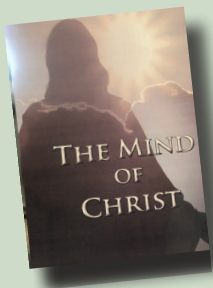




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FRANCE: L'Aurore, 39A rue des Bois, 68540 Feldkirch

GERMANY: Tagesanbruch Bibelstudien-Vereinigung e. V., Postfach 3, 64396 Modautal

GREECE: He Haravgi (The Dawn), PO Box 521167, Longwood, FL 32752-1167 USA

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Peace for Israel and the World

“Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end.”
—*Isaiah 9:7*

WARS HAVE LONG PLAGUED

the human race. The history of the world has been written in human blood. Wars increase, both in the amount of armament involved, and in their power to destroy. Many people are asking, “Will there ever be peace?” As the year 2023 draws to a close, we can readily see that the events of the last two years cast a grim outlook in answer to this question.

First, in February, 2022, Russia invaded the country of Ukraine, starting a war that continues even now. As of this writing, Ukraine has suffered the loss of about 70,000 of its soldiers, with another 120,000 wounded. Russia’s losses are significantly higher, with around 120,000 deaths and 180,000 wounded. In total, the dead and wounded from this armed conflict will soon surpass 500,000, and there appears no end on the near horizon to this war between neighbors.

Most recently, just one month prior to this writing, violence once again erupted in the Middle East, this time between Israel and Hamas. On October 7th,

over 1,000 Hamas militants invaded Israel, killed over 1,400 Israelis, and took more than 200 people hostage. The next day, Israel formally declared war on Hamas, vowing to destroy them. Now, one month since the war began, over 10,000 people have died and more than 33,000 wounded on both sides of this conflict, and these numbers will certainly continue to rise.

What do the Scriptures say about such wars, especially this most recent one involving the nation of Israel? God, through the Prophet Isaiah, spoke concerning the Jewish people, “Behold, I will gather them out of all the lands to which I have driven them in My anger, in My wrath and in great indignation; and I will bring them back to this place and make them dwell in safety. ... I will make an everlasting covenant with them that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; ... I will rejoice over them to do them good and will faithfully plant them in this land with all My heart and with all My soul.” —Jer. 32:37,40,41, *New American Standard Bible*

Israel was driven away from the land which God had promised to them—modern-day Palestine. (Num. 33:51-53; 34:1-29; Josh. 11:13-21) This was because of their disobedience to God and their rejection of the Messiah—Jesus. Jesus prophesied this, saying: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, ... How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!” (Matt. 23:37,38, *NASB*) He added, as recorded in Luke’s account: “Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.”—Luke 21:24, *NASB*

Israel's punishment was to be only temporary as the Apostle Paul wrote: "I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery ... that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in; and so all Israel will be saved; just as it is written, The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will remove ungodliness from Jacob. This is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins." (Rom. 11:25-27, *NASB*) While Israel lost their relationship with God under the Law Covenant due to disobedience, they were not cast off forever. God promised to regather them from all the lands to which he had scattered them and make with them a new, an everlasting covenant.

"Behold, days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them, declares the LORD. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD, I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, Know the LORD, for they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, declares the LORD, for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."—Jer. 31:31-34, *NASB*

The Apostle Paul quoted this prophecy, adding that Jesus is the one who makes this covenant possible. "We have such a high priest, who has

taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, ... He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion sought for a second. For finding fault with them [the Jewish people], He says, behold, days are coming, says the Lord, when I will effect a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah.” (Heb. 8:1,6-8, *NASB*) Because of their imperfection, the Jewish people could not keep their first covenant, established at Mount Sinai. They needed a better high priest and a better sacrifice—a ransom for Adam—to be cleansed from sin so they can come back into harmony with God. (I Tim. 2:5,6) Jesus provided that better sacrifice with his death on the cross and as a result, became a better high priest. As that high priest, Jesus is the guarantor and “mediator of a better covenant,” the New Covenant under which Israel and eventually all mankind will be cleansed from sin and restored to life and to God’s favor.

For nearly a century and a half, God has been steadily regathering the Jewish people back to their land of promise in preparation for the establishment of this New Covenant. When it is established with Israel, Paul writes, “What will their acceptance be but life from the dead?” (Rom. 11:15, *NASB*) The New Covenant will result in “life from the dead,” that is, the resurrection of all mankind from the grave, and we are promised that both Jew and Gentile, Arab and Israeli, will be included in this great work.—John 5:28,29

As we have seen the Jewish people being regathered to their promised homeland, many surrounding peoples and nations have raged against it. This, too, is a sign that God's plan for Israel's and all mankind's salvation is progressing toward the promised result of blessing all the families of the earth. (Ps. 2:1-9; Gen. 22:16-18) God's purpose to gather Israel to their homeland and bring them back into harmony with himself will not be thwarted by any earthly nation or organization. Neither will it be thwarted by spiritual wickedness in high places—Satan and the fallen angels.—Eph. 6:11,12

By regathering Israel back to the promised land and establishing a New Covenant with them, God says, "I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, ... Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when I prove Myself holy among you [the Jewish people] in their sight. For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers; so you will be My people, and I will be your God."—Ezek. 36:23-28, *NASB*

God has promised in this regathering of Israel that they will never be uprooted again. "I will bring My exiled people of Israel back from distant lands,

and they will rebuild their ruined cities and live in them again. ... I will firmly plant them there in their own land. They will never again be uprooted from the land I have given them, says the LORD your God.” (Amos 9:14,15, *New Living Translation*) “They will possess their land forever, for I will plant them there with my own hands in order to bring myself glory.” (Isa. 60:21, *NLT*) “They will live in the land I gave my servant Jacob, the land where their ancestors lived. They and their children and their grandchildren after them will live there forever, generation after generation.”—Ezek. 37:25, *NLT*

THE DESIRE OF ALL NATIONS

Thus far our discussion has centered mostly upon Israel and the wonderful promises God has made for their full restoration to his divine favor. However, as we have alluded to, the blessings promised to them will be extended to all nations and peoples of the earth in the Messianic kingdom, now near at hand.

As our opening text states, universal and lasting peace ultimately will be established in the earth. However, it will not come by human efforts, nor will it be induced by mutual fear of destruction, nor by armament races and wars. It will be established by the kingdom of Christ, a worldwide government that will exercise control in the affairs of men. Those who believe the promises of the Bible pertaining to the coming of Christ’s kingdom can thus look into the future with a great deal of optimism.

The Bible says that “the desire of all nations shall come,” and we know that fundamentally the vast majority of nations and people of the earth

desire peace. (Hag. 2:7) However, some quote Jesus' statement that there shall be "wars and rumors of wars," and add to it his words, "then shall the end come," as proof that wars will continue on this earth until the world comes to an end, which to these mean the destruction of the literal earth and the end of all human experience.—Matt. 24:6,14

When Jesus spoke of "wars and rumors of wars" it was in answer to questions asked him by his disciples pertaining to the time of his return and the end of the age. "What shall be the sign of thy coming," they asked, "and of the end of the world?" (Matt. 24:3) The *King James Version* of the disciples' questions is misleading, for it incorrectly translates the Greek words *parousia* and *aion* used in the text. With these words properly translated the questions are, "What shall be the sign of thy presence, and of the end of the age?"—See *Rotherham Emphasized Bible; Young's Literal Translation*

When Jesus said that there would be "wars and rumors of wars," after which the end would come, he simply meant that the many centuries following his earthly ministry would be characterized by intermittent wars, and that this would continue right down to the end of the age. He did not mean that the end of the age would mean the destruction of the earth, nor the end of all human experience on the earth. As the prophecies of the Bible point out, the end of the age of "wars and rumors of wars" marks the beginning of a new age, the age during which Christ's kingdom will be the controlling factor in the affairs of men. Then, as our text declares, "Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end."

HUMAN EFFORTS FAIL

The lesson of history is that armament races and balances of power do not prevent war. With fallen human selfishness dictating the policies of nations, the only hope for peace is in the establishment of an authority in the earth powerful enough to impose laws of justice and righteousness which transcend the petty jealousies and selfish ambitions of individual leaders and nations. Such an authority cannot stem from any existing nation or government of earth. Only the kingdom of God is capable of exercising such an authority and of executing justice and righteousness in all the earth.—Zech. 14:9

In this regard many earnest students of the Bible have failed to realize that in the outworking of the divine plan there is to be an actual government of righteousness established in the earth, a government that will effectively rule the nations and assure peace and happiness to all mankind. Despite all the marvelous references in both the Old and New Testaments to this “kingdom” which is to rule from “sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth,” many insist that God’s kingdom is merely a righteous spirit, or disposition, in the hearts of individuals.—Ps. 72:8

This concept of the kingdom is based on the expression, “The kingdom of God is within you.” (Luke 17:21) These are purported to be the words of Jesus, but they are a faulty translation of what he actually said. The Pharisees had asked Jesus “when the kingdom of God should come.” (vs. 20) Replying, he said, quoting verses 20-21 from *The Emphatic Diaglott*, “The kingdom of God comes not with outward show; nor shall they say, Behold here! or there! for, behold, God’s royal majesty is among you.” A more exact

translation of this statement would be, "The King is among you." This brings it into harmony with the conversation between Jesus and the Pharisees.

