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The Permission of Evil

“Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”

—Genesis 2:17

WHY DOES SO MUCH EVIL, suffering and adversity exist in the world? This question is asked in time of war when cities are destroyed, and the young, the old, the infants, the righteous, the wicked, the believers and the unbelievers

perish because of man’s inhumanity to man. It is asked by those who experience or observe suffering on beds of sickness. Why does an innocent child sicken and die? Why do the unrighteous often appear to prosper, while noble and upright people frequently experience hardships?

There are those also who are killed, injured, or suffer loss of homes and property as a result of natural disasters such as hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, tsunamis, floods and wildfires. The present worldwide COVID-19 pandemic is a stark example of a calamity which has no boundaries and spares no segments of earth’s society. Fear, not only of the disease, but also of the long-term health

and economic consequences, has gripped the entire world, and the future is, at best, still very unclear. If, as we believe, there is a loving God who is the supreme being and creator of the entire universe, can he not do something about these things? In fact, why does he permit such terrible tragedies to occur at all? Has God no pity? Does he care? Surely, if he is a God of love, as the Bible testifies, he must have some reason for permitting evil, and just as important, a plan for its ultimate eradication.

Evil and its adverse results are not limited to the present generation, nor to merely the recent past. As far back as history reaches, man has suffered and died as a result of pestilence, war, famine, calamities, sickness and disease. All in every generation have succumbed to the great enemy—Death. Abel, a son of Adam, was considered righteous before God, yet he is the first human being whose suffering and death is recorded in the Bible—the victim of murder at the hand of his brother. Today, more than 150,000 humans die worldwide every twenty-four hours. While hospitals, nursing homes, mental institutions, and hospice facilities exist for the care of the suffering and dying, yet, a majority among humanity endure sickness, disease, and finally death at home or in the care of family and friends.

JOB SEEKS THE ANSWER

The question among God-fearing people of why the supreme being of the universe permits evil is not a new one. It has been asked throughout the ages. Thousands of years ago, Job, a faithful servant of God, became personally concerned with discovering the meaning of his own suffering. The record of this

is found in the book of the Bible which bears his name. The first verse of this book informs us that Job was an upright man who feared God and shunned sin.

Job was a prosperous man, abundantly blessed by God along material lines. The record is that he had “seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she asses, and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the east.” (Job 1:3) Job was also blessed with a large family, and he desired that they too should be blessed by the Lord. Job prayed for his family, and offered sacrifices, because, as he said, “It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts.” (vss. 4,5) Job felt, apparently, that in the event that his sons had sinned, his prayers on their behalf would be heard and favorably answered. All human logic would conclude that Job was fully deserving of life’s continued blessings because of his uprightness before God.

However, experiences were ahead for Job for which he was not wholly prepared. Satan, the great adversary of God and men, charged that this servant of the Lord was faithful to God only because his loyalty had been bought by the abundance of good things with which he had been blessed. In answer to this charge, God permitted Satan to inflict calamities upon Job to test his fidelity. God did not have any doubt about the outcome of this trial, for in his wisdom knew that any temporary suffering he permitted to come into Job’s life would, in the end, prove to be a great blessing to him.

Job did experience great trouble. The record states: “There was a day when his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother’s house: And there came a messenger unto Job, and said, The oxen were plowing, and the asses feeding beside them: And the Sabeans fell upon them, and took them away; yea, they have slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The fire of God is fallen from heaven, and hath burned up the sheep, and the servants, and consumed them; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, The Chaldeans made out three bands, and fell upon the camels, and have carried them away, yea, and slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee. While he was yet speaking, there came also another, and said, Thy sons and thy daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother’s house: And, behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.”—vss. 13-19

JOB STILL LOYAL

Job’s reaction to these horrible tidings was: “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.” We read that “in all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.” (vss. 21,22) Then God permitted further troubles to come upon Job. His health was

taken away. He was smitten with “boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown. And he took him a potsherd to scrape himself withal; and he sat down among the ashes.” (Job 2:7,8) Then Job’s wife turned against him, and said, “Curse God, and die.” To this Job replied, “Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?”—vs. 9,10

Job did not turn away from God when trouble came upon him, as so many throughout the ages have done. His chief concern was to know why God permitted him to be afflicted with such bitter experiences, and throughout his book we find evidences of his search for this understanding. After Job was stricken down with disease, three of his friends visited him for the supposed purpose of giving comfort. Later in the book we are informed that these three did not speak the truth concerning God, implying that the viewpoints they expressed to Job were not correct.—Job 42:7

There is chapter after chapter of philosophizing and interchange on the part of Job and his three friends. However, what it all amounted to was that, according to Job’s friends, he was suffering because he had committed some gross sins which he was hiding from them, and for which he had not repented and sought God’s forgiveness. Job understood that he was not perfect, but he also knew that he had not willfully transgressed God’s laws, so he could not accept this explanation.

WHY DO EVIL MEN PROSPER?

Job knew that, while as a servant of God he was now suffering, frequently evil men prospered, and

apparently escaped the calamities that come upon so many. So in answer to his friends, he said, “Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power? Their seed is established in their sight with them, and their offspring before their eyes. Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them. Their bull gendereth, and faileth not; their cow calveth, and casteth not her calf. They send forth their little ones like a flock, and their children dance. They take the timbrel and harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ. They spend their days in wealth, and in a moment go down to the grave [without suffering a long, painful illness].” —Job 21:7-13

Though Job knew the explanation offered by his friends was not the true one, he did not understand why God was allowing him to suffer so severely. In a beautiful, poetic manner he describes his search for an understanding of God in the light of his own experiences, saying, “Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him; But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.” —Job 23:8-10

Job realized, by faith, that there was a divine purpose for his being tried so severely, but he had not yet discovered that purpose. He was confident, however, that if he maintained his integrity before God, he would pass the test successfully, and would “come forth as gold.” Job’s wife wanted him to curse God, but he knew this would be foolish. In all ages, there have been those professed believers who, when

affliction came upon them, have wondered where God was, and what he was doing to protect their interests. Many such have even turned against God, but faithful Job did not.

GOD'S REPLY

Beginning with chapter 38, couched largely in question form, we find God's answer to Job's searching. The many questions were designed to remind Job that he really understood very little about God, and because of his limited knowledge in every field where the Lord manifests himself, he should not be surprised at failing to comprehend fully why he was being permitted to suffer.

This is an important viewpoint for us to keep in mind when we ask why God does not do something about human suffering. We may mistakenly assume that if God had the intelligence we possess he certainly would do something. Carried to the extreme, if we do not see what we believe should be done to alleviate such evil and its results, we may tend to doubt that there is a God. To the extent we may find ourselves guilty of this type of faulty reasoning, it would be well to consider the questions which God asked Job. They appear in chapters 38-41.

God's questions all concern the wonders of creation. He asks Job if he was present when he laid the foundations of the earth, and whether he understood the laws by which the tides of the sea were controlled. He asks him about the instincts and habits of the various birds and animals, and even of the great creatures of the sea. Then Job is asked if he can explain the wisdom and power that are represented in these marvels of creation.

As the questioning proceeds, Job interrupts and says, “Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer thee? I will lay mine hand upon my mouth. Once have I spoken; but I will not answer: yea, twice; but I will proceed no further.” (Job 40:4,5) In Job’s expression, “Behold, I am vile,” the meaning of the Hebrew word translated “vile” is “swift, small, sharp.” Apparently, Job was acknowledging to God that he had spoken too quickly—that his viewpoint was too limited, and that it was voiced too sharply.

JOB LEARNS IMPORTANT LESSONS

Job was now beginning to understand his own proper position before the Lord. It was not for him to judge God according to his own limited human understanding, and then so freely to speak his opinions when he really knew very little about the matter. This is also a good lesson for all of us. It is true that the world is filled with many forms of evil. However, it is not for us to lose faith in God because of this, nor even to criticize him. Our proper attitude should be one of humility, and of earnestly seeking the answer to our questions from the only proper source, which is the Word of God, rather than from our own limited, and often faulty, human reasoning.

God’s questions continued, and eventually Job spoke again: “I know that thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from thee. Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. Hear, I beseech thee, and I will speak: I will demand of thee, and declare thou unto me. I have heard of

thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee.”—Job 42:2-5

Job finally learned the meaning of his severe trial. He learned that its loving purpose was to give him a clearer understanding of God, that he might serve him more faithfully and with greater appreciation. He speaks of this clearer understanding as “seeing” the Lord, instead of merely having heard about him. Since he had gained such a wealth of understanding, Job’s brief period of suffering must have seemed to him to have been a most valuable experience.

