those beguiled by Jim and Tammy Bakker, Rev. Sun Myung Moon and his Unification Church, L. Ron Hubbard and Scientology, Jim Jones in Guiana, and countless evangelists who, like Hawaii’s first missionaries, “came to do good, and did very well.”

The entire second chapter of this letter contains such a scathing denunciation of false teachers that it is hard to be sure just what lesson there is for us today. Sometimes there are situations when it appears a leader has so much influence over his flock that he does all their thinking for them. But even applying the widest definition of what constitutes our fellowship I don’t know of any situation that could be described by these words:

2 Pet. 2:18 [New English] They utter big, empty words, and make of sensual lusts and debauchery a bait to catch those who have barely begun to escape from their heathen environment. [vs. 22] For them the proverb has proved true: “The dog returns to its own vomit. “

Peter says there are situations when it appears that there is no day of reckoning, no retribution for misconduct on the part of leaders or followers. Yet that is simply not true. Peter offers three examples as proof that God does take strong action when it is required: 1) the flood that destroyed the old world except for the righteous; 2) the fire and brimstone that destroyed those living in Sodom and Gomorrah except for the righteous; and 3) the restraints placed on the “angels that sinned.”

2 Pet. 2:4 [Weymouth] God did not spare angels when they had sinned, but hurled them down to Tartarus and consigned them to caves of darkness, keeping them in reserve for judgment.

The King James gives the word hell for the Greek word *Tartaroo*. This is the only place in the Bible where this Greek word appears. Peter mentioned these fallen angels before. In his first letter, chapter 3:19,20, he describes disobedient spirits as “in prison.” We do know that the freedom to materialize enjoyed by spirit creatures before the flood was

taken from them after the flood. They may have been placed under other restraints as well. The point, however, is that God **does** take action when it is the right time to do so.

### Chapter 3: Hold on to your faith

What do you do when it appears that everything you believe is being rejected by those who claim to know more than you do? Consider the matter of the Lord's promise to return. Peter selects this doctrine for special attention:

2 Pet. 3:3 Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming [Greek: *parousia*]? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.

These "scoffers" appear to be synonymous with the false teachers of chapter two. Does that mean that anyone who today thinks the Lord is not present is being one of the "scoffers" identified by Peter in this verse? Some say yes even though few would label any brother or sister as a false teacher who like a dog has returned to his own vomit. The "scoffers" in this chapter specifically are 1) walking in their own lusts ["of the flesh" an added modifier in chapter 2] and 2) rejecting the teaching that the Lord will ever come again at any time. They say he won't ever return because "all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." Certainly neither of these accusations can be leveled against our brethren who may disagree with how we read the "signs of the time" and what they mean to us. Our brethren who do not believe the Lord is present DO believe he will return a second time; they simply differ with us on the matter of timing. To apply 2 Pet. 3:3 to those who think the Lord's second presence is yet future is using the scriptures as a club. It invites the response, "If any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not" (Matt. 24:23).

The argument that "all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" is summarily dealt with by Peter by showing that believing tomorrow will be like today meant disaster for those living just before the flood. What evidence was there that a flood of water was about to sweep them away? None. Well not exactly. There was one evidence: they had the preaching of Noah (and 2 Pet. 2:5 is the only place in the Bible where Noah is called a preacher). The people preferred their own unbelief. And they were wrong.

Righteous Noah and his family had to watch wickedness go unpunished year after year. It was the same in Peter's day, during the dark ages, and during the last days in which we are living. Is this because God is slow to do anything? Not at all. Peter would have us understand that God does not measure time as we do. Only Peter supplies what has been a long-held Bible Student mathematical formula: 1000 years [of man's time] = 1 day [of God's time]. (2 Pet. 3:8) (The only other similar reference is in Psa. 90:4 where a thousand years are as yesterday AND a watch in the night.) God is NOT slow ... he IS patient. Things will be done according to His time clock, not man's.

How will this present evil world come to an end? Peter—and only Peter—tells us it will be destroyed by fire:

2 Pet. 3:10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

Many Christian fundamentalists believe this earth will literally be burned to a crisp as the faithful are caught away to heaven. One can understand why they think that way. Peter just said the old world was covered with literal water and it perished. It's reasonable to assume he expected literal fire to destroy this present evil world. Of course he also says [in verse 12], "The **heavens** being on fire shall be dissolved." But here our fundamentalist friends would say that refers to the earth's atmosphere which disappears with the earth.

Did Peter expect the earth to be literally burned up? No, he did not! In Acts he said something quite different:

Acts 3:20,21 And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: whom the heaven must receive until the **times of restitution** of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.

Peter did not change his mind some 30 years later. He never changed his expectation that the times of restitution would take place on this literal earth. He did know that mankind's present arrangements would first have to be swept aside before restitution could take place. That's why he used the Greek word *kosmos* to refer to what would be destroyed. Although translated *world*, it really means mankind's arrangements, not the literal world. When he wrote this last letter, Peter used fire as a metaphor for the destruction of man's works.

The last words of verse 10 ("the works that are therein shall be burned up") are not correct. Many translations\* based on older manuscripts say the works of the earth will "be laid bare." The "fires" that bring today's heavens and earth to an end will reveal the hidden works of darkness for all to see. Just as Noah and his family stepped out on the same literal earth that existed before the flood, so also will kingdom blessings be poured out on those living on the same literal earth as we have today. But the political, social, and religious arrangements will all have been swept away. This is called a "new heavens and a new earth."

At the end of his letter and after delivering the warnings about false teachers and the inevitability of the destruction of mankind's present arrangements, Peter admonishes us to be steadfast and "grow in grace." How do we do that? We follow the advice he gave us at the beginning of this letter: We work diligently to add fortitude, knowledge, self-

---

\* NIV, New English, Rotherham, Diaglott footnote, etc.

control, patience, godliness, *philadelphia* love, and *agape* love to our faith. Perhaps that's why his list is frequently referred to as the "graces of the spirit"—they enable us to grow in grace.

## Conclusion

We have taken a close look at Peter's last written discourse. Since it appears he knew his death was near, it has been instructive to see what he thought he should tell the brethren. Of the many things we find in this letter, two topics are emphasized:

1. Guard against false teachers who will try to lead you into error.
2. Keep your faith strong by clinging to the words of the holy prophets and the Lord's apostles.

It was the condition of their faith that concerned Peter the most. He addresses his audience by acknowledging that they "have obtained like precious faith with us." That was a result of the Lord's blessing upon his ministry, Paul's ministry whom he specifically acknowledges at the end of his letter, and the other apostles. But he knows people get discouraged when things don't go the way they expect. So he emphasizes what they should do to keep their faith strong:

1. Consider the basis of what you believe. In the case of the gospel message, it was received first-hand from those like Peter who saw the glory and heard God's voice. This was fresh confirmation of the prophetic word previously transmitted to man by God. It surely was not the cunningly devised fables spun out by men.
2. It should be clear by now that God acts according to his own time-table, not man's. Don't let the apparent long passage of time discourage you.
3. Concentrate your efforts on acquiring the graces of the spirit so that you'll make your calling and election sure, so that you will never fall.

The words of this letter are almost 2000 years old, yet they speak to us with the same force as though Peter had written them this morning. Brethren, it is our faith that is being tried. We must not let either false teachers or discouragement lead us astray. Let us concentrate all our effort to add to our faith: fortitude, knowledge, self-control, patience, godliness, *philadelphia* love, and *agape* love. Peter ends with these words:

2 Pet. 3:17,18 [Phillips] But you, my friends whom I love, are forewarned, and should therefore be very careful not to be carried away by the errors of unprincipled men and so lose your proper foothold. On the contrary, you should grow in grace and in knowledge of our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ--to him be glory now and until the day of eternity!

Closing Hymn: #324 — Cause For Gratitude

## *Propitiation*

Opening Hymn: #190 — “The Precious Blood”

1 John 2:2 And he is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

1 John 4:10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

The word “propitiation” has more or less passed out of our everyday language and means very little to us. So we need a better word. Let’s try the RSV:

1 John 4:10 (RSV) In this is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the **expiation** for our sins.

*expiation*: the means by which atonement or reparation is made.

*atonement*: satisfaction or reparation for a wrong or injury; amends

“Expiation” is good and can be used to render the Greek, but somehow the word “atonement” sounds best of all, and that is the way Phillips renders this text:

1 John 4:10 (Phillips) We see real love, not in the fact that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to make **personal atonement** for our sins.

The entire subject of atonement cannot be discussed within Bible Student circles without considering the atonement sacrifices of the Israelites. The word “atonement” appears 72 times in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers alone. In fact, the only other scripture that uses the word “propitiation” actually forces us back to the Israelites and their sacrificial arrangements:

Rom. 3:24,25 Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood...

Strong #2435: *an expiatory (place or thing); an atoning victim or the lid of the Ark.*

Rom. 3:25 (Diaglott) whom God has set forth to be a Mercyseat<sup>†</sup> by His own blood...

<sup>†</sup>The Greek word *hilasterion* never signifies “propitiation,” as it is translated in the common version; but it is always used wherever it occurs, both in the Old Testament and the New, to express the mercy-seat; which was the golden lid of the ark upon which the Shechinah or cloud of glory rested, and from which oracles were dispensed. *[end of quote]*

We have confirmation that the Diaglott is correct when we turn to the only other place where #2435 is used:

Heb. 9:4,5 [beyond the second veil was] ... the ark of the covenant ... and over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the **mercyseat**; of which we cannot now speak particularly.

So we conclude that the word “atonement” or, in this latter instance, “place of atonement” is a better expression than “propitiation.” We have now examined all three instances where the word “propitiation” is used in the King James. So now let’s turn our attention to...

### **Sacrifice and the Tabernacle**

There is no question that the Tabernacle, its construction and its ceremonies, is meant to teach important lessons. Twelve chapters in the Bible talk about its creation, while only two chapters are devoted to the creation of the world. Noah's ark was the first structure whose plans were provided by God. The Tabernacle was the second, and we are told that the builders had to follow the plans precisely.

Heb. 8:5 [Phillips] [The priests] are serving what is only a pattern or reproduction of things that exist in heaven. Moses, you will remember, when he was going to construct the tabernacle, was cautioned by God in these words: See that thou make all things according to the pattern that was showed thee in the mount.

Large sections of the book of Revelation draw on illustrations that come from the Tabernacle. The entire book of Hebrews explains clearly and concisely what those sacrifices were all about. Without this explanation and a knowledge of the truth, how revolting it all would be. Animals slaughtered in the morning, animals slaughtered in the evening, and the blood seemingly splashed on everything in sight.

But that “pattern that was shown to Moses in the mount” was designed to teach two lessons:

1. Forgiveness comes only through the shedding of blood;
2. Salvation is obtained through atonement.

Paul makes it completely clear what that ancient pattern was all about:

Heb. 9:10-12 [Phillips] The ceremonies are concerned with food and drink, various washings and rules for bodily conduct, and were only intended to be valid until the time when Christ should establish the truth. For now Christ has come among us, the High Priest of the good things which were to come, and has passed through a greater and more perfect tent which no human hand had made. It was not with goats' or calves' blood but with his own blood that he entered once and for all into the Holy of Holies, having won for us men eternal reconciliation with God.

All that blood was necessary to show the concept of “propitiation”—or atonement. That blood and nearly all the symbolism of the Tabernacle was meant to illustrate the great sacrifice for sin that was yet future, and that means the sacrifice of Christ.

Heb. 9:22-24 [Phillips] And you will find that in the Law almost all cleansing is made by means of blood—as the common saying has it: “No shedding of blood, no



remission of sin.” It was necessary for the earthly reproductions of heavenly realities to be purified by such methods, but the actual heavenly things could only be made pure in God's sight by higher sacrifices than these. Christ did not therefore enter into any holy places made by human hands ... but he entered Heaven itself to make his appearance before God as High Priest on our behalf.

### Christ in the Tabernacle

As we enter the courtyard that surrounds the tabernacle structure, the first thing we see is a large altar, 4½ feet high, and 7½ feet square. We are told that it was to be overlaid with brass (Exod. 27:2) so we call it the Brazen altar. The Hebrew word translated brass is #5178 which Strong's says means copper. In fact this Hebrew word is translated just once as copper (in Ezra 8:27). Yet we believe the altar was not made of pure copper and not an alloy of copper and zinc which is the way you make brass. I have read that zinc was a metal that was unknown in those times. We should call it a Copper Altar, but no one does. It was made of wood sides overlaid with sheets of copper. Actually there were the four sides plus a grate that was positioned at the half way mark.

Ex. 27:5 Thou shalt put [the grate] under the compass of the altar beneath, that the net may be even to the midst\* of the altar. [\*Rotherham footnote: “half”]

It was on this altar that sacrifices were burned. The halfway mark was 1½ cubits, and that was the height of the mercyseat in the Most Holy. Thus we see that the sacrifice in the courtyard—the blood from which was sprinkled on the mercyseat—was neither higher or lower than the representation in the Most Holy. It was the same sacrifice, but illustrating how the sacrifice was consumed. The “value” of the sacrifice—the blood—was what was carried into the Tabernacle. It was the sacrifice on the Brazen Altar that brought justification, and we know that our justification comes only through Christ:

Rom. 5:9 Much more then, being now **justified** by [Christ's] blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.

There were so many sacrifices that it is easy to get confused and think of them all as the same thing. Actually two major considerations are all that we need keep in mind: (1) the sin offering; (2) the burnt offering, or "sweet savor" offerings. The sin offering was essential, and it had to be made first. The lesson is that there is no access to God without there first being a sacrifice for sin. After this has been done acceptably, then other offerings—offerings which were considered a sweet savor by God—could be given. This was such an important lesson that we see it being taught at the very first mention of sacrifice in the Bible.

Gen. 4:3-7 [Rotherham] So it came to pass after certain days that Cain brought in of the fruit of the ground a present to Yahweh; Abel also even he brought in of the firstlings of his sheep and of their fat. And Yahweh approved of Abel and of his present, but of Cain and his present he approved not. And it angered Cain greatly and his countenance fell. So then Yahweh said unto Cain, Wherefore hath

it angered thee, and wherefore hath thy countenance fallen? Shall it not, if thou do right, be *an uplifting (of my countenance and of thine)?* But if thou do not right, at the entrance a sin-bearer is lying. (*As much as to say: "With which thy brother will supply thee"*) Unto thee, moreover, shall be his longing, though thou rule over him.

*Italics represent Rotherham footnotes.*

The *Companion Bible* draws our attention to the fact that the Hebrew words say that Abel brought in “the firstlings, and the fattest ones too” yet the text does not say Cain offered his firstfruits. The implication might be that Cain’s offering was not the best he had. The “approval” of God of one offering and not the other might very well have been shown by fire from heaven. Cain had the chance to do better, but when he talked with his brother, he allowed rage to overpower him and he so killed him. Cain probably couldn't understand why his gift wasn't just as acceptable as Abel's, but when told what to do, he refused and killed his brother out of hatred. “Religion is and ever has been the greatest cause of blood-shedding”—*Companion Bible*.

### **The Laver**

As we proceed from the brazen altar toward the door of the Tabernacle, we encounter the laver—a large bowl made of copper mirrors holding water for cleansing. The priests were instructed to use the laver before entering the tabernacle under penalty of death.

Ex. 30:20 When they go into the tabernacle of the congregation, they shall wash with water, that they die not...

The symbolism is clear: the unwashed priest perishes. Likewise those followers of Jesus at this time must be washed if they are to be acceptable to the Heavenly Father.

Titus 3:5 .. according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Spirit.

1 Cor. 6:11 [RSV] But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.

### **The Incense Altar**

As we pass through the door of the tabernacle, we find another altar, made of wood overlaid with gold sheets. It is the incense altar. What does it represent?

Psa. 141:2 Let my prayer be set forth before thee as incense and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.

Most expositors suggest that the incense altar shows communion with God in prayer. In fact, Lev. 16:18 says that the altar was “before the Lord”—meaning right in front of the mercyseat (even though there was a veil between).

Lev. 16:18 And he shall go out unto the altar that is before the LORD, and make an atonement for it; and shall take of the blood of the bullock, and of the blood of the goat, and put it upon the horns of the altar round about.

This blood is the blood of the sin offering and includes both the bullock and the goat. God provided two animals for a sin offering because he meant to illustrate two sacrifices—namely, his son Jesus and those who would be associated with him in a life of sacrifice. If in this picture we were to see only the sacrifice of Jesus, only one animal would have been sacrificed.

The offering of incense was perpetual. Aaron offered up incense every morning and every evening [Ex. 30:7,8]. Paul tells the Christian church: "Pray without ceasing" [1 Thess. 5:17].

Rev. 8:3 And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer, and there was given unto him much incense that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.

Although this is a somewhat different vision, there is an interesting lesson in it. The prayers go up **with** the incense. It is Christ's intercession on our behalf that makes our prayers acceptable. Without **his** merit, no prayer goes up.

Rom. 8:34 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.

The day of atonement sacrifices are described in Leviticus, chapter 16. A reading of that chapter seems to imply that only the High Priest was to be involved. Verse 17 even specifically states that no man [excepting the High Priest] was to be in the tabernacle when atonement was being made. We see Christ as our High Priest, officiating over the sacrifice of himself [the bullock] and his body members [the church]. He is both priest and sacrifice:

Isa 53:7,12 He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter ... he hath poured out his soul unto death ... and he bare the sin of many.

### **The Mercyseat**

We must pass under the veil between the Holy and Most Holy. When our Lord died on the cross, the veil in the temple was ripped from top to bottom. Jewish authorities attest that it was four inches thick and tightly woven ... showing the miracle that occurred.

Heb. 10:19-22 [Phillips] So, by virtue of the blood of Jesus, you and I, my brothers, may now have confidence to enter the Holy of Holies by a fresh and living way, which he has opened up for us by himself passing through the curtain, that is, his own human nature. Further, since we have a great High Priest set over the household of God, let us draw near with true hearts and fullest confidence,

knowing that our inmost souls have been purified by the sprinkling of his blood just as our bodies are cleansed by the washing of clean water.

When we read about prayers and incense in Rev. 8:3, we are told that the altar was before the heavenly throne. In the tabernacle, the incense altar was before the mercy seat and that mercy seat was also a throne:

Ex. 25:22 And there I will meet with thee [when kings meet others, they are on their throne], and I will commune with thee from above the mercyseat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony.

The flat lid of the mercyseat represented God's justice, for it was on the lid that the blood was sprinkled. God's wisdom could be pictured in the supernatural light above the lid, and the two cherubims—love and power—look down upon justice, waiting for it to be satisfied with the blood of sacrifice before they can spring into action on behalf of the people.

Lev. 16:14 And [Aaron] shall take of the blood of the bullock and sprinkle it with his finger upon the mercyseat eastward, and before the mercyseat shall he sprinkle of the blood with his finger seven times.

The journey of the blood from the brazen altar here reaches an end. The sprinkling of the blood satisfies justice and instead of a throne of justice, it has become transformed into a throne of grace:

Heb. 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.

Why was blood necessary? It specifically pictured the giving up of a life:

Lev. 17:11 For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul.

God's justice could never be satisfied by the blood from animals. It is only when we realize that God was illustrating a great sacrifice to come that we can understand it at all:

Heb. 9:12-14 Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood [Christ] entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. For if the blood of bulls and of goats and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling the unclean sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

Turning again to a scripture we started with...

Rom. 3:25 Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood...

“The thought in the O. T. sacrifices and in the N. T. fulfillment is that Christ completely satisfied the just demands of a holy God for judgment on sin by his death on the cross. Propitiation satisfies the righteousness of a holy God, thereby making it possible for him to show mercy righteously.”

—Scofield Reference Bible footnote

As we look down the paths of history, we notice a progression in the way God has manifested himself to his people:

1. A personal and individual revelation existed with those who worshipped him ... includes Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
2. His presence became more encompassing in the tabernacle arrangement, and in particular the visible cloud that all the people recognized.
3. The glory of the Father that shown out through his son demonstrated to all the people what perfection really was. “We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” says John [1:14].
4. The broader manifestation shown by the indwelling of the holy spirit in all of Christ's followers throughout the world during the past 2000 years.
5. The worldwide and universal manifestation to come when the New Jerusalem shall descend upon a glorified earth.

Rev.21:3-5 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, nether 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. And he said unto me, Write, for these words are true and faithful.

Closing Hymn: #212—”The Sinner's Friend”

*[First given in Los Angeles, June, 1971. Published in The Dawn, March, 1990.]*

NOTES:

The Tabernacle; W. G. Moorehead; Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, 1952. [Originally written around 1895]

Tabernacle of Israel; James Strong; Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1952. [Originally written around 1890]

## *The Book of Praises*

Opening Hymn: #235 — “Praise Our King”

When the Old Testament Book of Praises was translated into Greek by the Septuagint translators, they changed the name from "praises" to "psalms" the name now used in most non-Hebrew Bibles.

"Praise" is a good one-word description of the Psalms. The English word in its many forms appears more times in the psalms than in all the other books of the Bible combined.\* Generally titles in small print that have the word psalm [e.g. Psalm 9: A **psalm** of David] are Strong's #4210 meaning a poem set to music.

Here is Psalm 100's celebration of praise. Note the imperative form of the verbs, the form used to give orders. Praising the Lord is what we 're supposed to do. (*Emphasize the verbs.*)

MAKE a joyful noise unto the Lord, all ye lands.

SERVE the Lord with gladness.

COME before His presence with singing.

KNOW ye that the Lord he is God: it is he that hath made us, and not we ourselves; we are His people, and the sheep of His pasture.

ENTER into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise:

BE THANKFUL unto Him, and bless His name. For the Lord is good;  
His mercy is everlasting; and His truth endureth to all generations.

The psalms are poetry. In English we generally expect poems to rhyme and to have a kind of beat or rhythm. Although poems can be much appreciated by those who know the language, it is very hard to translate them and preserve both rhythm and rhyme. That's because the equivalent words in another language generally don't rhyme.

So how do you translate a hymn that is to be sung to the same music, and still have it rhyme? Answer: you take liberties with the words:

### **English #237**

Praise the Lord ye heav'ns, adore him;  
Praise him, angels in the height;  
Sun and moon rejoice before him;  
Praise him, all ye stars of light.

### **French #5**

Praise the Lord under the heavens  
Glorify Him by singing  
In a choir let us unite our voices  
By praising him at all times.

In spite of translation difficulties the poetic Hebrew psalms have been prized by everyone regardless of what language in which they're read. Vivid parallel repetition of thoughts and ideas formed the basis of the poetic form, and that translates very well:

---

\* 32 times in N.T.; 65 times in O.T. [NOT Psalms] ; 128 times in Psalms.

ENTER... into His gates with thanksgiving, He gathered as in a bottle the waters of the sea,  
 into His courts with praise. putting the deeps in storehouses.  
 (Psalm 33:7, Eaton's trans.)

Some psalms were constructed with poetic constraints. There are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet. Psalm 25 and 34 have 22 verses [lines] each starting with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Of course an English poet would have to write 26 lines to duplicate this effect. In Psalm 119 the poet took each Hebrew letter in turn and wrote eight lines each beginning with that same letter (so the entire psalm consists of  $8 \times 22 = 176$  verses). Clearly that effect can't generally be translated, but here's one expert's attempt at verses 129-136 where the translation begins each verse with the letter P. (You might follow in the King James to see how cleverly the translation was done.) Psalm 119:129-ff:

**P**romises from you are marvelous, so I guard them with my life.  
**P**utting forth meaning, your word gives light, making wise the simple.  
**P**anting with open lips I thirst and long for your commands.  
**P**eace be on me from your merciful face, after your rule for lovers of your name!  
**P**lant my feet right by your speaking to me and let no evil take power over me!  
**P**reserve me from man's oppression that I may keep your principles!  
**P**our light from your face on your servant and teach me your decrees!  
**'P**lashing waters, my tears drop down that men have not kept your teaching.

Experts say the craftsmanship of the psalms is highly sophisticated and represent high art. Centuries ago people appreciated them so much that many memorized all of them. So if one began a quotation from a psalm, the rest of the words would flood into the mind to complete it. I understand that at one time prelates in the Church of England had to know them all by heart.

There is a wonderful economy of communication when everyone has memorized them. Our Lord, for example, had only to utter the opening words of Psalm 22-- "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"--and listeners would instantly find words flooding into their minds:

vs. 7: They that see me laugh me to scorn. saying, "He trusted on the Lord that He would deliver him, let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him."

vs. 14: I am poured out like water, all my bones are out of joint.

vs. 16: The assembly of the wicked have enclosed me, they pierced my hands and feet.

vs. 18: They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.

Suddenly some might see that this psalm does not describe David's experiences. It is a prophecy of Messiah. Although it begins with suffering, it ends with victory over death and the blessings that are to flow to the world in the kingdom. The last words of this psalm are: "It is finished." [See note in *Companion Bible*.] Thus our Lord could give a

marvelous testimony to those gathered near the cross by simply uttering the opening words, then later the final words of this psalm. Memory would supply all the other words and perhaps with it a realization of the psalm's prophetic significance.

### **David as Psalmist**

We say this psalm does not describe David's experiences, but who says David wrote it? Those who haven't thought about it might think David wrote all the psalms:

2 Sam. 23:1 Now these be the last words of David . . . the sweet psalmist of Israel.

But on closer examination, there's no question that David did not write a great many psalms. However, the fine print at the start of Psalm 22 says "A Psalm of David." Are those words inspired? They have no verse number in our English Bible, though the French Bible does assign a verse number to those captions.

In 2 Samuel 22 we find the words of a song that are spoken by David to the Lord. If you read it, you'd think it was in fact a psalm, even though it is not in the Book of Psalms. But in fact it is! Psalm 18 is an almost word-for-word duplicate; the fine print of Psalm 18 identifies it as a psalm of David. Experts disagree about whether the fine print can always be trusted. Apparently such words are very old. In at least one other instance we have proof the words identifying the author are correct:

Luke 20:42 And David himself saith in the book of Psalms, "The Lord said unto my Lord, sit Thou on my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool."

Jesus is quoting the first verse of Psalm 110 and he says David is the author. Because Jesus speaks only the words the Father gave him to speak (John 12:49), we can be absolutely sure he's right. The fine print at the start of Psalm 110 says it is "A Psalm of David." About half the psalms have a similar identification. The oldest psalm is Psalm 90, and there the fine print says it is "A Prayer of Moses, the man of God."

So we see that the psalms are not just praise; they are also prayers. In fact, the last verse of Psalm 72 says: "The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended." This marked the end of one collection, or book, of psalms. Originally there were five such books and all were combined to make what we call the Book of Psalms. This division into "books" is not identified in the King James, but it is in the NIV and others. Following Psalm 72, the NIV Bible says "Book III."\*

We can't be positive about the order and even which psalms were in the scriptures used by the Lord and the apostles, but these words from the Apostle Paul are instructive:

Acts 13:33 God hath . . . raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.

What's interesting is that it was the second psalm in Paul's Bible and it is the second psalm in ours. However, this is the only place where a psalm was identified by number.

---

\* The end of the other books is after Psalm 41, 89, and 106.



Often quotes were not identified as coming from the psalms, though because of memorization, most everyone surely knew it. Here's a typical example:

Heb. 2:6 But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man that thou art mindful of him...

The "one" doing the testifying is the author of Psalm 8 which the fine print identifies as "A Psalm of David." Our Lord and the apostles were not the only ones who quoted from the psalms. The only time Satan quotes scripture, he picks a psalm:

Matt. 4:5-7 Then the devil . . . setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple and saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, "He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone."

The memory of the adversary must have been a bit weak because he omits one phrase from Psalm 91 and adds one of his own. Even so, by making such a quotation he acknowledges the prophetic application of the psalms and that they were talking about a "greater than David" who would eventually come on the scene. It was probably this that inspired William Shakespeare to write:

The devil can cite scripture for his purpose. An evil soul producing holy witness is like a villain with a smiling cheek, a goodly apple rotten at the heart. O, what a goodly outside falsehood hath! [Antonio speaking in *Merchant of Venice*, Act 1, Scene 3.]

If the adversary had continued the quotation, he would have had to say: "Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder [or serpent]." This would bring him uncomfortably close to what he heard in the garden when God said that the seed of the woman would bruise [crush] his head. (Gen. 3:15) So, being a diplomat, he stopped where he did.

### **The Psalms as Prophecy**

None of us prove our doctrines by quoting the words of a hymn. But the psalms are not ordinary hymns. They are inspired by the Holy Spirit and have all the validity of prophecy.

Luke 24:44 And he said unto them, 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.

Our Lord and the apostles quoted or referred to specific psalms at least 70 times, more than any other Old Testament book. [*Isaiah with 55 references is in second place.*] Without question the psalms were considered the equal of any prophetic utterance. When the disciples were concerned with Judas' apostasy, Peter stood up and said:

Acts 1:20 For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his office let another take.

