

SELECTED
VERSE BY VERSE
COMMENTARIES

ON THE
SCRIPTURES

BY
THE PASTORAL BIBLE INSTITUTE

Dinah

Tragedy at Shechem

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

Verse by verse study in Genesis 34

Because Jewish genealogies followed the male line of descent, the female children of a family were often not recorded. The mention of Dinah, the daughter of Jacob and Leah, is an exception to this rule and does not imply that Jacob did not have other daughters by either of his wives or their handmaids.

The narrative itself is a rather unseemly one. It is a tale of intrigue and violence that does no credit to the house of Jacob. Our theme text may be suggestive of the thought that the account was inserted to explain the omission of land inheritance to the tribes of Simeon and Levi.

Illegitimate Love -- Verses 1 through 4

And Dinah the daughter of Leah, which she bare unto Jacob, went out to see the daughters of the land. And when Shechem the son of Hamor the Hivite, prince of the country, saw her, he took her, and lay with her, and defiled her. And his soul clave unto Dinah the daughter of Jacob, and he loved the damsel, and spake kindly unto the damsel. And Shechem spake unto his father Hamor, saying, Get me this damsel to wife.

Leah, the mother of Dinah, gave birth to her after producing her sixth son, Zebulun (Genesis 30:20,21). She was probably between 13 and 16 at the time of this incident. Jacob and his family had been living in the area of Shechem for some eleven years by this time. Although the command to be separate from the nations around them was not given until the days of Moses (1 Kings 8:53), nevertheless the command of circumcision (Genesis 17:11) implied this restriction.

The Hivites were of Canaanite descent (Genesis 10:17), and therefore one of the nations which were to be driven from the land. Though they were not listed among the ten tribes to be dispossessed by Israel in Genesis 15:19-21, the fact that they were from Canaan implied their inclusion in this list. In any case, they are mentioned in the list of tribes to be conquered west of the Jordan river (Joshua 3:10).

It should be noted that Shechem did not seek out Dinah. She went, of her own volition, from the family compound out to view "the daughters of the land." Josephus writes,

"Now as the Shechemites were keeping a festival Dinah, who was the only daughter of Jacob, went into the city to see the finery of the women of that country" (Ant., 1, 21, 1). If true, the implication is that Dinah wanted to observe, and probably copy, the custom of her neighbors. This is a lesson for all true followers of God. Any attempt to observe and perhaps copy the customs of the land leads the true Christian into danger. "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Romans 12:2). Samuel Butler has phrased it well, "The reasonable man adapts himself to the world, but the unreasonable man tries to adapt the world to him -- therefore all progress depends upon the unreasonable man."

Although Shechem greatly erred in his sexual advances on Dinah, the narrative indicates that he developed a true affection for her. He shows honorable intentions in desiring to form a true marriage with her. God's law forbidding marriages with Gentiles had not yet been given and, as far as we know, her twelve brothers married Gentile wives as well. The Hebrew verb translated "clave" is the same used in Genesis 2:24, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh." It describes that true relationship which a husband and wife should properly feel for each other, desiring to be united to each other spiritually, mentally, and emotionally.

Reactions -- Verses 5 through 7

And Jacob heard that he had defiled Dinah his daughter: now his sons were with his cattle in the field: and Jacob held his peace until they were come. And Hamor the father of Shechem went out unto Jacob to commune with him. And the sons of Jacob came out of the field when they heard it: and the men were grieved, and they were very wroth, because he had wrought folly in Israel in lying with Jacob's daughter; which thing ought not to be done.

There is a marked contrast between Jacob's reaction and that of his sons. While their grief found vent in anger, Jacob held his peace. Maturity has the patience to consider a matter well before rashly planning revenge in a fit of anger.

The mention of "the sons of Jacob" without singling out Simeon and Levi suggests that all of the sons, or at least the majority of them, were involved with the plot for vengeance. In a similar vein, we find all of the brothers plotting against Joseph, though there were voices, such as Reuben's, which argued for restraint. Joseph's later choice of Simeon (Genesis 42:24) to be the one held prisoner suggests that he might have been the ringleader in the plot to kill Joseph (Genesis 37:20).

An interesting sidelight is that verse 7 is the first biblical reference to Israel as the name of a tribe, rather than just a personal name for Jacob. It indicates that it was only a few years after Jacob was renamed Israel (Genesis 32:28) that the newly-acquired name was taken as the tribal title. This also indicates that the brothers did not take the rape of Dinah as a personal sin against her, but one against the entire tribe.

The Marriage Proposal -- Verses 8 to 12

And Hamor communed with them, saying, The soul of my son Shechem longeth for your daughter: I pray you give her him to wife. And make ye marriages with us, and give your daughters unto us, and take our daughters unto you. And ye shall dwell with us: and the land shall be before you; dwell and trade ye therein, and get you possessions therein. And Shechem said unto her father and unto her brethren, Let me find grace in your eyes, and what ye shall say unto me I will give. Ask me never so much dowry and gift, and I will give according as ye shall say unto me: but give me the damsel to wife.

Following the custom of that time, Hamor, the father of Shechem, sought to arrange the marriage. However, breaking with custom, Hamor makes the proposition to Dinah's brothers instead of to Jacob, her father. This is in marked contrast with verse six where he confesses the transgression of his son directly to Jacob. It was this decision that led to the tragedy which would follow. Anger, even righteous indignation, forms a poor base for rational decisions to reconcile crises.

Hamor's proposition contained five enticements: 1) intermingling of the two tribes through marital alliances; 2) a treaty of peaceful co-existence; 3) mutual trade agreements; 4) rights of land possession in his territory; and 5) a dowry of the amount to be set by Dinah's family.

Peaceful co-existence was already a reality and had been for many years. The city of Shechem was Abraham's first dwelling place in Canaan (Genesis 12:6). Jacob had probably lived here for nearly eleven years before the incident with Dinah. There is no indication of animosity between the two clans. Rights of ownership were also a reality. Jacob had already purchased a plot of ground from Hamor for his homestead and erected an altar dedicated to "El-elohe-israel," meaning The Lord, the God of Israel (Genesis 33:19,20). There is no conflict between this text and that in Acts 7:16 which states that it was Abraham who made the purchase. In that New Testament text, the name Abraham is used, as is that of Hamor, in an idiomatic sense, meaning the clan or tribe, of Abraham and Hamor (United Bible Societies Handbook on Acts 7:16). The recognition of the validity of this purchase is attested by the fact that it is uncontested hundreds of years later when the bones of Joseph are laid to rest in a tomb at this site (Joshua 24:32).

Mutual trade agreements were a rich incentive. The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia has this to say about the location of the city of Shechem: "It lay in the pass which cuts through Mts. Ephraim, Ebal and Gerizim, guarding it on the North and South respectively. Along this line runs the great road which from time immemorial has formed the easiest and the quickest means of communication between the East of the Jordan and the sea. It must have been a place of strength from antiquity." It must have therefore been an important stop for the great trade caravans between the Orient and both the Mediterranean seaports and prosperous Egypt.

The Hebrew words *mohar* (Strong's 4119, dowry) and *mattah* (Strong's 4976, gift) are distinct. The gift was given to the bride while the dowry was given to the family. The

dowry may have been related to the later custom to purchase wives (Exodus 22:16,17). In any case, the offer of Hamor was without limitation and to be determined by the family. He was not bargaining for the lowest price.

A Deceitful Answer -- Verses 13 through 17

And the sons of Jacob answered Shechem and Hamor his father deceitfully, and said, because he had defiled Dinah their sister: And they said unto them, We cannot do this thing, to give our sister to one that is uncircumcised; for that were a reproach unto us: But in this will we consent unto you: If ye will be as we be, that every male of you be circumcised; Then will we give our daughters unto you, and we will take your daughters to us, and we will dwell with you, and we will become one people. But if ye will not hearken unto us, to be circumcised; then will we take our daughter, and we will be gone.

As a personal decision, circumcision may have been merely a hygienic process; but as a required rite, it was a token of covenant relationship with God (Genesis 17:10,11). A resident alien in Israel was circumcised and thus received the benefits of Hebrew citizenship (Exodus 12:48). Circumcision was practiced in Egypt before it became a Jewish ritual (Microsoft Toolworks Encyclopedia). "Apparently circumcision in the case of the Hebrews was prohibited during the Egyptian period -- circumcision being a distinctive mark of the ruling race" (International Standard Bible Encyclopedia). However, in the Bible it is treated in the Hebrew sense of a covenant relationship with God. In this narrative the requirement for circumcision was a tactic of deception to place the dwellers of Shechem in a weakened physical condition and thus easier to conquer in battle.

The insistence on the outward symbol of circumcision finds an analogy in the New Testament where the Judaizers in the newly-founded Christian church insisted on circumcision as a pre-condition for acceptance of the Gentiles into their midst. As forced circumcision weakened the Shechemites, so forced circumcision spiritually weakened the faith of the Gentiles in the early church, placing outward form above true conversion and circumcision of the heart.

The threat of the brothers to remove themselves from the land if the situation was not resolved, proved to be a true threat, for in the beginning of the next chapter we see God directing the family to move from Shechem to the area of Bethel, some 19 miles to the south.

Acceptance of the Terms -- Verses 18 to 23

And their words pleased Hamor, and Shechem Hamor's son. And the young man deferred not to do the thing, because he had delight in Jacob's daughter: and he was more honorable than all the house of his father. And Hamor and Shechem his son came unto the gate of their city, and communed with the men of their city, saying, These men are peaceable with us; therefore let them dwell in the land, and trade therein; for the land, behold, it is large enough for them; let us take their daughters to us for wives, and let us

give them our daughters. Only herein will the men consent unto us for to dwell with us, to be one people, if every male among us be circumcised, as they are circumcised. Shall not their cattle and their substance and every beast of theirs be ours? only let us consent unto them, and they will dwell with us.

The terms are acceptable to Shechem because "he was more honorable than all the house of his father." Now the problem remained to convince his clan members to accept these terms. He summons the men to the gate, where city decisions were made, and suggests four distinct advantages to the alliance. First, there would be a pact of peace between the traders of Shechem and the herdsman of Israel; second, it would assure a profitable trade arrangement; third, it would provide a larger pool for the selection of marital mates; and, finally, he suggests that in time the trade arrangements would cause the resources of Israel to fall into the hands of the Shechemites.

While the final bait was debatable, such an offer would make it more palatable for the male residents of the city to submit to the painful rites of adult circumcision. The argument is reminiscent of the one Haman made to King Ahasuerus in order to secure permission to kill all the Jews. After listing his logical arguments, he offers the prospect of financial enrichment. "If it please the king, let it be written that they may be destroyed: and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the hands of those that have the charge of the business, to bring it into the king's treasuries" (Esther 3:9).

Few temptations are as powerful as financial ones. One of the strongest desires of mankind is the feeling of security and power which comes from the possession of great wealth. Christians face this in the temptations to involve themselves with the affairs of business more than in the affairs of God. Yet Jesus' advice was simple and to the point, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24; Luke 16:13). Truly, "the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil" (1 Timothy 6:10, ASV).

Treachery -- Verses 24 to 29

And unto Hamor and unto Shechem his son hearkened all that went out of the gate of his city; and every male was circumcised, all that went out of the gate of his city. And it came to pass on the third day, when they were sore, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brethren, took each man his sword, and came upon the city boldly, and slew all the males. And they slew Hamor and Shechem his son with the edge of the sword, and took Dinah out of Shechem's house, and went out. The sons of Jacob came upon the slain, and spoiled the city, because they had defiled their sister. They took their sheep, and their oxen, and their asses, and that which was in the city, and that which was in the field, And all their wealth, and all their little ones, and their wives took they captive, and spoiled even all that was in the house.

The arguments of Hamor and Shechem were persuasive. The adult males consented to circumcision. Authorities state that adult circumcision leaves one in a weakened condition for up to three months, but that the fever tends to top out on the third day. Whereas the other brothers of Dinah seemed content to live with the agreement, Simeon

and Levi took advantage of the weakened condition of the city and slew Hamor and Shechem. It should be noted that, as in the case of Joseph, Reuben, the first-born son of Leah, was not a ringleader in the crime.

After all the males were killed, the other sons of Jacob joined in the looting that followed. Even though they may have held back from the slaughter, greed compelled them to take advantage of the situation and reap the rewards of victory.

The fact that Dinah was found in the house of Shechem implies that the agreement to the pact of circumcision was considered as a formal acceptance of the marriage. Oriental custom considers a marital contract to be binding from the time of engagement, though cohabitation was to await the final marriage ceremony.

The Aftermath -- Verses 30 and 31

And Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, Ye have troubled me to make me to stink among the inhabitants of the land, among the Canaanites and the Perizzites: and I being few in number, they shall gather themselves together against me, and slay me; and I shall be destroyed, I and my house. And they said, Should he deal with our sister as with an harlot?

Jacob recognized the deed as shame-worthy. The Canaanites, as relatives of the slain Hivites, and the Perizzites, as neighbors, might well seek revenge as well as feel justified in considering the Israelites as potential threats to their well-being. Therefore a direct result of the tragedy at Shechem was the relocating of Jacob's family to Bethel (Genesis 35:1).

The two brothers, Simeon and Levi, were unrepentant. They maintained their contention that the slaughter was for the maintenance of the family honor.

Jacob, however, never forgot the incident and he penalized these two sons in his dying blessing of his children by depriving them of an inheritance in the promised land. "Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations. O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honor, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their self-will they digged down a wall. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel" (Genesis 49:5-7).

Jacob's dying condemnation contains an enigmatic phrase, "in their self-will they digged down a wall." Following the better manuscripts, most versions indicate that the crime was not the destruction of a wall, but the hamstringing of an ox. This results from the textual reading of the Hebrew word for ox, *showr*, (Strong's 7794) instead of the similar word for wall, *shuwr* (Strong's 7791). However, even this seems inconsistent since Genesis 34:28 states that the Israelites took the cattle to themselves and would hardly want to harm animals which would contribute to their own wealth.

Adam Clarke suggests a plausible answer: "They murdered a prince -- Hamor, the father of Shechem. Instead of *showr* (Heb. 7794), which we have translated a wall, and others an ox, I read *sar* (Heb. 8269), a prince, which makes a consistent sense (see Kennicott's first Dissertation, p. 66)."

As a result, Jacob prophesies they would receive no inheritance but be scattered in Israel. The destinies of these two tribes, however, were quite diverse. Levi became a dominant tribe, fathering the priesthood of Israel, while Simeon was relegated to selected cities in the tribal inheritance of Judah (Joshua 19:1). Since both brothers were equally guilty in the slaughter, there must be a reason for their different destinies. Whereas the tribal members of Simeon did nothing to atone for the crime of their father, the tribe of Levi, in singular loyalty, stood by Moses' side when the rest of Israel bowed to the golden calf. They responded to Moses' ringing inquiry, "Who is on the Lord's side?" (Exodus 32:26-28).

It has always been a truism that God hears the repentant heart, even to the third and fourth generation. What a final lesson for each of us! If we have, in rashness, done that which is wrong, or violent, or self-willed, a full return to the Lord will bring a compensating blessing. Let us each seek to be as the descendants of Levi, not as the descendants of Simeon.

A Second Passing Over

God Divideth the Sea

"But I am the LORD thy God, that divided the sea, whose waves roared: The LORD of hosts is his name." -- Isaiah 51:15

Verse by verse Bible study in Exodus 14

Passover is the oldest continually observed holiday in history. For over three thousand years Israelites have used this day to recount their deliverance from bondage in Egypt. The form of observance from that which God ordained in Exodus 12 has changed, but the remembrance of that marvelous deliverance is annually renewed.

While the term "passover" relates particularly to the saving of the firstborn children of Israel from the death angel, there were two other "passings over" which are also commemorated. The first of these, which we will investigate in this article, is the "passing over" of the Red Sea by the Hebrews a few days after leaving their Egyptian homes in Goshen. Then there was the still larger "passing over" of the intervening desert that lay between Egypt and the promised land, a "passing over" that was extended forty long years because of their lack of faith.

The Setting -- Verses 1 to 4

"And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, that they turn and encamp before Pi-Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea, over against Baalzephon: before it shall ye encamp by the sea. For Pharaoh will say of the children of Israel, They are entangled in the land, the wilderness hath shut them in. And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, that he shall follow after them; and I will be honoured upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host; that the Egyptians may know that I am the LORD. And they did so."

There were three trade routes connecting Egypt with their trading partners to the east. The "Way of the Philistines" (or *Via Maris*, "the way of the sea"), hugged the shoreline of the Mediterranean as far as present day Tel Aviv before turning northeastward to Assyria. The "Way of Shur" was so named for the "shur" or great wall of Egypt, a long fortified wall separating ancient Egypt from the deserts to the east. This road paralleled the *Via Maris* some thirty miles to the south, going through the trading center of Beersheba. Further south, the "Way to Arabia" followed a line of oases due eastward to the copper-rich area of Aqaba, from whence it entered into present-day Saudi Arabia.

When the Israelites began their journey to Succoth (Exod. 12:37), it appeared that they would take the "Way of Shur." However once assembled they took a sharp turn northward crossing the "Way of the Philistines" and camping to the west, between Bazal-zephon and Pi-Hahiroth. Some writers suggest that Pi-Hahiroth is not a place name, but

should be translated as a topographical description, "the mouth of the gorge." Here they were surrounded by the tall walls of a great gorge with a "sea of reeds" in front.

Evidently Pharaoh had his spies following the fleeing Israelites. They reported back that the Hebrews appeared to be lost in the wilderness, not following any of the well-traveled roads, and now encamped in a gorge with impassable water in front of them. It was a perfect situation for Pharaoh to recapture his slave labor and once again bring them into bondage.

However, as in so many other instances, what appears to be wise strategy on the part of the enemies of God's people is really part of Jehovah's overruling providence for them. The little word "for" which opens verse three shows that it was God's intent from the beginning to take this route in order to lure Pharaoh into the battle.

Although most translations credit God with "hardening" the heart of Pharaoh, this is not the only sense of the Hebrew word *chazaq* (Strong's #2388). The usual meaning of the word, according to the lexicon of Brown, Driver, and Riggs, is "to strengthen." Probably here the thought of the word is to firmly set Pharaoh's heart to do what he had already determined to be done.

The ultimate purpose, however, of this entire maneuver was not so much to destroy the Egyptian army as to clearly demonstrate once and for all the superiority of Israel's God to that of their oppressors. This had been the special mark of each of the plagues preceding the Exodus, each successive plague exposing a different god of the Egyptians.

We are to remember, too, that these instructions God gave to Moses and not to all of Israel. As the leader of the people and one well accustomed to the desert, he would have found it strange to take the route by which God led them. God, however, informed Moses that the purpose was to entrap Pharaoh and his hosts. "Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7).

The Pursuit -- Verses 5 to 9

"And it was told the king of Egypt that the people fled: and the heart of Pharaoh and of his servants was turned against the people, and they said, Why have we done this, that we have let Israel go from serving us? And he made ready his chariot, and took his people with him: And he took six hundred chosen chariots, and all the chariots of Egypt, and captains over every one of them. And the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and he pursued after the children of Israel: and the children of Israel went out with an high hand. But the Egyptians pursued after them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, and his horsemen, and his army, and overtook them encamping by the sea, beside Pihahiroth, before Baalzephon."

The pursuit begins. The army of Pharaoh seems unreasonably small. An Egyptian chariot carried three men: the charioteer, who seldom fought; a soldier to protect the charioteer; and one soldier to fight the enemy. Thus the entire force of the Egyptians is

approximately 1800, sent out to bring back nearly two million fleeing slaves. It was evidently considered sufficient, however, since the Israelites were unarmed and used to being in subjection and therefore timid to challenge authority. There may also have been other foot-soldiers, not mentioned in listing the number of chariots. Josephus claims that Pharaoh was accompanied by 200,000 horsemen and 50,000 footmen.

Israel's Reaction -- Verses 10 to 14

"And when Pharaoh drew nigh, the children of Israel lifted up their eyes, and, behold, the Egyptians marched after them; and they were sore afraid: and the children of Israel cried out unto the LORD. And they said unto Moses, Because there were no graves in Egypt, hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness? wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt? was not this the word that we did tell thee in Egypt, saying, Let us alone, that we may serve the Egyptians? For it had been better for us to serve the Egyptians, than that we should die in the wilderness. And Moses said unto the people, Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever. The LORD shall fight for you, and ye shall hold your peace."

How quickly confidence turns to fear when there is a lack of faith! Marching out with a "high hand," they now quiver in fearful foreboding. As in any traumatic experience, therein lies a test. There was a twofold reaction by the Israelites. The sense of the Hebrew is that some cried unto the Lord (v. 10) while others cried unto Moses (v. 11). The former properly resorted to prayer, the latter to murmuring. The former saw the cloud leading them onward, the latter saw merely a man who seemingly had made a fatal leadership mistake.

How short is memory in times of distress! Had not Moses been the instrument of God in plague after plague, ultimately freeing them of years of enforced slavery? They distrusted Moses from the start. "Was not this the word we did tell thee in Egypt?" Yes, they had complained there also. When Moses' pleadings with Pharaoh brought forth the edict to make bricks without straw, they had said, "The LORD look upon you, and judge; because ye have made our savour to be abhorred in the eyes of Pharaoh, and in the eyes of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to slay us" (Exod. 5:21).

The direction they were given to "stand still" was not a direction to idleness but to resoluteness of purpose. The Revised Standard version correctly translates it as "stand firm." Do not be swayed by the seeming impossibility of your circumstances. Have faith in God. He who has led thee thus far will lead thee further.

Moses assured the people that if they would trust God in this newest of a long series of confrontations it would be the last time they would need to face the dreaded Egyptians: "ye shall see them again no more for ever." The victory was to be such a manner as to both reveal to the Egyptians that Jehovah was the superior deity and to show the Israelites that any deliverance would not be by their own acumen or power. To put the closing

words of this section into colloquial English, "Do not worry. Quiet down. God will fight for you."

Go Forward -- Verses 15 to 18

"And the LORD said unto Moses, Wherefore criest thou unto me? speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward: But lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea. And I, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them: and I will get me honour upon Pharaoh, and upon all his host, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen. And the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gotten me honour upon Pharaoh, upon his chariots, and upon his horsemen."

"Go forward!" These were the marching orders. The lifting of Moses' rod was to symbolically provide the power to separate the waters of the sea ahead so that the Israelites could go through dry shod. Seeing their captives escape, the Egyptians would plunge in after them.

The New American Standard version translates verse 25, " And he caused their chariot wheels to swerve, and he made them drive with difficulty; so the Egyptians said, Let us flee from Israel, for the LORD is fighting for them against the Egyptians."

This suggests that perhaps their heavier chariot wheels would soon become bogged down in the mud, as would their horses' hooves. Thus mired down, they could go neither forward nor retreat to the rear. They had little choice but to watch in horror as the waters rolled back over them and they drowned. Thus did Jehovah vindicate himself and demonstrate to the Egyptian people who was truly God.

The same command has always been the word of God when his people are surrounded by difficulties. It remains so today. "Go forward!" If our hearts will truly "stand firm" in their resoluteness to serve our God, then our trust will continue in its determination to do so no matter how formidable may seem the barriers ahead or how powerful our fears seek to have their paralyzing effect.

Deliverance -- Verses 19 to 29

"And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel; and it was a cloud and darkness to them, but it gave light by night to these: so that the one came not near the other all the night. And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left. And the Egyptians pursued, and went in after them to the midst of the sea, even all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen. And it

came to pass, that in the morning watch the LORD looked unto the host of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and of the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians, And took off their chariot wheels, that they drave them heavily: so that the Egyptians said, Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the LORD fighteth for them against the Egyptians. And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the sea, that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen. And Moses stretched forth his hand over the sea, and the sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared; and the Egyptians fled against it; and the LORD overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained not so much as one of them. But the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea; and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left."

There were five steps in the deliverance process. (1) the cloud moved from over the camp of Israel to their rear, hiding the movements of Israel from the Egyptians. (2) A strong east wind drove back the waters of the sea. It is therefore probable that the canyon walls of the gorge stretched from north to south, the winds pushing the waters to the right and left so that they formed a wall on both sides of the fleeing Israelites. (3) A sufficiently wide passage was opened up for some two million Israelites with their herds and their belongings, to pass through dry shod. (4) The pursuing Egyptians soon found their chariot wheels bogged down. Some feel that the Hebrew text suggests that the surging of the horses actually pulled the wheels off the chariots, so that they were forced to evacuate and flee by foot. (5) Finally a sudden let-up in the wind caused the waters to fall back into their natural channels, thus completely overwhelming the Egyptians.

Moses' part in the drama was to hold forth his rod. It is not that this rod divided the sea by itself but that it became the command to the winds to do so. In like manner, having crossed, the cessation of the winds came again at the holding forth of Moses' hands (v. 27). The force of the winds would not only divert the waters but, blowing all night, would somewhat dry out the land beneath as well.

It seems amazing that wind from the east sufficiently strong to part the waters of the sea would not hinder the crossing of the sea as well. If the passage were from west to east the Israelites would be running directly into the face of the wind and if their passage were from north to south there would be such a strong cross-current as to make it difficult if not impossible to stand upright. Thus it would seem that the wind was a closely controlled force and not attributable to an ordinary blast.

A possible allusion to this crossing of the Red Sea is furnished in Job 26:12: "He divideth the sea with his power, and by his understanding he smiteth through the proud [Hebrew, Rahab, a symbolic name for Egypt (see Psa. 87:4; 89:10; Isa. 51:9)]. This indicates that the crossing of the Red Sea was prior to the time of Job.

The Aftermath -- Verses 30 and 31

"Thus the LORD saved Israel that day out of the hand of the Egyptians; and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea shore. And Israel saw that great work which the LORD did upon the Egyptians: and the people feared the LORD, and believed the LORD, and his servant Moses."

The returning waters washed up on shore the dead Egyptians. Not only did this assure Israel that the opposing army had been, indeed, completely defeated but it may have also provided a ready supply of weaponry which they would need for their subsequent wilderness battles against the Amorites and other foes. God is a great economist. One action may have many side effects. A parallel to this was in Israel's modern six-day war of June 1967. Israel had been running short of iron for their smelting of copper at Eilat. After the war, their supplies were replenished with the tanks and other war equipment of the demolished Egyptian forces.

Now, with renewed vigor, they could again march forward "with high hand." The song of Moses and the dance of Miriam in chapter 15 demonstrate their new-found courage. But, alas, it was not to last long. Over the next forty years they were to be brought repetitively face to face with hardship and overwhelming odds. Repetitively they succumbed to the spirit of fear. They tried not only the patience of Moses but that of God himself. As a result most of the people who left Egypt were not to achieve their goal and enter the promised land. Yet this did not annul the promises and power of God. Forty years later their descendants did inherit it, conquer it, and claim it for their own.

This is the sad lesson of the Exodus. This is the lesson to which Paul refers in 1 Corinthians 10:11, 12: "Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

Yet, God had a grander purpose in mind. That was a purpose that would not fail. He would take of this people of Israel and prepare them for future work. Out of their midst, some 2000 years later, would come Jesus of Nazareth. He would select, initially from the Jewish people and adding Gentiles, a people who would become the "new heavens" of his kingdom. And he will still take, in some near future point of time, another faithful remnant of Israelites to form the "new earth" of this kingdom.

This, the prophet declares, was the real reason for dividing the sea and bringing Israel through dry shod. "The captive exile hasteneth that he may be loosed, and that he should not die in the pit, nor that his bread should fail. But I am the LORD thy God, that divided the sea, whose waves roared: The LORD of hosts is his name. And I have put my words in thy mouth, and I have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand, that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion, Thou art my people" (Isa. 51:14-16).

Future Crossings

On three future occasions were there to be crossings of water beds dry shod: Israel was to end their wilderness wanderings as they began them, crossing another body of water on dry ground. This time it would be the passage over Jordan into Canaan. Several centuries later two prophets, Elijah and Elisha, were to cross that same river on dry ground. One of them, Elisha, was to part the waters a final time before returning dry shod to the west bank of the stream.

On all of these occasions one of the chief lessons is the passing over of the death sentence. And that is just the relationship the crossing of the Red Sea had to the Passover a few days prior. As the Passover was to picture the deliverance of the "firstborn," the "church of the living God," from the death sentence, so the passing over of the Red Sea was to picture the ultimate and subsequent deliverance of the whole world of mankind from the clutches of death. Then they will be trained, tested, and tried to see whether they have the proper faith to claim the "promised land" of eternal life.

Foreshadows of the Messiah

Jesus: Our Rock and Our Rod

[Israel] did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. -- 1 Corinthians 10:4

A verse by verse Bible study in Exodus 17

The Old Testament is replete with types and shadows of the crucifixion of Christ. The most notable, perhaps, are the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham and the raising up of the brazen serpent in the wilderness. However, there are many other pictures illustrating the same event. Two of these are found in the seventeenth chapter of the book of Exodus. In this chapter we find two of the trials the Israelites endured during their wilderness wanderings -- the testing at the waters of Meribah and the battle with the Amalekites at Rephidim.

The Setting -- Verse 1

And all the congregation of the children of Israel journeyed from the wilderness of Sin, after their journeys, according to the commandment of the LORD, and pitched in Rephidim: and there was no water for the people to drink.

While the term "wilderness of Sin" seems such a fitting name for this wilderness, considering the sins of Israel during their wanderings, this is not an appropriate use of the word. Here Sin is the name of an Egyptian city and of the surrounding wilderness.

Rephidim has not been positively located, nor is even the derivation of the name agreed upon by scholars. Nelson's Bible Dictionary defines it as "refreshments," implying an oasis, while Strong's Concordance gives it as "ballusters," supports, suggesting a location between high cliffs. McClintock and Strong's Encyclopedia lists both possibilities.

An oasis would make a logical stopping place for the Israelite camp; if Moses chose the spot, he might not have known that the water supply was dried up. However, Moses was not the one to choose the encampment. They had been led there directly by God through the medium of the "cloudy pillar" (Exod. 13:21, 22). Certainly God would have known that there was no water at the site of the encampment.

One could logically ask why God led them into a location where there was not the necessary supplies for survival. The answer is simple. The needed water supply was there. They just could not see it. He who brought them there was amply able to care for them also. As the familiar adage phrases it, "His grace will not lead us where his power cannot keep us."

The Complaint -- Verses 2 and 3

Wherefore the people did chide with Moses, and said, Give us water that we may drink. And Moses said unto them, Why chide ye with me? wherefore do ye tempt the LORD? And the people thirsted there for water; and the people murmured against Moses, and said, Wherefore is this that thou hast brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?

The sin of complaining and murmuring was Israel's abiding weakness. Their situation in Egypt had been none too comfortable. As slaves they were an oppressed people. Yet they found the conditions of their deliverance more intolerable than the conditions of their bondage.

On five different occasions in the Pentateuch they are spoken of as "murmuring" against Moses. Only once the biblical God accuses them of "murmuring against me" (Num. 14:29). In truth, as Moses says here, "Why chide ye me? wherefore do ye tempt the LORD?" Moses was only the representative of God. God was the hidden director of their wilderness path. In a similar vein God confronts the "miserable comforters" of Job with the charge "ye have not spoken of me the thing that is right" (Job 42:7).

They "thirsted" for water. The statement seems almost redundant. If there was no water it is only natural that they would "thirst." Matthew Henry, in his Commentary seems to capture the essence of their complaint: "If they had no water to drink, they must needs thirst; but this intimates, not only that they wanted water and felt the inconvenience of that want, but that their passion sharpened their appetites and they were violent and impatient in their desire; their thirst made them outrageous. Natural desires, and those that are most craving, have need to be kept under the check and control of religion and reason."

From complaint sprang demand, "Give us water to drink." They were demanding it, as if it were a debt Moses owed them. They had been supplied manna (16:15), now they must be supplied with water. Both were gifts from God, neither was an obligation owed them. How often we, too, begin regarding God's graciousness as an inalienable right and, taking it for granted, slack in our continual thanksgiving for the bounties the Lord has provided.

The Solution -- Verses 4 to 7

And Moses cried unto the LORD, saying, What shall I do unto this people? they be almost ready to stone me. And the LORD said unto Moses, Go on before the people, and take with thee of the elders of Israel; and thy rod, wherewith thou smotest the river, take in thine hand, and go. Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the name of the place Massah, and Meribah, because of the chiding of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the LORD, saying, Is the LORD among us, or not?"

The geography of this verse is puzzling. Moses was commanded to go in the company of at least some of the elders of Israel to Horeb where he would find a rock which, once smitten, would issue forth sufficient waters for the people to drink and be refreshed. Horeb is called the "mountain of God" (Exod. 18:5) and was the spot where Moses was first addressed by the Lord at the burning bush (Exod. 3:1). It is usually identified with Mount Sinai where the Law was given. However, Israel does not break up camp at Rephidim to move to Sinai until Exodus 19:2. The two are thought to be about one day's journey from each other.

The most logical solution to this problem is to assume that Horeb does not refer to a single mountain but to a range of mountains, which separated Rephidim from Mount Sinai. Moses is apparently led to the pass leading through these mountains where he is shown the rock he is to smite to produce the needed water.

In applying the picture we have one sure starting point. The Apostle Paul definitely identifies the rock that produced the water -- "and that Rock was Christ" (1 Cor. 10:4). The "smiting" of the rock relates to his life of trials and crucifixion (Isa. 53:4). Jesus refers to himself as the fountain of living water in his discussion with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:10).

Speaking poetically in his "Song of Deliverance," Moses likens this water to "honey and oil" (Deut. 32:13). Honey is generally recognized as a picture of the high calling of the church, while the oil is the fruit of the olive tree. Paul likens the olive tree to the Abrahamic covenant in Romans 11, into which all men, both Jew and gentile, will eventually be grafted. For Israel this water was life producing for both the firstborn and the entire nation. Likewise Christ's death is effectual in producing both those who will receive the heavenly and the earthly salvation -- the "sand and the stars" of the Abrahamic promise.

The next stop of Israel was at Mount Sinai where they received the law. The location of the rock at Horeb suggests that it was at the boundary between Rephidim, the site of their trials, and Sinai, the "mount of God;" this implies an experience at the crossroads between the present permission of evil and the new law covenant of the future. This is the location of the cross of Christ. It forms the legal bridge from the death sentence to the resurrection of the dead.

This miracle was to be specifically performed in the sight of the elders of Israel so that there would be witnesses. Any suspicion of Moses finding a hidden well and faking the miracle was thus precluded.

The renaming of the site to Massah and Meribah was as a testimonial against the murmuring of the people. These names are derived from the words of Moses' question in verse two, "Why chide ye with me? Why tempt ye the Lord?" Massah is a Hebrew word based on the root word translated "tempt" in this verse while Meribah is a name from the root translated "chide." Men chide or quarrel with fellow men, but it is God whom they

are putting to the test, or proving. God seeks to be taken by faith and believed and not put to the test. Israel was demonstrating a lack of faith in the care given by their God and for this they were chastised.

Battle with Amalek -- Verses 8 to 10

Then came Amalek, and fought with Israel in Rephidim. And Moses said unto Joshua, Choose us out men, and go out, fight with Amalek: to morrow I will stand on the top of the hill with the rod of God in mine hand. So Joshua did as Moses had said to him, and fought with Amalek: and Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill.

The Amalekites were a branch of the family of Esau and related to Eliphaz, one of the comforters of Job. They dwelt in the southern Sinai and apparently were a marauding tribe seeking to pillage and loot the Israelites. According to Deuteronomy 25:16, 17, they followed behind the migrating nation and attacked the feeble and poor in the rear of the procession. This battle was undoubtedly to stamp out this annoying threat. The battle evidently occurs in a lowland, for Moses is to be clearly visible on the heights above where he goes with Aaron and Hur.

The choice of lieutenants for Moses is an interesting one. Aaron is readily identifiable as Moses' brother and, at this time, the high priest designate. Hur is not so easy to identify. He was obviously prominent, for he and Aaron were put in charge of the camp when Moses went up into the mount (Exod. 24:14). He was the cousin of Elisheba, wife of Aaron (Exod. 6:23; Num. 2:3), and Nashon, father-in-law of Rahab and ancestor of David. Tradition has him as the brother-in-law of Moses and husband of Miriam. He was also the grandfather of Bezaleel, the chief craftsman of the tabernacle. Thus in Aaron and Hur we see the uniting of the priestly and kingly functions of Israel.

The Banner -- Verses 11 to 13

And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed: and when he let down his hand, Amalek prevailed. But Moses' hands were heavy; and they took a stone, and put it under him, and he sat thereon; and Aaron and Hur stayed up his hands, the one on the one side, and the other on the other side; and his hands were steady until the going down of the sun. And Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword.

Joshua led the battle, but Moses was the real hero. As long as that great leader held his rod stretched out in his hand the Israelites were winning, but when his arms drooped the battle went against them. The setting is vivid. While the battle rages below, the silhouette of Moses with the outstretched rod, supported by the leaders of the priestly and kingly houses, became the banner under which victory would be wrought.

The presence of two to strengthen him suggests that the rod was stretched out between his hands, with one man supporting each side. To the soldiers below the silhouetted form of Moses, sitting on the rock with the rod going from side to side, formed the shape of a

cross. Is not the cross of Christ the banner under which we, especially the poor and feeble, gain the victory. They are the ones with whom Christ identified: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28); "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3); ". . . they that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick" (Luke 5:31). All our victories are in him: "But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:57).

Memorials -- Verses 14 to 16

And the LORD said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovah-nissi. For he said, Because the LORD hath sworn that the LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation.

Victories are not to be forgotten. In this case there were two memorials. An account of the battle was written in a book and an altar was built and given the name Jehovah-nissi, Jehovah our banner. This is also true for the Christian. Lives may be full of conflicts and struggles. Some end in defeat; more will result in victory as the banner of Christ crucified is kept before the mental vision. These successes are not to be forgotten, but to be commemorated in appropriate ways to remind us of the power that is in our Savior.

Our memorials may take the form of a testimony, or a letter to a friend, or an entry in a diary, or a poem. All of these will be incentives to greater endurance next time. This was one of the great weaknesses of Israel in the wilderness. As David so aptly puts it, "They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel" (Psa. 106:13).

In contrast, may our attitude be that "This is my infirmity: but I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High. I will remember the works of the LORD: surely I will remember thy wonders of old. I will meditate also of all thy work, and talk of thy doings. Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary: who is so great a God as our God?" (Psa. 77:10-13).

A Stunning Deliverance

The Song of Deborah

Awake, awake, Deborah: awake, awake, utter a song. -- Judges 5:12.

A Verse-by-Verse Study in Judges 5 by Carl Hagensick

Repetitive warfare punctuated the period of the judges of Israel. Among their foes were the Philistines in the south and the Canaanites in the north. Deborah of Ephraim and her general, Barak of Zebulun, were particularly concerned with an oppression by the Canaanites during the reign of Jabin of Hazor. The account of this battle is related in “Deborah, Gideon, and the LORD,” p. 8.

After obtaining the decisive victory and the death of Jabin’s general Sisera, Deborah wrote a victory song much as Moses and Miriam led Israel in song after the successful crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 15).

Introduction -- Judges 5:1-3

Then sang Deborah and Barak the son of Abinoam on that day, saying, Praise ye the LORD for the avenging of Israel, when the people willingly offered themselves. Hear, O ye kings; give ear, O ye princes; I, even I, will sing unto the LORD; I will sing praise unto the LORD God of Israel.

Though little is known of Barak’s father Abinoam, the fact that he was from Kedeshnaphtali, a Levitical city of refuge (Joshua 20:7), implies that either Abinoam was a Levite or that he fled there for refuge; if the latter, it might explain Barak’s secondary status. Barak himself, however, was sufficiently faithful to be listed as a hero of faith in Hebrews 11:32.

Deborah begins her song with praising the Lord for the victory, but is quick to add her appreciation of the willingness with which ten thousand Jews put their lives on the line to defend the nation against the superior armaments of the armies of Sisera. It is unclear whether the kings and princes to whom she addresses her words were leaders in Israel who helped in her struggle, or rulers of surrounding nations encouraged to reflect on the power of Israel’s God.

As Deborah and Miriam sang hymns of praise for miraculous deliverances from the hands of the enemy, so it is appropriate today for Christians to likewise take time after a spiritual victory to compose a hymn or testimony of thankfulness. As with Deborah, such testimony should first show gratefulness to God, but also include appreciation of fellow Christians who joined in our struggles, either through their prayers (James 5:16) or by words of encouragement, counsel, or other substantial assistance.

Praising God's Methods -- Judges 5:4,5

LORD, when thou wentest out of Seir, when thou marchedst out of the field of Edom, the earth trembled, and the heavens dropped, the clouds also dropped water. The mountains melted from before the LORD, even that Sinai from before the LORD God of Israel.

It seems odd that all three of the geographical places named in these verses (Seir, Edom, and Sinai) are in the south of Israel, whereas the battle concerned a foe from the north and took place in the northwest by the river Kishon, a stream that flows from Mt. Carmel.

Undoubtedly the method God used to bring victory to Barak's army was a flash flood of the river, brought on by a sudden storm making the approach route for Sisera's chariots not only impassable but actually bogging them down in the mire. The march of God from Seir and Edom suggests that this storm approached from the southeast, quite contrary to the usual middle eastern squalls, which blow in over the Mediterranean in the northwest before turning south along the Jordan river valley and being dissolved in the arid Negev desert.

The quaking of the earth may be understood as either an earthquake accompanying the downpour or figurative language of the trembling of the people at the intensity of the rainfall. The likeness to the quaking is described as reminiscent of the quaking of Mt. Sinai at the giving of the Law covenant.

So with the Christian, the dark clouds that seem to cause the deepest distress are the very means for discomfiting the foes of the new creation.

Effects of Oppression -- Judges 5:6-8

In the days of Shamgar the son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the highways were unoccupied, and the travelers walked through byways. The inhabitants of the villages ceased, they ceased in Israel, until that I Deborah arose, that I arose a mother in Israel. They chose new gods; then was war in the gates: was there a shield or spear seen among forty thousand in Israel?

The judgeship of Shamgar was some hundred years before that of Deborah. Thus it is intimated that dire conditions had existed for about a century. This does not necessarily mean that Jabin's domination in the north was that long, for the oppressors faced by Shamgar were the Philistines (Judges 3:31). In fact there is evidence of Canaanite influence immediately preceding Shamgar, for the name of his father Anath is that of one of the three principal goddesses of Canaan, either the wife or sister of Baal and associated with lust and war (*Insights Into Bible Understanding*, "Anath.")

It was not just the organized oppression of Gentile kings exacting heavy taxes. The general condition of lawlessness among highwaymen made the roads unsafe and forced the local population to seek narrow lanes to avoid being robbed. Even today one deep

ravine in northern Israel is known as the “valley of the robbers” since the bandits could attack easily from their hiding places in the surrounding forested hills.

The term “inhabitants of the villages” which appears in italics in the King James version is more correctly rendered “the rulers ceased in Israel.” In other words, there was a period of time in which no judge was raised up to deliver the oppressed Hebrews. The “they” in verse 8 apparently refers to those who should have been the leaders of the people. Much of the blame for Israel’s desperate circumstances rested on their shoulders. Those to whom the safety of the people had been committed became instead the very ones who helped sponsor idolatry.

How true, even in our day, those entrusted with the spiritual welfare of their flocks frequently depart from the teachings of the Bible, substituting the gods of humanism, secularism, or the creedal gods of the dark ages.

The fact that there was not one spear among forty thousand of the Jews may well indicate that the northern oppressors, like those of Philistia, had imposed a forced embargo on the smithy trade among the Jews (1 Samuel 13:19-22).

Appreciation for the Governors -- Judges 5:9-11

My heart is toward the governors of Israel, that offered themselves willingly among the people. Bless ye the LORD. Speak, ye that ride on white asses, ye that sit in judgment, and walk by the way. They that are delivered from the noise of archers in the places of drawing water, there shall they rehearse the righteous acts of the LORD, even the righteous acts of his rule [ASV] in Israel: then shall the people of the LORD go down to the gates.

Deborah’s praise of the governors of Israel is in contrast to her attitude toward “those who ride on white asses” and those that “sit in judgment” and those that “walk in the way.” According to *Insights Into Bible Understanding*, “Governors in Bible times generally had military and judicial powers and were responsible to see that the tribute, tax, or revenue to the king or superior ruler was paid by the jurisdictional district or province that the governors ruled.” As such, they often served as tax collectors, and Deborah praises their willingness to join in revolt against the oppressive taxation by the Canaanite king.

Deborah asks three groups to consider or meditate on this nobility, for thus is the thought of the Hebrew *siyach*, translated “speak” in verse 10. The riding on white asses, or ass colts, was sometimes the privilege of the descendants of a judge, as was the case with the sons of the judge Jair (Judges 10:4). These sons of judges often did not have the same piety as their more illustrious fathers. Thus the conduct of the governors was to be an object lesson to them, as it was to lesser local judges who sat in judgment at the city gates and to those who walked by the way, an idiomatic expression for those who went along with popular opinion and did not have the strong character to stand for Israel. (Similar

English idiom: those who take the path of least resistance, or, those who go with the flow.)

Verse 11 indicates another dimension of the oppression, speaking of armed men gathering at the wells. Since it was the women who most often did the water drawing, they were specially delivered in this battle. Along with verse 30, the implication is strong that it was customary for these women to be violated by these armed oppressors. This might be why it was a woman, Deborah, calling herself “a mother in Israel,” who rose up in rebellion rather than her male contemporaries.

The *American Standard Version* translates the latter part of verse 11, “There shall they rehearse the righteous acts of Jehovah, even the righteous acts of his rule in Israel. Then the people of Jehovah went down [again] to the gates.” None would rejoice more than the Hebrew women when the oppression was over and it was again safe to go down to their own judges in the gates of the cities.

The Refrain -- Judges 5:12,13

Awake, awake, Deborah: awake, awake, utter a song: arise, Barak, and lead thy captivity captive, thou son of Abinoam. Then he made him that remaineth have dominion over the nobles among the people: the LORD made me have dominion over the mighty.

This refrain, possibly repeated at the end of the song, marks a transition in the poem from a theme of thanksgiving to the mention of the roles played by the various tribes and then strikes a derisive satirical note in a final rejoicing over the defeat of the hated foe.

In the latter verse above Deborah mentions two dominions; first, the dominion of the surviving warriors over the less honorable nobility who chose to avoid the conflict, and second, her personal exaltation over the other tribal judges who lacked the courage to foment the rebellion against the Canaanites.

Tribal Reactions -- Judges 5:14-18

Out of Ephraim was there a root of them against Amalek; after thee, Benjamin, among thy people; out of Machir came down governors, and out of Zebulun they that handle the pen of the writer. And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah; even Issachar, and also Barak: he was sent on foot into the valley. For the divisions of Reuben there were great thoughts of heart. Why abodest thou among the sheepfolds, to hear the bleatings of the flocks? For the divisions of Reuben there were great searchings of heart. Gilead abode beyond Jordan: and why did Dan remain in ships? Asher continued on the seashore, and abode in his breaches. Zebulun and Naphtali were a people that jeoparded their lives unto the death in the high places of the field.

One of the main distinctions between the period of the judges and that of the kings was the alliance of the tribes. During the judges, each tribe acted separately and cooperated

only on selected occasions, whereas the kings ruled over a much more structured nation where, when they went to war, they went unitedly. Deborah's song demonstrates the varying decisions of the different tribes. Deborah singles nine of these tribes out for specific mention. Judah, Simeon, and Manasseh are not mentioned. This omission may indicate the extent of control that Midian, Amalek, and the Arabs had just before Sisera's defeat.

Ephraim joined in the battle. Ephraim played a dramatic role in the earlier defeat of Moab and Amalek in the days of the judge Ehud, by providing him a refuge after he slew Eglon with a dagger (Judges 3:13-30).

Benjamin is briefly mentioned as the second tribe to contribute forces to the tribal coalition.

Machir, from Manasseh (Numbers 26:29), founded a dynasty that conquered Gilead (Numbers 32:39,40). Manasseh is noted for supplying governors, military chiefs and tax enforcers.

Zebulon furnished those who handled "the pen of the writer," more appropriately translated as "the marshal's staff" in the *American Standard* translation. These would have been the leaders who were in the forefront of Barak's forces. They were also a northern tribe under the oppressive taxation of King Jabin.

Issachar, seemingly the southernmost tribe directly affected by the Canaanite occupation, provided foot soldiers for the battle.

Reuben did not participate. Their inheritance was in the south and not directly affected by Jabin. Reluctantly they declined, since it was the time for their sheep to bring forth new lambs, thus they were held back by the temporal interests of their bleating flocks.

Gilead, being unaffected in trans-Jordan, also declined with the aforementioned segment of Machir.

Dan remained in his ships, not willing to jeopardize his profitable sea trade and his alliance with Tyre and Sidon.

Asher also was involved in maritime pursuits and was safely protected by the deep ravines, or "breaches" that led down from the anti-Lebanon mountains to the Mediterranean. Thus they felt secure and had no desire to risk their security and prosperity by joining against the powerful kingdom of Hazor.

Zebulon and **Naphtali**, being most affected, provided a great number of troops to hold the high ground overlooking the plain of Jezreel where the battle took place.

There is a lesson here for all God's people not to refrain from giving assistance to our brethren for fear of financial loss, or out of the sense of personal security that says, "This is your battle to fight, it does not affect me."

The Battle at Taanach -- Judges 5:19-23

The kings came and fought, then fought the kings of Canaan in Taanach by the waters of Megiddo; they took no gain of money. They fought from heaven; the stars in their courses fought against Sisera. The river of Kishon swept them away, that ancient river, the river Kishon. O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength. Then were the horsehoofs broken by the means of the pransings, the pransings of their mighty ones. Curse ye Meroz, said the angel of the LORD, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the LORD, to the help of the LORD against the mighty.

Although many of the nobility did not join the fight, Deborah calls all of the fighters "kings," for they acted as kings should act, protecting Israel against oppression and fully conquering the promised land. Their battle was not mercenary, they took no spoil, but fought out of pure patriotism, reminding one of the victory of Abraham in saving Sodom for Lot's sake (Genesis 14:22,23).

The stars fighting, whether referring to angels or the elements themselves, might imply that some of the battle at least was still being fought at night. A bright night would enable the Israelites to more easily find the discomfited and deeply mired soldiers of Sisera.

It is from the song, and not the account of the battle in the previous chapter, that we learn the method God used was a flash flood down the Kishon River. The Kishon flows for about twenty-three miles from the hills of Taanach through a narrow mountain gorge to the sea. Usually dry in summer, spring rains can quickly cause a rushing torrent and swell the river to as wide as sixty six feet. Such a sudden onsurge of water would overwhelm the prancing horses and thoroughly mire down the scythed steel chariots.

Although Meroz has not been positively identified, it has been identified by some archaeologists with Khirbet Marus, some five miles south of Barak's home town of Kadesh-naphtali. The curse on the city was probably occasioned by their failure to stop and capture the fleeing Sisera.

Jael -- Judges 5:24-27

Blessed above women shall Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent. He asked water, and she gave him milk; she brought forth butter in a lordly dish. She put her hand to the nail, and her right hand to the workmen's hammer; and with the hammer she smote Sisera, she smote off his head, when she had pierced and stricken through his temples. At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down: at her feet he bowed, he fell: where he bowed, there he fell down dead.

Although Heber had been a guide for the Israelites during their exodus from Egypt, his descendents fell into idolatry in their city of Arad in southern Judea. It may have been for this reason that Heber separated himself from his fellow Kenites and settled in Zaanaim, near Kadesh[naphtali] (Judges 4:11). He and his wife evidently were proselytes to Judaism and sought to be faithful to the Mosaic covenant.

When Sisera approached her tent in acute thirst requesting water, she flattered him by offering milk and butter, a potion which, when warmed, induces sleep. As he slumbered, she took a tent peg and, with the blow of a heavy hammer, slew the general by driving it through the temples.

It was for this act of heroism that Deborah lavishes praise on Jael. By thus meeting his death at the hand of a woman, the prophecy was fulfilled that Barak would not receive the glory for the victory (Judges 4:9).