The Pharisees did not believe that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the great King of the Old Testament prophecies. From their standpoint, how could he set up a kingdom in opposition to Rome, liberate Israel, and extend peace and joy to all nations? He had no army. His friends were not people of importance. What could embarrass Jesus more, the Pharisees thought, than to ask him just when he expected to set up his kingdom?

Jesus knew what was in their hearts and answered accordingly. The kingdom of God, he explained, was not to come into power in the manner of other kingdoms or governments. There would be no outward show—no armies, no wars of conquest, and no display of armament. As a matter of fact, as he pointed out, the future King was even then in their midst, although they refused to believe it. Jesus' work at his First Advent was related to his future kingdom, but no soldiers were needed to accomplish it.

The faulty translation, "The kingdom of God is within you" could not have been true, for Jesus was talking to the Pharisees whom he had styled hypocrites, whited sepulchres, children of the devil. (Matt. 23:27; John 8:44) How could the kingdom of God be within them? It was not, and later Jesus cast them off from having any share in the rulership of his kingdom.—Luke 13:28

NOT OF THIS ORDER

Another statement of Jesus which also has been greatly misunderstood is the one he made to Pilate,

when he said, “My kingdom is not of this world.” (John 18:36) This has been taken by many to mean that all the promises of God pertaining to a kingdom are to be fulfilled in the experiences of Jesus’ followers when they die and go to heaven. After all, say these, Jesus said that the kingdom promised in the Bible has nothing to do with this world of sin.

The difficulty here lies in the use of the word “world” to translate the Greek word *kosmos*, which means order or arrangement of things. What Jesus said was that his kingdom was not of this present order of society. The Bible reveals that there are different “worlds” or social arrangements in the plan of God. The coming kingdom, or new social order, is the one which follows the present one. This new order or arrangement is ushered in by the return of Christ at his Second Advent. It is then that his kingdom is established and that the “government shall be upon his shoulder.” It is then that the promise will be fulfilled, “of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end.”—Isa. 9:6,7

The disciples at first did not understand this, so Jesus related a parable to illustrate it, concerning a certain nobleman, which referred to himself, who went into a far country to receive a kingdom and to return. (Luke 19:12) In his introduction to this parable Luke explains that Jesus gave it because his disciples thought that his kingdom “should immediately appear.”—Luke 19:11

All of Jesus’ teachings were related directly or indirectly to God’s promised kingdom. They do not all pertain to the blessings which will reach mankind through the agencies of that kingdom. Many of them relate to various aspects of preparation for

it. Jesus' death as man's Redeemer is in this category, for God's plan is that the Messiah of promise was not to rule over a dying race, but a race redeemed from death. Thus, each individual could be offered the opportunity, upon conditions of obedience, to live forever.

The followers of Christ are offered the opportunity of reigning with him if they are willing to suffer and die with him. (II Tim. 2:11,12) The Gospel call to those willing to accept these terms of discipleship has been going out during the entire age since Pentecost, and this has also been in preparation for the kingdom. Many of Jesus' parables relate to the work of this present age, being illustrative from one standpoint or another of the joys, blessings, difficulties, and trials of these "children of the kingdom." —Matt. 13:38

Not understanding the plan of God, it has been easy to conclude that all the kingdom promises of the Bible simply refer to the enjoyment of a home in heaven for all eternity; for there are many heavenly, or spiritual, promises associated with the theme of the kingdom. However, these promises are to those called to be rulers in that kingdom, and not to its subjects. When Jesus was raised from the dead, he was highly exalted to the divine nature, having given his flesh for the life of the world; and the promise is that those who will live and reign with him in his kingdom will be made like him, and share his heavenly home and nature.—Phil. 2:8,9; John 6:51; I John 3:2,3

These spiritual rulers in the kingdom of God will have human representatives. The religious rulers of Israel thought they were to represent God in his

kingdom, and they could have, had they qualified through humility and obedience. These were in line to be the “children of the kingdom,” but when the kingdom is established on earth they will discover that through unfaithfulness they forfeited the right to any official position therein. Jesus explained this, saying, “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.”—Luke 13:28,29

The expression “weeping and gnashing of teeth” is descriptive of the chagrin and disappointment to be experienced by those who, while once in line to be used in the kingdom, find when they are raised from the dead that this desired position is occupied by “Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets.” These faithful ones also will be raised from the dead in what the Apostle Paul speaks of as a “better resurrection.”—Heb. 11:35

These restored worthies of the ancient past are prophetically referred to in Psalm 45:16 as those who will be made “princes in all the earth.” We might speak of them as the leaders of the earthly phase of Christ’s kingdom. They will represent and operate in conjunction with the kingdom’s spiritual phase, made up of the glorified Jesus and his faithful followers who, in the “first resurrection,” are exalted to live and reign with him.—Rev. 20:4,6

These two phases of the kingdom of Christ are symbolically described in Micah 4:1-4 as “Zion”—the spiritual or heavenly—and “Jerusalem,” the

human or earthly. This prophecy also refers to Jesus and his followers, the “sons of God,” as the ruling “house of the LORD,” symbolized in this prophecy as the “mountain,” or kingdom, of the Lord. The prophecy reads:

“In the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the Word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the LORD of hosts hath spoken it.”

Thus will peace come to all mankind, Jew and Gentile, through Christ’s world government. It will not be a peace through mutual fear, nor by submission of one nation to another, but a peace so complete and enduring that there will be peace and freedom from fear for all people. As the prophet states, “none shall make them afraid.” Peace alone, however, even peace with economic security as symbolized in this prophecy by the idea of dwelling under vine and fig tree, would not be wholly satisfactory. Even with these much desired and sought-after blessings

attained, there would still be sickness and death. However, another Old Testament prophecy in which a “mountain” is used to symbolize Christ’s kingdom, assures us that even death is to be destroyed.

“In this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. And he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the vail that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it. And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”—Isa. 25:6-9

“All people,” “all nations,” “all faces,” “all the earth,” the prophet states. What more clear statement could there be that the blessings of Christ’s kingdom will be for people of every family, city, town, nationality, race, in every country and continent upon the face of the earth? How apparent it is also that these inspiring kingdom promises mean so much more than merely a righteous sentiment in the hearts of individuals, that they describe a literal and genuine government which will rule the world in righteousness, bringing peace and health and life to all mankind. We long for these wonderful promises to be fulfilled, for they will mark the end of man’s nighttime of sorrow and death and the beginning of a bright, new day in the experience of all mankind, both Jew and Gentile.—Ps. 30:5 ■

Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz

Key Verse: “*And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God.*”
—Ruth 1:16

Selected Scriptures: *Ruth* 1:1-22; 4:9-13

women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelled there about ten years. And Mahlon and Chilion died also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband.”—vss. 3-5

When Naomi heard that the famine in Israel had ended, she decided to return to her homeland. Her daughters-in-law desired to go with her. However, as Naomi began her journey, she advised them to return to

THE BOOK OF RUTH opens with these words: “Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled [Israel], that there was a famine in the land. A certain man of Bethlehem-judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab. ... And the name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon and Chilion. ... And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there.”—Ruth 1:1,2

While in Moab, “Elimelech Naomi’s husband died; and she was left, and her two sons. And they took them wives of the

their mother's homes. Orpah complied and returned to Moab, but Ruth insisted on staying with Naomi. (vss. 6-15) Ruth's words of love and devotion found in our Key Verse comprise one of the most touching statements found in the Bible and show her complete trust in Naomi and in Naomi's God.

When Naomi and Ruth arrived in Bethlehem, it was the time of barley harvest. Ruth went to the edge of a field to collect grain, which was allowed under the Jewish law. Boaz, the owner of the field, noticed Ruth and inquired who she was. When he discovered that they were related through Naomi's husband Elimelech, who had died, Boaz instructed those working in the field to treat Ruth kindly.—Ruth 1:22; 2:1-16

Ruth continued collecting grain, and Boaz watched over her. Naomi instructed Ruth to make herself attractive and to lie at Boaz's feet after a long day on the threshing floor. Boaz awoke about midnight and realized that someone was lying near him. When he asked who she was, she said, "Ruth thine handmaid," and informed him that he was her family's "near kinsman."—Ruth 3:1-9

Under Jewish law, a near kinsman of one who had died could take on the role of progenitor in order to continue the lineage of the deceased one. Since both Naomi and Ruth were widows of Israelites, there was no one to carry on the family line. Boaz pointed out to Ruth that there was a closer family member who had first rights to her as a kinsman. (vs. 12) He assembled his family to discuss the matter, and it was agreed that Boaz would assume the responsibility as kinsman redeemer.—Ruth 4:9-12

Boaz married Ruth and their son Obed was born. Obed was the father of Jesse, who was the father of David, who became king of Israel. The book of Ruth furnishes an important link in the family chain of the tribe of Judah leading to King David, which then leads to the man Christ Jesus, the Redeemer of mankind.—Ruth 4:13-22; Matt. 1:5,6,16; Luke 3:23,31,32 ■

David Slays Goliath

Key Verse: “*David said moreover, The LORD that delivered me out of the paw of the lion, and out of the paw of the bear, he will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine.*”
—*I Samuel 17:37*

Selected Scripture:
I Samuel 17:31-51

bear when they took a lamb out of the flock.—*I Sam. 17:34-36*

However, for all his valor in the foregoing ways, David is also remembered as one skilled with the harp and as a composer of songs. David’s love for Jehovah raised his lyrics far above the common level of simple entertainment, making them classical masterpieces dedicated to the worship and praise of the Lord.