Besides restoring Job’s health, we read that “the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning: for he had fourteen thousand sheep, and six thousand camels, and a thousand yoke of oxen, and a thousand she asses. He had also seven sons and three daughters. ... And in all the land were no women found as fair as the daughters of Job: and their father gave them inheritance among their brethren.”—Job 42:12-15

AN ILLUSTRATION

God’s design in the general permission of evil throughout the ages was, and is still today, the same as in the case of Job. He created Adam a perfect human, in his own image. Being in the image of God implied an ability to reason. One of the questions which God asked Job was, “Who hath put wisdom in the inward parts? or who hath given understanding to the heart?” (Job 38:36) It was the Creator who had endowed Adam with the ability, through the process of reasoning, to attain knowledge and wisdom. This was in contrast to what we

call instinct, which had been given to the lower animals.

However, God did not miraculously implant knowledge upon Adam's mind with the intention that he would be forcibly governed by this knowledge. God did not desire his human creation to be like robots, which move about mechanically and without any sense of understanding. Man was given the ability to learn and the freedom to make choices for himself by the knowledge he attained. What man would do with this knowledge was ultimately to determine his eternal destiny.

Man acquires knowledge through his five senses. He learns from observation, which is the exercise of his sense of sight. He learns from what he hears—the sense of hearing being the means of collecting information. With the sense of touch, man feels pain and is alerted to possible danger as in when he comes into contact with boiling water. Experience then teaches him to temper the water he uses for internal and external purposes. Man smells the fragrance of a rose and is delighted by it but turns away in disgust when he smells unpleasant odors. Smell works along with taste in enabling man to appreciate the flavor of wholesome food and teaches him to avoid the eating of unpalatable things, even though his sense of sight might at first indicate that they are beautiful.

Thus, we see that in the exercise of his five senses man learns from information communicated to him through observation, and through experience. It is claimed by some that man also acquires knowledge through “intuition,” but this is not strictly true. The so-called intuition of man

is based upon information already at hand. God alone possesses the inherent ability to acquire and develop knowledge entirely independent of all outside sources.

For man to be a faithful child of God, it is essential that he receive a knowledge of evil as well as of good, that he might be able to make an intelligent choice between the two. Jesus said that God wants those who desire to worship him to do so "in spirit and in truth." (John 4:23,24) God does not request blind worship, but a fidelity to, and trust in him which is based upon understanding and appreciation. The accomplishment of this in connection with Adam and his offspring is one of the major objectives of the permission of evil in God's great plan for mankind's recovery from sin and death.

EXPERIENCE—THE ALL-IMPORTANT FACTOR

Right and wrong, as principles, are established by divine law. The world today is filled with war, crime, chaos and suffering because God's laws—his standards of right and wrong—are often ignored and denied. While man was endowed with a conscience, the conscience itself is not aware of what is right and wrong unless it is furnished with this information from an authoritative source. This source, we believe, is only to be found in the Word of God, the Bible.

Knowing that Adam possessed the ability to understand facts which were communicated to him, God placed a test of obedience upon his human son, defining the law which was involved. The Creator had provided our first parents with a wonderful home "eastward in Eden," possessing "every

tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food.” (Gen. 2:8,9) There were the trees of life, and another which is described as “the tree of knowledge of good and evil.” God commanded Adam not to partake of this particular tree, and informed him that the penalty for disobedience would be death: “In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.” (vs. 17) As man’s Creator, God had a right to demand obedience from his human creation, and to sentence him to death if he disobeyed.

This demand of obedience was a divine law, simply stated and easy to comprehend. Since God informed Adam that death would be the penalty for disobeying, we can say that by information he knew the result of transgression. True, Adam could not look down through the ages and visualize all the suffering and death that would be brought about by human sin and selfishness which had their beginnings in his own disobedience. However, he did know that his disobedience would lead to his own death.

However, this information was not sufficient to deter Adam from taking the wrong course. He lacked a heart understanding of what was involved in his disobedience, because his knowledge was based, not on experience, but merely on what he had been told. Doubtless, Adam loved his Creator, but perhaps falsely reasoned that since Eve had already transgressed, and would die, it would be better to die with her than to live without her. Thus, not having the additional strength that experience would have given him, Adam transgressed divine law and was plunged into death.

A KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL

In God's plan, in which he could foresee man's fall, it was Adam's freewill disobedience that was to lead ultimately to his acquiring a fuller knowledge of God and of his standards of right and wrong. The tree of which he was forbidden to partake was "the tree of knowledge of good and evil." It followed that having partaken of this tree he would gain the knowledge implied by its name, even though in the process he would inevitably suffer and finally die.

After both Adam and Eve had partaken of the forbidden fruit, God said concerning them, "Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil." (Gen. 3:22) This does not mean that the forbidden fruit had some magical effect upon our first parents, enabling them at once to have a full knowledge of good and evil. We do read that soon after their disobedience they became ashamed of their nakedness, but this was no doubt due in part to the sense of guilt they immediately felt in having disobeyed their Creator's command.

We think God's statement means, rather, that because of disobedience man was now destined to know both good and evil, and that he was to gain this knowledge through experience. Thus, the education of our first parents immediately began. They were driven out of their garden home into a harsh environment. They were to be plagued with all sorts of unfavorable elements, spoken of as "thorns" and "thistles," which the "cursed" ground would bring forth to them, and against which they would have to struggle until, in death, they would return to the earth from which they were taken.—
vss. 17-19

In next month's issue of *The Dawn* magazine, we will consider the grand and glorious result of man's experience with sin, suffering and death. In that result, we will see that mankind's current experience with evil will teach an eternal lesson which will never need to be repeated throughout the endless ages of eternity. Man will be given the opportunity to be restored to perfection of mind, body and character, to live on a perfected earth—no longer cursed—forever. ■

*Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel,
Who alone works wonders.
And blessed be His glorious name forever;
And may the whole earth be filled with His glory.*
—*Psalm 72:18,19*
New American Standard Bible

WEEKLY PRAYER MEETING TEXTS

JULY 2—“Being reviled, we bless, being persecuted, we suffer it.”—I Corinthians 4:12 (Z. '99-5 Hymn 299)

JULY 9—“When he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice.”—John 10:4 (Z.'00-230 Hymn 257)

JULY 16—“Be ye filled with the Spirit.”—Ephesians 5:18 (Z. '99-92 Hymn 85)

JULY 23—“If any provide not for his own, ... he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever.”—I Timothy 5:8 (Z.'99-127 Hymn 23)

JULY 30—“Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines.”—Canticles 2:15 (Z. '99-172 Hymn 145)

Wisdom is Vindicated

Key Verse: “*The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they exclaim, See this man!—given to gluttony and tipping, and a friend of tax-gatherers and notorious sinners! And yet Wisdom is vindicated by her actions.*”
—**Matthew 11:19**,
Weymouth New Testament

Selected Scripture:
Matthew 11:7-19

and cripples walk; lepers are cleansed, and deaf ears hear; the dead are raised to life, and the poor have the Good News proclaimed to them.” (vss. 4,5, WNT) Upon receiving this answer, John must have rejoiced, fully assured that Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah.

Then Jesus asked the multitude concerning John, “What did you go out into the Desert to gaze at? A reed waving in the wind?” No, John was not a weak person, nor easily influenced. “What did you go out to see?”

JOHN THE BAPTIST, THE last of the prophets who preceded Christ, was one of God’s chosen servants. His message was “Repent, ... for the Kingdom of the Heavens is now close at hand.” (Matt. 3:1-12, *Weymouth New Testament*) John also proclaimed that Jesus was “the Lamb of God who is to take away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29, WNT) However, when he was put in prison, John the Baptist sent some of his disciples to ask Jesus, “Are you the Coming One, or is it a different person that we are to expect?”—Matt. 11:2,3, WNT

Jesus answered, “Go and report to John what you see and hear, ... blind eyes receive sight,

Jesus continued. “A man luxuriously dressed?” No, John wore simple clothes and lived in seclusion, but he was faithful and earnest in the delivery of God’s message to all who would hear. Jesus further inquired, did you “see a prophet? Yes, I tell you, and far more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written, See I am sending my messenger before thy face, and he will make thy road ready before thee.”—vss. 7-10, *WNT*

Jesus then declared concerning John, “If you are willing to receive it, he is the Elijah who was to come.” (vs. 14, *WNT*) John did a work which fulfilled the prophecies declaring that one like Elijah must first come and do a reformatory work before Messiah would begin his ministry. (Mal. 3:1; Isa. 40:3; John 1:19-27) While many accepted John’s message, most did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah, even though it was demonstrated by many wonderful works.