A Satire -- Judges 5:28-31

The mother of Sisera looked out at a window, and cried through the lattice, Why is his chariot so long in coming? why tarry the wheels of his chariots? Her wise ladies answered her, yea, she returned answer to herself, Have they not sped? have they not divided the prey; to every man a damsel or two; to Sisera a prey of divers colors, a prey of divers colors of needlework, of divers colors of needlework on both sides, meet for the necks of them that take the spoil? So let all thine enemies perish, O LORD: but let them that love him be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might. And the land had rest forty years.

Deborah closes her song on a satirical note, mocking the mother of Sisera for anticipating the victorious return of a conquering general. She sarcastically pictures her attendants as saying he will quickly return in triumph, bringing vast spoils. Referring to the loot as containing “a damsel or two” for each soldier gives further weight to the removal of sexual exploitation as one of the elements of the Canaanite oppression which was especially galling to Deborah.

The brightly colored needlework, while referring to any garment, seems to be applied specially to shawls that would be “meet for the necks of them that took the spoil.”

The song ends, like it begins, praising Jehovah, and neither Barak nor Jael, as the ultimate cause of victory. May it be thus, she pleads, to all tyrants who oppress the people of God. The enemies are temporary but the shining prospect of those who are the Lord’s is to shine eternally as the sun -- the Sun of Righteousness with “healing in its wings” (Malachi 4:2).

While the song and story of Deborah has many applications to the final battle of Armageddon, it also contains a lesson for all Christians as they battle the foes of the world, the flesh, and the devil in their personal lives. Every time we experience a personal victory, let us lift up our hearts and voices in a hymn of testimony and praise.

To Go or Not to Go

To Moab and Back

Verse-by-verse study of Ruth 1

A Bethlehemite family faced a dilemma. There was a famine in Judah. All the inhabitants of the land had to decide whether to stay, endure the hardships, and trust in God, or whether to move to the nearby land of Moab where food was plentiful. The family of Elimelech decided to move. The book of Ruth chronicles their experiences.

Elimelech's Decision -- Ruth 1:1-5

Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehemjudah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons. 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, Ephrathites of Bethlehemjudah. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there. And Elimelech Naomi's husband died; and she was left, and her two sons. And they took them wives of the 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.

According to the *Jerusalem Targum*, this was one of ten famines (or calamities) from God to chastise his people: "God has decreed ten grievous famines to take place in the world, to punish the inhabitants of the earth, before the coming of Mëssiah the king. The first in the days of Adam; the second in the days of Lamech; the third in the days of Abraham; the fourth in the days of Isaac; the fifth in the days of Jacob; the sixth in the days of Boaz, who is called Abstan (Ibzan) the just, of Bethlehem-judah; the seventh in the days of David, king of Israel; the eighth in the days of Elijah the prophet; the ninth in the days of Elisha, in Samaria; the tenth is yet to come, and it is not a famine of bread or of water but of hearing the word of prophecy from the mouth of the Lord; and even now this famine is grievous in the land of Israel."

The fact that Elimelech died shortly after the move to Moab as well as the names of their two children -- Mahlon, meaning sickly, and Chilion, meaning pining -- imply that poor health may have been part of the motivation for their decision. However, as Matthew Henry has so well said, "Changing our place seldom is mending it." The move was disastrous and all three males of the family died in Moab.

It had never been their intent to move permanently to Moab, but to "sojourn" there until the food shortage in Bethlehem was over. Ironically, Elimelech, whose name means "God is my king," was the one who voluntarily left Israel's God-given country for that of a frequent enemy and oppressor of Judah. He failed to live up to the promise to God

which spouses make to each other at their nuptials with the words “for better or for worse.”

Similar decisions face God’s people even today. Hardships come upon Christians, and are even predicted for them. These test their faith in the pledge of God to “never leave nor forsake” them (Hebrews 13:5). If he will never leave us, why are we prone to leave him when the going gets rough? He never promised “days without rain,” but merely the assurance to be with us in our spiritual droughts as well as in times of prosperity.

Then again, it may be out of concern for the temporal welfare of our children that we are tempted to remove them for a time, to “sojourn” so to speak, from where God’s promises are centered. We never intend such separations to be permanent, but now often, as was the case with Mahlon and Chilion, they die in that foreign land of estrangement from God.

After the three male members of the family die, Naomi is left alone with two foreign daughters-in-law and she has a difficult decision: remain in Moab with the only two members of her immediate family whom she dearly loves, or return to her homeland she left so long ago.

Naomi’s Decision -- Ruth 1:6,7

Then she arose with her daughters in law, that she might return from the country of Moab: for she had heard in the country of Moab how that the LORD had visited his people in giving them bread. Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters in law with her; and they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah.

Since the famine in Judah had ended, there appears to be little hesitation in Naomi’s determination to return. Both Orpah and Ruth, the Moabite girls who had married her two sons, apparently accompanied her as far as the border, the river Jordan just south of Jericho.

A Suggestion to Return to Moab -- Ruth 1:8-10

And Naomi said unto her two daughters in law, Go, return each to her mother’s house: the LORD deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me. The LORD grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept. And they said unto her, Surely we will return with thee unto thy people.

Great unselfish love is shown here. The bond between Naomi and her two daughters-in-law was apparently very strong. The Moabitish girls had evidently been faithful and loving wives to Mahlon and Chilion, as well as a comfort to Naomi herself. This strong love between women of such diverse cultures and religions speaks volumes of the tact and wisdom of an ideal mother-in-law. She would have kept a kosher kitchen; they would

not have been so naturally inclined. She never stopped worshipping Jehovah; they would have been more used to their god, Chemish. Yet, their differences did not appear to weaken their relationship. In fact, Naomi's conduct was so admirable, that both girls greatly desired to go to Judah with her.

Unselfishness is also shown in the suggestion that the girls remarry and find "rest" in the home of new husbands. The word rest is a translation of the Hebrew *menuchah*. Commenting on this word in his *Notes*, John Meggison writes: "There is great beauty in the Hebrew word rendered 'rest' here. The position of a single woman in those days was an unhappy one. The youthful widow married again. There she found an asylum of protection, safety and honor. That is the idea of the word *menuchah*, resting place, which Naomi urged them to find in their own land, in the house of another husband which Jehovah would grant them. It is a beautiful expression. Deuteronomy 12:9 [reads], Hitherto ye have not come into the rest and inheritance which Jehovah your God giveth you."

Thus the contrast is shown in the difficult decision the two young women had to make: whether to find their rest, their *menuchah* of protection, in new husbands from their native land or in an unknown God and a strange land with an uncertain future.

Both of them initially demur from the suggestion to return to Moab and assure Naomi of their desire to accompany her to Judea. It appears that the life Naomi lived proved to be a good witness to her daughters-in-law. While they did not make a commitment to convert to the God of Israel, they did show a willingness to live according to the customs of the Hebrews.

The Suggestion Reiterated -- Ruth 1:11-13

And Naomi said, Turn again, my daughters: why will ye go with me? are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? Turn again, my daughters, go your way; for I am too old to have an husband. If I should say, I have hope, if I should have an husband also to night, and should also bear sons; Would ye tarry for them till they were grown? would ye stay for them from having husbands? nay, my daughters; for it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the LORD is gone out against me.

Naomi persists in her suggestion they not accompany her to Judea. She recognizes that they would have little prospect for marriage in Israel since the Mosaic law forbade such unions. This indicates that although they loved Naomi, they had not yet converted to Judaism. Their only hopes for a remarriage would be if Naomi had more sons, highly improbable because of her age and the time it would take for them to grow to adulthood.

Naomi's answer also implies that while she had remained faithful to her religion for the ten years she had been in Moab, her love for her daughters-in-law was so strong that she would not object to any future children marrying these foreign wives.

Ruth and Orpah's Decisions -- Ruth 1:14-18

And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her. And she said, Behold, thy sister in law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister in law. And Ruth said, Entreat 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: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me. When she saw that she was stedfastly minded to go with her, then she left speaking unto her.

There is a strong contrast in the decision of the two women. Orpah, though loving her mother-in-law, reluctantly departs and returns to Moab. Ruth determines to go onward and to accept the implied conditions as well. She will adapt, not only to the new customs of a strange land, but to convert to its God as well. She resolves to never look back, to keep her new people and new God as long as she shall live.

Well has Ruth's beautiful response been repeated in countless weddings. There exist few more beautiful statements of the nuptial commitment than this. By making such a promise, Ruth was unconditionally embracing her new land and its God.

While Orpah can hardly be faulted for her decision, Ruth chose the better part. And such is the decision often faced by the Christian. Whether to return to the customs of one's native home of planet earth or to proceed to a spiritual Canaan with all that implies of whole-hearted acceptance of its terms and conditions is the big question. If like Orpah one does not cross the Jordan, one's life goes on as before, but the heart has not been affected by such a decision. If like Ruth the Jordan is crossed, there will be an entirely new relationship with both God and man and the heart finds its peace in such a determined choice.

Seeing such a resolute desire in Ruth, Naomi desists in further discouraging it but, we can be sure, it was with a heart full of joy that she proceeds onward with her beloved Ruth.

Back to Bethlehem -- Ruth 1:19-22

So they two went until they came to Bethlehem. And it came to pass, when they were come to Bethlehem, that all the city was moved about them, and they said, Is this Naomi? And she said unto them, Call me not Naomi, call me Mara: for the Almighty hath dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full, and the LORD hath brought me home again empty: why then call ye me Naomi, seeing the LORD hath testified against me, and the Almighty hath afflicted me? So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter in law, with her, which returned out of the country of Moab: and they came to Bethlehem in the beginning of barley harvest.

Calling herself Mara, meaning bitterness, shows not only an attitude of sadness, but also connotes repentance for the bad decision she and her husband had made a decade earlier.

Perhaps she was not only bitter over the loss of her husband and two sons, but also remorseful for the family's manifest lack of faith for forsaking Judah for the greener pastures of Moab.

How often a Christian is tempted in times of trial, like Elimelech, to seek a situation promising greater prosperity. Or perhaps as Lot had earlier chosen the fertility of the Sodom valley, a Christian looks for that which brings the most temporal gain. Whatever the reason, placing the transitory things of this earth above the permanent riches of a brighter tomorrow based on the promises of God is always a poor decision: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matthew 6:33).

The women returned at the beginning of the barley harvest. That harvest was celebrated with the waving of the first barley sheaf two days after the Passover. As the Passover marked the onset of the Jewish religious year, so a Christian's return to his promised inheritance marks a new beginning. May we each make those decisions to return from our wayward paths to a closer walk with God and thus experience a new beginning in our Christian lives.

The Passing Over of Elijah

Crossing the Jordan

And Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped it together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground. 2 Kings 2:8

Verse-by-verse study of 2 Kings 2 by Carl Hagensick

There are four occasions in the Old Testament when waters were dried up to permit people to pass on dry ground: 1) The nation of Israel going from west to east across the Red Sea; 2) The nation of Israel going from east to west across the Jordan River; 3) Elijah going from west to east across the Jordan River; 4) Elisha going from east to west across the Jordan River. Two of these are described in 2 Kings 2, a chapter we will look at in detail.

An Eventful Day 2 Kings 2, verse 1

And it came to pass, when the LORD would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal.

Though this chapter is not referenced in the New Testament, on several occasions Jesus did apply the prophecy of Elijah in Malachi 4:5,6 to a spokesman of the Lord announcing the approach of “the great and dreadful day of the LORD” -- an apt reference to the true Christian Church.

Elijah was apparently aware of the Lord’s intentions to take his life that day, for his visit to Bethel and Jericho was to inform the school of the prophets of his imminent demise and the appointment of Elisha to take his place. Too frequently Christian leaders are not so aware of their mortality and fail to arrange for successors to the roles they play in the church.

The aging prophet was also probably informed of the method of his death: a great storm would carry him up into the heavens. We infer from this that the career of the church on earth ends in a storm cloud of trouble completing the heavenly salvation.

The narrative begins with Elijah at Gilgal. The name Gilgal, meaning “circle,” imply a setting in a box canyon in the Judean hills just west of the Jordan valley. Gilgal was the first location of the Tabernacle when Israel passed over the Jordan under Joshua. That crossing followed the occupation of the East Bank of the Jordan by the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh.

These two-and-a-half tribes claimed the east bank of the Jordan and could have this inheritance only if they helped their brother tribes conquer the rest of the land. This

suggests they represent the heavenly salvation who help their brothers of the human race achieve the earthly salvation, represented on the western side. (See further comments on this picture in *The Passover Renewed*, p. 21.)

Thus the incidents of Joshua with the Israelites and also Elijah are connected: 1) by a crossing of Jordan dry shod; 2) both represent the time when the full number of the heavenly salvation is complete and the work of the earthly kingdom is about to begin; 3) both narratives are associated with Gilgal. It was also at Gilgal that the people assembled to welcome back David as king after his exile during the rebellion of Absalom (2 Samuel 19:15).

Bethel and Jericho -- verses 2 to 7

And Elijah said unto Elisha, Tarry here, I pray thee; for the LORD hath sent me to Bethel. And Elisha said unto him, As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they went down to Bethel. And the sons of the prophets that were at Bethel came forth to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the LORD will take away thy master from thy head to day? And he said, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace. And Elijah said unto him, Elisha, tarry here, I pray thee; for the LORD hath sent me to Jericho. And he said will not leave thee. So they came to Jericho. And the sons of the prophets that were at Jericho came to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the LORD will take away thy master? a, I know it; hold ye your peace. And Elijah said unto him, Tarry, I pray thee, here; for the LORD hath sent me to Jordan. And he said will not leave thee. And they two went on. And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood to view afar off: and they two stood by Jordan.

The term “sons of the prophets” probably refers to a training school in the office of prophecy. After being originally organized in Naioth of Ramah by Samuel (1 Samuel 19:19,20), it likely fell into disuse until it was reorganized by Elijah and expanded to groups in Gilgal, Bethel, and Jericho. The journey to these cities to inform them of Elijah’s replacement by Elisha was met similarly. Upon hearing the news, the sons of the prophets inquired as to Elisha’s response. In all cases Elijah invited him to stay behind, but the younger prophet declined, choosing to accompany his mentor until his departure.

Let us consider the pictorial implications of this story and begin by identifying modern counterparts for the various characters involved.

ELIJAH: As God’s prophetic spokesman for his time, he finds a counterpart in the church, the followers of Jesus. (See Malachi 4:5,6; Matthew 17:1-13; Mark 6:15; Luke 9:8; Luke 4:26.)

ELISHA: As the anointed prophetic spokesman to succeed Elijah, he symbolizes, at the beginning, the Great Company, and then/after the Ancient Worthies.

SONS OF THE PROPHETS: “Elijah represented the Little Flock and Elisha the Great Company who are also the Lord’s people, and to some extent associated with them but are not so zealous for the Truth as the Little Flock, and these sons of the prophets have more or less interest in both the others. This picture seems to indicate that, after the separation has taken place between the Little Flock and Great Company, there will be still another class of righteous people more or less connected with the Lord’s people who are included neither in the one class or the other -- neither the Elijah nor the Elisha class - - but who are posted somewhat, and who will be saying thus and so.” -- *What Pastor Russell Said*, p. 666.

Although some have historically interpreted the three cities visited as representing dates, there appears to be no precedent for applying cities to dates; rather cities frequently picture governments or organizations. The progression of Elijah and Elisha through these towns, where schools of prophets were located, represents the passage of the church and Great Company through a series of organizations before the final exaltation of the church to her heavenly home. It is interesting that the first organization through which the harvest church has passed used the name “Bethel designate its headquarters. It may also be significant that though fifty of the sons of the prophets in Jericho followed to view the crossing of the river at a respectful distance, those in Bethel remained where they were. If Gilgal represents Christendom (compare Hosea 9:15), and Bethel the truth movement in the day of Pastor Russell, perhaps the ones remaining in Bethel show that many of the Lord’s unconsecrated but sincere people remained in the Society.

Smiting the Jordan -- verse 8

And Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped it together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground.

Since there was no town at the Jordan, it would seem that this does not represent an organization, but an event. On the two prior crossings of bodies of water by Israel -- at the Red Sea and Jordan entering the promised land -- the waters represented the death sentence and the successful entrance into a new life. There seems no reason to depart from this concept in this incident.

On the other hand both Elijah and Elisha passed together and walked for some distance conversing with one another after going across the river. If the church class is limited to precisely 144,000 as suggested in Revelation 7:4 and 14:3, and if each of these must be tested before being found worthy, then there must come a time when the last member who will be accounted faithful begins his consecrated course. At that time no further members of the Great Company will begin their Christian walk either. At that point in time both the church and the Great Company will have, for all practical purposes, passed over the sentence of Adamic death. Yet their lives will be prolonged long enough for a final testing and approval or disapproval and their conversation together will continue.

This verse not only describes the river crossing, but also the means. The waters divided when struck by Elijah's mantle. The mantle of Elijah indicated his prophetic function and authorization to speak in God's name. When Elijah anointed Elisha to be his successor, he demonstrated that fact by putting his mantle on Elisha's shoulders (1 Kings 19:19). This suggests that the passing over of this death sentence would be by the exercise of his prophetic function -- the giving of a final message. The coincidence of this with the dividing of the waters "hither and thither" -- not cleanly separated -- further implies that the timing of the mantle's strike was simultaneous with the onset of the storm that eventuated in the whirlwind in which Elijah ascended. Perhaps this indicates that the real cause of dividing the waters was the storm, the smiting by the mantle, being simultaneous, only an apparent cause.

Consider the instrument the Lord used in drying up the waters in the various crossings of Israel and these two prophets: 1) At the Red Sea it was Moses stretching out his hand [presumably with the rod of command] (Exodus 14:21,27) and speaking to the children of Israel that they "go forward" (Exodus 14:15). 2) In Israel's crossing into the promised land, it was the moving of the ark of the covenant into the overflowing stream (Joshua 3:3,11). 3) In the two 2 Kings 2 crossings it was through the use of a prophet's mantle, first by Elijah and later by Elisha.

Why did Elijah smite the Jordan? Answer: to reach the other side. So the desire of the church, and for that matter the Great Company as well, is to reach the other side -- the heavenly salvation.

Elisha's Question -- verses 9, 10

And Elijah said, What shall I do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me. And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing; nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so.

The recorded conversation between the two prophets on the eastern shore is brief, one question and its answer. Elisha requested a double portion of the spirit. Though some scholars note sixteen recorded miracles by Elisha as compared with eight by Elijah, this is probably not the real import of the double portion.

A "double portion" is the firstborn's inheritance (Deuteronomy 21:17). Adam Clarke notes that "the original words, *pi shenayim*, mean rather two parts, than double the quantity. The Great Company will share with the closest followers of Christ, "the church of the firstborn" (Revelation 12:23).

Elijah's response is that though the request is a difficult one, Elisha can secure his request by remaining with Elijah until he is caught up. This indicates that members of the Great

Company, though desiring to be part of the firstborn class, can only feel assured of this - reward if they loyally stand by the true church until it departs from the earthly scene.

Elijah's Exaltation -- verses 11, 12

they still went on ere appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them.

Two elements come into play as the drama unfolds: a chariot of fire and a whirlwind. The stated function of the chariot is to part Elijah and Elisha asunder, and the whirlwind is the means of Elijah's exaltation. For this reason many feel Elijah was not transported in the chariot, but only by the whirlwind. However, since a chariot is a means of conveyance, the separation probably occurred by Elijah getting into the chariot while Elisha remained behind. Pastor Russell makes an interesting comment about this: "Elijah was separated from earthly scenes by a chariot of fire, representative of the spiritual glory and exaltation awaiting use of the Church alive and remaining to the last days." -- *The Time Is At Hand*, p. 260.

Later in the same paragraph he identifies it further by saying "a storm is a symbol of trouble, as much as the fiery chariot is a figure of victory and glorious escape from the trouble. a similar usage we meet chariots of fire in 2 Kings 6:17 where, when the city of Dothan was surrounded by Syrian enemies, "Elisha prayed, and said, LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. d he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. ee also 2 Kings 13:14.)

The implication is that this protection is through the ministry of angels. This is more clearly stated in Psalm 68:17, "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the LORD is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place. is is the fulfillment of the promise in Psalm 34:7, "The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.>

Elisha Smites the Jordan -- verses 13, 14

He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan; And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the LORD God of Elijah? and when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over.

As Elijah was taken heavenward, his mantle fell at Elijah's feet. Now was the time for Elisha to use his prophetic office. His leaving from the eastern bank of Jordan represents

the Great Company entering into death, probably preceded by giving a message of truth with the church represented by Elijah. As Elisha emerged on the western bank he continued to represent the office of the Lord's spokesman on earth, an office fulfilled when the Ancient Worthies emerge from death.

Though we are not given details of this message, there is an intimation of it in Canticles. A woman possessing the same lack of conviction and courage as the Great Company finally awakens to search for her Lord. In her search she meets the "daughters of Jerusalem," title suggesting the descendants of natural Israel. To these she utters the beautiful description of her Lord found in Canticles 5:10-16. This causes these daughters of Jerusalem to join the search for this Messianic lover (Canticles 6:1). Pastor Russell comments on this: "It is not our expectation that the Jews will become Christians now. It will be after they shall have returned to Palestine and the spirit of prayer and supplication shall have been poured on them, that they will 'look upon him whom they pierced.'r message is to comfort them and to turn their eyes toward Palestine and to their glorious promises centering there. The Scriptures seem to imply that the Great Company will have the honor and privilege of leading them to recognize Jesus as Messiah, during the time of trouble." -- *Reprints*, p. 4728.

The Search for Elijah -- verses 15-18

The sons of the prophets id, The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha, d bowed themselves to the ground before him. And they said unto him, Behold now, there be with thy servants fifty strong men; let them go, we pray thee, and seek thy master: lest peradventure the Spirit of the LORD hath taken him up, and cast him upon some mountain, or into some valley. And he said, Ye shall not send. And when they urged him till he was ashamed, he said, Send. d they sought three days, but found him not.

Elisha's smiting the Jordan not only permitted his safe passage, but was a sign to the observant sons of the prophets that he had the same authority Elijah had possessed. Undoubtedly they reached this conclusion by seeing his mentor's mantle on Elisha's shoulders, and even more so by his duplicating Elijah's feat of dividing the waters of the river.

The desire of the sons of the prophets to send a search party to find Elijah's body shows they did not believe he actually went to heaven, but that he had been lifted by the tempestuous winds and dropped near by. Over the protests of Elisha they conducted their search, but it was unsuccessful.

Verses 19-24 speak of two episodes: healing the brackish water with a new cruse of salt (the application of truths from those who have been "the salt of the earthll cleanse the - waters for the world), and rebuking forty-two youths for mocking Elisha (the spiritually immature of Christendom which formerly ruled for forty-two months, disposed to mock the authority of the Ancient Worthies).

Elisha Moves Onward -- verse 25

And he went from thence to mount Carmel, and from thence he returned to Samaria.

After revisiting the two schools of the prophets, Elisha's onward journey carried him to Mount Carmel, then back northwest to Samaria, the capital of Israel. Mount Carmel was the location of Elijah's earlier contest with the priests of Baal where he dramatically demonstrated the power of Jehovah and the impotence of foreign gods. The journey of the newly-anointed prophet thus endorsed by this historic visit, he wentspan>to the capital city where his career is set in marked contrast to that of Elijah. Whereas Elijah was sharply critical of the corrupt and godless regime of Ahab and the house of Omri, Elisha became a trusted advisor to the next three kings of Israel.

The taking up of Elijah and the installation of Elisha in his stead furnishes many details of the transition of the kingdoms of this world into the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Musicians of Israel

Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him, talk ye of all his wondrous works. -- 1 Chronicles 16:9

A verse by verse study in 1 Chronicles 25

Music has always played an important part in worship. As Albert Edersheim writes in his Bible History of the Old Testament, "the effect of music is to detach [us] from surrounding circumstances [and] to call forth strong feelings." Additionally, in a society where many were illiterate, music served as a memory aid. Songs sung in the temple worship services were thus not only devotional, but often instructional as well.

The earliest memories of a Jewish child would include the songs heard at the temple steps. Again, quoting Edersheim, "on those steps that led up to the innermost sanctuary the priests had lifted their hands and spoken over the people the words of blessing; and then, while the drink-offering was poured out, the Levites' chant of psalms had risen and swelled into a mighty volume; the exquisite treble of the Levite children's voices being sustained by the rich round notes of the men, and accompanied by instrumental music. The Jewish child knew many of these words. They had been the earliest songs he had heard -- almost his first lesson when clinging as a "*taph*" to his mother." (Sketches of Jewish Life, page 87.) It was probably the mnemonic effect of the songs that made it an accompaniment to the messages of the prophets (1 Samuel 10:5).

The earliest mention of music in the Bible pre-dates the Noachic flood. The Bible informs us that Jubal, a descendant of Cain, "was the father of all such as handle the harp and organ" (Genesis 4:21). At least twelve different words are used in the Old Testament to describe the various instruments -- two among the strings, five each in wind instruments and percussion. In later times, four additional instruments are found in the book of Daniel.

The use of the Hebrew words *alamoth* ("in the manner of maidens") and *sheminith* ("in the lower octave") in the title of the psalms indicates that certain songs were composed for female voices and others for the masculine tenor and bass tones (International Standard Bible Encyclopedia). Though both sopranos and basses sang together, their singing was antiphonal with each part carrying the melody line.

Harmonization was a development of far later times. Since the word *sheminith* indicates an eighth, or octave, it suggests that the Hebrews used the eight-note scale that is common to most music today. The word *Selah*, so common in the psalms, is evidently a musical notation indicating either a pause or a musical interlude. Some of the psalms were written for one kind of instrument, and others for another. The same was true in the selection of voices for the singing of the psalms.

Although David is often thought of as the author of the psalms, many of them were written by other hands. Some date back as early as Moses, others to Hezekiah, and still

others appear to be post-exilic, notably Psalm 137 which speaks of the Israelite's exile in Babylon. The most prolific song-writer appears to be King Solomon who is credited with writing some 1,005 songs, probably including the Song of Solomon (1 Kings 4:32).

It was King David, however, who formalized the use of music into the worship services of Israel. The Levites were the temple employees. They numbered 36,000. More than ten percent of the Levites were assigned to the task of performing music in the temple. There were four thousand singers. These were supported from the tithing of the children of Israel and from the temple tax. At today's minimum wage, the budget for singers alone would be over \$40 million dollars annually. However, since they were ordered into twenty-four courses, it is probable that they were only paid for the time involved in temple service. The rest of the time they would farm the areas surrounding the Levitical cities (Leviticus 25:34). The appointment of these singers is the subject matter of 1Chronicles chapter 25.

The Appointment of the Singers -- Verses 1 to 6

Moreover David and the captains of the host separated to the service of the sons of Asaph, and of Heman, and of Jeduthun, who should prophesy with harps, with psalteries, and with cymbals: and the number of the workmen according to their service was: Of the sons of Asaph; Zaccur, and Joseph, and Nethaniah, and Asarelah, the sons of Asaph under the hands of Asaph, which prophesied according to the order of the king. Of Jeduthun: the sons of Jeduthun; Gedaliah, and Zeri, and Jeshaiiah, Hashabiah, and Mattithiah, six, under the hands of their father Jeduthun, who prophesied with a harp, to give thanks and to praise the LORD. Of Heman: the sons of Heman; Bukkiah, Mattaniah, Uzziel, Shebuel, and Jerimoth, Hananiah, Hanani, Eliathah, Giddalti, and Romamtiezer, Joshbekashah, Mallothi, Hothir, and Mahazioth: All these were the sons of Heman the king's seer in the words of God, to lift up the horn. And God gave to Heman fourteen sons and three daughters. All these were under the hands of their father for song in the house of the LORD, with cymbals, psalteries, and harps, for the service of the house of God, according to the king's order to Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman.

Three families are placed in charge of the temple musicians. These correspond to the three sons of Levi himself: Asaph being a descendent of Gershon, Jeduthun of Merari, and Heman of Kohath. It is also interesting to note that Heman is the grandson of the prophet Samuel (1 Chronicles 6:33). His father, Joel, was Samuel's firstborn and noted for his wickedness (1 Samuel 8:2,3). Heman, however, appears to have reverted to the righteous ways of his grandfather and was known as one of the wisest of men in the days of Solomon (1 Kings 4:30,31). He was also the most blessed with children, having fourteen sons and three daughters. Presumably these were also assigned to temple singing.

In his commentary, Matthew Henry says "it is probable that Heman, Asaph, and Jeduthun, were bred up [tutored] under Samuel, and had their education in the schools of the prophets which he was the founder and president of; then they were pupils, now they

came to be masters." This may explain why each of the three, in addition to the title of musician, also bears the title of seer, or prophet.

Specific psalms are attributed to each of these three heads of the families of the singers. In this regard, Asaph is the most prominent, with twelve psalms to his credit (Psalms 50 and 73 to 83). Jeduthun is mentioned in Psalms 39 and 77, while Heman is only mentioned in the title of Psalm 88. It is probable, however, that these were not the composers of these particular psalms but rather they were composed to be sung or played by their musicians. A strong indication of this is that Psalm 74, ascribed to Asaph, appears to have been written during the Babylonian captivity, several hundred years after the death of Asaph. Psalm 74:7,8 refers to the temple sanctuary being put to the flames. The only time this happened in the biblical record was by the forces of Nebuchadnezzar (Jeremiah 52:13).

The mentioning of three specific instruments in 1 Chronicles 25:1,6 is probably meant to stand for all the instruments then extant -- the cymbals for percussion, the harp for the strings, and the psalteries (probably a primitive form of the bagpipe) for the winds. The sons of Jeduthun appear to have specialized in the strings and those of Heman in the wind instruments.

While the Bible does not record where this temple singing was to take place, Edersheim in his *Sketches of Jewish Life*, places them on the steps to the sanctuary. These are the predecessors for the cantors in many of today's Jewish worship services.

Teachers and Students -- Verses 7 and 8

So the number of them, with their brethren that were instructed in the songs of the LORD, even all that were cunning, was two hundred fourscore and eight. And they cast lots, ward against ward, as well the small as the great, the teacher as the scholar.

The Revised Standard Version translates verse 8, "And they cast lots for their duties, small and great, teacher and pupil alike." The selection was to be done by lot to avoid any favoritism by the ones doing the choosing. All were to be used, whether prominent or not, whether skilled teachers or novice students. Although the Hebrew word *mishmeret*, translated "ward" in the KJV, usually refers to guards or watchmen, the lexicon by Brown, Driver, and Riggs lists "function" as one meaning of the word.

The 288 "cunning men" are apparently the most skilled in the musical arts. The remaining 3,712 Levitical singers were under their direction. We might think of the smaller number as choir-masters or conductors. Since these were divided into the same 24 divisions as their teachers, there were approximately 155 individuals assigned to sing in the temple at all times.

The Twenty-Four Courses -- Verses 9 to 31

Now the first lot came forth for Asaph to Joseph: the second to Gedaliah, who with his brethren and sons were twelve: The third to Zaccur, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve: The fourth to Izri, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve: The fifth to Nethaniah, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve: The sixth to Bukkiah, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve: The seventh to Jesharelah, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve: The eighth to Jeshaiiah, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve: The ninth to Mattaniah, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve: The tenth to Shimei, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve: The eleventh to Azareel, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve: The twelfth to Hashabiah, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve: The thirteenth to Shubael, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve: The fourteenth to Mattithiah, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve: The fifteenth to Jeremoth, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve: The sixteenth to Hananiah, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve: The seventeenth to Joshbekashah, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve: The eighteenth to Hanani, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve: The nineteenth to Mallothi, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve: The twentieth to Eliathah, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve: The one and twentieth to Hothir, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve: The two and twentieth to Giddalti, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve: The three and twentieth to Mahaziah, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve: The four and twentieth to Romamtiezer, he, his sons, and his brethren, were twelve.

All of the Levitical services were divided by David into twenty-four consecutive courses. It is unclear whether their terms were two weeks each once a year or one week each twice a year. There were 24 courses of the priesthood and 24 courses of the porters (guards or door-keepers) as well as the 24 courses of the singers. (The same number is picked up in the book of Revelation as 24 elders.) Only the 6,000 appointed as "officers and judges" (1 Chronicles 23:4) apparently served year round. The number is curious since it does not evenly divide into the 52 weeks of the year nor into the traditional 30-day month used by the Hebrews. It is, however, exactly twice the number of tribes of Israel, and thus is suggestive of a shadow representation of restoration to the 12 tribes.

Lot	Asaph	Jeduthun	Heman
1	Joseph		
2		Gedaliah	
3	Zaccur		
4		Izri	
5	Nethaniah		
6			Bukkiah
7	Jesharelah		
8		Jeshaiah	
9			Mattaniah
10	Shimei *		
11			Azareel
12		Hashabiah	
13			Shubael
14		Mattithiah	
15			Jeremoth
16			Hananiah
17			Joshbekashah
18			Hanani
19			Mallothi
20			Eliathah
21			Hothir
22			Giddalti
23			Mahazioth
24			Romantiezer

* Shimei is assumed to be the fourth son of Jeduthun since 2 Chronicles 25:3 mentions his six sons while only naming five of them. The other variations are standard Hebrew alternative spellings for the names listed in the first six verses of the chapter.

The selection of the courses was done by lot. Probably the lots were not totally random, but seem to have been three urns for the lots -- one each for Asaph, Jeduthun, and Heman. This would account for the orderly course of progression between the three families. Asaph received the first, third, fifth and seventh places, alternating with Jeduthun, who had the second and fourth lots as well as the eighth, twelfth, and fourteenth. This alternated him with Heman who had the sixth, ninth, eleventh, and thirteenth places. The balance of lots fell to Heman because he was the only one with descendents sufficient to fill them. This division is illustrated in the chart on the previous page.

The use of music, then, became a major feature of temple services. In the New Testament, the apostles admonish the Christian to not only employ music in his worship but to carry the matter still deeper -- to have melody in the heart. "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:19). James states that, if any is merry, "let him sing psalms" (James 5:13). But songs need not be reserved for times of joy. We note the strength of faith of Paul and Silas who sang in their prison chains. "And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them" (Acts 16:25).

What rejoicing shall there be to those who, singing in joys and singing in sorrows, finally secure their victory and join in a choir of 144,000 to sing God's praises for eternity. "And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest." -- Revelation 15:2-4

A Foretaste of the Kingdom

The Passover of Hezekiah

So there was great joy in Jerusalem: for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there was not the like in Jerusalem. -- 2 Chronicles 30:26

A verse by verse study in 2 Chronicles 30

Hezekiah ranks as one of the best of the kings of Judah. In fact, the Bible chronicler puts him in first place: "He trusted in the LORD God of Israel; so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor any that were before him. For he clave to the LORD, and departed not from following him, but kept his commandments, which the LORD commanded Moses" (2 Kings 18:5,6).

His chief claim to fame came from the early part of his reign when he brought about great reforms, especially in attempting to rid the country of idol worship. His actions after his sickness, for which he prayed for fifteen extra years of life, were not nearly as noble.

The theme of this chapter deals with his re-institution of the Passover, which had fallen into general non-observance after the reign of Solomon approximately three centuries earlier.

Passover in the Second Month -- Verses 1 through 4

And Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, to keep the Passover unto the LORD God of Israel. For the king had taken counsel, and his princes, and all the congregation in Jerusalem, to keep the Passover in the second month. For they could not keep it at that time, because the priests had not sanctified themselves sufficiently, neither had the people gathered themselves together to Jerusalem. And the thing pleased the king and all the congregation.

Immediately upon becoming king, Hezekiah commenced a great religious reform. In eight days they had re-opened the great Temple of Solomon and cleansed it of defilement (2 Chronicles 29:1-17). Hezekiah then proceeded to offer a burnt offering, which with the offerings of the people, totaled 600 oxen and 3,000 sheep. There were so many animals that the priests needed to draft the Levites to assist them in the ritual slaughter (2 Chronicles 29:33,34).

With the temple in order Hezekiah proceeded to send a message for the people to assemble to celebrate the Passover. He not only invited his compatriots of Judah, but the northern ten-tribe kingdom representatives through Ephraim and Manasseh. Hezekiah may have felt comfortable inviting his brethren of Israel since there was no king of the northern tribes at that time, Assyria having subjected them.

Since the cleansing of the temple was not completed until the sixteenth day of the first month (Nisan) and the Passover was due to be celebrated on the fourteenth, Hezekiah was faced with a dilemma. Either they have to wait nearly a full year for the next Passover or celebrate it late. This would explain why he called a council to decide the matter.

Although the Law called for Passover in the first month, the judgment of God was given that in cases of uncleanness, it would be permissible to keep the ceremony the fourteenth day of the second month (Numbers 9:6-11). The situation in Hezekiah's day was of sufficient similarity to invoke the application of that judgment.

The Passover Proclamation -- Verses 5 through 9

So they established a decree to make proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beersheba even to Dan, that they should come to keep the Passover unto the LORD God of Israel at Jerusalem: for they had not done it of a long time in such sort as it was written. So the posts went with the letters from the king and his princes throughout all Israel and Judah, and according to the commandment of the king, saying, Ye children of Israel, turn again unto the LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, and he will return to the remnant of you, that are escaped out of the hand of the kings of Assyria. And be not ye like your fathers, and like your brethren, which trespassed against the LORD God of their fathers, who therefore gave them up to desolation, as ye see. Now be ye not stiff-necked, as your fathers were, but yield yourselves unto the LORD, and enter into his sanctuary, which he hath sanctified for ever: and serve the LORD your God, that the fierceness of his wrath may turn away from you. For if ye turn again unto the LORD, your brethren and your children shall find compassion before them that lead them captive, so that they shall come again into this land: for the LORD your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if ye return unto him.

The proclamation was sent throughout the borders of both the northern and southern kingdoms -- from Dan to Beersheba. Since the northern tribes had already been taken captive by Assyria, the proclamation was addressed to "the remnant of you, that are escaped out of the hands of the kings of Assyria." Hezekiah's breadth of mind and scope of vision for a united kingdom were not deterred by the fact that his brethren had broken away from him. His was a liberality that reached out to all regardless of the slights and hurts of past history.

However, it was not a message of forgiveness without repentance. He was not asking them to acknowledge their wrongs to their southern brethren, he was pleading with them not to turn from Jehovah as their fathers had done. The message reassured the Israelites that if they would be faithful to their part of the reform, God would be faithful in bringing them back again into one fold.

The Reaction -- Verses 10 through 13

So the posts passed from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh even unto Zebulun: but they laughed them to scorn, and mocked them. Nevertheless divers of

Asher and Manasseh and of Zebulun humbled themselves, and came to Jerusalem. Also in Judah the hand of God was to give them one heart to do the commandment of the king and of the princes, by the word of the LORD. And there assembled at Jerusalem much people to keep the feast of unleavened bread in the second month, a very great congregation.

The reaction to the invitation was mixed. Evidently the majority treated the news with scorn, but some from three tribes -- Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun -- were humble enough to come to the feast at Jerusalem. The trans-Jordan tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half of Manasseh, had already passed into Assyrian captivity and the Simeonites were scattered among the cities of Judah. Thus representatives of six of the twelve tribes -- Judah, Benjamin, Simeon, Levi, Naphtali, and Issachar -- made the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, so that a great number were on hand for the celebration of the feast.

Preparation for the Passover -- Verses 14 through 20

And they arose and took away the altars that were in Jerusalem, and all the altars for incense took they away, and cast them into the brook Kidron. Then they killed the passover on the fourteenth day of the second month: and the priests and the Levites were ashamed, and sanctified themselves, and brought in the burnt offerings into the house of the LORD. And they stood in their place after their manner, according to the law of Moses the man of God: the priests sprinkled the blood, which they received of the hand of the Levites. For there were many in the congregation that were not sanctified: therefore the Levites had the charge of the killing of the passovers for every one that was not clean, to sanctify them unto the LORD. For a multitude of the people, even many of Ephraim, and Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet did they eat the passover otherwise than it was written. But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, The good LORD pardon every one that prepareth his heart to seek God, the LORD God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary. And the LORD hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people.

The first act of preparation was the removal of the idolatrous altars which King Ahaz had erected in each of the four corners of Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 28:24). The stones of these demolished altars were thrown into the creek bed of the Kidron where they would be washed away by the flowing stream.

The solemnity of the ceremony was of such a nature as to cast guilt on the priests and Levites for allowing themselves to become ceremonially unclean. Before they began offering the animals of Passover, they performed their own cleansing rituals and offered the burnt offerings prescribed by law. Thus cleansed, they performed the ceremonial sprinkling of the Passover blood.

However, many of the congregation, specifically those of the northern kingdom tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, also had not gone through the required pre-Passover cleansing. Despite this, and probably not knowing the requirements since it had been so long since the last such observance, they participated in the feast.

Again, the magnanimity of Hezekiah was shown. Rather than berating them for disobedience of the law requirements, he prayed for them, those who would prepare their hearts to seek after God. The word for pardon in this verse is the Hebrew *kophar*, meaning to cover or atone. It suggests an official removing of the guilt of the sin committed.

Here we have a beautiful picture of God's kingdom when the antitypical Passover is celebrated in the second month (celebrations in the first month show the application of the Passover to the church). Many of mankind will be unclean, not being informed before their resurrection of the divine requirements. It is for these that the mediator will step between and intercede on their behalf, that the atonement will cover the sins of all who then will apply themselves to learn and do the precepts of righteousness.

The response of God is that Jehovah will hearken to these prayers and will heal the uncleanness of all who seek to learn and do the will of God, walking humbly up to perfection on the "highway of holiness" (Isaiah 35:8-10).

The Feast of Unleavened Bread -- Verses 21 through 27

And the children of Israel that were present at Jerusalem kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with great gladness: and the Levites and the priests praised the LORD day by day, singing with loud instruments unto the LORD. And Hezekiah spake comfortably unto all the Levites that taught the good knowledge of the LORD: and they did eat throughout the feast seven days, offering peace offerings, and making confession to the LORD God of their fathers. And the whole assembly took counsel to keep other seven days: and they kept other seven days with gladness. For Hezekiah king of Judah did give to the congregation a thousand bullocks and seven thousand sheep; and the princes gave to the congregation a thousand bullocks and ten thousand sheep: and a great number of priests sanctified themselves. And all the congregation of Judah, with the priests and the Levites, and all the congregation that came out of Israel, and the strangers that came out of the land of Israel, and that dwelt in Judah, rejoiced. So there was great joy in Jerusalem: for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there was not the like in Jerusalem. Then the priests the Levites arose and blessed the people: and their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to his holy dwelling place, even unto heaven.

The account of Hezekiah's Passover illustrates one of the chief functions of all of Israel's feast days -- the recognition and sorrow for individual sin. Once again, this particular festival well illustrates Messiah's kingdom, for it will also be a time for the recognition of past sins and repentance for them -- a time for the offering of peace offerings.

Though sadness for past neglect cast a pallor over the feast, it did not preclude glad songs of joy, accompanied by the temple musicians. Throughout the feast, as it will be throughout the kingdom, the spiritual Levites will teach them "the good knowledge of the Lord."

Verse 22 records that Hezekiah spoke "comfortably" to the people. This word is actually a phrase composed of two Hebrew words, *al leeb*, meaning literally, he spoke "to the heart" of the people. It is the same expression used in Isaiah 40:2 where the admonition is to "speak comfortably" to Israel. The phrase has a deeper meaning than merely comfort. It indicates that the words touched not merely the minds, but also the heart or emotions of the audience. Hezekiah, as representative of the throne of David, appears to represent Christ and his church in their future role of touching the hearts of all humanity.

As the congregation was so happy to have this feast renewed, the decision was made to continue it for another week. So restored humanity will be so pleased with the results of the Messianic kingdom they will continue the celebration by rendering continued obedience, not for another week or even another thousand years, but for eternity.

The immense size of the number of the gathered Israelites is further indicated by the number of animals that were given for the feast. The offering of the king of 1,000 bullocks and 7,000 sheep was topped by the princes (perhaps representing the ancient worthies) with their offering of 1,000 additional bullocks and 10,000 sheep.

The "great number of priests who sanctified themselves" is in addition to the ones consecrating themselves in verse 15. A text which may shed light upon this second group of priests is found in Isaiah 66:19, 20 where we read of an exodus of Jews to Israel after their final battle. Of these returnees he prophesies in Isaiah 66:21, "And I will also take of them for priests and for Levites, saith the Lord."

A priest is one who offers sacrifices or prayers on behalf of others. In patriarchal times this was a function filled by the first-born as the heir-apparent to the headship of the family. The patriarch Job fulfills this duty for his "comforters" in Job 42:8-10. In this way many who hear the word of the Lord will assist in such Levitical offices as teaching others and in such priestly work as offering prayers (see Revelation 22:17).

It is also noteworthy that the celebrants included not only native-born Israelis but the foreigners among them. These "strangers" were not people of other nationalities who happened to be passing through, but those who had made Israel their permanent home and adopted the religion of Israel as their own. Likewise the blessings of God's kingdom apply not only to Israel but, through them, to all the families of the earth. Yet to receive of these blessings these Gentiles must not merely "pass by" but make their spiritual home in the new arrangement, adopting its laws as their own.

The joy and rededication that attended this Passover was not an end in itself, but merely a beginning in the larger reform of Hezekiah as outlined in succeeding chapters, as he sought to remove all idolatry from Israel.

Sadly, the reform was short-lived. One more attempt would be made to make it permanent. In the reign of Josiah a similar appellation was made to his great Passover: "Since the time of Solomon, the son of David, king of Israel, there was not the like in

Jerusalem" (2 Chronicles 30:26). That reform also failed and it was not long before the Babylonian armies subdued the once mighty kingdom of Israel.

Nevertheless, the voice of Hezekiah's Passover, and all such attempts at future reforms, were prayers that would indeed ascend to God's holy dwelling place, "even to heaven." This is for us the great lesson of this event -- to constantly invoke the memories of God's past deliverance of his people to rekindle the zeal to praise and serve him afresh.

Rebuilding the Temple

Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do ye see it now? is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?--Haggai 2:3

Carl Hagensick

An multitude of nearly fifty thousand responded to the edict of Cyrus permitting a return to Jerusalem for the Jews of the Babylonian captivity. They must have included many of the more prosperous Jews for over seven thousand were servants and maids (Ezra 2:64,65).

The trek would be some eight hundred miles if they traversed the intervening desert, and longer if they followed the Euphrates north into Syria before turning south to Israel. The journey is likely to have taken about five months.

Arrival in Jerusalem -- Ezra 3:1

And when the seventh month was come, and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem.

If the journey did take about five months, the Israelites would have left Babylon about the first of May. To avoid the fierce summer desert heat, it is likely they followed the fertile Mesopotamian crescent and then went south along the Mediterranean coast or through the Beqaa valley that separates the Lebanon and Ant-Lebanon mountain ranges.

Finding the city of Jerusalem in shambles, the party formed small village settlements in an area surrounding their former capital for about twenty-five miles. Once they settled in and made arrangements for their herds and flocks, they unitedly turned their attention to Jerusalem.

Rebuilding the Altar--Ezra 3:2,3

Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and builded the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God. And they set the altar upon his bases; for fear was upon them because of the people of those countries: and they offered burnt offerings thereon unto the LORD, even burnt offerings morning and evening.

Leadership of the work was placed in the hands of the heads of the Levitical priestly family and the heir of the line of David. Joshua, the high priest, was the grandson of Seraiah, the chief priest at the beginning of the captivity who was taken prisoner and executed by the forces of Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 25:18-21). Zerubbabel, the grandson of Jeconiah, appears to be the biological son of Pedaiah, who was presumably killed, and raised by Salathiel (1 Chronicles 3:17-19).

The religious zeal and enthusiasm of the returning captives are well attested by their quick attention to rebuilding the temple and its altar. The altar was a prime necessity for at least four reasons:

1. They feared their enemies with their superior size and armament and therefore felt the need of an altar to offer sacrifices and seek God's divine protection.
2. The Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles were fast approaching and these festivals called for the offering of many animals.
3. They desired to reestablish the daily sacrifices that were a fundamental part of their religious worship.
4. They felt the need to seek the aid of Jehovah in the great work of rebuilding a suitable house of worship.

Evidently the foundation of the altar of Solomon's temple was still standing and it was there, on Mount Moriah, they placed the rebuilt altar. It was there that Abraham offered Isaac. It was there that David had placed the tabernacle when he brought the ark to Jerusalem. It was there that Solomon had constructed the first temple. And it was there that Jesus preached so frequently in the magnificently refurbished temple of King Herod. Indeed it was a holy spot and it must have been with great jubilation that the people willingly set about their task.

The Feast of Tabernacles--Ezra 3:4,5

They kept also the feast of tabernacles, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the custom, as the duty of every day required; And afterward offered the continual burnt offering, both of the new moons, and of all the set feasts of the LORD that were consecrated, and of every one that willingly offered a freewill offering unto the LORD.

The religious fervor of the returned exiles was so great that they not only observed the sacred feast of tabernacles, but also all of the other sacrifices prescribed in the Mosaic Law. The Israelites had learned a great lesson from their long captivity in Babylon and were now ready to observe all of their God-given rituals. Although there was a falling away from this original zeal, there is no historical record of the returning Jews ever again turning to outright idolatry.

The freewill offerings that were proffered to the temple ministry were in addition to the thousand sixty drams of gold, five thousand pounds of silver, and one hundred priestly garments previously given (Ezra 2:69). This offering is said to have equaled some \$400,000 in 1899 dollars, apparently contributed in roughly equal sources by the Jews who remained in Babylonia, the wealthy of the returnees, and the poorer classes chipping in about three dollars each (Nehemiah 7:71,72; see *Reprints* p. 2511).

The energy and human resources that were given so voluntarily well illustrates the enthusiasm and ready hearts and purses that contributed to the more significant return from mystic Babylon in the early days of the Lord's second advent; a return so well pictured by the dramatic events recorded in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

The Temple Foundations--Ezra 3:6-9

“From the first day of the seventh month began they to offer burnt offerings unto the LORD. But the foundation of the temple of the LORD was not yet laid. They gave money also unto the masons, and to the carpenters; and meat, and drink, and oil, unto them of Zidon, and to them of Tyre, to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea of Joppa, according to the grant that they had of Cyrus king of Persia. Now in the second year of their coming unto the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, began Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the remnant of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all they that were come out of the captivity unto Jerusalem; and appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to set forward the work of the house of the LORD. Then stood Jeshua with his sons and his brethren, Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah, together, to set forward the workmen in the house of God: the sons of Henadad, with their sons and their brethren the Levites.”

The renewed fervor of the returned exiles manifested itself in three activities:

1. Reinstating all of the temple sacrifices.

These were begun shortly after their arrival (Ezra 7:9). In the meantime they no doubt arranged for living accommodations and pasturage for their sizeable flocks (Ezra 2:66,67). They probably did not settle in Jerusalem itself as the city was in ruins, but in surrounding areas where they may well have encountered strong resistance from the current inhabitants of the land.

2. Making necessary preparations for the rebuilding of the temple itself.

The Jews obtained the raw materials by a barter system, trading foodstuffs (as well as money) to the same nations from which these products had been obtained for the first temple of Solomon. Zidon, Tyre, and Lebanon had the rich cedar forests that were lacking in Judea. Evidently the contributions of the people were supplemental by the grant of money given them for this purpose by the Persian king, Cyrus.

These groups of workers are given the task of rebuilding the temple:

- a. Jeshua and his sons--this does not appear to be Joshua the high priest mentioned in the previous verse but another Levite with the same name mentioned in Ezra 2:40.
- b. Kadmiel and his sons--a group of seventy-four, also mentioned in Ezra 2:40.
- c. The sons of Judah--again showing the leadership divided between the two tribes, the kingly tribe of Judah and the priestly tribe of Levi.
- d. The sons of Henadad--A family whose descendants also played an active role in the work of Nehemiah in the next century of rebuilding the city (Nehemiah 3:18,24).
- e. Other Levitical families--Thereby producing a work force of somewhat over a hundred laborers in all
- f. Reestablishing the Levitical order to oversee the offering of the sacrifices

Although the original law had established the service of the Levites as being from the age of thirty (Numbers 4), it was decreased in the time of David to twenty (1 Chronicles 23:24). This younger age was probably necessary then because of the increased workload foreseen for the temple arrangements, and was probably considered wise in the return from Babylon because of the relatively smaller number of Levites available from which to draw the temple ministry.