Notice how the book of Hebrews begins:

Heb. 1:1 God who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the **prophets** hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed Heir of all things. [*now we skip to vs. 8 which is one in a series of examples of prophetic words*] But unto the Son He saith [*and here starts a quote from Psalm 45*], Thy throne O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of Thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity; therefore God, even Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy fellows.

Some commentators have suggested that Psalm 45 was written to commemorate an actual wedding of a Jewish king. That is, however, beside the point. Hebrews 1:8 makes it clear that its value rests in its prophetic significance concerning the Son. When seen in that light we can appreciate much more. As we see beginning in verse 14, the Son marries a bride who comes in with her companions, and those considered "fathers" are made princes in all the earth. This pictures the kingdom with Christ as king of kings, the church at his right hand, the great company with her, and ancient patriarchs or "fathers" who are made the visible princely representatives of the earthly phase of the kingdom.

The prophetic value of the psalms can be dramatically shown in the unique reference to Melchizedek in Psalm 110. It was this verse that provided the insight into how Melchizedek typified Christ:

Psa. 110:4 The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.

These words are quoted in Hebrews 5:6 and 7:17,21 as proof of the superiority of the new Melchizedek order of priesthood compared to the obsolete Aaronic priesthood. But if we did not have this single text in Psalm 110, there would be no proof, and we would not have received the blessing associated with this important doctrine as it is presented in the book of Hebrews.

At the conclusion of the last supper the little group sang a hymn and went out. (Matt. 26:30) Undoubtedly they sang a psalm. Although the account doesn't say which psalm was sung, I like the suggestion that it might well have been Psalm 118. It has wonderful prophetic significance. Although the disciples might not make the connection to Jesus at the time they sang it, they would understand when they received the Holy Spirit. That psalm contains a particularly obscure reference:

Psa. 118:22 The stone which the builders refused is become the head of the corner.

When Peter was brought before the high priest and asked how he was able to work miracle cures, he quotes this verse and applies it to Jesus Christ. (See Acts 4:11) This certainly was not something he could have done prior to Pentecost.

Rev. 19:7 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. And to her was granted that

she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.

This Revelation chapter opens with the sound of great praise. The shout of "Alleluia" from those whom verse 1 calls "much people" is the voice of the Great Company who are "in heaven" (vs. 1). (The phrase "great multitude" is used in verse 6.) This is the only place where we find the word "[h]alleluia" in the Bible. But it is not a Greek word. Rather it is the transliteration of two Hebrew words: halle-Jah. That means "Praise God" and is found many times in the psalms\*. The last five psalms are called the Hallelujah psalms because they all begin and end with "Hallelujah" (translated "Praise ye the Lord").

### **Praise**

Today we don't talk much about praise. Yes, we do have "prayer, praise, and testimony" meetings, but too often there are long silences when no one seems to have much to say. We do sing songs of praise, but sometimes only the first and last verses, and not even that if we're running short of time. Why? Are we embarrassed by "Hallelujah"? Maybe our first love is getting a bit old.

Do you remember what your first love was like? No? Then think about someone you've known who was head-over-heels in love. All he can talk about is his beloved. "Isn't she grand?" "Have you ever seen anyone more wonderful than she?" "Don't you just want to hug her?" Woe to you if you don't agree with these judgments.

That's how the psalms celebrate God.

Hallelujah. Praise ye the Lord from the heavens: praise him in the heights.

Praise ye him, all his angels: praise ye him, all his hosts.

Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars of light.

Praise him, ye heavens of heavens, and ye waters that be above the heavens.

Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded, and they were created.

--Psalm 148:1-5 [first third of it]

"Isn't He grand?" "Could there be anyone more wonderful than He?" These are the words of someone in love. What do you think when you hear words of praise from your children, or grandchildren? You react to the love radiating out from the one speaking the words. We were made in the image of God, so we can understand that God similarly reacts to the expressions of love and praise we render to Him.

Heb. 13:15,16 By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

Some may grow tired and forget how important it is to render praise to God:

---

\* Found in 102:18; 104:35; 105:45; 106:1,48; 111:1; 112:1; 113:1,9; 115:18; 117:2; 118:19; 135:1,3,21; 146:1,10; 147:1,20; 148:1,14; 149:1,9; 150:1,6--for a total of 34 times out of 38 occurrences of Strong's #3050.

Rev. 2:4 Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

This was written to the church at Ephesus. You'd think it was Laodicea. Actually it's a problem that's shared by all the churches, by all who have named the name of Christ and who have vowed to love him above all others.

If you're having trouble recognizing things that justify praising God, start back at the very beginning. Soon you'll have a very long list of reasons:

- Praise Him for the creation of this wonderful planet.
- ... for His wonderful characteristics and attributes.
- ... for His plan to bless all the families of the earth.
- ... for the life we have received.
- ... for the opportunity we have to be His children.
- ... for His overruling providences in our life.
- ... for an understanding of His word.
- ... for the opportunity to be part of the bride of Christ.

May we all in the days or years ahead, always cling to our first love. Let us enthusiastically, by word and deed, render praise to His name.

Closing Hymn: #288 — “The Lord's My Shepherd”

*[First given at the Sacramento Convention, February, 1993]*

## *Rahab*

Opening Hymn: #300 — “Light after Darkness”

Heb. 11:6 [NIV] Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

At the beginning of the second chapter we read about Joshua’s first battle:

Joshua 2:1 [NIV] Then Joshua secretly sent two spies. “Go look over the land,” he said, “especially Jericho.” So they went and entered the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there. The king of Jericho was told, “Look! Some of the Israelites have come here tonight to spy out the land.” So the king of Jericho sent this message to Rahab: “Bring out the men who came to you and entered your house, because they have come to spy out the whole land.” But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. She said, “Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they had come from. At dusk, when it was time to close the city gate, the men left. I don’t know which way they went. Go after them quickly. You may catch up with them.” (But she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them under the stalks of flax she had laid out on the roof.) [vs. 8] Before the spies lay down for the night, she went up on the roof and said to them, “I know that the Lord has given this land to you and that a great fear of you has fallen on us, so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you. We have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed. When we heard of it, our hearts melted and everyone’s courage failed because of you, for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below. Now then, please swear to me by the Lord that you will show kindness to my family.”

“Jericho is located in the Jordan Valley, north of the Dead Sea and west of the Jordan River. It is the world's oldest known settlement [with significant archaeological remains dating back as far as 8000 BC]. It is about 800 ft below sea level making it one of the lowest cities in the world.” [Encarta Encyclopedia] It is about five miles west of the Jordan River.

The king of Jericho was more or less the city manager. Notice that there is no-one he can ask for help against this formidable adversary coming against him from out of the wilderness. If all the kings of Canaan had been united together in a mutual-protection confederacy, they might have had a better chance of resisting Israel.

Joshua’s parents named him Oshea meaning savior, or salvation. But Moses put a “Je” in front of his name and that changed its meaning into “he by whom Jehovah will save.”

Numbers 13:16 And Moses called Oshea the son of Nun Jehoshua.

Here is what God says to him when he becomes Israel’s leader when Moses died:

Joshua 1:5 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.

Having just received God's promise to be with him, and possessing a name meaning "Jehovah brings salvation," why did Joshua send out spies? He knows victory is certain. But he also knew one more thing: if he did not use the counsel, prudence, and strength which he had received from God, he would not succeed. Although he was depending on divine direction and power, he also knew it would be prudent to embark on an "intelligence gathering" expedition. There is a lesson here for us: We cannot expect success, either in things spiritual or temporal, unless we also exercise prudence. Yes, God is in command of our experiences. But we are workers together with God. (2 Cor. 6:1) Let us do everything we should do as though success actually depended upon our own efforts.

Because the Jordan was relatively easy to cross at this point, Jericho became a popular rest stop for the many trade caravans that traveled between Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Phoenicia. Foreigners and strangers were frequently within the city which may be why the spies felt bold enough to walk right in. But where would they stay for the night? Why at the place known to welcome strangers: an inn operated by a woman who on occasion offered more than bed and breakfast. It would be these many travelers who would bring the news of the day, who would tell Rahab about what had happened to Israel over the last forty years. The reaction of almost everyone in the city was fear and dread. But Rahab came to the correct conclusion that Israel was serving the true God; all other gods were false. When the spies came to her house, they found the only person in the city of Jericho who was friendly to their nation. Rahab **believed**. Soon she showed she had more than belief. Rahab had **faith**.

Undoubtedly the spies were not the only ones at her house that afternoon. Their manner of speech probably betrayed their nationality so a message soon gets back to the king that spies from Israel have entered the city. Rahab can guess that's happening so she hides the spies on her flat roof.

Now it might seem strange that the king's messengers didn't just enter the house and search it. But in those days a woman's tent or apartment was private and her privacy was **never** violated. Rahab hid the spies so that there would be no obvious evidence of their presence to anyone who came to the door. Then she lies. She says, "Yes, they were here, but they're gone now."

## Lying

Do you lie? Do you think there are circumstances that justify lying? Have you ever lied and later regretted it? Here's a true story that happened in an eastern European country in 1997. Brethren were on a train. They had no tickets because of circumstances outside their control. So they paid conductors what they wanted from time to time. This is illegal, but once on the train without tickets they had no choice. Near the end of the trip the conductor tells them the police are on this segment and are checking tickets. He suggests

that they tell the police they got on the train at the last stop. This would reduce their fine to a much lower level, an amount they had the money to pay. But if the police knew they had traveled a long distance without tickets, there was the real possibility they would be taken to jail. *[pause]* What would you do if you were in this group of brethren?

Now it's one thing to say we should always tell the truth, but when there is the possibility of going to jail, might this not be an exception to the rule? How do we decide?

We know how Rahab decided. She lied, and she did it convincingly. The king's messengers went off toward Jordan hoping to catch the spies. Later that night she lowered them over the city wall using a rope and told them to flee in the opposite direction and hide several days in one of the many mountain caves. I suppose it's possible that someone could claim that because she lied, she became a great hero of faith:

Hebrews 11:31 [NIV] By faith the prostitute Rahab, because she welcomed the spies, was not killed with those who were disobedient.

James 2:25 [NIV] Was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?

There is nothing here that praises Rahab because she lied. To say that she is listed as a hero of faith because she lied would be to say that Abraham is listed because he lied about Sarah's relationship to him *[twice]*, or that Jacob is listed because he lied to his father about his identity when he wanted his father's blessing, or that David is listed because he murdered the husband of a woman he wanted for himself.

Lying is so easy. Cain is the son of parents who were created perfect. When God asks, "Where is your brother Able?" he replies: "I don't know. Am I my brother's keeper?" [NIV of Gen. 4:9] How can we know under what circumstances it is justifiable to lie? Easy: it is never justifiable.

We have given up our own will to do the will of the Heavenly Father. How do we know what that is? One way is to follow the pattern of Jesus who always did the will of his Father. If we do what he did, we may be sure we're doing the will of the Father. And there is not one single instance where Jesus lied. Not one. This should not be surprising. God cannot lie:

Hebrews 6:18 That by two immutable things, in which it was **impossible for God to lie**, we might have a strong consolation . . .

Lying is part of the old man. The world thinks there are times when it is appropriate; it is never appropriate for us. Even in the world, it is hardly the best policy. Would you want to live in a world where people lie as easily as they speak truth? Bible Students are so unsuspecting that lies are used to manipulate them. Beware of words like "well, I've heard it said that..." or "he believes or doesn't believe..." In nearly every instance when I

was a manager, the stories brought to me about the people in my department were not what they seemed. I found the truth only when I went looking for it.

**Anecdote:** The little girls were by themselves making paintings. Nannette heard Analisa start to cry loudly. She investigated. Analisa said Tiffany said she didn't like her painting. Tiffany said, "Analisa asked me if I liked her painting and I said no. Our mother says when you ask someone's opinion about something, you have to prepare yourself for the answer no matter what it is." Nannette had to agree that that was true.

Col. 3:9 **Lie not** one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds.

**Another Anecdote:** [behavior is taught by example] It was a sunny Saturday afternoon and Bobby Lewis was taking his two little boys to play miniature golf. He walked up to the fellow at the ticket counter and said, "How much is it to get in?" The young man replied, "\$3.00 for you and \$3.00 for any kid older than six. It's free for those six or younger. How old are they?" Bobby replied, "The young one's three and the older one is seven, so I guess we owe you \$6.00." The man behind the counter said, "You could have saved yourself three bucks by telling me the older one was six; I wouldn't have known the difference." Bobby replied, "Yes, that may be true, but the **kids** would have known the difference." —*Chicken Soup for the Soul*, p. 103.

Returning to Rahab: Could she have saved the spies without telling a lie? Based on the customs of her time, it would never occur to her to try. Within her culture she certainly had **not** been taught the value of speaking only the truth. Arabs to this day lie effortlessly—Yassar Arafat is Exhibit A. Even though the world knows this, it amazes me so many accept whatever he says at face value.

"Strict truth, either in Jew or heathen, was a virtue so utterly unknown before the promulgation of the Gospel that, so far as Rahab is concerned, the discussion is quite superfluous."—*McClintock & Strong*

Adam Clarke comments on this subject: "There is a lax morality in the world that recommends a lie rather than the truth when the purposes of religion and humanity can be served by it. But when can this be? The religion of Christ is one eternal system of truth, and can neither be served by a lie nor admit one." He goes on to say that the next [false] step is to say: "Let us do evil that good may come of it"—which was one of the accusations leveled against the Apostle Paul by his critics:

Rom 3:8 [NIV] Why not say—as we are being slanderously reported as saying and as some claim that we say—"Let us do evil that good may result"?

Undoubtedly the Spanish Inquisitors thought their torture and persecution of heretics was necessary because of the good that would come from it.



**lie** *n.* **1.** A false statement deliberately presented as being true. **2.** Something meant to deceive or give a wrong impression

If lying is evil, it's evil . . . no matter what the eventual result may be. And white lies? "Those who think it permissible to tell white lies soon grow colorblind!"

### The Scarlet Thread

Rahab and the spies discuss what she is to do to identify her house so the soldiers will know to save her and her family. The King James says:

Joshua 2:18,21 Behold, when we come into the land, thou shalt bind this line of scarlet **thread** in the window which thou didst let us down by. [21] And she sent them away, and they departed: and she bound the scarlet **line** in the window.

The NIV said it was a scarlet cord, but I think it was a **cloth** woven with scarlet thread, a kind of red flag. Rahab hid the spies among stalks of flax drying on the roof. Flax is used to make linen, and Rahab probably made cloth. One of the spies might have seen some red cloth in her home and he realized it could be used as an identifying flag. The "red" was a sign or pledge of safety to all within that house.

Marking the outside of a home with red reminds us of the Exodus. Israelites marked their doorposts and lintels with red blood so the death angel would pass over their house during the night of death. It showed faith by a family that splashing blood would do any good at all. Rahab also had faith that this red flag would save her.

And of course it did save her. She and her family became the first proselytes of Judaism after Israel entered Canaan. She was fully accepted by the Israelites. Her past was in the past. In fact she married a prince of Judah:

Matthew 1:5 [NIV] Salmon the father of Boaz, **whose mother was Rahab**, Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David.

It is a great many years from the marriage of Salmon and Rahab to the birth of Jesse. I believe there were more intermediate steps than just Boaz and Obed who are named here. The Jews could say a grandfather or a great-grandfather was the father of someone. In Matt. 3:9 the Pharisees say they have Abraham for their father [not ancestor]. In the book of Hebrews unborn Levi is considered to be affected because his great-grandfather Abraham paid tithes to Melchisedec (Heb. 7:2).

Salmon's father was Nahshon. When he died in the wilderness, Salmon would have succeeded him. What could have possessed Salmon to marry a heathen prostitute? First of all, when he married her she was neither heathen nor a prostitute. All that was in the past. Although we can't prove it, it is likely Salmon was one of the two spies that fateful night. He saw Rahab's faith firsthand and fell in love with her. Although initially she was outside God's covenant nation, Rahab was fully accepted and became part of the genealogical chain extending from Adam to Jesus Christ. How like our loving God to do

the unexpected, to take one here one there who may be considered undesirable by those who think they know better:

Matthew 21:31 [NIV] The tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.

What does God think of prostitutes? He loves them. And if they accept his love, they can become transformed:

1 Cor. 6:9-11 [NIV] Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers . . . will inherit the kingdom of God. And that is what some of you were [pause] but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

God did something similar for another woman who was born outside the chosen nation. Consider what he had previously said about the Moabites:

Deut. 23:3 An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD for ever.

Strong language, but even so, there could be exceptions:

Ruth 1:22 So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter in law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab: and they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest.

Of course Ruth eventually married Boaz and became part of the genealogical chain from Adam to Jesus Christ.

## Summary

The experience of Rahab and the spies contains interesting lessons for us:

1. Let us like Joshua use wisdom in undertaking the work of the Lord and try to do everything carefully even though we know the results are from the Lord.
2. “Without faith it is impossible to please God.” Rahab says, “the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath.” (Josh. 2:11) She was determined to serve that God, not something less. She survived because of her faith. We know so much more than she did about this God. Let us never lose our faith in Him.
3. Lying is wrong. Period. It is sad to see brethren lie. Learn to say, “I’d rather not answer that question,” or “I don’t know.” Speak the truth, or don’t speak at all. The “ends” never justify the means. Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44). The God whom we serve is the father of truth.
4. God is able to reach outside of his “chosen” people to find one here one there to bless. Many of us are in the truth thanks to the faith of other family members. But how

wonderful to see that the privilege of being a part of the bride of Christ also goes to those with no family connection with the truth movement.

*“He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.”—*

1 John 2:6. He is to walk as our Lord walked, in his general deportment and relationship to everything that is good and correspondingly to avoid everything that is evil. He is to walk as nearly as possible in the footsteps of Jesus. This, however, does not mean that he either should or could, in an imperfect body, walk up to all the perfection of his Lord, who even in his flesh was perfect. It means just what it says, that we should walk as he walked—in the same way, in the same direction, toward the same mark and standard that He recognized and established.—*Manna, November 16*

Col. 3:9,10 [Living Bible] Don't tell lies to each other; it was your old life with all its wickedness that did that sort of thing: now it is dead and gone. You are living a brand new kind of life that is continually learning more and more of what is right and trying constantly to be more and more like Christ who created this new life within you.

1 Peter 3:8–11 [Living Bible] Be like one big happy family, full of sympathy toward each other, loving one another with tender hearts and humble minds. Don't repay evil for evil. Don't snap back at those who say unkind things about you. Instead, pray for God's help for them, for we are to be kind to others, and God will bless us for it. If you want a happy, good life, keep control of your tongue, and **guard your lips from telling lies.** [vs. 14] God will reward you.

Closing Hymn: #255 — “Salvation”

*[First given at Paterson, November 1997]*

## LYING IS LIKE RECKLESS DRIVING 271.5

Sometimes lying makes our lives easier. If you want the day off, just call in sick. If your boss asks if you've finished a report, say you left it at home. And if an irate customer calls, just make up a good cover-up story. Sure, technically these are lies but since no one is hurt, what's the big deal?

We tell ourselves these sorts of lies are harmless. But are they really? Telling lies is like drunk driving. If we're lucky, we won't get caught and no one will get hurt. Still, drunk driving is wrong because it's irresponsible to recklessly endanger human life. Most lies are wrong because they recklessly endanger human relationships. What's more, lies are habit forming -- the more lies we tell the easier it becomes, so we tell more lies.

Self-serving lies that help us get out of a jam or look better are like land mines. Many of them may lay dormant, but sooner or later some of them will explode, damaging both credibility and reputation. The ethical duty to be worthy of trust does not bend to our needs, convenience or desire to avoid unpleasant consequences. Besides being dishonest, lying is disrespectful because it deprives the victim of true information needed to make sensible decisions.

Lies damage personal and business relationships because they generate suspicion and distrust. Once lied to most people think, "What else will he lie to me about?" This is not a healthy basis for any relationship.

This is Michael Josephson reminding you that character counts.

## *The Resurrection of the Dead*

Opening hymn: #265—"Resurrection"

On January 31, 2000, *U.S. News and World Report* ran a cover story on hell. As a part of their research they conducted a poll asking people what they believed about heaven, hell, and what they thought happened when someone died. Here's question #8:

**Which of the following statements comes closest to your view about life after death?**

Certain there is life after death: **52%**

Hope there is life after death but not sure: **26%**

Seriously doubt there is life after death: **15%**

Don't know: **6%**

Refused: **1%**

Because America has been a Christian nation from the time of its founding, most Americans know something about the Bible. They may not have studied it, but even if they are not regular church goers, they know about Jesus Christ's life and his death on the cross. And it is likely they also know how Jesus was resurrected from the dead on that first Easter morning. Even today Easter Sunday is a time when the churches are filled with people.

Now suppose we asked people to pick the one event in history they would most like to see with their own eyes. I suspect many would pick events associated with the life of Jesus, perhaps when he raised Lazarus back to life after he had been dead several days. Certainly we would all want to see the events that occurred that first Easter morning when Jesus was resurrected from the dead.

Resurrection ... the bringing back to life of someone who was dead. What an incredible thought! In fact the idea is so incredible that people rarely talk about it. Everyone takes the miracle of birth for granted. No-one even thinks about the miracle of the exact positioning of our planet so that it is not too hot to boil off all the water, nor too cold to keep it perpetually frozen. Miracles happen all around us. Bringing back the Jews from the lands into which they had been scattered is a modern-day miracle, one that should never have happened if historical precedent means anything. We continue to live in a time of miracles. And we have become indifferent to them.

On one occasion the great apostle Paul spoke to king Agrippa and noticed he was having trouble with something Paul said. So Paul asked the king directly: "Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?" (Acts 26:8) I suspect the king was not the only one who had trouble with this idea. Even today people seem to find it easier to believe the dead continue to live in some unknown, far-off place than that they will be brought back to life at a future time.

Jesus knew when and where he was going to die. He tried to tell his close associates, but they did not want to hear about it:

Matthew 16:21,22 From that time forth began Jesus to show unto his disciples, how that 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. Then Peter

took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.

Of course Peter wanted certain things to happen then. He was sure a dead Jesus couldn't do anything. Although a dead Jesus who came back to life would certainly be powerful, this was just too incredible for Peter to believe. It is not that he had not seen someone resurrected. He had. On one occasion Jesus demonstrated the power of God when he raised the daughter of Jairus from the dead. The account is in Luke 8:

Luke 8:51-55 And when he came into [Jairus'] house, he suffered no man to go in, save Peter, and James, and John, and the father and the mother of the maiden. And all wept, and bewailed her: but he said, Weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn, knowing that she was dead. And he put them all out, and took her by the hand, and called, saying, Maid, arise. And her spirit came again, and she arose straightway: and he commanded to give her meat.

"She is not dead but sleepeth." Throughout the Bible death is called a sleep. Why does it use this word? We all know that when people are sleeping, it is natural to believe they will eventually awake. "Sleep" is a wonderful way to describe death because death is a temporary condition that will end some day. Yes, the Bible promises that a day will come when those who are in the sleep of death will "hear his voice and shall come forth." (John 5:28,29)

Of course it was one thing for the disciples to believe Jesus had the power to bring others back to life, but quite another to believe Jesus could bring himself back to life if he died. Such an idea was beyond human understanding. That's why they wanted to do everything they could to keep him from foolishly putting himself in a dangerous situation. What they did not understand was that Jesus did NOT raise the dead because of his own power and he would NOT bring himself back to life after he died. The miracle of the resurrection is a direct result of the power of God.

Acts 13:28-30 [Paul is speaking] And though [the Jerusalem rulers] found no cause of death in him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the [cross] and laid him in a sepulchre. But God raised him from the dead.

### **The Empty Tomb**

Jesus predicted that not only would he be put to death, he would come back to life after three days.

Mark 8:31 And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

The next verse says he said this openly. This was heard and remembered by his enemies because they went to Pilate after he had been placed in the tomb and quoted these words:

Matthew 27:62-66 Now the next day, that followed the day of the preparation, the chief priests and Pharisees came together unto Pilate, Saying, Sir, we remember that that deceiver said, while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again. Command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day, lest his disciples come by night, and steal him away, and say unto the people, He is risen from the dead: so the last error shall be worse than the first. Pilate said unto them, Ye have a watch: go your way, make it as sure as ye can. So they went, and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch.

So the temple guards were given the job of insuring that nothing happened to his body. You can be sure they checked the tomb first before taking up their positions. They knew if that body disappeared, they would be serious trouble.

The chief priests thought the presence of the guards would insure that nothing would happen to the body. But that very act proved to be the best proof that a miracle had happened. It was a great embarrassment to the chief priests that in spite of their best efforts, the body disappeared. What should they do?

Matthew 28:11-15 Behold, some of the watch came into the city, and showed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, Saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.

It is amazing that the soldiers were expected to say they were so soundly asleep they never heard anyone roll back the stone and steal the body. What kind of soldiers would be so untrustworthy? But what else could they say? The great adversary of God attempts to spoil God's plan but he never actually spoils anything. Likewise the chief priests' attempt to interfere with the resurrection made the miracle even more credible.

The apostle Paul was not an eye-witness to this miracle, but he talked with others who were. Paul knew that this was the most important event to Christians:

1 Cor. 15:3-8 For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: and that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: after that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. [note the use of "sleep" for "death"] After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time.

What Paul found so hard to understand was that some Christians in Corinth had stopped believing in the resurrection. He says in verse 12: "Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?"

And in verse 17: “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.”

The phrase “they which are fallen asleep in Christ” refers to those who have followed Christ when they were alive, and they were now dead. But if Christ is NOT raised, Paul says we must conclude that no-one else will be raised either which would make the sleep of death permanent. Those in that “sleep” have “perished.”

Essentially the resurrection of Christ, which the Christian world celebrates every Easter, is the guarantee that one day “all that are in their graves shall come forth.” If God’s mighty power can raise just one person from the dead, it surely is able to raise two people, or a thousand, or a million, or countless billions. We know there are many more stars in the entire universe than human beings who have ever lived. Their creation has not been difficult for God. Why should anyone think the re-creation of several billion human beings is hard? It may be hard for us; it’s easy for God.

The resurrection is the first event in a future period we call “the kingdom.” Christians have been praying for this kingdom for 2000 years when they say the words, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven.” It is a time when the dead will be brought back to life, when families and friends will be reunited. It will be a time when everyone will reach the perfection enjoyed by our first parents in the garden of Eden, the same perfection as possessed by our Lord. We read of the time of the kingdom in Revelation:

Rev. 21:2-5 And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 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. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.

This is a marvelous promise, one that thrills the hearts of all who read it. But too many restrict the blessings of the kingdom to those who are saved, who have named the name of Christ. What happens to those who either have not heard of Christ, or who have heard but do not believe?

Don’t be too quick to say, “They’ve had their chance and with God there are no second chances.” If that were true, why did Jesus speak to the people in riddles? His disciples certainly did not understand why, so they asked him about it:

Matthew 13:10-17 And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. [14] And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not



perceive: [16] But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. [17] For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them.

If our eyes are open and our ears unstopped, let us praise God. But if those who don't see or don't hear are "lost," why didn't Jesus open **their** eyes and ears? Did he want them to be lost? Surely not! The obvious answer is that he knew there was a future time for them, a time when "all that are within their graves shall come forth."

Of all the nations of the earth, the one who had been specially favored above all others was Israel. Yet most of Israel did not accept Jesus, did not have the faith to believe that he was the son of God. The leaders of Israel found a way to put him to death. Yet in spite of this murder of an innocent man, even these great sinners will come back in a resurrection:

Hebrews 8:10-12 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 neighbour, 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.

All humankind dies because our first parents were sentenced to death because of their disobedience. They could only pass a dying condition on to their progeny. But Jesus changed all that.

1 Cor. 15:21 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. [25] For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.

What a wonderful promise! Because of Adam's sin, all die. Because of Christ's faithfulness, all will eventually be made alive. And when the kingdom processes have done their desired work, even death itself will be destroyed.

Do you think this is "too good to be true"? In fact it is so good it must be true; it must be what a kind, loving creator would do for those he created in his own image. This was his plan from before the foundation of the world, and it shines forth from the pages of the Bible, the word of God.

Some years ago I watched Bill Moyers talk with a panel of experts as they discussed some of the important events in Genesis. Most of his panelists expressed shock and amazement at God's behavior in these early chapters. Not one person suggested that a resurrection from the dead of Abel, Adam, Eve, and those who perished in the flood helps us understand how a loving and benevolent God could allow innocent people to die. The

panelists left the impression in the mind of their viewers that the God of the New Testament was quite different from the God of the Old Testament. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Malachi 3:6 For I am the LORD, I change not.

James 1:17 [Phillips] Every good endowment that we possess and every complete gift that we have received must come from above, from the Father of all lights, with whom there is never the slightest variation or shadow of inconsistency.

### **When Will the Resurrection Begin?**

Of course everyone wants to know how much longer before the resurrection begins. It is natural that what we want, we want now. After Jesus was resurrected and was speaking with his disciples, they asked him a question:

Acts 1:6 When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?