John the Baptist lived simply, but some falsely claimed, “He has a demon.” Jesus lived somewhat less peculiarly, eating and drinking and being clothed as other people, but of him some falsely accused, “See this man! Given to gluttony, ... and a friend of tax-gatherers and notorious sinners!” Jesus then added, “Yet Wisdom is vindicated by her actions.” God’s wisdom had sent both John the Baptist and Jesus Christ for specific and different purposes which will ultimately be vindicated, or proven right, by the fulfillment of God’s plans and purposes.—vss. 18,19, *WNT*

It is a great blessing and privilege to find godly wisdom. (Job 28:12-28; Prov. 3:13-18) Such wisdom had its greatest exemplification in God’s only begotten Son, “the man Christ Jesus,” “the true Light.” God’s wisdom is represented throughout the Bible. However, for a majority it is unseen and unknown. “The God of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not.” Thankfully, God has promised that, in due time, all the blind eyes shall be opened, and then the true light, the true wisdom from above, shall enlighten everyone!—I Tim. 2:5,6; II Cor, 4:4; Isa. 35; John 1:9

■

Increasing in Wisdom

Key Verse: “As Jesus grew older He gained in both wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.”

—**Luke 2:52,**
Weymouth New Testament

Selected Scripture:
Luke 2:39-52

was read and treasure it up in his heart. Thus the “grace,” or favor of God, was upon him.

Luke writes that Jesus’ parents “went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover,” an annual remembrance of the Israelites’ deliverance from Egypt. (vs. 41) The slaying of the Passover lamb was a type, or exact pattern, of the much greater “Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” (Exod. 12:1-11; John 1:29) As Paul later wrote, “Our Passover Lamb has already been offered in sacrifice—even Christ.”—I Cor. 5:7, *Weymouth New Testament*

The Passover celebration mentioned in this week’s lesson was especially noteworthy because of Jesus’ conduct on this occasion. Jewish custom was that when a boy reached twelve years of age, he could make a dedication of himself to the Mosaic Law, after which he was

then considered a “son” of the Law.

Jesus recognized himself as being not the son of Joseph, but instead as God’s only begotten Son. He knew that he had come into the world on a special mission. Therefore, it was a preliminary step on Jesus’ part to gain wisdom respecting the work he was to do, as outlined in the Law and the testimonies of God’s holy prophets. Reaching the age of twelve, Jesus perhaps wondered whether this custom of becoming a son of the Law implied that he should begin to serve God in some capacity at that age.

After the Passover, his parents went a full day’s journey toward home before noticing that Jesus was not with them. They returned to Jerusalem and searched for him several days. Finding him in the Temple, they asked why he had stayed in Jerusalem. “Why is it that you have been searching for me? He replied; did you not know that it is my duty to be engaged upon my Father’s business?” (Luke 2:42-49, *WNT*) We are not told what questions Jesus asked in the Temple. Part of his inquiry may have been to know at what age Messiah should begin his work, and whether the custom of considering a boy a son of the Law at twelve years of age was founded upon anything specified in the Law, or whether it was merely a human tradition.

Apparently, Jesus found the answers to his questions, determining that in accordance with the Word of God, he should not begin his ministry or public work until reaching the age of thirty. (Gen. 41:46; Num. 4:3,46,47) He returned with his parents to Nazareth and “was always obedient to them.”—Luke 2:51, *WNT*

God’s wisdom limited the record of Jesus’ childhood and youth. The boy Jesus is not to be our focus, even though his zeal for God and submission to his parents is worthy of admiration. At the age of thirty, Jesus made a full consecration to God, outwardly symbolized by water baptism. “The Holy Spirit came ... upon Him, and a voice came from Heaven, which said, Thou art My Son, dearly loved: in Thee is My delight.”—Luke 3:21-23, *WNT* ■

The Wisdom of Jesus

Key Verse: *“On the Sabbath He proceeded to teach in the synagogue; and many ... were astonished. Where did he acquire all this? they asked. What is this wisdom that has been given to him?”*
—Mark 6:2,
Weymouth New Testament

Selected Scripture:
Mark 6:1-6

had been brought up, accompanied by his disciples. “On the Sabbath He proceeded to teach in the synagogue.” The Old Testament Scriptures were often read and discussed in the synagogue. It was a group study method which is found to be appropriate and beneficial even today.—Mark 6:1,2; Luke 4:16

Jesus was handed the Book of Isaiah and he read from the place where it was written, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor; he has sent me to announce release to the prisoners of war and recovery of sight to the blind: to send away free those whom tyranny has

WHEN JESUS REACHED the age of thirty, he made a consecration of his life to the Heavenly Father and then symbolized this by having John the Baptist baptize him in the river Jordan. He was then begotten with the Holy Spirit of God. After this, Jesus went into the wilderness for forty days and was tempted by Satan. Then, he went into the region of Galilee, proclaiming “the gospel of the kingdom of God” in various cities and places.
—Mark 1:9-15

Soon afterward, Jesus “came into His own country,” where he

crushed, to proclaim the year of acceptance with the Lord.” Jesus rolled up the book, returned it, sat down and said, “Today is this Scripture fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luke 4:17-21, *Weymouth New Testament*; Isa. 61:1,2) As noted in our Key Verse, many were astonished and wondered how he had acquired such wisdom.

The wisdom and understanding which Jesus had was coming from the Holy Spirit of God, which he received without “limitations,” after having made a full consecration to God. (John 3:34, *WNT*) As the Prophet Isaiah had written centuries earlier, “There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding.”—Isa. 11:1,2

Isaiah’s prophecy explains that the “wisdom” and “understanding” bestowed upon Jesus would “make him of quick understanding in the fear [reverence] of the LORD,” and he would not “judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: But with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth.”—vss. 3,4

Throughout human history, mankind has been accustomed to misgovernment. Therefore, it was necessary that Isaiah’s prophecy concerning Messiah give assurance that his new government, which will soon rule upon the whole earth, will have both good motives, as well as superior wisdom and judgment. The poor, the helpless, and the despised during the present time will, in the future Messianic kingdom, discover that their new leader is a friend. As a result, there shall then be neither rich nor poor, but all shall be brought to one common level.—Isa. 65:21,22; Mic 4:4,5

At that time, the meek who love righteousness will no longer be oppressed, but shall be exalted and blessed. Their king, Christ Jesus, will be God’s faithful, diligent servant, and “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea.”—Isa. 11:4,5,9 ■

Wisdom to Follow Jesus

Key Verse: *“I am the Way, replied Jesus, and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”*
—**John 14:6,**
Weymouth New Testament

Selected Scripture:
John 14:5-14

Our Heavenly Father’s “house” is the universe and, figuratively speaking, heaven is his “throne” and the earth is his “footstool.” (Isa. 66:1; Acts 7:48,49) In God’s “house” are many different “resting-places,” or planes of being. One such place is heaven, where angels dwell. Another is the earth, where mankind dwells now, as well as in Christ’s future kingdom. Those who accept the heavenly call during the present time, and are faithful unto death, will become part of the “little flock” in heaven upon their resurrection. —Heb. 3:1; Luke 12:32; I Pet 1:3,4

Jesus said he was “going to make ready a place” for these called out ones. First, he willingly gave his life for the human race as “a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.” (I Tim. 2:5,6) God then resurrected Jesus from

ON THE NIGHT BEFORE his death, while still in the upper room, Jesus gave the following lesson: “In my Father’s house there are many resting-places ... I am going to make ready a place for you. ... I will return and take you to be with me, that where I am you also may be. And where I am going, you all know the way.”—John 14:1-4, *Weymouth New Testament*

death as a spirit being, and seated him “at His own right hand in the heavenly realms, high above all other government and authority and power and dominion, ... either in this Age or in the Age to come.”—Eph. 1:20-23, *WNT*

Jesus told his disciples he would “return” to take them to the place he had prepared, and said, “You all know the way.” Not understanding what Jesus meant, Thomas inquired of the Master, “We do not know where you are going. In what sense do we know the way?” In the words of our Key Verse, Jesus answered that he was the way, the truth, and the life, and that no one can come to God, the Heavenly Father, except through him.

For more than three years Jesus had been making them acquainted with his Father’s character. Hence they were to feel that they knew the Heavenly Father and could appreciate such a dwelling place of righteousness. Their experiences with Jesus, along with his instructions, guidance and example, had made them acquainted with “the way” to God, though they did not recognize these things fully until the Holy Spirit came upon them at Pentecost.