All this training prepared David for one of his greatest life achievements—shepherding God’s people. It is written: “[God] chose David also his servant, and took him from the sheepfolds: From following the ewes great with young he brought him to feed Jacob his people, and Israel his inheritance, So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart; and guided them by the

DAVID’S YOUTH SPENT AS a shepherd boy had a profound influence on the rest of his life. It prepared him to survive as a fugitive when, in later experiences, he was forced to flee from the wrath of Saul. He also acquired skill with the sling-shot. He developed endurance and courage through the challenges of rescuing sheep which had been separated from his father’s flock. David did not even hesitate to kill a lion and a

skillfulness of his hands.”—Ps. 78:70-72

When David first left his work tending his father’s sheep, at the request of King Saul, he served as the court musician to soothe the king’s troubled spirit, as well as to serve as his armor bearer.—I Sam. 16:19-23

Later, when David took food to his older brothers serving in the king’s army, he saw Goliath scoffing at Israel. He received the king’s permission to confront this gigantic Philistine enemy. (I Sam. 17:4-37) As David, armed only with a sling and five smooth stones, neared Goliath, he cried, “Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied.” (vs. 45) David hurled the stone he had in his sling and with one blow brought down Goliath, then quickly cut off his head.—vss. 49-51

David was placed over Israel’s men of war. Often when David returned from a victorious expedition against the enemies of Israel, he would be greeted by women dancing in the streets. David’s popularity stirred up envy in Saul who soon became set upon eliminating him. From this time forward, David’s life was in constant jeopardy. However, he behaved himself so wisely that he attracted universal respect and love among the Israelites.—I Sam. 18:5-16

When Saul died it resulted in a crisis in Israel, and a period of civil war followed. David assumed his residence at Hebron in the hill country of Judah, nineteen miles southwest of Jerusalem. He was anointed king over the house of Judah and reigned seven and one-half years in Hebron. (II Sam. 2:1-11) Israel’s civil war finally came to an end, resulting in the downfall of the house of Saul. David was then anointed king over all Israel.—II Sam. 2:8-5:5

As David relied on the Lord’s strength in his life, let us seek divine assistance in all our experiences. ■

An Angel Speaks to Zacharias

Key Verse: *“The angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.”*
—*Luke 1:13*

Selected Scripture:
Luke 1:5-17

continued in the way of righteousness to God, but were now well advanced in age and childless because Elisabeth was barren.—vss. 6,7

As Zacharias performed his duties as a priest, he went to the temple to burn incense when the people had gathered there to pray. As he did so, “there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense.” Zacharias was full of fear when he saw the angel, but was assured by the messenger’s words, quoting again from our Key Verse, “Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John.”

OUR LESSON CONCERNS

the events surrounding the birth of John the Baptist during the reign of Herod the Great, king of Judea. John’s father, Zacharias, was a priest “of the course of Abia,” and his mother “was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth.” (Luke 1:5) Both Zacharias and Elisabeth, according to the account, led a proper life by following God’s commandments and trusting in him. They had

The angel went on to explain that the child's birth would bring joy to many people and would be a cause of great gladness. He also explained that the child would be raised in a special manner, "and he shall be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb."—vss. 9-15

The news was overwhelming. After so many years he and Elisabeth would be blessed with a son; and no ordinary son, but one who would grow to manhood and become a great prophet of the Lord. He would turn the hearts of many in Israel to the Lord their God. He would do so in the spirit and power of Elijah the prophet, in fulfilment of Malachi's prophecy.—Mal. 4:5,6

This was more than Zacharias could believe, and he expressed doubt. "How shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife is well advanced in years. And the angel answered and said to him, I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God, and was sent to speak to you and bring you these glad tidings. But behold, you will be mute and not able to speak until the day these things take place, because you did not believe my words which will be fulfilled in their own time."—Luke 1:18-20, *New King James Version*

We are instructed by this incident. As Zacharias' wavering faith led to a lessening of the glory of the moment, so our unbelief at times will diminish the manifestation of God's power in our lives. Let us listen, and believe, when God speaks through his providences.

John's birth and subsequent life helped to restore harmony between many in Israel and their faithful ancient "fathers." This dear son of Zacharias and Elisabeth would be the forerunner to prepare the way for the coming Messiah, Jesus. John would "go before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah." (vs. 17, *NKJV*) He would have an uncompromising and fearless spirit, backed by the power of divine Truth.—I Kings 18:17-41 ■

Mary and Elisabeth

Key Verses: *“It came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit: And she spake out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.”*
—Luke 1:41,42

Selected Scripture:
Luke 1:39-45,56

highly favored and blessed among women. Earlier, the angel Gabriel had reassured Mary. First, he reminded her of the prophecies relating to the promised birth of Jesus. Being well versed in the Scriptures, Mary likely recalled the words of Isaiah 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.”

Second, Gabriel told Mary that the Holy Spirit—God’s power—would accomplish this miracle. He said,

MARY’S EXAMPLE OF faithfulness and obedience to God’s instruction speaks loudly to her character. The Scriptures indicate that both Mary and Joseph were pious people, as demonstrated by their annual trips to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. (Luke 2:41) The fact that Mary was chosen to be the mother of Jesus according to the flesh was a testimony to her nobility and purity of heart before God.

Our Key Verses point out that Mary came to visit Elisabeth and saluted her in a loving way upon entering her home. In response, Elisabeth spoke the message that Mary was

“The power of the Highest shall overshadow thee.” (Luke 1:35) Perhaps this brought to her mind Exodus 40:34-38, in which God promised to overshadow the Israelites’ Tabernacle in the wilderness with the pillars of a cloud and of fire. To an Israelite such as Mary, it was comforting to believe that God would hover above her like an eagle over its nest with wings outspread, protecting, providing, and helping.

Gabriel then told Mary that her cousin Elisabeth was also about to bear a son. Elisabeth had been barren but had now conceived “in her old age.” (Luke 1:36) This additional miracle was enough to convince Mary that God was indeed able to perform whatever he desired, as Gabriel declared, “With God nothing shall be impossible.” (vs. 37) Mary might have also recalled these words of the prophet: “So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.”—Isa. 55:11

After hearing these reassurances and proofs from the angel Gabriel, Mary put the entire matter into the Lord’s hands with these beautiful words: “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word.” (Luke 1:38) This loving and complete acceptance of God’s will is reminiscent of that which Hannah expressed concerning the miraculous birth of her son, Samuel: “My heart rejoiceth in the Lord, mine horn is exalted in the Lord: my mouth is enlarged over mine enemies; because I rejoice in thy salvation. There is none holy as the Lord: for there is none beside thee: neither is there any rock like our God.”—I Sam. 2:1,2

Let us be full of faith as Mary, knowing the prophecies concerning the call of the church, and remembering the begetting of God’s called ones as children of God. Let us remember that God will accomplish in us what he desires—the development of a bride for his Son, Christ Jesus.—I John 3:2; Rev. 19:7,8 ■

The Wise Men

Key Verse: *“Lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.”*
—**Matthew 2:9**

Selected Scripture:
Matthew 2:1-12

FOLLOWING THE BIRTH of Jesus, “wise men from the east” came to Jerusalem. They inquired of Herod the king, asking him where the King of the Jews had been born, saying that they had seen his star and travelled a long distance to worship him. (Matt. 2:1,2) When Herod heard this, “he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.” (vs. 3) This reaction was

because the king felt his own rule was now threatened. Likewise, others in Jerusalem who may have had some advantages because of Herod’s rulership were fearful of losing these special privileges.

Herod “gathered all the chief priests and scribes” of the Jews and demanded to know where Christ should be born. Knowing the prophecies concerning Messiah, they answered, “Bethlehem of Judaea.” Herod told the wise men, “Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.” (vss. 4-8) This was a deception by Herod. If he knew where the young child Jesus was, he could then have him killed, thus protecting his rulership.

After the wise men departed from Herod, our Key Verse says that the star, which they had been following, continued to lead them until it stood over where the

young child was. “When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.” (vs. 10) The account goes on to state that when they came into the house, the wise men saw the young child with Mary his mother. They bowed down and worshipped him and then presented him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.—vs. 11

Joseph and Mary were no doubt surprised by the precious gifts received from these strangers. In God’s providence, however, their costly value was probably helpful to meet expenses during their flight to Egypt, which would soon follow.—vss. 13-15

Each of the gifts given by the wise men seems to have had a special meaning. Gold, a rare metal and considered precious throughout history, was a fitting gift for a king—the King of the Jews. Frankincense produces a pleasant odor when burned and was used extensively in Israel’s Tabernacle and Temple. It was one of the ingredients in the holy incense and was also placed on top of the showbread in the Holy compartment. (Exod. 30:34-38; Lev. 24:5-7) The gift of frankincense perhaps pointed forward to Jesus’ priestly service.

Myrrh was one of the ingredients in the holy anointing oil of the Tabernacle. (Exod. 30:23-25) A bitter herb, it may have symbolized in advance how during Jesus’ earthly ministry he would be “a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.” (Isa. 53:3) Myrrh was also applied to Jesus’ body after his death.—John 19:39,40

After the wise men presented their gifts, having been “warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.” (Matt. 2:12) Let us be as the wise men, presenting daily our treasure to the Heavenly Father—all that we have and are. “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.”—Rom. 12:1 ■

Walking with God

“Can two walk together, except they be agreed?”