In addition to the work of ministering in the temple there was a choir of some two hundred singers to vocalize their praise to God (Ezra 2:65). Two other subdivisions of temple workers are mentioned in Ezra 2:70--porters and Nethinim. The role of a porter (literally, gatekeeper) is poorly defined and is associated both by Edersheim (*The Temple, Its Ministry and Service*, p. 62) and Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 7,4) with that of guard. This would be an important service in the hostile environment of Jerusalem in the days of the rebuilding of the temple.

The Nethinim are even more vague. Literally, the term was taken to mean "given ones." Edersheim (ibid, p. 63) states that they were probably "originally strangers and captives, as in all likelihood the Gibeonites had been the first 'Nethinim' (Joshua 9:23,27)." They were eventually incorporated into the genealogies of Israel (1 Chronicles 9:2). There were 392 Nethinim from forty-four families who made the journey from Babylon to Jerusalem (Ezra 2:43-58). These were apparently Gentiles who had sufficient faith in the God of Israel to return and resume their responsibilities in temple service.

Celebrating the Rebuilt Temple--Ezra 3:10-13

And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel. And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because he is good, for his mercy endureth for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the LORD, because the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid. But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy: So that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people: for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.

The great joy of the people in seeing the relaying of the foundation for a new temple on the very site where the magnificent temple of Solomon once stood evoked a festive celebration. They followed the pattern of King David in welcoming the ark to Jerusalem and perhaps used many of his psalms to honor the occasion (1 Chronicles 15:16).

The singing was responsive with one group answering another. The phrase “by course” in verse 11 is better rendered “one to another” in the *American Standard Version*. Thus the alternating stanzas were deeply impressed the gathered crowd with the import of this historic occasion.

The theme of their song was the mercy of Jehovah who, after severely chastising them for their national pride and sins by selling them into captivity, had now mercifully closed that chapter of their history.

All, however, were not equally elated.¹ The younger, looking forward to a brighter future, shouted loud with anticipatory joy for the opportunity to make a fresh start. The older, looking backward, compared the bleak surroundings and humble copy as only a shadow of the glory of by-gone days.

There is a lesson here for all true Christians. Many see the stark comparisons of modern materialistic religion with the fervor and joy of the zeal and vision of the early church. Still others compare it with the bold start of the Great Reformation and bemoan the muted efforts at reform in our day. Bible Students tend to compare the heady days of the founding of their movement with the over-filled auditoriums, large amounts of distributed literature, the glory of the *Photo-Drama* showings, and a rapidly growing world-wide movement with a system fragmented with divisions and showing but dim results in the vastly changed environment of the past 125 years.

In contrast, others see a future through the rose-colored glasses of optimism and raise their voices loud in shouts of praise for the Lord’s mercies in permitting further service in his vineyard even at this late date.

So mixed were the emotions that the sound of the one could not be distinguished from the sound of the other¹. Mingled, however, they form a reaction that is heard afar off--yea, around the world. The question remains for each to ask and individually answer: Will I weep over the lost glories of the former days or will I rejoice in untold privileges still ahead?

1. An interesting demographic might be noted here. Apparently this great celebration happened in the second year of Cyrus (Ezra 1:1; 3:1). This followed the captivity in Babylon which many Bible Students calculate as seventy years. It must be presumed that the Levites who saw the first house in its glory were of sufficient age at that time to appreciate the extent of that glory, probably at least ten years of age. This would make them 82 at the laying of the new foundations. Their numbers appear to be roughly equal to the young rejoicers, for the sound of the one could not be distinguished from the sound of the other. Considering the five hundred mile distance of their trip across a vast desert expanse, it seems to strain the credibility of the account to imagine thousands of such aged ones making the journey. On the other hand, if the time actually spent in Babylon was fifty-one years, as most chronologists have it, the age of the older ones would be sixty-three and up. While lacking any authority as proof, it presents a fact that must be taken into consideration in determining whether the seventy years of Jeremiah refer to desolation of Israel or to the duration of power to be exercised by the Babylonian empire.

Coping with Opposition

Such a Man as I!

"And I said, Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in." -- Nehemiah 6:11

A verse by verse study in Nehemiah 6

Nehemiah is the last hero of faith mentioned in the Old Testament. Few men can match his nobility. Although appointed governor by King Artaxerxes, he refused to take any salary for his work. Instead he fed over 150 people daily out of his own resources, feeding them bountifully with sheep, oxen, fowls, and wine (5:14-18). Not content to direct others, he worked side by side with his men on rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. Completing the walls in just over seven weeks, Nehemiah proceeded to introduce sweeping reforms, including a return to pure worship and even an attempt to reinstitute the Jubilee (chap. 5).

The Enemies -- Verse 1

Now it came to pass, when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and Geshem the Arabian, and the rest of our enemies, heard that I had builded the wall, and that there was no breach left therein; (though at that time I had not set up the doors upon the gates;)

Nature abhors a vacuum. With the Israelites exiled from the promised land to Babylon, neighboring tribes from the east began to migrate into Israel. The leadership of these nomadic tribes was usually dominated by either the Ammonites or the Moabites. In the opening verse of this chapter, we find evidence of a confederation of three of these tribes, with Sanballat as the first among equals.

Sanballat is called a Horonite in Nehemiah 2:10, designating him as either from Beth-Horon, some 13 miles northwest of Jerusalem, or, more likely, from Horonaim, a city of Moab mentioned in Isaiah 15:5 and Jeremiah 48:3-5. In papyri found at the Jewish settlement in Elephantine, Egypt, Sanballat is called the governor of Samaria. His daughter was married to the Jewish high priest Eliashib (Neh. 13:28).

Tobiah was an Edomite. He is designated as a servant in 2:10, though some translators use the word "official" instead. The word is the usual designation for a servant and probably indicates that he was Sanballat's lieutenant and not a full member of the coalition.

Geshem (or Gashmu, 6:6), on the other hand, was undoubtedly a chieftain from the more distant Arabia and a full partner in the league. Their motive was probably jealousy. The Israelites were newcomers to them and potential rivals for grazing land and for the commercial revenue that would come from caravans traveling between Egypt and points east. These neighboring tribes had previously planned to enter the city through the

breaches in the walls and attack from within. Nehemiah had received word of this and set careful watches to prevent this infiltration (chap. 4). Now the breaches were all filled and only the doors needed to be installed in the gateways. New tactics were called for, and chapter six details these final attempts of Israel's foes to stop the building of the city.

The Plot -- Verses 2 to 4

That Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me, saying, Come, let us meet together in some one of the villages in the plain of Ono. But they thought to do me mischief. And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you? Yet they sent unto me four times after this sort; and I answered them after the same manner.

Nehemiah's enemies proposed a peace conference. The site selected was in the lowland plains around the town of Ono, about six miles from the Mediterranean Sea. The location was nearly a day's journey, some 27 miles northwest of Jerusalem. The road to Ono led through the narrow valley of the Aijalon river where, it appears, Sanballat and Geshem had planned to ambush Nehemiah and his party. Sensing the trap, Nehemiah demurred, pleading the greatness of the very work his enemies were trying to stop. The wily trio was persistent and extended the invitation four times. Each time, with resolute fortitude, Nehemiah declined.

This carries a lesson for us today. "Just say no" is a popular slogan in our times but temptation does not take rejection easily. If nothing else can be said for our great Adversary, we must admit his persistence. Repetitive temptations often succeed if the first resistance is not strong and steadfast.

The Open Letter -- Verses 5 to 9

Then sent Sanballat his servant unto me in like manner the fifth time with an open letter in his hand; Wherein was written, It is reported among the heathen, and Gashmu saith it, that thou and the Jews think to rebel: for which cause thou buildest the wall, that thou mayest be their king, according to these words. And thou hast also appointed prophets to preach of thee at Jerusalem, saying, There is a king in Judah: and now shall it be reported to the king according to these words. Come now therefore, and let us take counsel together. Then I sent unto him, saying, There are no such things done as thou sayest, but thou feignest them out of thine own heart. For they all made us afraid, saying, Their hands shall be weakened from the work, that it be not done. Now therefore, O God, strengthen my hands.

Evidently the first four invitations had been delivered personally to Nehemiah. Now it was time for the conspirators to make their case public. An open letter to the people of Jerusalem was sent to intimidate them into putting pressure on Nehemiah to come to the conference at Ono.

Two basic charges were being leveled. First, that the people of Jerusalem were planning a rebellion against the Medo-Persian empire and, second, that Nehemiah was trying to set himself up as a rival king to Artaxerxes.

To lend credibility to their charges, they supported them by writing, "and Gashmu saith it." Gashmu is the Geshem of the first verse. He is one of the conspirators. Why should his word lend weight to the charges being made? Evidently Geshem had attained a measure of stature with the Persian monarch. Adding his word to the anonymous reports of the other surrounding gentiles was intended to make the charge more credible.

How often it is true with us that those who would spread rumors seek to make them more believable by attributing the charge to someone in recognized authority. This, in fact, does little to establish credibility of charges. The only one who is in a real position to clarify an unsubstantiated charge is the accused himself. This is one of the main reasons for the counsel given by Jesus in handling disputes (Matt. 18:16-18).

Further support is obtained by quoting certain prophets who had been saying, with Nehemiah's consent, "There is a king in Judah." It is very probable that these words were often spoken at the time. The lie in the charge was not in the words but in the charge that these words were from "appointed prophets to preach of thee [of Nehemiah] at Jerusalem." Nehemiah was interested in restoring the people to a religious fervor and may well have requested the prophets to assure the people that God was once again with them and that he was their "king in Judah." Today also there are those who would misunderstand our words. We do believe that the present evil systems of the world will be replaced by the kingdom of Christ. Some may misunderstand and think that we are advocating the overthrow of government instead of merely predicting from the Bible what we foresee of the future of the world.

Nehemiah does not take the time to give a point by point rebuttal but rather contents himself with a simple blanket denial, attributing the charges to the imaginations of the writer. Here again is a lesson for the Christian. A follower of Christ could spend all his time defending himself against false charges. Such charges are unimportant. They are diversions, detracting one from the spiritual tasks to which he sets himself. There is only "one that judgeth," even "God, the judge of all" (John 12:48; Heb. 12:23).

Realizing the persistency and cleverness of his foes, Nehemiah takes his case directly to God. He recognizes that the entire thrust of the conspiracy is to stop the work of building the wall. This becomes the burden of his prayer, "Now, therefore, O God, strengthen my hands." The petition is simple. He merely asks for the ability to complete the work he has started for the Lord.

A New Plot -- Verses 10 to 14

Afterward I came unto the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah the son of Mehetabeel, who was shut up; and he said, Let us meet together in the house of God, within the temple, and let us shut the doors of the temple: for they will come to slay thee; yea, in the night will they come to slay thee. And I said, Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in. And, lo, I perceived that God had not sent him; but that he pronounced this prophecy against me: for Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. Therefore was he hired, that I should be afraid, and do so, and sin, and that they might have matter for an evil report, that they might reproach me. My God, think thou upon Tobiah and Sanballat according to these their works, and on the prophetess Noadiah, and the rest of the prophets, that would have put me in fear.

Unable to lure the Israelite governor out of the city, Sanballat and Tobiah sprang a second plot. Their puppet in this ploy was well chosen. Shemaiah was a common name at that time. No less than 12 people by that name are listed in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah alone. However all of them appear to have been either priests, singers in the temple, or other active Levites. Therefore Shemaiah would have been a man of prominence, possibly intermarried with a woman from the area. This would have placed him in a position to both hear of any plots from the conspiracy and yet be in a position to have the ear of Nehemiah.

What is meant by the expression that Shemaiah was "shut up" is unclear. The Hebrew word is open to a wide variety of meanings and could mean that he was confined because of illness or that he was an invalid or that he was under house arrest. Were it the latter, he might have called for Nehemiah to come and offer to exchange some privy information about the conspirators for release or at least leniency in judgment.

In any case his words seemed harmless. He predicted an attempt by night to take Nehemiah's life. He advised that the two of them spend the night behind locked doors in the temple. This would not need to interrupt the work, for little could be done on building the walls during the darkness of night. What was the danger in following this simple precaution?

At this juncture Nehemiah responds: "Should such a man as I flee? and who is there, that, being as I am, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in."

Notice the confidence of the man. Should such a man as I flee? He will not be linked with the easily intimidated ordinary mortal. His is the courage of conviction. What he has set himself to do he will accomplish. He will not be sidetracked. His is the courage of a Joshua, "as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Josh. 24:15). His is the determination of the three young Hebrews who, even if not delivered out of the fiery furnace, proclaimed that they still would not serve Babylon's gods (Dan. 3:18). His is the resoluteness of a Paul who said "this one thing I do . . . I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling" (Phil. 3:13, 14).

Every Christian needs such steadfastness to fend off temptation. It is not self-confidence; it is rather the confidence of one who can rely on Christ to supply every need: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13). When buffeted by temptations, let the Christian answer with conviction, "shall such a man as I flee?" There is yet a deeper meaning to these words. Nehemiah had journeyed to Jerusalem only to find a complacent and secular people. His job was not merely in engineering and construction but in galvanizing a people grown lax. They had "lost their first love" and their ardor to rebuild a temple and city for their God. He must not only be their cheerleader and prompter but above all he must be their example. That weight of leadership on his shoulders gave added significance to those determined words, "shall such a man as I": I who urge you to build, with trowel in one hand and sword in the other; shall a man possessed with the responsibility of urging you on, shall such as I, show any streak of cowardice in the sight of danger.

This is true, also, at all times of the Christian. As the Apostle Paul says, "we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men" (1 Cor. 4:9). Our life must be lived in a fishbowl. We are the only Bible that many will ever read, and it is only when others "see your good works" that they will "glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16).

But above all these, there lurks another thought in Nehemiah's words, a concept suggesting the subtlety of the ruse Sanballat and Tobiah were using. Before convincing Artaxerxes to send him as an envoy to rebuild Jerusalem, Nehemiah had been one of the king's most trusted servants. He was the cup-bearer to Artaxerxes (1:11). He held the same office that the butler in prison with Joseph had in the court of Pharaoh (Gen. 40:2). The word there translated "officer" in the King James Bible should be more properly translated "eunuch." It was normal for kings to require that those who either kept their harem or were responsible for their food be made eunuchs that they might be free from sexual enticements. These were those who "were made eunuchs of men" (Matt. 19:12). It is likely, therefore, that Nehemiah was a eunuch.

The law strictly forbade eunuchs from entering upon the priesthood (Lev. 21:21). While this did not bar them from the temple precincts, anyone found in the precincts overnight lay open to the charge of violating this command. This seems to have been the plot and it was to ensure that the charge would be made that Shemaiah wanted to spend the night in the temple with Nehemiah.

It is interesting to note in passing that one of the first converts to Christianity was the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:27-39). Just as Peter had been shown, when being sent to the gentiles, that "what God hath cleansed, call not thou common" (Acts 10:15), so the story of the Ethiopian shows that the Gospel is for all -- all are cleansed from their blemishes by acceptance of the Redeemer.

Nehemiah's action was resolute. He discerned that Shemaiah was merely a paid lackey and that the desire for him to claim refuge in the temple was not of God. He rejects it

firmly, asking God to make the proper judgments of the perpetrators, including a false prophetess, Noadiah, who must have played some role in the attempted deception.

The Wall Completed -- Verses 15 and 16

So the wall was finished in the twenty and fifth day of the month Elul, in fifty and two days. And it came to pass, that when all our enemies heard thereof, and all the heathen that were about us saw these things, they were much cast down in their own eyes: for they perceived that this work was wrought of our God.

The wall which had been so derided in its early stages (4:2, 3) was erected in record time. In less than two months the city was secured. The quickness of the work, especially under such adverse conditions, impressed the surrounding heathen. Their inability to stop the project was depressing to them but at the same time it clearly demonstrated that it must have been a work wrought of God.

It is good for Christians at the beginning of each year to start with certain specific spiritual projects in mind. If they apply themselves to them, they will find the Adversary scoffing, trying to divert their attention to other matters, accusing them by rumors and open letters, and luring them to their own destruction. But, using the resoluteness of a Nehemiah, they can accomplish that which they attempt in the fifty two weeks each year allots and be ready for more projects in the years which follow.

The Enemy Never Stops -- Verses 17 to 19

Moreover in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters unto Tobiah, and the letters of Tobiah came unto them. For there were many in Judah sworn unto him, because he was the son in law of Shechaniah the son of Arah; and his son ohanan had taken the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah. Also they reported his good deeds before me, and uttered my words to him. And Tobiah sent letters to put me in fear.

The animosity toward Nehemiah does not let up after the completion of the wall. A faithful servant of the Lord, when queried about why he never took a vacation, once said, "I will take a holiday as soon as the devil does."

Sanballat fades to the background and now Tobiah becomes the chief protagonist. As Sanballat's daughter had married the son of the high priest, so Tobiah's son was married to the daughter of one of the men who had worked so hard in rebuilding the wall (3:4, 30), and his daughter was married to Shechaniah, who was probably one of the priests (12:3).

Intermarriage has frequently been a ploy of the Adversary. It was true in Israel's wilderness wanderings (Num. 25:1-9); it brought idolatry into Israel in the days of Solomon and Ahab; and it was a major problem in the days of Ezra. God had chosen Israel, as he now chooses his church, to be a sanctified people. Sanctification, by its very

definition, means a people set apart, separated for holy service. Intermarriage is contrary to sanctification.

The in-laws of Tobiah became his public relations team. They reported all the good things about Tobiah to Nehemiah, hoping to win acceptance for their father-in-law. More than that, they were also spies, reporting back to Tobiah all the information they could glean from Nehemiah. Tobiah used this information to carry out continuous psychological warfare, using a repetitious letter writing campaign to keep Nehemiah in fear. It did not work because the man God had chosen for this work was a man of great determination and resolution.

It must be the same for the Christian today. Satan will not stop his attempts to halt the work of the Lord. One defeat will only make him more determined to try and try again. The Christian must be equally resolute and on constant guard remembering to "Just say no." Every time he is invited to compromise by meeting halfway in the plains of spiritual Ono, he must reply, "Oh no! I will not come. I will not be diverted from my God-given task of rebuilding the walls of my spiritual Jerusalem."

God's Word Stands Forever

Preservation of the Law of God

And Moses commanded them, saying, At the end of every seven years, in the solemnity of the year of release, in the feast of tabernacles, when all Israel is come to appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose, thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing. -- Deuteronomy 31:10,11

A verse by verse study of Nehemiah 8

Shortly after Israel left Egypt for the promised land, God gave them a law at Mt. Sinai. At the end of their forty-year wandering in the wilderness, Moses gathered the people together in the plains of Moab and repeated the precepts of the law (Deuteronomy 1:1-3). After seven decades of captivity in Babylon, the Hebrew people once again returned to their homeland, and once again the law was read to them in an open assembly. That is the subject of this study of Nehemiah 8.

As a result of three successive invasions of Jerusalem by the forces of Nebuchadnezzar, perhaps as many as 70,000 Jews were deported to Babylon.* When Cyrus made his decree permitting their return some seven decades later, some 42,000** took up the challenge and went back to rebuild their beloved capital city (Ezra 2:64).

The years of captivity in Babylon had a profound effect upon the exiles from Israel. As Dr. Foakes-Jackson has noted, "With the captivity the history of Israel ends, and the history of the Jews commences" (Biblical History of the Hebrews, p. 316). Placed in the midst of heathen and idolatrous surroundings, the Israelites recoiled from the abominations of their neighbors and clung to the faith of their fathers in the God of Abraham. Scorned for their beliefs, they cultivated an exclusiveness of faith and beliefs. Deprived of the right to offer their ritual sacrifices, they learned to prize the spiritual lessons from their traditions and history. Another writer observes:

"Within [a] hundred years the teaching of Moses was established as the basis of the national life, the first steps were taken toward the formation of a canon of Scripture. Jewish society was molded into a shape which succeeding centuries modified, but did not essentially change. During this period the Judaea of the days of our Lord came into being. Within this period the forces which opposed Christ, and the forces which rallied to his side, had their origin. This century saw the rise of parties which afterward became sects under the names of Pharisees and Sadducees. It laid the foundation of Rabbinism. It fixed the attitude of the Jews toward the Gentiles." -- Dr. P. Hay Hunter, *After the Exile*, I, xvi.

It was just this sense of community that made the returning exiles so enthused about returning. Although the rigors of living in the desert outpost (which Jerusalem had become) and the fears of antagonistic neighbors had diminished their original zeal, Nehemiah met the challenge and gave them fresh vigor. The rebuilding of the walls was only one of his accomplishments. With the aid of Ezra the returned exiles were purged of

their pagan wives and had the vision of a law-abiding nation restored to them. It is of this activity that we find the narrative of the re-reading of the law in Nehemiah 8.

At the Water Gate -- Nehemiah 8:1-4

And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the street that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel. And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month. And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the law. And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithiah, and Shema, and Anaiah, and Urijah, and Hilkiah, and Maaseiah, on his right hand; and on his left hand, Pedaiah, and Mishael, and Malchiah, and Hashum, and Hashbadana, Zechariah, and Meshullam.

The timing of the event was the "first day of the seventh month." This was the beginning of the civil year at the feast of trumpets, an event we know today as Rosh Hoshanah. It was only one week after Nehemiah had finished the construction of the wall around Jerusalem in 52 days (Nehemiah 6:15). Although our theme text specifies that the annual reading of the law was to be on the feast of tabernacles, it was probably moved forward on this occasion so they would be able to recognize the importance of that feast. Apparently this feast had fallen out of favor during the Babylonian captivity.

The place was at "the street that was before the water gate." This gate lay south of the temple and led eastward to the water supply of the springs of Gihon in the Kidron Valley. The word translated "street" would be better translated "courtyard," and was a wide, open area specifically designed for addressing a large audience. It was actually part of the temple complex and is called "the open square of the house of God" in Ezra 10:9 (NKJV).

The congregation was "all that could hear with understanding." Although men and women were alike present, it is doubtful that small children were encouraged to attend this particular assemblage since the readings would last several hours and the natural demands of children would be distracting in the discussions of the law. It was, however, the responsibility of the parents to fully inform the children of their responsibilities under the law.

The leader of the congregation was Ezra, whose lineage is traced through the high priestly line all the way back to Aaron. It was in his role as scribe and copyist that Ezra is credited with laying the foundation for the canon of the Old Testament. James Orr, in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* notes: "The age of Ezra and Nehemiah, therefore, is not that of the beginning, but, as Jewish tradition rightly held (Josephus; 2 Maccabees 2:13; Talmud) rather that of the completion, systematic delimitation, acknowledgment and formal close of the canon."

The subject was "the book of the law of Moses." It is debatable whether this refers to the entire Pentateuch or merely the book of Deuteronomy which Moses had instructed be kept "in the side of the ark of the covenant" (Deuteronomy 31:26). It is most likely that it included all of the first five books of the Bible, since special information about the use of booths was included in the reading and those instructions are only found in Leviticus 23:42, 43.

The assembly gathered early, for the reading was to begin at dawn. For six hours the willing crowd gave rapt attention. It is not likely that it was a drawn-out monologue, but rather that the thirteen other priests that shared the platform with Ezra took their turns in the reading. The readings of the law may have also been interrupted with translations and explanations.

Reading of the Law -- Nehemiah8:5-8

And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up: and Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground. Also Jeshua, and Bani, and Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, caused the people to understand the law: and the people stood in their place. So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading.

The session opened with prayer and the audience stood with bowed heads and hands lifted in reverence. An example of such an introductory prayer is found in the words of David in 1 Chronicles 29:10-13, "Blessed be thou, LORD God of Israel our father, for ever and ever. Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name." The double "Amen" of the audience indicated the fervor of the occasion and their willingness to not only hear, but seek to follow the words of the law being read to them.

The activities of that fateful morning were broken into three parts:

1. "They read in the book the law of God distinctly." It was necessary for the reading to be "distinct" and clear so that the assembled people, who had been largely out of touch with pure Hebrew during their Babylonian sojourn, would understand the words.
2. "And gave the sense." Ancient Hebrew rabbis understand this phrase to mean the giving of a paraphrase in the Chaldaic tongue with which the audience was more familiar. As Hebrew after years of use within Germany degraded into Yiddish, so one result of the

years in Babylon was to produce a hybrid language -- part Hebrew and part Chaldaic. These translations, preserved in written form, were called "Targums," or "interpretations." (The word *tirgum* is translated "interpreted" in Ezra 4:7.) Original targums are still found in the Chaldaic, Syrian, and Aramaic languages.

3. "And caused them to understand the reading." This was the role of the 13 Levites, in addition to the 13 priests on the podium. They were scattered among the crowd. Their function was to lead discussion groups in order to help the people understand the practical import of the words being read.

It was thus that the integrity of the precepts of the ancient Mosaic law was preserved, even after seven decades of virtual disuse.

The Feast of Trumpets -- Nehemiah 8:9-13

And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the LORD your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law. Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength. So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, Hold your peace, for the day is holy; neither be ye grieved. And all the people went their way to eat, and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them. And on the second day were gathered together the chief of the fathers of all the people, the priests, and the Levites, unto Ezra the scribe, even to understand the words of the law.

The origins of the title "Tirshatha" are obscure. However both of the two most prominent explanations are appropriate descriptions of Nehemiah's office. The linguist Lagarde derives it from the Bactrian *antarekshatra* meaning "he who takes the place of the king," a most appropriate designation in the light of the commission given in Nehemiah 2:6-9.

The reading of the law had a profound effect upon the assembled people. Being convicted of their failure to keep the law, they wept profusely. Perhaps they also realized that their recent captivity had been as a direct consequence of their neglect of their religious responsibilities toward God. Both Nehemiah and Ezra remonstrated against such weeping, not because it was improper, but that it was inappropriate on this joyous festival day. The Day of Atonement which was some ten days yet future, was the proper time for such repentant sorrow. Now it was the time not to look back on their past sins, but to rejoice in the future prospects ahead of forgiveness and a renewed opportunity to attempt to keep the law. Even sorrow for sin must not grow so obsessive as to hinder our joy in God and our cheerfulness in his service. This *Rosh Hoshanah* was to be an occasion for true New Year resolutions.

Their rejoicing, however, was not to be self-centered nor in the immediacy of the bounties on the festive table, but it was to be a joy of a renewed relationship with God; it

was to be "the joy of the Lord" that would give them strength to carry out the resolutions they had made. Their "mirth" was not to be based on eating, drinking, or making merry; rather, it was the rejoicing of a heart uplifted by "understanding" the laws of God. As the psalmist phrased it, "Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them" (Psalm 119:165).

Nor were they to be unmindful of those not privileged to be at the feast, but were to take some of the bounties and send it to them. These would include not only those too sick to be at this assembly, or those in remote villages who could not come, but undoubtedly included their fellow countrymen back in Babylon. This lesson should not be lost on today's Christians who may, being free from mystic Babylon, forget their less fortunate brethren who may remain behind for one reason or another. Such customs of sharing the bounties of their festivals were not uncommon to the Jewish people (see Esther 9:19-22; Luke 14:13).

As the first day of the New Year was a celebration of the Law for all the people, so the second day was a day of instruction for the leaders of the various tribes, the priests, and the Levites. Ezra became their teacher as he informed them of their unique responsibilities in maintaining the purity of the Jewish religion. It has been just this care over the word of God that has preserved the integrity of the Bible over the many centuries of its existence.

Feast of Tabernacles -- Nehemiah 8:14-18

And they found written in the law which the LORD had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month: and that they should publish and proclaim in all their cities, and in Jerusalem, saying, Go forth unto the mount, and fetch olive branches, and pine branches, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as it is written. So the people went forth, and brought them, and made themselves booths, every one upon the roof of his house, and in their courts, and in the courts of the house of God, and in the street of the water gate, and in the street of the gate of Ephraim. And all the congregation of them that were come again out of the captivity made booths, and sat under the booths: for since the days of Jeshua the son of Nun unto that day had not the children of Israel done so. And there was very great gladness. Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God. And they kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according unto the manner.

The statement in verse 17 that from the time of Joshua "the children of Israel had not done so," should not be understood as meaning that the nation had not observed the feast of tabernacles. There are references to them having held such observations in 2 Chronicles 8:13 and 1 Kings 12:32. Rather, it indicates that they had not followed the custom of building booths during these occasions although this had been commanded as part of the celebration in Leviticus 23:42,43.

The three main Jewish festivals were all commemorative of historic events related to their exodus from Egypt: Passover celebrating their departure; Pentecost, the giving of the Law at Sinai; and Tabernacles, their safe arrival in the promised land. The antitypes were likewise progressive: Passover, picturing the death of Christ; Pentecost, the giving of the holy spirit to the church; and Tabernacles, showing the entrance of mankind into their eternal inheritance. (Each of these feasts was also a harvest festival: Passover for the barley harvest, Pentecost for the wheat, and Tabernacles for the grape vintage.)

In Nehemiah 8 the feast of tabernacles is stressed mainly because it was the first occasion to observe one of the features of the Law which they had just rehearsed in such great detail. However it is also suggestive that the return of Israel from Babylon may foreshadow the return of the Israelites to their true prophetic position after they return to the Lord at the end of their Diaspora.

The booths were primarily to show how the people had been protected in their temporary dwelling quarters during the wilderness wanderings. The booths were patterned after the temporary shelters for "the watchmen of the vineyards and melons, and maize fields, protecting them against thieves, herds, and wild beasts. . . . [and] only slightly put together" (Keil & Delitzsch). They measured about eight feet square and could go as high as 15 feet.

It is the temporary nature of booths that is stressed in Job 27:18, "He buildeth his house as a moth, and as a booth that the keeper maketh." The booths also indicated an isolated condition: "Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire: your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. And the daughter of Zion is left as a cottage in a vineyard, as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city" (Isaiah 1:7,8).

All of these lessons were particularly appropriate to Israel in the days of Nehemiah. As the Lord had led them safely from the land of Egypt to the promised land, so now they had been returned to Jerusalem from their captivity in Babylon. It will thus be appropriate in that future reality when they shall have returned from their dispersion throughout the earth, and once again hear and give heed to the Word of the Lord, that Jerusalem becomes the permanent capital of the earth (Isaiah 2:2-4).

And so the people went to work and filled Jerusalem with booths -- on the housetops, in the temple square, in the plazas, and even in the streets. As the Wycliffe Commentary notes, "Probably the inhabitants of the city built their booths by their own homes, the priests and Levites built in the temple courts, and non-resident laymen in the open places."

But such activities formed only the setting. Their real activity was seven days of studying and meditating on the law of God. What a beautiful picture we have here of the Messianic kingdom when, for a thousand years, mankind shall read and contemplate the laws of a perfect God so that, keeping them, they may live forever. The Bible, which has

been so faithfully preserved since its inception, will still be the divine standard for all men for ever.

It was on the eighth day that they removed their huts and returned to their dwelling places. So it will be that, after God's 7,000-year plan for mankind shall have wrought its perfect work, all men will receive their eternal inheritance (Matthew 25:34). As the booths fade into the realities of life again in their own possession, may it ever be a reminder that "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the word of our God shall stand for ever" (Isaiah 40:8).

* A cursory reading of Jeremiah 28-30 might imply a captivity of only 4,600. However this is in direct conflict with 2 Kings 24:16 where the number of landowners and metal-workers alone was 8,000. The total number including women and children, according to D. George Adam Smith, may have been between 62,000 to 70,000, nearly half the residents of the country, leaving only the poor to tend the land (*Jerusalem*, volume 2, pp. 268-270).

** Although the number of Israelites had undoubtedly swelled to many more than the 70,000 taken captive, many were too old to return, others because of health reasons or other commitments did not feel ready to leave, and some had become assimilated into the Babylonian culture.

Handling Discouragement

When God Hides Himself

And I will surely hide my face in that day for all the evils which they shall have wrought, in that they are turned unto other gods. -- Deuteronomy 31:18

Verse by verse Bible study in Job 23

Nowhere are the workings of God more obscure than in the life of Job. A righteous man, beset by trials not of his own making, seeks for an answer to the age-old question: "Why do bad things happen to good people? Why does God permit evil?"

Three friends, undoubtedly sincere, seek the answer with him. Their reasonings are so inadequate that Job finally calls them "miserable comforters." Eliphaz has just finished his oration, which Job rebuts. Eliphaz accuses Job of rebellion against God and suggests that he has lost contact with his Creator and needs to become reacquainted with him.

Job's Cause -- Verses 1 to 3

Then Job answered and said, "Even to day is my complaint bitter: my stroke is heavier than my groaning. Oh that I knew where I might find him! that I might come even to his seat!"

Accused of magnifying his complaint, Job responds that his trial is greater than his complaint. Matthew Henry wisely notes: "We wrong God if our groaning be heavier than our stroke, like forward children, who, when they cry for nothing, have justly something given them to cry for."

Job correctly sees that nothing in his own action merits such a heavy load of afflictions. He wants to discuss the matter with God but feels that he has lost touch with his Creator since his prayers appear to be unanswered.

His timidity is not unlike that of Queen Esther when asked by Mordecai to intervene with King Ahasuerus on behalf of her people. She demurred on the grounds that she had not been able to approach the king for thirty days (Esther 4:11). This quest for reestablished communication forms the pathos of our chapter.

Job's Intentions -- Verses 4 to 6

I would order my cause before him, and fill my mouth with arguments. I would know the words which he would answer me, and understand what he would say unto me. Will he plead against me with his great power? No; but he would put strength in me.

The fourth verse contains two key ingredients for handling such stressful situations -- to set our arguments in order and to seek out that which we would plead.

Sorrow, distress, and grief have a habit of so overloading our minds that we stop thinking rationally. When distraught, our first order of business must be to calm our nerves and to look logically at the situation before us. The prophet Jeremiah provides a good example of this. He was overcome with grief when the city of Jerusalem fell to the armies of Babylon. The expressions of his sorrow have been appropriately named Lamentations. The book is written in poetic style using the disciplined form of an acrostic, where each successive verse begins with the next successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. All but the central chapter include twenty-two verses, one for each letter in that alphabet. The third, or middle, chapter has sixty-six verses with each successive set of three beginning with the progressive alphabetic letters. Such a style requires great discipline of thinking and is not typical of other writings penned in the midst of overwhelming grief.

The second expression, I would "fill my mouth with arguments," suggests importunity, constancy in bearing our petitions before the Almighty. The parable of the Importunate Widow in Luke 18:1-8 was similarly given "to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint" (v. 1). Constancy and persistency are required by the diligent seeker.

Job's request is a reasonable one. He desires to know the specific charges against him. Confident that God would not arbitrarily take issue with him, Job understandably calls out, "Why?" He does not know the background in the first chapter of the book where permission has been given for the afflictions of Job to show the great adversary that there are some who will serve God willingly even if it fails to bring an instantaneous reward. Job's service to God is not a Pavlovian reaction but a determination to serve the Creator under all circumstances. This is what is being put to the test.

How often we desire an immediate answer to our wondering about why certain things are happening to us. Viewed from the short range picture of the current life there is no satisfactory answer to this question. Only when we step back and look at the long picture can we realize that today's afflictions, no matter how severe, are trivial compared with the blessings of eternity. "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18).

Perhaps in verse five Job is also contrasting the words he expects to hear from God to that which he is hearing from his three friends. "I do not understand what you three are trying to tell me; what I desire is to hear what God has to say on the matter." How important it is, when we seek to solace another, that we not give them our philosophies and counsel but point them to the words of the Lord. In contrast to these three "comforters," the young man Elihu, who speaks later to the issue, seeks to do just this: "My words shall be of the uprightness of my heart: and my lips shall utter knowledge clearly. The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life" (Job 33:3, 4).

Not only is Job convinced that God would not plead against him but, with his great power, would give him strength to endure what he cannot understand. This is a noble prayer. When buffeted by sicknesses and afflictions, it is not the Christian's place to pray

that these be removed but rather that we be given the necessary strength to bear up under them. The thought of 1 Corinthians 10:13, that God will provide "a way of escape" from our trials, is more correctly translated in Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott "will direct the issue so that ye may be able to bear it."

The Righteous Man -- Verse 7

There the righteous might dispute with him; so should I be delivered for ever from my judge.

This verse is open to two diverse interpretations. It may be that he is merely referring to the justice of God in reasoning with "a righteous man" -- one who seeks to live righteously, as Job had done. The plea then is for judgment based on intentions rather than on strict conformity to the principles of righteousness, for "there is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Psa. 14:3; 53:3).

However Job's meaning may be considerably deeper. This may contain a veiled prophecy of the resurrection time, when man will not plead his own case but will have an ally, a mediator, to argue for him. Other places in Job contain phrases that appear to have the same intent. For instance the words of Elihu in Job 33:23, 24, "If there be a messenger with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to shew unto man his uprightness [not man's, but the righteousness of the interpreter]: Then he is gracious unto him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom."

And again in Job 9:32-35, "For he is not a man, as I am, that I should answer him, and we should come together in judgment. Neither is there any daysman betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both. Let him take his rod away from me, and let not his fear terrify me. Then would I speak, and not fear him; but it is not so with me." Nelson's Bible Dictionary defined "daysman" as an Old Testament word for mediator. It is only with the knowledge of such a mediator on our behalf that we need not fear his rod -- his chastening rod now and the "iron rod" of righteousness in his kingdom.

Job's Search -- Verses 8 to 10

Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him. But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.

Oh, the agony of not being able to trace the footsteps of God; the sorrow of soul to find oneself estranged from the Almighty; to feel, in the words of the Psalmist, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Psa. 22:1). David must have felt similarly when, hiding in a cave, he wrote Psalm 142: "I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul" (v. 4). He, too, prays for deliverance, in verse 7: "Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name: the righteous shall compass me about; for thou shalt deal bountifully with me."

Looking forward, backward, on the right, and on the left, it would appear that Job had searched everywhere -- everywhere but up, for then he might have found him. How oft do we look first to all human agencies before turning our eyes heavenward to the one sure place where true solace can be found?

Yet Job, in the despair of his fruitless search, is not faithless but believing. Though he cannot discern God in his life at the moment, he does not let go of one main principle: "But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold." Here we have the Old Testament equivalent of that precious promise of Romans 8:28, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

This promise is one that is frequently repeated. "Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways" (Psa. 139:3). And again, "But thou, O LORD, knowest me: thou hast seen me, and tried mine heart toward thee" (Jer. 12:3).

Job's Plea -- Verses 11 and 12

My foot hath held his steps, his way have I kept, and not declined. Neither have I gone back from the commandment of his lips; I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food..

Job pleaded with "the answer of a good conscience toward God" (1 Peter 3:21). He had done what he could. Like the rich young ruler who answered Jesus with similar words, his query must have been "What lack I yet?" (Matt. 19:20).

Nor did Jehovah require more from poor Job than the best he could give. The principle applied to him, as well as it does to us, that "if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not" (2 Cor. 8:12).

David knew as well that seeking to do right was the best answer. When expressing his sincere repentance for his sin with Bathsheba, he emphasized that it was not the animal sacrifices of a personal sin offering that God desired but that these, to be effective, must be preceded by a far more difficult sacrifice: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. . . . Then shalt thou be pleased with the sacrifices of righteousness, with burnt offering and whole burnt offering: then shall they offer bullocks upon thine altar" (Psa. 51:17, 19).

Nor was it a one-time instruction in his youth that Job pleaded, but a daily feeding on the words of God. How well he lived the words of the Law which Jesus quoted during his temptations: "And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live" (Deut. 8:3). As that manna must be gathered daily so

must we, as the ancient Bereans, daily seek out the word of God, the heavenly manna, for sustenance (Acts 17:11).

The Judge -- Verses 13 and 14

But he is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth. For he performeth the thing that is appointed for me: and many such things are with him.

Turning now to describe his judge, Job first recognizes his omniscience. The thought of the Hebrew is, "He is one, who can change him?" Because he is the Creator of all things, he alone has the right to make the rules for that which he creates. As the psalmist writes, "the fear [or respect, reverence] of the Lord is the beginning [starting point] of wisdom" (Psa. 111:10).

Job notes Jehovah's omniscience and his omnipotence as well: "what his soul desireth, even that he doeth." Proceeding from the general to the specific, Job notes particularly that Jehovah's actions in his personal life are all "appointed." Professor W. E. Vine uses the word "prescription" as one of the meanings of the word. God gives us prescribed experiences. As a doctor must often insist that a patient take some bitter medicine for his overall health, so God prescribes experiences which, though appearing to be bitter, "afterward yield the peaceable fruit of righteousness" (Heb. 12:11). As the physician may lance a wound, so God sometimes wounds, but he wounds to heal (Isa. 19:22). Nor is God content to do these appointed acts once, but "many such things are with him." A similar expression is found in Elihu's words in Job 33:29, "all these things God works oftentimes with man." Jehovah knows his students learn best by repetition, practicing the graces of the spirit over and over until they become second nature. Not only are there the lessons of affliction but there are compensating lessons with prosperity as well. Frequently the latter brings the greatest rate of failure. Both are needed to the full rounding out of the Christian character. "Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits" (Song of Sol. 4:16).

Job's Reactions -- Verses 15 to 17

Therefore am I troubled at his presence: when I consider, I am afraid of him. For God maketh my heart soft, and the Almighty troubleth me: Because I was not cut off before the darkness, neither hath he covered the darkness from my face.

Being unable to perceive the ways of the Lord, it was natural for Job to be fearful of the future. He had no way of knowing that the end of his experience would be a two-fold blessing (chap. 42). What was needed was a heart reliance and trust in the truth, which he intellectually grasped, "when he hath tried me I shall come forth as gold." How we, when similarly perplexed, need to grasp the words of the hymnist:

*I know not what tomorrow holds,
But I know who holds tomorrow,
And I know he holds my hand.*

Yet despite the troubling thoughts which vexed Job's mind, God was using these experiences to soften his heart. There is a negative sense in which the heart can be made soft, when it melts like wax out of fear of an uncertain future. There is also a positive sense, for just such difficult experiences as Job was going through create a sensitivity to the experiences of others. We each need to have the hearts of stone removed, replaced by hearts of flesh: hearts sensitive to another's needs; hearts that are pliable in the master potter's hands.

For these reasons we are not cut off in death before going through our beds of afflictions, and for these reasons he does not hide and protect us from the dark clouds of trouble that sometimes surround and engulf us.

Though God may seem to hide himself from our frail eyesight at times, it is to help us detect more surely and follow more completely the way he leads. So directed, we will not only follow him when his leadings are obvious, but learn to discern the very wink of his eye, which leads us to our heavenly home. "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye" (Psa. 32:8).

I Have Found a Ransom

For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.--1 Timothy 2:5, 6

A verse by verse study in Job 33

Unlike the three comforters who preceded him, Elihu was a true comforter to Job. The trio of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar were intent on linking Job's afflictions to some sin he had committed. While Elihu does reprove Job for being overly righteous, he points to the one remedy, not only for Job's problems, but for the deeper problems of the permission of evil on the entire human race.

As a Buzite (Job 32:2), Elihu was a close relative of Abraham (Genesis 22:20, 21). In contrast, the other comforters were either from the Arabic tribes of Esau or descendants of Keturah. While it is not clear who the Naamathites (ancestors of Zophar) were, the Septuagint links them to the Minaeans. The Assyrian king Shalmaneser II identifies the land of Uz, Job's homeland, with the northeastern part of Palestine. This accords with Josephus' assertion that "Uz founded Trachnonitis and Damascus" (*Antiquities*, I, vi, 4). Thus Elihu, of all the consolers of Job, would have the closest link to the religion of Abraham.

Elihu Addresses Job -- Verses 1 and 2

Wherefore, Job, I pray thee, hear my speeches, and hearken to all my words. Behold, now I have opened my mouth, my tongue hath spoken in my mouth.

In the previous chapter Elihu spoke to the comforters. He pleaded his youth as the reason for keeping silent so long. However, frustrated by their failure to produce an adequate answer to Job's trials, he decided to speak up. His opening word, both to the other three and to Job, are a model of tact. While accusing Job of unrighteous responses, he nevertheless is careful not to condemn Job as a person. In this his speech differs markedly from those who spoke before him.

Proper Criticism -- Verses 3 to 12

My words shall be of the uprightness of my heart: and my lips shall utter knowledge clearly. The Spirit of God hath made me, and the breath of the Almighty hath given me life. If thou canst answer me, set thy words in order before me, stand up. Behold, I am according to thy wish in God's stead: I also am formed out of the clay. Behold, my terror shall not make thee afraid, neither shall my hand be heavy upon thee. Surely thou hast spoken in mine hearing, and I have heard the voice of thy words, saying, I am clean without transgression, I am innocent; neither is there iniquity in me. Behold, he findeth occasions against me, he counteth me for his enemy, He putteth my feet in

the stocks, he marketh all my paths. Behold, in this thou art not just: I will answer thee, that God is greater than man.

Elihu takes great pains to lay the foundation for his words to Job. He wants to assure Job that he has no desire to hurt him, but rather to help him in his dilemma. In these introductory remarks we find a good example for those times when we need to make a needed correction of another.

Proper Motivation: He assures Job that he is talking from the uprightness of his heart, that he has searched his heart and found no motive of pride or evil-thinking in his inner being. The Hebrew word translated "clearly" can be better rendered "sincerely." Sincerity is another part of proper motivation. Further, he assures Job, he will give criticism which is approved by the spirit of God. For us today, this implies phrasing our criticism in biblical terms.

Invites Rebuttal: Elihu recognizes that he is only perceiving Job's situation from observation. He invites Job to offer a rebuttal to the criticism, recognizing that Job may have not intended his own words to carry the meaning which Elihu took from them.

No Busy-Bodying: "Behold, I am according to this wish in God's stead." The thought conveyed is that Elihu has felt invited to comment on Job's troubles. Interfering in another's business where not invited is to be avoided.

No Superiority: "I also am formed of clay." How vital it is to assure another that we ourselves are not above similar criticisms. It is because we also err that we should have great sympathy with another whose path we perceive to be wrong.

An Uplifting Hand: "Behold, my terror shall not make thee afraid, neither shall my hand be heavy upon thee." It must have been comforting to Job, after the harsh words of the other three comforters, to hear the assurance that Elihu's criticisms would not be harsh. The sole desire of this critic is to lift Job up out of his sorrow, not push his face into it.

No Hearsay: "Surely thou hast spoken in mine hearing, and I have heard the voice of thy words." It is easy to get drawn into a dispute where we are only second-hand parties to the evidence. Elihu limits his criticism to words which Job has uttered in his hearing. This rule is so important that it is even an essential part of our criminal justice system. The Roman governor Festus, when hearing the case against the apostle Paul, utters similar counsel: "It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have license to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him" (Acts 25:16).

Actions, Not Person, Criticized: "Behold, in this thou art not just." Finally, after citing the offending remarks by Job, Elihu carefully makes the distinction between the sin and the sinner. He condemns the remarks, without condemning Job.

The specific charges which Elihu listed can all be documented from Job's own words. An example of some of the words of Job follows: "For he breaketh me with a tempest, and multiplieth my wounds without cause" (Job 9:17); "I put on righteousness, and it clothed me: my judgment was as a robe and a diadem" (Job 29:14); "Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and holdest me for thine enemy?" (Job 13:24); "He hath also kindled his wrath against me, and he counteth me unto him as one of his enemies" (Job 19:11); "Thou putttest my feet also in the stocks, and lookest narrowly unto all my paths; thou settest a print upon the heels of my feet" (Job 13:27).

Despite these strong claims by Job, he was held to be innocent of speaking evil against God (Job 42:7). Nevertheless, "there is none righteous, no, not one," and that includes Job. One of the Adversary's main tools is the wedge. The stronger the accusation, the stronger the defense. Soon, an innocent defense can become an overstatement of the facts. No where is this better illustrated in the book of Job and the justified charges of Elihu.

Dreams and Visions -- Verses 13 to 18

Why dost thou strive against him? for he giveth not account of any of his matters. For God speaketh once, yea twice, yet man perceiveth it not. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; Then he openeth the ears of men, and sealeth their instruction, That he may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man. He keepeth back his soul from the pit, and his life from perishing by the sword.

The opening sentence of this passage loses much of its sense in translation. Rather than being a statement that God did not deign to inform man of his dealings, it is an affirmation that God does communicate with man. The New American Standard Version renders it more appropriately, "Why do you complain against Him, that He does not give an account of all His doings? Indeed God speaks once, or twice, [yet] no one notices it" (Job 33:13, 14).

Diverse from other New Testament epistles which begin with the name of the author, the writer of Hebrews opens with a stronger authority: "**God**, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets" (Hebrews 1:1). Elihu picks up on this theme and discusses two of God's approaches with Job. The first of these is through dreams and visions. While this is not a method God employs today, it is one which he used many times in Old Testament history.

It is not God who is not speaking, it is the individual who is not listening. It was when the recipient was in repose, with thoughts of earthly distractions blocked out, that God often chose to reveal his will. Its purpose was always to remove the individual from his own thoughts and thus take away his pride by removing selfish thoughts from consideration. These were always to correct the human so that he would be neither in danger of judgment by God ("the pit") or by man ("the sword").

God Speaks Through Sufferings -- Verses 19 to 22

He is chastened also with pain upon his bed, and the multitude of his bones with strong pain: So that his life abhorreth bread, and his soul dainty meat. His flesh is consumed away, that it cannot be seen; and his bones that were not seen stick out. Yea, his soul draweth near unto the grave, and his life to the destroyers.

In Job's case, God chose to speak to him through suffering. It is unfortunate that most translators chose to introduce this thought with the word "chastening." Although a frequent correct translation of the Hebrew word, it is far from the only way it is used in the Bible. It might be better rendered "appointed" in this passage as it is in Genesis 24:14, 44.

Elihu sees a far different lesson in Job's experiences than do the other so-called comforters. Elihu sees the suffering as a method God has chosen to remove all fleshly desires from Job--so that his life would abhor bread and tasty foods. Nor should the thought be limited to food alone, but to any of the fleshly desires of man. By bringing Job to the very brink of death, God could better show the reward of fidelity under the most trying of conditions. As a picture of either Israel or the human race, it aptly pictures the depths to which God permits evil and suffering so that the lessons learned may be truly indelible.

The Ransom Solution -- Verses 23 and 24

If there be a messenger with him, an interpreter, one among a thousand, to shew unto man his uprightness: Then he is gracious unto him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit: I have found a ransom.

The Hebrew word here used for messenger is usually one reserved for a spirit being and is most frequently translated "angel." The term "one among a thousand" is merely a Hebrewism for one who is rare. While the usual translation of the Hebrew term used for "interpreter," Brown, Driver, and Riggs, point out that in the Hiphil conjunction here used it has the thought picked up by most literal translators of "mediator."

The object of this mediator is not to show man his own righteousness, but rather to show him the uprightness of the mediator. It is this mediator who interprets the sufferings of Job and gives the ultimate answer for the larger question, "Why does God permit evil?" The answer is simple, "I have found a ransom." This is God's ultimate answer to the permission of evil. A ransom, or corresponding price for Adam, guarantees not only a reversal of the death sentence against the human race, but a final and fitting restoration from all the effects of sin and evil itself.

The Principles of Salvation -- Verses 25 to 30

His flesh shall be fresher than a child's: he shall return to the days of his youth: He shall pray unto God, and he will be favorable unto him: and he shall see his face with joy: for he will render unto man his righteousness. He looketh upon men, and if any say, I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not; He will deliver his soul from going into the pit, and his life shall see the light. Lo, all these things worketh God oftentimes with man, To bring back his soul from the pit, to be enlightened with the light of the living.

Elihu's foresight into the application of the principles of salvation seems to bear out his earlier statement as uttering words given him by "the breath of the Almighty" (Job 33:4). He enumerates six of these principles in the words above.

1. The one who experientially "finds the ransom" will not only be restored to life, but will return to the days of his youth, with his flesh becoming fresher than that of a child.
2. This newly resurrected one will enjoy the privilege of prayer with the assurance that God "will be favorable unto him."
3. As a result of answered prayer, humans will no longer be afraid of approaching the face of Jehovah, but "will see his [Jehovah's] face with joy."
4. Repentance and acknowledgement of sins, both past and present, will result in ultimate deliverance from the human soul returning to the pit.
5. Not only will such an one be delivered from going into the pit but he will profit greatly from the experiences of sin and redemption--"his life shall see the light."
6. Errors will be permitted for a while in God's kingdom. This process of repentance and deliverance, Job is assured, "worketh God oftentimes with man."