There is only one “way” to be reconciled back to our Heavenly Father and to enter his “resting-place.” It is through accepting by faith the sacrifice of his only begotten Son as “a ransom for all.” Additionally, during the present age, those who consecrate their all to God are “justified by faith ... through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand.”—Rom. 5:1,2

We must also personally apply the “truth,” the words and instructions from Jesus as well as the entire Word of God, in our daily life in order to come into closer harmony with the spirit and character of God. This process is described in the Bible as “sanctification,” a gradual work which should progress throughout the Christian’s life. “This is the will of God, even your sanctification.” “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.”—John 17:17; I Thess. 4:3,4; II Thess. 2:13; I Pet. 1:2 ■

The Great Shepherd's Rod and Staff

*“Thy rod and thy
staff they
comfort me.”
—Psalm 23:4*

IN THE FOURTH AND FIFTH

verses of the 23rd Psalm, David expresses a more intimate relationship with the divine Shepherd of Israel than is apparent in the opening verses of this beautiful song of praise to the Lord. In the first three verses, the psalmist speaks in the third person concerning God's loving care and guidance. In verses four and five, however, David speaks to the Lord directly. Thus the psalm changes from a testimony to a prayer. At first David was content to testify that the Lord was his shepherd, who led him beside still waters and caused him to lie down in green pastures. He was a shepherd, moreover, who was willing and abundantly able to restore his soul, and to lead him in paths of righteousness, even through the valley of the shadow of death—a wonderful shepherd indeed!

Seemingly, as David thus gave expression to these great truths concerning his God, the thought of the

shepherd's loving care gave him a sense of nearness that impelled him to pour out his personal prayer to the Lord rather than merely to write about him. Thus he continues, "Thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." (vs. 4) Happy are we, for whom this psalm was especially written, if we, too, can see in our Great Shepherd's "rod" and "staff" evidences of his special presence and his nearness to us. In joy we can go to him in prayer, just as David did, thanking him for the wonderful manner in which he is supplying all our needs.

In David's prayer to God he indicates that both the rod and the staff are sources of comfort. In ancient times a shepherd carried these two pieces of equipment. He used the rod, or crook, to guide the sheep while leading them through narrow and dangerous passes, and to gently bring them back to the flock if they strayed. The staff he used to assist in driving off wild animals which might attack the flock. The staff was also used by the shepherd as a walking stick, or support, as he journeyed over long distances and often rugged terrain with his flock.

THE ROD OF THE LORD

The Hebrew word translated "rod" is used symbolically to denote authority, as well as an implement used to guide and correct. This is illustrated in a natural way by the use of a rod to keep the sheep in the right way, and to protect them from the danger of not holding to the path along which the shepherd leads. Thus, sometimes the sheep are guided back into the right way by the shepherd's hooking the crook of the rod around their necks and gently lifting them back to the path, and sometimes around the

hind legs to steer them aright. No hurt is brought to the sheep by these gentle, but at times necessary, actions of a loving shepherd.

Transferring the lesson of this symbol to the Christian life we see in it a beautiful illustration of the chastenings of the Lord. These, the apostle assures us, are a special evidence of God's love: "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth." (Heb. 12:6) We are not to think of these chastenings as punishments which the Great Shepherd administers because he is angry with us. The Greek word translated "chasteneth" means to train, instruct or teach. Thus, for the Christian, these experiences are designed to train and instruct us to walk in the right way. It is because the Lord loves us that he uses such measures to keep us close to him. Indeed, in the symbol, the rod was used by the shepherd to keep the sheep close to him, and in the path of safety.

It certainly would have been uncomfortable for a sheep to feel the crook of the shepherd's rod hooked around its neck. It would, in fact, seem unyielding and severe, and the sheep would have no choice as to the direction in which it walked. Such treatment of the sheep might seem harsh, if not for the fact that the faithful shepherd knew that grave dangers would likely befall the sheep if they were allowed to stray. When David put himself in the position of the sheep, and knowing the viewpoint of the shepherd—having served faithfully as one—he realized that what seemed an unyielding attitude on the part of God was in reality an evidence of his love. God loved David and would not permit him to continue in a straying path. David knew this, and explained in another place, "Before I was afflicted I went astray."—Ps. 119:67

Sometimes the chastening, or training, which we receive from the Lord comes upon us in the form of afflictions. In such experiences we might get the discouraging thought that the Great Shepherd is angry with us and is administering punishment. However, what we might at first view as a frowning providence is, in reality, the smiling face of his love. The experience comes because of the shepherd's loving care, and it is designed by him to train us to walk more circumspectly, that we might abide safely within the bounds of the way in which he is leading us day by day.

It is said that when a shepherd in olden times was leading his flock through dangerous mountain passes, he frequently looked back to his flock. If he noticed one of the sheep going too near the edge of the precipice, he would gently draw it toward the other sheep and away from danger by applying the crook to its hind legs. Possibly David had this in mind when he wrote, "The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth him with his hand."—Ps. 37:23,24

David fell into iniquity on more than one occasion, but God did not permit him to be utterly cast down. Probably David knew of the wonderful promise the Lord made concerning him, as recorded in II Samuel 7:14,15, which reads, "I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: But my mercy shall not depart away from him." How wonderfully this was fulfilled in the case of David. When he did wrong God's chastening rod was not withheld, but it was used in mercy, and with the object of

instructing and keeping him in the “paths of righteousness.”—Ps. 23:3

David was chastened with the “rod of men.” This might indicate that God used human agencies of one kind and another to keep him from going too far astray. It also indicates that God considered the shepherd’s rod a fitting symbol of the experiences which he permits to come to his people in order that they might be properly trained to walk in the way which he outlines for them. In the case of the Christian, as the apostle points out, “No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward,” Paul adds, “it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.”—Heb. 12:11

THE SHEPHERD’S STAFF

The shepherd’s staff, as we have noted, was used to help him protect the sheep by warding off attacking animals, and as a support, or walking stick. The “staff” of the Great Shepherd assists us in both these respects. The enemies of the Christian do not attack in a physical sense, but the assaults are against our faith. This is the reason we can resist these enemies only by being “stedfast in the faith.” (I Pet. 5:9) Furthermore, we cannot resist our adversaries alone, apart from the help and wisdom given us by the Lord. It is his staff, not anything of our own, that wards off the attackers and supports us in our walk of faith.

If we are to be protected by the staff of the Great Shepherd, it is essential that we remain very close to him. By so doing, we will be comforted by that staff. The attacks of our enemies, being along

spiritual lines, are to be deflected not by carnal weapons, but by the Word of God. In reality, God's Word as found in the Scriptures is the staff which is provided to sustain and protect us, as well as to be our support throughout our walk in the way of righteousness. As God's Word is symbolized by the "green pastures" and "still waters" of the psalm, so it is also shown by the staff of the shepherd. We can rest assured that we will be victorious over all our enemies as long as we use the means which the Lord provides for our protection.

When thinking of the staff as the Word of God, it is necessary to depart from the strict interpretation of the symbol in order to appreciate the full value of the lesson. Actually, a sheep never takes the staff from the shepherd's hand to use it for his own protection, but the Christian thus uses the Word of God. Our Great Shepherd provides the staff for us, but it is essential that we use it to combat our enemies, and to lean upon in our weakness.

We usually think of our enemies as the world, the flesh, and the devil, and we are to use God's Word in combating all of these. However, there are other enemies of the Christian. We may be attacked by temptation, discouragement, pride, weariness and other foes, both internal and external. Against all of these the Word of God is the only sure protection.

When Jesus was attacked by temptations instigated by the Adversary, the Scriptures were his sure defense. "It is written," was the Master's reply to every subtle suggestion made to him. (Matt. 4:1-11) So it should be with us. Whether we are tempted to depart from the narrow way, or to believe a false

doctrine, the enemy can always be beaten off by a “thus saith the Lord.” This is a supporting staff that never fails, but we must call upon it and use it.

Discouragement may threaten us. Here also, let us rely upon the Word of God. “For he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” (Heb. 13:5) Upon this blessed promise we can lean and find assurance of strength to sustain us until we reach the end of the way. Again, we turn to the Bible and find it saying to us, as Moses said of the tribe of Asher, “As thy days, so shall thy strength be.” (Deut. 33:25) With these and many similar promises to reassure us, we can fight off discouragement and take our places among those who are following the Great Shepherd victoriously and in safety.

Pride, a dangerous enemy of the Lord’s sheep, may be lurking near our hearts, seeking an opportunity to strike us down or to lure us away from the “paths of righteousness.” Likewise, the Word of God may be used to protect us. In it we are warned not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. (Rom. 12:3) We are also admonished to humble ourselves “under the mighty hand of God.” (I Pet. 5:6) “Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD,” the Bible tells us, and “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.” (Prov. 16:5,18) These are but samples of the many passages of God’s Word which may be brought into action when we note the first symptoms of pride—the first suggestions that come to us that we are superior in various ways to our brethren.