—Amos 3:3

THE QUERY OF OUR TEXT

was addressed to the nation of Israel. In the preceding verse Jehovah declares to them, “You only have I known of all the families of the earth.” (Amos 3:2) As his own chosen people, God had been faithful to them, but they had not been faithful to him. In this prophecy he explains his purpose in chastising them, that it was to bring them into line with the covenant he had made with them. He wanted them to see the error of their ways and to make a more earnest effort to do his will, and it was his will that they walk with him. Yet, how could they walk with God unless they were in agreement with him—that is, unless they were fully committed to doing his will?

While in principle the thought of our text also applies to human relationships, God asked the question of those who professed to walk with him, the Creator and Heavenly Father, with the intent of pointing out to them that this could be true only if they were in full agreement with him and with his will. This was true of Israel, and it is equally true of the Lord’s people today. We can walk with God only if our hearts and lives are in agreement

with his will. God does not change his course in order to walk with us. Instead, we must learn the way he would have us walk and agree to tread that way if it is to be true of us that we are walking with God.

The Hebrew word translated “agreed” in our text is one that is used almost exclusively in the Old Testament to denote joint action in the doing of God’s will. In Numbers 10:3 it is translated “assemble,” and in this passage instructions are given to the effect that when two silver trumpets were blown all the children of Israel were to “assemble” at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. If but one trumpet was blown, then only the princes of Israel were to assemble. Failure to respond to the call of these silver trumpets would denote a lack of full obedience and to that extent, a failure to walk with God. In Nehemiah 6:10 this same Hebrew word is translated “meet” and the reference is to meeting together in the house of the Lord—the Temple in Jerusalem.

From the use of this word in our text and its other uses in the Old Testament applying to God’s people, it becomes clear that God wants his chosen ones to be in agreement with him as a group. His will for one is his will for all, and in the execution of his plan he calls for joint action. This has been true in God’s dealings with all of his people in every age. His chosen people, regardless of when they lived, are his coworkers in the great plan of human redemption and salvation. Those who have had his blessing are the ones who have been attentive to the “silver trumpets” of Truth that have reached their ears through Jesus, the prophets, apostles and others whom he has raised up from time to time.

ENOCH WALKED WITH GOD

In Genesis 5:22-24 we are told that Enoch “walked with God.” Not a great deal is said in the Scriptures concerning Enoch, but we are assured that he had faith in God and was faithful in bearing testimony to the knowledge that had been revealed to him. (Heb. 11:1-3,5) Jude informs us that Enoch prophesied concerning the coming of the Lord to judge the world, and that myriads of his saints would then be associated with him. (Jude 1:14) In the light of Truth subsequently revealed it is manifest that Enoch’s walk with God consisted of his faithfulness to the light then due to be understood. His heart was in agreement with God’s plan, and his lips bore testimony to that which he understood.

Genesis 6:9 declares that “Noah walked with God.” We know more about Noah’s life of faithfulness to God than we do about Enoch’s. He was a chosen servant of God to perform a very definite mission in connection with the ending of the “world that then was.” (II Pet. 3:6) It required great faith in God and utmost confidence in his instructions to perform the task assigned to him, but it was his faithfulness in obeying the divine will that constituted Noah’s walk with God.

Much was involved in Noah’s walk with God. He was called upon to be a “preacher of righteousness” and was commissioned to build an ark in preparation for the coming flood. (II Pet. 2:5; Gen. 6:13,14,17) Had he failed in either of these privileges of service he would not have been walking with God. However, he did not fail. He was in agreement with God’s will for him and did not

shirk the responsibilities involved in doing what he knew the Lord wanted him to do.—vs. 22

Abraham most assuredly walked with God, his great faith enabling him to believe and act upon the promises made to him. Being in agreement with God cost him a great deal, changing the whole course of his life. Abraham's faith in the Lord and his agreement with the divine will constituted him a "Friend of God." (James 2:23) One of the essential foundations of genuine friendship is agreement. Those who are out of harmony with each other cannot be wholehearted friends.

In Moses we have another noble example of one who walked with God because of being in agreement with him. As a young man Moses was interested in the promises of God and solicitous for the well-being of God's people, his fellow Israelites. He had more respect for the promises of God and what they implied for him and all his brethren than he did for the glory of Egypt. On one occasion he even manifested his interest in God's people by slaying one of their oppressors. However, more was required than his faith in God and his interest in the people of God to constitute walking with him.—Acts 7:21-24; Heb. 11:24-26; Exod. 2:11,12

Forty years after Moses fled from Egypt to escape the wrath of Pharaoh, God appeared to him at the burning bush and there gave him a commission of service. He was to return to Egypt, intercede before Pharaoh on behalf of his brethren, and be the great deliverer of the children of Israel. At first Moses' agreement with this plan of God for him was only in part. Doubtless he was glad to learn that God intended to deliver his chosen people

from Egyptian bondage, but he did not agree with God that he was the one who was qualified to take the lead in such a great undertaking, so he offered the excuse that he was not able to speak.—Acts 7:30-34; Exod. 3:10,11; 4:10-13

In response to Moses' objections God assured him of his cooperation by providing Aaron to be a mouthpiece. Finally, Moses agreed with the Lord and embarked zealously on the mission assigned to him. (Exod. 4:14-16) It was at this point that his walk with God began. Prior to this he was in the position of those who know something about God's promises, and have a measure of confidence in their author, but have not come into full agreement with him as coworkers in his plan. There is a definite time in the experience of every servant of God when the opportunity is given either to go forward and cooperate fully in the divine program, or else be left on the sidelines among those who are glad that God has a plan but do nothing special about it—they do not walk with God.

A CLOUD OF WITNESSES

We might continue and cite one after another of those ancient servants of God and note their faithful walk with him, a faithfulness based upon their being in agreement with him. The Apostle Paul speaks of them as a "cloud of witnesses," recalling their example of loyalty as an incentive for us likewise to walk by faith with God and to follow faithfully in the way he indicates to be his will for us. (Heb. 12:1) This may often mean, as it did in the case of Abraham, exercising implicit faith in the promises of God and following his

directions without knowing just where he may be leading.—Heb. 11:8

In order to walk with God at all it is essential that we be in agreement with him, and the most outstanding example we have of complete fidelity to God is Jesus. After telling us of the great “cloud of witnesses” with which we are surrounded, the apostle sets before us the perfect example of our Lord: “Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Heb. 12:2) Had Jesus not been fully in agreement with his Heavenly Father he would not have attained that high position “at the right hand of the throne of God.”

At the early age of twelve Jesus began to inquire regarding the way of the Lord: “Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?” he asked his parents when they found him in the temple. (Luke 2:49, *New King James Version*) Even then Jesus knew that he could not properly be about his Father’s business until he discovered what that business was. What he probably learned on this occasion was that under the requirements of the Law it would not be proper for him to enter upon the service of God until he was thirty years of age. (Num. 4:3-47) Hence, we read that when he “began to be about thirty years of age” he came to John at Jordan to be baptized.—Luke 3:21-23

THAT WHICH HAD BEEN WRITTEN

It was at Jordan that Jesus began his walk with God. There he entered into a covenant with his

Heavenly Father, agreeing to do all that had been written of him “in the volume of the book.” (Heb. 10:7-9) Jesus steadfastly adhered to the terms of this covenant. On one occasion it may have appeared that his own natural preference would have been to take another course, but even in this severe time of testing he set aside his own wishes, saying, “Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.”—Luke 22:42; Matt. 26:39

On many occasions during the self-sacrificing ministry of Jesus we find him emphasizing his agreement with God. “I and my Father are one,” he said. (John 10:30) What a beautiful statement of the resignation of his own will to that of his Father! They were one because he was doing his Father’s will, not because they had jointly decided what was to be done. Surely, if it was proper for Jesus, the “holy, harmless, undefiled” one, to agree with the divine will in order to walk with God, is it not likewise essential for his followers to commit their ways fully to the Lord if they are to have the assurance that they are walking with him?—Heb. 7:26; Gal. 3:27; I Pet. 2:21

This point cannot be emphasized too strongly. Many have been deceived by the argument that it does not matter so much how one serves the Lord, or what he believes, but the important thing is to be sincere in what we do and the way we live—that this is all the Lord requires. Sometimes even among those enlightened by the Truth of God’s Word there might be a tendency to adopt this easygoing viewpoint of what it means to walk with God.

Jesus did not have this viewpoint, however, nor did any of the apostles. Jesus had agreed to do all

that had been written of him, and thus being guided by the Word of God, he walked with the Father. Jesus knew that although uprightness of character was a vital part of a life dedicated to God, that alone did not constitute walking with him. He knew that God had a definite plan for the redemption and recovery of the human race. He knew that he had come into the world to perform a service in connection with that plan. He knew, therefore, that the only way to be pleasing to his God was to discover from the Word—the “volume of the book”—what that plan was and the manner in which he was to serve in connection with it. There were certain things which God wanted done, and certain ways to do them, and it would have been unthinkable for Jesus to undertake a service for his Father along any other line.