It seems amazing indeed that individuals living in the days of Job, probably one or two generations after the Exodus, had such a depthful insight into the operations of a kingdom some four thousand years distant.

A Further Invitation -- Verses 31 to 33

Mark well, O Job, hearken unto me: hold thy peace, and I will speak. If thou hast any thing to say, answer me: speak, for I desire to justify thee. If not, hearken unto me: hold thy peace, and I shall teach thee wisdom.

Verse 30 ends Elihu's first of four speeches. Before proceeding with more difficult lessons for Job, he reiterates his earlier invitation for Job to give him an answer. He also stresses that his objective is to justify Job and not to condemn him. Barring Job's rebuttal

Elihu invites him to listen to the further words of this lesson. Since Job does not answer, it is to be presumed that he gives Elihu permission to continue. This he does through chapter 37.

Some argue that Elihu is to be classified with the other three comforters since his words are interrupted by God in chapter 38 with the words, "Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?" (Job 38:2). However such seem to miss the import of verse one of that chapter, "Then the LORD answered **Job** out of the whirlwind." Jehovah's words are addressed not to Elihu, but to Job.

In any case, the discourse of Elihu in Job 33 shows a remarkable insight into God's plan of salvation and forms one of the earliest foregleams of the great work which the Messiah was to accomplish, not only for Israel, but all humanity as well, through the provision of a ransom at his first advent and the carrying out of the restoration of the entire race at his return.

A verse by verse study in Job 38

Jehovah, the Omniscient

God is greater than man. -- Job 33:12

Nature is awe-inspiring. As we view the wonders of earth, from the stark interplay of colors in the Grand Canyon of the Colorado to the towering snow-capped peaks of the Himalayas, all we can do is respond with a stream of "Ooh's" and "Ah's." Who has not thrilled with the shepherd psalmist as he sang "When I consider thy heavens ... What is man, that thou art mindful of him" (Psalms 8:3, 4)? Or again, "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth forth his handiwork" (Psalms 19:1).

Nature is intimidating. Not only its sheer size, but the intricate balancing necessary to make it all work in soundless harmony challenges the minds of even the brightest scientists. Billions of dollars in research and countless hours in sophisticated laboratories have only scratched the surface of the wonders of the universe.

It is to these wonders and the wisdom that went into their planning that Jehovah refers when he enters the discussion between Job and his companions.

The Challenge--Verses 1 to 3

Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said, Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me.

The address of God begins with a ringing rebuke. It is noteworthy that this rebuke is not addressed to Elihu, the speaker whom God interrupts from the whirlwind, nor to the three who Job terms "miserable comforters" (16:2), but to Job. The book of Job opens by describing him as "perfect and upright" and it closes with the commendation that he spoke of God "the thing that is right" (42:7). Yet he is the one singled out for the strong criticism: "Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without wisdom?"

One of the tools of the Adversary is the wedge, where one extreme position begets the opposite. This is illustrated well in the book of Job. Job's early professions of innocence, antagonized by the well-meant accusations of his three friends, degenerate into the self-righteousness which the young man Elihu cites (33:8-13). It is this self-righteousness which God reproves. Jehovah does this by enumerating the wonders of natural creation and challenging Job to answer how they were accomplished.

It is significant that Jehovah speaks "out of the whirlwind." This whirlwind is the great storm from the south that Elihu notices approaching and describes in the preceding two chapters. In the larger symbolic picture of Job, this storm probably refers to the prophetic event known as "the time of trouble" (Daniel 12:1), when man will have reached his extremity and Jehovah will manifest to all that he is indeed the Almighty, the Creator of

heaven and earth. In microcosm, the same is true of each individual of the race -- it is only when he reaches the extremity in his personal "whirlwind" that he becomes open to the voice of God.

In the verses that follow, God shows his wisdom in seven distinct areas of creation: 1. the earth itself (verses 4-7); 2. the seas (verses 8-18); 3. the ways of light (verses 19-21); 4. the provision of water resources (verses 22-30); 5. the stars (verses 31-33); 6. the control of climate (verses 34-38); 7. the animal creation (38:39 through chapter 41).

Foundations of the Earth--Verses 4 to 7

Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof; When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?

The language in this passage is architectural. We see the master planner deliberating over his drafting board, determining precise sizes for his project. He is building a home -- a home for not only the human race but for countless other species of flora and fauna. It would be a living home, constantly growing and replenishing itself. As scripturally foretold, the earth was made to abide "for ever" (Ecclesiastes 1:4).

Much thought would need to be given to its size and the effect of that size on the gravitational pull its inhabitants could withstand. Its size would determine its atmosphere. The effect of a satellite, or moon, upon its water surfaces was considered. An appropriate and delicate balance must be maintained between the oceans as a reservoir and the arable land surfaces, including provisions for growth through volcanic, glacial and earthquake activity as the subterranean tectonic plates shifted.

The earth is not a solid sphere. Much of the interior is molten and fluid. Stability for the continental land surfaces is attained by giant rock massifs penetrating far below the earth's surface. Prof. J. W. Gregory locates seven of these, one each below North and South America, Sweden, Siberia, India, Africa, and Australia (*Encyclopedia of Modern Knowledge*, "The Making of the Earth," pp. 192-3). Another scientist writes of these rock pedestals, "These oldest rocks -- that form the basement of continental land masses -- often cover large areas, and are spoken of as 'massifs,' 'coigns,' or 'shields.' ... We are here face to face with ... the very floor of the continent, a foundation 'massif' on which the newer sediments have been built during the succeeding geological periods. ... The sediments, which at first were soft, when subjected to crush and super-heated conditions of a later age, became crystalline, and passed into fusion. Granites formed in the folds of the mountain ranges." (*The Building of Australia*, Part I, Prof. W. Howchin, D.Sc., p. 32.)

The Hebrew word translated "foundations" in verse six is different than the one used in verse four. The latter would be better translated "pedestal," "pillar," or "footing." It is most frequently translated "socket" and is so used for the sockets of the tabernacle in the

wilderness. The word "fastened," in the original, has the concept of being sunk deeply into a solid footing. These terms are very appropriate for the size and depth of these massive rock pedestals which form the foundations for the continental land masses.

Verse seven shows that this part of the creative work was some time after the making of the angelic host, which suggests that these innumerable spiritual beings may have been employed in the building process, not only of the universe, but of the particular spot within it for the habitation of the human race. Their "shouting together for joy" may indicate they were willingly and usefully employed in preparing the earth for human habitation.

The Bounds of the Sea--Verses 8 to 18

Or who shut up the sea with doors, when it brake forth, as if it had issued out of the womb? When I made the cloud the garment thereof, and thick darkness a swaddling band for it, And brake up for it my decreed place, and set bars and doors, And said, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed? Hast thou commanded the morning since thy days; and caused the dayspring to know his place; That it might take hold of the ends of the earth, that the wicked might be shaken out of it? It is turned as clay to the seal; and they stand as a garment. And from the wicked their light is withholden, and the high arm shall be broken. Hast thou entered into the springs of the sea? or hast thou walked in the search of the depth? Have the gates of death been opened unto thee? or hast thou seen the doors of the shadow of death? Hast thou perceived the breadth of the earth? declare if thou knowest it all.

This section calls to mind the works of the first three creative days of Genesis 1. Here God speaks of the divisions of light and darkness, of sea and cloud, and of sea and dry land. The Genesis account presumes the earth to already exist and to be in an unformed and liquid condition: "And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" (Genesis 1:2).

In poetic language, the book of Job sees these waters erupting from below. The words are not incompatible with the waters coming from cooling vapors as the primordial globe began to be prepared for use. Sir James Jeans sees four stages in this process: (1) the earth, at first, as a gas perhaps from the sun; (2) condensing into a liquid at a very high temperature; (3) losing heat, congealing into a hot plastic mass; and (4) cooling into the present solid crust (Encyclopedia of Modern Knowledge, "The World, Whence and How," p. 14).

The Hebrew word for doors signifies a double door, such as a sluice gate. The study of volcanoes illustrates how gases thrown into space contain vast amounts of water vapor. In the case of the earth, this vapor had been "shut up" around the central core before the Creator opened the sluice gates and sent it forth as gases to later condense and fall into pre-formed ocean beds. However, both in the heavens and upon the earth, the accumulations of water had to be carefully controlled.

Passing from the waters below to the waters above, God describes the remaining liquids surrounding the earth as "swaddling-bands." The picture is an apt one. As a new-born child is quickly swathed from head to toe, so the newly-formed earth would be encircled with cloudy vapors.

At first glance, verses twelve to fifteen appear to be almost parenthetical. The discussion turns from the seas to the distinction between light and darkness and then, in verse sixteen, back to the seas. However the two thoughts are related. It was the encircling rings of vapor which prevented the dawn from making its appearance. At first these permitted but little light to penetrate to the surface of the planet, but as they fell, ring after ring, the light became clearer, and finally on the fourth creative day the shape of the light-giving sun and stars and the reflective moon became visible.

The reference to the "placement" of the dayspring, or dawn, is not mere poetic allusion. In the formative processes of the planet, Jehovah planned the earth's axis to be tilted. This would cause the different portions of the earth's surface to be at varying angles to the sun through the year, thus producing the varying climate needed for the growing seasons. These were intended to be permanent in the utilization of the earth. "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease" (Genesis 8:22).

While the allusion to the "wicked" in this passage may have some reference to the preference of evil-doers to work their nefarious trades under cover of darkness, we suggest that this is not the primary purpose here. The word here twice rendered "wicked" is the Hebrew *ra*, meaning calamities of every sort, including natural catastrophes. The intrusion of light on to the surface of the water-enveloped earth had the effect of purifying it.

Verse fourteen is a difficult one to interpret. One scholar has traced no less than twenty different attempts to form an interpretation. Professor Rich, in his *Second Memoir on the Ruins of Babylon* (page 59), suggests that the metaphor is of the Babylonian cylindrical seal which, when rolled over moist clay, leaves a distinct and intricate impression.

The *New International Version* phrases it the clearest. "The earth takes shape like clay under a seal; its features stand out like those of a garment." Two distinct actions are here described. The making of the image by the seal and the revelation of that image by its removal. It was the weight of the super-heated rings above the earth that formed the seal. Their gradual descent would reveal the work which they had wrought, making the features of the new planet "stand out like those of a garment."

Edward Dormath in his *A Commentary on the Book of Job* (Thomas Nelson, 1984, pp. 581, 582) notes that the clay here referred to is red in color, just as the earth in the eerie half-light then visible would have taken on a red appearance. Perhaps it is for this reason that the paraphrased Living Bible contents itself with wording this verse, "Have you ever robbed the dawn in red."

Once again, in the next verse of this section, we meet "the wicked." Once again it is a translation of the Hebrew *ra*. While the moral lesson is true and obvious, perhaps the verse here, as the rest of the chapter, has reference to the creative process. The beauties of the revealed earth were manifest. But the unfolding light did not illuminate the catastrophes held within these sharply modeled features. Many of the mountains would later reveal their volcanic innards and other beauty spots would later be shaken by mighty earthquakes. These were all a part of the growing process for a planet that was not due to reach its maturity for thousands of years. Living side by side with this growing process would give the human race ample opportunity to see the continuing creative processes. Often these would wreak havoc and leave thousands dead in their wake. But, in due time, even though these earth-growing forces may continue, their strong destructive arms will be broken. As increasing light reveals more and more of the purposes of these natural phenomena, they will be accurately predicted and lose their destructive threat.

Verse 16 is the only biblical use of the word translated "springs," and would be better translated "depths." It is rendered *profunda* by the *Latin Vulgate*. The challenge here is to go where man, at that time at least, could not go -- the floor of the oceans. It is only in the past century that attempts, even yet imperfect, have been made to map these areas, some plummeting miles below sea level. It is in the comprehension of these that God suggests Job may find some of his answers concerning the principles of Jehovah.

In the next verse the lesson is brought home to Job. In his sorely afflicted condition he felt close to death's door. "If you do not understand the principles of life," God is saying, "how do you expect to comprehend the details of death?" With such a lack of knowledge, one cannot help but appreciate the faith of Job, who utters such profound thoughts on the subject of death and resurrection!

It will take resurrected man eternal life to fully plumb the depth of planning that has gone into the molding of planet Earth for human habitation. All fields of science will proceed from hypothetical probability to fact, and theory will grow into reality, as mankind probes the limitless breadths of information before him.

The Source of Light--Verses 19 to 21

Where is the way where light dwelleth? and as for darkness, where is the place thereof, That thou shouldest take it to the bound thereof, and that thou shouldest know the paths to the house thereof? Knowest thou it, because thou wast then born? or because the number of thy days is great?

What is the ultimate source of light? While the sun furnishes the bulk of visible light to the earth, we receive additional light from literally billions of other stars, each in its own galactic environment. Light from these distant bodies has traveled millions of years to reach our planet. Even with expensive space probes, and the Hubble telescope, scientists are only beginning to realize the true size of the universe. Speculation as to its origin is still theoretical. The search goes on. But God knew. That is the premise of his answer to

Job. Not only did he know, he planned for their placement. Nor is that placement accidental, for each celestial body exerts gravitational pressure on each other body, and thus they must be distributed so as to maintain a precise balance.

Darkness seems too simple to be remarkable. We define it merely as the absence of light. Yet darkness works its own wonders and plays an important role in the continuation of life on earth. Experiments have shown that withholding darkness for long periods of time deprives one of the necessary restorative powers of deep sleep.

God's challenge to Job is clothed in simple language. Where were you when these laws were formed? Job's answer, while unspoken, is obvious. These were all before he existed. But it is not the simple challenge of Job's brevity that makes the chapter so intriguing. It is the complete accord of this language with the works of creation as written both in Genesis and in the fossilized records of nature.

Water Resources--Verses 22 to 30

Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow? or hast thou seen the treasures of the hail, Which I have reserved against the time of trouble, against the day of battle and war? By what way is the light parted, which scattereth the east wind upon the earth? Who hath divided a watercourse for the overflowing of waters, or a way for the lightning of thunder; To cause it to rain on the earth, where no man is; on the wilderness, wherein there is no man; To satisfy the desolate and waste ground; and to cause the bud of the tender herb to spring forth? Hath the rain a father? or who hath begotten the drops of dew? Out of whose womb came the ice? and the hoary frost of heaven, who hath gendered it? The waters are hid as with a stone, and the face of the deep is frozen.

Water is the largest single component of earth's surface. Water comes in many forms -- ice, snow, hail, sleet, rain and steam to name but a few. Without refreshing rains or flowing streams for irrigation the entire earth would be a desolate wilderness. A simple yet detailed description of the water cycle is found in Ecclesiastes 1:5-7. "The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose. The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits. All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again." From the evaporative action of the sun over the oceans, to the role of the winds bringing the clouds inland, to that of the heights delivering the water back to the sea by gravity, the entire weather pattern of the earth is traced in simple, yet poetic language.

A vital feature of this cycle is played by snow. Snow-capped mountains form the reservoirs, replenished by seasonal precipitation, to provide a steady flow of life-giving water to the arable lowlands. Not only do these flowing streams deliver water, but with it fresh supplies of top soil in the form of silt so that the earth continues to grow as a living planet.

Of all the forms of watery precipitation, hail is unique in that it forms no known beneficial purpose. It is the farmer's bane, repeatedly destroying valuable crops. It wreaks havoc on buildings and the populace as well. Hail was used by the Lord as one of his munitions of war against the enemies of Israel; witness the plagues of Egypt and the hail which laid low the armies of the Amorites at Gibeon (Joshua 10:11). Job is challenged to show how God, out of the same component, makes both the benevolent treasures of the snow and the malevolent armories of warfare.

Verses 25 to 28 describe the action of storms. The "watercourses" are the rain patterns formed by the interplay of high and low pressure zones. They follow sufficiently defined paths to enable today's weathermen to predict their effects with increasing accuracy days, and even weeks, in advance. Mountains play an important role in this pattern, breaking the clouds so that they drop their precious moisture at the higher elevations, to descend more gradually through the river beds to where they are needed most. As one has remarked, "All Australia needs to become extremely productive is a mountain range near the western seaboard to bring rainfall to the outback."

Two additional water forms are introduced in verse 29 -- ice and frost. Frost is the plowman of the Lord. Its crystalline elements embed themselves in the ground and, by expansion, break up the clods of earth around them. Ice, covering the lakes and rivers, serves as an insulator, stabilizing the temperature of these bodies in their greater depths. It preserves an even temperature of four degrees Celsius in larger lakes and smaller ones where high winds do not raise a complicating factor (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, "Ice and Ice Formations").

Controlling the Stars--Verses 31 to 33

Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion? Canst thou bring forth Mazzaroth in his season? or canst thou guide Arcturus with his sons? Knowest thou the ordinances of heaven? canst thou set the dominion thereof in the earth?

Two distinct lines of knowledge are evident in these verses -- astronomic truths and symbolic interpretations. Though Orion is literally having its "bands" (the stars which form the scabbard of the hunter) loosed as the stars separate from each other, the stars of the Pleiades are bound in a cluster and move together. Meanwhile Arcturus, the shepherd constellation at the end of the handle of the Big Dipper (known originally as the large sheepfold) is guiding his sons (the handle stars, or sheep) into the fold (or pot of the dipper). None of this is apparent to the eye, and can only be detected by modern astronomical methods. Yet God expressed these matters accurately to Job.

The introduction of the word Mazzaroth adds an additional line of thought to these verses. Literally the word refers to the constellations of the Zodiac, the twelve signs. These were important in ancient time, not for astrological purposes, but for predictably marking the months and seasons. However, since these signs are designated by animal and other figures, the word is suggestive of a symbolic interpretation to the star signs. This is further bolstered by Genesis 1:14 where one of the purposes of the formation of

stars was for "signs." However, care must be exercised in using this line of interpretation to avoid anything akin to astrology, which is condemned in Scripture.

Climactic Patterns--Verses 33 to 38

Knowest thou the ordinances of heaven? canst thou set the dominion thereof in the earth? Canst thou lift up thy voice to the clouds, that abundance of waters may cover thee? Canst thou send lightnings, that they may go, and say unto thee, Here we are? Who hath put wisdom in the inward parts? or who hath given understanding to the heart? Who can number the clouds in wisdom? or who can stay the bottles of heaven, When the dust groweth into hardness, and the clods cleave fast together?

Jehovah's words now proceed from the general to the specific. Apparently he is alluding to the whirlwind, out from which Job hears his voice. The challenge here is not only Job's inability to command the weather to do his bidding, but his inability to plan the weather patterns. The beneficial aspects of lightning had not been studied until the last century when it was found that vast amounts of nitrogen are released when lightning discharges, cleansing the air and providing an essential nutrient for crop development.

Numbering the clouds may refer to understanding the amount of water which must be evaporated to properly irrigate the earth's surface. However the Hebrew word translated "clouds" apparently refers not so much to the clouds themselves as to their individual particles. The challenge to Job is whether he can know the number of particles in the clouds. These are innumerable. Only the Architect of creation knows the formulae for the composition of each cloud to provide the optimum rainfall.

The Hebrew in verse 38 is ambiguous, capable of two opposite interpretations. Most translators treat it as descriptive of the hard caked earth which needs the rains for softening. Most lexicons, on the other hand, note that the word translated "groweth" is a word used to describe the action of flowing molten metal. From this they derive the thought of hardened earth turning into mud, flowing the formerly caked earth into one moldable mass and thus making it arable. In either case, the description is that the storm is needed to prepare the earth for future growth.

In the allegorical interpretation of the book of Job, the whirlwind that is the focal point from Job 36:27 through 40 depicts the great time of trouble of Daniel 12:1. The wisdom of God in arranging weather patterns for appropriate growing seasons is equally displayed in the role of this time of trouble in preparing the earth for the blessings of the kingdom to follow. The prophet Daniel connects the time of trouble with a rapid growth of knowledge. Both are necessary for the success of the kingdom work, just as both the refreshment of rain and the harsher aspects of frost, hail, and lightning all play their parts in the natural preparation of earth for the new growing seasons ahead.

The Brute Creation--Verses 39 to 41

Wilt thou hunt the prey for the lion? or fill the appetite of the young lions, When they couch in their dens, and abide in the covert to lie in wait? Who provideth for the raven his food? when his young ones cry unto God, they wander for lack of meat.

Inasmuch as these three verses properly belong to the thirty-ninth chapter, we leave their discussion for another time. Suffice it here to mention that in the next section of God's discourse to Job, he challenges the afflicted man to understand the care given to the creation of animals, their different periods of gestation, and the thought given to providing food and a suitable habitat for each species.

The net affect of Jehovah's words provide the very motivation which the human comforters could not -- the production of humility and repentance on the part of Job (Job 40:3-5; 42:1-6). It should be the same for each of us. Contemplating the greatness of God -- both his omnipotence and his omniscience -- should produce humility and repentance in us as well. Truly, God's ways are higher than man's ways and his thoughts than man's thoughts.

Psalm 2

Both Psalm 2 and 110 refer to Christ entering his royal honors at his resurrection. "I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee" (Psalm 2:7). In the Hebrew language, as in the Greek, the word for begotten is used either for begettal or birth, and could be rendered "generated." It is rendered "begotten" here in most translations probably because the active agent is Jehovah, generally supposed to represent the dominant male gender as opposed to the female (though of course the difference in gender does not truly apply to spirit beings).

The analogy in this text, however, is not to begettal, as though the subject were an embryo. The subject is a son, and the "generating" is represented as complete. Literally, as applied to David, it signifies David's authority as a divinely appointed king ruling from Zion, which was David's seat of authority. "I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion" (verse 6).

The Israelites had a favored position before Jehovah: "I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High" (Psalm 82:6). How much more was David favored, as the anointed leader of Israel. "Thou art my father, my God" said David, and God said of David, "I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth" (Psalm 89:26, 27). So David was placed in authority over his neighbors, and ruled over them.

As applied to the greater David, Messiah, it pertains to his resurrection when he was highly exalted above all other powers. "God hath ... raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee ... now no more to return to corruption" (Acts 13:33,34).

Smiting of the Nations

Verses 8 and 9 are the natural consequences of this raising to power. "Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."

One key to understanding the Divine Plan of the Ages is to recognize there are two separate and distinct ages of redemption -- the Gospel age for the selection of the spiritual class and the Millennial age for the gathering of all others into Christ. The words of Psalm 2 apply to both ages, and at the outset of each there are different kings opposing the rule of the anointed one.

Acts 4:26,27 speaks of the royal opposers at the first advent: "The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together." These enemies, both Jewish and Roman, were to be broken under the power of the newly exalted king. His disciples would do "not only ... this which is done to the fig tree

[cursed and shriveled], but also ... this mountain ... [shall] be cast into the sea” (Matthew 21:21). Both the Jewish state (the fig tree) and the Roman empire (the mountain) were swept away to allow the growth of Christianity. (Compare Revelation 8:7, 8, which describes these judgments.)

The judgments of this psalm are applied again at the close of the Gospel age, as the - Millennial kingdom becomes established in the earth. “He that overcometh and keepeth my words unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father” (Revelation 2:26,27).

In both cases the leaders of this world are advised to submit quickly to the new power, to avoid the severe blows otherwise necessary. “Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little” (Psalm 2:10-12). Those who submitted to King David quickly were spared much difficulty, and such powers as bent to the advance of Christianity, or now bend to the authority of the incoming kingdom of Christ, meet correspondingly less severity in the transition.

Revelation testifies that awesome force will be employed to dislodge the powers that be, reticent to recognize the situation and yield gracefully. “Out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron [breaking the power of nations]: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God” (Revelation 19:15).

A Messianic Prophecy

To the chief Musician upon Aijeleth Shahar, A Psalm of David. -- Psalm 22 (Title)

A verse-by-verse study of Psalm 22

The psalms of David cover a wide variety of subjects, but few are Messianic. Speaking of Psalm 22 Gill's Commentary says, "This passage is sometimes applied by the Jews themselves to their Messiah."

Many of the Jews observing the crucifixion of Christ may have remembered the words of the psalmist which Jesus spoke, and they would have seen that many of the prophecies of this particular psalm were then being fulfilled before their eyes. Several of the psalms were sung in their places of worship and they would have been quite familiar with the words of these verses.

No doubt David wrote of his own experiences in poetic verse and song. Perhaps there is a situation in David's lifetime which prompted him to write this psalm, though no details are recorded in the Old Testament.

While the words of this psalm may have had a literal fulfillment in this literal king of Israel, the real fulfillment is in the prophetic king of Israel, Jesus Christ the Messiah. Because this psalm contains direct prophecies of our Lord's crucifixion, death, and resurrection, its prophetic fulfillment cannot be denied.

King David, the beloved of Jehovah, a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14), fulfilled the will of the Lord (Acts 13:22). It is this same Lord who guided David's expressions and made his words represent Messiah prophetically years before their fulfillment (Acts 13:33-36).

"Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me" -- Verses 1 and 2

"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent."

The opening words are the exact words uttered by Jesus when he was on the cross (Matthew 27:46). The person in this psalm cries out three times for help in hopelessness and despair, yet there was apparently no help. There are three different Hebrew words to express the appeal in this psalm: a crying out in distress (verse 1); a calling out for help (verse 2); and a crying out in need (verse 5).

David must have felt a deep agony when writing this psalm, and perhaps similarly when he wrote Psalm 142 while hiding in a cave: "I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul" (Psalm 142:4).

Perhaps the psalmist's cry in the night refers to Jesus' Gethsemane prayer the night before the crucifixion. Jesus uses the term "My God" only on the cross and before his ascension (Matthew 27:46; John 20:17).

What does "forsake" mean? Either Jesus was actually forsaken on the cross because he needed to feel exactly what it was like so he could be our merciful high priest, or he was calling attention to the psalm so those around him would see him as the suffering servant, the Messiah, who was prophesied about in this psalm.

This is a prophetic psalm which foretells the events which surrounded our Lord's life and contains a description of his feelings. He apparently felt forsaken by the heavenly Father as also did David who wrote this psalm. There simply is not enough information in either the psalm or the gospels to determine whether Jesus actually felt forsaken by God, as David did, or whether he was truly forsaken by the Father so he could understand mankind's plight and relationship with God.

Implicit Trust -- Verses 3-5

"But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel. Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them. They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded."

This language is reminiscent of the praises in the tabernacle of the wilderness after the deliverance from Egypt. The presence of God dwelt there. He was surrounded by all those who praised him.

Even though the psalmist asks why God has forsaken him, he still trusts in his God: "He trusted on the LORD that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him" (verse 8).

David felt that even though he was suffering and could not unite in the lofty praises of God, yet God was worthy of all the praises which should be addressed to him, no matter what circumstance one may be in. Even though he asked God why he was forsaken, he remembered that while Israel was in the wilderness, they cried out for deliverance, and deliverance was given. He expected a similar deliverance.

"A Worm and No Man" -- Verses 6-11

"But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the LORD that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him. But thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly. Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help." The Chaldee paraphrase renders the word "worm" in verse 6 as "weak worm." A humble

man has lower thoughts of himself than others may have of him. Even though David was king of Israel, he described himself as a lowly "worm."

The Hebrew word describes the worm from which scarlet dye was obtained. This also is prophetic of Christ in the way he was mocked with a scarlet robe and in which his body was covered in blood when he hung upon the cross and cried out the first words of this psalm. Alternatively it may refer to the blood he shed for all (Colossians 1:20).

The language of this section of the psalm is very much like that of Isaiah 53, which has been viewed by both Jews and Christians as a Messianic prophecy. This reinforces the thought that such an interpretation is not "forced."

Although they shook their heads at him (Psalm 22:7; Matthew 27:39), scorned, and ridiculed him, he trusted that the LORD would deliver him (Psalm 22:8). The true sense of the Hebrew phrase, "He trusted on the LORD that he would deliver him," contains the idea of being under the pressure of a heavy burden and rolling it off, or casting it off, onto another. This should encourage us to "Commit [our] way unto the LORD; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass" (Psalm 37:5; see also Proverbs 16:3).

The psalmist reminds himself that God had not abandoned him while he had been in the womb. He owed his life to God. Jesus was with his Father from the beginning of the world; from the time he was a youth he had always been faithful to his heavenly Father. Perhaps Jesus thought of these words as he saw his mother standing near while he was on the cross (John 19:26).

In verse eleven he once again requests help, although he realized that no human could help him. No one could understand what loneliness he felt, or what burden he bore. God had helped him in the past, and again he asked God to be near him in his most desperate hour.

The Bulls of Bashan -- Verses 12, 13

"Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion."

The bulls surrounded him -- Chief Priests, Elders, Scribes, Pharisees, the crowds, Herod, Pontius Pilate -- in his arrest, arraignment, trial, and condemnation. They were like bulls in their rage and accusations against Christ. The bulls of Bashan (a territory on the east of Jordan, north of Gilead) were known for their size, fierceness, and strength. The suggestion of verse 12 is that Jesus' persecutors were full of fury comparable to these bulls of Bashan.

This description is of roaring lions surrounding him with teeth bared, mouths open, preparing to attack. This scene is quite reminiscent of the crowd as they cried, "Crucify him! Crucify him!"

"All My Bones are Out of Joint" -- Verses 14-18

"I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death. For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture."

Now we move from a description of those around him to what he feels. David describes his utter weakness, like being poured out like water. His bones are described as being "out of joint," words also literally true of crucifixion. This was one of the most severe pains of crucifixion, the weight of a victim pulling bones out of their sockets. Vitality leaving him is depicted as a heart that melts like wax within his bowels, or in other words, within him.

His tongue can no longer do its work. The dogs continue to circle waiting for his death. They pierce his hands and feet. They look and stare at him and they part his garments and cast lots for it (Mark 15:24). At this point in the psalm he feels his lowest and closest to death, yet he continues to trust in the Lord even though he feels forsaken and alone.

Saved from the Unicorns -- Verses 19-21

"But be not thou far from me, O LORD: O my strength, haste thee to help me. Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog. Save me from the lion's mouth: for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns."

Again the Lord is appealed to for help with a request for deliverance. It is remarkable that through all the things the servant in this psalm suffers, he still describes the Lord as his strength. This should also be true of us for we should rely on the Scriptural promise that we should "take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake" (2 Corinthians 12:10) for when we are weak, then we are strong.

He asks to be saved from the lions who earlier were ready to attack him. This could be a reference to the devil, who as a roaring lion seeks "those whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8), or it might refer to the civil magistrates (2 Timothy 4:17) such as the chief priests and elders who were mainly responsible for Jesus' crucifixion.

Regarding the words in verse 20, Martin Luther writes:

"'My darling' had better be rendered 'my lonely, or solitary one.' For he wishes to say that his soul was lonely and forsaken by all, and that there was no one who sought after him as a friend, or cared for him, or comforted him: as we have it, Psalm 142:4, Refuge failed me; no one cared for my soul; I looked on my right hand, but there was no one who would know me; that is, solitude is of itself a certain cross, and especially so in such great

torments, in which it is most grievous to be immersed without an example and without a companion. And yet, in such a state, everyone of us must be, in some suffering or other, and especially in that of death; and we must be brought to cry out with Psalm 25:16, Turn thee unto me, and have mercy upon me, for I am desolate and afflicted."

He desired to be delivered from what he called "the horns of the unicorns." He felt surrounded by enemies from all sides and as the wild beasts, dogs, and unicorns, were seeking his life he cried out for his Lord.

The meaning of the Hebrew word translated "unicorn" is undetermined. Gesenius and Dewette's lexicons render the word as "buffalo" rather than the mythical creature. However, the horns of buffalo are curved, and are not known for their strength. Whatever this animal was, it was distinguished for its power (Numbers 23:22) although it was not used to till the soil (Job 39:9,10). Since buffalo can be trained to till the soil, we do not know which animal this was. We do know it was a wild, untrained animal with strength in its horns (Deuteronomy 33:17), horns which attracted attention as some sort of majesty or dignity (Psalm 92:10).

Praise for Deliverance -- Verses 22-26

"I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee. Ye that fear the LORD, praise him; all ye the seed of Jacob, glorify him; and fear him, all ye the seed of Israel. For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard. My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation: I will pay my vows before them that fear him. The meek shall eat and be satisfied: they shall praise the LORD that seek him: your heart shall live for ever."

The writer of Hebrews applies verse 22 to Jesus (Hebrews 2:12). In his plight, he attempts to encourage his brethren and even while in his distress his thoughts were for his church. God had heard his prayer and his immediate concern was not for himself, but for his brethren. As the prophetic suffering servant of this psalm, he dedicates himself anew to fulfill his vows to the Lord. He declares to his brethren that God's purpose was not to hide his face or to despise the afflicted and that they were to trust in him, and praise him in the entire congregation. He encourages the meek to likewise fulfill their vows to the Lord. This encouragement was not only for his brethren, but for all worshippers of Yahweh. The term "seed of Israel" is synonymous with "seed of Jacob."

The Lord has spread a table for the meek to eat and only the meek will eat and be satisfied for they are the ones who seek, trust, and praise the Lord. The word "meek" in this passage refers to those who are afflicted. The suffering servant of this psalm now relies on the promise that those who will praise the Lord will live forever. We too should remember this when we go through our own difficult experiences. "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12).

A Lesson for Future Generations -- Verses 27-31

"All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee. For the kingdom is the LORD's: and he is the governor among the nations. All they that be fat upon earth shall eat and worship: all they that go down to the dust shall bow before him: and none can keep alive his own soul. A seed shall serve him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation. They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done this."

In these verses we have a prophetic prediction of the conversion of the Gentiles, for all those who have gone to the dust will return and bow before him. In all parts of the earth, and all the ends of the world, all those resurrected, all the kindreds of the nations, all the nations of the earth that were to be blessed through the seed of Abraham, will remember and return to the Lord. Those nations who have forgotten the Lord will remember him and they will worship him as their king. For when God's judgments are in the earth, "the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness" (Isaiah 26:9). "For this is right and acceptable before God our Savior, who doth will all men to be saved, and to come to the full knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:3,4, Young's Literal Translation).

Again we find a similar thought in the Messianic prophecy of Isaiah. "Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand" (Isaiah 53:10).

This psalm applies entirely to Jesus Christ without stretching or forcing any interpretation or application. The events of the crucifixion were told in explicit detail more than a thousand years before they happened. These things included not only the actions which surrounded Messiah on the cross, but also his feelings, his fears, and his hopes, as well as encouragement for his followers. May we be faithful to the vision and continue running this race: "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us" (Hebrews 12:1).

"That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us" (Hebrews 6:18).

In his Treasury of David Spurgeon makes this comment about the ending words "that he hath done this":

"It is finished. Salvation's glorious work is done, there is peace on earth, and glory in the highest. It is finished: these were the expiring words of the Lord Jesus, as they are the last words of this psalm. May we by living faith be enabled to see our salvation finished by the death of Jesus!"

As Pants the Hart

O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary. -- Psalm 63:1, 2

A verse by verse study in the 42nd Psalm

Nothing whets the appetite for God more than a life of hardship and trials. Prosperity diminishes man's need for God while opposition and persecution strengthen it. King David of Israel was one who could testify to these facts. He had experienced both sides. As king and conquering warrior he knew the accolades of the crowd -- "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands" (1 Sam. 18:7). But as a refugee from the wrath of Saul and later put to flight by the almost successful rebellion of his son Absalom, he knew the depths of discouragement. David was a complex man. He combined the warrior-like qualities of a great military man with the gentle nature of a poet. His reflective qualities earned him the praise of God as "a man after mine own heart" (Acts 13:22). The thoughts of his heart are preserved for us in the book of Psalms.

The Title of the Psalm

For the director of music. A maskil for the sons of Korah (Title).

Unlike other portions of the Bible where superscriptions are inserted at the whim of the translator, the titles of those psalms which bear superscriptions or subscriptions are part of the inspired record. The annotation "for the director of music" suggests that the psalm was meant to be used in temple service and was to be assigned to the group of singers known as "the sons of Korah."

In preparation for the temple services David had divided the singers into twenty-four courses, with one noted director from the three descendants of Levi over each of three sets of eight groups (1 Chron. 6:31-53). The three leaders were Heman, a Kohathite (v. 33); Asaph, a Gershomite (v. 39); and Ethan [otherwise called Jeduthun], a Merarite (v. 44). The singers led by Heman were called the "sons of Korah" because they were his lineal descendants.

In fact, Heman had two noted forefathers -- Korah and Samuel. Heman descended from Samuel through his son Joel who "walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment" (1 Sam. 8:3).

In this simple illustration we see the mercy of God, overlooking the gross misdeeds of the forebears to honor the heart devoted to his service.

The word '*maskil*' is derived from the Hebrew *sekel* [Strong's 7922], which is frequently translated "understanding." Psalms so marked were designated as "teaching psalms," or

"psalms for instruction." The forty-second psalm is an excellent example of a "teaching psalm," where the lesson to be learned is that in times of distress the only reliable help is in seeking the Lord.

The Search for God -- Verses 1 to 3

As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?

Anyone who has visited the arid Negev wilderness in the area of En Gedi where David was holed up in his flight from the wrath of Saul can well imagine the imagery he uses here. He pictures before us a young hart, or deer, in flight from a hunter. After the long chase he enters the green oasis of En Gedi, panting from fright and the rigor of flight, hot from the searing sun overhead, longing for the cooling, refreshing waters of the streams that tumble into this narrow valley.

In this graceful creature of the wilderness David sees a simile to his own experiences. He, too, has been wearied from the flight and distraught within from the continuous pursuit of his king. He, too, longs for refreshment, not the refreshment of En Gedi's cooling streams, but the more lasting refreshment that comes from a knowledge of the favor of God.

There is a similarity in imagery between this and the sixty-third psalm, a psalm which the title informs us was penned "in the wilderness of Judah," probably the last of the wilderness psalms. David's life, like the scene around him, was "a dry and thirsty land, wherein is no water."

We are told that while men can go for long periods without solid food they will die of dehydration if they are without water for only three days. David felt that he could only bear up a short time without a knowledge of his relationship to God.

He had been feeding on the tears of discouragement, now he sought to wash them down with a refreshing draft of fellowship with his God. His feeling of estrangement was heightened by the taunts of his enemies, "Where is your God?"

His desire for God was not merely a reassurance of his presence but also an invitation to approach him in prayer and lay out his trials before him -- "when shall I come and appear before God?"

Have we ever felt the same way? Has the road at times become so dreary and discouraging that we feel unable even to pray? Like Esther of old said of her husband, "I have not been called to come into the king these thirty days" (Esth. 4:11). We cry, like Job, "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the

right hand, that I cannot see him." We unfortunately at times lack the faith to take the next step; "But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:8-10).

These seasons of spiritual drought in our lives are not without value. We need such experiences to feel that deep heartfelt longing which caused David to write the words of this Psalm.

A Soul Poured Out -- Verse 4

When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday.

In sharp contrast to present experiences, David recalls earlier, happier days. It is here and in verse six that we get the impression that this Psalm was written later in David's life, perhaps in the flight from Absalom, noting the similarities with his earlier flight from Saul.

The "house of God" at that time was in a private residence, in the home of Abinadam (1 Sam. 7:1). Yet even here it was attended by festive crowds. From this verse we learn a great lesson about the worship of ancient Israel. We discover that it was not a time so much for solemnity as it was a time for the outpouring of joy. The two words translated "multitude" in this verse bear out this thought. While the first word means simply "a throng, or mass of people," the second word describes a loud and jubilant festive procession.

This is further emphasized with the words translated "a voice of joy and praise." Strong's Concordance defines the word for joy as a "shrill sound," usually referring to a joyful outbreak. The word for praise contains the thought of "extending the hand" and is thought to refer to a choir, or it could even be descriptive of such Jewish round dances as the "hora."

Worship was not looked at somberly, but joyfully, in appreciation of God's protective care and generosity to them. Where religion envisions a stern and harsh God praise can be evoked only by a fear of the consequences if it is not given. Where God is viewed as a God of love, joy predominates in his worship service.

This joyful worship was reflected when Ezra read the law to the people of Israel upon their return from Babylon, "Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the LORD is your strength" (Neh. 8:10).

In order to afford to go the long distances to the feasts of the Lord, the faithful Israelite was to lay aside a special tithe for this purpose. The laws of this tithe are given in the fourteenth chapter of Deuteronomy. One of the provisions was for the turning into cash

of the tithe and taking the proceeds to the place where the festival was to be held. We read of this in verse twenty-six: "And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth: and thou shalt eat there before the LORD thy God, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household."

The house of the Lord is more a house of smiles and good-hearted laughter than it is a house of tears. While sobriety is always encouraged, so is a cheerful heart. Rather than continual remorse for the sins of the past, there is the lightness of heart that comes from the certainty of their forgiveness.

Depression Defeated -- Verses 5 to 8

Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance. O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar. Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me. Yet the LORD will command his lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life.

Here we see the two faces of David; his abiding spirituality and the weakness of his human nature. Even though David knew by personal experience that God was with him and there was no real cause for depression, yet he was experiencing that very depression. While discouraged by his present situation, he points to the one antidote for all depression -- hope.

To hope is to firmly grasp the future. Thus hope requires faith: faith in the reality of the future which God promises; that it will not only be better than today but that it will also show the purpose of today's hard experiences. In a similar vein, in the sixty-third Psalm, while fleeing Saul in the wilderness of Judea, he pens these words: "Because thy loving kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee. Thus will I bless thee while I live: I will lift up my hands in thy name. My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips" (vs. 3-5).

The New American Standard version translates the last phrase of verse five, "I shall again praise him for the help of his presence." This conveys the correct thought of "countenance." It is as though God had turned his face away from David, leaving him to suffer his afflictions, but David retained the confidence that God's face would once again be turned back toward him, that he would continue to have God's abiding presence in each and every experience.

The geographic descriptions in this passage relate more to David's flight from Absalom than to his seeking to escape the wrath of Saul. He fled Saul in the wilderness of Judea, encamping near the oasis at En Gedi. It was when Absalom made his move to seize the kingdom that David fled northward to Mahanaim and was met with a caravan of supplies

from Amman, in Jordan (2 Sam. 17:24-29). Mount Hermon and the nearby hill of Mizer were still further north, in what is today the country of Lebanon.

The metaphor changes in verse seven from that of an arid desert to a boisterous sea. Perhaps that is why this Psalm forms the basis for the prayer of Jonah while in the belly of the fish (Jonah 2). The change of illustration teaches us that regardless of the cause of our turmoil, whether it be the aridity of prolonged hardship and separation from God or being caught up in the turbulence of life, we are still wisest to leave the outcome to a loving heavenly Father, confident that he is too wise to err.

The obvious contrast between God's abiding care in the brightness of our daytime joys or the depths of sorrow's dark night is a comfort to all of his people. Yet the lesson is even stronger. The word translated "daytime" in verse eight (*yowmam*, Strong's 3119) is better translated "daily." Not only can we count on God's loving kindness, his mercy, day and night, but every day, "daily."

Yet, in the contrast between "day" and "night" there is also a rich lesson for the Christian. Our nighttime hours are a good opportunity to reflect upon our daytime experiences. They provide time to thank God for his daily leadings. They are not merely reflections of the evening, but "songs" in the night, songs of praise for God's loving kindness. These expressions of thankful praise continue despite the hardships of the day. As David expresses elsewhere: "The bands of the wicked have robbed me: but I have not forgotten thy law. At midnight I will rise to give thanks unto thee because of thy righteous judgments" (Psa. 119:61, 62).

Hope is the Answer -- Verses 9 to 11

"I will say unto God my rock, Why hast thou forgotten me? Why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy. As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me; while they say daily unto me, Where is thy God? Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God."

The thought of God being David's "rock" is that of a fortress or defense. Note the synonymous phrases he uses in Psalm 18:2, "The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower."

God is always the "rock" in the Old Testament, while Christ is the "rock" in the New. This fact is not a proof of the concept of the trinity. Instead, it merely shows the essential oneness in purpose and work between the two. This dual analogy shows how God provides his strength to man -- through his Son, his "right arm." The very fact that Jesus' name was to fulfill the prophecy that his name would be "Emmanuel," God with us, demonstrates that it is through Jesus that God operates as a stronghold, a "rock," to bring deliverance.

Rather than ending on a negative note, the closing words of this Psalm are upbeat. David clearly states his trials -- the feeling of desertion by God and the sarcastic reproaches of his enemies -- but immediately rebuts these negative feelings by countering his negative feelings with the antidote of hope. It is because of this deep-seated hope that David can continue to praise God, even while going through the rigors of flight from mighty foes. His God has become "the health of [his] countenance," maintaining the ruddy glow of an optimistic man, and not the gloomy disposition of one defeated in spirit.

The word "health" in this closing verse is the Hebrew *yeshuwah* (Strong's 3444), usually translated "salvation." It is the Hebrew word from which the name Jesus is derived, meaning Savior. David's hope has become his salvation, saving him from the downcast countenance of a defeated man, giving him the true optimism of one primed to continue faithfully on in the struggles and hardships that lie ahead.

"For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?" -- Romans 8:24

A Verse-by-verse Study of Psalm 45

The Bride and Bridegroom

The marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. -- Revelation 19:7

Carl Hagensick

Weddings are joyous occasions. This is especially true when the bride and bridegroom are of royalty. Psalm 45 was composed for just such an occasion and becomes an ode to love in commemoration of the king's nuptial day.

While the festive occasion that caused the composition of this song is debatable, it most likely was for one of the weddings of King Solomon, perhaps to the daughter of Pharaoh (1 Kings 3:1). This is supported by the reference to the daughter of Tyre (verse 12).

The Title

To the chief Musician upon Shoshannim, for the sons of Korah, Maschil, A Song of loves.

E. W. Bullinger in Appendix 64 of the *Companion Bible*, correctly says the term "To the chief musician" is misplaced in the authorized version; it belongs to Psalm 44. It is less clear whether he is correct in assuming the words "Upon Shoshannim" also belong to that psalm. We believe they are correctly placed as the first of four titles for Psalm 45.

"Upon Shoshannim" -- or "for the lilies" -- is a term that is difficult to identify. Some feel it refers to a lyre of six strings which was either in the form of a lily or is a derivative of the Hebrew word *shesh*, the number six. Others ascribe it to a popular tune of the time entitled "The Lily." Still others take it as a spring song when the lilies were in bloom, composed to be sung during the Passover season. It is most likely, in line with the wedding theme of the psalm, that it was sung during the procession when lily petals were strewn before the bride.

"For the sons of Korah" -- a reference to the ones appointed to sing the song. David organized the temple with three main leaders: Heman, the grandson of Samuel and a descendant of Kohath; Asaph, who traces his ancestry back to Gershon; and Ehan (or Jeduthun), a Merarite. Since Korah was a descendant of Kohath, it seems likely that those who were under the direction of Heman sang this song.

"Maschil" -- or, "for instruction." The word is derived from the Hebrew *sakal*, to scrutinize, and implies that the author intended a deeper meaning than what appears on the surface. In this psalm the deeper meaning is that the marriage here celebrated is allegorical of the far greater marriage of Christ and his bride, the church.

“A Song of loves” -- more accurately, a song of the beloved virgins, one expressing the sentiments of the bride’s companions.

The Author’s Enthusiasm -- verse 1

My heart is inditing a good matter: I speak of the things which I have made touching the king: my tongue is the pen of a ready writer.

The enthusiasm of the writer is apparent. The word translated “inditing” would be better rendered “to gush out,” or, as some translations phrase it, “overflowing.” The word “ready” in the Hebrew also is suggestive of the rapidity with which words came to his mind as he composed the psalm for this festive occasion. He literally bubbles over and the words come rushing to his mind as he seeks to describe the majesty of the king, the loveliness of the bride and her apparel, and the sheer beauty of the marriage splendors.

The King’s Beauty -- verse 2

Thou art fairer than the children of men: grace is poured into thy lips: therefore God hath blessed thee for ever.

These words represent the feelings of the beloved virgins, the bride’s companions. They are reminiscent spiritually of the thoughts of the great company, the five foolish virgins of our Lord’s parable in Matthew 25, and correspond well to the sentiments expressed by the great multitude in Revelation 19:7 and the beautiful description of Christ voiced by the lazy lover in Song of Solomon 5:10-16.

The King’s Power -- verses 3-5

Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty. And in thy majesty ride prosperously because of truth and meekness and righteousness; and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things. Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king’s enemies; whereby the people fall under thee.

The prosperity of the king is attributed to his conquests and these, in turn, are a result, not so much of unhindered power, but an outgrowth of truth, meekness, and righteousness. These are not usually thought of as the springboards of power.

Truth does not alone refer to accuracy of belief and teachings, but also to that consistency which comes from faithful stability. Righteousness refers to the fact that his judgments are rendered objectively and strictly according to the merits of each individual case. Meekness, referring to the gentle application of the principles of justice, grants the wielder great power for it shows compassion even while administering strict discipline.

The word translated “teach” in verse four would be better rendered “shoot out,” as an archer shoots arrows (see Strong’s #3384). Although there is a secondary meaning of “to

point out, to teach” this does not fit as well with the allusion to archers in the succeeding verse.

The arrows that the Lord shoots forth are the words of his mouth convicting his enemies of their wrong-doings and converting them to the ways of righteousness. This will occur under the New Covenant when the words of Psalm 19:7 find their grand fulfillment: “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul, the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.”

This falling of the Lord’s enemies under him is the same conversion work to which Jesus refers in the parables of the pounds: “But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay [by turning the enemies into friends] before me” (Luke 19:27).

The King’s Justice -- verses 6-8

Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre. Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows. All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad.

Since these words refer to the reigning Christ, it is often used by Trinitarians to support their belief. Two thoughts may be helpful. First, the Leeser translation reads, “Thy throne, **given of God**, endureth forever and ever” (see *Reprints*, p. 774). This is supported in the quotation of the psalm in Hebrews 1:8, “God is thy throne for ever and ever” (Twentieth Century Translation). Adam Clarke, a Trinitarian, admits that this translation cannot be faulted, noting that the word “God” is in the nominative case. Clarke also notes that this translation is supported by Wakefield in his *History of Opinions*.

The Hebrew word translated “God” in this psalm is *elohim*, a term meaning “mighty one” and is applied widely including mighty men of earth. The context determines to whom it is to be applied; since this is a Messianic psalm, it applies to Christ and not Jehovah.

The psalmist continues by expressing the righteousness of the judgments of the king’s reign. This agrees with the assessment of that reign by Paul: “He hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead” (Acts 17:31). Isaiah says, “When thy judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world will learn righteousness” (Isaiah 26:9).

The foundation for these judgments are the love of righteousness and the hatred of wickedness. This is true both of these principles and of those who adhere to them. In harmony with this, the prophet writes of that kingdom, “Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not” (Malachi 3:18). The followers of Christ, likewise, must learn not only to love righteousness but to consider everything wicked as abominable.

As it was the custom for honored guests to be anointed with oil, and especially the bride and groom, so the adherence to the principles of righteousness will cause the host, God himself, to endorse this happy marriage with the “oil of gladness.” The expression in Song of Solomon 3:11 uses a slightly different metaphor: “Go forth, O ye daughters of Zion, and behold king Solomon with the crown wherewith his mother crowned him in the day of his espousals, and in the day of the gladness of his heart.”

The effect of this anointing was to leave a lingering perfume of myrrh, aloes, and cassia upon the bridegroom’s garments. All three of these spices are aromatic. Myrrh and cassia were ingredients of the holy anointing oil of the tabernacle (Exodus 30:23,24). Aloes had medicinal properties. All three are bitter to the taste. While all come from plants, they come from different parts of the plant: myrrh from the sap or gum, aloes from the leaves, and cassia from pulverized bark. Together they represent the perfection of character that comes from the endurance of suffering and bitter experiences (Hebrews 5:8,9).

In *The Treasury of David*, Spurgeon notes that the word translated “whereby” is not the usual word for that meaning. It is the Hebrew *mane*, or, as a place name, *Minnaea* in Arabia Felix (“Happy Arabia” because of its abundant resources, today’s Yemen). A possible translation of this verse is: “Myrrh, aloes, and cassias, are all thy garments. From ivory palaces of Minnaea they have made thee glad.” The geographer Strabo informs us that Minnaea abounded in myrrh and frankincense; the historian Diodorus of Siculus writes that “the inhabitants of Arabia Felix had sumptuous houses, adorned with ivory and precious stones.”