They probably thought the answer would be “of course,” but there could be no harm in asking. What possible reason would there be for a delay? Rather than discourage them by telling them just how long it was going to be, Jesus replied:

Acts 1:7 It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.

Even though our question is not about restoring the kingdom to Israel, it is in the same category, and perhaps deserves the same answer. Our Heavenly Father is in charge of times and seasons, and everything is going to happen on his timetable, and at exactly the right time.

Nonetheless, we know it can't be much longer. At the end of prophetic book of Daniel, in chapter 12, we read [NIV translation]:

Dan. 12:1,2 At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake.

We live in times of distress. At the beginning of the twentieth century we had a war so great it was the first to be called a world war. It ended the dynasties that controlled Europe. It was terrible, and the second one was worse. That war ended with the dropping of one bomb on one Japanese city followed by a second bomb on a second city. Those cities disappeared in a mushroom cloud. Since then the world watches to see what will happen next. The fear, largely unspoken, is that if the world's nuclear arsenals are ever used, it will be the end of life on earth as we know it.

Daniel heard the words of this prophecy, but he did not understand them. So he asks in verse 8 when these things would happen, but he was told that the understanding of the words was for a later time. Daniel did, however, receive a wonderful promise:

Dan. 12:13 [NIV] As for you, go your way till the end. You will rest [*in the sleep of death*] and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance.

One who sleeps is unaware of the passage of time. Daniel will awaken in the kingdom and feel as though the resurrection had occurred immediately. It will be the same with us. Although we have every reason to believe that the promised kingdom is just around the corner, that this old world cannot hang together much longer, that actual time does not really matter. Whether we are alive when it happens, or in the sleep of death, that time will be marvelous. When it occurs, we, with all of mankind, will praise God for what he has done for his human creation.

One final note. One of the more eminent biblical scholars of the nineteenth century was Adam Clarke. I frequently consult his commentary on the Bible and appreciate his point of view. After extensive comments on the 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians, Adam Clarke wrote: “The doctrine of the resurrection appears to have been thought of much more consequence among the [early] Christians than it is now. How is this? The apostles were continually insisting on it, and exciting the followers of God to diligence, obedience, and cheerfulness through it. And their successors in the present day seldom mention it! So the apostles preached, and so [the early] Christians believed; so we preach, and so our hearers believe. There is not a doctrine in the Gospel on which more stress is laid; and there is not a doctrine in the present system of preaching which is treated with more neglect!” (Adam Clarke, *endnote #3, 1 Cor. 15*)

Christ our Lord has risen from the dead. Thus we have the assurance that through him, all will someday live again. Let us rejoice and give thanks for this precious truth.

*Announce free copies of the booklet Resurrection of the Dead, The Herald magazine, and other free booklets on the table.*

Closing hymn: #31 — “Christ the Lord is Risen Today”

*[First given at a Los Angeles public meeting, April 2000]*

## *Revelation 12: The Woman and the Dragon*

Opening Hymn: #281 — “The Church”

When we hear of “women of the Bible” we naturally think of Ruth, Esther, Sara, Mary, Martha, and others. Today we want to talk about an unusual woman because she stood on the moon!

Rev. 12:1 And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet and upon her head a crown of twelve stars.

The book of Revelation contains highly symbolic language. Let’s explore these symbols and see if we can understand this unusual description.

Here’s a summary of the important features of chapter 12:

A woman is in the pains of child birth. She is intimidated by a dragon whose purpose is to destroy her child. Her child is a son, and rather than being destroyed by the dragon, it is whisked away to safety. A battle between the dragon and the son occurs and the dragon is defeated. A voice from “heaven” declares that salvation has come. The dragon finds itself where the woman is and makes trouble for her again. The woman flies away from the dragon to a wilderness there to spend 3½ “times.” This enrages the dragon and he tries to destroy the woman with a flood of water, but no harm comes to her.

Let's look at the symbols in the first verse again:

**12 Stars:** The number twelve reminds us of twelve apostles. An earlier verse in Revelation interprets the symbol “star” for us.

Rev. 1:20 The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels [messengers] of the seven churches...

**Sun:** source of light; sustainer of life.

1 Peter 2:9 Ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

So the sun represents the light of truth brought to us through Jesus.

**Moon:** reflects the light it receives from the sun

This symbol is not so straightforward. Some scriptures refer to the “darkening” of the moon, or of its being turned into blood, but none say exactly what the moon represents. Yet “reflecting” the sun reminds us of the types and shadows of the Old Testament because they reflect the truth.

Heb. 10:1 For the law having a shadow [or reflection] of good things to come and not the very image of the things can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.

So we think the moon represents the law, or Old Testament types and shadows.

Who was the **Woman**?

- she is standing on the Old Testament word
- has the bright sunshine of the truth for her robe
- closely associated with the apostles (twelve stars are in her hair)

We conclude that she represents the early church. In verse 14 we read about an interesting symbol given to the woman:

Rev. 12:14 And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle that she might fly into the wilderness into her place where she is nourished.

To confirm that the woman represents the church, we turn to Isaiah and read about the symbol “eagles’ wings”:

Isa. 40:31 But 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.

**Man child:** This would seem to be a symbol of Jesus because:

verse 5: [And the woman] brought forth a man child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God and to his throne.

verse 7: And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels.

This “man child” doesn’t represent Jesus even though verse 7 appears to call him Michael! But it can’t be Jesus. If the woman represents the early church, how could the early church “beget” and “bare” Jesus when he was here before the church existed? Another problem: If “Michael” fought and defeated the dragon, this would be equivalent to the binding of Satan; yet in verse 13 the dragon continues to persecute the woman! A loud voice announces in verse 10: “Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ” yet the woman has to fly into the wilderness to escape. Clearly this is **NOT** the “time of salvation,” at least as far as the woman is concerned.

So who did this “son” (called “Michael”) represent?

The word “Michael” is Hebrew #4317 and means “Who (is) like God.” The word appears twice in the New Testament where it is simply the Hebrew word rendered in Greek. Notice that the son is set up as God. What he represents came into existence when the early church had full clear light. So it must be before the so-called “dark ages” occurred.

This “son” says salvation has come, yet the woman flees for her life which, according to verse 14, is a time, times, and half a time. This is repeated in other words in verse 6 as “a 1000, 200 and 3 score days.” Since a prophetic day equals a literal year, the woman is in the wilderness for 1260 years **AFTER** the day of salvation was announced!

Who was this new-born son? It is the papacy, called by most people the Roman Catholic Church.

- pa-pa-cy** 1. the office, dignity, or jurisdiction of the Pope of Rome.  
2. the system of ecclesiastical government in which the Pope is recognized as the supreme head.

This “son” represents a person or organization that represents itself **as God** and achieves the success indicated in verses 7 to 12.

- 2 Thess. 2:3,4 Let no man deceive you by any means, for that day [of Christ] shall not come except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that **he as God** sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

When Paul says “he as God” he is almost saying “Michael” [Who is like God] the name found in Revelation chapter 12.

After the war in “heaven” when the one “as God” [man of sin] fought the “dragon” we read:

- Rev. 12:10,11 And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation and strength and the kingdom of our God and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto death.

This loud voice comes from “heaven” which is a symbol of religious control. It is the voice of papacy. It claims that its past sufferings (described in verse 2) gives it a right to claim kingdom promises, which it proceeds to do.

In the 2 Thess. text Paul mentions the “man of sin.” In verse 5 and verse 13 we read about the woman's “man-child.” Look carefully at verse 13. The word “child” is in italics which means it is translator-supplied. In verse 5 the woman brings forth a male child, but in verse 13 “the dragon...persecuted the woman which brought forth the man.” Although newly born, the child quickly becomes the dreaded “man” predicted by Paul.

"But how," some may ask, "could anything so terrible as the papacy be said to have come from the 'womb' of the early church?"

Paul's warning to the Thessalonians continues:

- 2 Thess. 2:7 (Weymouth) “For lawlessness is already at work in secret; but in secret only until the man who now restrains it is removed.”

- 1 John 2:18-20 (Concordant) “Little children, it is the last hour, and, according as you hear that the antichrist is coming, now also there have come to be many anti-christs, whence we know that it is the last hour. **Out of us they come, but they were not of us**, for if they were of us, they would have remained with us. But it

was that they may be manifested that they are not all of us. And you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all are aware.”

From volume 2, page 272, paragraph 1, chapter MAN OF SIN:

“These various descriptions [of the man of sin] indicate a base, subtle, hypocritical, deceptive, tyrannical and cruel character, developed in the midst of the Christian Church; at first creeping in and up very gradually, then rapidly ascending in power and influence until it reaches the very pinnacle of earthly power, wealth and glory — meanwhile exerting its influence against the truth, and against the saints, and for its own aggrandizement, claiming, to the last, peculiar sanctity and authority and power from God.”

Sufferings are painful. The Thessalonians were anxious for the kingdom, and evidently some there were already saying the “day of Christ” had already arrived. Paul said this faction to proclaim the kingdom as set-up and themselves as rulers, already worked within their midst. Eventually they succeeded in setting up a false kingdom upon the earth.

### **The dragon.**

Rev. 12:9 And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast with him.

This seems to say directly that the dragon is Satan, but if that were true, we have some problems:

- If the dragon represents “Satan,” then the papacy casts Satan down to the earth from his former residence in “heaven.”
- Verse 3 gives the dragon seven heads and ten horns. Do you think Satan has many heads and ten horns?
- If the woman and the her son are symbolic, the dragon is probably also a symbol.

What does the dragon represent?

- It was in existence before the woman's son [which is a symbol of the papacy].
- It wanted to destroy Christianity before the papacy was established.

We believe the dragon represents pagan Rome. Of course pagan Rome was an instrument of Satan just as the papacy is an instrument of Satan.

- pagan**
1. one of a people or community professing some other than the Christian religion (applied to the ancient Romans, Greeks, etc., and sometimes the Jews)
  2. one who is not a Christian, a Jew, or a Mohammedan.
  3. an irreligious or heathenish person. (taken from the Latin, *paganus*, meaning civilian; so called by the Christians because he was not a soldier of Christ)

This “dragon” has seven heads and ten horns. These seem to symbolize time divisions within this civil power and there isn’t enough time to explore this aspect now.

In verse 4 the dragon casts one-third of the stars of heaven to the earth. Because the 12 stars represent the 12 apostles, we can say that the symbol “stars” represent great religious personalities, or leaders. How were these particular “stars” cast to the earth? They were “drawn” or attracted; they were not wrenched from their place in “heaven” against their will. What does this teach us?

It seems that to avoid persecution, some of the early Christian leaders voluntarily associated themselves with pagan Rome to avoid persecution. Suffering can be painful. This explains the rapid rise of the papal system once it started. The leaders rationalized their cooperation by saying, “We deserve these rewards for being so faithful to the Lord.”

Satan tempted Jesus by offering him all the kingdoms of the earth. That offer didn't work with Jesus — but it certainly did work with the man-child! And he delivered on his promise: the papacy came to dominate the entire western world

In Revelation chapters two and three, there are seven messages given to the churches. Each message could be considered as directed to the true church at a different time period. It has been said that as the 12th chapter opens, we are in the “Smyrna” phase. Here’s the message to that church:

Rev. 2:8-11 (Weymouth) To the angel of the Church at Smyrna write as follows:  
These are the words of Him who is the First and the Last — who died and has returned to life. Your sufferings I know, and your poverty — but you are rich — and the evil name given you by those who say that they themselves are Jews, and are not, but are Satan's synagogue. Dismiss your fears concerning all that you are about to suffer. I tell you that the Devil is about to throw some of you into prison that you may be put to the test, and for ten days you will have to endure persecution. Be faithful, even if you have to die for it, and then I will give you the Crown of Life.

This is a good description of the “woman” during the time the man-child is in control of everything.

Rev. 12:14 And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times and a half a time, from the face of the serpent.

The “wilderness” condition of the church all during this “reign” of the papacy is similar to Paul's admonition:

Heb. 13:13 Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.

Our scripture says this condition would last a “time, times and a half a time.” This is the equivalent of 3½ times. A “time” is 360 prophetic days (12 lunar months of 30 days or



one Jewish year). 3 times 360 results in 1260 prophetic days or, applying the day-for-a-year rule, 1260 literal years.

This is the same period of time noted in verse 6 as “a thousand two hundred and three score days” which in plain English is 1260 days. It is literally the same time as Elijah was in the wilderness some of which time he was fed by ravens (see 1 Kings 17). Elijah would, of course, be a type of the church.

In Revelation chapter 13 verse 5, referring to the “beast” John saw we read:

Rev. 13:5 And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months.

Most expositors of Revelation, including Br. Russell, date these 1260 years from AD 539 through 1799, when Napoleon took the pope prisoner. The French revolution coincides with the ending of this time, and it helps explain the 15th verse:

Rev. 12:15 And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood.

Water is a symbol of truth and ordinarily we would not expect truth to be associated with Satanic forces. But nothing was too extreme to stamp out those who were still faithful to the Lord. The ending of the dark ages we associate with the French Revolution, but instead of swallowing up the church in anarchy by the rush of freedom and truth which swept over the people, we read:

Rev. 12:16 And the earth opened her mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth.

## **Conclusion**

We have suggested what appears to be a reasonable explanation for this 12th chapter of Revelation. Let us review what we have learned, “translating” these symbols into ordinary language.

The early church, which was longing for its deliverance from suffering and pain, was thoroughly grounded in the Old Testament writings. It had the full light of the gospel and the writings of the apostles. But Pagan Rome at that time was far from contented to let the fledgling church alone. It stepped up its persecution to the point where many left the church and joined forces with the Roman system. Sometime after the death of the apostles, the forces that had been at work in the church to produce the kingdom on earth, bore fruit. Although Rome would have liked to destroy this new life immediately, almost miraculously did it survive. It grew so powerful that the once omnipotent Roman system gave way to a new church/state system where religion became fashionable. “Christ's kingdom has come,” was the proclamation. But this was no help to the remnant of the true church because this new power sought just as actively to destroy it. For 1260 years the true church is protected by God while the counterfeit kingdom has its day. The devil fails to harm the church no matter what he does.

Our story which started so dismally for the woman, turns out to have a happy ending. Let us continue to look forward enthusiastically to the time when we can share in blessing all the families of the earth in the real kingdom. Let us not grow weary because the time for the full establishment of the kingdom seems to tarry. Growing weary proved to be disastrous for the early church. It could be equally unfortunate for us as well.

Closing Hymn: #324 — “Cause for Gratitude”

*[First given in Fresno, April, 1963]*

## Sacrifice

Opening Hymn: #187 — Jesus Paid It All

2 Chron. 29:31 [Hezekiah speaks] Now ye have consecrated yourselves unto the LORD, come near and bring **sacrifices** and thank offerings into the house of the LORD. And the congregation brought in **sacrifices** and thank offerings.

The word “sacrifice” in its various forms appears 230 times in the King James Old Testament. We know, of course, about offerings from Cain and Able, Noah after he left the ark, and even Abraham’s willingness to offer up Isaac his most precious possession. But the first occurrence of the word “sacrifice” is in Gen. 31:54, “Then Jacob offered sacrifice upon the mount.” The Hebrew word here as well in our opening verse from 2nd Chronicles is Strong’s #2077, *zeh'-bakh*, and means a slaughter, by impl. a sacrifice (the victim or the act). It is translated: offer (-ing), sacrifice.

The Companion Bible says this verb means *to slay* [and offer up]; *hence to offer what has been slain; to sacrifice*. As a noun it is “the proper word for a victim, *slain* and offered. The Hebrew name for altar (*mizbeah*) is derived from the same root and denotes *the place of slaughter*.”

Today nobody would define the word *sacrifice* in terms of slaughtering something, but that’s exactly what it meant in Old Testament times. So let’s think a little about why there’s so much emphasis on the sacrificial offering of animals, of what possible value it had to God, and what kind of sacrifice pleases him today. It might also be well to think about what we’re doing that in any sense of the word constitutes sacrificing.

### The Formal Institution of Sacrificing

Leviticus specifies in great detail what kind of animal sacrifice was required, under what circumstances, and how it was to be made. Why was this so important? Since the Bible makes it clear that the blood of bulls and goats has no real value, why should God ask the Israelites to do something that was useless?

First, such laws provided a constant reminder that no matter how hard they tried, everyone was constantly falling short of God’s righteous requirements and had to do something to regain God’s favor. Just saying “I’m sorry” was not enough.

Heb. 10:3 But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year.

Second, animals represented wealth. Parting with an animal cost the sinner something. So although one could obtain forgiveness, it was not free.

However, **WE** see something more. We see a picture of something that was yet future:

Heb. 9:22 Almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.

The first Passover celebrated in Egypt clearly shows the idea that salvation from death can only occur if a sacrifice takes place. It pictured the death of a perfect, innocent victim, which would truly bring atonement for a world of sinners. But of course Israel never saw it this way. They knew only that if they followed the rules and gave God what he wanted, they could go back to their daily business.

Today we'd say that "they just didn't get it." God didn't want their sheep, their goats, and their bullocks. Balaam, for example, thought that's exactly what God wanted:

Num. 23:1,2,4 And Balaam said unto Balak, Build me here seven altars, and prepare me here seven oxen and seven rams. And Balak did as Balaam had spoken; and Balak and Balaam offered on every altar a bullock and a ram. (vs. 4) And God met Balaam: and he [Balaam] said . . . I have prepared seven altars, and I have offered upon every altar a bullock and a ram.

In other words, "I have given you a lot of those bullocks and rams you love so much, and now I was wondering if you might do a small favor for me!"

One reason a specific formula for animal sacrifices was given in Leviticus was so the people would not think the more costly an offering, the more surely God must accept it. If that argument is taken to its extreme, one offers sons and daughters because it is the most valuable thing one has. This idea first occurred among the heathen nations, and was eventually accepted by Israel too, even though they were specifically told by God not to do it:

Deut. 12:30,31 [Don't say to yourself...] How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise. Thou shalt **not** do so unto the LORD thy God: for every abomination to the LORD, which he hateth, have **they** done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters [the most valuable thing they had] they have burnt in the fire to their gods.

Jer. 32:35 And they . . . caused 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, to cause Judah to sin.

When one thinks only about the sacrificial animal as such, it is easy for those looking to get by cheap to conclude that since it is going to die anyway, one might just as well offer a less-than-perfect specimen:

Mal. 1:8 (NIV) When you bring **blind** animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice **crippled** or **diseased** animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you?

Can you imagine how confused they must have been when God told them he really had no interest in animal sacrifices at all?

Isa. 1:11 To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats.

So what's the lesson? What kind of sacrifice does God expect from us? How can we avoid the mistakes that were made by fleshly Israel?

### Sacrifices Today

Psalms 40 is a wonderful recitation of what the Lord has done for us. Verse 6: "Sacrifice and offering thou didst **not** desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou **not** required." Once again we see that God has no interest in "things." And we know that because our "ears have been opened."

What does that mean? There are two explanations:

#1: This is the only place where the Hebrew word is translated "opened." In nearly every other place it is translated "digged." It describes what was done to a slave who did not want to be set free, who wanted to serve his master for life. Exod. 21:6 says "his master shall bore his ear through with an awl and he shall serve him forever." (However, the Hebrew words for "digged" and "bore" are quite different, and "boring with an awl" occurred on an ear's outer rim not within the ear itself. [Barnes p. 1303])

#2: "Digged" means to clean out, to excavate, which is what mothers think children should do to their ears when they can't hear what's being said to them. "This people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing . . . But blessed are . . . your ears for they hear." (Matt. 13:15) A similar text is Isa. 50:5, "The Lord God hath opened mine ear and I was not rebellious." (However, this "opened" is not the same Hebrew word as in Psa. 40:6.)

But whether you prefer the "servant for life" or the "ears that hear" explanation, this psalm makes it clear that because of "opened ears" there is a change of behavior:

Psa. 40:8-10 I delight to do **thy will**, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart. I have 1) preached righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I have not refrained my lips, O LORD, thou knowest. I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have 2) declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation.

The one with opened ears is **not** doing his own will, he **is** doing the will of God, e.g., preaching righteousness and declaring God's faithfulness and salvation. That is what God desires.

Giving one's will means giving one's self. When Aaron and his sons went through the ritual we call the consecration of the priesthood (Lev. 8), they laid their hands on animals, and these animals were slain. The laying on of hands pictures that what was to happen to

these animals should be seen as though it were happening to them. They were really offering themselves in sacrifice, which means to be slain.

Rom. 12:1 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.

There is a cartoon in the Dawn's shipping department. It shows a character climbing down off a huge altar. The caption reads: "The problem with a living sacrifice is it keeps crawling off the altar!"

When the animal was slain, it absolutely ceased to have a will of its own. So if we have sacrificed ourselves, we must have no will of our own. This is what sacrifice means from God's standpoint. It is not about giving God "things," for we read:

Acts 17:25 (NIV) [God] is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else.

Psa. 50:10,12 For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. . . . the world is mine, and the fulness thereof. (vs. 5) Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice.

The rich of Jesus' day thought that giving God things would please Him. But they were not looking at it from God's point of view:

Luke 21:1-4 (NIV) As he looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. I tell you the truth, he said, this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.

It seems that the more one has, the harder it is to be pleasing to God. The richer and more prosperous the kings of Israel became, the less pleasing they were to God. The young man who claimed to have kept all the commandments from his youth was too rich in this world's goods to obtain true riches:

Mark 10:21-23 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. And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions. And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!

This young man was unwilling to become a sacrifice—a living sacrifice—because he could not “slay” himself, could not give up his will like a sacrificial animal.

## The Example of Jesus

Heb. 8:3 (NIV) Every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices, and so it was necessary for this one [Jesus] also to have something to offer. [10:9,10] Then he said, “Here I am, I have come to do your will.” . . . And by that will, we have been made holy through the **sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ** once for all.

Jesus sacrificed his body by giving up his will to do the will of his Father. This was his consuming desire; it was a “living sacrifice” and it eventually resulted in his physical death. “My food, said Jesus, is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.” (John 4:34) We may not be a high priest like he was, but we are priests:

1 Pet. 2:5 (NIV) You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be **a holy priesthood**, offering spiritual\* sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

We are a holy priesthood. We were told that priests offer both gifts and sacrifices. Jesus offered himself, and as we look at every detail of his life, we see that everything he did was to please his Heavenly Father, not himself. What are we offering? It’s easy to say that because we made a consecration, we have also given ourself. But have we? Let’s take a slightly different look at the parable of the sheep and the goats. Even though its primary application is to the end of the Millennial Age, its principles have universal application:

Matt. 25:34-36 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand [the sheep], Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. [when telling the goats they never did these things. the goats act surprised—vs. 44] Then shall they [the goats] also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?

It is one thing to say that God has no pleasure in sacrifices for sin, that God does not need nor desire “things.” But does that mean that since we are free from the law (oh happy condition!) we are free to do as we please? Surely not! Why were the goats destroyed? They, like the sheep, professed love for the Lord. They call him Lord. But they haven’t done a thing to demonstrate their professed love. And that is what seals their doom.

From time to time we hear warnings that there may be some **future** great persecution that will come upon the last members of the church to test us severely. I first heard such warnings 50 years ago during the second World War. And it is quite possible that there

---

\* Although Bro. Russell frequently said *spiritual* is not in the oldest manuscripts, every translation I checked, even the *Diaglott*, includes it without a marginal note of any kind.

will be some great persecution. But at the same time, there is a great danger in concentrating our attention on an unknown future: it blinds us to the trials we are having now. And what might these be? Our tremendous collective prosperity that takes us away from doing the Lord's will and from sacrificing ourselves.

When was the last time you fed the hungry? When did you last take in a stranger or give clothing to someone in need? When did you last visit someone who was sick? Have you ever visited someone in prison? The goats say they would have done all these things for the Lord, but in fact they never did it to one of the "least of these." What do we really sacrifice? If you were to answer for others, you might list all kinds of things that they do not consider a sacrifice. They might say it's fun, far more satisfying than anything else they do. Someone once said a sacrifice was when you did something you really didn't want to do. If you don't want to visit the sick or those in prison, it's no surprise that you stay busy with other things and somehow never get around to doing what you don't want to do.

In our opening hymn we sang, "Bring a willing sacrifice." You've probably heard that if it's not a willing, enthusiastic sacrifice, it isn't worth anything. I'm not so sure. An enthusiastic worker in the Lord's vineyard once said (and I paraphrase), "At the start of my Christian walk, everything was a sacrifice. But I did it anyway, and I learned. Now near the end of my walk, I'm finding that nothing is a sacrifice!" Perhaps if you are not willing to visit the sick, you should do it anyway. Eventually you may find it is no sacrifice at all. There are even those who speak enthusiastically of their service to those in prison.

John 12:25 He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal.

Do you love your life? Look back on it so far and ask whose will you've been following. If you have been doing your own will, then you are not a living sacrifice.

When a Jew wished to sacrifice, he selected an animal and killed it. But Jesus did not select an arbitrary victim. He gave himself to be killed. But today sacrifice is much like the gentleman who graciously observed that he had given his nephew to the war and stood ready to sacrifice his brother-in-law as well! We, however, are expected to sacrifice OUR wills—e.g., time, talent, means, influence—not the wills (time/talent/means) of others. We don't own our spouses, children, parents, ecclesia.

The principle that we must sacrifice what is ours and not what belongs to others is nicely illustrated by David:

2 Sam. 24:22 And Araunah said unto David, Let my lord the king take and offer up what seemeth good unto him: behold, here be oxen for burnt sacrifice, and threshing instruments and other instruments of the oxen for wood. (vs. 24)  
And the king said . . . Nay; but I will surely buy it of thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the LORD my God of that which doth cost me



nothing. So David bought the threshingfloor and the oxen . . . and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings.

When Saul was caught red-handed with the best the Amalekites had even though he had been told to destroy everything, he says it's not his fault, but even if it was, it was for a good cause:

1 Sam. 15:13-15 And Saul said unto Samuel, Blessed be thou of the LORD: I have performed the commandment of the LORD. And Samuel said, What meaneth then this bleating of the sheep in mine ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear? And Saul said, They [not me!] have brought them from the Amalekites: for the people spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen, **to sacrifice** unto the LORD thy God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed.

Sacrifice? Of what cost nothing? God is supposed to be pleased that the people offer in sacrifice Amalekite sheep and oxen? Not likely. Saul's complete lack of understanding about sacrifice resulted in his rejection. Samuel's words ring out to us today:

(vs. 22) And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in **obeying** the voice of the LORD? Behold, **to obey** is better than sacrifice.

Jer. 7:22,23 For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: But this thing commanded I them, saying, **Obey my voice**, and I will be your God, and ye shall be my people: and walk ye in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well unto you.

So this is the "bottom line." God doesn't want "things" from us, he wants obedience:

Prov. 23:26 My son, give me **thine heart**, and let thine eyes observe my ways.

If we give our heart to God, there are definite actions that will follow to demonstrate the sincerity of that claim:

Prov. 21:3 (NIV) To **do what is right** and just is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.

Heb. 13:15-16 (NIV) Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a **sacrifice of praise**—the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to **do good** and to **share with others**, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

Hosea 6:6 For I desired **mercy**, and not sacrifice; and the **knowledge of God** more than burnt offerings.

So we do not buy our way into the kingdom by contributing what has only been given to us by God. However, I'm reminded of a funny story. Seems a preacher was warning his flock

against the Bible Students: “In our church we all tithe, but if you get involved with those people it won’t cost you 10%; it will cost you everything you’ve got!” Upon hearing this one of our number observed: “Our movement might be better off with the 10%!”

One of the scribes asked Jesus which was the most important commandment. Jesus answered and the scribe repeated what he heard:

Mark 12:33 (NIV) To love [God] with all your heart, with all your understanding, and with all your strength, and to love your neighbour as yourself, is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.

“Another form of service frequently not discerned by the royal priesthood is the opportunity of renouncing our own ways or plans, our own methods or preferences, and in the interests of peace accepting instead the plans, the preferences of others—where it is merely a matter of personal preference, and where we believe the Lord will be as willing to have the matter one way as another.”—Manna April 24; *R3266*

May we all in the days and weeks that lie ahead, offer up sacrifices that are pleasing to our Heavenly Father.

Closing Hymn: #54 — Once For All

*[First given in Los Angeles, February, 1994]*

## *Salt*

Opening Hymn: #238 — Heavenly Truth

**salt** A colorless or white crystalline solid, chiefly sodium chloride, used extensively as a food seasoning and preservative.

I had never particularly associated salt with the Scriptures, with one exception. Being raised on Bible stories I could not forget the indelible mental picture of Lot's wife. After Lot, his wife, and his two daughters fled Sodom on the morning of its destruction, we read:

Genesis 19:26 But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.