IN HIS STEPS

Few Christians would likely disagree with this thought with respect to Jesus. However, it is important to remember that as Christians we are called to follow in his steps. Hence this principle of learning and doing God’s will also applies to us. If we want to walk with God, we must walk as Jesus did in this respect as well as to emulate him along other lines. Jesus’ earthly ministry occurred at the end of the Jewish age and the beginning of the Gospel age. God’s will for his people therefore changed at that time in various ways, and Jesus was the first one to call attention to these changes.

Until then, for example, the keeping of the Jewish Law was an important consideration for all who would be pleasing to God. Jesus did not teach that

the Law had become unimportant, but now there was a higher service to be rendered. He introduced a new arrangement, not the prophetic New Covenant of Jeremiah 31:31, but a covenant which called for sacrifice. (Ps. 50:5) From that time forward, no one could walk with God simply by sincere efforts to live up to the requirements of Israel's Law Covenant.

The apostles recognized this and taught it. Many in the early church failed to grasp the full significance of this great change which had been introduced by Jesus, so there was considerable controversy over the matter. Not once did the apostles suggest that if any could not see this great Truth of the new age they should not be concerned about it, that they could walk with God just the same by continuing to strive to keep the old Law Covenant.

When Noah walked with God it was necessary to build an ark, but in Moses' day a tabernacle was needed. Thus, beginning with Pentecost those who would walk with God were given a different task than were those who served him during previous ages. As God's plan developed there was another work to be done. This meant that those in the Early Church who walked with God would walk together. Not only would they be in agreement with God, but they were also to be in harmony with one another. They walked together, they served together, they died together, being faithful to the terms of their covenant of sacrifice even unto death.—Acts 2:42-47; Heb. 10:24,25

ANOTHER CHANGE

Now, two thousand years later, we are near the end of the Gospel age which was introduced by Jesus. However, it is still God's will that his people

follow in the footsteps of the Master by laying down their lives sacrificially in his service. The great Truth of the redemption and of the kingdom is the same now as then, but certain details with respect to the service of God are indicated by the Scriptures as being revealed at the end of the age. One of these is the difference between “sowing” and “reaping.” Another is indicated by the fulfillment of various prophecies which have taken place during the “time of the end.”—Matt. 13:24-30,36-43; Dan. 12:1-4,8,9

In order to appreciate the importance of this additional understanding, it is first of all necessary to take into consideration some of the intervening events of the last two millennia. The Scriptures foretold that following the death of the apostles there would be a great falling away from the faith once delivered unto the saints, and that a great Antichrist system would develop. The Truth of God’s Word would be largely replaced by the errors of human tradition and then, at the end of the age, it would be restored, causing the people of God to rejoice.—II Thess. 2:1-3,7,8; I John 4:1-3; Acts 20:28-30

Those who today are rejoicing in the light of the Word of Truth have noted these developments in history, and they understand that in fulfillment of the Master’s promise, at the end of the age he would gird himself and serve his people with “meat in due season.” (Luke 12:37; Matt. 24:3,44-46) To use another metaphor, they have heard the silver trumpet of Truth and have recognized that thereby the Lord has called them to joint action in the doing of his will and in furthering the divine cause in the earth by proclaiming the “gospel of the kingdom.”—Matt. 24:14

Just as Pentecost was a marked development in the plan of God at the beginning of the age, so also here at the end of the age the promised “meat in due season” indicates certain important facets of God’s purposes are now due to be understood and fulfilled. As in the case of previous changes from one age to another in the plan of God, so now there is a period during which the work of one age is drawing toward completion, and preparation for the work of the next age is being manifest. All of this has an important bearing on what the Lord wants his people to be and to do at the present time.

First there is the completion of the harvest work to be done. This is the calling, selection and development of the last members of the church, Jesus’ body members, which must be completed before the work of the incoming age of Christ’s kingdom begins. In addition to this, and in full harmony with what lies ahead for the world of mankind, there is the work of proclaiming the coming kingdom and the glorious hope of man’s resurrection and restoration to all that was lost in Eden.—John 5:28,29; Luke 19:10; Acts 3:20,21

On the part of those who have heard and accepted these reassuring messages of Truth there has been a spontaneous agreement that it was from the Lord, and a wholehearted desire to walk with God in keeping therewith. These have all walked the same way and done the same things—those things which the Truth has revealed to them as being the will of their God. Some, perhaps, have become disgruntled and have chosen to go their own way, but it has always been thus. This was true in the

days of the Early Church, and it is still true today. However, it is just as true today as it was in the Early Church that those who are walking with God are also walking together. Together they have responded to the message of the Gospel, and in cooperation with one another they are telling the whole world the blessed tidings of the kingdom now so near.

One of the blessings of walking with God is that those who are thus enjoying his fellowship have no desire to condemn or judge those who are not walking with him. We can feel exactly as the Apostle Paul did concerning those of his day who chose to walk in another direction, that the “Lord knoweth them that are his.” (II Tim. 2:19) At the same time, we should not slacken our efforts to carry out the terms of our own consecration along the lines which the Scriptures indicate to be God’s will for us. Simply because others with whom we come in contact may not see matters as we do is no excuse for us to say or think that it does not make any difference.

Besides, the Lord’s people should always be in a hopeful attitude toward others, feeling that if they do not see God’s plans and purposes today, perhaps they will tomorrow, or if not then, they will come to a knowledge of these things in the Messianic kingdom. Such an attitude helps us to be patient toward even those who today may strongly disagree with us. Thus, to walk with God requires not only testifying to his Word, but also being tolerant of those who do not appreciate the message at the present time and who are, as a result, not walking with us as we walk with God.

Are we walking with God by doing what he has commissioned his people to do in these closing hours of the Gospel age? We often sing: “Send out thy light and truth, O Lord, Let them our leaders be.” However, the mere singing of these words is not enough. Two great truths are involved here. First, we are to make sure that we are following the leadership of the Word of Truth, which is the leadership of the Lord. Second, if we are doing this, we will also be laying down our lives in service and sacrifice by making known God’s Word to others, and as often as we have opportunity giving the whole world an opportunity to hear the glad tidings. Thus, we will be walking with God, and in the very nature of things we will be walking with one another.

Brethren, as we close out the year 2023, let us not for a moment compromise the Truth, nor allow ourselves to think that it makes little difference what we do about its service. It has been given to us as a sacred trust, and by it we have been called to serve the divine cause. Let us serve in the right way and let us serve together. Let us walk with God as did the prophets, our Lord Jesus, the apostles, and all who have learned to know and love the doing of God’s will. ■

“I take joy in doing your will, my God, for your instructions are written on my heart. I have not kept the good news of your justice hidden in my heart; I have talked about your faithfulness and saving power. I have told everyone ... of your unfailing love and faithfulness.”

—Psalm 40:8,10, New Living Translation

“We Have Seen His Star”

“Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.”
—Matthew 2:1,2

AS WE LOOK TO THE heavens at this time of the year when the Christian world celebrates the birth of the Savior, what comes to mind? Observing the stars on a clear night is a wonderful way to reflect upon the beauty of God’s creation, and of his great power. Perhaps we ponder as David did, “When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man,

that thou art mindful of him? ... O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!”—Ps. 8:3,4,9

At the proper time in the great work of creation, the Bible record states, “God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven; ... and it was so.” (Gen. 1:14,15) Stars have always been important

to every culture. They have been used in religious practices and for assistance in navigation and orientation. The sheer grandeur of the stars may be found in one definition, which we here quote: "A self-luminous body visible in the sky whose shape is usually a sphere and whose size may vary. A star may be as small as the earth or as large as 650 times greater in diameter than the Sun." Truly the verse, "One star differeth from another star in glory" applies here, although we have come to understand that there is also a spiritual meaning to these words. (I Cor. 15:41) When we realize from constant new discoveries the seeming boundless domain of galaxies and stars, we are awestruck and feel our own insignificance.

LIGHT BRINGS HOPE

The Sun is our most important star, bringing us warmth, light, and life. Life as we know it would not be able to exist without the Sun. It is a fitting comparison to the Son of God, who also is responsible for light and life coming to the world. Since the penalty of sin and death was pronounced, all have been born in sin and "shapen in iniquity." (Gen. 2:17; 3:19; Ps. 51:5) Thus we see that without the Sun, representing God's beloved only begotten Son, all would be lost. Mankind would be condemned to death, and have no hope of life in the future. "Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun." "The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." (Eccles. 11:7; Hab. 2:14) Looking at the promises of God gives us hope and joy that everything is working out according to

his wonderful divine arrangement. As a result, “every knee” shall bow and “every tongue” confess to the glory of God in due time.—Phil. 2:10,11

“WHAT MANNER OF CHILD?”

The question was posed concerning the promised birth of John the Baptist, “What manner of child shall this be!” (Luke 1:66) When John began his ministry as the forerunner of Jesus, the scripture further states, “The people were in expectation, and all men mused in their hearts of John, whether he were the Christ.” The question would be answered by John, when he said, “One mightier than I cometh.”—Luke 3:15,16

This fact had been proclaimed earlier in the promise to Mary by the angel Gabriel, that she would “bring forth a son, and shalt call his name Jesus.” (Luke 1:31) Upon his birth, an angel said to the shepherds of the field, “Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2:11) Thus, according to the flesh, our Lord Jesus was born through his mother, Mary, and therefore was the son, or direct descendant, of Israel’s King David. (Gal. 4:4; Luke 3:23-31, *Amplified Bible*) It is of importance to note that Israel’s Messiah and the Savior of the world would be born through the kingly line of the Jews.