“Let us not be weary in well doing,” writes Paul, “for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.”

(Gal. 6:9) How this text should help us to fight off the enemy of weariness as we walk in the narrow way. “In due season,” says Paul. How essential that we recognize God’s due time. To do this means to wait on him, and to recognize that our times are in his hands. (Ps. 31:15) They that wait on the Lord, we are assured, “shall renew their strength; ... they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.”—Isa. 40:31

As our minds dwell upon all these precious and reassuring promises, we feel much as David did when, instead of merely testifying of the Lord, he poured out his heart in praise to him, saying, “Thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.” Through his Word God does indeed make his presence with us a glorious reality. We know that he is near, and that by claiming the precious promises of the Scriptures we are strengthened in the conviction that no evil will befall us. Even in our unintentional waywardness, his rod of instruction and training will turn us back into the right way because the Great Shepherd loves us.

“THEY COMFORT ME”

How wonderfully true it is that the rod and staff are sources of comfort to us. David wrote, “Remember the word unto thy servant, upon which thou hast caused me to hope. This is my comfort in my affliction: for thy word hath quickened me.” (Ps. 119:49,50) Indeed, it is the Word of the Lord that comforts all of his people in their times of need. The Great Shepherd may permit us to have disciplinary experiences in the event the instructions of his Word are not fully heeded, but these are allowed because of God’s great *(Continued on page 36)*

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(Continued from page 31) love for us. In this knowledge we should truly find comfort.

The Word of God is sufficient for all our needs if we apply ourselves to its study and practice. Paul wrote, "Every scripture inspired of God is ... profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work." (II Tim. 3:16,17, *American Standard Version*) What a wonderful rod and staff the Lord has provided. How comforting to realize that all we need to guide, warn, and strengthen us in the "narrow way" is abundantly supplied in his Word!

The entire Bible serves to keep the sheep of the present age in the pathway of righteousness, hence the Old Testament is also a source of comfort. Paul wrote, "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope." (Rom. 15:4) One of the particular "things" alluded to by the apostle as having been written for our comfort are the prophecies concerning the reproaches of Christ. Jesus might have avoided these reproaches had he been governed by selfish considerations, but he sought not to please himself. It is a comfort for us to realize that we have the privilege of sharing in these reproaches of Christ, and that if we endure them faithfully, we will receive a crown of life which fadeth not away.—Ps. 69:9; Rom. 15:3; Heb. 13:12,13; I Pet. 4:14

Every part of the Word of God is a comfort to the Christian. As we look about us in the "valley of the shadow of death" we would be dismayed and discouraged if we did not have an understanding of why

this “valley” is permitted. Indeed, we have the scriptural assurance that in God’s due time its mists of darkness will be dispelled by the healing rays of the rising “Sun of righteousness.” (Mal. 4:2) We see much in the world around us that is wrong, and we would be tempted to try, in our imperfect way, to right these wrongs, if we did not know from the Bible that this is not the plan of God for us at the present time. Instead of focusing on such efforts now, the Great Shepherd urges us to remain in the narrow way of sacrifice. Thus, we may be prepared to share with Christ Jesus in the glorious work of actually restoring the world to perfection of body and mind, and to give all the willing and obedient the joys of everlasting life. What a comfort it is to realize that this is God’s way, hence the only right course to follow.

When the cares of life, with its sorrows and hardships, tend to discourage us, how comforting it is to be reassured of the Great Shepherd’s love, as so beautifully set forth in the rod and staff of his Word. We hear him speaking tenderly to us that he will never leave nor forsake us, and, feeling the strength of that promise, our courage is renewed and our hearts are comforted. We know that he who gave his “only begotten Son” will surely fulfill all his precious promises. Trusting in him to do so, let us redouble our efforts to follow his direction as he leads us in paths of righteousness.

At times the way may seem unduly long and arduous. There are many hills to climb, many obstacles to surmount, and we may be longing for rest. However, we are reminded by the Scriptures that the Great Shepherd’s plan is that we be faithful even unto death. (Rev. 2:10) Only by following his leading

all the way to the end of our earthly walk may we hope to be with God and his dear Son, the “Lamb,” on “mount Sion.” (Heb. 12:22-24; Rev. 14:1) This is a glorious hope set before us. When we contemplate it, our hearts are filled with joy, and it is this joy that enables us to continue on in the way of sacrifice.

We should appreciate the rod and staff of the Lord now more than ever before. Although we have the blessed assurances as well as the many evidences of his guiding hand in our lives, we are living in a day when the enemies of God and of his Word are ever desirous of attacking his sheep from every direction. Only those who are fully protected by the truths and precious promises of the Scriptures will be able to stand against the “desires of the flesh,” the “wiles of the devil,” and the “spirit of the world.” (Eph. 2:3; 6:11; I Cor. 2:12) If through complacency, pride, self-will or confidence in the arm of flesh, we do not look to the Great Shepherd for help, we will surely be overcome by our adversaries.

However, comforted by the rod and staff we are refreshed, our strength is renewed and we continue on, rejoicing in the assurance that our God will keep us from falling. He may permit affliction, but if we are properly exercised thereby, we are drawn closer to him and can discern the pattern of his guiding hand more clearly. As we hear his voice through the Word, and discern his leading through our experiences, our hearts leap for joy as we realize the great privilege of praising the Great Shepherd. Let us, therefore, be submissive to the loving guidance of God’s rod and staff, and daily “follow the Lamb,” his beloved son, “whithersoever he goeth.”—Rev. 14:4

■

“These Three”

*“Now abideth
faith, hope, love,
these three; and
the greatest of
these is love.”*

—I Corinthians

13:13, Revised

Version

AFTER POINTING OUT THE

vital importance of love as a motivating influence in the Christian life, Paul wrote the words of our opening Scripture. The apostle mentions “these three” again, expanding upon their meaning, in

I Thessalonians 1:3, which reads, “Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father.” In this statement Paul indicates the relationship of faith, hope, and love to the Christian life. Faith “works,” love “labors,” and hope enables the Christian to have “patience,” he declares.

Some have endeavored to establish the relative value of faith compared to works in the Christian life. However, this cannot actually be done, for neither real faith nor Christian works can exist alone. A true Christian faith will be demonstrated by works, and the only works which are acceptable to God are those which are the outgrowth of faith. James expressed a similar thought when he wrote, “Shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.”—James 2:18

WHAT IS FAITH?

Hebrews 11:1 reads, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Verse 6 reads, "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." The rewards which God has promised to the faithful followers of the Master are spiritual, and therefore invisible, but our faith provides a basis, or substance, to these things. Contrasting temporal, earthly matters with eternal, spiritual realities, Paul wrote, "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."—II Cor. 4:18

Because we have faith in the existence of God, and believe his promises, we are desirous of doing his will in order to demonstrate our faith. This has been true of the Lord's people in all ages. Abel believed God and offered an acceptable sacrifice to his Creator in demonstration of his belief. Noah had faith in God, and when asked by him to build an ark, he proceeded to do so. Noah believed that a deluge would come upon the earth, although at the time there was no visible evidence that this would happen. It was his confidence in the divine forecast of a coming flood of waters, however, that gave substance to his faith. Thus, building the ark was Noah's work of faith, based on his conviction of God's Word.—Heb. 11:4-7

Abraham believed God, and on the strength of his belief was willing to leave his native country and go to a land he had never seen, with little or no knowledge of the conditions there. Paul said that Abraham

left his own country “not knowing whither he went.” (vs. 8) Abraham could not visibly see the land of Canaan, but his faith in God and in his promises gave substance to it, and enabled him to make the necessary sacrifice, and to endure the trials involved in obeying the Lord’s voice.

Abraham’s faith also worked in his obedience to the voice of God when asked to offer up Isaac as a burnt offering. (vss. 17-19) Isaac was born as a result of a miracle in response to the work of faith on the part of Abraham and Sarah. Now, however, God asked Abraham to offer his miracle son in sacrifice. In this Abraham might well have wondered if he actually heard the voice of God, for what he was asked to do seemed so contrary to what he believed was God’s purpose. Abraham knew the voice of God, however, and his faith rose to the occasion. His faith was so great that he believed God would raise Isaac from the dead, so his faith worked in obedience to the divine instructions. Abraham built the necessary altar, laid his son upon it, and would have slain him, but God intervened and, as Paul says, he received Isaac “in a figure” from the dead.

MOSES ALSO

In Moses we have another outstanding example of the work of faith. Moses was raised in the court of Pharaoh but had learned the promises of God concerning his people from his mother, who had been engaged as his nurse. In Moses’ position he had every opportunity for promotion in the Egyptian government, but his faith in God’s promises to the Hebrew people would not permit him to accept the praise of men.