I thought that the Lord performed some kind of miracle turning the wife into a standing, vertical pillar much like petrified wood. And there are artist's drawings much to this effect. But of course the miracle was that the destruction of the city did not happen until the Lord brought Lot and his family out of it. There is nothing to say that when the wife died she became a vertical pillar. Undoubtedly she stumbled, fell, became unconscious and was covered with salt deposits. She became a fallen, horizontal "pillar."

There is much more to salt than Lot's wife. It occurs in a variety of contexts. There is one instance where it was offered with animal sacrifices:

Ezekiel 43:23,24 When thou hast made an end of cleansing [the altar], thou shalt offer a young bullock without blemish, and a ram out of the flock without blemish. And thou shalt offer them before the Lord, and the priests shall cast salt upon them, and they shall offer them up for a burnt offering unto the Lord.

Salt was always to be included with the sacrificial grain offerings:

Leviticus 2:13 (NIV) Season all your grain offerings with salt. Do not leave the salt of the covenant of your God out of your grain offerings; add salt to all your offerings.

Just before God tells Israel to add salt to all their grain offerings, he specifically tells them not to burn any leaven or honey on the altar. That we can understand because leaven is a type of sin; honey is sugar and causes fermentation, a kind of corruption. But what about salt? Why was it so important that salt be added to every grain offering?

Salt has long been a prized commodity. We usually use it as a condiment, and so did Job when he wrote, "Can that which is unsavory be eaten without salt? or is there any taste in the white of an egg?" (Job 6:6). From the Latin root for salt we get the word salary, which was money given to Roman soldiers to buy salt. Thus when we say a person is "worth his salt," we're saying he's worth what we're paying him.

But salt was important not just to make things taste better. It was an antiseptic and a preservative. It retarded putrefaction of fish and meat so both could be kept a long time

without spoiling. Salt was used by the prophet Elisha when he performed his first miracle:

2 Kings 2:19-22 (NIV) The men of the city said to Elisha, “Look, our lord, this town is well situated, as you can see, but the water is bad and the land is unproductive.” “Bring me a new bowl,” he said, “and put salt in it.” So they brought it to him. Then he went out to the spring and threw the salt into it, saying, “This is what the Lord says: I have healed this water. Never again will it cause death or make the land unproductive.” And the water has remained wholesome to this day, according to the word Elisha had spoken.

Of course the salt did not do the healing. The miracle was done by the Lord at the hand of Elisha. The prophet could just as easily have struck the waters or spoken to them to heal them. Salt water is considered unfit for human consumption unless the salt is removed. But in this miracle the unfit waters were sweetened by **adding** salt—the opposite of expectations. In a November 1998 “Beauties of the Truth” article, David Rice suggested that at the opening of the kingdom the added ingredient will be the teaching influence of the church beyond the veil, as kings, priests, instructors. Those who are called the “salt of the earth” will then bless, nurture, and restore mankind, and cause the blessings of life and truth to indeed refresh and enliven the dead world. The “new cruse” of salt shows this church class to be a fresh, “newly” developed class which will provide mankind the sweet waters of life.

### **Covenant of Salt**

When we use the expression “breaking of bread,” we mean the sharing of a meal with any kind of food. Likewise a “covenant of salt” meant an agreement between two parties had been ratified by eating “salt” together and it was inviolate. It was, in effect, an everlasting covenant. In Leviticus 2 where we read that salt was to be offered with the grain offerings, we were told that it was “the salt of the covenant of your God.” There are two other references to such a covenant in Scripture:

Numbers 18:19 All the heave offerings of the holy things, which the children of Israel offer unto the Lord, have I given thee, and thy sons and thy daughters with thee, by a statute for ever: it is a covenant of salt for ever before the Lord unto thee and to thy seed with thee.

2 Chron. 13:5 Ought ye not to know that the Lord God of Israel gave the kingdom over Israel to David for ever, even to him and to his sons by a covenant of salt?

The idea that salt represented fidelity and loyalty is contained in a text in Ezra, but it is hidden in the translation we have in the King James:

Ezra 4:14 Now because we have maintenance from the king's palace, and it was not meet for us to see the king's dishonour, therefore have we [done certain things].

The phrase “have maintenance” is Strong’s 4415 and means “eat salt.” The Hebrew word is used only here. The writers are using the phrase to acknowledge that their “salary” comes from the king, and hence they are writing their letter out of allegiance to him.

## **Salted With Fire**

Let us turn now to a text in the New Testament:

Mark 9:43-49 (NIV) If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched. Everyone will be salted with fire.

This is a favorite text of those who believe hell consists of unquenchable fire and never-dying worms. And yet, if the way to avoid such a terrible fate were to amputate a hand or a foot, one would expect to see countless examples of this happening in Scripture. In fact never do we hear of any disciple doing such a thing. And note that Jesus was speaking to his disciples, not the world in general. In verse 33 he confronts the 12 with their strong desire to have the preeminence. In verse 38 John tells Jesus that they tried to stop a man who was casting out demons because he was not “one of them.” This feeling of superiority, of pride, and of ambition on their part could, if persisted in, keep them from entering the kingdom—from “entering life” as he puts it in this text. In fact it could cause them to die the second death, pictured by *Gehenna*, the Greek word translated “hell.”

Clearly the Master is not talking about an offensive hand or foot. How, after all, could your hand ever cause you to sin? And your eye? Well, yes, with the cooperation of the brain, the eye can see things that could well lead to sin:

Luke 11:34 (NIV) Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are good, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are bad, your body also is full of darkness.

It is not our hand, foot, or eye that we need to watch. It is our heart:

Luke 6:45 A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for [out] of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.

It might be possible to simulate allegiance to the Master for a time, but eventually every disciple of the Master will be sorely tested: “salted with fire,” an expression that appears only in this one text in Mark.

1 Cor. 3:13 Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

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:

Jamieson, Fausset and Brown's comment on this text is that when the Master refers to "every sacrifice" in verse 49, he is referring to every acceptable sacrifice in the spirit of Romans 12:1—present your bodies a living sacrifice. They suggest the Master's words might be paraphrased this way: "Every disciple of mine shall have a fiery trial to undergo, and every one who would be found an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable and well pleasing to God, must have such a salting, like the Levitical sacrifices."

Although we make no judgment about the ultimate fate of Judas, surely he was an example of someone whose "hand" was corrupting him. What should he do about it? He should cut it off! He needed to take swift action to distance himself from all feelings of disloyalty. He had "broken bread" with the Master. He had entered a "covenant of salt" and was expected to remain faithful to it.

Mark 9:50 (NIV) Salt is good but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves and be at peace with each other.

This "salt" is an antiseptic, a preservative. Certainly the disciples needed some kind of antidote to the corruption that was entering their ranks.. Far from being at peace with each other, they were jostling to see which of them would be the greatest, who would sit on his right hand and who on his left. It was John—and he probably voiced the thoughts that were in the minds of others—who was concerned that anyone not of their particular group should do anything good in the name of Jesus. Rather than being examples of true Christians, they were behaving like the scribes and Pharisees.

Matthew 5:13-16 (NIV) You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. ... Let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Today we don't understand how salt could lose its saltiness, but such was possible in ancient times. Salt deposits were often mixed with other elements and when exposed to the wind and rain, the salt could be leached out leaving behind worthless things of the earth. In this text the disciples are compared to salt. Are they having a positive affect on those with whom they come in contact? Are they retarding the corruption and putrefaction of the world around them? If they are not, they have become useless, the equivalent of salt that has lost its saltiness.

## Lessons for Us

We have so much to be thankful for. We have been called out of a state of darkness into a state of light.

1 Peter 2:9 But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light:

We are to be single-minded in our dedication to this great commission.

Luke 14:33 Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.

Have you forsaken all that you have, or are you still clinging to something or someone in the world that means a lot to you? Is there something other than the Lord that is as dear to you as a “right arm”? If there is, cut it off. Otherwise you will cease to be a disciple. You will be like salt which has lost its seasoning power. Verse 34 of Luke 14 reads: Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned?

This is the time of refining experiences for those antitypical “sons of Levi” who are to be as valuable to the Lord as gold and silver is to most people:

Malachi 3:2,3 But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: and he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.

We all live on a tiny, insignificant grain of sand in this vast universe. Even those among us who live reasonably long lives would be the first to agree that life is short. Would some temporary gain lasting at most for a couple of years be worth jeopardizing your reward in heaven? Surely not!

Matthew 16:25 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.

This is the great paradox of the Bible. Lose your life in the service of the Lord, the truth, and the brethren, and you will in fact find it. The fact that the world takes little note of us, thinks we are misguided and misinformed, means nothing. That’s what the world has always thought of those who are the Lord’s:

Matthew 5:11,12 Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Although a race course has been used to describe the attainment of our reward in heaven, it is a comparison that is seriously flawed. A race has only one winner; the rest

are losers. But that's not descriptive of our walk along the narrow way. Of course we want to attain the prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus, but we should be equally dedicated to helping our brethren attain that prize as well. Let us not fall into the trap of seeking advantage over someone else, let us not criticize anyone who is doing a great work for the Lord who is not "of us." This was the attitude of the Pharisees and it was condemned by the Lord in the strongest possible terms:

Matthew 23:29 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! [verse 33] Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell [Gehenna, a reference to the second death]?

We have made our calling sure. Let us make our election sure as well. And may we help those with whom we come in contact by watching what we say:

Col. 4:6 Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt.

Salt makes food wholesome and palatable; may grace season our speech so that it contributes to the nourishment of our brethren.

Closing Hymn: #331 — Christ For Me

*[First given in Los Angeles, September, 2002]*



## The One Loaf

The twilight hour, when all the world doth dream, I stand amid  
 The ripening grain, that ripples, like the bosom of a lake  
 Beneath the evening breeze. I pluck, and idly hold within  
 My hand, one golden ear, the while in swift succession pass  
 Strange visions of the olden time. I see a threshing-floor—  
 The wheat by wooden flail bereft of chaff and shining husk.  
 The scene is changed: I see a woman grinding at a mill—  
 Between the upper and the nether stones the grain is crushed  
 Until no semblance of its former state remains, but each  
 Is merged into one common whole—a coarse and homely meal.  
 Another picture—mixed with water and with salt, a loaf  
 Or flattened cake is formed and laid upon the glowing coals.  
  
 And as I gaze my thoughts are lifted to a higher plane;  
 I see “the members of His body” like the golden grain,  
 Denuded of their glittering robes of earthly pride and fame;  
 The upper and the nether stones of life’s vicissitudes  
 Are slowly, surely, grinding rich and poor, the high, the low,  
 Into one common-union—heart and mind, and zeal and love.  
 With purifying salt, life-giving water of the Rod,  
 The mass is being drawn and held and molded in “one loaf.”  
  
 Ah, then, beloved, when we drink of that memorial cup,  
 And eat the symbol of His flesh, let us partake with joy,  
 Nor marvel if we need that strange, transforming power of fire,  
 Ere we are counted worthy to be like our Lord and Head,  
 And “broken” that a hungry, fainting, dying world be fed!

*—Poems of Dawn, p. 54*

## *The Serpent vs. The Seed of the Woman*

Opening Hymn: #300—"Light After Darkness"

Gen. 3:15 And 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.

### **The Serpent**

How do people react to Genesis chapter 3? Most Christians probably think it means just what it says: Adam and Eve were happy in the Garden of Eden until the day a snake got Eve alone. Although snakes can't talk, this one was different. It spoke with Eve and convinced her to eat an apple, something she had been told not to do.

Although this is the majority view, there are problems with it. Put yourself in Eve's place. You're happy with your husband in this garden of the Lord. You can do anything you wish with one exception: Don't eat apples (or whatever the fruit was—Genesis doesn't say). You know animals don't talk. No matter how good this tree looks to you, I doubt that you'd believe anything said by a snake.

There's another problem. Gen. 3:14 condemns the snake to go on its belly and eat dust. The evidence is that snakes have always moved on their bellies and to this day, they do NOT eat dust.

When Christians talk this way about the snake, Eve, and the apple, two things can happen: 1) The picture is so absurd a non-Christian might dismiss it as a myth; 2) One concentrates on the trivial aspects of the picture while completely overlooking what's really important. So before we go on, let's take a closer look at this serpent.

This was not a literal snake that talked with Eve. We say this even though the Hebrew word translated *serpent* in Gen. 3:1 is used throughout the Old Testament to describe literal snakes. But this snake was not literal. It was Satan himself, who appeared in the glory and beauty of a higher being. Consider:

2 Cor. 11:3 But I fear lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.  
[vs. 14] Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.

Paul tells us the serpent that beguiled Eve through subtlety can also corrupt the church. How? Through false apostles and deceitful workers. He refers to the Genesis 3 narrative and equates the "serpent" with Satan who transformed himself into an angel of light. (But of course Satan was only impersonating such a being.)

Think how convincing a materialized angel would be to Eve. Although she has been told what she can and cannot do, here is a higher being in front of her. And he appears to be a friend. Is it any wonder that Eve was fascinated, even enchanted.

There's more about who the snake really was in Ezekiel:

Ezek. 28:12 Son of man, take up a lamentation upon the king of Tyrus and say unto him, Thus saith the Lord God; Thou sealest up the sum, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God.

This is not a literal king in Ezekiel's day. This is a description of Satan.

Ezek. 28:14 Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; [vs. 15] Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created till iniquity was found in thee.

A cherub is not an animal; the opening verse of Genesis 3, is not talking about animals:

Gen. 3:1 [Amplified] Now the serpent was more subtle and crafty than any **living creature** of the field which the Lord God had made. And he [Satan] said to the woman, Can it really be that God has said, You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?

Living creature is a frequent and correct translation for the Hebrew word translated *beast* in the King James. The use of this term is like the four beasts of Rev. 4. We all know a better English word is *living creatures*, not beasts.

Calling someone an animal doesn't make him a literal animal:

Luke 13:32,33 ...Herod will kill thee. And [Jesus] said unto them, Go ye and tell that fox, Behold...

The curse of Gen. 3:14 on the serpent—"On thy belly thou shalt go; dust thou shalt eat"—is not a literal statement, implying that the serpent previously traveled some other way. It is a curse of prostration. This belly is no more literal than the "heel" that the serpent is to bruise.

Ezek. 28:17,18 ... I will cast thee [King of Tyrus] to the ground, I will lay thee before kings that they may behold thee ... I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth ...

Psa. 72:9 They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him; and his enemies shall lick the dust.

At the end of our Bibles, in the book of Revelation, we read [in 20:2] "And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan..." Satan is that "old serpent" because he was the original serpent of Eden. "Serpent" is one of his titles, much as we might call a deceitful person a "snake in the grass."

The Hebrew word NACHASH is applied to literal snakes, but we believe that came after the experience in Eden. Snakes, like Satan, seem to enchant and beguile their prey, so NACHASH is the name that came to be applied to them.

## The Seed

Gen. 3:15 is the first use of the word "seed" in the Bible with the meaning of offspring. It is the Bible's first great promise of hope to mankind, though it is not clear Eve under-

stood what this promise really meant. The promise of a seed was reiterated by God again at a later time.

Gen. 21:12 For God said unto Abraham ... in Isaac shall thy seed be called.

Abraham undoubtedly saw this promise as applying to his son as an earthly inheritor. But Paul quotes this text in Romans to make it clear that it has nothing to do with earthly inheritance. It applies to a spiritual seed:

Rom. 9:7,8 Neither because they are the seed of Abraham are they all children: but, in Isaac shall thy seed be called. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are **NOT** the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.

In Galatians Paul returns to this point, and conclusively identifies the seed:

Gal. 3:16,29 Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many: but as of one, And to thy seed which is Christ. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise. [4:28] Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.

Clearly this “seed” in Genesis is Christ, and those who are Christ's. The church is counted in as a part of this special seed that will, in due time, bruise—crush—the serpent's head. They do not crush a literal serpent, but that old serpent, Satan.

Note that the Genesis scripture called this the “seed of the woman.” It is not the seed of the man **and** the woman. That's because the seed is produced without the involvement of any man: “Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son” [Isa. 7:14].

### The Prophecy

Genesis 3:15 says that the serpent will bruise the heel of the seed of the woman. We have seen how this seed is Christ and those that are Christ's. Clearly this is not talking about anyone's literal heel. Nor does it have anything to do with the **feet members** of Christ, those now living at the end of the Gospel Age. Every footstep follower of the Master will have been attacked by Satan no matter when they lived.

This is picture language. The heel is at the lowest part of the body. Any damage to the heel, although painful, would not cause permanent damage. It tells us that Satan will be able to inflict only temporary sufferings upon both Christ and **ALL** those who are his.

Notice another use of the word “heel”:

Psa. 41:9 Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, Hath lifted up his heel against me.

These words were quoted by the Lord [in John 13:18] as applying to Judas. Certainly Judas had done nothing with his literal heel. It is picture language. It means one who had been accepted as a friend was now acting like an enemy.

The promise of Gen. 3:15 says that the seed of the woman will bruise the head of the serpent. Once again this is not the literal head of bone and brain of some literal serpent. It is symbolic language: the most vital part of the body will be crushed. Satan and his works will ultimately be destroyed. And we have scriptures that say that directly:

Heb. 2:14 ...that through death He [Jesus] might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.

Rev. 20:10 And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone [a symbol of total destruction]

### **The Battle from Satan's Viewpoint**

It is hard to know just what Satan expected would happen once he got Eve to do what he wanted. Perhaps he thought God would never let his creation die. But once he saw that death was a reality, he had to adopt a new strategy. He must, at all costs, destroy the “seed” before it could destroy him. The history of the past 6000 years shows where Satan has tried one scheme after another to eradicate that seed. Initially he tried to corrupt the entire human race.

Jude 6: And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation ... [Less than 1000 years after Eden, Enoch uttered the prophecy in vs. 14] The Lord cometh with ten thousand of His saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed ...

With the materialization of these angels the world became so corrupt God destroyed them all in a flood, except for Noah and his house. If everyone had died, Satan would have successfully killed the seed.

Subsequent attempts to destroy the seed were focused on the line through which the seed would come. God in Gen. 21:12 said that the seed would come through Isaac [and by extension, through Jacob and his 12 sons and their families]. Satan attempted to kill off the Israelites by famine. But that plan also failed and Jacob and his family were fed from the stored grain of Egypt:

Gen. 50:20 But as for you [my brothers], ye thought evil against me [Joseph]; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.

So Israel settled in Egypt. But soon there arose a Pharaoh that “knew not Joseph” and enslaved the people. Satan's next attempt to interfere with God's plan is recorded in:

Exod. 1:22 And Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river...

Moses, of course, was not only saved from certain death, he became a great leader. There were many experiences in leaving Egypt, in the wilderness, and in entering the promised

land that seemed to spell the doom of Israel, through which the seed was to come. But they survived. The next threat to the entire nation is recorded in:

Esther 3:13 And letters were sent by posts into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day ...

Satan was behind this diabolical scheme of Haman's. And like all the other attempts to interfere with God's plan, it failed.

We come to the New Testament. Mary is with child, but not by Joseph. Since Joseph tries to live in strict conformance with the law, what is he to do? Satan suggests to his mind that he should have Mary stoned for fornication. [Deut. 22:22j

Matt. 1:20 Behold an angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit.

Mary was not stoned. But when the baby was born, Satan entered the heart of Herod:

Matt. 2:16 Then Herod ... sent forth and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem ... from two years old and under.

Once again, the promised seed was safe from Satan's harm. Any hurt he directed to the seed was only a temporary hurt, a bruising of the heel as it were. Jesus grows to maturity. Satan, in a particularly cunning suggestion, tries to make Jesus destroy himself:

Luke 4:9 And he brought him to Jerusalem, and set him on a pinnacle of the temple, and said unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down from hence: for it is written, he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee.

God's voice from heaven had just been heard to say clearly that Jesus was his beloved son. Now, as in Eden, Satan calls God's clear statements into question by saying, "**If** thou be the Son of God." But Jesus was not interested in what Satan had to say.

If Jesus wouldn't kill himself, perhaps Satan could inspire a crowd to do it:

Luke 4:28,29 And all they in 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.

Jesus passed harmlessly through their midst. A few chapters later Satan tried to use a great storm on the lake to take his life:

Luke 8:23,24 But as they sailed he fell asleep: and there came down a storm of wind on the lake and they were filled with water and were in jeopardy. And they came to him and awoke him, saying, Master, master, we perish.

Satan probably thought they all would perish, but he was wrong again. Finally, at the cross, Jesus, the promised seed, was dead and Satan had the victory that had up until then eluded him. What harm could a dead seed ever do to him? None, of course. Which is why God raised his son from the dead.

Ever since the resurrection of Jesus, Satan has continued his attempt to interfere with God's plans and has been directing his enchantments against the church. How has he done that? Perhaps one of the most cunning enchantments has been his establishment of a false church.

Rev. 17:5,6 Mystery, Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus ...

If Satan got everyone into the false church, there would be no true church. He would thus successfully frustrate the plan to have the seed consist of "those who are Christ's." Bloody persecutions and the inquisition were designed to force everyone to join themselves to this "woman" of Revelation. Although it did bring about a time we all call the "dark ages" where the light of truth almost went out, Satan has been unsuccessful at doing any permanent injury to the church. Any harm done to those who are walking in the footsteps of Jesus is only temporary, no more serious than a "bruising of a heel."

### **The Battle from God's Viewpoint**

When we look at this battle from God's viewpoint, it is no contest. Every attempt Satan makes to frustrate God's plan seems like it is going to succeed, but at the last moment something goes wrong.

Psa. 2:4 He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision.

Of course the battle is already over. Jesus has triumphed over Satan and over death itself. And he invites us to do the same:

Acts 26:15,17,18 And I [Paul] said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. [vs. 17] I now send thee unto the Gentiles to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance ...

Consequently Satan's efforts are directed against us, trying as always to change the execution of the sentence pronounced in Gen. 3:15. But it is only a question of a little more time before even this battle is over:

Rom. 16:20 And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly.

The Greek word translated *bruise* means to *crush completely*. When this happens, it will be the complete fulfillment of Gen. 3:15.

## What Can We Learn From This Study?

There are great many lessons for us in this study of the serpent and the seed. Here are a few that appeal to my mind:

1. *Satan's strategy has always been to misrepresent God's word.*

When we see the word of God being misrepresented, we are seeing Satan at work. He asks Eve, "Did God really say that?" He asks Jesus, "Are you really the son of God?" "Isn't it also written that..." Although we don't debate Satan face-to-face, we should recognize that he always misrepresents God. And that leads us to lesson #2.

2. *Our test is simple: Whom do we believe, the "serpent" or God?*

When put this way, the answer is easy. But it is never put this way. The wonderful creature who talked with Eve seemed to make so much sense. The suggestions to Jesus in the wilderness appeared to come from a friend. If this were not the case, there would be no deception. So we must never doubt God's word. He is faithful that promised.

3. *When we know some "fruit" is not for us, it is not for us. Period!*

Eve got into trouble because she didn't like being deprived of what she wanted. The same thing could happen to us. We can be convinced by the world around us that there are no restrictions, that we can have whatever we want. That just is not so:

Matt. 16:24 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. [vs. 26] For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?

When Adam has to explain himself to God, he says that the woman tempted me, and ... and what? It isn't necessary to say, and I gave into the temptation. This sentence can be completed several ways. Let us hope we recognize temptation when we see it, and that we resist it.

4. *The narrative of Gen. 3 is not a myth.*

A snake is not talking. The misery that resulted from Eve's disobedience came from an outright lie, from the father of liars, and from a real personality called Satan. Adam, his fall, and his need for a ransom are at the foundation of our entire faith structure.

2 Peter 3:17,18 Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever. Amen.

Closing Hymn: #310—"Triumphant Zion" [first and last verses]



## *The Smiting of the Image*

Opening Hymn: #171—"Our King is Marching On" [verses 1 and 2 only]

One of the most dramatic incidents in the book of Daniel concerns a dream King Nebuchadnezzar couldn't remember. This occurred in the beginning of the book, shortly after Daniel and his friends were captured and brought to Babylon. Daniel was just a teenager when this happened. In Babylon he was taught all the wisdom of the Babylonians. There was much to learn starting with the language of these people. Of course not everything they thought was knowledge was really true. In Ezek. 21:21 we read about how the king of Babylon used divination as a way to determine the future. Among other things, we are told that "he looked in the liver." Of course Daniel knew this was just a deception.

As chapter two begins the king dreams about something he's sure is important. He wants to know what it means, so he calls for his wisest men:

Dan 2:2 Then the king commanded to call the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans, for to show the king his dreams.

You may think the Old Testament is written in Hebrew, and most of it is. But the book of Daniel is written in Hebrew and one other language. In verse 4 we read, "Then spake the Chaldeans to the king in Syriack..." and from that point forward until the end of chapter 7 everything is in Aramaic (which is the Hebrew word here translated Syriack; the word is also translated "Syrian language"). This was the language of the Chaldeans.

These wise men ask the king to tell them the dream, knowing that they could easily contrive some kind of interpretation. But the king says he can't remember it. Furthermore, if they can't come up with both the dream and its interpretation, the king says he will have them all killed. This seems bizarre in the extreme, and the wise men are thrown into a panic. What has gotten into Nebuchadnezzar?

Some have suggested that the king was becoming increasingly frustrated by the political intrigues hatched by these "wise" men whom he felt had no special powers. But how could he rid himself of them? The dream was the excuse. When in verse 5 he says, "**thing** is gone from me," it is a matter of conjecture whether he's referring to the dream or to the decree that follows in the next few words. Consider: if you were one of those wise men and the king wants you to come up with both the dream and its interpretation, but the king says he can't remember the dream, what would you do? I know what I'd do: I'd invent a dream of my own and tell the king it was his dream. After all, he can't remember it. But these wise men don't do that. Perhaps they realize that the king does remember it all too well.

You've probably heard the expression: "Don't throw the baby out with the bath water." It means you should keep the good when discarding the bad. But Nebuchadnezzar doesn't discriminate. All the so-called wise men, whether good or bad, will be executed, includ-

ing young Daniel and the others who were taken from foreign lands. This seems an extreme way to deal with those who were involved in palace intrigues, but in the heat of the moment and with no wise counsel to the contrary, the king does not care. Daniel is about to be seized and executed, but even before God reveals anything to him, he says he can do what the king asks. Such is Daniel's great faith. And of course in time God does reveal the dream to him.

I'm sure everyone knows this dream. Nebuchadnezzar saw a great image with a head of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass, legs of iron, and feet of mixed iron and clay. A stone cut out without hands struck the image on its feet and it collapsed into pieces that the wind carried away. The stone became a great mountain and filled the entire earth.

### The Interpretation

This was the dream, and Daniel interpreted it. In vs. 38 Daniel says to the king: "Thou art this head of gold." But your kingdom will be succeeded by other kingdoms. Finally this progression ends:

Dan. 2:44 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.

Although Daniel does not name the kingdoms that would succeed Babylon, in chapter 8 we do find the names of the next two kingdoms. The breast with its **two** arms is Media and Persia, and the kingdom that supplants them is Greece (8:20,21). Daniel lived long enough to see the transition from Babylon to that of the Medes and Persians. In B.C. 336 Alexander the Great overthrew that empire and established world domination by the Greeks. (Incidentally, Alexander won his great victories when he was only in his twenties; he died at the age of 33.) Daniel does not say who is represented by the **two** legs, but at the time of our Lord's birth it was Caesar Augustus who decreed that all the [Roman] world should be taxed [or registered]. This empire had its beginnings with a western "leg" in Rome and an eastern "leg" in Constantinople.

This much is easy. But what can we say about the feet and toes of mixed iron and clay. Is this another world empire like its predecessors? The *Companion Bible* thinks so. They claim that the operative concept is who controls Jerusalem so the feet must be the Mohammedans who controlled that city beginning in 636 A.D. [see *Companion Bible*. comment on Luke 21:24]. But that thought doesn't appeal to me. Bro. Russell's view seems much more reasonable: "The feet represents what is called the Holy Roman Empire, a mixture of religious and civil power." (Question Book p. 81) The great religious systems of the last 2000 years have aligned themselves with civil power because these powers controlled the armies.

Note that the feet are not made of a new material like wood, say, or even just clay alone. If they were, it would support the idea of the Mohammedan conquest. But remnants of

the iron legs are mixed in with some new material. And what is that material? Imitation stone! It is the “imitation kingdom” the Roman Catholic Church claimed to head, and it was mixed with the remnants of the Roman Empire of the Caesars. The division into ten toes does not mean there would be exactly ten sub-kingdoms any more than praising God upon a ten-stringed harp means we must have ten and only ten basic doctrines. The toes simply show divisions of old Roman Empire into sub-kingdoms. The pope crowned and uncrowned the kings of Europe. And these kings pledged their armies in support of the objectives of the pope. Thus continued an uneasy alliance of iron mixed with imitation stone.

### **Smiting the Image**

Now we’re ready for a question that has been debated by Bible Students: Has the reality of the smiting of the image occurred? If it has, why are the European nations and the Roman Catholic Church still in power? If it hasn't, when will it be smitten?