If such a conclusion is correct, it lends weight to the occasion of this psalm being one of the marriages of Solomon, for it was he who developed trade with these southern kingdoms and who had a special relationship with Hiram, king of Tyre (see verse 12).

The Bride’s Invitation -- verses 10, 11

Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father’s house; So shall the king greatly desire thy beauty: for he is thy Lord; and worship thou him.

The use of the combined verbs “hearken” and “consider” urge not only the listening to the bridegroom’s invitation, but a careful contemplation of what it involves and the seriousness of the marriage vows. Acceptance of the connubial relationship means leaving behind all former associations. This is what God demanded of Abram (Genesis 12:1) and in the God-given formula for marriage: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). What an encouragement to leave behind the trifling pleasures of this earth which once seemed to mean so much.

Great is the contrast between what the world offers compared with the love and companionship of Christ. Well has one written, “Although the whole family in heaven

and earth will be blessed through him [Christ], only his wife, cooperating with him in his work, will alone be his companion, his confidante, his treasure.” Even now the church is attractive to the Lord as his peculiar treasure. The same author continues: “Clad in the glorious robe of our Bridegroom’s furnishing, we can stand all complete, even now, in the eyes of Jehovah. And possessing the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, the faith that trusts under every condition, the love that delights to do the Father’s will, we are lovely in the eyes of our Beloved, our Bridegroom and our King.” (*Reprints*, p. 5862)

The Wedding Guests -- verse 12

And the daughter of Tyre shall be there with a gift; even the rich among the people shall intreat thy favor.

Solomon and Hiram, king of Tyre, were not only partners in trade but friends as well. Josephus (Apion. I, 17, 18), quotes the historians Dius and Melander as saying that extensive correspondence between the two kings was preserved in the records of Tyre and that the two friends enjoyed challenging each other with riddles. Phoenician historians relate that Hiram gave his daughter in marriage to Solomon. Therefore it is not surprising that women of Tyre would be in attendance at a wedding of the Jewish monarch.

Tyre was a wealthy kingdom and had joint maritime expeditions with Israel in trading spices and precious metals as far away as India, probably the location of the fabled Ophir. Although Tyre is used as a symbol of evil and the empire of Satan in Isaiah 23 and Joel 3:4, these prophecies are of a later date than this psalm and it does not appear that negative implications are implied here. Rather, Tyre seems to be a neutral symbol of all Gentiles, especially of the wealthier classes.

The presentation of a wedding present and the entreatment of the rich is reminiscent of scenes from the closing chapter of Job where the three comforters entreat him for forgiveness, and his family and friends present him with a piece of money and a gold earring. The latter shows the heeding of Job’s words while the piece of money, literally a “lamb” of money, i.e., a coin worth the value of a lamb, may aptly picture the recognition of the cost of redemption -- the sacrifice of “the Lamb of God.”

The wedding guests at the wedding feast of Christ and the church will be all the Gentiles who will give the gift of their lives during the Millennial age (Acts 15:14-17).

The Bridal Garments -- verses 13, 14a

The king’s daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought unto the king in raiment of needlework.

While the church, the daughter of the great king Jehovah, is to be beautiful with all the fruits and graces of the spirit, this is not the meaning here. The American Standard Version correctly supplies an ellipsis, rendering the text “The king’s daughter **within the**

palace is all glorious.” Perhaps a better thought would be “within her pre-nuptial chambers.” It is even while in the state of preparation, on this side of the veil of death and preceding the marriage, that the bride is to be all glorious in her character.

She is as the beautiful young maiden Esther who, in preparation for her appearance before the king, “required nothing but what Hegai, the king’s chamberlain, the keeper of the women, appointed” (Esther 2:15). So the church has been under a spiritual Hegai, the holy spirit, and needs nothing more than she is furnished by it.

Any imperfections or blemishes are covered by the seamless robe of Christ’s righteousness with its carefully interwoven golden promises that the wearers might “be partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4).

The needlework suggests that the bride embroiders her robe with the graces of the spirit so that, at the end of her course, the white robe of Christ’s imputed merit is exchanged for new white garments which are “the righteousness of saints” (Revelation 19:8). The apostle Peter states that we must “add to your faith” the attributes of a Christian character (2 Peter 1:5).

The Bridal Party -- verses 14b, 15

The virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto thee. With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought: they shall enter into the king’s palace.

As maidens accompanied Rebekah when she went to meet her bridegroom Isaac (Genesis 24:61), so there is a class of virgins who will accompany the church to be with her royal Lord. These are styled virgins because they have maintained their purity, but they do not have the same standing as the bride. In Jesus’ parable they are called “foolish” virgins because of their unpreparedness (Matthew 25).

Nonetheless they do overcome at the end and are identified as a “great multitude” in Revelation 19:6 who gladly call out, “Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready” (Revelation 19:7).

The fact that they follow the bride implies that they go where the bride goes, into the king’s palace. That means they receive a spiritual resurrection. Their stature, however, will never be the same as that of the bride, nor will they share in the resurrection to the divine nature with its attribute of immortality (Revelation 20:6).

Offspring of a Royal Marriage -- verse 16

Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children, whom thou mayest make princes in all the earth.

Israelites looked at their national and spiritual forebears as “fathers.” Hence we read of numerous references to Abraham as “father” (Matthew 3:9; Luke 1:73; John 8:53). These “fathers” will be the firstborn children of the royal couple, the first to be resurrected from the dead. Then David’s son (Christ Jesus) will become David’s Lord and Father (Luke 20:41-43). It is called “a better resurrection” (Hebrews 11:35) because it is pre-eminent in both time and position.

Their role in that kingdom is also prophetically spelled out in this marriage psalm: they shall be made “princes in all the earth.” This implies that they will not only play a governmental role, but that they will be ambassadors “in all the earth.” Theirs will be the joy of making known the rules and regulations of that kingdom to all mankind, thus helping the human race back to perfection as they travel the “way of holiness” (Isaiah 35:8).

The Crown of the Year

Thou crownest the year with thy goodness; and thy paths drop fatness.--Psalm 65:11

A verse by verse study in Psalm 65

Every year ancient Israel had two "new years." The religious new year was in the month of Nisan (March-April by modern reckoning). The civil new year was in the month Tishri (September-October). Both new years were marked by agricultural harvests--barley in the springtime and fruit in the fall. Both months were celebrated with harvest festivals. In the spring it was the feast of the Passover which, while primarily commemorating the deliverance from Egypt, also included the waving of the first of the barley sheaves. In the fall it was the Feast of Tabernacles, a feast of thanksgiving for both the nation's preservation during the exodus wanderings and for the harvesting of the bountiful fruit crop. The fall festival was also associated closely with the annual Day of Atonement and its sacrifices for sin and the cleansing of the tabernacle (and later the temple) for another year of sacrificing.

Internal evidence suggests that Psalm 65 was written in connection with the fall festivals of harvest thanksgiving, although the psalm includes allusions to the fullness of grain as well as the ripening of grapes.

Both a Psalm and a Song

The titles and subscriptions are a part of the ancient manuscripts in addition to the text of the Psalms. This Psalm is entitled "A Psalm and Song of David" and bears the subscription, "To the chief musician." While "psalm" is used 28 times and "song" 44 times, both are only used together in 14 Psalms. The word "psalm" (Hebrew: *mizmor*) denotes any writing, in either poetry or prose, that was penned for the purposes of meditation. "Song" (Hebrew: *shir*) designates a writing that is in poetry and meant to be sung by either a group of singers or the entire congregation.

It was probably the popularity of the 13 psalms which bear both words in their titles that caused the author to set the words to music. The closing notation, "To the chief musician," usually designates a direction to the leader of the singers to preserve both the words and music for use on regular occasions--in this case, at the Feast of Tabernacles.

Introduction--Verses 1 to 3

Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Sion: and unto thee shall the vow be performed. O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come. Iniquities prevail against me: as for our transgressions, thou shalt purge them away.

The Hebrew verb translated "waiteth" is used only four times, all of them in the Psalms. In two instances (Psalms 22:2; 39:2) it is translated more accurately "silent" or "silence" and is rendered so in this text in the New American Standard. The attitude expressed is of

a great hush in the presence of a vastly superior being. In a similar vein (though using a different Hebrew word), the Psalmist declared: **Be silent**, O all flesh, before the LORD: for he is raised up out of his holy habitation" (Zechariah 2:13).

Israel had been instructed in the Law to bring an offering of their vow unto the Lord to the appointed feasts (Numbers 15:3). The vow they were to make was one of continued fidelity to the keeping of the Law which had been given to them through Moses at Mount Sinai.

Acknowledging the propriety of prayer for all, David in his Psalm called attention to the burden of the prayer. It is to be a prayer for the forgiveness of sin and a proper attitude at all times but especially as the Day of Atonement drew near. The word "iniquity" in this passage is a translation of two Hebrew words. The phrase more properly should be rendered by the phrase "iniquitous words prevail against me." In this context, "iniquitous words" were not those of calumny and condemnation by peers, but the just charges of infidelity by a righteous God. That the charges were just is humbly admitted by the penitent, calling them "transgressions" that need to be purged away. David expressed the same attitude which he had exhibited in his prayer after he had sinned with Bathsheba: "For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me" (Psalm 51:3).

The Blessed Priesthood--Verse 4

Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple.

At this point the psalmist turns his attention to those offering the sacrifice. The vocation of priest was designed by God to be an honorable one. Even when the office was filled by dishonorable men, the office itself was to be honored (Acts 23:5; Exodus 22:28).

The priests of ancient Israel represented a future spiritual group of priests. Like David, the revelator also spoke of priests (Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:6), though those in Revelation are of a different order or line.

The Aaronic line of priests was chosen through heredity, those of the Melchizedec priesthood are individually selected by God. Then they are brought near to God and permitted to dwell in his courts. It is of these courts that the apostle Paul spoke: "And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:6). What a blessing, indeed, it is for those called to a heavenly calling to dwell in these heavenly courts! It is of these the psalmist wrote: " He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty" (Psalm 91:1).

What abundant goodness dwells within these hallowed courts! Israel's priest was surrounded by walls of gold and framed embroidery of cherubim, woven in blue, purple, and scarlet. These are emblematic of the divine and precious promises by which some

might eventually attain the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). It is here that one enjoys the enlightenment of the golden candlestick and views the nourishing "bread of presence." It is here that one has the privilege of offering up prayers with the rich incense provided by Christ himself (Revelation 8:4).

The word translated "satisfied" in verse 4 is much stronger than implied by the English. It more properly could be rendered "sated" or "surfeited" according to Prof. W. E. Vine. God's goodness is so abundantly more than could be described that it is hard to find a word strong enough to appropriately express appreciation. The words of the apostle Paul come to mind: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" (Romans 11:33).

The use of the word "temple" has caused some to state that this Psalm could not have been written by David since the temple was not built until the reign of his son Solomon; however the same Hebrew word is used of the tabernacle in the days of Eli in 1 Samuel 1:9. David uses the same word to describe the tent on the threshing-floor of Araunah in 2 Samuel 22:7.

Nature Controlled--Verses 5 to 8

By terrible things in righteousness wilt thou answer us, O God of our salvation; who art the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of them that are afar off upon the sea: Which by his strength setteth fast the mountains; being girded with power: Which stilleth the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the people. They also that dwell in the uttermost parts are afraid at thy tokens: thou makest the outings of the morning and evening to rejoice.

As with the word "fear" which is sometimes the translation of this Hebrew word *yare'* (Strong's 3372), "terrible" is open to either a positive or negative definition. Prof. W. E. Vine says about this Hebrew word:

"Used of a person in an exalted position, *yare'* connotes 'standing in awe.' This is not simple fear, but reverence, whereby an individual recognizes the power and position of the individual revered and renders him proper respect. In this sense, the word may imply submission to a proper ethical relationship to God."

David showed his appreciation for the abundant crops of the year by extolling the power of God in controlling the course of nature. From the establishment of the mountains, whose vast reservoirs of water were so important to the nation, to the controlling of the sea waters so they did not flood the coastal plains, David sees a magnificent goodness in the great Creator.

He noted that the same power that holds the seas in their place also stills the stormy hearts of men. Perhaps in this Psalm he is referring to the surrounding nations whose attempts to plunder Israel had been restrained during his reign.

In verse 8 David broadened the lessons learned from the power of God over the elements of nations. God's beneficent goodness in providing the necessary resources for food crops is not limited to Israel. As Jesus said, "That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45).

The final phrase of verse 8 can either mean that the worshippers would praise the Lord from dawn to dusk or, as some read it, that God should be worshipped by all from the west to the east. The Hebrew word for "outgoings" can point to direction and is translated "east" in Psalm 75:6.

God's Abundant Goodness--Verses 9 and 10

Thou visitest the earth, and waterest it: thou greatly enrichest it with the river of God, which is full of water: thou preparest them corn, when thou hast so provided for it. Thou waterest the ridges thereof abundantly: thou settlest the furrows thereof: thou makest it soft with showers: thou blessest the springing thereof.

The song of praise continues with direct references to the blessings leading to the rich harvest. Attention first is called to the rains which, during the winter, dropped as snow in the Anti-Lebanon mountain range to the north and flowed down "the river of God" (probably a reference to the Jordan and its four tributaries) which brought a continuous flow of life-giving water to the fertile valleys in the south. There is a similar understanding of this water course in Psalm 133:3 where the precious anointing oil which installed the kings and priests is likened to this flow of water. "As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore." Psalm 29 also shows the same comprehension of the rainfall pattern in Israel.

David recognized that God is not only the provider for abundant crops, but also the planner for them. He recognized that corn would come only when God had "so provided for it." Man cannot dictate to God when blessings should be conferred. God is the sovereign and the timing remains with him.

The "ridges" and the "furrows" are both technical agricultural terms. The first refers to the depths of a furrow left by a plow, while the latter to the clods of earth cast up. David notices that the same rain which fills the little man-made valleys of the furrows with water also softens the hard earth of the surrounding clods. Thus the showers prepared the ground for the new grains to spring forth.

The Crown of the Year--Verses 11 to 13

Thou crownest the year with thy goodness; and thy paths drop fatness. They drop upon the pastures of the wilderness: and the little hills rejoice on every side. The pastures are clothed with flocks; the valleys also are covered over with corn; they shout for joy, they also sing.

The word for "crownest" can be translated "circled" or "compassed" as in 1 Samuel 23:6 and Psalm 5:12. Both "crownest" and "circled" fit this Psalm. Although the fatness of the fields is the crowning achievement of the agricultural year, David more likely was praising the fact that the beneficence of nature has been good to the land all year long.

The word translated "goodness" is the same as in the oft-repeated expression in the first chapter of the Bible: "and God saw that it was good" (Genesis 1:10). David, like God at creation, looked over the lushness of the pastures, the fatness of the flocks, and the abundance of grain and said, "It is good." Therefore it was appropriate that those receiving these blessings should gather in the appointed harvest feasts and raise their voices to shout and sing.

How much more so, in the lives of the Christian today! The abundant provisions of the heavenly Father are recognized in providing amply for the harvest of the fruits of the spirit. The Christian shows his appreciation for these spiritual gifts by gathering together and joining their voices in songs of praise.

The Battle Is the Lord's

The Song of Jahaziel

**Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations,
as when he fought in the day of battle.--Zechariah 14:3**

A verse-by-verse study in Psalm 83

Old Testament prophecies frequently have two fulfillments. One applies to the local situation that inspired the prophecy. The second and larger fulfillment refers to a future event--often associated with the end times. In order to understand the greater fulfillment, one must look at the immediate occasion. The historic event of some prophecies is difficult to discern this far from the story, especially when the connection between the two is not immediately evident.

One clue which connects this psalm with the event which inspired its author is in the inspired title of the Psalm.¹ It is "A Psalm of Asaph." Asaph was one of the three choir directors of King David (1 Chronicles 25:1). The members of this choir in succeeding generations were known as "the sons of Asaph." Chapters in the book of Psalms which appear under the title "A Psalm of Asaph" refer either to songs composed by Asaph, or by one of his sons, or was composed specially to be sung by this choir.

One of the sons of Asaph, who wrote a prophesy concerning a battle which closely resembles that described in this psalm, is mentioned in 2 Chronicles 20:14, "Then upon Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, the son of Benaiah, the son of Jeiel, the son of Mattaniah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, came the Spirit of the LORD in the midst of the congregation."

The battle described in this chapter took place during the reign of Jehoshaphat and is associated by many students of the Bible with that mentioned in Joel 3:1-3 in "the valley of Jehoshaphat." In that war the forces of Moab and Ammon, confederate with others, sought to invade Israel. While only two allies, Syria and Edom, are named, the account implies a host from many nations joined the invasion.

The invaders took up their position in the area of En-Gedi on the southwest shore of the Dead Sea. Jehoshaphat offers a prayer to Jehovah, pleading the smallness of his forces. He is informed: "Be not afraid nor dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's (2 Chronicles 20:15).

Singers are told to assemble in the plains of Tekoa on the plateau on the other side of the Judean hills. When the enemy advanced by the "cliff of Ziz," at the peak of the pass leading to Jerusalem, the Kohathite singers were to begin singing praise to God. The invading forces turned on each other and the succeeding anarchy in their ranks brought an aborted end to the invasion. This is apparently the background for Psalm 83.

The Prayer--Psalm 83, verses 1-4

“Keep not thou silence, O God: hold not thy peace, and be not still, O God. For, lo, thine enemies make a tumult: and they that hate thee have lifted up the head. They have taken crafty counsel against thy people, and consulted against thy hidden ones. They have said, Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may no more be in remembrance.”

This plea of helplessness against an attack by surrounding nations is mirrored in the prayer of Jehoshaphat recorded in 2 Chronicles 20:11, 12, where he prays in part, “Behold, I say, how they reward us, to come to cast us out of thy possession, which thou hast given us to inherit. O our God, wilt not thou judge them? For we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee.”

The request that God keep not silence manifests a declining faith based on the many times God permitted enemies to conquer because of Israel’s unfaithfulness. These defeats had resulted many times in Israel becoming tributary to surrounding nations. But now, Jehoshaphat fears, the situation is more dire, their very existence as a people is threatened by the invading confederacy.

These same sentiments are echoed in recent times. The pogroms of Israel’s Diaspora and the decimation of the Jews under the Nazi holocaust have brought many Israelis to conclude that they can no longer trust in God for deliverance. Since the formation of the state of Israel in 1948 their repetitive victories over onslaughts by their Arab neighbors have given rise to the thought that they can only trust in their formidable military might and the alliances they have formed, particularly with the United States.

Recent events, however, with the Palestinian intifada, the solidarity of the Arab League, and the guerilla attacks by Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Al Aqsa Martyr brigade, among others, have forced the Israelis to face the fact that their enemies, even while proclaiming a desire to live at peace, may be actually plotting the complete destruction of Israel.

Not only is the desire to cut them off from being a nation, but even includes the revising and rewriting of history to blot out their name from being “in remembrance.”

The League of Ten--Verses 5-8

“For they have consulted together with one consent: they are confederate against thee: the tabernacles of Edom, and the Ishmaelites; of Moab, and the Hagarenes; Gebal, and Ammon, and Amalek; the Philistines with the inhabitants of Tyre; Assur also is joined with them: they have holpen the children of Lot. Selah.”

Comparing the confederacy described here with that which is allied against Israel in Ezekiel 38 and 39, it has been noted that this one is all Semitic while that in the Ezekiel passage is largely non-Semitic. Therefore many Bible students understand these two

conflicts to be different, the one in this psalm preceding the one in Ezekiel.

There are, however, two main methods of interpreting Bible names in prophecy. The usual method is to treat the names genealogically, tracing the present day descendants of the nations mentioned in prophecy. The alternate method is to trace them geographically, identifying the biblical peoples with the inhabitants of the same regions today. While this approach also reveals many non-Semitic peoples in the Ezekiel list of seven nations, it also demonstrates that the catalog of nations in both Psalms and Ezekiel describe the main body of Muslim countries which oppose present-day Israel (see map below where dark green areas denote Sunni Muslim majorities; the much darker green areas are dominated by the more fundamentalist Shia Muslims. Note: While India is indicated as being Muslim, most authorities list India as Hindu` though many Muslims do reside there. Map source:

http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/world_maps/muslim_distribution.jpg.



**Sunni [light green] and Shia [darker green]
Muslim Majorities in Europe, Africa, and Asia**

While the confederacy of nations which joined Ammon and Moab in the battle mentions only Edom as a named partner, 2 Chronicles 20:1 mentions “other” besides the Ammonites and the second verse refers to a great multitude “from beyond the sea on this side Syria.” The Targum reads “beyond the west side of Syria,” referring to the desert lands between Syria and Nineveh.

This matches well with the Hagarenes² (or Hagarites) of 1 Chronicles 5:10, “And in the days of Saul they made war with the Hagarites, who fell by their hand: and they dwelt in their tents throughout all the east land of Gilead.”

Thus the coalitions of 2 Chronicles may match well with those in Psalm 83 and, though different than those in Ezekiel 38, may both refer in general to the forces of Islam so

adamantly arrayed against Israel today.

Assur, being with them, may imply that Iraq would be aligned with a Jordanian led invasion of Israel. Given the relative neutrality of Jordan today this would appear to be a future conflict.

Historic Defeats--Verses 9-12

“Do unto them as unto the Midianites; as to Sisera, as to Jabin, at the brook of Kison: which perished at Endor: they became as dung for the earth. Make their nobles like Oreb, and like Zeeb: yea, all their princes as Zebah, and as Zalmunna: who said, Let us take to ourselves the houses of God in possession.”

The prayer of the psalmist is reminiscent to that of Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 20:12, “O our God, wilt thou not judge them? for we have no might against this great company that cometh against us; neither know we what to do: but our eyes are upon thee.”

In the psalm the plea for help has two sections. The first calls to mind significant Jewish victories of the past. The second uses agricultural metaphors.

Two great victories are remembered: that of the forces of Gideon against the Midianites and the defeat of the armies of Sisera by Deborah and Barak. Both of these were fought in the plains near Megiddo and are thus suggestive of the prophetic Battle of Armageddon (Revelation 16:16).

Zebah and Zalmunna were kings of Midian, and Oreb and Zeeb were princes thereof. After the initial victory of Gideon’s force of 300 at Megiddo, the rest of the Israelites joined in pursuit of the Midianite host under the command of these rulers and soundly defeated them in the hills east of the river Jordan (Judges 7:25 to 8:13).

In the case of Jabin, king of Hazor, and his general Sisera, Jewish armies under the command of Barak met them in battle in the valley where the river Kishon descended from Mt. Carmel. A flash flood mired the enemy’s chariots in the swollen waters of the stream and Israel was victorious, with the captain of the foe, Sisera, being slaughtered by the Kenite woman, Jael, with a tent peg (Judges 4 and 5).

In both cases Jehovah fought the battle for Israel--through a flash flood in the case of Sisera and by discomfiting the Midianites so that anarchy broke out in their camp as Gideon’s three hundred burst upon them with the midnight trumpet blasts.

Likewise, in the battle of Jehoshaphat, the Jewish armies were told to sit by and let the singers sing while God caused confusion among the invading forces and the Edomites fought against their fellow invaders, giving the victory to Israel.

So it will also be in Israel’s final battle, as the prophet wrote, “Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle” (Zechariah

14:3).

The Wheel, the Fire, and the Storm--Verses 13-15

“O my God, make them like a wheel; as the stubble before the wind. As the fire burneth a wood, and as the flame setteth the mountains on fire; So persecute them with thy tempest, and make them afraid with thy storm.”

The wheel of which the psalmist writes is the threshing wheel. In harvest time, grain was gathered from the fields and laid out on a flat hard surface. A large wheel was then passed over the grain, separating the wheat from the chaff. The separated grains were then winnowed by being flung into the air, letting the light chaff blow away in the wind while the heavier kernels of wheat fell back to the threshing floor.

Thus the invading forces, both in the immediate and long range fulfillments, served two purposes for Israel. First, they were God’s tool to test Israel’s obedience, and then they became as stubble meant for destruction. Of the first purpose we read in Isaiah 10:5,6: “O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets.” But of the latter end of these tools of the Lord we read: “And I am very sore displeased with the heathen that are at ease: for I was but a little displeased, and they helped forward the affliction” (Zechariah 1:15).

Some scholars translate the word for wheel as “rolling thing,” similar to our tumbleweeds. Threshing often took place on the mountain tops to take greater advantage of wind on the higher ground to blow away the chaff. The residue of chaff and tares was then burned, so that the mountains appeared to be on fire during the harvest. This same figure of speech is used of the end-time battles in Isaiah 17:13, “The nations shall rush like the rushing of many waters: but God shall rebuke them, and they shall flee far off, and shall be chased as the chaff of the mountains before the wind, and like a rolling thing before the whirlwind.”

The final illustration is that of a storm, a figure often used in the Bible of the final battle of Armageddon (see Psalm 29:4-10).

The Purpose of the Battle--Verses 16-18

“Fill their faces with shame; that they may seek thy name, O LORD. Let them be confounded and troubled for ever; yea, let them be put to shame, and perish: That men may know that thou, whose name alone is JEHOVAH, art the most high over all the earth.”

The grand object of this final conflict is clearly repeated--“that they [the confederacy of enemies] may seek thy name” and again, “that men may know that thou . . . art the most high over all the earth.” The same purpose is similarly stated when God gives Israel the

victory in Ezekiel 39:6,7: “And I will send a fire on Magog, and among them that dwell carelessly in the isles: and they shall know that I am the LORD. So will I make my holy name known in the midst of my people Israel; and I will not let them pollute my holy name any more: and the heathen shall know that I am the LORD, the Holy One in Israel.”

The details of how God’s name will be known are spelled out in a description of the aftermath of this final conflict in Isaiah: “For I know their works and their thoughts: it shall come, that I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come, and see my glory. And I will set a sign among them, and I will send those that escape of them unto the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud [among the nations mentioned in Ezekiel 38], that draw the bow, to Tubal, and Javan, to the isles afar off, that have not heard my fame, neither have seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the Gentiles” (Isaiah 66:18,19).

The fact that the escapees of this battle will declare God’s glory to their native lands leads us to assume that the “perishing” in verse 17 does not mean their annihilation, but their “perishing” as foes by becoming converted to the God of Israel.

Thus we see that all of the battles of Israel, from their founding as a nation, through the chastisement of their Diaspora, to the full return to the Lord in a final victory are all for the purpose of glorifying God’s name, using the instrumentality of his ancient chosen people, the Jews.

1. While the suggestion in this article is that Psalm 83 should be connected with 2 Chronicles 20 and that of Ezekiel 38 and 39, there are many Bible Students who feel this refers to a preliminary conflict in which Israel will be victorious and thus achieve the “peace and safety” which is a prerequisite for the final battle. This view also points to the distinction between the Semitic majority in the psalm and the non-Semitic nature of the hosts mentioned in Ezekiel.

2. The Hagarenes are not to be confused with the Ishmaelites, who also descended from Hagar. It is assumed by most scholars that the Hagarenes were children by Hagar from a second husband after she fled the tent of Abraham and Sarah.

Amiable Tabernacles

And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. -- Revelation 21:3

A verse by verse study in Psalm 84

David's psalms cover a broad variety of subjects. Some plead for victory over enemies. Some are expressions of gratitude for deliverance. Some offer praise for the beauties of creation. A few are prophetic in nature. Still others, of which the eighty-fourth is an example, are centered around the dream of David's life, to build a temple as a permanent habitation for the God of Israel. To David it was not the grandeur of the structure, it was the intimate relationship with Jehovah he wanted to celebrate.

The House of God -- Verses 1 to 4

How amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O LORD of hosts, my King, and my God. Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee. Selah.

When this psalm was written the magnificent temple of Solomon had not yet been built. The psalm, however, anticipates that structure and was written for the worship services to be held there. It was written specifically, as its title indicates, for the sons of Korah -- one of the three divisions of singers David organized for temple worship.

The reference to tabernacles in the plural suggests both the tabernacle at Gibeon and the temple David envisioned in Jerusalem. The plain coverings of the Mosaic tabernacle were hardly things of beauty, especially after traveling forty years through the dusty Sinai and having stood for hundreds of years during the period of Israel's judges. Yet to David they are "amiable" or "lovely," not for their outward show but for their religious significance.

Similarly today, the humble home where God is worshiped in sincerity and truth is much more lovely than the most beautiful of the world's cathedrals, where lip service is more often common than true heartfelt worship.

The intensity of David's desire to see the house of worship fully used is expressed in the strongest terms. He not only longs to be in the condition represented by God's courts, his very soul is consumed, so as to almost faint, with that longing. This intense longing

pervades both his "heart" (or spiritual elements) and his "flesh" (or earthly needs). Not only is true worship of God satisfying to the inner man, it is necessary for even the fleshly creature's peace of mind.

Sparrows in the Altar

Many Bible students treat verse three as a rebuke to Israel, that David is saying that the altar of God had fallen into such disuse that they had become habitations for birds of the sky. The context of this psalm, however, does not seem to permit such a thought. The New International Version addresses this question by suggesting that the birds nest "near the altar," as though finding a haven in its proximity.

We suggest a more correct thought may be expressed by translating the text thus: "as the sparrows find a house and the swallows a nest to lay her young, so I have found my nesting place in thine altars, O Lord of Hosts."

Notice that the word "altars" is in the plural, referring to either the brazen and golden altars in the tabernacle or to the brazen altars in both the tabernacle and the temple. The first of these two thoughts seems most likely. Our habitation with God is both obtained through the sacrifice on the brazen altar and maintained through an active prayer life at the golden altar. When the Christian accepts Christ as his personal Savior, he is both acknowledging the blood atonement which redeemed him and the advocacy of Christ by which he has access for continual cleansing.

Worship of God is not an occasional act. For the Israelite it was not to be only at the time of the appointed feasts. Christian worship is not just a Sunday exercise of faith. Rather, God's tabernacles are a house to be dwelt in where he is "still," or better, "ever" worshiped. When David organized the worship of the house of the Lord, he exempted the singers from any other responsibilities because they were employed in singing "day and night" (1 Chron. 9:33).

The Blessed Men -- Verses 5 to 8

Blessed is the man whose strength is in thee; in whose heart are the ways of them. Who passing through the valley of Baca make it a well; the rain also filleth the pools. They go from strength to strength, every one of them in Zion appeareth before God. O LORD God of hosts, hear my prayer: give ear, O God of Jacob. Selah.

Although the word "man" is in the singular in verse five it does not refer to a given man but to any who match the qualifications. Thus, the succeeding pronouns are in the plural. In these verses we have a poetic description of the journey into the courts of God's house. Both the New American Standard and the Revised Version in verse five give the thought that God will place a road map of the highways to God in the hearts of the believer. The New International renders it, "whose hearts are set on pilgrimage."

The pathway leads through the valley of Baca. Literally, the phrase means "the valley of weeping," "the vale of tears." It is drawn from the story in Judges 2, where Israel is reprimanded for lack of diligence in driving out their enemies in the conquest of the promised land. There the name is expressly given for their tears (Judg. 2:4, 5).

Proper worship of the Lord will turn these failures into victories. The valley of weeping will become a place of springs and the lessons learned will be used eventually in helping all mankind conquer sin and self to serve the living God.

The rain referred to here is the autumn rain. This is the "latter rain" referred to in the latter part of Joel 2:23 which is to fall in the "first month" of the civil year -- September to October. It perhaps refers to the time in Joel 2:28 when his spirit is "poured out upon all flesh." This work of lifting up the human race inspires the Christian today in his worship, giving purpose to every experience of life. The fact that the filling of the "pools" by the rain is apart from the main subject of the psalm, but given as a side effect that also happens, further substantiates this meaning.

As the Christian progresses through his "Baca" (weeping) experiences he not only gains insights into mankind's problems but new strength as well -- going "from strength to strength." Speaking in similar language of Christian growth, the Apostle Paul urges us to go from "glory to glory" (2 Cor. 3:18), from one stage of heart development to another, growing more and more like Christ.

Each must walk this road individually. The growth is personal. When the long journey is finished each must appear before God to be given his rightful reward. Star may differ from star in glory (1 Cor. 15:41), but each must appear in white linen robes, "the righteousness of the saints" (Rev. 19:8).

Our Sun and Our Shield -- Verses 9 to 12

Behold, O God our shield, and look upon the face of thine anointed. For a day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. O Lord of hosts, Blessed is the man that trusteth in thee.

In verse nine the Lord is presented as a "shield" and in verse eleven as both "a sun and shield." As a "shield" he pledges protection, but as a "sun" he is the precursor of new life. The shield looks to the preservation of life while the sun portends new life to come. God is our shield through justification: "it is God that justified, who is he that condemneth" (Rom. 8:33, 34).

But it is as the "sun" that we see the future work of the church. "Unto you shall the Sun of Righteousness arise, with healing in his wings" (Mal. 4:2). This will be after the Lord hath given "grace and glory" (Psa. 84:11). Before this can occur, however, the pilgrim must pass the tests implied in verse ten.

We must treasure a day in the courts of the Lord as being more precious than a thousand spent elsewhere. We must have the humility that will accept a responsibility as only a "doorkeeper" in the house of the Lord and esteem that better than sharing the luxury of a lifetime in the tents of wickedness.

If we pass these tests of humility and walk humbly through our Baca valley trials with honest hearts and in uprightness of soul, we shall find that truly "no good thing" will God withhold from us. "Blessed," indeed, "is the man that trusteth in Thee!"

Selah

The untranslated word Selah appears twice in this psalm, at the end of verses four and eight. It thus serves as a section divider. The word closely corresponds to our "Amen," serving as an audience response of affirmation, "Let it be so!" However the Hebrew word goes beyond this simple usage and serves as a musical notation to pause and an indication for the reader to likewise pause and reflect. Still further, it connects the passage preceding the word with that which follows.

In this particular psalm it divides the section which speaks of the Lord's house from that which refers to the one who worships in that house. The second half separates the one doing the worshiping from the role God plays in his life to enable him to reach the inner courts of the temple and all that is therein implied.

Conclusion

The psalm is arranged poetically by Charles Taze Russell on pages 652 and 653 of his book, *The Battle of Armageddon*, and we quote:

"The Prophet David (Psalm 84) seems to have been given a foreview of this great 'Valley of Blessings,' close to Jehovah's 'feet,' when he sings first of the saints of the gospel age and then of those blessed in the next age, saying:

*'How lovely are thy dwelling places
O Jehovah of Hosts!
My soul desired, yea, it even fainted
For the courts of Jehovah.
My heart and my flesh shout with joy
Unto the living God.
Even as the sparrow hath found a house,
And the swallow a nest for herself,
Where she may lay her young:
(so I have found) thine altars, O Lord of Hosts.
My God, my King.
Happy are they that dwell in thy house*

*They shall be continually praising thee.
Selah.*

*Happy is the man whose strong confidence is in thee,
Whose heart reflecteth (wholly) on the paths of (righteousness.)
Passing through the valley of mourning,
They change it into a place of (joy) springs -- [Valley of Blessings]
.The autumn rain brings them blessings [Joel 2:28];
They go from strength to strength
That each may be presented (perfect)
Before God in Zion.' (cf. RSV)*

Psalm 110

The resurrection of Christ is referenced in this psalm as elucidated in the New Testament. Paul combines the testimony of Psalm 2 and Psalm 110 as finding fulfillment together at the raising of Christ. "Christ glorified [honored] not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee. As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedek" (Hebrews 5:5,6).

Paul's point is that Jesus entered upon his heavenly high priestly duties as Melchizedek when he was raised to heaven and now, with everlasting life, is a priest "for ever" -- unlike the Levitical priests who were replaced generation after generation because of death. Jesus, since his resurrection, is "made ... after the power of an endless life. For he testified, Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchisedec ... of whom it is witnessed that he liveth" (Hebrews 7:16,17,8, citing Psalm 110:4).

Melchizedek

The mention of Melchizedek in Psalm 110:4 is the first mention of this historical personage since the account in Genesis 14. The original Melchizedek was King of Salem, which many regard as the same urban area which later was known as Jeru-Salem. The name Melchizedek comes from two parts, Melchi (king) and Zedek (righteous). Paul comments how fitting this description is of Christ, "being by interpretation [meaning of the name] King of righteousness, and after that also [by title] King of Salem, which is, King of peace" (Hebrews 7:2).

Later kings of Jerusalem did not emulate the godliness of Melchizedek, but retained titles that were essentially the same. When Joshua defeated the king of Jerusalem, his name was Adonizedek (Joshua 10:1). Adoni (lord) has replaced Melchi (king), but it uses the same concept as the name in Genesis 14. Probably like the name Abimelech (father-king), it was used by successive rulers generation after generation.

The first godly king of Jerusalem we have record of, after the time of Melchizedek, is David -- the very one to whom the promise was given, "The LORD hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." It is an appropriate title for David, a righteous king who as ruler of Jerusalem was a successor of the original Melchizedek, and prototype of the greater Melchizedek to come.

Melchizedek in Genesis 14 was both a king and a priest. These offices are combined also in Christ, but in the days of King David they were separated. In a sense David did do priestly things -- he brought the ark of the covenant back to a place of dignity and reverence, secured the worship of Jehovah among the people, and prepared for the building of the temple. In this way he combined the services of both offices perhaps as much as any Judean king could.

But, literally, he was not and could not be an officiating priest under the law, as that

privilege was assigned to the Levitical tribe, specifically to the sons of Aaron. However, combining the title of David (king, Melchi) with the name of the officiating priest (Zadok, or Zdk since Hebrew has no vowels), produces the name Melchi-zdk, or Melchizedek. Like Zerubbabel and Joshua much later, David and Zadok jointly comprised a picture of our great Melchizedek priest, Jesus (Zechariah 3:8, 4:7).

Smiting the Nations

Psalm 110, just as Psalm 2, speaks of the king ruling from Zion and subduing his enemies. Jehovah is the one who offered this privileged authority: “The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool” (verse 1). Also, as in Psalm 2, the rod would break his enemies. “The LORD shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies.” David did this in a typical way during his reign over his neighboring Gentile kingdoms, subduing and then ruling them. Jesus did this also by successively subduing Judea and Rome and then ruling through conversion (compare Psalm 45:5 and Revelation 6:2). But the fullest application of this promise is in the present transition from the Kingdoms of this world into the kingdom of Christ, during the *parousia* (Christ’s presence).

Verse 3 speaks of the willingness of the youth in King David’s realm to support his campaigns by joining his military ranks. The thought is expressed more clearly in the NIV than in the King James translation: “Your troops will be willing on your day of battle. Arrayed in holy majesty, from the womb of the dawn you will receive the dew of your youth.” As David’s warriors stood valiantly on his side, so the early disciples were arrayed in loyal support of Jesus’ conquests through conversion. Now, beyond the veil, in the close of the harvest, the risen saints are “arrayed in holy majesty” beside our conquering king. “The armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean” (Revelation 19:14).

By this force all opposing powers will be defeated “in the day of his wrath ... [when] he shall wound the heads over many countries” (verses 5, 6). Nothing will impede the progress of this mighty victor. As warriors wearied of pursuit and battle might refresh themselves at a nearby brook and thus be sustained and refreshed, so our triumphant Lord will not succumb to any fatigue or discouragement in his campaign. “He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law” (Isaiah 42:4).

The Passover Hymn

The Last "Hillel"

And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives. -- Matthew 26:30

A verse-by-verse study of Psalm 118 by Carl Hagensick

According to Jewish tradition, Psalms 113 to 118 were sung at the annual feast of Passover. These were known as "The Great Hillel" or song of praise, from the same root as the word Hallelujah, "Praise to Jehovah." Supposedly Psalms 113 and 114 were sung with the second cup of Passover and Psalms 115 to 118 at the end of the meal. These psalms were also sung on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles.

Although written at different times and for various occasions, they are all variations on the theme of praise. Opinion is divided on whether they refer to David or to the Messiah. Quite likely they have reference to the king as a type of the greater than David, Jesus of Nazareth.

Three-Fold Mercy -- Psalm 118:1-4

"O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: because his mercy endureth for ever. Let Israel now say, that his mercy endureth for ever. Let the house of Aaron now say, that his mercy endureth for ever. Let them now that fear the LORD say, that his mercy endureth for ever."

God's goodness is indelibly connected with his mercy. Fallen man has claim to neither. Because mercy is one of the deity's operable principles, it acts regardless of the rights of its recipients. Mercy dictates the operation of divine grace; goodness is the product of such actions. "The LORD hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad" (Psalm 126:3).

Three classes are singled out as examples of having received such unmerited favor:

Israel: With the Temple being completed, the nation had, so to speak, passed out of its probationary phase of acceptable worship into a permanent one. God's mercy had not only brought Israel to its promised land, but established sufficient tranquility to establish a permanent sanctuary to Jehovah.

The House of Aaron: This permanent temple was also a special blessing to the priesthood. These descendants of Aaron were now permanently ensconced in their sacerdotal positions.

All That Fear the Lord: Not only natural-born Israelites, but the proselytes in their midst were beneficiaries of these mercies.

But this three-fold mercy, great as it was, blanched in comparison with the mercies vouchsafed by the sacrifice, which followed the last Passover of Jesus when these words were sung before the departure into the mount of Olives.

Israel, though temporarily falling into disfavor, is guaranteed a restoration to the highest earthly position, under their resurrected ancient prophets, in the kingdom for which Christ died.

The House of Aaron, the priesthood, was typical of a spiritual order of priests. These “Melchizedek” priests are to be priests on thrones, reigning with Christ for a thousand years (Revelation 20:6).

All That Fear the Lord from every land and nation will then taste the merciful goodness of eternal life. Only the stubbornly and rebellious disobedient will be cut off in second death.

Trust in the Lord -- Psalm 118:5-9

“I called upon the LORD in distress: the LORD answered me, and set me in a large place. The LORD is on my side; I will not fear: what can man do unto me? The LORD taketh my part with them that help me: therefore shall I see my desire upon them that hate me. It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes.”

David’s past experiences were the basis for his implicit trust in the Lord. It has well been said, “All that I have seen, leads me to trust him for all I have not seen.” At the time of the writing of this psalm, all of Israel’s foes had not yet been defeated. The miraculous manner in which past victories were accomplished gave David confidence that future victories would be secure.

This faith had been the hallmark of David from his earliest youth. When volunteering to fight the Philistine giant Goliath, he rested his trust in his earlier victories over a lion and a bear (1 Samuel 17:34-37). This was the faith with which he met his mighty foe: “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. This day will the LORD deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee, and take thine head from thee; and I will give the carcasses of the host of the Philistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth; that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel” (1 Samuel 17:45,46).

The word translated “distress” in verse 5 literally means a narrow place, and is set in contrast to the larger place wherein he now was set. This finds a deeper meaning on the day when Jesus and his disciples sang this song. That Passover, and the events which followed it, brought Jesus’ followers out from the bondage of the law into the “liberty wherewith Christ has made us free” (Galatians 5:1). Jesus, too, was about to be released from the restrictions of flesh to enjoy an unhampered spiritual life with his Father on the

plane of the Divine nature.

While the wording of this psalm makes David appear vengeful, his abhorrence of his enemies is not personal, but rather because they had defied Israel and its God. It was this omnipotence of Jehovah that fueled David's desire to demonstrate that the God of Israel was well able to protect his people.

It was not, therefore, either in the men of his army or their prince or leaders in whom David placed his trust, but in Jehovah who had promised their eternal care and protection.

More To Follow -- Psalm 118:10-16

“All nations compassed me about: but in the name of the LORD will I destroy them. They compassed me about; yea, they compassed me about: but in the name of the LORD I will destroy them. They compassed me about like bees; they are quenched as the fire of thorns: for in the name of the LORD I will destroy them. Thou hast thrust sore at me that I might fall: but the LORD helped me. The LORD is my strength and song, and is become my salvation. The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tabernacles of the righteous: the right hand of the LORD doeth valiantly. The right hand of the LORD is exalted: the right hand of the LORD doeth valiantly.”

David now turns his attention from the past to the future. In his lifetime the Philistines from the east, the Ammonites from the west, the Moabites from the southwest, the Amalekites from the south, and the Syrians from the north, threatened Israel. Buoyed up by past victories, he faces these foes unafraid.

They stormed Israel as swarms of bees. The Hebrew suggests that they also attacked with bee hives. One of the tactics of ancient warfare was for invading troops to throw hives of bees at their attackers and quickly retreat while the insects stung the defending horses, causing them to panic, run, and throw off their riders. In confidence, David viewed them as no more than tumbling tumbleweeds to be quickly quenched by the fires of Jehovah.

Verse 14 is borrowed from the song of deliverance which Moses and the children of Israel sang after God drowned Pharaoh's army in the surging waters of the Red Sea (Exodus 15:1). The sword and shield of battle would soon give way to the songs of triumph and deliverance.

David credits these future victories to “the right hand of Jehovah,” a metaphor for the son of God, who as Michael, was the Creator's guardian angel for Israel.

In the deeper picture of Jesus' last Passover, this song heralded the sure defeat of all the enemies of his incoming kingdom. As the Master put it in the parable of the pounds, “But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me” (Luke 19:27). Here he speaks not of the literal slaughter of those who opposed him, but the transformation of them into friends by conversion on the “way of holiness” (Isaiah 35).

The Gates of Righteousness -- Psalm 118:17-21

“I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the LORD. The LORD hath chastened me sore: but he hath not given me over unto death. Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will go into them, and I will praise the LORD: This gate of the LORD, into which the righteous shall enter. I will praise thee: for thou hast heard me, and art become my salvation.”

David did die and, as the apostle expressed it, “his sepulcher is with us to this day” (Acts 2:29). The reference here, in this Messianic psalm, is to the greater than David, Jesus Christ. He also died, but in three days he was raised in triumph from his tomb. As a result of his death David also will live again, as will all mankind.

Jesus’ father had permitted him to be chastened sore: “Though he were a son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered” (Hebrews 5:8). As his chastening experiences proved his total loyalty, so his followers must learn the same implicit obedience through hard trials. But though they, like their Master, might be afflicted, they would not suffer eternal death but rather gain life with their Lord by passing through death.

The opened gates of righteousness may refer to either of three entranceways:

1. The gates of Jerusalem. The Targum translates the phrase “open to me the gates of the city of righteousness.” The Jerusalem of the kingdom is to be called “the city of righteousness” (Isaiah 1:26).
2. The outer temple gates of the temple over which the spiritual Levites will have oversight (Ezekiel 44:11).
3. The gates into the inner sanctum, the Holy of Holies, picturing heaven itself.

While all three may be appropriate, we suggest that the reference is to the outer gates of the temple. It is through these gates that all who eventually attain full righteousness will enter to worship Jehovah their God. Christ and his church enter these gates and proceed on to the gates of the second vail, while all mankind will be able to enter the outer gates into a spacious courtyard large enough for the entire human race.

It was fitting for this hymn to be sung at that last fateful Passover in Jerusalem, for there began the trail of events which led to the death of mankind’s redeemer who, entering these everlasting portals, “brought life [on earth] and immortality [in heaven] to light” (2 Timothy 1:10). Only as these gates are entered will Christ have become their salvation.

The Rejected Stone -- Psalm 118:22-24

“The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner. This is the LORD’s doing; it is marvellous in our eyes. This is the day which the LORD hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.”

The corner stone is an obvious reference to the chief corner stone of the temple (see 1 Peter 2:4-7). The term “chief” corner stone is apt in such a reference. Being constructed on the crest of Mount Moriah, the foundation plane was uneven. Even after leveling the ground, the Temple platform was to extend over the Kidron valley which was more than a hundred feet below. Thus the southeast corner stone of the Temple complex had to be carefully fitted to the terrain and on it would come the bulk of the weight of the structure above.

Such a stone would be rejected at first by the builders, but later greatly prized for its preeminent position. David was looking forward in his mind to the realization of his dream -- to build a fitting house for the worship of Jehovah, a temple that would attract the devotees to it. The day of its inauguration, when tradition says this psalm was sung, would truly be a great day of rejoicing.

In like manner Jesus was about to be rejected and killed shortly after the Passover in 33 A.D., but it was that very event which would begin the construction of the spiritual house of which Peter writes in the second chapter of his first epistle. Looking backward we, although repulsed at the cruelty of his crucifixion, nevertheless consider it a day of rejoicing for it portends the salvation of all. Truly the day of Jesus’ dying for man’s sin was a unique “day which the Lord hath made.” We rejoice, not in the agonies he endured, but in the result of redemption thus attained.

Peter expressed it well when speaking of the plot of the Jews, Herod, and Pilate. He states that all they really accomplished was “to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done” (Acts 4:28).

Hosanna -- Psalm 118:25, 26

“Save now, I beseech thee, O LORD: O LORD, I beseech thee, send now prosperity. Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the LORD: we have blessed you out of the house of the LORD.”

These are the words that were shouted by the crowds welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem just four days before the Passover (Matthew 21:9). These are also the words which Jesus quoted in his sermon denouncing the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23:39, “For I say unto you, Ye shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.”

The plea of the crowds at the triumphal entry would not be answered until the people acclaimed him in his rightful role as king. Jesus did not say that he would not return until

they recognized him, but that they would not realize that he was invisibly in their midst until they accorded him that honor.

This is in accordance with the prophecy of Revelation 1:7, “Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.”

The blessing that is spoken of in the latter half of verse 26 is that of Numbers 6:23-27, “Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: the LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: the LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. And hey shall put my name upon the children of Israel; and I will bless them.”

Bind the Sacrifice -- Psalm 118:27-29

“God is the LORD, which hath shewed us light: bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar. Thou art my God, and I will praise thee: thou art my God, I will exalt thee. O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.”

The symbolism here is apt for the Passover festival. Thousands of lambs were brought to the priest as ritual sacrifices. These lambs were pictures of Jesus as the Lamb of God, who would soon bind the sacrifice of his life to the altar as a ransom price for the entire race.

It is interesting that both Rotherham and the New American Standard Bible add the word “festive” before “sacrifice,” again suggesting the celebratory nature of Jesus as the spiritual Passover Lamb, providing atonement now for his church, but eventually for all humanity.

The course he had embarked upon at Jordan was now about to be climaxed with the words, “It is finished.” He had begun his narrow way of sacrifice in the words of the psalmist, “I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart” (Psalm 40:8). Now he was to complete it in the words of this psalm: “Thou art my God, and I will praise thee: thou art my God, I will exalt thee.” From beginning to end his walk was a walk of willing and joyful obedience to the desires of his heavenly Father.

This is the example he left us to follow. “O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good: for his mercy endureth forever.”

Wisdom And The Foolish Woman

"For wisdom is better than rubies; and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared to it." -- Proverbs 8:11

A verse by verse study in Proverbs 9.

The book of Proverbs can be divided into three sections. The first six chapters are introductory and stress the necessity of gaining true wisdom. Chapter ten begins with the words "The proverbs of Solomon" and contains a lengthy list of wise adages, closing with two chapters which are either copies from other writers or are by Solomon, but written under pseudonyms, or pen names, as the Jewish authorities argue. These apparently are not arranged in a random order, but specifically placed. This is suggested in Solomon's autobiographical book, Ecclesiastes: "And moreover, because the preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yea, he gave good heed, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs" (12:9).

The intervening section of Proverbs is in the form of a parable or allegory in which the characteristics of wisdom and foolishness are contrasted. In chapter seven we have a complete description of foolishness portrayed as a seductive prostitute, her seductive tactics likened unto the temptation of the great adversary of all mankind, the Devil. In chapter eight we find a poetic description of wisdom and its origins which many expositors interpret as a personification of Jesus. Then in chapter nine, the chapter we will here investigate, we find both brought into play in marked contrast to each other.

The Messenger -- Verses 1 to 3

"Wisdom hath builded her house, she hath hewn out her seven pillars: She hath killed her beasts; she hath mingled her wine; she hath also furnished her table. She hath sent forth her maidens: she crieth upon the highest places of the city."

The house of wisdom is contrasted with the house of the foolish woman (v. 14). The action of the chapter is the contrasting invitation by both wisdom and the foolish woman to entice the wayfarer therein. Wisdom's house is said to be of seven pillars. Whether the number seven is to be taken in anything more than a symbolic sense of completeness is unclear. It is worthy of note, however, that James, in describing wisdom, mentions seven specific attributes in connection therewith. "But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy" (James 3:17).