We quote Paul's eloquent tribute to Moses, and his faith: "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible."—Heb. 11:24-27

As with Abel, Noah, Abraham and Moses, so it was with all the faithful "ancient worthies" of old. They demonstrated their faith by their works, and upon this basis proved their worthiness to "obtain a better resurrection." (vs. 35) Faith demonstrated by works is likewise an essential element of Christian character if we are to prove worthy of a share in "the first resurrection" to live and reign with Christ.—Rev. 20:6

OUR WORKS OF FAITH

Paul mentioned some of our works of faith in his letter to the brethren at Thessalonica. To these he wrote, "From you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing." (I Thess. 1:8) Here the sounding forth of the Word of the Lord is referred to as a work of faith. This is a work of faith because it is in obedience to the instructions given to us by our Master, Christ Jesus, to give witness to the Gospel message.—Matt. 5:14-16; 24:14; 28:19; Acts 1:8

If we fail to let our light shine, we would be in the same position before the Lord as Noah would have been had he failed to build the ark, or as Abraham would have been had he remained in Ur of the Chaldees when God called him to go to Canaan. With these patriarchs it would have meant faithlessness, instead of faithfulness. It would have meant a disregard for the will of the Lord, based upon a lack of faith in him and in his promises. It would have meant disobedience, and so it would mean for us should we fail to do the Lord's will.

Paul also recalls to the Thessalonian brethren how they had "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God." (I Thess. 1:9) This was another work of faith. In their worship of idols there was something which they could see with their natural sight, but they could not discern the "living and true God." He became substance to them through their faith, a faith which enabled them to believe that he existed, and that he was a rewarder of those who diligently seek him. (Heb. 11:6) They had heard the Gospel and had responded to it. They knew that they were to depart from the unclean gods of the heathen. Upon the basis of their faith, they were obedient.

A similar test is upon the Lord's people at this end of the age. There are many false gods in the professed Christian world from which the Lord's people are called upon to depart. There is the torture god, for example. If, through the Scriptures, our spiritual vision sees the true and living God of love, the doctrine of a torture god becomes unacceptable to us, and we speedily turn away from this unscriptural teaching. This is not difficult except as our friends and family, whose eyes of understanding

are perhaps not yet opened, look upon us with suspicion and sometimes contempt. It is a work of faith to stand up for the loving and merciful character of our Heavenly Father in the midst of the misconceptions and traditions of men.

Before we gained a vision of the true God, we may have set up idols of our own—idols of pleasure or riches. We may be inclined to make idols out of our hobbies. Anything which diverts our hearts and minds from full devotion and obedience to the true and living God properly can be considered an idol. To turn away from these, and to give our full devotion to our Heavenly Father and to the doing of his will, is a work of faith which believes that God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him only, and no other god or idol.

Obedience to any aspect of the divine will is a work of faith. God's will runs contrary to the desires of our fallen flesh, and to the selfish spirit of the world around us. Unless we have faith in God and in the rightness of his will and ways, we will have no interest in doing the things which are contrary to the desires of the flesh and the world. Our faith in him, however, gives pleasing substance to those things pertaining to God's will which otherwise would seem empty and foolish.

MOUNTAINS MOVED

Paul speaks of possessing mountain-moving faith. (I Cor. 13:2) This is evidently a symbolic statement denoting that which seems, from the human standpoint, to be impossible. The faith that prompted Elijah to call upon God to accept his sacrifice by fire sent down from heaven would be a mountain-moving faith.

(I Kings 18:30-39) Jesus exercised mountain-moving faith when he raised Lazarus and others from the dead. Moses likewise exercised this sort of faith when he led the children of Israel through the Red Sea.

While our experiences today are not as outstanding and dramatic as many of those recorded in the Bible, nevertheless, hindrances to the doing of God's will are still encountered by the Lord's people. These hindrances may be insignificant to the Lord, but they often appear as mountains to us. However, they are mountains which can, and will, be removed if, by faith, we go forward depending upon the Lord to help us in our every time of need.

Given the conditions in the world today, one of the hindrances which might easily confront the Lord's people today is the "mountain" of fear. We may fear the uncertainties of the troubles and perplexities all around us. We may hesitate to bear witness to the Truth because we are fearful of what the results may be. We may fear our ability to proclaim the message, or that we might be misunderstood. There are many ways in which fear needs to be overcome by faith in God and in his promises. However, if we exercise an abiding faith in him we will see these "mountains" removed again and again, for the power of God will be manifested in our weaknesses.—II Cor. 12:9,10

LABOR OF LOVE

True Christian character is not made up of faith alone. Paul emphasized this when he wrote that although we may have mountain-moving faith, if we do not have love it profits us nothing. (I Cor. 13:2) We recall that Paul, who complimented the

Thessalonians on their “work of faith,” included in his encouragement the expression “labour of love.” Faith works and love labors. These two thoughts are closely related, although we believe that there is a difference.

One of the differences is that faith is that confidence and conviction of heart and mind which gives us the necessary courage to step out on the promises of God and do the works outlined for us in his Word. Love, on the other hand, is the motivating character quality which prompts us to engage in the works of faith. Paul uses both of these words in Hebrews 6:10: “God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.”

Certainly, to lay down our lives for the brethren is a labor of love. It is also a work of faith, because it means the sacrificing of the flesh and its interests in order that we might have time, strength and means which can be devoted to the service of the brethren. Such service primarily is in their spiritual interests, but may also be along material lines when needed. Just as with faith and works, there is no measuring the relative value of faith and love. Both are essential elements of Christian character. Without faith and its associated works it is impossible to please God, and without the labor of love all our endeavors toward faith would be as nothing in God’s sight.

LOVE NOT ENOUGH

In the 13th chapter of 1st Corinthians, Paul stresses the great importance of love, and some have mistakenly supposed that he thereby discounts the

importance of faith and works. However, this is not Paul's thought. He wrote, for example, "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity [love], I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal." (vs. 1) Here is the thought of proclaiming the Truth, which we are commissioned to do. Indeed, the Lord wants us to proclaim the Gospel as effectively as possible. All Paul is saying is that unless our efforts are prompted by love for God and for the doing of his will, they will be of no avail.

Knowledge of the Truth and an understanding of the mysteries of God apart from love would be valueless. (vs. 2) However, the Lord wants us to study his Word and to gain as much knowledge as we can of his plans and purposes, not for personal satisfaction or glory, but for the glory of the Lord, because we love him. However, we cannot substitute love for a knowledge of God's plan.

Even a mountain-moving faith such as we have discussed, apart from love, would not be pleasing to God. We know that without such a faith we cannot please God, nor would we have the strength and the courage to move forward in the doing of his will. Love must always be the motive which prompts our works of faith if we are to be pleasing to the Lord.

Jesus said to the rich young ruler that if he bestowed all his goods to feed the poor he would be laying up treasures in heaven. (Matt. 19:21) Laying up heavenly treasure is what we should do, for it is the condition upon which we walk the narrow way. Paul explains, however, that if we thus give our all in the service of the Lord apart from the motivation of love, it will profit us nothing. (I Cor. 13:3) There will be no treasure laid up in heaven.

Paul invites us to present our bodies a living sacrifice, or, symbolically speaking, give our bodies to be burned. (Rom. 12:1) This is what consecration means. Taking up our cross and following the Master into death is a crucial test of our faith, and the works of a true faith will be manifested by giving “the witness of Jesus” and “the word of God,” sacrificing our all in service to the Lord and to the brethren. (Rev. 20:4) Here again, these aspects of the Christian life must be intermingled with, and prompted by love, else we will fail to make our calling and election sure.

How wonderful are the qualities of love! “Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up; doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked, taketh not account of evil; rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth with the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Love never faileth.”—I Cor. 13:4-8, *Revised Version*

“PATIENCE OF HOPE”

As quoted in the beginning, not only does Paul speak of the Thessalonian brethren as being faithful in their “work of faith, and labour of love,” but also of their “patience of hope.” Christian hope engenders patience, or cheerful endurance. A bright and shining hope helps us to avoid becoming “weary in well doing,” knowing that “in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.”—Gal. 6:9

Hope is a combination of desire and assurance. A person might be afflicted with an incurable disease. Naturally he would desire to be cured of that disease, but since the doctors could give him no assurance

that he could be cured, he would have no real hope. An individual might desire to possess wealth, and all the good things of life which wealth could procure. However, if his situation in life is such that he has no assurance of ever being wealthy, likewise he would have no true hope along this line.