First of all, the continued existence of the remnants of the Holy Roman Empire should not concern us. Before Nebuchadnezzar dreamed his dream Assyria and Egypt were world powers. Let's remind ourselves what this “head of gold” represented:

Dan. 2:37 Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven **hath given thee** a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory.

When God gave Nebuchadnezzar a kingdom, He withdrew his support from what had been His kingdom up until that time. And that kingdom was Israel.

1 Chron. 28:5 **[David speaks:]** [The Lord God of Israel] . . . hath chosen Solomon my son to sit upon the throne of the **kingdom of the Lord** over Israel.

So the key is Israel. When Assyria or another nation acted as the rod of God's anger to punish Israel, He still considered them as His kingdom. But no more. Starting with Nebuchadnezzar God gave the Gentiles complete domination over Israel, a domination that was permitted until the time when He would set up a permanent kingdom of righteousness. When the stone strikes, God takes back the right to rule over Israel. But the stone hadn't struck in the time of Paul. Rome's right to control was acknowledged by him in Rom. 13:1,

Rom. 13:1 For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.

Luke quotes our Lord as saying that this domination of Jerusalem by the Gentiles would continue for a predetermined time:

Luke 21:24 And Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.

“Times of the Gentiles” is a scriptural term that can be found only here. We might disagree about when these “times” began and when they end, but we should be able to

agree on one crucial fact: Jerusalem is no longer controlled by a Gentile power. Therefore we know that the “times of the Gentiles” have absolutely been fulfilled.

World events generally do not conform to the expectations of modern day prophets. William Miller's expectation of the second coming in 1844 was not to be. The society's expectation concerning 1925 was not realized. Many brethren thought 1954 would see the full end of this present evil world (for no other reason than it was 40 years after 1914). Absolutely nothing significant happened in 1954. But there is one incredible exception to date setting and that's Bro. Russell's single-minded determination that 1914 would be the end of Gentile times. He began preaching the importance of this date early in his ministry and he never wavered. Where did he get this date? One of his most compelling arguments concerned the “times of the Gentiles.” He was sure that God would have foretold in the scriptures just how long this period would be. He turned to Leviticus:

Lev. 26:18 And if ye will not yet for all this hearken unto me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins.

He believed this text (repeated in verses 21, 24, and 28) held the secret. Israel's punishment would last seven “times.” We knew how long a “time” was from Revelation. There the same period of time is called 42 months [11:2], 1260 days [12:6], and 3½ “times” [12:14]. So one “time” had to be 360 days; seven “times” was 2520 prophetic days.

How long is a prophetic “day”? Answer: One literal year. The prophet Ezekiel, for example, was told in 4:6 that he was to do something for a set number of days and that each day represented one literal year. This formula unlocks the meaning of other prophecies in Daniel.

Dan. 9:25 From the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks.

Daniel is not talking about literal weeks because no Messiah appeared 69 weeks after the command to rebuild Jerusalem. But evidently ancient students of prophecy knew how to determine the hidden meaning. At the time of our Lord, we read in Luke 3:15 that “the people were in expectation and all men mused in their hearts of John whether he were the Christ [Messiah] or not.” Why were they so expectant? A simple application of the day-for-a-year rule regarding Daniel's seventy weeks prophecy pointed to a fulfillment in their time.

So Israel was to receive a punishment lasting for 2520 years. When does this period start and when does it end? In Volume 2 Bro. Russell calculates that Zedekiah, the last king in David's line, was removed by Nebuchadnezzar in 606 B.C. Counting forward 2520 years from that date brings us to A.D. 1914.

There were other lines of reasoning that pointed to the importance of 1914, but this argument was the most compelling. It was not without problem. The key text in Lev. 26:18 does not contain the word “time” in the original Hebrew. The word is translator-

supplied. Bro. Russell acknowledges this and says because the Hebrew word for “times” is explicitly given in four places in Daniel chapter 4, the word is correctly supplied in Leviticus (see B89).

There were also those who disagreed about when Zedekiah was overthrown. McC & Strong thinks the fall of Zedekiah and Jerusalem took place in B.C. 588 [McC&S, vol. 6, p. 898] a date that is 18 years later than Br. Russell's date. But Bro. Russell was unconvinced because only a date of 606 (really 607 B.C.) harmonized with the scripture that said the land would lay desolate 70 years. Since the decree of Cyrus permitting Jews to return to their land occurred in 537 B.C., the captivity had to start 70 years earlier than that. Here's the text:

2 Chron. 36:11 Zedekiah ... reigned eleven years in Jerusalem and he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord his God. [vs. 17] Therefore God brought ... the king of the Chaldees who slew their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion ... [vs 19] And they burnt the house of God and brake down the wall of Jerusalem ... and them that had escaped from the sword carried he away to Babylon ... to fulfil the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her sabbaths; for as long as she lay desolate she kept sabbath, to fulfil three-score and ten years.

If you make Zedekiah's overthrow 18 years later, the land does not lay desolate for 70 years. It lays desolate for 62 years only. Did Bro. Russell know of this other idea. Yes he did. When he spoke to the Jews in the Hippodrome on October 9, 1910, he said:

“There are some who claim that Zedekiah's dethronement should be dated B.C. 588. If this be true, it could make a difference of but 18 years and give the date 1932. My convictions, however, favor 1914.” [Sermon Book, p. 480]

He was convinced that the uncertain dates of secular history should not be accepted in place of the plain, positive statements of the Bible. (Even dates more recent than 606 B.C. are sometimes disputed by the experts—e.g. the year of Jesus' birth.) Today we know of at least one instance where a solar eclipse was placed 29 years too early in an ancient Assyrian listing. The speculation is that this was done to satisfy religious superstitions which associated a prominent solar eclipse with misfortune and calamity.

But whether or not brethren agree about whether Leviticus 26 contains a time prophecy concerning how long Israel's disfavor would last, with the benefit of hindsight we can see that 1914 is one of the most significant dates in modern history. In the war that began then—the first to be called a World War—the hereditary ruling houses of Europe came crashing down. Nothing has been the same since. About the only winner in that war was Israel. The Balfour Declaration issued in 1917 pledged British support to the Zionist hope for a Jewish national home in Palestine. The return of favor to the Jew culminated in the establishment of the Jewish State in 1948.

So was the image struck in 1914? Since I believe the image represents Gentile domination over Israel, I believe it was struck then because that domination has ended. We should enthusiastically sing the words of hymn 171: “The Gentile Times have ended for their kings have had their day.” The right or privilege God gave the Gentiles to rule over Jerusalem and His people Israel ended. 1914 also marks the start of the great “time of trouble” prophesied in Dan. 12:1. Daniel never said how long that trouble would last. Certainly it has lasted much longer than Bro. Russell thought it would. Even today we marvel that this old world still creaks along, especially since atom bombs in the wrong hands could lead to the extinguishing of all life.

### The Stone

Dan. 2:34,35 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. . . . and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth.

What does the stone represent? Notice that the stone was cut out “without hands.” This expression always refers to a work that God does. In Mark 14:48 the false witnesses at the trial of Jesus before Caiaphas say they heard him say that “within three days I will build another [temple] made without hands.” In Col. 2:11 Paul says we have received the “circumcision made without hands.” And when interpreting this dream Daniel says:

Dan. 2:44 And in the days of these kings shall the **God of heaven** set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed . . . and it shall stand for ever.

We would say the stone represents the kingdom because it became a great mountain. God is the one that brings down the present systems. That is not done by you or me. The use of the word mountain to symbolize a kingdom is found frequently in the scriptures:

Isa. 11:9 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.

### Conclusion

Brethren, we are living on borrowed time. The full establishment of the kingdom has not occurred when many earnest Bible Students expected it would. But there is no question that little time remains for this sin-sick old world. God gave us prophecies of future events in His word not to satisfy our curiosity, but to provide a foundation for our faith. When we see the past fulfillment of many of Daniel's prophecies, we know it is only a matter of time before all the other prophecies and promises will also be fulfilled. We read these words in Daniel's prophecy about the time of trouble:

Dan. 12:3 They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.

Those of us who want to be associated with the stars who shine forth in the kingdom should do everything we can to be faithful to our covenant of sacrifice. There is not much time left.

Closing Hymn: #171—"Our King is Marching On" [verses 3 and 4]

*[First given in Los Angeles, January 1992]*

### **Our King is Marching On [Hymn #171]**

Mine eyes can see the glory of the presence of the Lord:  
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;  
I see the flaming tempest of his swift descending sword:  
Our King is marching on.

I can see His coming judgments as they circle all the earth,  
The signs and groanings promised to precede a second birth;  
I read his righteous sentence in the crumbling thrones of earth:  
Our King is marching on.

The "Gentile Times" have ended, for their kings have had their day,  
And with them sin and sorrow will forever pass away;  
The tribe of Judah's Lion now has come to hold the sway:  
Our King is marching on.

The "Seventh Trump" is sounding, and our King knows no defeat,  
He will sift out the hearts of men before His judgment seat.  
Be swift, my soul, to welcome him; be jubilant, my feet:  
Our King is marching on.

## Stephen

Opening Hymn: Appendix D — “E’en Though It Be A Cross”

Rev. 2:10 Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life.

Stephen is called the first Christian martyr. The dictionary defines a *martyr* as “One who CHOOSES to suffer death rather than renounce religious principles.” The idea that martyrs choose death is surprising. But we would certainly say Jesus chose death by the things he did rather than renounce his religious principles. Such was also the case with Stephen. We begin with Acts chapter 6.

Acts 6:1,2 And in those days when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Then the twelve ... said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables.

Who are these Grecians and Hebrews? Both were Jews, of course. The gospel had not yet gone unto Gentiles. The Grecians were Jews who spoke Greek; the Hebrews were Jews who spoke Hebrew (or, among the common people, Aramaic).

The complaint (vs. 1): the Hebrew-speaking widows were receiving most of the charity at the expense of the Greek-speaking widows. Widows were dependent upon charity since few women worked outside their home. When a husband died, the means of support for the wife usually died with him.

The congregation considered this problem and selected seven individuals to be responsible for serving the food. All seven have Greek names and may all have been Greek-speaking. If that is so, their selection may have been an over-reaction to the fact that it was the Greek-speaking Jews who complained about their widows. The first of the seven is:

Acts 6:5 And they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit...

The top of my Bible titles this column, “Stephen the deacon,” even though the Greek word *diakonos*—Strong’s 1249 meaning servant—is not used in this account. But Strong’s 1248, translated *ministration* in verse 1, and Strong’s 1247, translated *serve* in verse 2, do appear. That’s close enough to call Stephen a deacon. But we’re not interested in Stephen because of his deacon duties; we want to consider his activities outside the church.

Just about all we know of Stephen is contained in the next few verses:

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



Consider that phrase, “Synagogue of the Libertines.” The Libertines were Jews who had been carried captive to Rome, then liberated at a much later time. Thus it appears Stephen’s activities are among Greek-speaking Jews. Clearly he has an excellent knowledge of truth. His service activities within his ecclesia don’t stop his witness activities to the outside world. And his knowledge of the truth is so keen his enemies cannot win arguments by logic. So they try deceit:

Acts 6:13-15 They set up false witnesses which said, This man [said] ... this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us. And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.

Since the writer of Acts was not sitting in the council, how did he know what kind of face Stephen had? We’ll try to answer that question a bit later. In any event, Stephen is about to have an experience similar to Jesus. False witnesses say he wants to destroy the temple and change the law of Moses. Stephen is brought before the Sanhedrin and forced to answer these charges. What did Stephen really think about the temple and the law? That’s in the next chapter.

## **Acts Chapter 7**

Because we know how this experience is going to turn out, it’s easy to picture a hostile Sanhedrin looking for any excuse to kill. But that’s not the case. The ones who hated Stephen were the Greek-speaking Jews, not the Sanhedrin. And the high priest just had an experience in chapter 5 with the apostles. He had them thrown into prison—the angel of the Lord released them from prison—they seized them again—Peter said he was going to obey God and not men and that the Sanhedrin was responsible for the death of Jesus—they wanted to kill the apostles—and then they got some good advice:

Acts 5:38-40: [Gamaliel, a Pharisee, speaks] Refrain from these men and let them alone: for if this counselor this work be of men, it will come to naught: but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it, lest haply ye be found even to fight against God. And to him they agreed.

We should try to remember this scripture whenever we don’t like what some other class or person is doing and we think it’s our job to put a stop to it.

The APOSTLES were a much greater threat to the council than Stephen. If the Sanhedrin decided not to kill the apostles, it’s hard to believe they intended to kill Stephen. However, Stephen’s enemies are the ones forcing the issue. The drama opens with the high priest:

Acts 7:1: Then said the high priest, Are these things so?

What things? The temple and the law of Moses. When we read Stephen’s defense, we must understand it is these two issues which he addresses. He selectively draws upon Israel’s history to make his defense. This is what he says:

1. God worked with Abraham while he was in Mesopotamia. [verses 2-7]
2. God dealt with our forefathers in the land of Egypt. [verses 8-19]
3. God dealt with Moses in the land of Midian; at the burning bush we learn the land itself was to be considered holy. [verses 20-34]
4. Moses, the one who was initially rejected as a leader, led the people to freedom. [verses 35-36]
5. Moses prophesied about one to come, like himself. But the people wouldn't listen to him, preferring to make an idol of a gold. [verses 37-46]
6. Solomon built a temple for God, but also said God does not live in a temple made with hands. [verses 47-50]

Let's summarize the case for the defense so far: Since the Jews believed the temple represented God's presence, Stephen selects examples of God working with those who love him even when they're not in the promised land. Solomon himself said God didn't live in a man-made temple. So, Stephen's logic goes, why be so concerned about whether this temple stands or falls?

And concerning the law of Moses, it was rejected by our forefathers in favor of an idol of gold, something they made with their own hands. You're worshipping the temple like a modern-day idol. The one who Moses said would come after him, has come, and like your forefathers, you have rejected him.

The council may not have initially realized where Stephen's defense was leading them, but by now, they got the picture. Clearly something happened in council chambers. We don't know what it was, but everything changed. Stephen stops his defense and launches into a counter-charge of his own:

Acts 7:51-53 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: who have received the law by the disposition of angels and have not kept it.

Strong stuff, but not any stronger than what Peter said in chapter 5 when he addressed this same council. Undoubtedly the Greek-speaking enemies of Stephen roared their disapproval of this old testament quote about God not living in a temple made with hands. Stephen could, at this point, simply remain silent and he would undoubtedly have been beaten and released. But he "CHOSE to suffer death rather than renounce religious principles." He kept talking. And what he said next, sealed his doom:

Acts 7:56 Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.

This is the greatest blasphemy possible to a Jew. Stephen claimed to see God, the God who had once told Moses that no man could look upon his face and live. How dare he say he sees God! Besides, they thought God lived in the temple, not up there in the sky!

Questions about the temple and the law of Moses fade into insignificance next to this outrage. Although the council was forbidden to execute anyone without the approval of Rome, an angry mob rushes at Stephen and...

Acts 7:58-60 they cast him out of the city and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul. And they stoned Stephen, [who] called upon God, saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

This murder by an uncontrolled mob shows that they were indeed like their fathers who persecuted the prophets and slew those who talked about the coming of the Just One (vs. 52). It was the law of Moses [Deut. 17:7] that required the witnesses to cast the first stones. To make throwing easier they removed their outer garments and placed them at the feet of their leader Saul. It is soon over. Stephen dies and goes not to heaven, but to the death condition which the scriptures call "a sleep."

### **What a waste!**

If we were looking for an outstanding leader in the early church, one of the best would be Stephen. When he is first introduced to us in chapter 6 and just before he dies in chapter 7 [vs. 55] the scriptures say he was "filled with the Holy Spirit." It seems such a waste of a young life. Think of what he could have accomplished if he had lived! My dear brethren, think of what he accomplished in his DEATH!

First of all, consider Saul.

Acts 7:61 And Saul was consenting unto his death.

The Greek word rendered *consenting* implies much more than appears on the surface. It means *to agree to a course of action emphatically and with considerable pleasure*.

And why would Saul possibly care one way or another? Probably because as an expert debater he found he could not answer Stephen. In Acts 6:9, some from Cilicia disputed with Stephen. In Acts 22:3 Paul says he was a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia. I believe Saul was among those who disputed with Stephen, could not withstand his logical arguments, and hated him because of it. Stephen's death would remove a "thorn in his side." But did it?

Acts 26:14 [Paul is recounting his conversion on the Damascus road and says] And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? It is hard [painful] for thee to kick against the goad.

- goad* 1. A long stick with a pointed end used for prodding animals.  
2. That which prods or urges; a stimulus or irritating incentive.

There is a difference of opinion about just what “goad” Saul was kicking against, but I believe Saul’s mind continued to return to the Stephen incident. He kept remembering that Stephen had really done nothing worthy of death, yet how Saul hated him because of his wondrous works and debating skill. And it is unlikely he ever forgot how Stephen responded to his enemies. Saul doesn’t ask the Lord what kicking against the goad is supposed to mean. He knew.

There is an interesting irony in Saul’s conversion on the road to Damascus. Stephen said he saw the “son of man” standing at the right hand of God. Saul certainly considered this gross blasphemy and a good enough reason to *execute* Stephen. Yet that is almost exactly the same vision Saul himself had on the Damascus road.

So the FIRST ACCOMPLISHMENT of Stephen’s death was its effect on Saul. Although he never knew it at the time, Saul’s involvement with Stephen’s murder was to haunt him the rest of life and to give him a measure of humility:

1 Cor. 15:9 For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

How did Luke know what Stephen’s face looked like when he appeared in front of the council. In fact, how did Luke know what Stephen said in such detail? The information probably came from an eye witness, and that eye witness must have been Paul. As far as Paul was concerned, his experiences with Stephen were unforgettable.

Stephen’s death also accomplished a SECOND OBJECTIVE:

Acts 8:1 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.

Prior to this time the early Christian church stayed close to home. But starting with the stoning of Stephen, the opponents of the truth became bold and increased the persecution upon all the disciples, scattering them into the surrounding country. And of course with this scattering came the preaching of the gospel into all the world. A short time later the first Gentile convert was welcomed into the fellowship and the message spread still farther.

A waste? Not at all. Few lives have done more in the service of the master than Stephen’s. And with the conversion of Saul, we see the Lord raising up another to continue the work which was cut short by the death of one of his saints.

### **What can we learn from Stephen’s life?**

As we look back over the life of Stephen, what have we learned?

**1. Stephen's assigned duties in the church didn't curtail his outside witnessing.**

Our life together in the ecclesia is wonderful. But our commission is to preach the gospel message to those around us.

1 Cor. 9:16 Woe unto me, if I preach not the gospel!

**2. He served his master enthusiastically even if it meant losing his own life.**

Are we sacrificing anything for our master? More than that, are we doing our sacrificing enthusiastically? Persecution must not cause us to change our relationship to God. In fact, it is an evidence of the holy spirit in our lives:

2 Tim. 3:12 Yea, all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

**3. He loved his enemies.**

And in this regard he followed the example of his master. It was hard enough for the people to understand what it meant to love their neighbor. But even that wasn't enough:

Matt. 5:44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you.

**4. He was filled with the Holy Spirit from start to finish.**

Eph. 5:18 ... be filled with the spirit.

We can be filled with the spirit only to the degree we eliminate the spirit of the world in our hearts and lives.

**5. His message: no one group has an exclusive relationship with God.**

God does not live in a temple made with hands.

Isa. 57:15 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.

From time to time God may do some mighty work using those who don't necessarily meet or agree with us. God should be allowed to direct the issue without interference from us.

Remember our opening text?

Rev. 2:10 Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life.

The Greek article is present before the word crown. It isn't an ordinary crown of life, it is THE crown of life—the divine nature. There is no question Stephen made his calling and election sure. Stephen knew, as Paul did when he wrote his second letter to Timothy, that he had fought a good fight and...

2 Tim. 4:8 Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day.

Stephen fell asleep in death, but with the full assurance of his faithfulness. May we learn lessons from Stephen's life that we too may be found faithful.

Closing Hymn: #279 — “Take Up Thy Cross”

*[First give at the San Diego Convention, September 1983. Published in The Dawn, October 1985.]*

## *The Dead*

Opening Hymn: #214 -- Only Waiting

And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.—Luke 9:59,60

This is not the easiest scripture in the Bible for our Christian friends to explain. How could dead people bury other dead people? Clearly they could not since we are told the dead know not anything. What Jesus is telling a potential follower is that one is not really alive in the world. “Aliveness” comes only in following the master. In other words: “Let those who are dead in my Father's sight bury their dead corpses.”

But can we truly say that someone who is alive is dead? I think we can:

Luke 15:32 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.

Once the prodigal son left his father's house, he was as good as dead as far as the father was concerned. His return was just like receiving him from the dead. This parable aptly illustrates the relationship the entire world of mankind has with their heavenly Father.

Gen. 2:17 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. [3:6] And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof and did eat and gave also unto her husband with her and he did eat.

There are several explanations for the problem created by the phrase “in the day thou eatest thou shalt die.” Some have suggested that a day with the Lord is as a thousand years; Adam did die within the Lord's thousand-year day. The margin of many Bibles suggests an alternate rendering: “dying thou shalt die.” In other words, the dying process began in Adam the day he disobeyed God.

But I think we can also accept this scripture from a third viewpoint: In God's sight, man was dead the day he disobeyed the commandment. Like the prodigal son, he left his father's house without so much as a backward glance. To all intents and purposes, man was dead, powerless to help himself.

John 3:16 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.

Here was the way of escape from the certainty of death: Christ was the answer!

Col. 3:2,3 [Phillips] Give your heart to the heavenly things, not to the passing things of earth. For, as far as this world is concerned, you are already dead and your true life is a hidden one in God, through Christ.

There is no apparent difference between the physical state of those in the world and those following the Master, but as Paul puts it, there is a true life that is hidden for now.

Eph. 2:1,2 [Phillips] To you, who were spiritually dead all the time that you drifted along on the stream of this world's ideas of living, and obeyed its unseen ruler (who is still operating in those who do not respond to the truth of God), to you Christ has given life!

It is just like the words Jesus uttered in our theme text: You have no life at all except in me. Let those who are spiritually dead, those who are drifting along on the stream of this world's ideas of living, bury their dead corpses.

Those that follow Jesus do die, of course. But John in Revelation talks about their death as something special:

Rev. 14:13 And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours and their works do follow them.

Only a very few in this age “die in the Lord”. This sacrificial death in Jesus is described by Paul as a “baptism” into death.

Rom. 6:3-5 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.

The baptism of Jesus wasn't just a single event at Jordan. It was something that affected his entire life.

Luke 12:50 But I have a baptism to be baptized with and how am I straitened [margin: pained] till it be accomplished!

Paul said he died daily, and that was an expression that applied as well to Jesus. We escape from death unto life by similarly following in the footsteps of Jesus, and that means a life of sacrifice every day. In a sense we give up nothing, for as part of the class called “The Dead,” our inheritance would be sin, sickness, and death. Of course the time is coming when the world will receive life from the dead through the ministry of Christ, head and body. And that's the point of our sacrificial baptism now.

1 Cor. 15:29 Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptized for the dead?

Our Mormon friends believe this text teaches the appropriateness of being baptized for others who are already dead. By receiving baptism in their name, presumably they are saved. But that is not the thought of this text at all.



This is the same baptism that Jesus described when he said, "I have a baptism to be baptized with and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" Paul here talks about those who are similarly baptized into Christ's death. Verse 19: If in this life only we have hope in Christ we are of all men most miserable. Verse 31: I die daily. What point is there to all this suffering? Why not eat and drink, for tomorrow we are as good as dead? The point, of course, is that the dead shall rise to life

### **The Resurrection**

The condemnation of man into death could have ended right there. Man could be sterile and propagation of the race never started. But that was never God's plan. Man could try to govern himself as best he could. But the results would always be the same. Without God, there was no real life. This lesson will only be appreciated by most men in the kingdom when they are raised back to life.

The concept of a resurrection from the dead is fairly novel among earth's religions. Even many Christians fail to understand this fundamental doctrine of the Bible. In the time of Jesus, there were teachers of the people—called Sadducees—who did not believe in a resurrection. In Mark chapter 12 they propound a hypothetical question: A woman marries a man, he dies, she marries his brother, he dies, and so it goes through seven brothers. In the resurrection, who will be her husband?

Now it is curious that the Sadducees thought this was a problem. The idea of one woman with seven husbands was contrary to their practices, but why should the woman have any of them as a husband? Marrying was governed by the law so that children would carry on the family name. Clearly such a need would not apply in the resurrection where there would be no children. And that was the way Jesus answered:

Mark 12:25 For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage: but are as the angels which are in heaven.

But this was not good enough. The Sadducees wanted a "thus saith the Lord" to prove the resurrection. They accepted only the law. It was their belief that angels, spirits and the doctrine of the resurrection were not taught in the law. So Jesus selected an argument they could not so easily dismiss:

Mark 12:26,27 And as touching the dead that they rise, have ye not read in the book of Moses how in the bush God spake unto him saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living: ye therefore do greatly err.

For the Sadducees this was a powerful reference. For it was Moses who received the law from God and delivered it to the chosen people. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were physically dead at the time God spoke to Moses. But he said he was the God of these three. Why? Because he knew they would live in a resurrection.

This argument was specially tailored to the beliefs of the Sadducees. But I like the argument used by Steven when he addressed the Sanhedrin:

Acts 7:5 And he gave [Abraham] none inheritance in the land, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child.

God promised Abraham the land. Abraham died without receiving so much as one square foot. Did God lie? Of course not! God's promise to Abraham can only be fulfilled by raising Abraham back from the dead.

When Paul spoke about the resurrection to King Agrippa, he found skepticism on the part of the king:

Acts 26:8 Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?

The king like many others probably found it easier to believe that one continued on living in some other life when they appeared to die. THAT was not incredible. Jesus said the Sadducees were making a mistake: they did not know their scriptures and they did not know the power of God. It does not take more power to raise man from the dead than it took to create him in the first place.

Some of our Christian friends believe in a resurrection, but they say it is only for those who are righteous. This is not what Paul believed:

Acts 24:14,15 But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: and have hope toward God . . . that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust.

That means no exceptions. The key to understanding what God is doing in the world is an appreciation of this doctrine: the life man now lives is not the only life he will ever have. Whether he knows it or not, Christ's death on the cross guarantees him life from the dead.

### **The Spirits in Prison**

1 Peter 3:18,19 For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit. By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison.

This is the reading of the King James and we need to make a few corrections to the translation. Christ "died" for sins, he didn't "suffer" for sins. "In the" and "by the" are not in the original Greek. So now we have:

Christ also hath once **died** for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God; being put to death flesh, but quickened Spirit.

What do you suppose the resurrection of Jesus as a spirit being had on the disobedient spirits in prison? It must have had an unforgettable affect for they saw the power of God. The word “preached” is poor. The Companion Bible suggests that this Greek word has no thought of teaching. A better word is “heralded.” So we have: “...quicken Spirit. In which condition he heralded [or announced his triumph] to spirits in prison who were sometime disobedient.” Now let us move forward to the next chapter...

1 Peter 4:6 For this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead that they might be judged according to men in the flesh but live according to God in the spirit.

I can find no commentator who applies “dead” to the world of mankind. That’s because the word does not “live according to God in the spirit.” Some who believe that everyone must have a chance to accept Jesus may think this refers to some kind of preaching work to those who were dead and waiting for the chance to accept Jesus. Such an idea comes from an incorrect interpretation of “preaching to spirits in prison” from the previous chapter.

Who lives to God in the spirit? Those who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit. The gospel was preached, some accepted its message, were condemned by men, but accepted by God. The Companion Bible suggests this rendering:

1 Peter 4:6 [Companion Bible] For to this end to those who are (now) dead was the Gospel preached that though they might be judged in the flesh, according to men, yet they might live [again, in resurrection] according to God, as regards the spirit.

This is man’s day of judgment, and man makes his judgment on the outward appearance. God judges differently. His reward to those who faithfully serve him in this age is a spiritual body. Paula says [1 Cor. 15:44]: It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.

### **Rest of the Dead**

Rev. 20:5 But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. What is this? Didn't we agree that the world is raised to life in the thousand-year kingdom of Christ? Why are not the dead alive then?

Br. Russell suggests the verse is not found in the oldest and most reliable manuscripts. And that may be true. But none of the other commentators I've checked make this statement. So we should be careful before dismissing this scripture so easily.

Adam was perfect. He sinned and he died. Mankind died with him. When mankind is raised to life in the kingdom, will they be perfect? No. They come back the way they went down. Although righteousness will predominate, they will still have to unlearn their old sinful ways. It will only be at the end of the kingdom that man will have regained perfect

life. It is only at the end of the thousand years that it can be said that mankind “lives again” in the full sense of the word.