A STAR IN THE EAST

Many in the Gentile world were also in expectation of a coming Messiah, as demonstrated by the visit of the wise men, or “Magi,” who came from the east. (Matt. 2:1) This designation originally referred to a class of priests among the Medes and Persians, who counseled their kings and who

practiced astrology. Ancient writers make frequent references to them, and the term was later applied to all eastern philosophers.

The Prophet Daniel associated with some of these non-Jewish wise men. He was once a prince in Persia, and he was well known to the disciples of Eastern religious philosophers such as Zoroaster. (Dan. 2:48; 5:11,12) Daniel's prophecies were made known to these Gentile wise men, as probably were the calculations by which he pointed to the time of the birth of the Messiah.—Dan. 9:24-27

A further belief was that this promised child would be born in Judea, gain dominion over the whole world, and establish a golden age upon the earth. (Mic. 5:2; Isa. 9:6,7) The miraculous star in the east which some of the Gentile wise men had been taught to look for, had finally made its appearance, and would guide them to the wonderful light of the world. "There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel."—Num. 24:17

The wise men had now come to Jerusalem, having traveled a far distance to observe firsthand what they thought was to be the culmination of their beliefs. They explained, when they arrived, that they had come to see "he that is born King of the Jews, for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him." (Matt. 2:2) When King Herod heard this, he was troubled and gathered together the chief priests and scribes of Israel, demanding that they tell him where Christ was to be born. They quoted the words of the prophet, "Thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, ... out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my

people Israel.” Herod then called the wise men and asked when the star had appeared to them, and said, “Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word,” under the guise of wanting to “worship him also.” —vss. 3-8; Mic. 5:2

When departing for Bethlehem, the wise men again saw the star and rejoiced, because it would lead them to the place “where the young child was.” Upon reaching the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary and “fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.” (Matt. 2:9-11) Gold here may be a fitting representation of obedience and consecration; frankincense an illustration of praise, devotion, and gratitude; and myrrh an exemplification of submission and a willingness to do service and to suffer for righteousness. These gifts also have special significance to us, and point out how we should present our hearts, our “treasure,” to the Lord. —Luke 12:34

The wise men showed their reverence to the mighty Jehovah of Israel, their faith in the divinely inspired prophecies, their zeal as Truth seekers, and their humility to inquire of the God of another nation. Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, and praise be to him, the true source “of every good gift and every perfect gift.” (James 1:17) We have the additional assurance of the glorious Truth associated with this star in the east, for as the Apostle Peter later stated, “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; ... until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts.”—II Pet. 1:19

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

We have now seen the humble beginning and earliest manifestation of this divinely appointed light. Jesus is indeed the light of the world, and the “Sun of righteousness.” (Mal. 4:2) “In him was life; and the life was the light of men. ... That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.” (John 1:4,9) Light here is used figuratively signifying hope, instruction, and knowledge. Throughout the Scriptures light is used to represent God, his Truth, servants, and their messages. To have fellowship with God, one must first gain a knowledge of him. No one can commune with the Creator without becoming acquainted in some measure with his Truth. With this comes an enlightened mind through the Holy Spirit that leads to an understanding of his plans and purposes. For those in harmony and fellowship with him, his plans and purposes become theirs.

When the clouds and darkness of error of this “present evil world” pass away, and the clear light of Truth shines brightly, “the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it.” (Gal. 1:4; Isa. 40:5) Jesus came not only to redeem man’s life, but also to enlighten him, and to restore as many as are willing to accept sonship, whether as heavenly sons or earthly sons.—I John 3:1,2; Rev. 21:3-7

Darkness represents error, superstition, and sin. The people that walk in darkness now are to see the great light one day when all of mankind will have eyes to see and ears to hear. At the present time, “gross darkness” covers the people, because Satan, “the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not.” (Isa. 9:2; 60:1-3; Matt. 4:16;

II Cor. 4:4) The exception to this is a very small group, the “church of the firstborn,” who as our Lord declared, are “not of the world.” (Heb. 12:23; John 17:16) The whole world is in the land “of the shadow of death,” and all of mankind “groaneth and travaileth in pain together,” waiting “for the manifestation of the sons of God.” (Jer. 2:6; Rom. 8:22,19) The world needs this great light of peace and joy, and we are assured that the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, as it did shine in the face of Jesus Christ our Lord, will in God’s due time, be revealed. The glorified Jesus tells us, “I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.” (Rev. 22:16) Indeed, he will shine forth for the blessing of mankind, to bring order out of the present chaos by dispelling the darkness and causing the knowledge of the glory of God to fill the whole earth.—Isa. 11:9; Hab. 2:14

BEING LIGHT BEARERS

The true light now shines in the hearts of the faithful footstep followers of Jesus. These have their paths illuminated by the Heavenly Father through his dear Son. We have an assurance of this: “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.” (Ps. 119:105) Concerning God’s leadings of his people, we read, “Blessed are your eyes, for they see.” (Matt. 13:16) This is a reference to having eyes of faith and understanding. Is this light of God’s Truth now shining in our heart? If it is there, it should shine out upon those with whom we come in contact during the daily experiences of life. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father

which is in heaven.” (Matt. 5:16) This light that comes to us from the Heavenly Father is not directly seen, but is more of a reflective type. “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. ... walk in the light, as he is in the light.”—I John 1:5,7

The true church is invited to become associated with Christ as light bearers. If faithful in permitting their light to shine now, they will be joined with him to shine forth as the “Sun of righteousness” in the Messianic kingdom. The Apostle Paul admonishes all such, “Now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light.” (Eph. 5:8) This refers to a transfer from darkness to light. It is a gradual process which involves the mind and which leads finally to perfection in the first resurrection. (Rev. 20:6) It includes a transformation of character on the part of the believer: “Be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” (Rom. 12:2) By this process, we can lift up the light of Truth so that “old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.” (II Cor. 5:17) How thankful we should be that we are able to walk in the light of understanding and in harmony with God’s plans and purposes. This new way of life, though “narrow” and difficult, leads to everlasting life for the “called, and chosen, and faithful.”—Matt. 7:14; Rev. 17:14

PROMISED GLORY

The nearest star to planet Earth and hence, the most important one to mankind, is the Sun. The Scriptures tell us that the church as a whole shall “shine forth as the sun.” (Matt. 13:43) As already

noted, our Lord Jesus is the “Sun of Righteousness,” and his bride will be with him when righteousness is established in the earth, shining forth and sharing in his glory. Daniel prophesied, “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.” (Dan. 12:3) Jesus’ worthiness of such a high position was manifest in his resurrection and exaltation as “Christ the firstfruits,” by the Father’s power. (I Cor. 15:20,23) He was the first to experience a resurrection in the full sense, to perfection and everlasting life. We also have the promise of a similar resurrection to life through Christ and a reward in heaven.—John 6:40; 11:25; Col. 3:23,24; Luke 6:23

Since Jesus was the direct creation of God, it is fitting that he has the character likeness of his Father, being “full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14) In proportion as we receive the Spirit of the Lord, we gradually become a copy of God’s dear Son, and a copy of the Father, and have the promise that we shall awake in his “likeness.” (Ps. 17:15) We are to seek to do only the will of the Heavenly Father, to set our affections on heavenly things and cast away our desires for earthly things. (Col. 3:1-5) This was the attitude of Jesus, and Apostle Paul tells us, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 2:5) This is why the Master told his followers to “lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.” (Matt. 6:20) A treasure is something that we take special pleasure in and is based on our most cherished thoughts, plans, and hopes. How much more precious should the treasure of a future heavenly reward be to those who are “called according to his purpose.”—Rom. 8:28

THE GREAT HEAVENLY KING

No treasure will be of more importance to the world of mankind than the promise made to them concerning the process by which the blessing and release of all people from the curse of sin and death will be accomplished. "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end."—Isa. 9:6,7

The world will rejoice at the inauguration of Christ's kingdom. We read, "Thou hast multiplied the nation, thou hast increased its joy." (Isa. 9:3, *Revised Standard Version*) This "nation" is the world of mankind under the new administration of the millennial kingdom. At that time, the kingdoms of this present world order will have passed away, having been replaced by what the Apostle Peter describes as "a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." (II Pet. 3:10,13) The people shall 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."—Isa. 2:3

These promises began to be set in motion with the birth of Jesus as the babe born in Bethlehem. He is then presented as God's Son, given on our behalf. His sacrifice began at Jordan and culminated at Calvary. Because of his obedience unto death, "God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven,

and things in earth, and things under the earth.” (Phil. 2:5,7-10) In God’s loving arrangement, “every knee” will include all those who sleep in death, and who will be raised from the dead and given an opportunity for a restored perfect life on earth.

“The government shall be upon his shoulder,” Isaiah prophesied. This is figurative of the authority, glory, and honor that shall be upon Christ Jesus. It is given to him from the Father through his great law of love. A change in dispensation will be ushered in through the Father’s promised “times of restitution of all things.” (Acts 3:20,21) Christ will receive the honor, glory, and dominion that was exclusively promised to him. He shall then fulfill all of the things predicted by God through his holy prophets concerning the restoration of mankind back to human perfection.