On the other hand, the person with the incurable disease might be convinced by the testimony of his physicians that he would soon die, but we could not say that he hoped to die. The individual who desired to be wealthy might fear that he would grow old in poverty, but he would not hope to this end. If we both desire something and have an assurance from a reliable source that what we desire is obtainable, only then do we truly have hope.

Hope always relates to the future, either the near future or the distant future. Paul wrote, "We are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it." (Rom. 8:24,25) Many in the world today are without hope. Though they desire many good things, including health and life, they have no assurance that the things desired will ever become realities. The reason so many people of the world have no assurance is that they have little or no faith in God, and therefore no confidence in his promises.

However, what a wonderful hope we have for the world! It is the hope of restitution, based on the assurances which God has given to us by the mouth of all his holy prophets. (Acts 3:20,21) In brief, these restitution promises of God assure us that a time is coming, and soon, when there will be no more war, no more pain, no more death. They reveal also that

those who have died are to be awakened from the sleep of death and given an opportunity to share in the blessings which the Lord has provided for the whole world of mankind. Yes, a glorious new day is near for the suffering world of mankind, and in this blessed hope we rejoice.—Mic. 4:1-4; Acts 24:14,15; Rev. 21:3,4

OUR GLORIOUS HOPE

The individual child of God has an even more blessed hope. Paul describes it as the “hope of the glory of God.” (Rom. 5:2) We are “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.” This includes the hope of immortality and partaking of the divine nature. (Rom. 2:7; 8:17; II Pet. 1:4) As natural men and women we did not desire these blessings, for we knew nothing about them. However, God opened the eyes of our understanding, and by his love we were led to devote ourselves to the doing of his will. As we learned of the glorious things provided for those who love him and follow in the footsteps of the Master, we desired them, and through his promises God assures us that by his grace we can obtain them. Thus we have a glorious hope!

As quoted earlier from Paul, having this hope “we with patience wait for it.” That is, we wait for its fulfillment. This is the “patience of hope.” We need patience, for many difficulties are involved in attaining the fruition of our hope. Paul wrote that we are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ “if so be that we suffer with him.” (Rom. 8:17) Therefore, to attain that for which we hope we must suffer. We must be planted together in the likeness of Jesus’ sacrificial death. (Rom. 6:5) We must continue faithful in the

narrow way of sacrifice until we have been faithful even unto death. It is only thus that we may hope to attain the “crown of life.” (Rev. 2:10) Truly, we have much need for the patience of hope!

Faith, hope and love are fundamental in the Christian life. Paul wrote that “the greatest of these is love.” (I Cor. 13:13, *RV*) This does not detract from the importance of faith and hope, but reminds us that love, being one of the attributes of God himself, will be eternal. Faith in God will likewise always be essential, for although the world of mankind will receive the kingdom blessings of restitution in many visual ways, their eternal relationship with God will still require faith.

Hope will not be needed once it is realized and understood. As quoted earlier, Paul wrote that when we receive what we have hoped for, there is no further need to hope for it. Love, on the other hand, will always be essential. It is the opposite of selfishness. All pride and selfishness are to be destroyed from the earth. Indeed, they will not be permitted anywhere in God’s great universe. Meanwhile, may we continue our work of faith, and our labor of love, while we patiently wait for the fulfillment of our hope. ■

OBITUARIES

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

Brother Dave Desmarais, Oceanside, CA—June 8.
Age, 73

Sister Judith Black, Portland, OR—June 12. Age,
76

Africa Trip Report

IN MARCH OF this year, the Dawn was pleased to have Bro. Joe Dolan and Bro. Bill Dutka travel to Africa. The purpose of their pilgrim trip was to visit brethren in four countries—Kenya, Uganda, Cameroon and Ghana—and to attend the International Pan-African Convention, also in Ghana. The trip was planned to last 50 days, but due to the rapid worldwide spread of the Coronavirus—COVID-19—it was necessary for Bro. Joe and Bro. Bill to return home after only 12 days. We are very thankful to the Lord that they arrived safely back in the United States on March 20th. Although their trip was much abbreviated, we are pleased to provide Bro. Joe and Bro. Bill's report of their visit with the brethren in Kenya—the only country they were able to visit. Below is their report.

On March 10th, we arrived in Nairobi, Kenya and were met by Bro. David Mutei and Bro. Joseph Ekamais. The next day we visited Bro. James Owuor at his home in Kibera, a suburb of Nairobi. There we had a nice visit with him and five other brethren from that ecclesia. Bro. James first heard the Truth in 1996 through study material sent from Bro. Gilbert Rice, and he continued with studies through 2010 when he was visited by Bro. David Rice. Bro. James

symbolized his consecration in 2012 but had given his life to the Lord some years before. We were thankful to meet with him and some of the brethren from the Kibera ecclesia.



Kibera - Bro. James Owuor with cane

The next morning we had a nice breakfast, and departed for the day-long drive to Turkana. We arrived that evening at a hotel and had lessons and good fellowship along the way. Some of the travel was “off road” because stretches of the highway were not completed. Along the way we saw large swarms of locusts, camels with their herdsman, donkeys, goats and cattle. The landscape became more and more arid as we approached Turkana.

Bro. Joseph Ekamais, who traveled with us, was raised in Turkana and informed us that the people in that area do not eat regularly three meals a day, but rather once a day. Often they may eat just three or four meals a week. We arrived at our hotel and walked to a cafe for supper late in the evening.

On March 13th we met with a group from Turkana, and Bro. Joseph, who is fluent in Turkana, Swahili and English interpreted our message about the Chart of the Ages. After the meeting we drove over open range to visit a well that was drilled this



Turkana Group

year with the help of brethren from the United States. The project was overseen on site by Bro. Mutei. Bro. Bill later met with the man who actually drilled the well, and for three hours they discussed the Scriptures and God's plan for mankind. Bro. Joe remained



Bro. Jacob and Bro. Joseph

with Bro. Joseph Eka-mais and Bro. Jacob Ekutan and discussed our Lord's return. He also explained the features available on the Bible Resources App that was on their phones.

The next morning we met with eight men from various parts of Turkana County. Some had traveled six hours to meet us. Turkana covers almost 27,000 square kilometers. These eight individuals all had been introduced to the Truth as a result of Bro. Mutei's pilgrim trips to that area over the past ten years. Bro. Mutei himself first became familiar with the Truth through his father, who lived in the Turkana region and was one of Bro. Gilbert Rice's contacts many years ago.



Home in Turkana

We purchased Swahili Bibles for these men because the Turkana Bibles they had were quite inferior to the Swahili translation. We also observed that the Bibles they had were worn and tattered. Bro. Bill showed them how to tell stories from their Bibles to those at home, and he encouraged them to have all the brethren use their cell phones to fellowship weekly with one another. We learned that they individually live hundreds of kilometers from one another. It was night when we arrived back at Bro. David's home in Kitale.

The next morning, after a good breakfast Sr. Ruth prepared, we left to visit the brethren of the Chepchoina ecclesia, where Bro. Jess Maxton Mukile is the elder. We had a two-



Sr. Ruth and Bro. David Mutei

hour interactive discussion on the Chart of the Ages, focused on the purpose of the Gospel Age. Among the elders present in addition to Bro. Jess were Bro. Charles Omondi, Bro. Joseph Kundy, Bro.



Chepchoina Ecclesia

Samuel Wamalw, Bro. John Kiboi and Bro. Kelvin Marofu. Bro. Kelvin is active in serving many classes, including his home class in Endebess, which is about 30 miles from Kitale. We thought it would be a great blessing if he could ever obtain a motorbike, so he would not have to rely on public transportation while traveling to serve the brethren, which takes him very far distances at times.

In that area there are many Bible Students scattered about in smaller classes, and we estimated that all combined they would number a few hundred. We were unable to visit all the brethren in this area, but those whom we did get to meet with all had Bibles. Some also made good use of their smartphones and the Christian Resources App. One brother said that he had all six volumes of *Studies in the Scriptures*, and he and his wife were using the *Expanded Biblical Comments* book at their meetings. Bro. Kelvin did a very good job as interpreter, and we were pleased to see his enthusiasm for the Truth.

We traveled next to the Lutaso ecclesia which is situated at Mt. Elgon—above 10,000 feet elevation—located on the border of Kenya and Uganda. The



Mount Elgon Brethren

air and the view were beautiful, but the weather there can be very harsh when the rains come and the temperatures drop. Bro. Patrick Mutai is an elder there and knows the Truth well. He and the other elders are looking for a way to build a place where the brethren can meet out of the weather.