The context of the scripture shows that this explanation or something like it must be the case. For in verse 4 the souls that were beheaded for Christ are said to “live and reign with Christ a thousand years.” And whom do they reign over? If they are the only ones alive, they reign over nothing. This can hardly be the sense of the scripture.

### **Will Any Die in the Kingdom**

So we have mankind coming back from the dead through the Christ, head and body. Will any die during the kingdom?

Acts 3:23 And it shall come to pass that every soul which will not hear that prophet shall be destroyed from among the people.

Clearly this teaches that obedience to the new rules will be enforced. God is not obligated to force everlasting life on anyone. If they refuse to obey, they will die. This seems to be the picture in:

Rev. 20:7-9 And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth and compassed the camp of the saints about and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.

This is a picture of the end of the Millennial age. And it shows the destruction of those who were not loyal to God. But will any die before this? The scriptures are more or less silent on this point. I prefer to believe that death won't occur until the end of the Millennium, perhaps in this way emboldening the discontented who think that death has been done away with.

Isa. 65:20 There shall be no more thence an infant of days nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old, but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed.

Br. Russell has suggested this means everyone will get at least 100 years of trial. If they make no progress, they will die since further time in their case would do no good. But that thought doesn't appeal to me. First of all, it seems to violate the general context. Starting at verse 17 to the end of the chapter:

For behold I create new heavens and a new earth and the former shall not be remembered nor come into mind . . . and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her . . . they shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain.

This is a prophecy of the completed work of the kingdom. Then we come to verse 20. It introduces such a jarring note that some scholars think it was a later addition and not part of the original text at all. Let's take a closer look at it:

“an infant of days”	no one whose life is quickly cut short
“old man not filled his days”	no one who is ready for death
“child shall die 100 yrs old”	

This is a faulty translation. The word “child” means one who is the prime of his life. Instead of being in one's prime at 20 years old, say, it will be that extreme old age (say 100 years) will be just like being in one's prime. The Septuagint renders this: “For he who is a 100 years old shall be young.”

Now the phrase: “sinner being 100 years old shall be accursed” (or “cut off” see Psalm 101:8, Companion Bible). This translation is poor. The one who will die is certainly the sinner who will not change his ways. He is physically in his prime (see the previous phrase), but the curse of God will come to pass and he will die. The Septuagint renders this: “And the sinner, who dieth at 100 years, shall be deemed accursed.”

I don't believe the 100 years is a literal number. Will no sinner die at 99 years? At 101 years? No one says the 100 years means exactly 100, no more and no less. In this text “100” is an expression referring to one's physical prime of life. It is faintly reminiscent of some words from Solomon:

Ecc. 8:12,13 Though a sinner do evil an hundred times and his days be prolonged . . .  
it shall not be well with the wicked . . . because he feareth not before God.

Here is the way I believe we should understand Isaiah 65:20 using the words from both the Knox and the Septuagint translations: “None shall die there unweaned from life; never an old man but lives out his full time. For he who is 100 years old shall be young; and the sinner, who dieth at 100 years, shall be deemed accursed.”

So we see that Isaiah 65:20 really is a precious promise of the blessings of the kingdom and that the ones who persist in sin will eventually be done away with.

So the whole world groans and travails together waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God. They are dead to God and his plan. They bury their dead. They eat, they drink. And they know not what is happening around them. But soon earth's dark night of weeping will be over. Soon we will have the fulfillment of John's words in Rev. 21:

[Weymouth] And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and the sea no longer existed. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God and made ready like a bride attired to meet her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying: Lo God's dwelling place is among men, and he will dwell among them and they shall be His people. Yes, God Himself will be among them. He will

wipe every tear from their eyes. Death shall be no more; nor sorrow, nor wail of woe, nor pain; for the first things have passed away. Then He who was seated on the throne said, See I am making everything new. And He added, Write down these words for they are trustworthy and true.

Closing Hymn: #54 — “Once For All”

*[First given in Los Angeles, April 1975]*

## *The Two Resurrections*

Opening Hymn: #285—The Lord Is Risen

Rev. 20:6 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.

The word “resurrection” appears 40 times in the Bible, and only in the New Testament. In spite of the fact that the word is not in the Old Testament, some of the Jews believed in a resurrection and some did not:

Acts 23:8 The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit: but the Pharisees confess both.

When Paul preached to the people of Athens on Mars’ Hill, he lost his audience when he referred to the resurrection

Acts 17:31,32 [God] hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead. And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter.

I watched Bill Moyers’ panel of experts discuss some of the important events in Genesis. Most of them express shock and amazement at God’s behavior in these early chapters. Not one suggested that a resurrection from the dead of Abel, Adam, Eve, and those who perished in the flood helps us understand how God could allow these things to happen and still be a loving and benevolent God.

To every Christian there should be no uncertainty about the doctrine of the resurrection. In fact we are told it is a fundamental doctrine:

Heb. 6:1,2 [Jerusalem Bible] Let us leave behind us then all the elementary teaching about Christ and concentrate on its completion, without going over the **fundamental doctrines** again: the turning away from dead actions and toward faith in God; the teaching about baptisms and the laying on of hands; the teaching about the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.

### **The First Resurrection**

Although “the resurrection of the dead” may be a fundamental doctrine, many do not understand that the Bible actually talks about **two** resurrections. We began by reading Rev. 20:6 which uses the phrase “**first** resurrection.” There is also this text:

1 Thess. 4:16 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**.

The “dead in Christ” are the ones who receive the benefits of the first resurrection. These are those who have consecrated their “all” to God and faithfully carry out their covenant of sacrifice even unto death. When they are resurrected, they receive spiritual bodies. Paul describes this in that marvelous resurrection chapter, 1 Cor. 15:

1 Cor. 15:42–44 [NIV] So it will be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a **natural** body, it is raised a **spiritual** body.

The Bible calls these true Christians by many different names: the Church, the Bride, Jewels, Wheat, and other names. The past 2000 years has seen the selection of those who will be a part of this group. Those whose eyes have been opened to appreciate the truth should never doubt the great privilege God has given to those He has called:

Romans 8:16,17 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.

Paul seemed amazed that anyone could stop believing in a resurrection from the dead. In his first letter to the Corinthians, he tried to show that the reality of Christ’s resurrection proves that others will also be resurrected:

1 Cor. 15:12...23 Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? [Because] if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen (*Paul shows he does not believe Christ had an immortal soul!*) <sup>17</sup>And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. <sup>20</sup>But now **is** Christ risen from the dead. Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. As in Adam **all** die, even so in Christ shall **all** be made alive. Every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his *parousia*.

Paul here says that it is at the time of Christ’s *parousia* or presence, that the resurrection of the dead begins. That beginning is called the “first resurrection.” Of course saying “first resurrection” necessarily implies a “second resurrection.” Who receives that? Answer: Everyone who does not experience the “first resurrection” because this text also says that **ALL** shall be made alive.

### **The Second Resurrection**

When Paul was brought before Felix, he said this about what he believed:

Acts 24:15 There shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.

This is another way to say that he believed in two resurrections. The resurrection of the Church is the same as the resurrection of the “just.” Unfortunately many Christians think



that's all there is. But they are wrong. Even the wicked Sodomites will be resurrected. Here's what Ezekiel said long after Sodom had been destroyed:

Ezekiel 16:55 When . . . Sodom and her daughters, shall return to their former estate . . . then thou and thy daughters shall return to your former estate.

It was Jesus who taught that there would be two resurrections: the good and the not so good.

John 5:28,29 [Rotherham] There cometh an hour in which **all** in the tombs shall hearken unto his voice and come forth—They who the good things have done unto a resurrection of life; but they who the corrupt things have practised, unto a resurrection of judgment.

Perhaps one of the reasons our Christian friends don't talk much about a resurrection from the dead is that too many of them believe that people are not really dead. They only appear to die. If they are not dead, they can't be resurrected from the dead. This idea is absolutely contrary to everything taught in the Bible. It is essentially what Satan, God's adversary, told Eve: "You will NOT surely die!"

Yet we cannot ignore the words of John 5. We read it from the Rotherham translation. If we had read from the King James, it would have said that those who have done evil things would have a resurrection of "damnation." Other translators say "to be condemned." The New English Bible says, "Will rise to hear their doom." This leads to the fantastic theory that what one does in this life seals one's doom and that although one's soul continues living somewhere after death, it is reunited with a body in the resurrection just long enough for a sentence of condemnation to be pronounced, after which the soul returns to where it was. Clearly this is one doctrine the churches would not like to see examined too closely.

Our understanding of Christ's Kingdom and its work answers every question. The "resurrection of judgment" is a time of teaching, of training in righteousness.

**Isaiah 26:9 When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness.**

And let us not forget Acts 17:31 previously quoted: "[God] hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world **in righteousness.**" The world's great judgment day is not a time when mankind "rises to hear its doom." It is a time of instruction and great blessing.

### **The Great Multitude**

The scriptures say the Church receives spiritual bodies in the first resurrection, and the world of mankind receives earthly bodies in the general resurrection. What do they say about the Great Multitude (or Great Company)? The expression occurs in just two places in the King James Bible:

Rev. 7:9 After this I beheld, and, lo, a **great multitude**, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.

Rev. 19:6 And I heard as it were the voice of a **great multitude**, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.

Bro. Russell said this was a secondary spiritual class who began their walk of consecration, but did not carry it out with enough faithfulness to receive the reward of the Church. Although he never changed his mind about this, Judge Rutherford had a different idea. Today the JWs believe that the Great Multitude is an earthly class and that it is simply another name for the whole world of mankind. One JW said to me, “I have never quite understood how Pastor Russell thought God would reward failure.” Perhaps he had never examined how Bro. Russell got this doctrine from the scriptures. Consider Paul’s description of how different Christians “build” upon a foundation:

1 Cor. 3:11–15 [Jerusalem Bible] The foundation: nobody can lay any other than the one which has already been laid, that is Jesus Christ. On this foundation you can build in gold, silver, and jewels, or in wood, grass and straw. But whatever the material, the work of each builder is going to be clearly revealed when the day comes. That day will begin with fire and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. If his structure stands up to it, he will get his wages. If it is burned down, he will be the loser, and **though he is saved himself**, it will be as one who has gone through fire.

Clearly this passage describes two different kinds of builders. Although both start their work upon the same foundation, the result is quite different. The one who builds a superior faith structure receives his reward. The other one loses much, although he himself is saved. Someone in this category is described two chapters later:

1 Cor. 5:5 To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Who are these people? Clearly they are Christians. Paul says that they built on the foundation of Jesus Christ. Today about one-third of the world claims to be Christian, which means two-thirds are non-Christian. The term Great Multitude cannot describe the world of mankind because most of them know nothing about God and have no relationship to Him. The Great Multitude is associated with the 144,000 (Rev. 7) and also the marriage of the Lamb and his Bride (Rev. 19). The Greek words translated “Great Multitude” also appear in the first verse of Revelation 19 and there we learn they are “in heaven”:

Rev. 19:1 [Rotherham] After these things I heard as it were a loud voice of a great multitude **in heaven...**

It is instructive to remember the special status of the priests and Levites in typical Israel. There was just one high-priest. He had four sons (under-priests). All five belonged to the tribe of Levi which consisted of thousands of others. There was one unique characteristic of the Levites. They had NO inheritance in the land as did the other eleven tribes. (Num. 18:20–24) Note also what God says about Levites who went astray. He does not cut them off or destroy them:

Ezek. 44:10,11 And the Levites that are gone away far from me, when Israel went astray, which went astray away from me after their idols; they shall even bear their iniquity. Yet they shall be ministers in my sanctuary, having charge at the gates of the house, and ministering to the house.

Making the Great Multitude an earthly class serves the theology of the today's Watch Tower organization in two ways: 1) the vast majority of the JW's prefer to live on earth anyway; 2) it provides a plausible explanation to what happens to those who join this organization today, a number that vastly exceeds 144,000.

I once heard someone say the "Great Multitude" had to be an earthly class because of the phrase "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes" [Rev. 7:17—referring to the Great Multitude]. It is also found in Rev. 21:4 where it clearly applies to the world of mankind. But eradicating sorrow has always been an objective of God's plan. If He "wipes tears away" from the eyes of all mankind He certainly will do the same for the Great Multitude as well. In Rev. 7 we read that the Great Multitude "are before the throne of God and **serve him** day and night in his temple." (vs. 15) We never read that the world of mankind stands before the throne of God where they serve Him. And of course we never read that the world of mankind is "in heaven."

## Second Death

Remember the words of Rev. 20:6, "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the **second** death hath no power." There are not just two resurrections, there are two deaths as well. The first is Adamic death which we all die now; the second is, well, second death. This doctrine too is questioned by some, especially those who believe in universal salvation.

1 Tim. 2:4 [God] will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

John 3:17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

According to those who believe in universal salvation, if God wants all men to be saved, they will be saved. But God wanting something should not be understood as wanting it to the point of interfering with man's free will. Unlike the lower animals, humans were created with the ability to **choose** good or evil. That means we can choose **NOT** to be saved:

Acts 3:22,23 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. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, **shall be destroyed** from among the people.

Jer. 31:29,30 In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge. **But every one shall die for his own iniquity**: every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge.

In the kingdom mankind will be instructed in righteousness. They are getting plenty of instruction in UNrighteousness now. Once they truly know good and evil, they will be tested in the "little season" that follows the work of the kingdom. That those who **choose** unrighteousness will be destroyed is made very clear:

Rev. 20:9 And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, . . . and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.

What happens to the world of mankind in the kingdom also happens to those who pass from death unto life by consecrating their life to God during this Gospel Age. Although we generally do not talk about it, those who turn their back on God after giving up their right to life in the kingdom, will die the second death from which there is no redemption:

Heb. 6:4,6 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, . . . 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.

Heb. 10:26 If we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins.

1 John 5:16 If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it.

Even the apostle Paul did not consider that he had guaranteed salvation. Notice his words:

1 Cor. 9:27 I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a **castaway**.

This Greek word translated "castaway" appears eight times in the Bible. Here's another example:

Heb. 6:8 That which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing; whose end is to be burned.

Paul did not believe in universal salvation, and neither do I.

We also have an illustration of those who go into the second death in the arrangements of typical Israel. Two of Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, died because they did not do what they were supposed to do. (See Lev. 10:2) More than that, their family line died with them:

Numbers 3:4 Nadab and Abihu died before the LORD, when they offered strange fire before the LORD, in the wilderness of Sinai, **and they had no children.**

Of course Nadab and Abihu did not die the second death. That was impossible prior to Gospel Age. But they do illustrate those who do die and are eternally cut off.

### Summary

So in our study of the scriptures we have seen that a resurrection from the dead is a fundamental doctrine. In fact, it is primarily a New Testament doctrine since the word itself is not found in the Old Testament. The scriptures talk about two resurrections: the first is a resurrection to spiritual life received by the church and the great multitude; the second, or general resurrection, is to earthly life for everyone else in the kingdom.

Just as there are two resurrections, there are also two deaths: the first, or Adamic death, and second death. Those who pass from death unto life whether now during the Gospel Age or in the future during the kingdom, will either gain everlasting life or, if unfaithful, will die the second death. From this death there will never be a resurrection.

Heb. 10:38,39 (NIV) But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him. But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved.

“The doctrine of the resurrection appears to have been thought of much more consequence among the primitive Christians than it is now. How is this? The apostles were continually insisting on it, and exciting the followers of God to diligence, obedience, and cheerfulness through it. And their successors in the present day seldom mention it! So apostles preached, and so primitive Christians believed; so we preach, and so our hearers believe. There is not a doctrine in the Gospel on which more stress is laid; and there is not a doctrine in the present system of preaching which is treated with more neglect!” *Adam Clarke, endnote #3, 1 Cor. 15*

Closing Hymn: #327—We Shall Reign

*[First given in Los Angeles, January, 1997]*

## *Two Views of Atonement*

Opening Hymn: #187 — “Jesus Paid It All”

“And this shall be a statute forever unto you; in the 10th day of the 7th month . . . to make an atonement for the children of Israel for all their sins once a year.”

--Lev. 16:29,34

The Hebrew word rendered "atonement" means "to cover." Strong says it appears in various forms including the words cleanse, disannul, forgive, be merciful, pardon, purge, reconcile

It is wonderful to see what a grand arrangement the Israelites received from God compared to the superstitious Egyptians. He gave them a beautiful place of worship, a priesthood to carry out the duties of worship, and a law or code of conduct that raised them morally and physically above their heathen neighbors. What they might not have known is that with the receiving of the law, they also became aware of how easily it was to disobey it and come under the influence of sin:

Rom. 3:20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

As individual Israelites realized their need for forgiveness when they sinned, they were to bring a sacrifice to the Tabernacle according to the rule and regulations of the law. But on the 10th day of the 7th month, there was a great national time of atonement when the nation was made right with God. This was such a serious matter that this was the only annual day of fasting according to the law:

Lev. 16:31 It shall be a sabbath of rest unto you, and ye shall afflict [Hebrew: fast] your souls by a statute forever.

Isaiah 58:3 Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? [vs. 5] Is it such a fast that I have chosen? a day for a man to afflict his soul?

How long did it take to construct the Tabernacle and establish this mode of worship? Less than a year! When the Israelites left Egypt they were told: "This month shall be unto you the beginning of months" (Ex. 12:2). It was the third month that Moses went up into Mount Sinai to talk with God, to receive the law, and the instructions for the building of the Tabernacle. And by the end of that first year, the construction was complete:

Ex. 40:17 And it came to pass in the first month in the second year, on the first day of the month that the tabernacle was reared up.

Without a priesthood to minister in the service of the tabernacle, it would not benefit the people. So in the 8th chapter of Leviticus we read about the ceremonies associated with inducting Aaron and his sons into the priesthood. It took one full week:

Lev. 8:33 And ye shall not go out of the door of the tabernacle of the congregation in seven days until the days of your consecration be at an end: for seven days shall he consecrate you

Naturally there had not yet been any "day of atonement" for there had been no completed tabernacle and no official priesthood. So it was necessary to purge the nation from sin [typically, of course] as the very first duty of the priests:

Lev. 9:7 And Moses said unto Aaron, Go unto the altar and . . . make an atonement for thyself and for the people . . . as the Lord commanded.

The service of atonement recorded in this 9th chapter of Leviticus occurred on the 8th day of Nisan, the first month of the year. It was never repeated again since by the 10th day of the 7th month the annual day-of-atonement arrangement applied for the typical purging of sin.

Both the ceremonies in the 9th chapter of Leviticus and the 16th chapter were for the express purpose of making atonement for the nation of Israel. We would ordinarily expect that the ceremonies would be identical. But in fact they are quite different. Why should this be? We suggest that it is because the atonement work is being describe from two quite different viewpoints.

### **Atonement Ceremonies**

There is no question that this entire arrangement was meant to teach us important lessons. It wasn't just an empty annual ceremony. It was to show us what was important in God's sight.

Heb. 5:1,4,5 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 sins. And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest...

So we see that Christ is the reality of the high priest in the atonement sacrifices. And the underpriests, Aaron's sons, picture those who walk in the footsteps of Jesus, the church. The time of sacrifice is the Gospel Age to be followed by a time of blessing in the Millennial Age. So we must recognize that the Day of Atonement really pictures what has been happening since the time of Christ. The next age is pictured in all the other days of the year.

### **Where did the ceremonies take place?**

In both the 9th and 16th chapters, the animals were killed in the court and parts of the animals were burned on the brazen altar. In both cases parts of the animals were burned outside the camp. But in the 9th chapter there is nothing that takes place in the Holy or Most Holy-the tabernacle proper. [Exception: at the very end of all the sacrificing, we read:

Lev. 9:23 And Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle of the congregation and came out and blessed the people.

### **Who does the sacrificing?**

The 9th chapter opens up with Moses summoning Aaron, his sons, and the elders of Israel. As the chapter goes along we see that the sons have a part in the ceremonies:

Lev. 9:9 And the sons of Aaron brought the blood unto him.

In the 16th chapter there is only Aaron. Moses has no part, the sons are not mentioned, there are no "elders" of Israel. There is incidental mention of someone to handle the scapegoat and the burning of hide/hoofs/dung outside the camp.

### **What types of sacrifices are made?**

Both the 9th and 16th chapters require a sin offering and burnt offering for "Aaron and his house" and a sin offering and burnt offering for "the people." The animals for these four offerings were the same for both sin offerings and for the burnt offering for Aaron and his house. But in Lev. 9 there is a bullock offered in addition to the Lev. 16 ram as a burnt offering for the people.

We notice that Lev. 9 talks about three offerings never mentioned in Lev. 16:

Lev. 9:17 And he brought the meal offering and took an handful thereof and burnt it upon the altar...

Lev. 9:18 He slew also the bullock and the ram for a sacrifice of peace offerings which was for the people...

Lev. 9:21 And the breasts and the right shoulder Aaron waved for a wave offering before the Lord...

### **What happened to the blood?**

Lev. 9:8,9 Aaron therefore went unto the altar and slew the calf of the sin offering which was for himself. And the sons of Aaron brought the blood unto him and he dipped his finger in the blood and put it upon the horns of the altar and poured out the blood at the bottom of the altar.

Clearly it was the brazen altar which received the blood of the sacrificed sin offering. But that is not what happens when we get to the 16th chapter:

Lev. 16:14 And he shall take of the blood of the bullock and sprinkle it with his finger upon the mercy seat eastward and before the mercy seat shall he sprinkle of the blood with his finger seven times.

This bringing in of the blood into the Most Holy is an important part of the symbolism of the atonement sacrifice. The blood was also sprinkled on the incense altar:



Lev. 16:18,19 And he shall go out unto the altar that is before the Lord and make an atonement for it; and shall take of the blood of the bullock and of the blood of the goat and put it upon the horns of the altar round about. And he shall sprinkle of the blood upon it with his finger seven times and cleanse it and hallow it from the uncleanness of the children of Israel.

Now it might seem that this is the brazen altar, but it is not. When the incense altar was constructed, instructions were given to hallow it once a year with the blood of sin offering:

Ex. 30:10 And Aaron shall make an atonement upon the horns of [the incense altar] once in a year with the blood of the sin offering of atonements; once in the year shall he make atonement upon it throughout your generations: it is most holy unto the Lord.

### **People's Sin Offering**

In the 9th chapter of Leviticus Aaron receives one goat for a sin offering for the people. In the 16th chapter he receives two goats. However, only a single goat is killed and sacrificed in both chapters. The second goat in chapter 16 is called the scapegoat and after having had the sins of the people confessed over it, it is led out into the wilderness and it is not heard from again.

### **Blessing of the People**

Two blessings are recorded in chapter 9; no blessing is recorded in chapter 16:

Lev. 9:22,23 And Aaron lifted up his hand toward the people and blessed them and came down from offering of the sin offering and the burnt offering, and peace offerings. And Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle of the congregation and came out and blessed the people: and the glory of the Lord appeared unto all the people.

Sacrifice for atonement occurs in the Gospel age. The world receives a kind of blessing from Jesus and the church class. But the real blessing comes after the "head and body" go into the tabernacle and then return to bless. "Glory of the Lord"--probably lightning, which came out of the protecting cloud and consumed the burnt offering (vs. 24).

### **Why the difference?**

These are the major differences. Perhaps you can find more. We must therefore ask, Why should these differences exist? Let us suggest that there are **two viewpoints** of the sacrifices which occur during this Gospel Age: (1) **Our viewpoint** in chapter 9, from the standpoint of the flesh; (2) **God's viewpoint** as described in chapter 16.

### **Where did the ceremonies take place?**

We see each other in the court condition and we understand about the stench of the sacrifice "outside the camp." But the incense altar and mercy seat are something that

only God appreciates. So the 16th chapter shows us how the value of the sacrifice in the court is brought into the very presence of God in the Most Holy with incense. Instead of a bloody thing, it is a sacrifice of sweet savour to Him.

### **Who does the sacrificing?**

In the 16th chapter only Aaron is mentioned. God sees only Christ as the high priest and the church as this high priest's body members. But **we see** Jesus as our high priest and elder brother and ourselves as under priests--chapter 9. The "elders" only briefly mentioned at the start of chapter 9 might well picture the ancient worthies whose faithfulness we recognize as though they were sacrificing right with us:

Heb. 11:2 For by [faith] the elders obtained a good report. [12:1] Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses.

### **What types of sacrifices?**

The sin offering was required to effect the atonement. The burnt offering showed God's acceptance of the sin offering.

But in Lev. 9 we have the meal, peace, and wave offering. These three offerings all show our consecration from three perspectives. From Lev. 9, perspectives **WE SEE**.

#### **MEAL**

The high priest "took a handful and burnt it on the altar" [9:17]. Vs. 4 says it was "mingled with oil." Notice that no measure was specified. Each person gives what's appropriate for him--a handful. The Companion Bible says the meal offering was a present, or gift offering. The oil would represent the Holy Spirit mingled among the kernels of ground wheat which we willingly sacrifice on the altar.

#### **PEACE**

The Companion Bible suggests: "The Hebrew word conveys the idea of peace on the ground of perfection of compensation or recompense. Hence connected with the thought of rendering payment of vows or praises because of peace enjoyed."

Rom. 5:1 Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God...

Psa. 66:13 I will go into thy house with burnt offerings: I will pay thee my vows.

#### **WAVE**

There is no instruction about how long Aaron was to wave the breasts and right shoulder. Clearly he was to continue doing so until it was taken from him. So we also must continue to "wave" the choicest portion of the peace offering (or consecration vows) until it is removed from us.

**God's viewpoint** of our consecration is nicely shown in 16:12 with the words "and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small." Again there's no measure, simply all we can give. This incense is described with the blood of the bullock representing Jesus. Although

it is not repeated with the Lord's goat, the principle does apply. We give all we can, as Jesus gave all he could.

### **What happened to the blood?**

We see in Lev. 9 the blood of sacrifice cleansing the brazen altar so that it is sanctified for use. In Lev. chapter 16 the incense altar that is sanctified. And the applying of the life of the animal represented in its blood upon the mercy seat in the Most Holy satisfies God's justice so that atonement is made. But this occurs only from God's viewpoint.

### **Why two goats?**

We do not perceive any difference between those walking in the footsteps of Jesus. So we have just one goat as a sin offering for the people in Lev. 9. But **God**, who can read the heart, sees that not all who present themselves in sacrifice are truly willing to carry out the terms and conditions of that covenant. So in Lev. 16 there are two classes: Church and Great Company. One willingly is sacrificed like their Lord and Master; the other is delivered unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit might be saved (1 Cor. 5:5).

### **Blessing of People**

The first blessing in Lev. 9 seems to indicate the partial benefit the world receives now. "Ye are the salt of the earth" reads Matt. 5:1 But the full blessing will come only after all the sacrificing is complete. Moses with Aaron in Lev. 9 seems to show the law (pictured by Moses) approves since justice is fully satisfied. This occurs only after Aaron goes into the tabernacle [showing a change from the sacrificing to the glorified condition] and comes out again.

In Lev. 16:24 we see from **God's** sight that after the sacrificing, a change of garments from sacrifice to garments of glory and beauty occurs. Specific blessing of the people in the next age is not a part of the atonement work of the Gospel Age in His sight.

### **A Beautiful Picture**

The majority of mankind may read the 9th and 16th chapter of Leviticus and come away with a very unlovely view. Why did so many animals have to die? Why was it necessary to splash blood on everything? Modern man calls it barbaric and turns away. But that's not the way it appeared to Paul. Writing in Hebrews he explains the symbolism:

Heb. 9:22-24 And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission. It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself now to appear in the presence of God for us.

Modern man would love the easy way out. No suffering, no sacrifice, no death. But remission of sins--atonement--comes only by the death of the perfect man Jesus. And as a result he has passed into the real Most Holy, the presence of God there to supervise the sacrifice of his body members.

Christ is pictured in so many different places in the Tabernacle. But that doesn't mean he's in **everything**. We are there too:

Heb. 13:11-13 For the bodies of those beasts whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore without the camp, bearing his reproach.

And which beasts had their blood brought into the sanctuary?

Lev. 16:15 Then shall he kill the goat of the sin offering that is for the people and bring his blood within the vail and do with that blood as he did with the blood of the bullock...

The bullock represents our Lord. If he did not lay down his life in sacrifice, there would never have been a goat to be sacrificed. But his sacrifice has occurred and Paul tells us to obey the picture and willingly accept the ignominy of the way the sacrifice appeared to the "world" outside the camp. It was a stench as these others gazed on the sacrifice. That was the way they saw it with our Lord and that's the way they see it with us.

The result of the sacrificing will be blessing. Hebrews speaks about Jesus being the mediator of a new and better covenant:

Heb. 8:6 But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant which was established upon better promises.

We don't really have to guess what this new covenant is, when it applies, or how it will benefit those who come in under it:

Heb. 8:10-12 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 neighbour 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.