If, on the other hand, wisdom be taken here as it is in chapter eight, as a personification of Jesus, we note that his house, the church, is also associated with the number seven -- seven stages, the "seven churches" of Revelation 2 and 3.

The festive table laden with slain beasts and mingled wine is another figure suggestive of Jesus. Of all Biblical meals one has more attention than the last supper of Jesus' life where he replaced the symbols of the old Aaronic priesthood, lamb and bitter herbs, with those of the incoming Melchizedek priesthood, bread and wine. The Passover gives way to the commemoration of its antitype, the death of Jesus. Here, in Proverbs 9, we find the combining of these two symbols -- the slain beasts of the Law dispensation and the mingled wine of the Gospel age.

The obvious connections between the maidens who proclaim the message of wisdom with the parable in which likens his church to a group of "ten virgins" seems to be more than coincidence. After his death on Calvary's cross, the church becomes his spokesmen, spreading the gospel message throughout the world (Matt. 28:19, 20).

The "highest places of the city" also finds its counterpart in the location of the harlot's house in verse 14, "on a seat in the high places of the city." Both invitations -- that of the Lord, or wisdom, and that of the adversary, pictured by the "foolish woman" -- go forth from the same locale. In ancient cities, even as often today, the higher elevations of the towns usually appealed to the more noble classes. Certainly the gospel message, as well as Satan's attempt to divert people from it, has concentrated its efforts on the more civilized portions of the globe, "the higher places" of the global city of mankind.

Wisdom's Message -- Verses 4 to 6

"Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled. Forsake the foolish, and live; and go in the way of understanding."

The gospel message is for the simple. The starting point of Jesus' beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount so begins: "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:3). The enticements of the Lord are graphically and romantically portrayed in an excerpt from the Song of Solomon, chapter eight, verses one and two: "O that thou wert as my brother, that sucked the breasts of my mother! when I should find thee without, I would kiss thee; yea, I should not be despised. I would lead thee, and bring thee into my mother's house, who would instruct me: I would cause thee to drink of spiced wine of the juice of my pomegranate."

It is not to her bed, as the harlot desires, but to her table that the Lord invites. Partake with him of those Memorial emblems, the bread and the wine, his flesh and his blood. The "mingling" of the blood can suggest either the transfer of his spiritual life to assume human form for the purpose of suffering death for every man, or the continuing offer to his followers to become co-participants in the "wine" of his sufferings, to drink of the cup of which he drank (Matt. 20:22, 23).

For them the invitation is a new life style. "Forsake the foolish," "repent and be converted," "be transformed by a renewing of your mind" (Acts 3:19; Rom. 12:2). Because this new way involves a "renewing of the mind" in entails new thought patterns and new sets of values, therefore it is called in our parable "the way of understanding."

The Audience -- Verses 7 to 12

"He that reproveth a scorner getteth to himself shame: and he that rebuketh a wicked man getteth himself a blot. Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be yet wiser: teach a just man, and he will increase in learning. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding. For by me thy days shall be multiplied, and the years of thy life shall be increased. If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thyself: but if thou comest, thou alone shalt bear it."

In any audience there are two kinds of hearers -- those who believe the message and those who do not. In this section in our text we meet these two classes as the "scorner" and the "wise man." Not only does the reproof of the gospel to the scorner bring unawareness, but it also incurs his anger against the reprover. The wise man, in contrast, will appreciate and love the one who gives him correction, realizing that such correction is for his own profit. The just man who increases his learning is reminiscent of the adage, "When you talk you repeat what you already know, when you listened you might learn something."

The modern philosophy of existentialism holds that all truth is relative and that there is no such thing as "absolute truth." The principle of wisdom given in verse ten is a direct rebuttal of such existential arguments: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom." Recognizing Jehovah as the great "first cause" and the creator of man as well as his universe, it also recognizes that the creator has the right to dictate the rules to the created. His laws are absolute.

Building upon this he adds, "and the knowledge of the holy is understanding." Too frequently secular science stands in its own right. Great theoretical hypotheses are drawn from demonstrable evidence and proclaimed as fact. When Holy Writ comes in conflict with such "science" the Bible is deemed dated and unreliable. The author of Proverbs here argues to the contrary. His position is that "holy" or religious knowledge is based on the inspired writings of an unchangeable God, and therefore superior to the deductions of scientists, which often change with new evidence and the theories of later scholars.

In verse eleven we find out why the religious knowledge is rated first. It alone can multiply days. While medical research may lengthen life expectancy it does so primarily by curing the mortality rate of infants and children, rather than actually lengthening life. Man still begins to rapidly deteriorate at the Biblical limits of "three score and ten" or "four score" (Psa. 90:10). God's Word alone holds out the formula for everlasting life through the sacrifice of his Son, Jesus Christ.

The Foolish Woman -- Verses 13 to 15

"A foolish woman is clamorous: she is simple, and knoweth nothing. For she sitteth at the door of her house, on a seat in the high places of the city, To call passengers who go right on their ways."

Our attention is now called to the contrasting invitation. She is the same foolish woman described as a harlot or prostitute in chapter seven. The Hebrew word translated "simple" has, according to Strong's Concordance, the implication of seduction. The word translated "clamorous" includes not only the stridency of her voice, but the spectacle of her appearance, as that of a harlot's apparel. The "high places of the city," while including the residency of the more affluent, were also the location of the pagan temples (see 1 Kings 11:7; 2 Kings 23:15 for examples). Cult prostitution was often a part of these worship services and therefore a natural gathering ground for women of this profession. Her audience is the heedless, the passers-by who "go right on their ways," unmindful of anything beyond temporary gratification.

Her Message -- Verses 16 to 18

"Whoso is simple, let him turn in hither: and as for him that wanteth understanding, she saith to him, Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. But he knoweth not that the dead are there; and that her guests are in the depths of hell [sheol]."

The audience attracted by the foolish woman is further described as "simple," or, as the New American Standard phrases it, "naive." Their naivete is based on their lack of understanding, which is in turn based upon their rejection of the "knowledge of the holy" (v. 10). What they lack is a moral or ethical base, therefore their consciences permit what God does not allow. The perversity of fallen human nature is outlined only too well in the phrase: "Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant." Fallen tendencies take delight in the thought of "getting away with something." How often have we noted the strength of temptation lying in the thought that we will not be discovered in our transgressions. Sin becomes almost a game, with the object to preserve an outward purity while giving vent to human passions within.

The conclusion of the parable emphasizes the naivete and is similar to another proverb of Solomon: "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. 14:12).

Once man tries to ignore the teachings of true wisdom, the wisdom of Christ, he is left to his own devices. These usually prove disastrous. A case in point is the history of Israel during the period of Judges when, after repetitive deliverance from their enemies, Israel kept reverting to the pagan idolatry of their neighbors. In summing up that historical era, the last verse of the book of Judges reads: "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judg. 21:25).

How glad we are that the "hell" to which those who accept the invitation of the foolish woman end up is not the traditional fiery "hell" of Christendom, or even the "*gehenna* hell" of the New Testament from which there is no return, but the "death and hell" of Revelation 20:13 which eventually shall deliver "up the dead which are in them" for the future judgment of God's kingdom when he shall "judge every man by that man whom he has ordained", Jesus Christ the righteous (Acts 17:31).

Solomon himself saw the twin invitations of wisdom and foolishness, following first the latter before going back and taking the other path, "the road less taken." He sums up the struggle between the two and his final conclusion in the closing words of Ecclesiastes, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Eccl. 12:13, 14).

A Mother's Prophecy

Wise Words to a Wayward Son

"And [Bathsheba] said unto [David], My lord, thou swarest by the LORD thy God unto thine handmaid, saying, Assuredly Solomon thy son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne." -- 1 Kings 1:17

Verse by verse Bible study in Proverbs 31

Minor prophecies are not confined to books written by those we call the "minor prophets." Many holy men and women of God were used by Jehovah to utter words of prophecy. Sometimes these prophecies are contained in a single verse of scripture, on other occasions they occupy an entire chapter. Sometimes the prophets address their words to a large group or even an entire nation; on other occasions their words are meant for an audience of one. In Proverbs 31, the prophecy is addressed to a particular person, the son of the prophetess.

Even though the individual to whom the prophecy was given has long since died, the principles delineated in the prophecy are timeless. They have numerous applications to many people at many different periods of time.

The Prophetess -- Verse 1

The words of king Lemuel, the prophecy that his mother taught him.

There has been much dispute as to the identity of this Lemuel. The oldest definition, and the one we prefer, is given in the Hebrew Talmud: "Solomon was called by six names: Solomon, Jedidiah, Koheleth, Son of Jakeh, Agur, and Lemuel" (Avoth d'Rab, Nathan c. 39). Both Strong's Concordance and the Brown-Driver-Brigg's Lexicon agree with this identification. If this is true, the author of this one chapter prophecy is Bathsheba.

The word translated "prophecy" in this verse would be better translated "burden" or "oracle." As an "oracle" it is to be understood as a message commissioned by God. As a "burden" it is a responsibility that weighs on the heart. A "prophecy," on the other hand, is usually associated with predictions of the future, though it can refer to any word from God. In this passage we have a warning of dangers that can affect the future.

Bathsheba appears to have been a caring mother. Although she had numerous children, her love seems to have been centered on Solomon, her second child by David. Their first child died as a chastisement of God for their sin of adultery. Solomon became to them the assurance of God's continued acceptance despite their earlier sin. This was confirmed to them when Nathan, the prophet who had berated them for their adulterous relationship, sent a message after the birth of the second child, bestowing on him the name Jedidiah (2Sam. 12:25). This name signifies "beloved of God" and not only demonstrated the

forgiveness of God for their shortcoming but also prefigured the words of Jehovah over his son, Jesus: "this is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17).

In the book of Proverbs, Solomon credits both his father and mother for their roles in his upbringing. "For I was my father's son, tender and only beloved in the sight of my mother. He taught me also, and said unto me, Let thine heart retain my words: keep my commandments, and live" (Prov. 4:3, 4).

His mother, at the insistence of Nathan, preserved the kingship for Solomon when his step-brother Adonijah laid claim to it (1 Kings 1:11-30).

Preview of the Prophecy -- Verses 2 and 3

What, my son? and what, the son of my womb? and what, the son of my vows? Give not thy strength unto women, nor thy ways to that which destroyeth kings.

Not only does she address her words to Solomon as her son but specially as "son of my womb," an idiom referring to a firstborn. In fact Solomon was not the first born. We do not know if she had children by Uriah, her first husband, but we know that the first child she bore David died. In any case, he was now regarded as her firstborn, the one upon whom special attention would be focused. He was also the "son of my vows." The preceding child had been begotten outside of the marriage bonds. Solomon, as a child begotten within the marriage arrangements, could be looked upon with full dignity with no blight of illegitimacy on his reputation.

As an observant mother, Bathsheba notes the weaknesses of her son. This causes her to emphasize two specific warnings in her oracle: a weakness for the opposite sex and a fondness for "that which destroyeth kings," probably wine, as suggested in the succeeding context.

Use of Alcohol -- Verses 4-7

It is not for kings, O Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes strong drink: Lest they drink, and forget the law, and pervert the judgment of any of the afflicted. Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more.

The first part of this counsel is easier to understand than the latter portions. Wine and strong drink, so often used at royal festive parties, is bad for a king to drink, not only because it perverts sound judgment but also because it lowers the dignity of the throne.

While it is true, as many commentators note, that strong drink was used to numb the senses of condemned prisoners, this does not appear to be the class being discussed in these verses.

The suggestion rather appears to be, not that it is recommended but that it is preferable, for those in hard circumstances to find some relief from their misery in the numbing effects of wine than it is for those in positions of power to do so, for their judgment affects the entire populace.

This verse more than any other in the chapter has led many to the conclusion that Lemuel was indeed a king of a surrounding nation and that the advice here is to be ignored. We are of a contrary opinion; once we begin finding a reason to ignore any portion of God's Word we are setting a precedent for ignoring others. Therefore, we look to interpreting this verse in a comparative fashion rather than one of direct counsel and advice. "If one is going to drink wine, it should be the pauper who has reason to seek release from his poverty rather than the king who may be called upon at any time to offer sound judgment."

A King's Role -- Verses 8 and 9

Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction. Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy.

Strictly speaking, the admonition does not appear to be directed toward unbiased judgment. The poor and needy and those "appointed to destruction" are not always in the right. Nor are the wealthy always in the wrong. But the rich have always, even in Bible times, their advocates to plead their cases, while the poor are usually left to their own defenses. Thus the king's role was to be an advocate for those who were without such. This is even the case today with the right of a defendant to a court-appointed attorney if he cannot afford one for himself.

While those "appointed to destruction" may seem to refer to those who are subject to the death sentence, it is noteworthy that Strong's Concordance suggests that it may refer to orphans. The literal definition of the term would be "sons [or survivors] of destruction." Again the thought is stressed that everyone, particularly the disenfranchised, have the right to the same protection of the law as the wealthiest and most powerful of citizens.

A Virtuous Woman -- Verses 10-31

The balance of the chapter is in the literary form of an acrostic poem. Each verse begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This device is often used in the Psalms (9, 10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119) and is also the structure for the whole of Lamentations. Its purpose appears to be two-fold: first, as a mnemonic aid for the Hebrew reader to better remember the passage; and second, in times of distress to force mental composure before setting one's feeling to print.

Rightly foreseeing the problems Solomon would have as a result of disastrous marriages, his mother here outlines the qualities he should look for in a wife. Many of these are parallel to those possessed by the Shulamite in the love poem that we know as The Song of Solomon.

Condensing the passage, we note the following prominent features of this woman's character:

1. She is a commendable wife and mother. 2. She lives for her home and family. 3. She is constantly industrious. 4. She is self-disciplined and orderly. 5. She is a sharp business woman. 6. She has good, refined tastes. 7. She manifests the grace of hospitality. 8. She is charitable in time of need. 9. She is spiritually-minded.

We proceed now to a more detailed examination of this section:

AS WIFE AND MOTHER: Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies. The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need of spoil. She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life (vs. 10-12).

This comparison of virtue to rubies is a common one in scripture (Job 28:18; Prov. 3:15; 8:11; 20:15; Lam. 4:7). It is no better demonstrated than in the comparison by a man who had a wife named "Ruby" and a second wife he loved even more. The Hebrew word for "ruby" is *paniyim* from which was taken the name of Elkanah's first wife, Peninnah (1Sam. 1:4, 5). Yet it was Hannah whom he considered far more precious than "Ruby" with all her children, saying to her, "am I not better to thee than ten sons?" (v. 8).

He can trust her because her love is constant. It is unmixed affection. Her attitude toward him will be constant and unchanging, not varying in reaction to his moods toward her or reactionary to other external circumstances. Knowing that she will be a full partner in the marriage relationship, he will have no need to look elsewhere for those qualities she lacks. Her industriousness will make it unnecessary to embark on expeditions for spoil, for together they will make their living honestly through hard work.

Many have applied this entire poem to the church, the bride of Christ, the "greater than Solomon" (Matt. 12:42). Certainly it is just this trustworthiness that Jesus desires in his church. He seeks a bride that will not only do good to him when it is to her convenience but will seek to serve him in good times and bad.

INDUSTRIOUS: She seeketh wool, and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands. She is like the merchants' ships; she bringeth her food from afar. She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens (vs. 13-15).

Her zealous activities are shown in her adeptness both at the spinning wheel and in the fields. Not content with feeding her immediate family, she also feeds her servants well.

In the spiritual application, we see the bride of Christ arising industriously during earth's night time of sin, before the Millennial morning wakens all of mankind, to make her "garments of righteousness" (Rev. 19:8; Psa. 45:14). She is willing to seek far and wide for that which is greater than bread, "every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4:4). She recognizes her responsibility to not only feed herself and her family but

also her "maidens," "the virgins her companions that follow her" (Psa. 45:14; Matt. 25:1-13).

WISE ADMINISTRATOR: She considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard (v. 16).

Not only is the virtuous woman a diligent laborer, she is a business woman as well. Here again she shows her wisdom by not just finding a field and making the purchase but considering whether or not it is an advantageous purchase. Neither is her purchase for the purpose of mere accumulation of land but for a specific purpose, to plant a vineyard so that its fruitage may be used for beverage, medicine, and sacrifice. She does not resort to credit to make her purchase but buys it "with the fruit of her hands," using funds from her own resources.

In the New Testament parables of the talents and of the pounds there is a responsibility for the Christian to invest what the Lord has put at his disposal. These are not to be invested recklessly but wisely, so that they may bring increase to the amount invested. This requires consideration of the use of one's time and talents.

ENERGETIC: She girdeth her loins with strength, and strengtheneth her arms. She perceiveth that her merchandise is good: her candle goeth not out by night. She layeth her hands to the spindle, and her hands hold the distaff (vs. 17-19).

When tiredness overtakes her, she girds on extra strength. She insures the quality of her workmanship by spending the extra hours necessary to do her job right. The spiritual lesson is clear. Not only is the Christian to be a full-time Christian, from early morning to late at night, but he is to give great care to the quality of his Christianity. It is only too common for one to be a Christian in name only, content with the form of religion rather than its substance.

PHILANTHROPIC AND PROVIDENT: She stretcheth out her hand to the poor; yea, she reacheth forth her hands to the needy. She is not afraid of the snow for her household: for all her household are clothed with scarlet. She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple. (vs. 20-22).

A genuine care for the less fortunate is always urged upon the faithful. "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27).

Her charity however does not impinge on her duty to her own household. This priority is well set forth in Galatians 6:10, "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."

The scarlet clothing hardly seems relevant to the cold weather of winter. The thought seems to be that scarlet dye, being very expensive, was used for heavy woolen cloth only. Likewise tapestries were made of heavy material and suitable for warm bed coverings.

Spiritually the thought is much deeper. The only garments that will adequately protect the Christian in winter times of trouble and distress are those dyed with the red of Christ's ransom for all. The adequate covering will not be a plain quilt but one that has the rich tapestry of God's plan woven deeply into it. The garments that will eternally last are the royal (purple) silk robes that will garb the world's kings and priests.

HER HUSBAND'S WORK: Her husband is known in the gates, when he sitteth among the elders of the land (v. 23).

Such a woman deserves an honorable husband and delights in his work and reputation. Here her husband is pictured as one of the elders of the city, sitting in the seat of judgment at the city gate. The husband of the bride of Christ is even yet more fortunate, for there is none higher and more worthy of respect than the Son of God.

HER REAL CLOTHING: She maketh fine linen, and selleth it; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant. Strength and honor are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come. (vs. 24, 25).

In these verses the poet breaks out of his symbolic language and speaks clearly of the garments of this woman of virtue -- they are the garments of "strength and honor." This is the clothing that enables one to "rejoice in the time to come." In a similar vein, the Apostle Peter speaks of wives being adorned with "the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price" (1 Peter 3:4).

A FAITHFUL MOTHER: She openeth her mouth with wisdom; and in her tongue is the law of kindness. She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her (vs. 26-28).

Great wisdom is required to "train up a child in the way he should go," so that "when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6). Rules and laws must be laid down, but they must be laid down in kindness and love. As the Apostle Paul counsels fathers in Colossians 3:21, "provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged." (See also Eph. 6:4).

The wise parent who can discern and walk the narrow line between strictness and love will find both a child and a spouse that will express their appreciation. No greater opportunity faces any Christian parent than that of nurturing their children in the admonitions of the Lord. The apostle expresses it well in 3 John 4, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth."

HER REWARD: Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all. Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the LORD, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates (vs. 29-31).

Not merely reputation, but especially the character developed by the virtuous woman will be her reward. "Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain." Reputation is accorded when one's ways please another. Yet it is fickle, for when the other person is not gratified, they quickly turn against the one they so recently praised. Jesus made himself of "no repute" (Phil. 2:7). His followers should be willing to do the same.

Beauty, whether of face or figure, is transient; "beauty is only skin deep." Character lasts forever. Character is the treasure the Christian is to "lay up in heaven" (Matt. 6:19, 20).

Ultimately it is not what another thinks, but it will be "her own works" that will "praise her in the gates." No sermon we give, no words we speak, can be nearly as effective as the life we live. Remember the words of the Master, "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).

May the virtues of the virtuous woman be the virtues that each of us strive to gain and apply in our individual lives.

I Am My Beloved's

I am my beloved, and his desire is toward me. -- Song of Solomon 7:10

*A verse by verse Bible study in the second chapter
of the Song of Solomon.*

Nowhere is the mutual love of Christ and his church more intimately shown than in the beautiful love poem of the Song of Solomon. The term "beloved" is used no less than thirty-three times in this short book. Here we see both the tenderness and the passions of a full-blown love relationship. In vivid imagery we trace a picture of the ever-deepening love of Jesus and his spiritual bride.

In the second chapter we find the opening sentiments of the two lovers. A brief statement by the male is followed by a more lengthy description of him and their relationship by his companion.

The Beloved - Verses 1 and 2

I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys. As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.

As the beauty of flowers in the springtime, so does the beloved present himself to his church. Unpretentious, yet their color and aroma fill the fields of northern Palestine. According to Nelson's Bible Dictionary, the rose of Sharon is different from the roses of which we know: "Most authorities think that the rose referred to . . . is not what we know as the rose today, but a low-growing bulbous plant producing from two to four yellow flowers on each stalk. This flower is noted for its fragrance." Similarly, the lily referred to is not the large water lily, but a small white field flower. Its simple attractiveness is remarked in the New Testament as well (Matt. 6:28). These simple floral illustrations not only call attention to his beauty and the sweet fragrance of his life but to the time of year as well -- springtime, when life springs up anew from its winter rest.

He notes a similarity between himself and the woman he loves. He is "the lily" and she is "as the lily" -- so closely does she seek to emulate his beauty. Her beauty is highlighted in his eyes by his comparison with those around her: "as the lily among the thorns." The comparison here is between the good and the bad. "Thorns" is better translated "thistles," referring to weeds that grow next to the lilies in the field, a similar illustration to that of Jesus' parable of the wheat and the tares. This seems evident by the use of his word, translated "thistle," in Job 31:40: "Let thistles grow instead of wheat, and cockle instead of barley. The words of Job are ended."

Matthew Henry grasps the thought well: "God's people are as lilies among [thorns], scratched and torn, shaded and obscured, by them; they are dear to Christ, and yet exposed to hardships and troubles in the world; they must expect it, for they are planted

among thorns (2:6), but they are nevertheless dear to him; he does not overlook nor undervalue any of his lilies for their being among thorns, When they are among thorns they must still be as lilies, must maintain their innocence and purity, and, though they are among thorns, must not be turned into thorns, must not render railing for railing, and, if they thus preserve their character, they shall be still owned as conformable to Christ."

The Bride's Response - Verses 3 to 7

As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste. He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love. Stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples: for I am sick of love. His left hand is under my head, and his right hand doth embrace me. I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please.

As the Lord had compared her to a lily among thorns, so she compares him to the apple tree among the trees of the wood. Here the contrast is not between good and bad, but between good and the best. The excellence of the apple is shown in the simple analogy of Proverbs: "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver" (25:11). Some authorities believe it is the apricot that is here referenced. The apricot was thought to be an aphrodisiac and was often called "the love apple."

It is not the fruit alone to which she refers but also to the shade of the tree. Shade is a welcome blessing in the heat of Palestine. Metaphorically, the shade also gives the thought of protection. Taken from the apple tree of the wilderness into the banqueting house she notes with pleasure the banner over the festive table bearing but one precious word: "Love." Here she is feted with the apples falling from her apple tree (v. 3) and flagons of wine, that fruitage of the spirit which will revive her in her fainting ["sick of love"] condition. Her beloved gently wraps his arms around her and there, still embracing, he falls asleep in the joy of giving comfort to the one he loves.

The daughters of Jerusalem in this poem appear to represent natural Israel (see 5:8). Once the church of Christ is complete, the next phase of God's plan is to restore Israel to the position of prominence which she will occupy in the kingdom of Christ (Acts 15:16, 17). Thus the petition here is that natural Israel not rush the work of God until he please -- until he has completed the work of selecting the church. The charge is given by, or for, the "roes" and "the hinds of the field," symbolically representing the completion of the work of restitution.

The Lord Returns - Verses 8 to 13

The voice of my beloved! behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills. My beloved is like a roe or a young hart: behold, he standeth behind our wall, he looketh forth at the windows, shewing himself through the lattice. My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; The flowers appear on the earth; the time of

the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land; The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.

Once again the scene changes. The beloved is now awake. He is returning from a journey, like the nobleman in the parable of the pounds (Luke 19:12). There is no dawdling here, but he runs and skips like the roe and the hart. Her whole being is aroused to his coming, yet she cannot see him. He is standing behind a wall, the wall of invisibility. But though we cannot see him, we can discern him for he peeps in at the windows and shows himself through the lattice work, giving us hints of his arrival. It is through the interwoven lattice work of prophecy that he must be discerned for, as he told his disciples of old, "Yet a little while and the world seeth me no more" (John 14:19).

"Rise up!" What beautiful words! What a welcome sound! For nearly two millennia the church has awaited these words: "Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away." Rise out of your graves for, at my return, "the dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them" (1 Thess. 4:16, 17).

"Rise up!" Awaken for it is springtime, the time for the resurrection to begin. The signs are there. "The winter is past" (see Matt. 24:20; Jer. 8:20). "The rain [both 'the early' and 'the latter' (see Joel 2:23)] is over and gone." Not only is it time for the flowers to reappear and the birds to sing their odes to spring, but even the voice of the turtle dove, a migrant that returns to Palestine in early April, is heard once more.

It is significant that the turtle dove is singled out from among the other birds, for it was also a dove that announced the beginning of a new age to Noah (Gen. 8:8-12) and it was a dove that announced the beginning of the Christian dispensation at the baptism of Jesus (Matt. 3:16). It not only symbolizes the holy spirit, but also the advent of peace on the earth. Nelson has the following to say about the dove: "Doves appear to express affection, stroking each other, and 'billing and cooing.' They mate for life, sharing nesting and parenting duties. They are gentle birds that never resist attack or retaliate against their enemies. Even when her young are attacked, a dove will give only a pitiful call of distress."

Other signs also portend the return of her Lord from his wilderness wandering. "The fig tree putteth forth her green figs" -- Israel once again is restored to divine favor and begins to produce spiritual fruitage (See Matt. 24:32; Jer. 24:1-8). "The vines with the tender grape give a good smell" -- the church has brought her "fruits of the spirit" to full ripeness (see John 15:1-5; Gal. 5:22, 23).

Once again he repeats his invitation, "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away." The invitation is sincere, the response is up to us.

The Final Prayer - Verses 14 to 17

"O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely. Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vines: for our vines have tender grapes. My beloved is mine, and I am his: he feedeth among the lilies. Until the day break, and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be thou like a roe or a young hart upon the mountains of Bether."

The attention of the church is now turned to the one she loves. He is now the dove for he has come as the "Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6). He is also the lawgiver, dwelling as Moses before him "in the cleft of the rock" (Exod. 33:22, 23), waiting for God to give him the law of the New Covenant as he gave the law of the old covenant to Moses.

Now is the time for the church to see his countenance. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). This will be the time to hear that sweetest of all voices which up to now we have heard by faith alone.

Yet one task remains to be accomplished, the removal of the small flaws, the secret faults, "the little foxes," which can so easily spoil the fruit of the vine. It is the tender grape, the newly formed fruit, that is so tasty to the young predators. And, wily as the sly fox, how easily the small sins creep in to rob the Christian of his fruitage..

My Beloved Is Mine

Then the cry of triumph, "My beloved is mine, and I am his." How wonderful to consummate our love for our Bridegroom. This has been the dream of the Christian all through the age. But this is only chapter two, and there is still much room for growth. Now the cry is possessive, "My beloved is mine, and I am his." Our priorities must change. It is not until the sixth chapter that she improves on this expression. Here the call is: "I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine" (6:3). We must grow until we realize that it is more important that we are his than that he is ours.

Yet there is still room for more growth. She arrives at her final stage of development one chapter later when she calls out, "I am my beloved's, and his desire is toward me" (7:10). Now the possessiveness is gone. It is enough to belong to him and to be assured that he looks upon us thoroughly.

"He feedeth among the lilies." While the love of Christ is individualized to each Christian, there can be no jealousy of one individual against another. They are content that he loves them each, with no desire for one to have a preeminence of that love over another. As the disciples battled with the wish to be the nearest to him and, thus, the greatest; so has this battle continued down through the age.

Such is the union of Christ and his church at the present time. But this is only the beginning. How we long for that perfect day when "the day break" and the Sun of righteousness arises with healing in his beams (Mal. 4:1); when the shadows of the past flee away, fully absorbed into the realities of the future. With what eagerness we await that day, looking for and "hasting" its arrival (2 Peter 3:12).

How we join with the prayer of the Shulamite, "Turn, my beloved, and be like a roe or young hart upon the mountains of Bether." Haste with the speed of a gazelle. Come, my beloved, and be at my side.

Bether means division or separation. These mountains were so named because they separated Jerusalem in the north from Bethlehem and the shepherd's fields in the south. It is to this period of time, between the nativity and the first advent and the Jerusalem reign at the second advent, that our lessons apply. Soon these mountains will be topped and the Lord will assume his rightful throne on the Temple mount.

"Haste, O my beloved, for I am sick of love."

The Burden of Egypt

Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the LORD! -- Isaiah 31:1

A verse-by-verse study of Isaiah 19

Chapters 13 through 23 of the book of Isaiah contain a series of prophecies, or “burdens,” against ten nations surrounding Israel during the reigns of kings Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (Isaiah 1:1). The burden of Egypt, the seventh in the series, is the subject of chapter 19.

The Hebrew word translated “burden” indicates an obligatory responsibility. The use of the word in Jeremiah 23:33 is illuminating: “When this people, or the prophet, or a priest, shall ask thee, saying, What is the burden of the LORD? thou shalt then say unto them, What burden? I will even forsake you, saith the LORD.” The word is a stronger one than “prophecy” because when a “burden” is laid on the prophet, there is an absolute necessity that it be delivered. Professor Strong says it refers especially to singing and Brown, Driver, and Briggs gives “uplifting, that to which the soul lifts up” as one of its definitions. Thus, while frequently associated with “woes” or prophecies of doom, these “burdens” of Isaiah have a bright side for they are uttered against the enemies of Israel. Even though some of these countries were allies of Israel at the time, their alliances were of expedience and not to be relied upon. Therefore the “woe” of our theme text was also a chastisement from God for the failure of his people to rely on him rather than on political confederations.

Judgment on Egypt -- Isaiah 19:1-4

The burden of Egypt. Behold, the LORD rideth upon a swift cloud, and shall come into Egypt: and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence, and the heart of Egypt shall melt in the midst of it. And I will set the Egyptians against the Egyptians: and they shall fight every one against his brother, and every one against his neighbor; city against city, and kingdom against kingdom. And the spirit of Egypt shall fail in the midst thereof; and I will destroy the counsel thereof: and they shall seek to the idols, and to the charmers, and to them that have familiar spirits, and to the wizards. And the Egyptians will I give over into the hand of a cruel lord; and a fierce king shall rule over them, saith the Lord, the LORD of hosts.

While there may have been a fulfillment of this prophecy in a literal sense during the time of Isaiah, the main application lies in the future. The complete anarchy described in these verses is elsewhere alluded to in other end-time prophecies (Ezekiel 38:21).

The LORD in this passage is Jehovah. Although he is spoken of as traveling into Egypt, the Hebrew word translated “presence” (*panim*, Strong’s 6440) does not so much signify presence as it does the turning of a face toward. It corresponds to the Greek *prosopon* (Strong’s 4383) used in Acts 3:19, “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence [face] of the Lord.” The word translated “swift” (Hebrew: *qal*, Strong’s 7031) literally means “light.” Because light, or white, clouds contain less moisture, they are swift clouds. This connects well to Revelation 14:14, “And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle.”

This all suggests a linkage between the “presence” or returned face of Jehovah with the second advent of Jesus Christ. The object of this returned attention of Jehovah to intervene in earth’s affairs is judgment. Egypt, in this context, is typical of the world, especially the Christian world (Revelation 11:8). The first effect is fear and perplexity at the turn of events. This coincides with Jesus’ words in Luke 21:25,26, “There shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.”

At the time of the exodus, the Egyptians resorted to idols and the doing of supernatural works by the court magicians. This is reminiscent of the apostle Paul’s description of Jesus’ second advent: “Then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: even him [Jesus Christ], whose coming is after [or, accompanied by] the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders” (2 Thessalonians 2:8,9). The miraculous acts referred to are “lying wonders” and not truly miracles, only having the appearance of such. The illustration is particularly applicable to Egypt since it calls to mind the wondrous actions of Pharaoh’s magicians in withstanding Moses.

The cruel lord and fierce king into whose hands these workers of wonders in Christianity are relegated is none other than Satan himself, making one last stand before his thousand-year banishment (Revelation 20:1-4).

Plagues -- Isaiah 19:5-10

And the waters shall fail from the sea, and the river shall be wasted and dried up. And they shall turn the rivers far away; and the brooks of defense shall be emptied and dried up: the reeds and flags shall wither. The paper reeds by the brooks, by the mouth of the brooks, and every thing sown by the brooks, shall wither, be driven away, and be no more. The fishers also shall mourn, and all they that cast angle into the brooks shall lament, and they that spread nets upon the waters shall languish. Moreover they

that work in fine flax, and they that weave networks, shall be confounded. And they shall be broken in the purposes thereof, all that make sluices and ponds for fish.

After Pharaoh's magicians were subdued by the miracles of Moses, a series of plagues came upon that nation. In like manner, Isaiah describes the returned face of the Lord as being accompanied by a series of plagues or disastrous events upon the land itself. These plagues in this Isaiah study are concentrated on the Nile delta. The Hebrew word *matsowr* (Strong's 4693; singular, or the plural *Mizraim*, meaning the two Egypts) literally means "[the delta of] Egypt." Thus the "brooks of defense" refer to the seven branches of the Nile river.

The disasters described affect four of the foundations of the Egyptian economy:

1. The Papyrus reeds -- Egypt was highly advanced in the literary arts. The library at Alexandria became the largest in the ancient world with over forty thousand volumes. Thus the manufacture of paper from the papyrus reeds was an essential part of the nation's commerce.
2. Agriculture was the mainstay of the economy. With the Nile being smitten, irrigation for the rich croplands in the delta would be severely affected.
3. The fishermen -- both the Nile where angle fishing was popular and the Mediterranean where nets brought in the harvest -- would be affected by these plagues.
4. The textile trade -- ancient Egypt had a highly developed textile trade. The kalasiris, or flowing robe similar to the sleeveless Japanese kimono, was made of fine linen from native flax and was a chief export.

The net effect of the disasters was to be total economic collapse. A similar concept in second advent prophecy is found in the sixth plague of Revelation where it is the waters of the Euphrates, not the Nile, that is dried up (Revelation 16:12-16).

The Princes of Zoan -- Isaiah 19:11-17

Surely the princes of Zoan are fools, the counsel of the wise counselors of Pharaoh is become brutish: how say ye unto Pharaoh, I am the son of the wise, the son of ancient kings? Where are they? where are thy wise men? and let them tell thee now, and let them know what the LORD of hosts hath purposed upon Egypt. The princes of Zoan are become fools, the princes of Noph are deceived; they have also seduced Egypt, even they that are the stay of the tribes thereof. The LORD hath mingled a perverse spirit in the midst thereof: and they have caused Egypt to err in every work thereof, as a drunken man staggereth in his vomit. Neither shall there be any work for Egypt, which

the head or tail, branch or rush, may do. In that day shall Egypt be like unto women: and it shall be afraid and fear because of the shaking of the hand of the LORD of hosts, which he shaketh over it. And the land of Judah shall be a terror unto Egypt, every one that maketh mention thereof shall be afraid in himself, because of the counsel of the LORD of hosts, which he hath determined against it.

Zoan is the Hebrew name for Tanis, an important city at the southern end of the Tanic, at the beginning of an eastern branch of the Nile. It was the capital of Egypt from the twenty-first to the twenty-fourth dynasties, when the capital shifted to Memphis around 725 B.C. It was during the latter portion of this period that the Isaiah prophecy must have been written.

Noph is another form of Memphis, indicating that this city was already rising to prominence. Noph's princes were the Cushite brothers Shabaka and Piye who conquered Egypt from the south. Isaiah is thus prophesying against the twenty-fourth dynasty of Egypt and its Cushite or Nubian successor. In 701 B.C. Shabaka joined forces with Hezekiah of Judah in an attempt to thwart Assyrian aggression from the north. Although Assyria was the victor, it was not able to conquer Jerusalem.

Isaiah's prophecy indicates that Jehovah opposed this union and punished Egypt with an economic depression. The "woman-like" fear would not be occasioned so much by the Assyrian conquest of Egypt (which occurred about a half century later), but by the reports of the success of the Assyrian campaign against Judah. Similarly all attempts at opposing alliances to Christ's incoming kingdom are equally doomed to failure (Isaiah 8:12,13).

A Tale of Five Cities -- Isaiah 19:18

In that day shall five cities in the land of Egypt speak the language of Canaan, and swear to the LORD of hosts; one shall be called, The city of destruction.

The chapter concludes with a series of four prophecies relating to "that day." These prophecies apparently mark a time division in the chapter and relate, not to the time of the Assyrian conquests, but to a much later time when God will again turn the fortunes of both Egypt and Israel to prosperity. We understand these four prophecies to relate to the "end time" of the second advent of Jesus Christ.

The five literal Egyptian cities appear to include Bubastis (capital of the twenty-second Dynasty from 945 to 730 B.C.); Tanis (capital of the twenty-third Dynasty -- co-existent with the twenty-second from 817 to 730 B.C. and the twenty-fourth Dynasty from 720 to 714 B.C.); Per Ramessu (earlier known as Avaris, one of the most important cities of the time); Memphis, capital of the twenty-fifth Dynasty from 716 to 656 B.C.); and Heliopolis (or, On, the priestly city).¹

While it is indeterminate whether the language of Canaan refers to Hebrew, it seems the most likely probability and would well represent the “pure language” of Christ’s kingdom coming to the world (Egypt) from restored Israel (Zephaniah 3:9).

Manuscripts differ as to whether the unique city of this verse is “city of destruction” or “city of the sun.”² If it refers to the “city of destruction,” it would seem to represent that the religious elements of present society are destined for destruction. If it is the “city of the sun,” the inference would be that present religion would be replaced by conversion to the city of the “Sun of righteousness” that arises with “healing in his wings” (Malachi 4:2).

An Altar and a Pillar -- Isaiah 19:19-22

In that day shall there be an altar to the LORD in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar at the border thereof to the LORD. And it shall be for a sign and for a witness unto the LORD of hosts in the land of Egypt: for they shall cry unto the LORD because of the oppressors, and he shall send them a savior, and a great one, and he shall deliver them. And the LORD shall be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians shall know the LORD in that day, and shall do sacrifice and oblation; yea, they shall vow a vow unto the LORD, and perform it. And the LORD shall smite Egypt: he shall smite and heal it: and they shall return even to the LORD, and he shall be intreated of them, and shall heal them.

The movement of the new dynasty to Memphis placed the capital at the south end of the Nile delta which separated lower and upper Egypt. This location was to be marked with “an altar” and “a pillar.” The altar signified a place of worship while the pillar illustrated the structure as both a memorial and a boundary marker.

Such a structure exists some ten miles north of Memphis: the great pyramid of Giza. This pyramid, erected some thirteen hundred years before this prophecy, serves both of these functions. It marks the border between upper and lower Egypt while standing at the mid-point of the fan-shaped Nile delta (see photograph on p. 5). It also differs from other pyramids in the area which were built as burial chambers for the pharaohs. The Great Pyramid contains a memorial to the creator of the universe, his plan being etched in the stone layout of its rooms and passages.

In the day when this pyramid shall deliver its message to the world, it will serve as a place commemorating the worship of Jehovah. Those who comprehend its precognition of this plan will bring themselves as a living sacrifice. They will make vows of obedience to the incoming kingdom and perform those vows.

Then the Lord will turn from his destructive works upon society and begin the rebuilding process shown in the following “in that day” prophecy.

A Highway -- Isaiah 19:23

In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians.

A highway is a means of communication. Highways between countries signify peaceful commerce and travel between them. As in the earlier part of this chapter, Egypt and Assyria were deadly enemies; so “in that day” peace would be once again established between them and that which they represent. Egypt was as much a model of civilization at the time as Assyria was of wild raiding elements. So today the world is divided into civilized and more war-like camps, between haves and have-nots, between conservatives and liberals. Little understanding exists between them. But “in that day” of Messiah’s kingdom, both sides will begin an era of mutual harmony and cooperation.

The metaphor of a highway is a frequent one in Isaiah’s prophecy. Most notably, in Isaiah 35:8-10 it is called “the way of holiness,” and aptly describes the educational opportunities of the kingdom in which all who will may “learn righteousness” (Isaiah 26:9).

Isaiah 11:15,16 describes the opening of this highway, likening it to the exodus from Egypt in Moses’ day: “The LORD shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea; and with his mighty wind shall he shake his hand over the river, and shall smite it in the seven streams, and make men go over dryshod. And there shall be an highway for the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria; like as it was to Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt.” The seven streams are the seven main branches of the Nile delta. The wording of this text suggests that the wilderness experiences of Israel pictured what earth’s inhabitants will face in their uphill battle to holiness.

Isaiah 40:3 and Isaiah 62:10 speak of the preparation of the roadbed for this highway as the gathering out of stones. This is the work of the present dispensation as both natural and spiritual Israel gain valuable lessons in the present time to assist all mankind in the Messianic kingdom to reach the goal of absolute perfection.

The Role of Israel -- Isaiah 19:24, 25

In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land: whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance.

In ancient days there was a literal road joining Egypt and Assyria. It was called the Via Maris and was the most important international highway throughout the biblical period,

originating in Egypt and running north by way of the Plain of Philistia and the Plain of Sharon. The road crossed the Carmel ridge at Megiddo, passed through the Valley of Jezreel, and continued by way of Hazor to Damascus (see Nelson's *Illustrated Bible Dictionary*). Israel was the center point of this highway, and it was in Israel at a mountain pass just north of Megiddo where commerce could be stopped or permitted. Thus it is symbolically that the battle of Armageddon, named for Megiddo, will be the turning point from whence mankind will begin its upward climb to peace.

“In that day” then, the entire world, like Egypt of old, will be called “my people” and the disenchanted masses, pictured in Assyria, will truly be called the work of God’s hands. There will be a special role for the nation of Israel: God calls them and them alone his “inheritance.” Being at the mid-point of the highway of holiness it will be their privilege to help produce world-wide peace in their intermediary and ambassadorial roles as representatives of Christ’s Millennial kingdom.

1. Source: Web page of Kibbutz Reshafim: www.reshalim.org.il

2. The most reliable manuscripts favor “the city of the sun,” including two Qumran texts, the Latin Vulgate and the margin of the Massoretic while the Massoretic text itself favors “city of destruction.”

The Suffering Messiah

Despised and Rejected

"The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day." -- Luke 9:22

A verse by verse study in Isaiah 53

Few chapters are more tender or touching to the Christian than the "Ode to the Suffering Messiah" in Isaiah 53. In beautiful and classical language the prophet summarizes the pathos of the Son of God taking on the sins and sufferings of a sinful and depraved world.

Chapter divisions in the Bible are not part of the inspired word but have been arbitrarily assigned by scholars. In the case of this chapter, the subject matter really begins with the last three verses of the preceding chapter, and it is there that we will commence this study.

God's Servant Isaiah 52:13-15

Behold, my servant shall deal prudently, he shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high. As many were astonished at thee; his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men: So shall he sprinkle many nations; the kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider.

The object of the first advent of the Messiah is succinctly captured in this introduction to Isaiah's theme. The four sub-divisions of his topic are briefly summarized: (1) the Messiah's ultimate glorification; (2) his humiliation; (3) the purpose for it; and (4) the fact that he would not be recognized as the Messiah.

The Hebrew words used in verse thirteen are ambiguous and open to a wide variety of meanings. A permissible rendering would be, "Behold, my servant shall gain understanding, he shall be lifted up, and exalted to the highest degree." Rather than the redundancy of using three words describing the exaltation of the servant, Isaiah is describing the results of two different experiences. Instead of "exalted," the Hebrew *ruwm* (Strong's 7311) is frequently translated "lifted up."

A New Testament equivalent of the thought is given in John 3:14, 15: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." The analogy is to the brazen serpent raised on a pole by Moses so that those looking upon it would not be hurt by the plague of serpents. Rather than describing Jesus' exaltation, it refers to him

becoming a public spectacle of sin by being lifted up upon the cross, concluding a sin offering for the transgressions of fallen humanity.

As a result of his sacrifice he was exalted to the highest degree. "And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name" (Phil. 2:8, 9).

Our text refers to the understanding gained by these contrasting experiences. Prof. W. E. Vine expresses it well by stating that only by experiencing both the human and the divine natures "could He comprehend the claims of the one and the needs of the other."

When we consider the disfigurations which men have caused to other men, verse 14 appears to be either a hyperbole or an obvious untruth. There have been many men more marred in appearance than was Jesus. Here again the problem lies with the obscurity of the Hebrew language. There is no Hebrew equivalent for the comparative word "more," though the grammar suggests it. The Syriac version phrases it, "His visage was so changed from that of man." The thought does not appear to be a comparison in absolute terms, but considering the fact that Jesus was perfect, the amount of disfigurement was in greater ratio than that which happens to others of mankind.

In one of the Messianic Psalms we read these words as expressing Jesus' thoughts at his crucifixion, "But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people" (Psa. 22:6). This phrase not only expresses the humiliation but contains a beautiful word picture of the death of Jesus. The word here translated worm refers to a specific insect, the *tola* worm. Writing of this worm one author has this to say: "When the female of the scarlet worm species is ready to give birth to her young, she attaches her body to the trunk of a tree, fixing herself so firmly and permanently that she never leaves again. The eggs deposited beneath her body are thus protected until the larvae are hatched and able to enter their own life cycle. When the mother dies, the crimson fluid stains her body and the surrounding wood. From the dead bodies of such dead scarlet worms the commercial scarlet dyes of antiquity were extracted. What a picture this gives of Christ, dying on the tree, shedding his precious blood that he might "bring many sons to glory" (Heb. 2:10)! He died for us that we might live through him" (The Biblical Basis for Modern Science, by Henry Morris, [Baker Book House, 1985; page 73]).

The final verse of the chapter shows the effects of his humiliation. "So shall he sprinkle many nations." It was the result of the acts of his scourging and "marring," leading to the final sacrifice on Calvary's hill that put Jesus in the position to "sprinkle many nations." The word translated "nations," the Hebrew *goyim*, usually refers specifically (though not exclusively) to Gentile or non-Jewish peoples. Thus Isaiah gives a hint of the universality of redemption which comes through Jesus' sacrifice.

This fact gives added force to the final phrase, "that which they had not heard shall they consider." In Old Testament times, God's word had been exclusively for the Hebrew nation. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth" (Amos 3:2). Paul writes

that it was unto them that were "committed the oracles of God" (Rom. 3:2). Now the Gentile nations, which had not previously heard of the offer of salvation, would be told of the redemption that would be theirs through the sacrifice of Christ.

The Unrecognized One Isaiah 53:1-3

Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

In the fifty-third chapter we have four distinct portraits of the Messiah. He is successively portrayed as (1) the unrecognized one; (2) the bearer of grief; (3) the redeemer; and (4) the benefactor. In the first three verses we receive some insight into why he was not more widely acclaimed at the first advent.

Having just stated that the nations would hear, the prophet proceeds to show that hearing alone is not the same as believing. The Apostle Paul elaborates on this principle in Romans 10:12-17, isolating faith as the necessary ingredient. Both the unbelieving Jews and the Gentiles who failed to respond to the Christian's message lacked this faith.

In the next verse the Messiah is presented in two related but distinct pictures. He was a tender plant. Strong's Concordance uses the phrase in defining the word, "a twig (of a tree felled and sprouting)." This accurately describes Jesus' relationship to the house of David, his ancestor. The royal house, or family tree of Jesus, was felled when Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon deposed Zedekiah from the throne of David. Now that tree was about to sprout again, but at the first advent he was already appointed to lead that kingdom, yet his style was not as a mighty oak but as "a tender plant."

In a similar vein he was a "root" out of the "dry ground" of a lineage that had produced no heir to the throne for some 21 generations. This term "root of Jesse" is used by Paul in Romans 15:12, quoting from Isaiah 11:1, 10, "And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust." (See also Rev. 5:5 and 22:16.) As a perfect man, Jesus must have been without blemish and comely. Isaiah does not contradict this when he said that he hath neither form, comeliness, or beauty. Rather the emphasis is on his last phrase, "there is no beauty that we should desire him." It is well said that "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." His was not the beauty of the conquering hero, the aggressive champion of macho manliness. Instead he was a gentle man, one who welcomed the little children, a teacher who associated with publicans and sinners, a Messiah who based his claim to that office partly on the fact that "the poor have the gospel preached unto them" (Matt. 11:5).

Rejected in the main by the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees alike, he called himself "the stone which the builders rejected" (Matt. 21:42). Instead of frequenting the halls of political, military, or religious power, we find him with the downcast of earth, acquainted with their grief. He was a physician more than a general. Therefore, his contemporaries turned their face from him, looking for a mighty deliverer instead.

The Bearer of Grief Verses 4 to 6

Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Even in the very act of associating himself with the human race in identifying with their sinful condition, he was esteemed as smitten of God. In this process of bearing our griefs, four distinct acts of the suffering Messiah are called to our attention: (1) wounded for our transgressions; (2) bruised for our iniquities; (3) chastised for our peace; and (4) beaten for our healing. These words were not haphazardly selected but are specific terms given in a specific order. The Hebrew word *chalal* (Strong's 2490), translated "wounded," appears 225 times in the Old Testament and usually carries the meaning of "to pollute" or "to profane" (Nelson's Expository Dictionary of the Old Testament, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985). In our text the thought appears to relate to the assumption of human flesh, "in the likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom. 8:3). The "bruising" (or "crushing," NASV) refers to the continuous experiences throughout his three and a half year ministry. The word is frequently translated "broken" in the Old Testament. It reminds one of Jesus' words: "And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me."

At the same time he was "breaking" his body, he was learning by experience what fallen humanity must learn to be educated in righteousness. These were the "chastisements" which will eventually bring at-one-ment, or peace, to the human family. However, harder "stripes" must often accompany "chastisements," or disciplinary experiences. "And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes" (Luke 12:47, 48). In Jesus' case, we see the "stripes" literally applied in the "scourging" before Pilate (John 19:1).

The Redeemer
Verses 7 to 9

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

In contrast to the preceding verses that speak of the sufferings of his ministry these verses talk of his death. He died so that men might live; he suffered so that men might live eternally. His death provided for a release from the grave; the sympathy gained by his life with the fallen race provides the understanding necessary to help them maintain that life when resurrected.

The symbol of the lamb is not only appropriate because of its quiet submissiveness to shearing, but because it is a universal biblical symbol of the Messiah. It was the animal of the morning and evening sacrifice (Num. 28:2-8); it was the Passover sacrifice (Exod. 12:3-6); it was the sacrifice Isaac expected Abraham to offer on Mount Moriah (Gen. 22:7); and it is the animal specifically identified with Jesus by the Apostle John, both in his Gospel and in the book of Revelation (John 1:29; Rev. 5:6; 13:8).

In Isaiah, it is the quiet submissiveness of the lamb that is emphasized. Thus Jesus quietly refused to rebut the accusations against him in Pilate's court (John 19:9-11). The reason for this silent acquiescence is given prophetically in Psalm 39:2, 9: "I was dumb with silence, I held my peace, even from good; and my sorrow was stirred. . . . I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it." It was not that he did not have a good defense nor that he could not present it well, but because he recognized that it was God's will that he be sentenced and die.