When Christ assumes the control of earth’s affairs his character of love and justice will be fully evident. This assures us that his reign will be a time of blessing, peace and joy to all who love righteousness and truth. His name and titles spoken of by Isaiah, representing the gracious things of which he is, will then be brought to the attention of all mankind. He will be “Wonderful,” beyond the power of human comprehension. He will be the “Counsellor,” whose instructions in righteousness will be satisfactory and respected by all among mankind who seek a return to divine favor and a full restoration of what was lost.
—Luke 19:10

He shall be called, “The mighty God” or mighty one, and on him shall rest all of the power and authority of God his Father. He is called the “everlasting Father”—a father because he will be the

life-giver to all who will accept the just and righteous terms of the New Covenant, which was sealed by his own precious blood.—Jer. 31:31-34

Finally, Christ shall be known as the “Prince of Peace.” Although his empire will begin by a smiting of the nations with a symbolic “rod of iron,” everything will be done in the interest of bringing peace, security and blessings to all of mankind. His entire reign will further insure the complete establishment of everlasting peace to all. His government, Isaiah states, will increase and be so successful that it will extend over all nations and families of the earth.—Ps. 2:6-9; Rev. 2:26-28; Isa. 9:7

According to God’s word through Isaiah, this kingdom will be established upon the throne of David. As David sat upon the throne of God’s kingdom, the greater than David, the Messiah, will reign since he has been given the right to do so because of his faithfulness. He will be the representative of the Father for all eternity and the heir of all of the gracious promises of God’s Word. “The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this,” Isaiah concludes. This is truly a wonderful expression of God’s love, for it was love that motivated the Father to give his only begotten Son. It will bring great joy to the Father to restore man to his original condition of perfection which he enjoyed in Eden.—John 3:16,17; Gen. 1:27-31

During the period of creation, God made a “greater light to rule the day,” and a “lesser light to rule the night.” (Gen. 1:16) The “lesser light” well represents the arrangement of the old Law Covenant which God made with Israel through their priests, kings and prophets. This was only temporary, occurring

during earth's present nighttime of sin, but pointed forward to a much better day. The "greater light" points forward to Christ and his church, who will dispel all darkness in the morning of the grand Millennial Day.

At the present time, only those who have accepted Christ, who truly believe on him and who have entered into a full consecration to God to follow in his footsteps, can understand the full import of the wise men's words, "we have seen his star." Let us, then, desire to continue pressing "toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." (Phil. 3:14) May the light of divine truth illuminate our way and lead us in the path of righteousness, until one day, if faithful to him, we shall behold "the glory of the LORD."—Isa. 40:5 ■



WEEKLY PRAYER MEETING TEXTS

DECEMBER 7—"When he was reviled, he reviled not again."—I Peter 2:23 (Z. '01-298 Hymn 335)

DECEMBER 14—"Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy."—Matthew 5:7 (Z. '01-332, '00-70 Hymn 247A)

DECEMBER 21—"Who is worthy?"—Revelation 5:2 (Z. '02-333 Hymn 338)

DECEMBER 28—"He shall drink of the brook in the way: therefore shall he lift up the head."—Psalm 110:7 (Z. '02-14 Hymn 116)

The Ministry of Sorrow

*“Out of the depths
have I cried unto
thee, O LORD.”*

*“When he giveth
quietness, who then
can make trouble?”*

—Psalm 130:1;

Job 34:29

THE LIFE OF EVERY HUMAN being has its lights and shadows, its heights of joy and its depths of sorrow. These make up a large part of mankind's experience. The tapestry of character which flows from the active loom of life will be

fine and beautiful or coarse and homely, according to the skill and carefulness with which the individual weaves into it the threads of experience. In every life, in the present reign of sin and evil, the somber shades often predominate. To such an extent is this true that the Word of God aptly describes the human family in their present condition as a groaning creation. “The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together,” says the apostle. The children of God are no exception to this condition, for we also “groan within ourselves,” awaiting with expectation our deliverance.—Rom. 8:22,23

While we are waiting for our deliverance, however, the daily experiences of life have a most important

mission to us, and the manner in which we receive them should be a subject of deepest concern. According to the use we make of them, each day's prosperity or its adversity and trial bear to us a blessing or a setback. Those experiences which we are accustomed to regard as prosperous often have in them subtle dangers. If wealth increases, friends multiply, or a large measure of earthly joy comes to us, how almost imperceptibly the heart may find its satisfaction in the things of this earth! Yet when the keen edge of sorrow or disappointment is felt, when riches or health fail, when friends forsake, and enemies take up a reproach against us, the natural tendency can often be towards despondency and despair.

Here is a very important part of the great warfare of our life as a Christian. We must fight the tendencies of our old nature and must confidently claim and expect the victory, but only in the strength of the great Captain of our salvation. (Heb. 2:9-11) We must not yield to the alluring influences of favorable outward conditions, neither must we sink beneath the weight of trials and adversity. We must not permit any experience in life, however difficult and painful, to sour and harden us or make us bitter, morose or unloving. Nor may we allow pride or love of show, or self-righteousness, to feed upon the temporal blessings which the Lord in his loving providence has given us to prove our faithfulness as a steward.—I Cor. 4:2; I Pet. 4:10

DEPTHS OF SORROW LEAD TO HEIGHTS OF JOY

Sorrows and griefs may, and perhaps often will, come in like a flood, but the Heavenly Father will be our strength in every experience which he permits.

The soul that has never known the experience of distress and trouble has never yet learned the joy and inestimable value of the Lord's love and helpfulness. It is in seasons of overwhelming sorrow and grief that we draw nearest to God and he draws especially near to us. (James 4:8) So the psalmist found it, when in his deep affliction he cried to God, saying, "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD. Lord, hear my voice; let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications." (Ps. 130:1,2) Feeling his own weakness and shortcomings, longing for full deliverance from every imperfection, and prophesying of the bountiful provisions of God's plan of salvation through Christ, he adds, "If thou, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities [imputing them to us], O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared [reverenced]."—vss. 3,4

How precious are such assurances when the soul is painfully conscious of its infirmities, of its utter inability to fully measure up to the perfect law of righteousness. How blessed it is to know that when our hearts are loyal and true, our God does not mark against us the unavoidable blemishes of our earthen vessel! If we come daily to him for cleansing, through the merits of our Redeemer, our failures are not imputed to us, but freely forgiven and washed away. (Rom. 4:6-8) The perfect righteousness of our Savior is our glorious dress, arrayed in which we may come to God with humble boldness, courage—even into the presence of the great Jehovah.—Ps. 132:9,16; Isa. 61:10

If thus God fully receives us and communes with us as his children, we should so regard one another.

We should not consider and charge against one another the infirmities of the flesh, which each humbly confesses, and which they, like us, are earnestly endeavoring to overcome by the grace of God to the best of their ability. To each one of the Lord's true children the words of the apostle apply: "If God is for us, who shall be against us? ... Who shall bring an accusation against the chosen ones of God? God, who declareth righteous? Who is he that condemneth? Christ Jesus who died?" (Rom. 8:31,33,34, *Rotherham Emphasized Bible*) The case is different, however, when the infirmities of the flesh are cultivated, indulged in without proper effort to correct them, and perhaps even justified in order that the faults may be continued. Then, indeed, they are charged against us. If we do not speedily "judge ourselves" and take decisive measures to correct them, the Lord will himself judge and chasten us. —I Cor. 11:31,32

In the midst of the cares, perplexities and difficulties that come to the children of God, we are to trust him fully, and to possess our souls in peace and patience. (Luke 21:19) How necessary is our patient waiting on the Lord and for his way to be revealed to us. The psalmist says, "I wait for the LORD, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning." (Ps. 130:5,6) In every experience of sorrow and distress, and when the strain of vexations and wounds that make the heart faint threaten to overwhelm the spirit, let us remember that God knows, and loves, and cares. His ministering angels are ever near us, and no trial will be permitted to be too severe. (Matt. 18:10; Heb. 1:14;

I Cor. 10:13) Our dear Master also is standing by the crucible, and the furnace heat will never be permitted to grow so intense that the precious gold of our characters shall be destroyed, or even injured. He loves us too much to permit any needless sorrow or suffering.

THE REWARD OF PATIENT WAITING

“Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday. Rest in the LORD, and wait patiently for him.” (Ps. 37:5-7) We must not be disappointed and allow our faith to falter when the test of patient endurance is applied, while the outward peace and quietness which we crave seems to tarry long. Our Father has not forgotten us when the answer to our prayers seems to be delayed. Outward peace and calm are not always the conditions best suited to our needs as Christians. Thus we would not desire conditions in which the precious fruits of the Spirit would not grow and develop in us. Therefore, “Think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice.” (I Pet. 4:12,13) He who numbers the very hairs of our heads is never indifferent to the sufferings and needs of his weakest and humblest child. How sweet is the realization of such loving, abiding care! “When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble?”—Matt. 10:29-31; Job 34:29

Faithful Christians have in every sorrow and grief a blessed consolation of which the world is wholly in ignorance. None but the child of God can know

it. What is this consolation? Those who have never enlisted under the banner of the cross of Christ; who have never put themselves wholly into the hands of the Lord to be molded and fashioned into his glorious likeness; who have never made an earnest effort to stem the tide of the tendencies of the fallen nature; who have never contended earnestly for truth and righteousness in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation; such cannot know of this divine consolation. It is the precious balm for wounded spirits on the battlefield of life. It is the stimulating, refreshing drink for fainting souls, hard pressed by the relentless foe. It is the soothing touch of a loving hand upon the fevered brow of the noble contender for truth and godliness. It is the gentle whisper of hope and love and courage when heart and flesh are almost failing. This is divine consolation, the only consolation that has in it any virtue of healing or refreshment. (II Cor. 1:3-7; II Thess. 2:16,17) It is reserved alone for those noble souls who are faithfully serving the King of kings, while those who drift with the current of the world and the downward tendencies of the fleshly nature can never have an intimation of its sweetness.