Are God's laws now being put into the minds of the house of Israel? Is it true that now all know God from the least unto the greatest? Of course not! Blindness still applies to the house of Israel:

Rom. 11:25 [RSV] I want you to understand this mystery, brethren: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles come in.

The full number of the Gentiles has not yet come in, but we are nearing the end of this Gospel Age. Soon the time for sacrifice will be at an end and the blessings of the new covenant will begin to flow to Israel and the entire world of mankind as they come into conformity with kingdom arrangements.

Our commission now is to lay down our lives in sacrifice and help our brethren do the same. Phillips has beautifully translated Heb. 10:19-25 this way:

So, by virtue of the blood of Jesus, you and I, my brothers, may now have confidence to enter the Holy of Holies by a fresh and living way, which he has opened up for us by himself passing through the curtain, that is, his own human nature. Further, since we have a great High Priest set over the household of God, let us draw near with true hearts and fullest confidence, knowing that our inmost souls have been purified by the sprinkling of his blood just as our bodies are cleansed by the washing of clean water. In this confidence let us hold on to the hope that we profess without the slightest hesitation--for he is utterly dependable--and let us think of one another and how we can encourage each other to love and do good deeds. Let us not hold aloof from our church meetings, as some do. Let us do all we can to help one another's faith, and this the more earnestly as we see the final day drawing ever nearer.

Closing Hymn: #54 — "Once For All"

*[First delivered at the San Diego Convention, August, 1980]*

## *The Vision of Present Truth*

Habakkuk. 2:2 "Write the **vision**, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it."

I grew up in the truth. When I attended the meetings as a small boy, I was always reminded of this scripture because I could see it on the Chart of the Ages which was displayed at our Sunday meetings. As a child I thought the chart **was** the "vision" mentioned in Habakkuk and that Brother Russell was the one who wrote it down.

Bro. Russell first printed the chart in the September 1881 *Zion's Watch Tower*, five years before the first volume appeared. He felt the chart was a good way to visually understand the great plan of God from the creation of man through the ages to come. He wrote, "We know of nothing which would give you so clear a conception of the plan of God."<sup>1</sup> Later in life I came to realize the vision is much, much more than the Chart of the Ages.

Bro. Russell died more than 80 years ago. There are few people alive who have seen him with their own eyes. Although we read about the great enthusiasm for witnessing and Bible study that energized the brethren during his ministry, it seems like a long time ago. To some the "vision" Bro. Russell saw and communicated does not seem as energizing as it once was. Important doctrines he emphasized are not always as appreciated today as they were then.

Hebrews 2:1 "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."

We are Bible Students. Why should it matter what Bro. Russell taught, or what was taught by the many great teachers we've had in all our lands? It matters because studying the Bible is not enough. Without a basic understanding of the plan of God—without an understanding of "the vision"—we can't understand what's in the Bible. You're here because you (or someone who taught you) first learned the basics of God's plan from Bro. Russell's writings. Bro. Russell was not just another writer; he was not just another commentator whose opinion on scripture was as good as but no better than any other. He was uniquely used by the Lord at the end of this Gospel Age to cleanse the church of the corrupting errors accumulated through the centuries, and to proclaim to the footstep followers of the Master that it was time to come out of "Babylon." Today the Chart of the Ages is recognized throughout the world as a symbol for those who believe as most of us do. It is our common understanding of the "vision" that allows us to unite our hearts and minds in fellowship with others of like precious faith throughout the world.

What was the "vision" of truth that Bro. Russell saw and communicated to us?

Habakkuk 2:1 "I will stand upon my watch, and fix my foot upon the **Tower**, and I will **watch** to see what will be said to me."

---

<sup>1</sup> R294, Oct. 1882

Bro. Russell was born in 1852. In July 1879, at the age of 27, he published the first issue of *Zion's Watch Tower*. Perhaps it was Habakkuk 2:1 that provided the inspiration for the title of that periodical.

### **Christ's Second Presence**

But *Zion's Watch Tower* was not its only title. The cover also contained the words *Herald of Christ's Presence*. The first article in the first issue was on the subject of Christ's second advent. An article in the second issue emphasized that this is an invisible presence which precedes the Millennium. In the October issue an article by J. H. Paton argued that this invisible presence occurred in 1874.

This was a revolutionary concept. Christendom then as now expected the second advent. William Miller thought the scriptures clearly indicated that Christ would return in 1844. It didn't happen. But Miller's preaching triggered an interest in the subject of Christ's second presence. Paton, Russell, and others came to the conclusion that the world would never see Christ again with their literal eyes. The second presence had to be invisible.

Believing that Christ is invisibly present now makes us unique among Christians. I doubt that there are any Christian groups whose roots are not in the writings of Bro. Russell who believe the Lord is present now. These words are from the Reprints, bottom of page 735:

“In October, 1883, the question was asked through the Tower: “Are there any other papers than the Tower which teach as it does, that Jesus is now present?” And the answer was given: “We know of none other which teaches the personal presence of Christ Jesus,” etc. If any reader knows of any journal which up to and at that date taught the presence of our Lord, they will confer a favor by sending us a copy of such paper with the article containing such teaching marked. We feel sure, that the above answer was correct.”

A belief in the invisible presence of our Lord is part of this “vision.”

### **Ransom for All**

Bro. Russell was absolutely convinced that the Bible taught that Jesus Christ died for all, whether anyone believed it or not, and whether they agreed with his understanding of the Bible or not. Believing in a ransom for all also made him unique in the Christian world. Today most Christians still believe that salvation is limited to those who agree with their understanding of the scriptures.

Bro. Russell was surprised that those with whom he initially cooperated, like Brothers Barbour and Paton, eventually rejected this doctrine. When they did, Bro. Russell immediately stopped cooperating with them. To him there could be no compromising this doctrine. He continually emphasized the primacy of the scriptures as our only creed.

*quote*—“Beware of and reject every theory which rejects the ransom, even though it adheres to the name Christian and quotes from the Bible.”—*unquote* [R895, Oct. 1886]

If all that are within their graves are to come forth, then it follows that the dead are not being tormented eternally in hell. This was said in the very first issue of the Watch Tower. The Bible hell is simply oblivion—death. It was an unconventional message in its time; today it seems less so. His was truly a “Gospel message” [meaning “good news”]. It stood in contrast to the “bad news” being preached by everyone else. Because all died in Adam; **all** will come back in the kingdom through Christ.

Think about the Christian community around you. Who teaches that mankind will be resurrected back to perfect human life right here on earth where they will be instructed in righteousness? Who teaches that the atheists, the Buddhists, the Mohammedans, the Confucians, the worshippers of Baal, or a 1000-and-one other false gods will all come back to life because there will be a resurrection of the dead? Not one that I know of. That first issue of *Zion’s Watch Tower* referred to what would become a favorite text of Bible Students:

Acts 3:19-21 "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 receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began."

A ransom for all and a restitution of all things forms a part of the vision communicated to us by Bro. Russell. It is a precious part of our heritage.

### **Why God Permits Evil**

Few within the Christian community can answer the question, “If God is all powerful, why does he permit evil to flourish in the world?” The lead article in the second issue of the *Watch Tower* answered that question and it involves restitution. If this were to be the only life mankind will ever live, then there is no answer to the question.

Matthew 11:23 "And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day."

So why weren’t such mighty works done in Sodom? Was it right to destroy Sodom without giving them a chance to repent? Yes it was because their chance is yet future in the kingdom. Mankind is receiving its education in unrighteousness now; its education in righteous will take place in the kingdom when they come back to life on earth.

Knowing why God permits evil to flourish is a part of this “vision.” You know it; most of your Christian friends do not.



## The Tabernacle

There were many articles on the various offerings of Leviticus and on the Tabernacle in the Watch Tower during the early years.<sup>2</sup> Bro. W. I. Mann authored many of them. Bro. Paton, in Oct. 1880 wrote about the scapegoat (R150). Because Bro. Paton rejected the idea that the Great Company was a spiritual class, Bro. Russell followed Paton's article with a note reaffirming his belief that it was.

The meaning of the typical sacrifices of Israel and their entire Tabernacle arrangement thrilled Bro. Russell. He writes about his experience in study and meditation on this subject. (R3824) The first book he authored and published was *Tabernacle Shadows*. It was published in 1881 when Bro. Russell was 29 years old. A diagram of the Tabernacle was also placed to the right of the Chart of the Ages when it was first published in 1881.

An appreciation of the types and shadows in ancient Israel and the lessons they teach spiritual Israel was communicated to us by Bro. Russell. Few among our Christian friends have any interest in nor do they draw any spiritual lessons from a study of this subject.

An understanding of the types and shadows of the Old Testament is an important part of the "vision" we have received through the ministry of Bro. Russell.

## Israel

In March 1880 in an article entitled "Jewish Restoration," Bro. Russell wrote:

*quote*—"We believe that fleshly Israel will, in the near future, be recognized as the chief nation of earth."—*unquote*

Bro. Russell believed and taught that Israel's period of disfavor was drawing to a close and that favor would return to them. In the chart of the ages which he published the following year, part of the pyramid showing the completed work of the kingdom is labelled ISRAEL RESTORED. It is placed higher than the part representing the world of mankind.

Most of Christendom has little interest in Israel or if they regard Israel at all, it is simply as another mission field to be conquered for Christ. That's because they have taken all the promises God made to Israel and given them a spiritual interpretation. The fact that Israel has been regathered from the four corners of the earth into their own land is ignored. The fact that Israel has been providentially protected since their establishment as a nation in 1948 has also been ignored.

But Israel is God's chosen people. He is specially guiding their affairs and protecting them.

Jeremiah 46:28 "Fear thou not, O Jacob my servant, saith the Lord: for I am with thee; for I will make a full end of all the nations whither I have driven thee:

---

<sup>2</sup> Feb. '80, *The Law Shadows*, talks about the typical sacrifices and what they mean. Mar. '80, *The Great Day of Atonement*. May '80, *The Sin Offering*. July '80, *The Tabernacle*.

but I will not make a full end of thee, but correct thee in measure; yet will I not leave thee wholly unpunished.”

Bro. Russell never wavered in his support for Israel. The high point came on October 9, 1910, when he spoke to 4,000 Jews gathered in New York’s Hippodrome. In his discourse he advocated the establishment of a Jewish nation. He never lived to see it. We have. He spoke “comfortably to Jerusalem, that her warfare is accomplished” (Isaiah 40:2). Few of our Christian friends do so today.

Recognizing Israel’s place in the plan of God is a part of this “vision.”

### **The Volumes**

Virtually all the important elements of the “vision” were communicated by Bro. Russell in the first few years of the *Watch Tower*. As time went by, much of what he wrote became available in six volumes entitled “Studies in the Scriptures.”

Volume 1—1886. It described the primacy and importance of the Bible; our Lord’s return; the permission of evil; ransom and restitution; the chart of the ages; the kingdom of God contrasted with the kingdoms of this world; and the coming great time of trouble.

Volume 2—1889. Bible chronology; Daniel’s 70 weeks; Times of the Gentiles; the manner of our Lord’s return; The Man of Sin. From the foreword: “The Times of the Gentiles ended in the fall of AD 1914.” Bro. Russell says he has been preaching this for over 40 years. Historians are united in their judgment that 1914 was an unprecedented year in earth’s history. Historian Barbara Tuchman said, “A world came to an end in 1914.” In an editorial, *The Seattle Times*, January 1, 1959, wrote: “The modern era . . . began in 1914 and no one knows when or how it will end. . . . It could end in mass annihilation.”

Volume 3—1890. This book describes God’s kingdom including the preparation work required for it. One chapter describes the restoration of Israel. From the foreword: “The Great Pyramid has not lost any of its interest to the author.” Even as early as May 1881, he said he had “great respect” for the Great Pyramid, and called it a “Miracle in Stone.”

Volume 4—1897. The Battle of Armageddon, the downfall of Babylon, and the establishment of the kingdom.

Volume 5—1899. From the foreword: “The keynote of this volume is the Ransom-price.”

Volume 6—1904. The New Creation along with notes on baptism, the Memorial, marriage, parenting, and other obligations.

### **Bro. Russell Himself**

If we had more time, we could continue to describe various elements of the “vision” Bro. Russell saw so clearly and communicated to those with ears to hear. How did he himself come to understand it? The same way our elders come to understand the truths they give

us from this platform. They did **not** talk with some divine messenger who told them what to say. They **did** study the scriptures and considered the thoughts of others to see whether these things are true or not.

Bro. Russell said at the age of 16 he had been a consecrated child of God for some years. He said he “stumbled” upon Adventism and “confessed indebtedness to Adventists.” He was influenced by Jonas Wendell, George Stetson, George Storrs, Nelson Barbour, J. H. Paton, and others. What mattered most to Bro. Russell was doctrines that could be proved from the Bible. He claimed “as a faithful student of the Word of God, to be an index finger . . . to help [us] trace for ourselves, on the sacred page, the wonderful plan of God.” (R3821)

Let us never forget this. Millions have studied the Bible yet they do not understand what it teaches. Errors from the past cloud their minds; they see no “vision” of God’s plan to bless the world of mankind. Others feel the books written by their leaders are far more important than the Bible so they only study those books. Even among our own fellowship some classes study only the Bible; other classes study only the writings of Bro. Russell. While studying a volume is one method of Bible study—a topical study of the scriptures—to say that it replaces direct Bible study is an error. The Bible itself is the word of God. If we call ourselves Bible Students, we should not be afraid to study it.

When asked what name those who were associated with Bro. Russell called themselves, he replied that we were strictly nonsectarian. He went on:

“We have no creed (fence) to bind us together or to keep others out of our company. The Bible is our only standard, and its teachings our only creed. . . . We are in fellowship with all Christians in whom we can recognize the Spirit of Christ, and especially with those who recognize the Bible as the only standard. We do not require, therefore, that all shall see, just as we do in order to be called Christians.” (R344, April 1882)

Let us never feel we must force conformity of thought among brethren. When one differs with Bro. Russell’s interpretation of scripture, he should be free to give the reasons for the difference. However, there is a serious problem when one **does not know** what Bro. Russell’s interpretation is. We are deceived if we think we can study the Bible by ourselves and come to an accurate knowledge of what it teaches without the help of others. This does not mean we are “following a man.” Everything we learn comes from others through the spoken and written word. Of course the Lord leads us, but he does it through human agencies. It has always been that way. The Ethiopian eunuch knew that. When asked by Philip if he understood what he read, he replied: “How can I, except some **man** should guide me?” (Acts 8:31)

If you want to understand the truth, study Bro. Russell’s writings. Learn about his “vision” of God’s great plan of salvation. If Bro. Russell says something you think is wrong, be prepared with the scriptures that lead you to that conclusion. Check your scriptures against his, then reconcile the differences. This is Bible study within the framework of the

truth the Lord has given us through Bro. Russell's ministry. If you don't have the right framework, you won't be able to appreciate the teachings of the Bible. And what is that framework?

- Our God is a God of love. He does have a plan to bless the human race.
- The foundation of His plan is the death of the perfect man Jesus Christ which provides a ransom for all whether they know it or not.
- The dead are really dead. But there will be a future kingdom of righteousness when all who have died will be brought back to life.
- Those who devote their lives to God during this age will receive a heavenly resurrection permitting them to bring blessings to everyone else in the kingdom upon the earth.
- Evil will not exist forever. It will be destroyed along with those who practice evil at the end of the kingdom.

This is so clear, so reasonable, so like a wise and loving God. Blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear. We should be enthusiastic when we share our "vision" with the world around us.

Near the end of his life, in the year 1914, Bro. Russell began his greatest witness effort ever: "The Photodrama of Creation." It took two years to prepare. Slides plus motion pictures in tinted color with sound from phonograph records were shown to thousands to bring them the message of God's plan. It was the most advanced communication technology of its time. I would now like you to see Bro. Russell as he appeared on film introducing the second part of the Photo Drama. His voice was recorded on phonograph records:

—*BEGIN video projection*—

"We have seen and heard part first of the Photo Drama of Creation. We hope that as a result, our reverence for our great Creator is increased. The Bible story of the fall of Father Adam, under the curse or sentence of death, may we never forget. The reign of sin and death, and its power and influence, even upon angels, leading up to the deluge, we have fixed in our memory. God's oath-bound covenant with Abraham we have seen to be the basis of all the resurrection hope. Our interest in God, and in the Bible, and in our fellows, increases as we gain a broader view of creation. It is for this reason that our patrons declare each part of the Drama the best.

"Let us keep in memory the great fact that creation is not yet complete. The completed creation will find our earth a paradise and filled with a perfect and happy human family in harmony with the Creator. Thereafter, there shall be no more sin, sorrow, sighing or dying. The curse of death will have been rolled away by the redeemer and the blessing of God will

be upon all—everlasting life; for all willful sinners will have been destroyed in the second death.

"Part second begins with Melchisedec, priest and king, the supposed builder of the Great Pyramid. It will show us Moses, God's typical dealings with typical Israel, the exodus, crossing the Red Sea, giving of the Mount Sinai law, the manna, the tabernacle and its sacrifices, and other wilderness experiences, the death and burial of Moses, Israel's crossing Jordan, Joshua's battles, Israel's kings—Saul, David, Solomon; Solomon's temple, Elisha, Elijah, Israel's last king—Zedekiah, concluding with the beautiful and touching film, "The Shunamite's Son." It illustrates the Divine power back of Messiah's coming kingdom, when all that are in their graves shall be called forth, and when sin and death will end."

—*END video projection*—

Let us also be committed to witnessing to others using all the available technologies we have today. If the Lord blesses our efforts, we rejoice. If there is no fruitage, it doesn't matter. Let us do with our might what our hands find to do in the vineyard of the Lord.

May the Lord help us remain faithful to the "vision" of truth he has given to each one of us. May it never be said of us that we let slip the things we have heard.

Amen.

*[First given at the 1998 International Convention, Miskolc, Hungary]*

## *What Must I Do To Be Saved?*

Opening Hymn: #101 — I Am The Door

Those with a knowledge of scripture probably like to do a bit of second-guessing when they hear a speaker's title. What's will this be about? Perhaps we'll hear about Paul and Silas and the time they were in prison. In Acts 16 there's an earthquake at midnight and the gates fly open. The jailer is horrified. When he hears no-one has escaped, he throws himself down at the feet of these two faithful missionaries and asks this very question. But that's not what we're going to talk about.

Instead we want to explore this subject as it was handled by Jesus. The account begins in:

Luke 13:22 And he went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem. Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved?  
And he said unto them . . .

As was often the case in his ministry, this lesson was stimulated by a question: "Lord, are there few that be saved?" But Jesus ignored both the man and his question. The account says that he spoke to THEM (not him). Why did he do this? That requires some speculation:

- Bro. Russell suggested that if Jesus had really answered the question, it would have led to many other questions the answers to which the audience was not prepared to receive (*R1951:3*). He also said it was not the due time to explain the particulars of the two salvations (*R5407:1*).
- If Jesus had answered the question (e.g., "Few are saved" -or- "In fact many are saved") the man might have said "Thank you" and gone his way none the better.
- On the other hand, if the man disagreed with Jesus' answer, a debate might follow which would have focused everyone's attention on what was really of no great consequence.
- So Jesus ignored the question because it was the wrong question. The answer would not do anyone any good.

If an outside observer were to study us, I think he would likely make one observation: "Bible Students love questions! Everywhere you go they seem to be debating one thing or another." We do this even though the answer might not be very important. Example: "Is the number 144,000 of Rev. 7 literal or figurative?" How are we the better if we were absolutely sure we had the definitive answer to that question? The answer satisfies our curiosity, but little more.

The last few verses of the gospel of John recounts an incident when Peter asks a wrong question:

John 21:21,22 (Phillips) [after being told the kind of death he would suffer Peter asks about someone else] "Yes, Lord, but what about him [meaning John]?" "If

it is my wish,” returned Jesus, “for him to stay until I come, is that your business, Peter? You must follow me.”

Rather than being concerned about whether the 144,000 is literal or symbolic, a better question is “What must I do to become a part of the 144,000 mentioned in Rev. 7?” That’s the kind of question the man in Luke 13 should have asked: “What must **I** do to be saved?” And that’s the question Jesus actually answered. Let’s go back to the parable and pick up both the question and the answer:

Luke 13:23–30 Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, **Strive** to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the master of the house is risen up, and hath shut the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and he shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets. But he shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.

In the very first word of his response, Jesus answered the question the man should have asked. How can he or anyone be saved? **Strive**—Greek word #75 which has as its root the Greek word *agon* (we get the words *agony* and *agonize*). It means to struggle, literally to compete for a prize, or figuratively to contend with an adversary. It appears six times in the scriptures and has been translated fight, labor fervently, strive.

Where today does one find those who labor fervently, striving and bending every energy to compete for a prize? Athletes come to mind, particularly those who compete in the Olympic games. Such games were held in Jesus’ day and this Greek word describes what athletes do to win. Paul used this word and gave us a wonderful word picture about this kind of “striving”:

1 Cor. 9:25–27 (NIV) Everyone who **competes** [#75] in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown of laurel that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore, I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man shadow boxing. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

(He also used the word in 2 Tim. 4:7 when he said that he had **fought** a good **fight**.)

And what is it that we should try so hard to do? Enter in at the strait gate. “Strait” is a word we rarely hear today, except in the plural (e.g., “he’s in dire straits,” or “the ship is in the straits of Gibraltar”). It means narrow or constricted. Most modern English translations render the Greek as “narrow door.” In New Testament Greek the word only appears here and twice in a similar passage in Matthew:

Matt. 7:13,14 Enter ye in at the **strait** gate: for 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.

Do you want to be “saved” [the question the man should have asked Jesus]? Then you must put forth all your energies and focus all your attention on that objective. Otherwise you will not be victorious. In the ancient world victory in the Greek games was one of the highest honors a man could achieve. Paul uses those games as an example for our struggle against everything that might keep us from the prize. Winning must be our chief business, and the winners will be accorded the highest honor among all the people in the kingdom.

In the Luke account, the man asked whether there would be only a few saved. In fact Jesus did answer that question in the words we just quoted from Matthew:

Matt. 7:13,14 Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and **MANY** there be which go in thereat: strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and **FEW** there be that find it.

This must seem a bit strange to many Christians. Does one really enter the way to life through a narrow, constricting gate? But isn’t entry as simple as confessing that Jesus is one’s personal savior? Only a few find it? Yet 1.6 billion people—roughly a third of the world’s population—are Christian. That sounds like a lot, not a few!

Yet both this scripture and our own eyes tell us that if one must “strive” to win the prize, there are few competitors. In this parable and in the world around us, we see that many want to be within the master’s house as long as it is no great trouble. They think they can enter whenever they wish. But that’s not true. Here and also in the parable of the wise and foolish virgins there does come a time when the master of the house shuts the door and those on the outside are not allowed to come in.

Why do they think they should be allowed in? They say, “we have eaten and drunk in thy presence, and thou hast taught in our streets.” In other words, we know who you are and we like what you have to say. They don’t say that they never did anything about those teachings, that they never left what they had like those who were always with him. But they knew Jesus was doing a good work and, if asked who they supported, they would certainly say Jesus.

Might any of us be like that? We enjoy our associations with the brethren, we like the message of the truth, we’re reasonably regular in our attendance. But to spend hours in



personal study, to deprive ourselves and our loved ones of money or time to devote to the gospel, to think of nothing else except the scriptures and our responsibility for what we know ... well that's a description of a fanatic. It is too extreme. There's too much **agony**.

Yet that's the word Jesus used when he said what appears in our Bible as the word "strive." Knowing the truth will not save anyone. "Thou believest there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble" [and remain devils!]. (James 2:19) Some think the number 144,000 is figurative because it appears to be much too small. I would be more inclined to think that if it is figurative, the literal number will be much smaller, if membership in that class requires "striving" in the Olympic Games sense of the word.

### **Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth**

Luke 13:28 There shall be **weeping and gnashing of teeth**, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out.

The expression "weeping [sometimes wailing] and gnashing of teeth" occurs only here and six times in Matthew.

Matt. 13:42 And shall cast them [the tares] into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Matt. 13:50 And shall cast them [the bad fish, the wicked] into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Matt. 22:13 Then said the king to the servants, Bind him [the man without a wedding garment] hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Matt. 24:51 And shall cut him [the evil servant] asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Matt. 25:30 And cast ye the unprofitable [one-talented] servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

So we see that "weeping and gnashing of teeth" is associated with tares, bad fish, the one without a wedding garment, an evil servant and a one-talented servant. This is a figure of speech and indicates the keen disappointment associated with loss. One commentator suggested that "gnashing" might be considered as "chattering" teeth since they were in outer darkness where it was always cold. It does not mean second death even though in the case of the tares and bad fish the destruction is in a "furnace of fire."

We quoted five of the six texts in Matthew. Here's the last one:

Matt. 8:11,12 "Many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven, but the **children**

**of the kingdom** shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

The “children of the kingdom” are cast into outer darkness? How can this be? In the parable of the wheat and the tares, our Lord tells us the wheat represents “the children of the kingdom” (Matt. 13:38), are gathered into the barn, while the tares are the ones associated with weeping and gnashing of teeth. We don’t have to guess as to what Jesus means in Matthew 8 because the Luke account says, “There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when YE shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob.” The “ye” means the leaders of the people, the scribes and Pharisees, who considered themselves God’s favorites. If one were to ask for a show of hands from all those who thought they were “children of the kingdom,” they would be the first to raise their hands. **They** thought of themselves as the children of the kingdom.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were the patriarchs of the nation, the ones everyone knew would be associated in the kingdom. But it would not be the religious leaders of that day who would be with them in the chief positions. It would be those who would “come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south.” And who were those? Everyone from the four corners of the earth, from all nations, kindreds, peoples, and tongues. Although this included Jews, these were mostly Gentiles.

### **The Last and the First**

“There are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.”

Here is another expression which needs interpretation. In the 19th chapter of Matthew, Jesus is visited by a rich young man who wanted to know what he had to do to gain eternal life. After he goes away disappointed, Jesus answers Peter’s question about what they, the disciples, will receive since they did what Jesus told the young man to do. After telling them about their specific reward, Jesus goes on to say that those who have forsaken anything for his name’s sake shall receive an hundredfold. The last verse in chapter 19 says, “Many that are first shall be last, and the last shall be first.” (Matt. 19:30)

Who were the “last” in Jesus’ time. According to man’s judgment it was Peter, James, John, and all who like them had forsaken everything to follow Jesus. And who was “first”? It would be someone like the rich young man who went away without obtaining anything of real importance. Those who wanted the rewards of victory without “striving” for it in the Greek sense of the word would essentially find themselves last, outside in the darkness where there was keen disappointment over the lost opportunity.

### **How Does This Affect Us?**

When we study the parables of our Lord, it is important that we seek to understand them from the viewpoint of those who heard them. Jesus did not talk over their heads. He did not expect they would get nothing out of them, nor that they would not be understood until

after many centuries went by. The people did, in a general way, understand what his parables were saying. That's why we read statements like Luke 16:14, "And the Pharisees . . . heard all these things and they derided him." If they and the people could not understand these parables, they'd shake their heads, walk away, and would consider Jesus no threat at all because he talked only in riddles.

So let's summarize what Jesus probably expected his audience to get out of the parable of the strait gate:

- Salvation comes only through "striving" like an athlete who wants to win a crown at the Olympic Games. Salvation does not come cheap.
- The time will come when the opportunity to obtain salvation will end. Then it will not matter how much you want it. You can't have it.
- Having a casual association with the Master does not count. Hearing his teachings is no better than not hearing them if you don't do anything about it.
- Those who are in the most prominent leadership positions will be keenly disappointed to find that they are not leaders in the kingdom, but are, instead, in "last" place.

That's a considerable number of lessons in one short parable. But the parable would hardly have been preserved for us if there were not lessons for us. In fact, every one of these lessons has just as much significance for us today as it had for those who heard it from the Master's lips. That's what makes all the parables so powerful:

- Obtaining a heavenly reward comes only through "striving" for it, putting aside everything else, concentrating all our energies on obtaining the prize of the high calling in Christ Jesus.
- The opportunity to gain a heavenly reward will end some day. When we hear the call, we are expected to respond to it. Delaying a commitment until one finishes school, gets married, has started a career, retires, or whatever means the opportunity will be given to others.
- A casual association with the Lord, the truth, and the brethren may be pleasant but it does not count. Hearing the truth has no particular benefit unless we do something about what we hear.
- Those who are in prominent leadership positions among us will not necessarily have prominent positions in the kingdom. It all depends upon how hard they "strive" to gain the mastery over the world, the flesh, and the adversary.

So this parable has much to say to us nearly 2000 years after Jesus gave it. May we do more than just hear its words. Let us take its lessons to heart so that the Holy Spirit will be able to transform us into a useful instrument for dispensing blessings to the entire world of mankind in the coming kingdom.