So he was taken from the prison house of Caiaphas and the judgment seat of Pilate to be crucified. It is worthy of note that the Hebrew word translated prison in Isaiah (*otser*, Strong's 6115) can also be translated "barren womb" and is so rendered in Proverbs 30:16. This rendering is in accord with the expression that follows in the Isaiah account, "who shall declare his generation," or as the New International Version phrases it, "who can speak of his descendants." As Adam was childless when expelled from Eden, so Christ, the second Adam, would die childless. The cause for this lack of children is specifically stated: "for he was cut off out of the land of the living, for the transgression of my people was he stricken." His seed was not to come from procreation but from right of purchase as Isaiah points out in verse ten.

Alternatively, the New American Standard Bible and Rotherham's translation renders the latter part of the verse: "and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, for the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due?"

Phrased this way, the text gives the thought that the prophet is predicting the unawareness of the populace to the fact that Christ was dying for their sins.

The thought of the ninth verse is well expressed in The Living Bible, "He was buried like a criminal, but in a rich man's grave; but he had done no wrong and had never spoken an evil word." Although sentenced to death as a malefactor, his body was not buried in a potter's field but in the rock-hewn tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin. Though that council had found him guilty, Joseph raised a dissenting voice (Luke 23:51) and showed the resoluteness of his council by donating his own tomb for the burial of Jesus. Joseph, at least, recognized the truthfulness of the prophetic word that the accused "had done no wrong and had never spoken an evil word."

The Exalted One **Verses 10 to 12**

Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

It seems incongruous that Jehovah was "pleased" to bruise his son. The Hebrew word is correctly translated and has the thought of "to take delight." The pleasure of God, however, was not in the bruising, but in the obedience of the son to submit to such treatment. The Father was pleased that by so doing his Son could reap the grand reward for his faithfulness and carry out the next step of the plan of redemption, the ultimate resurrection of all men from the bondage of sin and death. This thought is picked up later in the same verse when we read that, as a result of making his soul an offering for sin, the "pleasure" (same Hebrew root word) would "prosper in his hand."

Our text points out three rewards for Messiah's faithfulness in giving himself as a sin offering: (1) he would see his seed; (2) he would prolong his days; and (3) God's pleasure would prosper in his hands.

HIS SEED: Dying childless, he becomes the father of the entire human race. He secures all the rights and privileges of mankind's universal father, Adam. "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22). Not only a father, he becomes a better father. Adam, after his fall, became the father of a sinful and dying race. Jesus, through the education he will give his children in the kingdom, will be the father of a race that will live for ever -- "the everlasting Father" (Isa. 9:6).

PROLONG HIS DAYS: Though uniquely created as the first of all of God's works, "the beginning of the creation of God" (Rev. 3:14), he was nevertheless mortal, subject to

death. This fact is obvious when we consider that he died on the cross. Now, however, as a result of successfully giving the sin offering he was rewarded with eternal life. "For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself" (John 5:26).

GOD'S PLEASURE: The pleasure or delight of God is in the accomplishment of his plans. These plans, as revealed in the Bible, are for the development of a perfect and sinless race living in full harmony with God's laws and harmoniously with each other. These plans are in two steps: first, the development of a church, or bride for his son, to live with him in heaven and secondly, for the resurrection of mankind to live forever on a perfect and sinless earth. With both of these designs God is well pleased. Of the church, Jesus said in Luke 12:32, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." We read of God's over-all pleasure in Ephesians 1:9, 10: "Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him."

Verse eleven can be viewed in two different ways, both expressing a truth. The King James Version divides the verse into three thoughts: (1) the satisfaction gained by a review of his trying experiences while on earth; (2) the bringing to righteousness, justification, all of mankind by the knowledge thus gained; and (3) the removal of mankind's iniquity by substitutionary atonement. Other scholars divide the verse into only two concepts: (1) "he shall see of the travail of his soul and shall be satisfied by his knowledge [thus gained]; and (2) "he shall justify many for he shall bear their iniquities." The first concept calls attention to the justification of mankind based on Jesus' sin offering and the resulting application of Jesus' knowledge to humanity in Christ's kingdom, while the second emphasizes that their justification is a direct result of his sacrifice, through which he bore their iniquities.

In the final verse of our study another great biblical theme is introduced: the concept of the "spoil" which was originally taken from Adam and his race by the serpent through the introduction of sin. By that act the human race was "spoiled" or looted of its right to everlasting life, for that right was conditional upon perfect obedience to God's commands.

The return of this spoil is a three-step process. First, Christ recovers the "spoil" from Satan. "How can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house [plunder his goods (RSV)]" (Matt. 12:29). Second, as our text in Isaiah states, this "spoil" he will "divide" with "the strong," his church. Finally, they in turn will return the spoil to humanity, as recorded in Isaiah 33:23, "then is the prey of a great spoil divided; the lame take the prey."

Finally the prophet summarizes the four qualifications of the suffering Redeemer:

"He poured out his soul unto death" -- Throughout his ministry on earth, he daily bore the sufferings of others, healing their diseases by "virtue" going out of him (Mark 5:30).

"He was numbered with the transgressors" -- Not only did he assume "the likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom. 8:3), but dying the death of the worst of criminals, esteemed by others as cursed by God as well as man, for "cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Gal. 3:13).

"He bare the sin of many" -- This was accomplished on Calvary's cross. "So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation" (Heb. 9:28).

"Made intercession for the transgressors" -- Although the sacrifice at Calvary was sufficient to accomplish the redemption of all, there remained the matter of presenting it to the Father and making intercession for all. Thus Paul writes in Romans 4:25, "Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." Intercession on behalf of the church, however, is not a one-time matter, but, as an Advocate, "he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25). "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."

Though unrecognized by the majority at his first advent, what joy we have today to comprehend more and more the depth of the mercies of God in presenting us with the Son who has proved indeed to be "mighty to save."

"Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift" (2 Cor. 9:15).

God's Unspeakable Gift

*Of all the gifts that men have known,
There's one that stands beyond compare,
God gave his Son, his very own,
That men may live, and living, share
The glories of a perfect earth,
And life that lasts without an end.
When men shall have that second birth,
Their praise to God will then ascend.*

The Sarah Covenant Bears Fruit

Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the LORD. -- Isaiah 54:1

This text is cited in Galatians 4:27 in Paul's comparison of the Abrahamic Covenant and the Law Covenant. Paul saw from Isaiah 54 that Sarah represented the covenant given to her husband Abraham about a seed of promise to bless "all the nations of the earth" (Genesis 22:18). Paul's purpose in discussing the subject was to show the brethren that the promised "seed of blessing" would not come through the Law (Hagar), but through the original Abrahamic Covenant (Sarah).

That seed is Christ, Paul said in Galatians 3:16, but it also includes those who are in Christ: "If ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Galatians 3:29). Paul then concludes, "We, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise. We are not children of the bondwoman [Hagar, the Law], but of the free [Sarah, the Abrahamic]" (Galatians 4:28,31).

Therefore, it was wrong to insist that Gentile believers must keep the particulars of the Law. This was Paul's reason for raising the matter, which was directed to "ye that desire to be under the law" (Galatians 4:21).

Isaiah 54

It is relatively easy to grasp Paul's conclusion, and appreciating his apostolic authority, to accept our liberty from the Law. But to appreciate the details of the issue as Paul did, it is helpful to pursue the train of thought that led Paul to see the allegories he explains in Galatians. Paul tells us the basis by citing Isaiah 54:1 (in Galatians 4:27), applying the barren one to Sarah and "she which hath an husband" to Hagar. The (formerly) barren one was to be more fruitful than the other, just as the Abrahamic Covenant was to be more fruitful than the Law Covenant, even though the latter bore an entire nation of people before the Abrahamic Covenant even began to bear the promised seed with the advent of Christ.

Examining Isaiah 54, one may wonder how Paul knew when to apply the passage. Paul applied it from the advent of Christ forward, but what is the basis for this? One might surmise it is simply because his application seemed to fit, just as a key which opens a lock is evidently the correct key.

There is value to this approach. But there are two other foundation points which help establish the first advent context. 1) This prophecy immediately follows Isaiah 53, which is unmistakably about the advent of Christ. "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief ... he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows ... he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities" (Isaiah 53:3-5). 2) Isaiah 54:13, part of the very prophecy Paul is considering, was applied by

Jesus himself to his day: “All thy children shall be taught of the IORD; and great shall be the peace of thy children.” This is cited in John 6:45, and Jesus comments upon it: “Every man therefore that hath heard, and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me.” Though John recorded this late in his life, after the passing of the apostle Paul, no doubt these references of Jesus were circulated among the common body of information current in the early church, thus available to Paul.

The Barren One

Paul applied the barren one of Isaiah 54:1 to Sarah. This is consistent with the greater context of this part of Isaiah, for Isaiah 51:1,2 refer to “Abraham your father, and ... Sarah that bare you.” Also, Sarah’s barrenness until the age of 90 is renowned. Putting this together, it became apparent to Paul that the prophecy of barren Sarah producing children future from Isaiah’s day must refer to the seed of promise, Christ, and his Church.

She was to produce “more” than Hagar (Isaiah 54:1). Because of her promised increase, she was to “enlarge the place of thy tent ... stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations ... lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes” (verse 2). This does not mean Sarah’s descendants, the Israelites, were to outnumber Hagar’s descendants, the Ishmaelites (whether or not they did). The key to the great quantity is “thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles” (verse 3). This began to be fulfilled when the gospel was opened to Gentiles to join the Body of Christ. “They which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed” (Galatians 3:7,8).

The spiritual classes developed in the Gospel age may number millions. But ultimately the great increase prophesied of the barren woman takes us to the kingdom when the whole world will be children of faith by coming into Christ and thus being blessed through the original covenant made to Abraham.

The “Married Wife”

In this prophecy the “married wife” is contrasted with the barren one, Sarah, and thus evidently refers to Hagar. This is confusing since all know that Sarah was the real wife of Abraham, and Hagar was merely her handmaid. The problem is solved when we recognize the idiom being used. The expression “married wife” comes from one Hebrew word, *baal*, Strong’s 1166, “a primitive root, to be master, hence ... to marry.” As used of a woman it usually means to have a husband, or lord, *baal*, but in this case designates one who has produced child by a man. (Rotherham footnote: “the husbanded one.”)

Genesis 16:3 uses a similar concept: “And Sarai Abram’s wife ... gave her [Hagar] to her husband Abram to be his wife,” where the last term means to be a child bearer, not to become a wife in the sense we normally use it.

Afflicted Ones

God, through Isaiah, addresses Israel in Isaiah 54. He acknowledges that Israel was forsaken because of her sins, “but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy Redeemer” (Isaiah 54:7,8). The affliction from which they are gathered is apparently the Babylonian exile. Israel’s return from this was mentioned in Isaiah 52:1-12, “Depart ye, depart ye, go ye out from thence” (verse 11), and the next prophetic episode is the appearance of Messiah (verses 13-15) and the blessing of the elect of Israel gathered into Christ at the first advent. “Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace” -- the Israelites who received Messiah and became part of his body (Romans 11:5).

Isaiah 54:11 describes these Israelites as “afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted,” but promises they would become a new city resplendent with precious jewels: “I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and lay thy foundations with sapphires. And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones” (verses 11,12). The reader will recognize this as the foundation of Revelation’s vision of New Jerusalem -- the corporate Christ class -- in Revelation 21:12-21. There the city functions for the benefit of the world. But presently the New Jerusalem of Isaiah’s prophecies operates for the blessing of its citizens, spiritual Israel, as the next verse suggests, “all thy children shall be taught of the LORD” -- the very text applied by Jesus to his day, as discussed above.

It is this application of the prophecy which Paul had in mind in Galatians, “Jerusalem which is above ... the mother of us all” (Galatians 4:26). The citizens of a city are the “children” of the city, which is their “mother.” Thus in Galatians Paul uses two separate pictures regarding the saints: 1) We are children of the Sarah (Abrahamic) covenant; 2) We are citizens (children) of the corporate “Jerusalem” from above, spiritual Jerusalem.

Paul says the two women “are [represent] two covenants,” but “answer to [pertain to]” two different Jerusalems. The Hagar covenant pertains to “Jerusalem which now is ... in bondage with her children [Israelites under the Law],” the Sarah covenant pertains to “Jerusalem which is above ... the mother of us all” (Galatians 4:24-26).

“This is the heritage of the servants of the LORD” (Isaiah 54:17). This is the rich favor we may receive, through consecration to God, whether Israelite by birth or grafted into the covenants of Israel through faith.

Isaiah 65

They Shall Not Hurt

The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, but dust will be the serpent's food. They will neither harm nor destroy in all my holy mountain, says the LORD. -- Isaiah 65:25, NIV

A verse-by-verse study of Isaiah 65 (by Wade Austin)

God, through the prophet Isaiah, spoke concerning both the development of the spiritual phase of God's kingdom during the Gospel age and the establishment of the earthly phase of his kingdom in the Millennial age. God assured the nation of Israel that he would remain faithful to his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob concerning them as the natural seed. But, because of their unfaithfulness, the heavenly kingdom would be found by and given to "a nation that was not called by my name" (Isaiah 65:1; Romans 10:20).

A thorough study of Isaiah reveals Scriptures that are applicable: 1) to the nation of Israel alone; 2) to the world of mankind through the nation of Israel; and 3) to spiritual Israel (the church). The prophet Isaiah also wrote of essential characteristics and principles of God's kingdom that apply to both natural and spiritual Israel. A verse-by-verse study of Isaiah 65 reveals the intertwined process of God's creative work containing a promise concerning the new creation of the Gospel age, as well as the Millennial age promise to bless Israel and all the families of the earth during God's kingdom of peace.

Gospel Call -- verse 1

I am sought of them that asked not for me; I am found of them that sought me not: I said, Behold me, behold me, unto a nation that was not called by my name.

In this verse God speaks of revealing himself to the seed of faith among the gentiles ("a nation that was not called by my name"). Paul quotes this verse in Romans 10:20,21 as part of his documentation of the grace of God which he eloquently expounded on throughout Romans. Paul argued that Christ was the ultimate demonstration of God's grace and that he put an end to any notion that righteousness could be attained through keeping the law. Those who accept this revelation of God's grace (his unmerited favor) find God by faith and are called by his name.

Paul used the words of both Isaiah and Moses to teach the Jews of his day that God had prophesied of a time when God's grace would be revealed to a seed of faith, and with the advent of Jesus that day had come (Romans 10:18-21). Paul and Barnabas spoke forcefully to the Jews of their day: "When the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and talked abusively against what Paul was saying. Then Paul and Barnabas answered them boldly: We had to speak the word of God to you first. Since you reject it and do not consider yourselves worthy of eternal life, we now turn to the Gentiles. For this is what the Lord has commanded us: I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that

you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth” (Acts 13:44-47, NIV).

Disobedient Rejected -- verses 2, 3

I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people, which walketh in a way that was not good, after their own thoughts; A people that provoketh me to anger continually to my face; that sacrificeth in gardens, and burneth incense upon altars of brick.

God informs Israel that he offered his grace to them “all day long” (NIV), but they remained disobedient and obstinate. God describes the specific types of sins of Israel and warns of punishment for them. These sins included rebelliousness, a sinful walk, provoking God, sacrificing in gardens (a reference to idol worship and possibly tree worship), brick incense altars, lodging among graves and monuments (worshiping the dead), eating swine and other forbidden meat, and being self-righteous (specially their spiritual leaders, the scribes and the Pharisees). Finally God says: “Behold, it is written before Me, I will not keep silent, but I will repay; I will even repay into their bosom, both their own iniquities and the iniquities of their fathers together, says the LORD. Because they have burned incense on the mountains, and scorned Me on the hills, therefore I will measure their former work into their bosom” (Isaiah 65:6-7, NAS).

Punishment would be inflicted upon them for their fathers’ sins and for their own. To “repay into their bosom” means to deposit their sins in the folds of their robes about their breast where they carried their most precious possessions. Modern men carry their valuables in their pockets. Were this the custom with Israel, God would have repaid them in their pockets.

Paul may have captured the thought of this symbolism when he wrote, “Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. ... Although they know God’s righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them” (Romans 1:27-32, NIV).

When one is a slave to his own lusts, how great is that slavery. God in Isaiah informed Israel that if they are consumed by their lusts, by what they hold near and dear to their bosom, he will repay them with more of the same. They will get what they desire together with the fruits of that desire.

Jacob not Destroyed -- verses 8-10.

Thus saith the LORD, As the new wine is found in the cluster, and one saith, Destroy it not; for a blessing is in it: so will I do for my servants’ sakes, that I may not destroy them all. And I will bring forth a seed out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor of my mountains: and mine elect shall inherit it, and my servants shall dwell there. And

Sharon shall be a fold of flocks, and the valley of Achor a place for the herds to lie down in, for my people that have sought me.

God says he will not destroy Jacob (natural Israel) for his servant's sake. Instead, a seed is to be brought forth and "mine elect shall inherit it, and my servants shall dwell there." Paul refers to these elect servants when he poses and then answers the question, "Did God reject his people? By no means!" (Romans 11:1 NIV). He then clarifies his answer to his rhetorical question with the words, "So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace" (Romans 11:5,6, NIV).

Isaiah 65:10-16 contrasts the faithful seed with the unfaithful seed in respect to both their behavior and their rewards. Sharon, a level plain, will be a pastureland for sheep, and Achor, a word that means "trouble," will become a place for herds to lie down. Both pictures imply a time of dwelling peacefully without fear of enemies. In contrast, verses 11 and 12 again refer to the natural seed that "forgot" God's "holy mountain." "But you who forsake the LORD, who forget and ignore My holy Mount [Zion], who prepare a table for [the Babylonian God of fortune] Gad, and who furnish mixed drinks for [the goddess of destiny] Meni; I will destine you [says the Lord] to the sword, and you shall all bow down to the slaughter; because when I called, you did not answer; when I spoke, you did not listen or obey; but you did what was evil in My eyes; and you chose that in which I did not delight" (Isaiah 65:11,12, Amplified).

Because Israel sacrificed to the God of destiny, God destines that they will fall by the sword, and because they "prepared a table" (i.e., banquet), "you shall bow down to the slaughter." Here "slaughter" (Strong's #2876 and related to #2873) carries the thought of slaying for a banquet.

Cast-Off Israel -- verses 13-15

Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, my servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry: behold, my servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty: behold, my servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed: Behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation of spirit. And ye shall leave your name for a curse unto my chosen: for the Lord GOD shall slay thee, and call his servants by another name.

The condition of cast-off Israel is being contrasted with that of spiritual Israel. Jesus used similar imagery when he said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled" (Matthew 5:6, NIV). This was indeed contrary to the attitude of the natural seed: "Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness" (Romans 10:3, NIV). Likewise we have Jesus' words, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe" (John 6:35,36, NIV).

The “howl for vexation of spirit” (verse 14) is reminiscent of the “weeping and gnashing of teeth” mentioned in the New Testament. “My servants shall sing for joy of heart” refers to the spiritual seed as servants. Jesus said, “Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit” (Matthew 21:43, NIV).

The first part of Isaiah 65 closes with the words, “So shall ye leave your name for an oath, to my chosen ones -- So then My Lord Yahweh will slay thee, and his servants will he call by another name: so that he who blesseth himself in the earth will bless himself in the God of faithfulness, and he who sweareth in the earth will swear by the God of faithfulness, because the former troubles have been forgotten, and because they are hid from mine eyes” (Isaiah 65:15,16, Rotherham).

Rotherham more correctly translates Strong’s #7621 as “oath” instead of “curse” as it is in the King James. Spiritual Israelites (“my chosen ones”) do not go about using Israel as a curse word. Rather, God’s servants, his chosen ones, are known by another name, “the sons of God.” Israel’s name is an oath or covenant to the sons of God that what God has sworn to do he will perform. The apostle Paul explains: “These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come” (1 Corinthians 10:11,12, NIV).

In verse 16, the word translated truth in the King James, and faithfulness in Rotherham, is the word for Amen. That is to say, “the God of Amen.” Typically “amen” is used when one confirms the word of another in the sense, “let it be so.” By saying “amen” one affirms an intent to be faithful to the words just spoken or the covenant just entered into. God is a God of his word. He will faithfully perform what he says he will do. He will fulfill his promise to both the natural and the spiritual seeds of Israel.

The “earth” (verse 16) is not the Law age earth (the natural seed) under the Law age heavens (the Aaronic priesthood administering the Law Covenant). It refers to the Gospel age earth (the spiritual seed) under the Gospel age heavens (Christ, our high priest after the order of Melchisedek and the firstfruit of the promise made to Abraham through Sarah -- see Galatians 3:16-29; 4:24-31). Verse 16 assures Jews whose eyes are opened and who approach God by faith as a God of faithfulness, that they will be blessed because “I ignore the troubles of the past, I shut mine eyes to them” (Isaiah 65:16, Moffat).

A New Topic? -- verse 17

For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.

Verses 17-25 form a unified context. Do these verses connect to the subject of verses 16 and preceding, or do they introduce a new thought?

Certainly the picture language of Isaiah 65:17-25 suggests a time of blessing and peace such as has not existed among mankind. Just as certainly, the principles upon which the

peaceful conditions there described are founded will be the basis of peace during the Millennial age reign of Christ and his church. Nevertheless the symbolism of “earth” begun in verse 16 applies not only to mankind in the kingdom, it also applies to God’s chosen people (Gospel age earth, the church) with whom he has made a covenant (the Sarah feature of the Abrahamic Covenant) under the Gospel age heaven (Christ, our high priest). Paul used the same symbolism when he wrote, “Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother” (Galatians 4:25-27, NIV).

The similarity of the last phrase of verse 16 and the last phrase of verse 17 strongly suggests a continuity of the author’s message and not a switching of subjects. “The former shall not be remembered nor come into mind” (verse 16) refers to the Law age heavens and earth (the priesthood administering the Law Covenant and the nation of Israel under that covenant). “For behold me! Creating new heavens and a new earth, and the former shall not be mentioned, neither shall they come up on the heart” (verse 17, Rotherham) speaks to the Jews at the beginning of the Gospel age. Then God began to create his new creation and he gave the first opportunity to Jews. “The former shall not be remembered” poetically describes the freedom of all who came into Christ, especially Jews, who would no longer be in bondage to the law because they had died to it through baptism into Christ.

Jerusalem -- verses 18, 19

But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more. (NIV)

Understanding the symbolism of Jerusalem assists the reader to understand the dual application of these and the succeeding verses of this chapter. Research on the name Jerusalem results in some differences of opinion, but consensus seems to center around “city of peace,” with “habitation of peace” and “possession of peace” being alternate versions. Certainly such meanings contribute to the picture painted by the remaining verses of Isaiah 65, and they are equally accurate descriptions of the Gospel age church and the New Jerusalem (the Bride of Christ) that comes down from God out of heaven in the next age (Revelation 21:1-4).

Symbolic Blessings -- verse 20 (and onward)

Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not live out his years; he who dies at a hundred will be thought a mere youth; he who fails to reach a hundred will be considered accursed. (NIV)

Trying to understand Isaiah 65:20 literally causes great confusion. Picture language is never meant to be understood literally and the whole chapter of Isaiah 65 is filled with such language. This verse, rather than referring to a literal child, man, or “a hundred

years,” is a collection of idioms conveying the thought that in Jerusalem every person, young and old, will have a full opportunity to come into peaceful harmony with God. This is true of God’s sons during this age and it will be true of all mankind in the kingdom. After such a full opportunity, if any one dies, it will be for his own sins in spite of the abundant grace of God.

(Compare the use of the number 100 in Ecclesiastes 6:3 and 8:12, “If a man beget an hundred children, and live many years,” “Though a sinner do evil an hundred times.” 100 is not intended literally in either case.)

Picturesque Description -- verses 21-25

And they shall build houses, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them. They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; for they are the seed of the blessed of the LORD, and their offspring with them. And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent’s meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD.

These texts continue the picturesque description of Jerusalem, the “habitation of peace” enjoyed by God’s children now and assuredly to be enjoyed by all nations of the earth when the King of Peace, Jesus Christ together with his church, reigns in righteousness during the next age.

The Israelites were used to building homes, planting vineyards, and toiling to improve their lives only to have the work of their hands destroyed by invading armies. They yearned for peace but it never lasted because of their unfaithfulness. But the true children of God neither make war nor suffer destructive assault, nor will the resurrected people of the world in the coming kingdom. God hears the prayers of his people now before they call on him and this principle will exist in the kingdom to come. Likewise, former enemies (pictured by the wolf and the lamb, the lion and the ox, and the serpent) will dwell together in harmony and will continue to do so.

“They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain,” proclaims a blessed assurance fully understood now only by those who by faith lay hold upon the promises of the “God of faithfulness.” Most assuredly it will be understood by all when “he will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Revelation 21:4, NIV).

Two Prophecies of Israel's Regathering

Of Bones and Sticks

For if the austing away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead? -- Romans 11:15

A verse by verse study in Ezekiel 37

Vivid imagery characterizes the book of Ezekiel. In many respects it is the Old Testament counterpart to the book of Revelation. Not only does the prophet see a number of graphic visions, he becomes an interactive participator in them. This is especially true in the two visions which comprise the thirty-seventh chapter of his writings.

The Sections of Ezekiel

The prophecy is directed primarily toward the Jewish people living in Babylonian captivity, though the book actually begins some six years before the fall of the last king, Zedekiah. Set at such a dramatic turning point in Jewish history, it is easy to see that the prophecy as a whole is concerned with the future of that nation.

The book itself divides naturally into four sections: (1) The first three chapters begin with his vision of the glory of God and show how this became the introduction of his personal ministry. (2) The second division (chaps. 4-24) delineate God's judgments on Judah and Israel. (3) The next section (chaps. 25-32) details God's judgments on the surrounding gentile nations. (4) The final part of the book includes a happy ending, a series of prophecies concerning Israel's regathering and restoration as the People of God.

The chapter to be considered here lies in the last section and gives important details concerning the regathering of Israel.

The Setting

"The hand of the LORD was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry. And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord GOD, thou knowest" (vs. 1-3).

The valley may have been the same plain where the Lord was wont to talk with Ezekiel (3:22, 23). In vision he sees the valley strewn with bones: not piled in heaps but scattered, as though the people had died in battle. The fact that they were unburied in the vision lends hope for resuscitation; buried bones, like those of Gog and Magog in Ezekiel 39:12, 15 are put out of sight, not awaiting a resurrection.

The dryness of the bones stands in sharp contrast to the bones of a healthy man who has died as described in Job 21:23, 24: "One dieth in his full strength, being wholly at ease and quiet. His breasts are full of milk, and his bones are moistened with marrow."

Ezekiel's answer to the query, "Can these bones live?," is wise. The obvious response is, "No, of course not!" Ezekiel, however, does not challenge the power of the Almighty. His reaction is simply, "O Lord God, thou knowest."

A Command to Prophecy

"Again he said unto me, Prophecy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the Lord" (vs. 4-6)

This vision, like so many in the book of Ezekiel, is interactive. Rather than giving the prophet the answer to his question, he invites the prophet to participate in furnishing the answer. The prophecy God gives Ezekiel to pronounce identifies three stages in the process of life returning to these dry bones.

"Hear the word of the Lord!" This is fundamental. No action can take place without there being first a hearkening to the word of God. Jesus' words that there will be a resurrection of all follows the same order: "Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment" (John 5:28, 29 NAS).

Second, as described in the following verses, the mechanical action of bringing the bones back to life occurs in orderly stages. First, the bones come together; then sinews, muscles, and flesh. Now they are ready for the grand climax -- the breath of life entering the still bodies so that they can live.

Finally, ". . . and ye shall know that I am the Lord." This is contrary to what many expect. There is a general concept that man must first know the Lord in order to obtain life. Here the order is reversed; they are resuscitated and then brought to know the Lord. This same order is given by the Apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 2:3, 4: "For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth."

Bodies Reassembled

"So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them" (vs. 7, 8).

As the prophet delivers his message two forces react to bring the randomly strewn bones back together -- a noise and a shaking. The former is caused by the latter. The word here translated shaking is oftentimes translated "earthquake" in the Bible. The noise is the sound of the quake. Earthquakes are symbols of social revolution. A notable example is in the "wind, earthquake, and fire" of Elijah's prophetic vision at Mt. Horeb (1 Kings 19).

The bones of this prophecy are identified as "the whole house of Israel" in verse eleven. In a miracle of our time, the house of Israel, scattered throughout the world and driven from country to country, has come back together in its ancestral homeland. No natural contributing factor has been more important in this regathering than the spirit of social revolution and demand for independence that has been encircling the globe since the American and French revolutions of the late eighteenth century.

It was not until 1878, however, that the Hebrew people had a place to go and reassemble themselves as a nation. In that year the Turko-Russian war came to an end at the Berlin Congress of Nations. Presided over by a British Jew, Lord Beaconsfield, the peace treaty there agreed upon recognized the rights of all -- Jew or gentile -- to own property in the area then called Palestine. No one responded more immediately than the Jewish community. Pressured by a series of pogroms in Russia, a contingent of Israelis departed for the new territory and established a beachhead in the colony of Petach Tikvah -- "the door of hope." Further immigration was spurred when Theodor Herzl organized the World Zionist Congress in 1897.

From 1878 to 1948 the regathered exiles began forming the infrastructure of a government. In 1912 the Hadassah, under Elizabeth Szold, began to provide medical services for the returning exiles. In 1912 Technion-Israel Institute of Technology, followed in 1918 by the Hebrew University, made top quality higher education available. Labor organized the Histadrut in 1920 and the defense forces began to be formed by the Haganah the same year. The political and economic underpinnings of statehood developed under the Jewish Agency, formed in 1929, with the first political party, Mapai, appearing the following year, in 1930.

From the bones of nothingness events were heading for the inevitable: statehood. The official announcement of statehood on May, 14, 1948 was greeted by diplomatic recognition from a number of countries, starting with the United States. Membership in the United Nations gave Israel a definite seat in the world family of nations. Yet one thing was lacking, "but there was no breath in them."

The Second Prophecy

"Then said he unto me, Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army. Then he said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold,

they say, Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost: we are cut off for our parts" (vs. 9-11).

Ezekiel is now instructed to turn from the bones and prophesy to a new audience -- "the wind." The specific wind is here identified with "the four winds." These "four winds" are identified in Revelation 7:1 with a force that threatens to "hurt" the whole earth and are held in check until the church of Christ is first "sealed in their foreheads." The term "four winds" is suggestive of conflicting blasts, as in a whirlwind or hurricane. Most expositors conclude that it is a picture of extremely severe trouble, trouble without specific direction, as in anarchy. This would seem to agree with the picture of "fire" in Elijah's prophecy of 1 Kings 19.

Out of the midst of this whirlwind of anarchy another wind is to arise and become a "breath of life" to the bones now assembled in Ezekiel's valley. This might well represent a final onslaught of trouble for the newly assembled nation such as described in the two following chapters of Ezekiel (chaps. 38 and 39). It also fits well with an event described in Jeremiah 30:7, "Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it." The response to this prophecy is immediate. The bones now assume life, with the final act calling to remembrance the giving of life to Adam in the Garden of Eden, "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Gen. 2:7).

God proceeds to explain the vision to Ezekiel by identifying the bones, not as individual Israelites, but as the hopes and prospects of that nation. These hopes, once burning so brightly within the Hebrew consciousness, had dimmed and seemed impossible of realization. In a similar vein, at the first advent, Jesus is described as "a root out of dry ground" (Isa. 53:2). As their fortunes turn, their hopes reawaken and grow multitudinously -- "an exceeding great army." So total had been their scattering that they felt "completely cut off," as the idiom "cut off for our parts" signifies.

The Third Prophecy

"Therefore prophesy and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall ye know that I the LORD have spoken it, and performed it, saith the LORD" (vs. 12-14).

Now the prophet turns to his real audience, the people of Israel. They are at one of the darkest points in their history, just having been taken as a captive people to the city of Babylon, hundreds of miles from their beloved homeland. Their defeat by King Nebuchadnezzar had been so complete that their hopes of return were almost forsaken. Only a few kept the hopes burning brightly, like faithful Daniel, who prayed three times a day with his face toward Jerusalem (Dan. 6:10).

Like Jeremiah, much of what Ezekiel had to say was in prophecies of doom. Now he could say that this experience, like any chastening of God, was to have its end. How often they must have asked, "Will the Lord cast off for ever? and Will he be favorable no more?" (Psa. 77:7). Now the answer would come, as it had to the Psalmist, "For the Lord will not cast off his people, neither will he forsake his inheritance" (Psa. 94:14).

Ezekiel appears to broaden the scope of the prophecy in these verses. Formerly he spoke of their national hopes being as dry bones which would come back to life. Now he speaks of a personal resurrection. The two thoughts are not contradictory. They complement each other. What good would it be to revive the hopes without reviving those who hope?

One enigma remains. Here he speaks of putting his spirit within them before placing them in their own land. Elsewhere he speaks of them already being in Jerusalem before he pours his spirit upon them (Zech. 12:9, 10). The harmony is in grasping the thought of what God means by "placing" them in their land. Strong's Concordance defines the Hebrew *yanach*, here translated "place," as being to "allow to stay." Dwelling in the land is one thing,, it is another to have the land by covenant ownership. Abraham dwelt most of his life in this land, but as a "sojourner," "as in a strange country" (Heb. 11:9).

This thought seems well expressed in Ezekiel 20:38, "And I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me: I will bring them forth out of the country where they sojourn, and they shall not enter into the land of Israel: and ye shall know that I am the LORD."

When this personal resuscitation is accomplished he "puts his spirit in them," and as a result they recognize him as their delivering Lord. The words of the following chapters agree (see 38:23 and 39:7).

A Vision of Two Sticks

"The word of the LORD came again unto me, saying, Moreover, thou son of man, take thee one stick, and write upon it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his companions: then take another stick, and write upon it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions: And join them one to another into one stick; and they shall become one in thine hand" (vs. 15-17).

Now the vision changes. The previous vision had been to "the whole house of Israel" (v. 11), but Israel, at the time, was divided into two kingdoms. The ten-tribe kingdom of Israel abided in the north and the two-tribe kingdom of Judah in the south. In this second vision he foresees the reuniting of the divided house. They would reunite as one nation.

Curiosity Satisfied

"And when the children of thy people shall speak unto thee, saying, Wilt thou not shew us what thou meanest by these? Say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will

take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his fellows, and will put them with him, even with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in mine hand. And the sticks whereon thou writest shall be in thine hand before their eyes. And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all: Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions: but I will save them out of all their dwelling places, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them: so shall they be my people, and I will be their God" (vs. 18-23).

Watching Ezekiel playing with these two sticks must have seemed like a child at play to his viewing audience. Their curiosity prompted further inquiry. This produced the proper frame of mind for delivering the message behind the sticks. First, both nations would be scattered. Most of the ten tribe kingdom did not return to Israel from the Babylonian captivity, though a smattering of all tribes did. Judah, of whom more returned, would be again scattered by the Romans in both A.D. 70 and again in A. D. 135.

The scattering became more and more worldwide as they were chased out of one country after another. He speaks of this Diaspora as already beginning in the days of Ezekiel's prophecy, early in the Babylonian captivity. After the dispersion has accomplished its work (and the gospel call comes to a close), he regathers them back to their native land.

This had not been their first captivity. They had been a tribute people to the Philistines, the Midianites, and other nations. From those periods of subjection they repented, but soon turned back to their idolatrous ways. This time, Ezekiel informs them, they will never return to idolatry.

This transformation will not come automatically but, as he prophesies, "I will cleanse them." This work is not yet accomplished, though Israel has returned to her land. Before that can happen they must become "one nation" with "one king."

One King, One Land, One Covenant

"And David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them. And they shall dwell in the land that I have given unto Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children for ever: and my servant David shall be their prince for ever. Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them: yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (vs. 24-27).

Israel became divided by a dispute between two kings -- Jeroboam and Rehoboam. Now they would be united under one king: David, not the David of old but that great descendant of his, Jesus of Nazareth, "the son of David."

They had been citizens of two lands: Judea and Israel. Now they return to the land of a more distant past -- to the time when God had originally promised the whole of the land of Canaan to Abraham, Isaac, and to Jacob. They had had one covenant in the past, but it had not proved to be "a covenant of peace." Because of their inability to keep that covenant it had become a covenant of death instead of a covenant of life. Now they would be reunited under a "new covenant," as another prophet predicted:

"Behold, the days come, saith the IORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jer. 31:31-33).

Matthew Henry, in his *Commentary*, phrases this new condition of Israel in glowing terms: "They shall be one, one nation, . . . They shall have no separate interests, and, consequently, no divided affections. There shall be no mutual jealousies and animosities, no remembrance, no remains, of their former discord. But there shall be a perfect harmony between them, a good understanding one of another, a good disposition one to another, and a readiness to all good offices and services for one another's credit and comfort. They had been two sticks crossing and thwarting one another, nay, beating and bruising one another; but now they shall become one, supporting and strengthening one another."

The Gentiles

"And the heathen shall know that I the IORD do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore" (v. 28).

The beauty of God's plan is that it is not only for one nation or one people. It is not just for the Jew, nor is it just for the church. It encompasses "all men." In his economy, Jehovah uses the same experience to sanctify his name both to his chosen people of the past, Israel, and to all other nations.

In the two succeeding chapters in Ezekiel we read that many of these nations shall join a coalition to attack Israel. It will seem to be successful. Zechariah, speaking of the same event, says, "the city shall be taken" (Zech. 14:2). But, in the end, God himself shall fight for and deliver Israel. Not all of the attacking forces will be killed, but we read in Isaiah 66:18, 19:

"For I know their works and their thoughts: it shall come, that I will gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come, and see my glory. And I will set a sign among them, and I will send those that escape of them unto the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, that draw the bow, to Tubal, and Javan, to the isles afar off, that have not heard my fame, neither have seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the Gentiles."

Not only will the gentiles return to their countries and tell the wondrous things they have seen, but Israelis shall become missionaries, spreading the same good news. We read of this in Micah 5:7, "And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the LORD, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men."

At the head of this restored Israel will be their ancient prophets (Isa. 1:26). These, too, will be intermediaries in spreading the news and the work of the incoming kingdom, the kingdom of the greater than David, to all the world. We read of them in Psalm 45:16, "Instead of thy fathers, shall be thy children, whom, thou mayest make princes in all the earth."

Then nation will not fight nation, but love will well up in every heart. Then sickness will be no more, the eyes of the blind will be opened and the lame man leap as an hart. Then death will give way to life. And, best of all, then men will not need to inquire of the Lord but all will know his name, "from the least to the greatest." What a time that will be!

The Entombed Messiah

Jonah

*For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly;
so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights
in the heart of the earth. -- Matthew 12:40*

A verse-by-verse study in Jonah 2

Jonah of Gath-hepher and Nahum of Capernaum both come from the province of Galilee, giving the lie to the claim of the officers of the Sanhedrin that “out of Galilee ariseth no prophet” (John 7:52). Jonah and Nahum were also the only two prophets whose prophecies concerned Nineveh; Nahum prophesied **about** Nineveh and Jonah **to** Nineveh.

Jonah is the only prophecy (with the exception of portions of Hosea) where the prophecy is acted out, rather than spoken. The name Jonah means “dove,” a frequent symbol of the holy spirit. Jonah is like a four-act drama with each chapter of the book comprising a separate act. The book can be diagramed as follows:

Chapter	Location	Action
1	Tarshish and Mediterranean Sea	Flight of Jonah
2	In Belly of the Great Fish	Prayer of Jonah
3	Nineveh	Prophecy of Jonah
4	Outside Nineveh	Lesson of the Gourd

If Jonah does represent the holy spirit, we can extract these lessons:

Chapter	Holy Spirit's Agency	Time Period	Activity
1	Natural Israel	Jewish Age	Fleeing Responsibility
2	Christ and Church	Gospel Age	Praying
3	Christ and Church	Millennial Age	Producing Repentance
4	All Classes	All Time Periods	Moral Lesson of Book

Jesus' words in Matthew 12:40 says the time Jonah spent in the belly of the fish pictures the duration of Jesus' final experiences on this earth, his death, and his entombment. As Jesus went through the trials for three literal days, so the church, his body, goes through similar persecutions for parts of three thousand-year days. Thus the prayer of Jonah 2, while having a particular application to Jesus of Nazareth, is also the prayer of his church in the flesh.

The Belly of Hell -- Jonah 2:1,2

Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly. And said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice.

From this we see that Job was conscious and aware of his surroundings while in the belly of the fish. He not only prayed, but recalled the words of his prayer after being disgorged, and recorded them for our benefit.

Jonah's prayer shows a deep familiarity with the psalms. Many of the expressions in the chapter bear a close resemblance to those found in the writings of David. This proves that those writings were available to ancient Israel. Consider the following comparisons:

Jonah 2:2	Psalm 120:1
Jonah 2:3	Psalm 42:7
Jonah 2:4	Psalm 31:22
Jonah 2:5	Psalm 69:1,2
Jonah 2:6	Psalm 30:3
Jonah 2:7	Psalm 142:3; 18:6
Jonah 2:8	Psalm 31:6
Jonah 2:9	Psalm 116:17,18; 3:8

This teaches a Christian today to be intimately familiar with the Word of God, to be prepared for effective prayer in individual times of trial.

The belly of the great fish is here called "the belly of hell." The word translated "hell" is the Hebrew word *sheol*, a word more properly translated grave. Adam Clarke, a noted biblical scholar, states that "among the Hebrews *sheol* means the grave, any deep pit."

The New Testament reference to the "sign of Jonah" likens it to "the heart of the earth," focusing on Jesus' time in the tomb. However, a careful comparison of all New Testament references to this three-day period show it includes more than the approximately thirty-eight hours Jesus was in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea.

The gospel references to this period include his suffering at the hands of the priests, his mocking and scourging, and his capture in Gethsemane (Matthew 16:21; 17:23; 20:19; Mark 9:31; 10:34; Luke 9:22; 18:33; 24:7, 21). This adds another fifteen hours or so to the actual time Jesus remained dead.

When Jonah was in the belly of the great fish, he was not dead, but he could no longer control his own destiny. Wherever the fish went, Jonah went. So it was with Jesus: after the soldiers took him prisoner he went wherever they took him. As he said, "When I was daily with you in the temple, ye stretched forth no hands against me: but this is your hour, and the power of darkness" (Luke 22:53). From that time on he was in the darkness of the figurative "belly of hell."

The Waters of Affliction -- Jonah 2:3-5

For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me. Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple. The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head.

Jonah did not attribute his being thrown overboard to the sailors who had actually done it, but to the hand of God which motivated them to do it. The psalmist, speaking prophetically, ascribes the same motive to Jesus for not defending himself before Pilate: "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it"(Psalm 39:9).

The great fish may have been his prison, but it was also his protector because it saved him from drowning. The storm billows and waves passed harmlessly over him. He recognized that this storm was a corrective measure from God; these were "thy billows" and "thy waves." He sees his experience as an indication of Jehovah's "lovingkindnesses" (Psalm 42:7,8). The lesson for every Christian is to view every trial as tailored for one's spiritual development. We do well to remember the words of Jeremiah: "It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not" (Lamentations 3:22).

Although feeling cut off from the favor and sight of God, Jonah did not give up hope; he confidently expected to once again view the holy temple in Jerusalem. Similarly Jesus felt such a temporary estrangement when he cried out from the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46; c.f. Psalm 22:1). But he also held the confident hope of full restoration to his former position when he prayed, "And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was" (John 17:5).

The Christian, likewise, is exhorted to "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward" (Hebrews 10:35).

Back from Corruption -- Jonah 2:6,7

I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God. When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple.

Either by faith Jonah was convicted of the reality of his deliverance from the predicament he was in, or, composing the poem after his coming to land, Jonah thanks the Lord for bringing him back, as it were, to life.

The expression "the earth with her bars" strengthens the thought that the belly of the fish represents the great prison-house of death. To Jonah it must have indeed appeared that this imprisonment would last forever. For Jesus, the greater Jonah, and his church, if they

were to be found unfaithful their sentence would be an eternal one. However, as Jonah had faith that he would be delivered from the corruption he felt inside the great fish, so Christ has been and his faithful followers will be delivered from the corruption of death.

The apostle Peter quoted the prophetic words of Psalm 16:10 when he stated: "Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption" (Acts 2:27). To this agree the words of the apostle Paul: "For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Corinthians 15:53,54).

Thus will Christ and his church, the antitypical Jonah, join the heavenly Father in his heavenly temple, even as the literal Jonah lived to once again worship in the temple in Jerusalem.

Rededication -- Jonah 2:8,9

They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD.

Jonah's experience in the deep showed him the error of his ways. He saw the "lying vanity" of placing his judgment above the Lord's. The Lord had commissioned him to preach repentance to Nineveh. Jonah fled in the opposite direction when he embarked on a ship bound for Tarshish. Why did Jonah flee? The answer is given in Jonah 4:2, "And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil."

Jonah's decision was based not on the danger of the journey nor fear of persecution at the hand of the Ninevites; it was based on a fear of success -- the repentance of the Ninevites and God's forgiveness of these dreaded enemies of Israel. He knew of the mercy of God and his own previous success as a prophet (2 Kings 14:25); and he knew of the fierceness and rapacity of the Assyrians.

Rather than follow God's mandate to seek the repentance of an enemy, Jonah thought it wiser to not give the people of Nineveh any chance to avoid destruction from God. Now he makes two decisions as to how to change his life, if and when he is delivered from the great fish.

First: he would offer a thank offering for his own personal deliverance and also for being given another opportunity to mend his ways and accept the will of God in place of his own judgments.

Second: he would be more careful to fulfill his prophetic vows, vows to speak the word of the Lord whenever and wherever he was directed.

Jesus had no such need for repentance. Nevertheless, even he learned obedience by the things he suffered and was thus “made perfect” (Hebrews 5:8,9). If such perfecting trials were necessary for him who had no sin, how much more are they needed for the yet imperfect members of his body, the church.

It is a gradual process, howbeit a necessary one, to learn the fallacy of trusting one’s own wisdom instead of the great Creator of the universe.

“May thy will in me be done
May thy will and mine be one.”

Restoration -- Jonah 2:10

And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon dry land.

Having endured his three-day trial, the fish did what the mariners on the boat to Tarshish could not do: deliver Jonah safely on dry land. It did not, however, take him where he wanted to go, but to where God wanted him to be: back where he started. While the account does not say he was returned to Joppa, it was certainly in ancient Israel. It was not near the Euxine Sea, as stated by Josephus, for that was near Nineveh and in Jonah 3:2 he receives his second commission to go to Nineveh.

The lesson is clear for the Christian. As the hymn says:

“I’ll go where you want me to go, dear Lord,
O’er mountain, or plain, or sea,
I’ll say what you want me to say, dear Lord,
I’ll be what you want me to be.”

In chapter three the narrative continues with a renewed commission to preach to Nineveh. This time Jonah goes, preaches, Nineveh repents, and is spared (though only temporarily) from the threatened destruction. Thus the holy spirit continues its work in the next age of calling all men to repent (Acts 17:30).

The lesson is clear to all the children of God: “Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful” (Luke 6:36).

Building the Second Temple

A Call to Action

And they that are far off shall come and build in the temple of the LORD, and ye shall know that the LORD of hosts hath sent me unto you. And this shall come to pass, if ye will diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God. -- Zechariah 6:15

A verse-by-verse study of Haggai 1

Over a decade had passed since the foundation of a temple to replace that of Solomon was laid in Jerusalem. Matters of personal concern for earning a livelihood, combined with discouragement in the face of strong opposition from the people of the land, caused early zeal to flag.

It was into this condition that the prophet Haggai appeared on the scene. The historian Marcus Dods observes, “No prophet ever appeared at a more critical juncture in the history of the people, and, it may be added, no prophet was more successful” (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*).

Haggai’s mission, as was that of his contemporary Zechariah, was to reignite the religious fervor of the Jews who returned from the Babylonian captivity in response to the decree of Cyrus (Ezra 1:1-3).

The Background -- Haggai 1:1

In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet unto Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, saying ...

This Darius is not to be confused with Darius the Mede of Daniel 5:31, but rather Darius Hystaspis, a successor to Cambyses some fifteen years later. It fell to Haggai to initiate a reform in Jerusalem and encourage the completion of the earlier zeal that laid the temple’s foundations. In a similar vein, the Great Reformation of the sixteenth century, while laying a foundation for God’s spiritual temple, left that work unfinished until the second advent of Christ.

If the year was reckoned after the religious year, beginning in Nisan, this prophecy would be in the month Elul (August-September). Both Ezra and Nehemiah appear to have used the Nisan year in their dating as did both the contemporary Babylonians and Persians. This would be an auspicious time for this prophecy, both from the standpoint that the fruit crops were beginning to be harvested and they would have time for the temple work, and the meagerness of their prospective harvest would be fresh in their memory, something to which the prophet draws their attention. The first day of the month would

correspond to the regular feast of the new moon. Zechariah begins his message two months later after the rebuilding had begun.

Haggai delivers his message to the two who are in a position to lead the people in the grand work of building the house of the Lord: Zerubbabel, the legal heir to the throne of David, and Joshua, the high priest. It is likely that Zerubbabel is called the “governor of Judah” instead of a king since that royal title would rest with the Persian monarch who dominated the entire area.

If Josephus and the apocryphal book of Esdras are correct, Zerubbabel was a friend of Darius Hystaspis, having successfully competed before him in a contest whose object was to determine what was the strongest thing in the world: wine, kings, women, or truth. Zerubbabel, having demonstrated that truth was the mightiest of all, was called the king’s “cousin,” and was granted permission to go up to Jerusalem to build the temple (1 Esdras 3,4).

The Hebrew phrase rendered “by” in the King James literally means “in the hand of,” thus acknowledging God as the real author of the prophecy, with Haggai merely acting as the messenger of Jehovah.

“The Time Is Not Come” -- Haggai 1:2

Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD’s house should be built.

Their discouragement may have been the result of a ban on building the temple that had been issued by Artaxerxes (Ezra 4:23,24). Since this edict had not been rescinded, the returned exiles claimed that any effort to rebuild the temple would result in a forced stoppage.

The singers of Asaph (Ezra 2:41), are generally credited with penning the words of Psalm 74 in lamentation over this ban. The similarities between the post-exilic conditions and the words of this psalm are remarkable. Incidentally, the same words were prophetic of the destruction of Herod’s Temple in A.D. 70; and again of the true church’s captivity to the great antitypical Babylon of Revelation.

“Perpetual desolations” (verse 3) -- Compare to the desolations predicted in 2 Chronicles 36:19-21.

“The enemy hath done wickedly in the sanctuary” (v. 3) -- Corresponding to the ban on temple building secured by the people of the land.

“They set up their ensigns for signs” (v. 4) -- Encamping around Jerusalem, seeking to intimidate the people from their construction efforts.

“Cast fire into thy sanctuary” (v. 7) -- As Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Solomon’s temple.

“The oppressed return” (v. 21) -- Coming back after decades of captivity in Babylon.

The people claimed to be awaiting a sign to resume construction: “We see not our signs: there is no more any prophet: neither is there among us any that knoweth how long” (Psalm 74:9). They were awaiting some dramatic indication that the Lord wanted them to resume their work. In the initial return from their exile there was no generally accepted prophet to prod them into the sustained zeal required for the task. But now there was not only one prophet, but two -- Haggai and Zechariah -- to announce that it was time to resume the rebuilding efforts. Neither of these would hesitate to make such a proclamation.

Setting Priorities -- Haggai 1:3,4

Then came the word of the LORD by Haggai the prophet, saying, Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your cieled houses, and this house lie waste?

They left the Lord’s house in its unfinished state and set about establishing themselves in the promised land. They not only built houses for their families, but fancy ones at that. The word “cieled” means “paneled” and is so translated in the *New King James*. This paneling was often made of cedar, preferred for both its beauty and its aromatic qualities (see Jeremiah 22:14). Evidently the first to return had done well financially in Babylon and used their wealth to pay for a luxuriant life style.

The problem was not so much in the selection of building materials for their own homes, but for doing it while the house of the Lord remained unfinished. It was a matter of priorities.

The same question has always confronted the followers of Jehovah. What is their primary interest: personal adornment or the work of God and the state of his temple?

“Consider Your Ways” -- Haggai 1:5,6

Now therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes.

Rotherham captures well the meaning of the admonition “Consider your ways.” He renders it, “Apply your heart to your own experience.” It is as though the prophet were asking, “What has your choice of conduct brought you?”