How loving and tender is our God, and how wise and strong! His promises have never failed those who have put their trust in him. We may feel that our efforts to live righteously and to do good are very unproductive, that the opposition around us is very strong. However, it is when we are weak, when we realize our own insufficiency, that we may be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. (Eph. 6:10) It is then that we may realize that his strength is made perfect in our weakness. (II Cor. 12:9,10)

The fact that we are weak and often fall short does not separate us from the love and power of our God. "He knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust." (Ps. 103:14) Let us then more and more lay hold of this strength of the Lord, that we may courageously pursue our course in the narrow way of difficulty and trial. Valuable and precious indeed to the saint of God is the ministry of pain and sorrow.

THE PATIENCE OF JOB

The saints of every age have learned the blessing and value of afflictions. The psalmist wrote, "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word." "It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes." (Ps. 119:67,71) God's faithful servant Job suffered almost overwhelming troubles, but the Lord brought him to a much greater understanding when his trials had accomplished their designed effect. He was proven and strengthened by his sore experiences. Few if any of us could suffer more. He suffered the loss of all his property; then of all his children, whom he loved; then of the love and loyalty of his wife; and finally, he was smitten with sore disease from head to foot. To crown all this, three of his friends came to see him on hearing of his great trials. Instead of being true comforters, they added to his sorrows by insisting that his own sins must have been the cause of all these disasters; that his experiences must be punishments from the Lord because of unfaithfulness on his part. Surely Job was afflicted!—See Job, chapters 1,2,4,5,8,11

Did Job lose his faith in God? Hear him: "The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed

be the name of the LORD.” “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.” (Job 1:21; 13:15) Job was indeed much cast down, but he maintained his integrity of character and his faith in the Lord through it all. He did not charge God with injustice, and God did not desert his faithful servant. He reproved his accusers and required them to offer sacrifice, and he instructed Job to pray for them, that their trespasses might be overlooked. In the end, he was blessed more abundantly than ever before. (Job 42:7-17) Job is a great illustration of the human family, of the troubles of their fallen condition and of their final restoration to all that was lost in Adam, with the blessings of added experiences to make them wise. How faithful is the Lord in all his dealings! Truly his children should never doubt his love.

PRECIOUS FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

It is when continued trust in the Lord and his many responsive providences in our lives have ripened into precious personal acquaintance and intimacy that we learn to delight in him. It is when prayer brings recognized answers of peace; when divine love and care have been clearly seen in the guidance of our way; it is then that we can recognize the abiding presence with us of the Father and his dear Son. Thus we learn that however dark may be our way; however severe may be the storm that rages about us; the thought of divine protection is ever with us. As such, we are never in despair. Though cast down, we are not destroyed. Though persecuted, we are never forsaken. We know our Father's hand is ever at the helm, that his love and care are sure and unfailing.—II Cor. 4:8-10

Those who have come into full heart sympathy with God's will and way have learned to see him as the fountain of all goodness and truth and blessing. To them he is the one altogether lovely. His law is their delight. (Song of Sol. 5:16; Ps. 119:77,174) His friendship and love are their very life. When the heart has become thus centered in God, it is the most natural impulse to commit its way unto him. These can truly sing the words of the hymn:

“So on I go, not knowing, I would not if I might;
I'd rather walk in the dark with God, Than go
alone in the light;

I'd rather walk by the faith with Him, Than go
alone by sight.”

Surely these have the desires of their heart. No good thing shall be withheld from them, and their fervent prayers shall avail much. (Ps. 84:11; James 5:16) In the Lord's good time their righteousness, however much it may be misunderstood and misrepresented now, shall be brought forth as the light—clear, cloudless and made manifest. The justice and righteousness of their course and of their hearts shall shine as the noonday. (Ps. 37:6) Even while we remain here as aliens and foreigners in this present world, we shall be fed and nourished, temporally and spiritually, and shall rejoice in the “house of our pilgrimage.” (Ps. 119:54) Precious indeed are the promises of God, and to the praise of his abounding grace—his faithful ones of the past and the present all bearing ample testimony to their fulfillment. ■

“The ransomed of the LORD shall return. ... They will find gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.”—Isa. 35:10, NASB

“I Wish I Knew What To Do!”

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CHICAGO CONVENTION, December 30,31—IN PERSON AND BROADCAST ONLINE—Doubletree by Hilton, 3003 Corporate West Drive, Lisle, IL 60532. Contact T. Blackwell. Email: secretary@chicagobible.org, or contact M. Neiman. Phone: (630) 740-0900

PHOENIX CONVENTION, January 13,14—IN PERSON AND BROADCAST ONLINE—Fountain Hills Community Center, 13001 N La Montana Drive, Fountain Hills, AZ 85268. Contact A. Mengos. Email: samengos@yahoo.com

AUSTRALIAN CONVENTION, January 26-28—BROADCAST ONLINE ONLY—Contact R. Charlton. Email: ranscharlton@bigpond.com

SACRAMENTO CONVENTION, February 16-18—IN PERSON AND BROADCAST ONLINE—Holiday Inn Express, 2224 Auburn Boulevard, Sacramento, CA 95821. Phone: (916)923-1100. Contact J. Freer. Phone: (916)879-4655 or Email: shootingln@aol.com

FLORIDA CONVENTION, March 2-4—IN PERSON AND BROADCAST ONLINE—Winter Park Lodge, 1495 Grand Road, Winter Park, FL 32792. Contact J. Slavich. Phone: (407)494-8421 or Email: JohnSlavich@gmail.com

HIGHLAND PARK CONVENTION, March 16—BROADCAST ONLINE ONLY—Contact S. Koterba.

Phone: (917) 554-2348 or Email: sandykoterba@gmail.com

ALBUQUERQUE CONVENTION, March 29-31—IN PERSON AND BROADCAST ONLINE—Sheraton Albuquerque Airport Hotel, 2910 Yale Boulevard SE, Albuquerque, NM 87106. Contact S. Thomassen. Phone: (505) 268-8170 or Email: srbt@juno.com

METRO DETROIT CONVENTION, May 4,5—IN PERSON AND BROADCAST ONLINE—Milford Senior Center, 1050 Atlantic Street, Milford Charter Twp., MI 48381. Contact B. Johnson. Phone: (248) 343-7636 or Email: beckystevej@aol.com

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 Francisz Knop, Włoszakowicy, Poland—
October 26. Age, 83

Sister Nina Mlynek, Sion, Switzerland—October 23.
Brother Herkules Gonos, Athens, Greece—October
29. Age, 98

Sister Kazimiera Sękala, Chrzanów, Poland—October
30. Age, 96

Brother Jan Szumski, Oleszycy, Poland—November 3.
Age, 98

Brother Daniel Dudziński, Poznań, Poland—November
4. Age, 91

Brother Józef Konecki, Łódz, Poland—November 5.
Age, 82

Sister Olive Keith, Ithaca, NY—November 14. Age, 91

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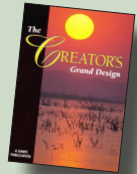


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To us the Scriptures clearly teach . . .

THAT THE CHURCH IS “THE TEMPLE” OF THE LIVING GOD

—peculiarly “his workmanship”; that its construction has been in progress throughout the Gospel Age—ever since Christ became the world’s Redeemer and the chief “corner stone” of this temple, through which, when finished, God’s blessings shall come “to all people”, and they find access to him.—I Cor. 3:16,17; Eph. 2:20-22; Gen. 28:14; Gal. 3:29

THAT MEANTIME THE CHISELING, SHAPING AND POLISHING

of consecrated believers in Christ’s atonement for sin progresses, and when the last of these “living stones,” “elect and precious,” shall have been made ready, the great Master Workman will bring all together in the first resurrection; and the temple shall be filled with his glory, and be the meeting place between God and men throughout the Millennium.—Rev. 15:5-8

THAT THE BASIS OF HOPE FOR THE CHURCH AND THE WORLD

lies in the fact that Jesus Christ, by the grace of God, tasted death for every man, “a ransom for all,” and will be “the true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world,” “in due time.”—Heb. 2:9; John 1:9; I Tim. 2:5,6

THAT THE HOPE OF THE CHURCH

is that she may be like her Lord, “see him as he is,” be a “partaker of the divine nature,” and share his glory as his joint-heir.—I John 3:2; John 17:24; Rom. 8:17; II Pet.1:4

THAT THE PRESENT MISSION OF THE CHURCH

is the perfecting of the saints for the future work of service; to develop in herself every grace; to be God’s witness to the world; and to prepare to be the kings and priests in the next age.—Eph. 4:12; Matt. 24:14; Rev. 1:6, 20:6

THAT THE HOPE FOR THE WORLD

lies in the blessings of knowledge and opportunity to be brought to all by Christ’s millennial kingdom—the restitution of all that was lost in Adam, to all the willing and obedient, at the hands of their Redeemer and his glorified church—when all the willfully wicked will be destroyed.—Acts 3:19-23; Isa. 35