Closing Hymn: #291 — The Gate Ajar

*[First give in Los Angeles, June 1994]*

## *Who Shall Be Greatest?*

Opening Hymn: #215 — “Earthly Treasures Vain”

Matthew 18:1 The disciples came unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?

On the face of it, this appears to be a reasonable question, God is pleased we are interested in His plan and want to know more. A healthy curiosity on the part of the disciples. was frequently rewarded with information they might not otherwise obtain. But as it turns out, they had other things on their mind. They weren't interested in how heaven was organized. They wanted to know about their own personal status.

Luke 9:46 Then there arose a reasoning among them, which of them should be greatest.

Rivalry and competitiveness had developed within their association to the point where this became a key question: Who **among them** was best! They had walked with Jesus a couple of years, had served him, had sacrificed earthly advantage. Perhaps now it was time to talk about reward, and particularly who would come out on top. Even today many are not interested in doing anything unless they know what's in it for them.

So what answer did they get? Who would be the greatest one? If they were looking for names—and there's no question they were—they had to be disappointed. For Jesus took yet another opportunity to teach a lesson he had taught before:

Matt. 16:25 For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.

This is the great paradox of the Bible. [Paradox: a statement seemingly self-contradictory, yet explicable as expressing a truth.] If you go after life directly, you'll never get it. If you go after rewards directly, you'll not get them either. So the Master didn't tell them who would be greatest. Instead he taught the lesson of service:

Mark 9:33-35 [Jesus asks] What was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way? But they held their peace, for by the way they had disputed among themselves who should be the greatest. And he sat down and called the twelve, and saith unto them, If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all and servant of all.

The lesson is very clear. Instead of debating about the **rewards** of service, they should be concentrating on how they might serve others. They were supposed to be servants, not masters. Did this settle the matter? Not at all.

Mark 10:37,41 [James and John] 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. And when the ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John.

I suspect that in the earlier “disputing” James and John were of the opinion that they deserved very high, if not the highest position in the kingdom. Here they are bringing up the matter again. And rather than let the master deal with it, the ten jump right in to contribute their words of criticism. Once again the master takes time to teach the lesson they don’t want to learn:

Mark 10:43,44 (Knox) Whoever has a mind to be great among you, must be your servant, and whoever has a mind to be first among you, must be your slave.

Now the King James doesn’t say “slave”; it says “servant.” I suppose there was a natural resistance to use the much stronger word “slave” even though that’s exactly what the Greek shows Jesus said. (The King James’ translators used the word slave only once in the Bible, and that time it was simply supplied. The word slaves appears only once.) The Greek word here is 1401: a slave (lit. or fig., involuntary or voluntary).

## Slaves

This is a word most of us don’t like. Lincoln freed the slaves. Slavery is dehumanizing and debases the individual. So we prefer to think about everybody as being free to do what they want to do. You serve if you want to serve. And when you get tired, you stop serving. But slaves have no such freedom. They must work whether they like it or not. And that, brethren, is exactly the position we are in.

Luke 17:7-10 (Goodspeed) What man among you, if he has a servant ploughing or keeping sheep, will say to him when he comes in from the field, “Come at once and sit down at the table,” instead of saying to him, “Get my supper ready, and dress yourself, and wait on me while I eat and drink, and you can eat and drink afterward”? Is he grateful to the slave for doing what he has been ordered to do? So you also, when you do all you have been ordered to do, must say, “We are good-for-nothing slaves! We have done only what we ought to have done!”

The slave doesn’t work on just one day of the week (perhaps just on Sunday, say). He doesn’t get vacations or days off. He works. Nothing he can do **earns** him special favors. It is his duty to serve his master. If he didn’t do it, his life was in jeopardy.

Christians today are in that same position. There is no room for pride or a feeling of some special merit because of what we do. It is our duty to serve our master so long as life shall last. And even when we think we’re doing a reasonable job, perhaps we should reflect on the words of this parable. At best we are unprofitable (or good-for-nothing to use Goodspeed’s word) slaves. Even though he loved them greatly, **Jesus** often found the disciples disappointing in their lack of progress. But **they** probably thought they had done a pretty good job and had learned their lessons well.

What is particularly interesting in this lesson of the slave, is that the scriptures show us something that is almost contrary to nature: The slave is expected to do nothing more than what the master himself has already performed. In fact, **we** are serving a master who takes pleasure in serving **us**:

Luke 12:37 (Goodspeed) Blessed are the slaves whom their master will find on the watch when he comes. I tell you he will gird up his robe and make them take their places at table, and go around and wait on them.

This is not the usual behavior of an earthly master at all. Throughout the Bible we are told to copy the characteristics of this very perfect master, Jesus.

Philippians 2:3-8 (Weymouth) Do nothing in a spirit of factiousness or of vainglory, but with humility let everyone regard the rest as being of more account than himself; each fixing his attention, not simply on his own interests, but also on those of others. Let the very spirit which was in Christ Jesus be in you also. From the beginning He had the nature of God. Yet He did not regard equality with God as something at which He should grasp. Nay, He stripped Himself of His glory, and took on Him the nature of a bondservant by becoming a man like other men. And being recognized as truly human, He humbled Himself and even stooped to die; and that too, a death on the cross.

This word “bondservant” is the Greek 1401--a slave. The lesson in this scripture makes it clear we are not to be looking for some earthly advantage. We can't do that. We're slaves! But the old human nature within us makes it so easy to forget.

### **Parable of the Penny**

Suppose we were unemployed and didn't know how we were going to feed our family. And suppose we were given the chance to do one day's work and get one day's pay for it. Would we be grateful for the opportunity? Maybe yes, and maybe no!

Matt. 20:1-16 (Goodspeed) For the Kingdom of Heaven is like an employer who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. He agreed with the laborers to pay them \$25 a day, and sent them to his vineyard. He went out about nine o'clock and saw others standing in the bazaar with nothing to do. And he said to them, “You go to my vineyard, too, and I will pay you whatever is right.” So they went. He went out again about twelve and about three, and did the same. About five he went out and found others standing about and he said to them, “Why have you been standing about here all day doing nothing?” They said to him, “Because nobody has hired us.” He said to them, “You go to my vineyard, too.” When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, “Call the laborers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last and ending with the first” When those who were hired about five o'clock came they received \$25 each. And when those who were hired first came they expected to get more, but they too got \$25 each. And when they received it they grumbled at their employer and said, “These men who were hired last worked only one hour and you have put them on the same footing with us who have done the heavy work of the day and have stood the midday heat.” But he answered one of them, “My friend, I am doing you no injustice. Did you not agree with me on \$25? Take what belongs to you and go. I wish to give the last man hired as much as I give you. Have I no

right to do what I please with what is mine? Or do you begrudge my generosity?"  
So those who are last now will be first then, and those who are first will be last.

There are a lot of good lessons in this parable. Clearly we can all understand the expectation of those who had labored all day. Although they knew what they had been promised, we can't help but see how they thought this generous employer would be even more generous when he came to them. What they failed to see was that they were at best unprofitable servants and lucky to have been selected by the master at all.

This parable has troubled some because it looks as though some who get into heaven are going to grumble about it, expecting to have a higher position of status than some others. But that's the wrong interpretation. This parable is not talking about what happens in heaven. It's talking about what happens right here on earth.

At the time Jesus preached the kingdom, his audience was typically divided into scribes and Pharisees, and publicans and sinners. The Scribes and Pharisees criticized Jesus because he associated with the sinners. They believed they were the ones who had served God "through the heat of the day" and thus deserved special consideration. They could not understand how the publicans and sinners should have the same opportunity as those who were obviously more faithful. The "penny" being paid was clearly the opportunity to enter upon the narrow way, and everybody got the same opportunity no matter how long they may have served in what they perceived to be the "vineyard of Jehovah". In this respect, this parable is like the parable of the Prodigal Son. The elder brother doesn't want the younger brother to get anything because he doesn't deserve it. But God's generosity isn't earned. Whatever we get is a gift. We do nothing to earn it. We do not merit it. [see Z5473]

Luke 10:2 Therefore said he unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest that he would send forth labourers into his harvest.

Although spoken of the harvest of the Jewish age, the circumstance is the same today during the harvest of the Gospel age. Rather than grumble about opportunities given to others who perhaps in our judgment don't deserve them, let us rejoice over every labourer in this harvest. Let us not begrudge the generosity of the Lord. He can bestow his favor on other friends, other classes, other groups just as he has been bestowing his favor on us.

I once heard a radio minister who had as his slogan "Blessings Now." It's an appealing slogan. Everyone, given their choice, would want blessings now. But that's not the way it's supposed to be.

Matt. 6: 1,2,8 (Weymouth) Beware of doing your good actions in the sight of men, to attract their gaze; if you do, there is no reward for you with your Father who is in heaven. When you give in charity, do not blow a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and streets in order that their praises may be sung by men. I solemnly tell you that they have received in full their reward. (vs.



8) Do not, then, imitate them; for your Father knows what things you need before you ask Him.

This is a strong statement that it's not "Blessings Now." If you do anything to gain blessings now, there will be no blessings later! It is a clear act of faith to believe our Heavenly Father will take care of us, that we don't need to have the approval of others around us. As we gain in Christian maturity, we should remind ourselves of this lesson.

Sometimes if we know **we** aren't supposed to get some special reward, we want **others** to get punished. That way we have a subtle indication that God's favor is shining on us, not upon those who disagree with us. It was immediately after the lesson about who should be greatest that we read these words:

Luke 9:52-56 (Weymouth) And He sent messengers in advance, who entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for Him. But the people there would not receive Him, because He was evidently going to Jerusalem. When the disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Master, do you wish us to order fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" But He turned and rebuked them. And they went to another village.

It never dawned on James and John that the Master was perfectly capable of calling down fire from heaven himself if that was the right thing to do. Somehow James and John wanted to show those Samaritans just who they were rejecting. But again, it's all in the same category of doing things to show how important they were. Who would be the greatest always seemed to be affecting their judgment.

## **Baruch**

There's a little-known character in the Old Testament who illustrates some of what we've been talking about. His name was Baruch.

Jeremiah 36:4-6 Then Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah: and Baruch wrote from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the Lord which he had spoken unto him, upon a roll of a book. And Jeremiah commanded Baruch, saying, I am shut up. I cannot go into the house of the Lord. Therefore go thou and read in the roll which thou hast written from my mouth, the words of the Lord in the ears of the people in the Lord's house upon the fasting day: and also thou shalt read them in the ears of all Judah that come out of their cities.

This was quite an experience for Baruch. He started out as Jeremiah's secretary, writing what Jeremiah dictated. But since Jeremiah had been barred from speaking in the temple court, Baruch was sent to do it. And Baruch did read the prophecies of Jeremiah to the people. Some of the princes heard the reading and requested a private audience. In vs. 15 Baruch reads it a second time just for the princes. Without question, Baruch took great pride in this experience and expected to accomplish what Jeremiah was unable to accomplish. Baruch thought he could convert the hearers to follow the ways of the Lord. How do we know Baruch thought this?

Jeremiah 45:2-5 Thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, unto thee, O Baruch: You said, Woe is me now for the Lord hath added grief to my sorrow; I fainted in my sighing and I find no rest. Thus shalt thou say unto him, The Lord saith thus; Behold, that which I have built will I break down, and that which I have planted I will pluck up, even this whole land. And seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not.

Seekest thou great things for thyself? Yes indeed. The record seems clear in its implication that Baruch expected to accomplish great things. And it's a very human failing. Even today we may want our class to grow in numbers more than other classes, or we may want to belong to the largest class, or do things better than they've ever been done before. It's so easy to say we're doing these things for the glory of God. But I suspect that if we could read the heart, there would be a little Baruch in all of us: We'd like to do it for our own glory as well. Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not!

Some of the words Jeremiah dictated to Baruch were found in...

Jer. 9:23,24 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.

How could the wise, the mighty, or the rich glory in those things? As far as the Lord is concerned, all are unprofitable servants and at best have only done those things that they ought. If there is to be any glory at all, it belongs to the Lord.

Paul probably had this citation from Jeremiah in mind when he wrote...

1 Cor. 1:27,29 But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; that no flesh should glory in his presence.

So when you start to feel particularly proud of your relationship to God, remember that you and I are part of these foolish and weak things selected by God so that we might never glory in what we have.

## The Gift

Slaves in the old days could be born into a household, work from dawn to dusk in that household, and die without even a word of thanks. That was slavery, and it was the way things were. Even though we all are unprofitable slaves and **at best** do what it is we ought to do, we know we're working for a master who knows how to reward his own.

Luke 18:28-30 Then Peter said, Lo, we have left all and followed thee. And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time and in the world to come life everlasting.

Los Angeles 2-11-79; Sacramento Conv. 2-17-79; Tehachapi 3-4-79; Jackson Conv. 9-3-79;  
Fullerton 9-9-79; Asilomar 5-23-81; Prince Albert 7-17-81; Seattle 10-9-83;  
San Diego 12-18-83; Fresno 5-20-84; Albion 7-29-85; Los Angeles 9-8-02

Peter wanted to know about the rewards. They had just heard a rich young ruler ask what he should do to inherit eternal life. And the ruler went away without making the commitment they had made. Jesus told them that they would be rewarded far beyond their expectations. It was similar to some of the words they had heard at the sermon on the mount:

Luke 6:22,23 Blessed are ye when men shall hate you...for the Son of man's sake.

Rejoice ye in that day and leap for joy, for behold your reward is great in heaven.

Our treasure is in heaven, not upon earth. The promise is that if faithful we will receive the crown of eternal life, the divine nature. Although we have many blessings today as a part of the present inheritance of the saints, we must recognize that this is not the time for reward. We must not seek great things for ourselves. The increase from our efforts belongs to the Lord. It is not the result of our special abilities.

Luke 12:31,32 Seek ye the kingdom of God and all things shall be added unto you.

Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

If we fix our eyes on that great prize of the high calling and if we look for opportunities to serve those around us, ours will be an abundant entrance into the kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. May the Lord help us all so to do.

Closing Hymn: #177 — "I Delight To Do Thy Will"

*[First given in Los Angeles, February 1979]*

## *Wine*

Opening Hymn: Appendix K—Take Time To Be Holy

Gen. 27:28 “God give thee of the dew of heaven and the fatness of the earth and plenty of corn and wine.”

This is part of the blessing Isaac thought he was bestowing on his son Esau, but it was really Jacob who pretended to be Esau. The word “corn” should really be translated “grain.” The sense of this scripture is that the people in ancient times depended upon grain for their daily bread, and wine for their daily drink.

Grain and wine were found together in the special offering that was a part of the feast of unleavened bread:

Lev. 23:13 [the priest first waved a sheaf of the firstfruits of harvest and sacrificed a lamb for a burnt offering] And the meal offering thereof shall be two tenth deals of fine flour mingled with oil...and the drink offering thereof shall be of wine...

Wine is a fascinating study in scripture. It’s hard to find anything else that is simultaneously despised and condemned at the same time.

Prov. 20:1 (Knox) A reckless counselor is wine, strong drink a riotous friend; the man who is swayed by these, call not wise.

Psa. 104:14,15 [Bless the Lord, O my soul.] ...he brings forth food out of the earth, wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and oil to make his face to shine, and bread which strengtheneth man’s heart.

Water has always been in short supply in the Holy land. When I saw the Sea of Galilee, I thought it should be called the Lake of Galilee. I thought the Jordan River was more like the Jordan Creek. But a friend said these names demonstrated how important water was to the people. Though water was always present, it could be contaminated and cause disease. Wine was their drink, their medicine within, and even without as an antiseptic (the Good Samaritan treated the injured man by pouring oil and wine on his wounds [Luke 10:34]). The promise of future blessing to Israel includes wine:

Joel 2:24 The floors shall be full of wheat and the vats shall overflow with wine and oil.

Today is no different than those olden times: an excess of wine leads to intoxication, and that is universally condemned in scripture. Yet because it appears in so many places, it may be instructive to look at what wine symbolizes in the scriptures, whether or not wine should be used at our Memorial service, and whether or not Christians today should ever drink it.

## Wine As A Symbol

Making wine isn't difficult. The grapes are gathered from the vines when fully ripe. They are put into a winepress and the juice is squeezed out. This mushy juice is called "must" and it starts to ferment almost immediately. This fermentation is caused by a natural yeast which appears on the grape skins just before the grapes are gathered. The yeast comes from the air. It changes the grape sugars into alcohol and carbon dioxide gas. Normally the gas is vented back into the air, but not always. Champagne is a wine which is bottled with the gas retained in the wine.

When the fermentation is finished, the wine is separated from the skins, seeds, and sediment. It must then be kept from the air so it won't turn into vinegar. Thus natural yeast (or leaven) transforms grape juice into wine through an intense chemical reaction which produces the carbon dioxide as a side effect. We can thus understand these words of Jesus:

Matt. 9:16,17 [Rotherham] No one layeth on a patch of unshrunk cloth upon an old garment for the shrinking of it teareth away from the garment and a worse rent is made. Neither pour they new wine into old skins, otherwise at least the skins are burst and the wine runneth out and the skins are spoiled—but they pour new wine into unused skins and both are together preserved.

"New wine" is the mushy juice from the pressing of grapes and is ready to start fermenting. The "wine skin" was usually the complete hide of an animal into which the juice was placed. If new, it could give with the generation of the carbon dioxide gas and not split. But if old, it would have no elasticity and would split.

Jesus gave this metaphor in response to a question from some disciples of John: "Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples don't?" Jesus is saying that he represents something new, something that can't be contained within the existing structure of Judaism. New wine (which is really unfermented grape juice) and unshrunk cloth are simply used to make this point, not that we are to see these as symbols for His teachings or doctrines, or whatever.

Most Bible Students say that in the Bible wine represents doctrines, although no scripture says this. At times it does represent doctrines, but depending upon context, it can represent other things as well:

Eph. 5:18 And be not drunk with wine wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit.

Wine here represents the spirit of the world and Paul uses it as a contrast to filling ourselves with God's holy spirit. Using wine this way also fits its use in Revelation:

Rev. 17:2,4 And the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of [the woman's] fornication. [vs. 4] ... and she had a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication.

The spirit of this woman Jezebel is a spirit of idolatry, worshipping anyone or anything except the true God. That's the picture in...

Rev. 2:20 Thou sufferest that woman Jezebel which calleth herself a prophetess to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed unto **idols**.

But the symbol of wine shifts a bit when we read about her punishment. God's judgment of this woman is also equated to wine:

Rev. 16:19 And the great city was divided into three parts and the cities of the nations fell and great Babylon came in remembrance before God to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.

A similar use of language is found in:

Rev. 14:19,20 And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden without the city and blood came out of the winepress.

Wine is the "blood" of grapes (see Gen. 49:11). Jesus used wine to represent his blood:

Luke 22:20 (Weymouth) He handed them the cup in like manner when the meal was over. "This cup," he said, "is the new Covenant ratified by my blood which is to be poured out on your behalf.

Partaking of this wine indicated their willingness to be sacrificed as their Master.

Matt. 20:22,23 But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of? They say unto him, We are able. And he saith unto them, Ye shall drink indeed of my cup.

Once each year Bible Students gather together and celebrate the Memorial of our Lord's death. We partake of unleavened bread and the "cup." But from time to time, there's controversy about what should be in that cup.

### **The Memorial Cup**

What should we be in our Memorial cup: Wine or grape juice? Why should we care? There appear to be two reasons, both of which are suggested by those who think we should use wine: (1) Grape juice contains yeast or leaven, a type of sin. Since the bread had to be without leaven, the cup should not have yeast, yet ordinary grape juice does contain leaven. (2) If we are so careful to celebrate on the right date according to the Jewish calendar, we should be equally careful to use the same drink as our Lord.

Every ecclesia must decide for themselves what to do. Some classes do use wine, most use grape juice, and others might provide both, or follow Br. Russell's suggestion of adding a

few drops of wine to grape juice. We don't want to change the procedure of any ecclesia. But let's look at these two arguments.

First, there's the question of leaven. Although it's true a natural yeast forms on the grape skins which later causes fermentation, there is no place in scripture where yeast or leaven is associated with grapes. It is always associated with bread and there it is specifically a picture of sin:

1 Cor. 5:8 Let us keep the feast not with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Today, however, we know more. Do we really want to knowingly drink leaven when we partake of the cup? No we don't, but in fact we are in no such danger. If there were yeast in grape juice, it would start to ferment. So the juice is heated—pasteurized—to destroy these organisms. The yeast disappears either by pasteurization or by the action of changing grape sugars into alcohol.

What about using the drink Jesus used. Did Jesus use wine at the Memorial supper? Yes he did. The grape harvest had occurred six months before. It was associated with the feast of booths which occurred on the 15th day of the 7th month, six months before Passover (Lev. 23:39-42). Grape juice could not be kept without fermenting for six months. Wine was the standard drink much as coffee is in our culture. So if Jesus used wine, why don't all Bible Student ecclesias do the same?

The reason is because of the physical harm it can do to some. Grape juice cannot harm anyone. Therefore if there is a possibility that wine would be injurious to any, many ecclesias prefer to use grape juice. But doesn't this violate our Lord's instruction? No.

Luke 22:17,18 And he took the cup and gave thanks and said, Take this and divide it among yourselves. For I say unto you, I will not drink of the **fruit of the vine** until the kingdom of God shall come.

The three gospel writers who record the last supper use the expression "fruit of the vine." If wine were the only acceptable drink, surely they would be careful to say so. This is the only context where the phrase "fruit of the vine" appears in scripture. We believe the vagueness of the phrase indicates a choice of liquid according to the dictates of the conscience of those who partake.

Br. Russell at first started Memorial celebrations using wine. In 1883 he reported that raisin juice was also available but only one person used it. But as time went on, he realized there was danger to some and he stopped using wine, suggesting that a few drops in grape juice was sufficient.

Why not let brethren have a choice by providing both wine and grape juice? Years ago the elders and deacons of Los Angeles discussed this. We decided not to do this on the basis that we risked confusing some of our brethren. They would have to read labels on the tray

when they had never done so before. Or some might accidentally get a cup of wine when they did not wish it. Changing the past policy of the class which was to use grape juice exclusively did not seem wise. So we continue to use grape juice in our class.

The importance of the Memorial cup is not what is in the cup, but what that cup symbolizes. When we partake, we acknowledge our participation in sacrifice with our Master:

1 Cor. 10:16 The cup of blessing which we bless [or: for which we give thanks], is it not the communion [or: participation] of the blood of Christ?

Paul reminds us of our participation with the sacrifice of our Master in:

Heb. 13:11-13 For the bodies of those beasts whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also that he might sanctify the people with his own blood suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.

The world of mankind will never be given this opportunity. Once this age of sacrifice comes to an end, there will no longer be a narrow way. Only the highway of holiness which leads to perfect life on earth will be open to the world.

Mark 14:25 Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God.

Instead of a cup of suffering and sacrifice, the cup is transformed into a cup of joy. And all who successfully lay down their lives in sacrifice in this age will participate in that joy in the kingdom.

2 Tim. 2:11,12 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: if we deny him, he also will deny us.

### **Should Christians Drink Wine?**

Here is another question that brethren must answer for themselves.

Lev. 10:8,9 And the Lord spake unto Aaron saying, Do not drink wine nor strong drink thou, nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation lest ye die: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations.

This was said just after Nadab and Abihu died because they had used “strange fire” in the service of the Tabernacle. There is an implication that they did this because they were intoxicated with wine or strong drink. So the prohibition is made explicit: Priests are not to touch wine when engaged in the Lord’s service. That did not mean they could never have wine, however.



Deut. 18:3,4 And this shall be the priest's due from the people, from them that offer a sacrifice, whether it be ox or sheep; and they shall give unto the priest the shoulder and the two cheeks and the maw. The firstfruit also of thy corn, of thy **wine**, and of thine oil, and the first of the fleece of thy sheep shalt thou give him.

So the type shows the priest was to treat the things of the Lord very carefully and was not to have his mind clouded by the effects of wine. But he was not denied wine when he was "off duty" so to speak.

Jesus himself drank wine as we saw in our examination of the cup. We also have his first miracle when he turned water into wine. He would hardly have done that if wine was prohibited. And he says this about himself:

Matt. 11:19 The Son of man came eating and drinking and they say, "Behold a man gluttonous and a **winebibber**."

The context is interesting. Jesus shows that that generation would be critical under every circumstance. John the Baptist was criticized because he didn't drink; Jesus was criticized because he did.

Throughout scripture the prohibition is against intoxication:

1 Tim. 3:3 [A bishop then must be...] not given to wine...

Paul is not saying elders should never drink wine. After all, in the same letter, chapter 5 verse 23, he says, "Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake." The correct thought is found in the margin: "A bishop should not be ready to quarrel and offer wrong, as one in wine."

The temperate use of wine is not prohibited. The priests received it as a tithe from the people. Jesus drank it. Timothy was told to drink it instead of water. But Paul also outlined a higher principle:

Rom. 14:14 I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself, but to him that esteemeth anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean. [vs. 17] For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. [vs. 21] It is good neither to eat flesh nor to drink wine, nor anything whereby thy brother stumbleth or is offended, or is made weak.

The general context of these verses has been whether it was permitted to eat meat which was first ceremoniously offered to idols. In verse 21 we have the introduction of drinking wine which had never been mentioned previously. Evidently there were questions about wine back in the days of the early church just as there are today. Paul points out that our decision on this question as on any other question of Christian behavior should be made on the basis of its impact on those around us. Since alcoholism is a problem in our day, we

should be especially careful about our conduct. Whether we like it or not, we are an example to those around us. We need to be careful that our example is a good one.

Some have suggested we abstain from wine and alcohol in any form so that we can make yet another separation of ourselves from the world around us. In this respect, it is like the vow of the Nazarite:

Num. 6:2,3 When either man or woman shall separate themselves to vow a vow unto the Lord, He shall separate himself from wine and strong drink...  
[vs. 5] no razor shall come upon his head...  
[vs. 6] he shall not come in contact with a dead body.

Clearly in deciding this question we must decide for ourselves in accord with our consecrated judgment. We are not to force others to adopt our standard or our answers, however. The scriptures do not give us that right.

### **Conclusion**

In our study together, we have looked at wine in the scriptures. We have seen how it was a staple in the diet of the Israelites, and also the criticism it received when it was used to excess.

As a symbol, wine appears in a variety of contexts. We are not to be filled with the spirit of wine, but to be filled with the Holy spirit. The spirit of idolatry is shown in the golden cup which all the inhabitants of the earth have drunk from the hands of that woman Jezebel. God's judgment is shown in another cup, the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.

Wine is the blood of the grape. Jesus said the Memorial cup was his blood which they were to drink. Each year we participate in that cup, willingly sacrificing our hopes, aims, and ambitions to follow the example of our Lord.

We believe that each ecclesia should determine what should be in the cup when the Memorial is celebrated. However, in Los Angeles we see no compelling argument to change past policy: we will continue to use pasteurized grape juice in the cup.

Whether Christians should drink wine is something that is left to individuals to decide for themselves. Although our Lord drank wine and Paul suggested wine to Timothy, wine drunk to excess is universally condemned in scripture.

Perhaps the best advice of all is contained in:

1 Cor. 10:31 Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

May that be our goal at the close of this age of sacrifice.

Closing Hymn: #171—Our King Is Marching On

*[First given in Tehachapi, January, 1982]*



# List of Discourses

By Michael R. Nekora

- Atonement in Leviticus 9 (1999)
- Baptismal Discourse (1994)
- Be Not Weary in Well Doing (1998)
- Be Ye Perfect (1971)
- Becoming a Disciple of Christ (1995)
- Blind Spot (1992)
- Blood (2005)
- Circumcision of Christ (2002)
- Deborah (1999)
- Earthen Vessels (1996)
- Exodus (1982)
- Faith and Gold (2001)
- Faith and Works (1995)
- Figs - Olives - Vines (2004)
- Forty, The Number of Probation (1999)
- Gospels [Matthew/Mark/Luke/John — Four talks] (1990)
- Habakkuk (1985)
- Hardening of the Arteries (1993)
- Hearing Ears (2003)
- Israel (1991)
- Jacob, Lessons from the Life of (2004)
- Joel, Lessons from the Book of (1975)
- Jude, the Book of (1991)
- Law Covenant (2000)
- Lazarus, the Rich Man and (1977)
- Levites (2002)
- Man of Integrity (2000)
- Mercy (1988)
- New Creature (2003)
- Nicodemus (2001)
- Peter's Last Letter (1991)
- Propitiation (1971)
- Psalms, the Book of (1993)
- Rahab (1997)
- Resurrection of the Dead (2000)
- Revelation 12: The Woman and the Dragon (1963)
- Sacrifice (1994)
- Salt (2002)
- Seed of the Woman (1987)
- Smiting of the Image (1992)
- Stephen (1983)
- The Dead (1975)
- Two Resurrections (1997)
- Two Views of Atonement (1980)
- Vision of Present Truth (1998)
- What Must I Do to be Saved (1994)
- Who Shall be Greatest (1979)
- Wine (1982)