We discussed God's plan for mankind and listened to their testimonies about how they came into the Truth. They also told us about their witnessing activities and meetings. There are two classes in this mountaintop area. Both are "open air" classes that have no building to meet in, although one of the classes is now building a meeting place made of stones from the fields, but it is a slow process. Both of these ecclesias requested Swahili Bibles.

We then had the opportunity to visit Bro. Jamin Malova of Chavakali, who provides a place for orphans at his home and helps at the school for orphans which is in the area. We visited him at the school and hope to have continued communications with him. After leaving Bro. Jamin we stopped to see Bro. David Mutei's farm where his mother and sister live. He, Sr. Ruth, and others plant and harvest maize on



Maura Kitale

five acres of land by hand, and that helps to sustain them financially throughout the year, providing the market for maize is good at harvest time.

On March 16th we had a day-long seminar with about 30 brethren in a meeting hall that Bro. David has built across the street from his home. After morning devotions, Bro. Bill led a PowerPoint interactive study on “World Events that Affect the Earthly Seed,” with the primary focus on Israel. The attention of the brethren and their interaction was a blessing to witness. These brethren have been meeting together between ten and twenty years and were very appreciative of the day’s activities. All promptly returned to participate after lunch was served by Sr. Ruth and other sisters. All in attendance were



Meeting across the street from Bro. David Mutei’s home

given a copy of the March 2020 issue, in English, of *The Dawn* magazine. Testimonies were given at the end of the day and a group photo was taken.

After the meetings there was a short business meeting, and two committees were formed. One committee will coordinate the translation of Volume 1 of *Studies in the Scriptures* into Swahili. The other is a “Phone Committee,” which will make regular calls to those brethren scattered throughout Turkana County.

On March 17th we traveled 150 miles to Suna Migori, near Kisumu, to meet with Bro. Zablon Anyumba. Some of the journey was slow due to poor



Meeting with Bro. Zablon

roads and detours. We traveled from 10:30 am until 8:30 pm. Our route took us past Lake Victoria and a wildlife sanctuary, where we made a rest stop. We were very tired when we arrived at our hotel in Suna Migori.

Before we left the United States, we had registered with STEP (Smart Traveler Enrollment Program) to receive security and travel updates for our itinerary. When traveling in rural Africa it is difficult to get daily news, so the STEP program was very helpful with emails to our smartphones, especially as we began to learn more about the COVID-19 situation. At this point in our trip, brethren from the United States were also sending updates via emails about these developments.

The next morning Bro. Zablon joined us for breakfast at our hotel in Suna Migori. Then we traveled

a short distance and met in a sister's home, where we had good fellowship and answered questions that she raised. Then we drove for thirty minutes and visited another home where Bro. Zablon's wife and brother were, along with five others. We had a question and answer session there for three hours and arrived back at our hotel by 6 pm.

By now it was apparent that COVID-19 was becoming a serious threat. We were faced with the decision as to whether we should proceed with the rest of our pilgrim trip to Uganda, Cameroon and Ghana. It was only a short time later that we received a phone call from one of the trustees of the Dawn advising us to seek a way to return to the United States without delay. We thanked the Lord for this providential overruling and took the phone call as an answer to our prayers concerning whether we should continue our trip.

We summoned Bro. David and Bro. Zablon to the hotel to inform them of our decision to return home. They exhibited their Christian love in understanding the situation and sought ways to help us. They continued with us, and at 11 pm, with their assistance, return tickets were secured from the hotel room for a flight leaving Nairobi the next day! It



Turkana meeting at hotel

was determined that if we were to arrive in time for the flight we must leave the hotel at 3 am to go 230 miles back to Nairobi. Before resting we called the brethren

in Uganda and Cameroon to advise them that our trip had to be curtailed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We left Migori at 3 am in route to Nairobi. Bro. David drove us all the way there, and Bro. Joseph remained with us also. We were again thankful to the Lord for his overruling after learning that the flight that we were on was overbooked by thirty people, and yet we were safely on board before the plane scarcely had any others on it! With various stops and layovers, we traveled for over 45 hours before returning to our respective homes. We noted how amazing it was to see so few people in the terminal at JFK International Airport in New York when we arrived there.

We especially want to thank our Heavenly Father for all his overruling during our shortened pilgrim trip to visit and encourage our brethren in Africa. Additionally, we wish to express deepest gratitude to the Dawn for providing a way to be with our brethren in four countries in Africa, although we were only able to visit brethren in Kenya before returning home. It seemed as though we had just begun our trip when we had to end it abruptly. If the Lord so indicates, we hope we can complete the planned itinerary at some future time. We were reminded of our dear Bro. Stephen Suraci, who long ago mentioned the following: “Disappointment—change one letter and you will see His Appointment.”

We leave with you these words: “Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.”—Jude 1:24,25 ■

SPEAKERS' APPOINTMENTS

The speakers listed below are invited by individual classes, or their services have been arranged by their home classes:

N. Austin

Online Broadcast of Convention
Saskatoon, SK July 4,5

R. Charlton

Online Broadcast of Convention
Saskatoon, SK July 4,5

L. Griehs

Online Broadcast of Convention
New Brunswick, NJ July 4,5

K. Humphreys

Online Broadcast of Convention
Saskatoon, SK July 4,5

J. Parkinson

Online Broadcast of Convention
Saskatoon, SK July 4,5

B. Sweeney

Online Broadcast of Convention
Saskatoon, SK July 4,5

*For all creation, gazing eagerly as if with
outstretched neck, is waiting and longing to see
the manifestation of the sons of God.
—Romans 8:19, Weymouth Translation*

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CONVENTIONS

These conventions are listed by request of classes who sponsor them. So your convention can be placed in these columns in time, make your request in writing three months before the date of the convention to Dawn Magazine, 199 Railroad Avenue, East Rutherford, NJ 07073.

IMPORTANT NOTICE: Numerous conventions in coming months will not be held in-person due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of these, however, will have an online broadcast alternative. Listed below are the details which the Dawn has been made aware of concerning upcoming conventions. Please contact the brethren shown in the listings to find out the status of a convention, and also how you can attend an online broadcast if one is planned.

SASKATOON CONVENTION, July 4,5—WILL BE BROADCAST ONLINE ONLY—Contact J. Nagy.
Phone: (306) 290-9589

BIBLE STUDENTS GENERAL CONVENTION, July 18-23—GENERAL CONVENTION ECHOES WILL BE BROADCAST ONLINE JULY 18-22—Contact E. Kuenzli. Phone: (407) 670-4189 or Email: ekuenzli@cfl.rr.com

CENTRAL OHIO CONVENTION, August 1,2—WILL BE BROADCAST ONLINE ONLY—Contact L. Winkske. Phone: (614) 579-5045.

BIBLE STUDENTS INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION, August 5-9—CANCELED—Contact M. Davis.
Email: lmkdavis@earthlink.net

SEATTLE CONVENTION, September 5-7—WILL BE BROADCAST ONLINE ONLY—Contact L. Flinn.
Phone: (206) 518-2678 or Email: laurie@flinn.us

TENNESSEE VALLEY CONVENTION, September 11-13—Comfort Inn, 4725 University Drive (HWY 72), Huntsville, AL 35806. For reservations, phone:

(256) 562-2525. For special rate of \$75.00 per night, mention Bible Students Rate, and make reservations by August 31. For other information, contact R. Armstrong. Phone: (256) 281-6807 or Email: robin@exzaktec.com

GRAND RAPIDS CONVENTION, September 25-27—NEW LOCATION—Little Pine Island Camp, 6889 Pine Island Drive NE, Comstock Park, MI 49321. Contact T. Malinowski. Phone: (616) 304-7691 or Email: Malinowski.TJM@gmail.com

COLORADO CONVENTION, October 2-4—Holiday Inn Express & Suites, 17140 West Colfax Avenue, Golden, CO 80401. Contact M. Homolka. Phone: (307) 267-5853

ORLANDO CONVENTION, October 24,25—South Seminole Masonic Lodge, 122 Triplet Lake Drive, Casselberry, FL 32707. Contact C. Goodman. Phone: (407) 695-6815 or Email: clmgoodman@gmail.com

SAN DIEGO CONVENTION, November 21,22—WILL BE BROADCAST ONLINE ONLY. Contact R. Brand. Email: blatbrand@aol.com

*Soon shall the joyous song arise thro' all the hosts
beneath the skies,
That song of triumph which records that all the
earth is now the Lord's.
Let all the Gentile kingdoms be subjected,
mighty Lord, to thee!
And over land, and stream, and main, now wave
the sceptre of thy reign.
Soon shall that glorious anthem swell, and
host to host the triumph tell,
That no rebellious foe remains, but over
all the Saviour reigns.
—Hymns of Dawn*