Their labors in the field brought only meager rewards. They had neither enough to eat nor to drink. The clothes they wore were inadequate for the cool night air. The wealth they had brought from Babylon was being frittered away, like money placed in a leaky bag.

“Apply your heart,” the prophet urges, “to this experience; what lessons does it teach?” Sin lies not so much in making wrong decisions, but in not taking heed to the lessons and their consequences. Cain was not punished for making the wrong sacrifice, but for not observing why God accepted the offering of his brother and not curbing the jealous rage that resulted in the world’s first recorded homicide.

Again “Consider Your Ways” -- Haggai 1:7-11

Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD. Ye looked for much, and, lo, it came to little; and when ye brought it home, I did blow upon it. Why? saith the LORD of hosts. Because of mine house that is waste, and ye run every man unto his own house. Therefore the heaven over you is stayed from dew, and the earth is stayed from her fruit. And I called for a drought upon the land, and upon the mountains, and upon the corn, and upon the new wine, and upon the oil, and upon that which the ground bringeth forth, and upon men, and upon cattle, and upon all the labour of the hands.

In reiterating his message, Haggai points out that it is not sufficient that they comprehend the lesson; they needed to act on it as well. Put in New Testament terms, they must both “repent ... and be converted” (Acts 3:19). He urges them to action, to start rebuilding on the sure foundation they had previously laid. For this temple there would be no cedars imported from Lebanon, no skilled artisans to be hired from the king of Tyre. They were to provide their own raw materials. This was to be a truly domestic temple.

The same is true for God’s spiritual temple. The Reformation laid only the foundations of the sole authority of the Bible and the priesthood of all believers. Justification, which could not be attained by works, was freely available by grace through faith. But these were only foundations. Centuries later the harvest work would build a structure of truth upon these fundamental verities.

The materials for this rebuilding would not be imported from Satan’s “kingdom of Tyre,” but would result from hard work in searching anew for those truths which would build upon the basics laid in the Reformation.

The failure to build this house following the formation of Protestantism was due, like Israel’s stoppage of temple building, to seeking personal prosperity rather than doing the work God wanted them to do. They looked for good increase in their crops, but Jehovah brought their efforts to naught by a great drought produced when the Lord “blew it away” with strong, dry desert winds. The Targum reads, “I sent a curse upon it,” suggesting a rot or insect infestation. What they did reap they “brought it home” to increase their own wealth.

The prophet brings another contrast to their attention. While they were slow in rebuilding a house for God, they did “run every man to his own house.” The *Revised Standard Version* reads, “You busy yourselves each with his own house.” Some manuscripts use

the Hebrew verb *ratsah* (Strong's #7521), meaning "to take pleasure," indicating that they were more pleased with their status than they were with God.

Where verse 9 gives the visible symptoms of their trouble (the wasting of their crops), verses 10 and 11 give the invisible cause (God calling for a drought). The prophet oratorically emphasizes his point with the use of a Hebrew homophone. The Hebrew word for "drought" (*choreb*, Strong's #2721) and for "waste" (*chareb*, Strong's #2720) have nearly the identical sound. Thus their inaction in leaving God's house waste (*chareb*) is brought into sharp contrast with his bringing on a drought (*choreb*).

Spurred to Action -- Haggai 1:12-15

Then Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as the LORD their God had sent him, and the people did fear before the LORD. Then spake Haggai the LORD's messenger in the LORD's message unto the people, saying, I am with you, saith the LORD. And the LORD stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua the son of Josedech, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remnant of the people; and they came and did work in the house of the LORD of hosts, their God, In the four and twentieth day of the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king.

Haggai's message obtained its intended results. Within a space of just over three weeks (presumably enough time to finish bringing in the harvest) the people along with their leaders, Zerubbabel and Joshua, were so stimulated by his message that they willingly volunteered their time to the great work ahead of them, an effort that would take four years to accomplish (Ezra 6:15; cf. Ezra 4:24).

Now the tone of the prophet turns from rebuke to encouragement: "I am with you, saith the LORD." In just over a month Zechariah would help shore up the people's enthusiasm.

In just twenty-seven days the framework of the new temple began to appear (Haggai 2:1). As the people, particularly those old enough to have remembered Solomon's temple, saw how paltry it was compared to the temple destroyed by the forces of Nebuchadnezzar, they wept (Haggai 2:3). Using the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles as a platform, the prophet assures them that in due time this house would be even greater than the one which had been destroyed (Haggai 2:9).

This was true literally when Herod built a magnificent temple, expanding on the one upon which the people in Haggai's day were so diligently laboring. But it would be more importantly true since it was this temple in its magnificent expansion that would be graced by the presence of Jesus of Nazareth, the son of God. It will be true in the fullest sense when, in Christ's kingdom, there will no longer be need of a literal temple "for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it" (Revelation 21:22).

A final message was needed two months later in mid- to late-December. This message had two purposes: first, to forewarn the people against conduct that would alienate them from God; and second, to further secure them against despondency by the prospect of rich and speedy blessings as a result of their repentance and obedience.

It is for us, in these latter days, to be on guard that we labor diligently to complete the Lord's spiritual temple, "which temple ye are" (1 Corinthians 3:17). In the words of David to those who would build the first temple, "Be strong, and do it" (1 Chronicles 28:10). Let us answer affirmatively to those he sought to volunteer for that work: "Who then is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the LORD?" (1 Chronicles 29:5).

The Salvation of Israel

Verse by verse study in Micah 5

***And so all Israel shall be saved. as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob.
--Romans 11:26***

The chastisement and ultimate redemption of the people of natural Israel is the theme for many Old Testament prophecies. Though cast off for a time because of their rejection of the Messiah, we are assured that this exile from divine favor was to be for a limited time only. "I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid" (Rom. 11:1).

The chastenings of the Lord are always corrective, never punitive. Thus, even after their regathering in the end times of prophecy, a final disciplinary action is intended for their good and not for humiliation. After this final period of trouble shall have accomplished its purpose of removing the pride of a great number of his chosen people (Zeph. 3:11, 12), it will serve its goal of preparing them for a great future work (Isa. 62:11). This final transition is the background for the prophecy of the fifth chapter of the Book of Micah.

Additionally the chapter furnishes a connection between God's work with Israel at the first advent of Christ and his work at the second advent. In other words, the prophet sets before us the complete cause and effect relationship of Israel's troubles to her ultimate restoration.

The First Advent

Now gather thyself in troops, O daughter of troops: he hath laid siege against us: they shall smite the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek. But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting (vs. 1, 2).

The first two verses refer to the assembling of the armies of Titus against Jerusalem in A.D. 68-73. Jesus speaks of the details of this fulfillment in the gospel of Luke:

"For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation" (19:43, 44). "For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled" (Luke 21:22).

The "judge of Israel" they will smite with a rod appears to refer collectively to the high priest, the other priests of that time, the Sanhedrin, and the leaders of the Pharisees and Sadducees. These all were treated with contempt by the Roman army and given no preference over the common captives.

Yet out of this turmoil would arise a new leader born in the small village to parents from the despised area of Nazareth in Galilee of the gentiles. Affirming pre-existence in the simple phrase, "whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting," his destiny is predicted; it is he "that is to be ruler in Israel"-in the future, not then.

The Diaspora

Therefore will he give them up, until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth: then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel (v. 3).

In this verse Micah passes over nearly two thousand years of the Diaspora, the temporary "casting off" of which Paul speaks in Romans. Micah also identifies the terminus of this period of rejection with the time when the church, the seed of the "barren" (Isa. 54:1), would come forth. This accords well with Paul's statement, "For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in" (Rom. 11:25).

The bringing forth of the church, however, is in two stages, as outlined in First Thessalonians: "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (4:16, 17).

The "dead in Christ" begin to rise with the return of the Lord at his second advent while those who "are alive and remain" follow after at their deaths.

The Savior of Israel

And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God; and they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth. And this man shall be the peace, when the Assyrian shall come into our land: and when he shall tread in our palaces, then shall we raise against him seven shepherds, and eight principal men. And they shall waste the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod in the entrances thereof. thus shall he deliver us from the Assyrian, when he cometh into our land, and when he treadeth within our borders (vs. 4-6).

The Hebrew verb translated "he shall stand" in verse 4 is the same as that used of the returned Lord in Daniel: "And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people . . ." (12:1). In both texts it describes a determined action on behalf of the covenant people. In the Daniel text it is deliverance from enemies; in Micah we find the work is that of feeding, or more properly, shepherding Israel as a flock of sheep. Here we are assured that they shall "abide" and not fall away again, not

because of their own innate goodness but because "he [their Messiah and deliverer] is great unto the ends of the earth."

In verse five the word "man" is inserted and is not supported by a Hebrew word. A spiritual being, their returned Lord, will bring peace when they are under attack by an enemy, here designated "Assyria." Israel's two main enemies were Egypt from the south and Assyria from the north. These two foes did not share the same characteristics. While Egypt was a highly civilized society, the Assyrians were marauding terrorists. Many students of end time prophecy anticipate a sharp division in the world forces between the haves and the have-nots, between the poor and the aristocratic rich. Many students of the Bible identify Assyria as a picture of the revolutionary forces of the poor and oppressed. Others identify Assyria geographically with Iraq and, on a larger scale, the combined forces of Islam. Which is represented is not as important as noting that it will be opposed to and in attack of Israel (see Ezek. 38, 39; Zech. 14).

When this attack takes place Israel's returned prince will "stand" on their behalf, accompanied by "seven shepherds and eight principal men [or, princes of men-see the RSV]." It is suggested that these shepherds represent the under shepherds of the Lord, his church, and the princes picture the restored prophets of old (as in Psa. 45:16). The number seven suggests that it is the completed church while eight (as the number of a new beginning) may indicate the resurrected worthies of Old Testament times. By this divine intervention, Israel is turned from being the victim to becoming the victor.

The Remnant

And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the LORD, as the showers upon the grass, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men. And the remnant of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles in the midst of many people as a lion among the beasts of the forest, as a young lion among the flocks of sheep: who, if he go through, both treadeth down, and teareth in pieces, and none can deliver. Thine hand shall be lifted up upon thine adversaries, and all thine enemies shall be cut off (vs. 7-9).

The miraculous deliverance by the Lord will be for only a remnant of Israel. This final battle will at first go against God's favored people, so much so that the "city shall be taken" (tech. 14:2). However a remnant of faithful Israelis will turn to the Lord for deliverance. The others will be removed because of their pride in thinking they could obtain victory without the Lord's aid. Those who remain will "not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid" (Zeph. 3:13).

The two-fold work of this remnant is set forth by the prophet Micah. While to their enemies they shall be as a lion among sheep, tearing in pieces so that "none can deliver," they will be also "as a dew from the LORD and as showers upon the grass." Through them will the word of the Lord spread to all the nations of the earth informing them of the

new king of earth and teaching them the laws of righteousness. This work is described as being that of "priests and Levites" in Isaiah 66:21.

Two-Fold Judgment

And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the LORD, that I will cut off thy horses out of the midst of thee, and I will destroy thy chariots: And I will cut off the cities of thy land, and throw down all thy strong holds: And I will cut off witchcrafts out of thine hand; and thou shalt have no more soothsayers: Thy graven images also will I cut off, and thy standing images out of the midst of thee; and thou shalt no more worship the work of thine hands. And I will pluck up thy groves out of the midst of thee: so will I destroy thy cities. And I will execute vengeance in anger and fury upon the heathen, such as they have not heard (vs. 10-15).

The Lord's purging judgment will be manifest in this final deliverance. Like a two-edged sword it shall cut two ways. Israel will be purged of her militarism [her horses, chariots, (walled) cities, and strongholds.] Not only will all idolatry [her witchcrafts, soothsayers, graven and standing images] be removed, but most importantly she will learn to put her trust in the Lord and lean upon him for help.

In the final verse of our chapter he assures them that he will execute strong vengeance upon the heathen who were her attackers-even "such as they have not heard." Although these heathen nations were used to execute the Lord's work in judging Israel, they were not justified in the extent to which they attempted to annihilate Israel. As we read in Zechariah, "And I am very sore displeased with the heathen that are at ease: for I was but a little displeased [with Israel], and they helped forward the affliction" (1:15).

This judgment will be unprecedented. It will be a time of trouble "such as never was, no, nor ever shall be" (Dan. 12:1). When God's plagues are fully poured out they will contain the fullness of the wrath of God (Rev. 15:1).

Although it is not the subject of this fifth chapter of Micah, we can rejoice that this deliverance in troublous times is only transitional. The trouble will be cut off when it shall have accomplished its work and then will begin to come to pass the answer to men's prayers for God's kingdom on planet earth, the foretold "times of restitution of all things" (Acts 3:19-21).

Jehovah Returns to Zion

Thus saith the LORD; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain. -- Zechariah 8:3

A verse by verse study in Zechariah 8

Zechariah, like the other prophets who wrote after the Babylonian captivity, stands in marked contrast to Jeremiah and those who wrote just before the captivity. Whereas the former prophets were viewed by their peers as doomsayers, the post-exilic prophets were decidedly upbeat in tone. And they had a right to be. Now the captivity was over. The land lay before them. The work of rebuilding was a big challenge and the prophets needed to be as goads to urge the people forward.

Uppermost in their minds was the rebuilding of the temple of God. The emphasis the prophets placed on this project showed the importance of arranging their priorities -- placing God first in their lives, both individually and nationally.

Nowhere is the positiveness of the conviction that God is with them more evident than in the eighth chapter of Zechariah. Ten times in just twenty-three verses we find the forceful assertion, "Thus saith the LORD."

The Jealousy of God -- Verses 1 to 5

"Again the word of the LORD of hosts came to me, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; I was jealous [zealous] for Zion with great jealousy [zeal], and I was jealous [zealous] for her with great fury [passion]. Thus saith the LORD; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof."

The New King James version of the Bible correctly captures the thought of God's jealousy by substituting the word "zealous." The Hebrew word properly describes zeal and should only be translated jealous when used in a negative sense. Similarly, the word translated "fury" would be better translated "passion." It is with great passion that Jehovah turns the fortunes of Jerusalem. Although the prophet is speaking of the immediate cause of rejoicing -- the return to Jerusalem from the Babylonian captivity -- he is also prophetically looking down the stream of time to a far greater deliverance of God's chosen people.

The immediate aim of Zechariah is to encourage the temple building. This was to be God's house. Therefore, he says that God will soon be able again to "dwell in the midst of Jerusalem." From that temple would issue forth the decrees of God, and Jerusalem

would be called "the city of truth." These expressions, however, have their deeper meaning in the long-term fulfillment of this prophecy.

Note the testimony of the Apostle John: "And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God" (Rev. 21:3).

Israel will be established "in the top of the mountains." It will be then that "out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (Isa. 2:2, 3). And it will be then that the streets of that city will bustle with life as old and young mingle together in the joys of life. "There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed" (Isa. 65:20).

The Returning Remnant -- Verses 6 to 8

"Thus saith the LORD of hosts; If it be marvelous in the eyes of the remnant of this people in these days, should it also be marvelous in mine eyes? saith the LORD of hosts. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Behold, I will save my people from the east country, and from the west country; And I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness."

How marvelous that time was to the Israelites! After seventy years of captivity for the people of Judah and even longer for those of the kingdom of Israel, they were suddenly to return to their native land. How much more marvelous is the return of Israel from their Diaspora! After nearly two thousand years they have returned to the ancestral land of their forefathers. Not only have they come from the east and from the west, but from all the nations wherein they have been scattered.

Now, as in those favorable days of the past, if they will but put God first and make room in their hearts to prepare for a home for their God, then indeed he "will be their God, in truth and in righteousness."

Building the Temple -- Verses 9 and 10

"Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Let your hands be strong, ye that hear in these days these words by the mouth of the prophets, which were in the day that the foundation of the house of the LORD of hosts was laid, that the temple might be built. For before these days there was no hire for man, nor any hire for beast; neither was there any peace to him that went out or came in because of the affliction: for I set all men every one against his neighbor."

Here lies the kernel of the prophet's message to Israel of that time. The foundation of the temple had been laid. Workers were needed to complete the job. But, as Nehemiah notes, now they were too busy building their individual fortunes, often at the cost of the less

fortunate among them (Neh. 5:5). As the contemporary prophet, Haggai, phrased it succinctly, "Is it time for you, O ye, to dwell in your ceiled houses, and this house lie waste?" (Hag. 1:4).

A similar proposition faces the Israel of today. They have been permitted reentry into their land. They have built a prosperous economy. The challenge now is to lay the spiritual foundation for their God.

Zechariah calls to mind the former days, days of famine, want, and unemployment. Haggai does the same: "Ye have sown much, and bring in little; ye eat, but ye have not enough; ye drink, but ye are not filled with drink; ye clothe you, but there is none warm; and he that earneth wages earneth wages to put it into a bag with holes. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Consider your ways. Go up to the mountain, and bring wood, and build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD" (Hag. 1:6-8).

In remembering the hardships of their Diaspora, Israel should find the incentive to build in each of their hearts a temple for their God, their God who has delivered them from these conditions of bondage to the prosperity of the present. Not only were they beset by economic hardships, but they faced social inequities as well. With "every one against his neighbor" they knew not who to trust and were frequently betrayed by seemingly the best of their friends.

The Return of Favor -- Verses 11 to 15

"But now I will not be unto the residue of this people as in the former days, saith the LORD of hosts. For the seed shall be prosperous; the vine shall give her fruit, and the ground shall give her increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things. And it shall come to pass, that as ye were a curse among the heathen, O house of Judah, and house of Israel; so will I save you, and ye shall be a blessing: fear not, but let your hands be strong. For thus saith the LORD of hosts; As I thought to punish you, when your fathers provoked me to wrath, saith the LORD of hosts, and I repented not: So again have I thought in these days to do well unto Jerusalem and to the house of Judah: fear ye not."

The word here translated "remnant" could just as well be translated "survivors." Professor W. E. Vine, in his Expository Dictionary writes: "The 'remnant' concept is applied especially to the Israelites who survived such calamities as war, pestilence, and famine -- people whom the Lord in his mercy spared to be his chosen people."

Here it describes not so much those who survived the Diaspora and the Holocaust experiences at its conclusion, but more particularly those who had the right heart condition to survive Israel's final climactic battle with the forces of Gog and Magog (Ezek. 38; 39).

To this remnant is promised prosperity. For them it will once again be true that they will be blessed (Deut. 28:5). But their prosperity will not be a selfish prosperity. They will share of their bounty with others. More importantly, they will share the secret of obtaining that bounty -- the rules and regulations of a new law covenant. Thus, as they had been a byword and a curse in times past to other nations, now they shall be a blessing to them.

A specific example of this blessing is given in Isaiah 19:23, 24: "In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land." Here Israel is assigned an intermediary role, as it were, between the warring factions of Egypt and Assyria. This may well signify a peacemaking role in the emotional conflicts between the western and eastern worlds, represented by Egypt and Assyria respectively.

The Requirements -- Verses 16 and 17

"These are the things that ye shall do; Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbor; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates: and let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbor; and love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate, saith the LORD."

These blessings will not come to all who are of Jewish origin (Rom. 2:28). These favors are reserved for those with the right character requirements. These requirements serve a practical purpose in addition to the benefits to those possessing such characteristics. Since the previous verses describe the kingdom role as being an intermediary and a blessing to the nations around them, it is imperative that they learn from their past experiences how to put themselves in the favor of God.

Mankind in that age will progress to righteous living along what the prophet Isaiah calls "a highway of holiness" (Isa. 35:8-10). Israel will have a role in the construction of that highway. We read of their responsibilities in Isaiah 62:10, "Go through, go through the gates; prepare ye the way of the people; cast up, cast up the highway; gather out the stones; lift up a standard for the people."

These stumbling stones consist not only of barriers to the acceptance of Christ, but include all impediments to the attainment of righteousness. Resurrected Israel will have been well trained for this educational work of helping mankind in God's kingdom.

Sorrow Turned to Joy -- Verses 18 and 19

"And the word of the LORD of hosts came unto me, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; The fast of the fourth month, and the fast of the fifth, and the fast of the seventh, and the fast of the tenth, shall be to the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts; therefore love the truth and peace."

The four fasts which Israel was observing during the seventy years were to commemorate four different incidents in their captivity under Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. The city was taken in the fourth month (Jer. 39:2). The temple was burned in the fifth month (Jer. 52:12, 13). Gedaliah, the appointed governor of Judea, was slain in the seventh month (Jer. 41:1-3). [It should be noted that some apply the fast of the seventh month to the annual fast on the Day of Atonement.] The siege of Jerusalem had been set in the tenth month of the preceding year (Jer. 52:4).

Now in a contrasting sequence of events, Israel's fortunes were to be reversed. This was true in the typical situation between the decree of Cyrus (Ezra 1:1, 2) until the final rebuilding of the walls under Nehemiah many years later. Likewise in the larger fulfillment of this prophecy in our own days we have seen a number of events since 1878 and onward showing a reversal of the misfortunes of Israel. Their fast days will become feast days.

The Gentile Effect -- Verses 20 to 22

"Thus saith the LORD of hosts; It shall yet come to pass, that there shall come people, and the inhabitants of many cities: And the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the LORD, and to seek the LORD of hosts: I will go also. Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD."

Once the new government becomes established in Israel with the ancient prophets at its head, there will come a movement among all the nations of the world to learn the secret of their success. The prophet says that all nations "shall flow unto it" (Isa. 2:2). Word of the remarkable victory which God accomplished will quickly reach the national capitals involved (Isa. 66:19). The prosperity of Israel will soon be reported world-wide (Zech. 14:14-19). It will not require a "hard sell" publicity campaign to convince the nations of the world that their prosperity, indeed their very life, will depend upon learning from the God of Israel.

A small picture of this is given in the book of Job. Israel, like Job, endured a vast number of hardships to show their fidelity to God. His comforters, like the nations of the world, had little to offer and were often his accusers -- well did they deserve the title "miserable comforters" (Job. 16:2). When the story of Job comes to its climax two things happen before it can reach its happy ending. The comforters are told to bring a peace offering to Job (42:8) and Job, representing Israel, had to offer intercessory prayer for them before his own fortunes were restored (42:10).

The Skirt of a Jew -- Verse 23

"Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you."

Though many students of the Bible have tried to enumerate the particular ten men involved in this text, it is probably no more than a general reference to a number to indicate the totality of the nations involved. It is in a similar vein that Jacob complains that his father-in-law had changed his wages "ten times" (Gen. 31:7), using a definite number to express an indefinite concept.

Others have noted that the pronoun "him" is singular, designating an individual man and not the total number of a group. Strong's Concordance bears this out, saying it refers to "a man as an individual or a male person." Some draw the conclusion from this that "the man" referred to here is Jesus. We feel such a conclusion is unwarranted. The word is used broadly, both of individuals and of groups. An enlightening use of the word is in Exodus 34:24 where it is translated "any man." That appears to be the usage in our text. The man referred to can be any of the faithful remnant of Israel.

Worthy of note is that they do not grab onto this "man" but "take hold of the skirt of him." The word for "skirt" properly means, as the New International Version has it, "the hem of his robe."

In the New Testament we see an illustration of this. In Capernaum Jesus was on his way to raise the daughter of Jairus from the dead. A large crowd followed him and pressed against him. One in the crowd, a woman having an issue of blood, came close to him and "touched the border of his garment." Immediately Jesus asked, "Who touched me?" Peter, noting that the thronging crowd had undoubtedly touched him often along the way, was puzzled and asked Jesus for the meaning of his question. Jesus replied that one had specially touched him for he had felt virtue go out of him to heal her.

Here, too, "the border of his garment" was touched. The meaning becomes clear when we consider what was peculiar about the border of the Jewish garment. "Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of the borders a ribband of blue: And it shall be unto you for a fringe, that ye may look upon it, and remember all the commandments of the LORD, and do them; and that ye seek not after your own heart and your own eyes, after which ye use to go a whoring" (Num. 15:38-40).

This blue fringe was to indicate a commitment to the Jewish law. Jesus had been so faithful. In acknowledging obedience the sick woman demonstrated her faith. So will it be in the kingdom. As men recognize and acknowledge that the special blessings Israel is experiencing come from their adherence to God's laws, they will be prompted to do likewise. And likewise, they will also receive blessings.

Thus it is that they will say, "we will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you." Thus, the faithful of the nation of Israel will yet realize their potential to be a blessing amongst all the nations of the world.

The Battle of Jerusalem

***Fear thou not, O Jacob my servant, saith the LORD: for I am with thee; for I will make a full end of all the nations whither I have driven thee: but I will not make a full end of thee, but correct thee in measure; yet will I not leave thee wholly unpunished.--
Jeremiah 46:28***

Verse by verse study in Zechariah 14

Zechariah was one of the prophets of Israel after their return from the Babylonian captivity. His message deals with the future of the nation, their further travails and their final exaltation to the position God had planned for them.

The prophecy can be divided into four sections. It opens with a series of eight visions which many feel can be interpreted in chronological order and which outline the future of Israel in highly symbolic language. After a short description of the crowning of the priest (Zechariah 6:9-15) the prophet spends two chapters dealing with questions concerning the observation of religious feasts after their return from Babylon.

The balance of the book contains two "burdens" or oracles from the Lord. The first (chapters 9-11) relates to the first advent of the Messiah while the second "burden" (chapters 12-14) speaks of events concerning his second advent.

It is the last chapter of this closing oracle which forms the basis for this verse by verse study.

[Jerusalem Attacked--Zechariah 14:1-3](#)

Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee. For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle.

This gathering of the nations against Jerusalem appears to be the same gathering as referenced in Joel 3:1-3 and Revelation 16:14-16. The word "spoil" is an indication that this gathering may also be connected with that of Ezekiel 38:3-7 (see particularly Ezekiel 38:12, 13).

The indication of the Zechariah text is that the enemies of Israel will at first be successful in this battle against Jerusalem. The rout will appear to be so complete that, in the over confidence of victory, they divide the spoils in the midst of the city. It is customary for invading forces to carry the spoils to a safe haven before making the division of them among the conquerors. The danger always exists of some lingering foe who might seek to kill an invader during the division process.

While the rifling of the houses was to enhance the fortunes of the invaders, the ravishing of the women was a tactical move to humiliate the vanquished and defeat their spirits. Such atrocities as these are frequent even in our own day in the battles in the Balkan states and in the tribal warfare in Africa.

To understand the phrase "half of the city" which is taken into captivity, let us consider a passage in the book of Zephaniah: "In that day shalt thou not be ashamed for all thy doings, wherein thou hast transgressed against me: for then I will take away out of the midst of thee them that rejoice in thy pride, and thou shalt no more be haughty because of my holy mountain. I will also leave in the midst of thee an afflicted and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the LORD. The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth: for they shall feed and lie down, and none shall make them afraid."--Zephaniah 3:11-13

Here we see two groups of people in Israel: one marked by fierce pride in their abilities and the other, afflicted and humble. The first of these two groups is taken away and is the same as described in Ezekiel 20:38, "And I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me: I will bring them forth out of the country where they sojourn, and they shall not enter into the land of Israel: and ye shall know that I am the LORD." The group of the city that is not taken--the meek and humble of Israel--appear to be the same as "the third part" that pass through the fire in the previous chapter (Zechariah 13:8, 9).

No details of how Jehovah will intervene are given. There is a clue, however, in the phrase that he will fight "as in the day of battle." During the time when Israel was governed by judges, a recurrent pattern developed. Frequent captivities were interspersed with frequent deliverances where the Lord fought for them. This pattern is recorded in Judges 2:16-19, "Nevertheless the LORD raised up judges, which delivered them out of the hand of those that spoiled them. And yet they would not hearken unto their judges, but they went a whoring after other gods, and bowed themselves unto them: they turned quickly out of the way which their fathers walked in, obeying the commandments of the LORD; but they did not so. And when the LORD raised them up judges, then the LORD was with the judge, and delivered them out of the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge: for it repented the LORD because of their groanings by reason of them that oppressed them and vexed them. And it came to pass, when the judge was dead, that they returned, and corrupted themselves more than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them, and to bow down unto them; they ceased not from their own doings, nor from their stubborn way."

To this agree the words of Isaiah 1:24-26, "Therefore saith the Lord, the LORD of hosts, the mighty One of Israel, Ah, I will ease me of mine adversaries, and avenge me of mine enemies: And I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross, and take away all thy tin: And I will restore thy judges as at the first, and thy counselors as at the beginning: afterward thou shalt be called, The city of righteousness, the faithful city."

These "judges" and "counselors" were their faithful leaders of the past. The suggestion is that Israel's ancient prophets and judges will return through a resurrection and become the catalyst by which Jehovah will bring victory to Israel. Noting that these are called "princes" in Psalm 45:16, this same thought appears to be indicated in the words of Micah 5:5, 6 (RSV), "And this shall be peace, when the Assyrian comes into our land and treads upon our soil, that we will raise against him seven shepherds and eight princes of men; they shall rule the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod with the drawn sword; and they shall deliver us from the Assyrian when he comes into our land and treads within our border."

The Cloven Mount--Zechariah 14:4, 5

And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south. And ye shall flee to the valley of the mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach unto Azal: yea, ye shall flee, like as ye fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah: and the LORD my God shall come, and all the saints with thee.

The aftermath of God fighting for Israel is his standing upon the mount of Olives, showing his taking authority and beginning his reign. This appears to be the same picture as found in Daniel 12:1 where "Michael stands up." Although Michael refers to the son of God and Zechariah speaks of Jehovah himself standing on the mount, there is no real conflict. Isaiah 40:10 speaks of Jehovah's reign, stating that "his arm shall rule for him."

The mount of Olives is closely associated not only with Jesus, but with his kingdom as well. It was from the apex of this mount that he made his triumphant entry into Jerusalem as a king (Matthew 21:1). It was on this mountain that he answered his disciples' questions about returning to set up his kingdom (Matthew 24:3). And it was from this eminence that he ascended into heaven (Matthew 26:30).

Now, in figure, we see this mountain cloven into two parts--half moving toward the north and half toward the south, leaving an east-west valley between the halves. It is at the conclusion of the battle of Jerusalem that we see God establishing his kingdom in two parts. The northern part relates to the spiritual phase, the church, and the southern part to the restored judges and counselors. These are the same two parts mentioned in Micah 5:5 as the "shepherds" (the church) and the "princes" (the restored prophets).

The valley was to provide a safe passage for the refugees from Jerusalem. It was a valley of blessing, stretching from Jerusalem to Azal. This Azal is probably to be identified with the Beth-Ezel (house of Azal) of Micah 1:11, a village some 30 miles southwest of Jerusalem, about midway between Hebron and Beersheba (see also 1 Chronicles 8:37, 38). Beth-Ezel is situated in the highlands just west of the Judean mountains and thus is as far as any valley could go. Once reaching Azal, one is free from mountain terrain and has a clear passage to safety.

The ensuing flight for refuge is compared to the flight that happened in the days "of the earthquake in the days of Uzziah." Not much is known of this particular earthquake from a historic perspective. Dr. R. C. Wetzel says that this earthquake destroyed Tyre, Sidon, Ashdod, from Damascus to Gaza (*A Chronology of Biblical Christianity*, page 22). Albert Edersheim states that Josephus and other Jewish authorities connect this earthquake and the vision of God's glory (Isaiah 6) with the divine punishment for Uzziah usurping the offices of the high priest (*The History of Judah and Israel*, page 60).

In any event, the earthquake was still well known in the days of Zechariah (over 200 years later) and was used to date the prophecy of Amos (Amos 1:1).

In That Day--Zechariah 14:6-9

And it shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear, nor dark: But it shall be one day which shall be known to the LORD, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light. And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be. And the LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one.

Zechariah identifies four specific features which mark "that day" of the Lord:

1. It shall be obscure, but brightest in the evening.
2. Living waters from Jerusalem shall flow to both the Mediterranean and Dead Seas.
3. The waters shall flow all year long, unlike the many dry wadies then known.
4. Jehovah would be the undisputed king of the earth.

The first of these shows how the kingdom will not be introduced precipitously upon the earth but will come in gradually. Peace will not instantly prevail upon the earth, but the clouds of trouble will slowly disperse. It will require the entire thousand years of this "day of the Lord" to fully bring about the bright prospects it promises. Thus it will not be until near the close of that day, at its eventide, that it will be light.

The picture of the promised blessing being as "living waters" is a recurrent one. It is elaborated upon in much detail in Ezekiel 47:1-12 and again in Revelation 22:1, 2, 17. The Ezekiel passage emphasizes the effect of these waters on the Dead Sea, sweetening them and making them potable (see also Joel 3:18). It also mentions that the river is lined with trees bearing all manners of fruits and with leaves of medicinal value. The Revelation account adds the information that the leaves are for the "healing of the nations" and enumerates the number of fruit as being twelve per month, equaling 144,000 in total (12 fruits x 12 months x 1000 years).

The image of half the waters flowing into the Dead Sea and half into the Mediterranean indicates that Jerusalem sits, as it were, on a continental divide. The waters proceeding both directions forms a pictorial representation of the forthcoming blessings spreading through all the world.

The New Jerusalem--Zechariah 14:10, 11

All the land shall be turned as a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem: and it shall be lifted up, and inhabited in her place, from Benjamin's gate unto the place of the first gate, unto the corner gate, and from the tower of Hananeel unto the king's winepresses. And men shall dwell in it, and there shall be no more utter destruction; but Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited.

As the north to south dimensions of all Israel are frequently stated as "from Dan to Beersheba" (Judges 20:1), so one could describe the north to south boundaries of Judah as being "from Geba to Rimmon." Geba is the border town between Judah and Benjamin, six miles north of Jerusalem, while Rimmon thirty miles southwest, lies near the southern border of Judah with Simeon. In other words, all of Judah would become a plain.

There is no need to take this in a literal sense. Rather, it seems to mean a leveling of society in the same way that is expressed in Isaiah 40:4, "Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain." The proud and haughty would be brought low, or humbled, while the meek would be exalted and praised. But we notice that it is not a lowland plain, but rather one that "shall be lifted up." Israel will again assume a leadership role in the earth.

The four place names in our text appear to be located at the four corners of old Jerusalem--Benjamin's gate at the northwest corner, the "first gate" in the southwest, the "corner gate" at the northeast corner, and from the tower of Hananeel, also in the northeast, to the king's winepresses, in the southeast, near the pool of Siloam and the king's gardens.

Although the earlier verses of the fourteenth chapter refer to the preparations for a flight from Jerusalem, the time has come now to return and reinhabit the city. There is a noteworthy contrast between these verses and the situation before the final battle of verses one to three, which is also depicted in Ezekiel 38 and 39. There we have the appearance of safety: "And thou shalt say, I will go up to the land of unwalled villages; I will go to them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates" (Ezekiel 38:11). Here we have actual safety. Any safety which is not dependent upon Jehovah is only a false sense of security.

The Plague of God--Zechariah 14:12-15

And this shall be the plague wherewith the LORD will smite all the people that have fought against Jerusalem; Their flesh shall consume away while they stand upon their feet, and their eyes shall consume away in their holes, and their tongue shall consume away in their mouth. And it shall come to pass in that day, that a great tumult from the LORD shall be among them; and they shall lay hold every one on the hand of his neighbor, and his hand shall rise up against the hand of his neighbor. And Judah also shall fight at Jerusalem; and the wealth of all the heathen round about shall be gathered together, gold, and silver, and apparel, in great abundance. And so shall be the plague of the horse, of the mule, of the camel, and of the ass, and of all the beasts that shall be in these tents, as this plague.

On two occasions at least we see the Lord using plagues in his battling for his people--against Egypt at the time of the exodus and in preparation for the Battle of Armageddon (Revelation 16). Some have noticed the similarity of the effects of this plague to the radiation emanating from the atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. While there may be some validity to such an interpretation, it is not the only explanation possible to these verses. Perhaps the symbols are to be taken in a metaphorical sense.

The eyes consuming in their holes is reminiscent of the punishment of the rebellious King Zedekiah by the forces of Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (Jeremiah 52:11). The eyes are connected in the Bible with greed (1 John 2:16). Greed is an apparent motive in this final battle of the ages, as is witnessed by the many references of the invaders to "take a spoil" (Ezekiel 38:12, 13).

The consuming of the tongue implies that the boastful words of the would-be conquerors shall come to naught. One of the graphic New Testament description of the final days is "gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 13:42). In either case, literal or symbolic, the text leaves no doubt that Jehovah will be victorious in this battle on behalf of Israel.

The plagues are not limited to the human population. All of the domesticated animals of transport are also stricken by these plagues, even as they were in the plagues on literal Egypt at the time of the exodus.

While the prophecy in Ezekiel 38 and 39 stresses the spoils that are in Israel as an incentive for this invasion, the verse before us emphasizes that the invaders will also bring their riches and that these will be used in the setting up of the new kingdom. There are several other prophecies which mention this feature of the Battle of Armageddon. (See Isaiah 23:18, Haggai 2:7 (NAS), and the fall of Jericho in Joshua 6:24.)

No Rain--Zechariah 14:16-19

And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles. And it shall be, that whoso will not come up

of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain. And if the family of Egypt go not up, and come not, that have no rain; there shall be the plague, wherewith the LORD will smite the heathen that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles. This shall be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all nations that come not up to keep the feast of tabernacles.

The rule of God's kingdom will be the same as it was with ancient Israel. Obedience will bring prosperity. "And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God. Blessed shalt thou be in the city, and blessed shalt thou be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of thy body, and the fruit of thy ground, and the fruit of thy cattle, the increase of thy kine, and the flocks of thy sheep. Blessed shall be thy basket and thy store. Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out" (Deuteronomy 28:2-6). Likewise chastisement accompanied disobedience (Deuteronomy 28:15-19). In the passage under consideration the discipline is represented as lack of rain, something that is critically important in a desert climate.

The singling out of Egypt shows the universality of God's chastisements. Egypt is not dependent upon rains, its irrigation coming from the Nile which is fed by melting snows further south. In our text God is saying that if the withholding of rain is not the appropriate punishment, then he would send a plague which would be equally effective.

The specification of the feast of tabernacles is significant for at least two reasons. Originally this feast was to celebrate the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage. In later times the feast took on agrarian importance, celebrating the fall harvest. Thus, not attending the feast of tabernacles was not to show appreciation for the crops of the land. All nations will need to learn that their prosperity is dependent upon obedience to Jehovah. It is also worthy of note that the feast of tabernacles fell just five days after the Day of Atonement, by which, typically, man's relationship to God is restored.

Bells and Pots--Zechariah 14:20, 21

In that day shall there be upon the bells of the horses, HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD; and the pots in the LORD's house shall be like the bowls before the altar. Yea, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah shall be holiness unto the LORD of hosts: and all they that sacrifice shall come and take of them, and seethe therein: and in that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the LORD of hosts.

In the days of the tabernacle the title HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD was reserved for the golden crown on the head of the high priest (Exodus 28:36). There also we find bells--on the fringe of the high priest's ephod (Exodus 28:33-35). Now this title would become so prevalent that it would even be found on the bells of the horses. The bells of the horses is reminiscent of the king's royal chargers in Esther 6:9, "And let this apparel and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that they may array the man withal whom the king delighteth to honour, and bring him on horseback through the

street of the city, and proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honor."

The proclamation of all mankind of HOLINESS UNTO THE LORD will be the highest honor of all mankind. That is the very object of the kingdom--to produce true holiness in all people. The lesson is captured well by Dr. Marvin Vincent: "In the kingdom of Christ each individual is a priest. The priest's work is not limited to any order of the ministry. All may offer the sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving . . . The consummation of this ideal appears in Revelation 21:22 where the heavenly Jerusalem is represented as without temple. It is all temple. It is the abolition of the distinction between holy and profane (Zechariah 14:20,21) -- nearer and more remote from God -- through all being henceforth holy, all being brought to the nearest whereof it is capable, to him." (*Word Studies in the New Testament*)

It is the same lesson that is stressed by saying all of the common utensils of the people--"every pot in Jerusalem and Judah"--shall echo the same refrain of holiness. This is the lesson of the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 10:31, "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

And there shall be no more the Canaanite in the land. When the nation of Israel took possession of their promised land under Joshua, there were a number of cities in which they did not drive out the inhabitants. Now, in this antitypical possession, all the forces of evil would be removed. The conquest would be total and complete. There will be no gentile there. All will be Jews. They will become so by proselytizing to the religion of the kingdom.

"And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem" (Isaiah 2:3).

What a day of rejoicing that will be! With the whole world willfully serving God and learning to live a life of holiness, there can be true peace on earth and true good will toward all men. How we can all look forward to the day when Zechariah's prophecy is completely fulfilled!

The Generation of Jesus Christ

The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham. -- Matthew 1:1

A verse-by-verse Bible study in Matthew 1

The same book, the New Testament, which contains a warning against studying "endless genealogies" (1 Tim. 1:4), itself opens with a lengthy genealogy -- "the generation of Jesus Christ."

Another even more lengthy genealogy of Jesus is found in Luke 3:23-38. The two lists of forebears differs in two respects. While the Matthew accounts traces Jesus' pedigree to Abraham, the Luke record goes even farther, all the way back to God through Adam.

The second difference is that Matthew is tracing the legal ancestry through the male line, Joseph's, "the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus;" while Luke follows Jesus' biological roots through his mother Mary.

It has been contested by some that Luke 3:23 makes that genealogy also that of Joseph. "And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli." However the total difference with that in given in Matthew would either make this an impossibility or one of them a lie. The Greek word *nomizo* translated "as was supposed," while having that general meaning, literally gives the thought of according to law (See Strongs #3543); or the son-in-law of Heli, the father of Mary, Joseph's wife.

Genealogical Problems

Verses 1 through 16 list the genealogy of Jesus. This is important to the theme of Matthew's gospel which was primarily written to prove to the Jewish people that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, "the son of David."

A detailed examination of this ancestral listing turns up two problems however. The first of these is in verse eight where Joram (Jehoram) is listed as the father of Ozias (Uzziah.) Three generations are omitted in this listing (Ahaziah, 2 Chron. 22:2); Jehoash, 2 Chron. 24:1; and Amaziah, 2 Chron. 25:1).

Rather than an oversight, the recap of the number of generations in verse 17, suggests that Matthew made this omission purposefully. The answer to this riddle appears to be found in Exodus 20:4, 5: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in

the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me."

The wife of Jehoram was Athaliah, the daughter of Israel's wicked king Ahab (presumably through Jezebel), introduced idolatry as the palace religion of Judah. To maintain her control she murdered all of her grandsons except Joash, who had been hidden by the priests.

Matthew therefore follows the law given in Exodus 20:4, 5 and omits the following three generations of kings.

The second problem is the omission of Jehoiakim between Josiah (Josiah) and Jechonias (Jehoiachin.) This appears to be an oversight, since the number of listed generations between David and the captivity is only thirteen, while the recap in verse 17 indicates there should be fourteen.

Long Generations

Another claim against the Matthew genealogy is the length of generations between Naasson and David in verses five and six. These four generations span a period of some 490 years (the period of the Judges plus the forty years of Saul's reign), an average of 122 years per generation, while the previous five generations (from Judah to Naasson) covers about 400 years, or 80 years per generation.

It is for this reason that many commentators suggest that there must have been omitted generations during this period. In defense of the listing as given by Matthew it should be noted that there is independent reason to consider these generations as longer than the normal for that time period.

Joshua 6:25 notes that Rahab lived to an exceptional age by noting, as a matter of interest, "she dwelleth in Israel even unto this day." Boaz was already well established when he married the widowed Ruth, mother of Obed. And of David himself we learn that he was sufficiently junior to his siblings as to use his sister Zeruah's sons Abishai, Joab, and Asahel, as chief advisors (see 1 Chron. 2:16; 2 Sam. 2:18).

Five Women

One additional oddity in this listing of Jesus' lineage is the inclusion of five women -- Tamar, Rachab, Ruth, Bathsheba and Mary. Paradoxically, each of the five could be considered a blot in the pedigree of Jesus.

The story of Tamar, the daughter-in-law of Judas who visited her in the role of an harlot, does little to enhance her reputation, although her motivation to force Judah to fulfil his obligations under Levirate law (Deut. 25:5-10), was indeed honorable. Nevertheless her son was, technically, illegitimate.

Once again the genealogy of Jesus is used to illustrate a principle of Old Testament law. One of illegitimate birth shall not enter the congregation of the LORD; "even to the tenth generation none of his descendants shall enter the congregation of the LORD" (Deut. 23:2 NKJ).

Counting forward from Thamar's sons Phares and Esrom, the tenth generation reaches to King David. This explains why, when Israel clamored to Samuel for a king, God did not choose one from the line of Judah, the prophesied royal line (Gen. 49:10)

Two of the other women, Rahab and Ruth, while both women of faith, were Gentiles by birth -- Rahab being a Canaanite and Ruth a Moabite. Thus is illustrated the validity of the Jewish law of the proselyte, and the universality of the lineage of Jesus.

The Bathsheba story relates to a serious moral lapse in the life of David. Yet, of all his wives, she becomes the favorite and the mother of both Solomon and Nathan, the two sons of David who become ancestors of Jesus. Her besmirched reputation however almost prefigures that of Mary, the mother of Jesus, who became with child through the Holy Spirit before consummating her marriage with Joseph, her espoused.

Fourteen Generations

"So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David until the carrying away into Babylon are fourteen generations; and from the carrying away into Babylon unto Christ are fourteen generations" (v. 17).

If the ancestral listing had been more literally accurate, the reoccurrence of the number fourteen might seem to be an interesting curiosity. It becomes even more so when taking the manufactured appearance of the number, taking into account the missing generations.

Why was fourteen so important? It is of interest at this point, to delve into the Jewish mind. Numbers were not written in the customary format of our day, but were composed of the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet -- *aleph* equaling one, *beth* being two, and so on.

It is in this vein that numbers are used in the book of Revelation, where the number of the beast is given as six hundred sixty six. An archaeological stele has been found with an engraving, similar to that left by two lovers today, of an heart inscribed with the words "he whose number is 32 loves her whose number is 25." These were decoded by adding the value of the consonants in the proper names of the individuals involved.

Following this light of reasoning, it appears to be no coincidence that the proper name David is composed of three consonants -- two daleths or "d", with a vau or "v" inserted between them. Daleth was the fourth Hebrew letter, having a numeric of four, and vau the sixth, with a value of six. The name David therefore had a numeric value of 6+4+6 for a

total of 14, the number of generations which Matthew finds between each of the major time markers in the genealogical history of Jesus.

Jesus was the "Son of David" (14), from Abraham to David; and again the "Son of David" (14) from David to the captivity; and once again the "Son of David" (14) from the captivity to the birth of Jesus.

The Birth of Christ

"Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Spirit. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit" (vs. 18-20).

While Luke's gospel records the annunciation of the angel Gabriel to Mary, Matthew gives us the other half of the story -- the announcement of Mary's pregnancy to Joseph. At the time of the event recorded here Joseph and Mary were espoused or engaged, but not yet married.

The Jewish engagement customs were quite different than those of today's western world. Concerning these we read the following from Nelson's Bible Dictionary:

"The selection of the bride was followed by the betrothal, not to be entirely equated with the modern concept of engagement. A betrothal was undertaken by a friend or agent representing the bridegroom and by the parents representing the bride. It was confirmed by oaths and was accompanied with presents to the bride and often to the bride's parents.

The betrothal was celebrated by a feast. In some instances, it was customary for the bridegroom to place a ring, a token of love and fidelity, on the bride's finger. In Hebrew custom, betrothal was actually part of the marriage process. A change of intention by one of the partners after he or she was betrothed was a serious matter, subject in some instances to penalty by fine.

The most important instance of betrothal in the Bible is the one between Joseph and Mary Matt. 1:18-19. A Jewish betrothal could be dissolved only by the man's giving the woman a certificate of divorce. A betrothal usually lasted for one year. During that year the couple were known as husband and wife, although they did not have the right to be united sexually.

Betrothal was much more closely linked with marriage than our modern engagement. But the actual marriage took place only when the bridegroom took the bride to his home and the marriage was consummated in the sexual union."

Joseph's nobility was shown by his desire to give Mary the required bill of divorcement inferred by his "putting her away privily." This would permit her remarriage and draw the least public commotion to the incidence of her unusual pregnancy.

The assurance of the angel of Mary's fidelity to him despite the obvious appearances of her being with child were sufficient for him to cancel these plans. This was another demonstration of his love for Mary and the nobility of his own character for, despite the assurance of the angel, the morals of Mary would be publicly questioned and her reputation (and his also, by association) tarnished.

Naming the Child

"And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS; for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us" (vs. 21-23).

At first reading these verses contain a contradiction -- his name was to be called Jesus because the Old Testament predicted his name would be Emmanuel (Isa. 7:14).

The name Emmanuel is interpreted by Matthew as meaning "God with us." In contrast, the name Jesus is usually interpreted as meaning "Savior". This interpretation, however, is only partially correct. Jesus is the Greek equivalent for the Hebrew Joshua, a name frequently given as a namesake for the famous Hebrew leader who led Israel into the promised land at the end of the Exodus from Egypt.

As we examine the Old Testament records we find that Joshua was a name given to one of the twelve spies who searched out the promised land. We read in Numbers 13:16, "These are the names of the men which Moses sent to spy out the land. And Moses called Oshea the son of Nun Jehoshua."

It was the name Oshea (or Hosea) which meant "Savior." By adding the prefix Je to the name and making it Jehoshua (or Joshua) Moses was changing the meaning to "Jehovah saves", an exact parallel to the meaning of Emmanuel, "God with us."

Joseph's Obedience

"Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife: And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS" (vs. 24, 25).

Our chapter closes with Joseph showing his nobility and obedience to the vision which he had seen. He not only drops his own plans of giving Mary an honorable bill of divorcement and chooses to share the consequences of a stained reputation with his wife, but also opts to remain celibate in the marriage until after the child is born.

While men rightly praise the purity and character of Mary, it is only fitting that we also remember the nobility and strength of character exemplified by the little known Joseph.

The Resurrection of Jesus

Why Seek Ye the Living Among the Dead?

Why seek ye the living among the dead? -- Luke 24:5

Verse by Verse study of Matthew 28

Perhaps no event in history so affected the people of its own time than the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. It became the theme that attracted thousands to the cause of Christ, and the cornerstone around which the early church was built.

In three and a half years of preaching, Jesus Christ, a perfect man who spoke "as never man spake" (John 7:46), and who attested his words with all forms of miracles, only some 500 became adherents of his beliefs. Within a very short time after Pentecost, the apostles, "unlearned and ignorant men" (Acts 4:13) added thousands to the fold.

The significant difference was the fact of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The Jews could not deny it. They had taken every precaution to make sure the body could not be stolen from the grave. Yet, despite the seal of Pilate and the elite guard of the Sanhedrin, the grave was empty. Given the importance of this event, it is surprising that the Bible gives only sketchy accounts of the details of some eleven post-resurrection appearances which were taken by the church as "infallible proofs" of Jesus' resurrection (Acts 1:3).

Word spread rapidly. One account, somewhat muddled in translation, reads thus: "And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many" (Matthew 27:51-53).

It is unlikely that this refers to a temporary resurrection of some who had died before Christ, or there would have been additional references to these remarkable individuals. There have been many attempts to answer the difficulties presented by this text. We suggest that the problem may not lie in the translation, but in the manuscript itself. A paraphrased translation of the fifth century Codex Bezae (D) reads: "And many bodies of the holy ones which slept were tossed upright in their graves where they were manifest to many after his resurrection at the holy city."

This act of tossing buried bodies into an upright position in itself would be a highly symbolic demonstration of a coming resurrection and would certainly have been widely noised about in the marketplace.

The last chapters of each of the gospels deal with the details of the appearances of Christ to prove to his disciples that he had indeed risen from the dead. We will take a look here at those mentioned in the last chapter of the gospel of Matthew.

The Messengers -- Verses 1 to 7

"In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre. And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow: And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly, and tell his disciples that he is risen from the dead; and, behold, he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him: lo, I have told you."

Earthquakes frequently have aftershocks. So it was in 33 AD. The earthquake on Friday afternoon that rent the temple veil and threw bodies upright in the graves on the slopes of Olivet was followed by an aftershock on Sunday morning which rolled back the stone from the tomb where Jesus was buried. As the first quake illustrated the twin effects of Jesus' death -- both opening up "a new and living way" of life into heaven, represented by the Most Holy of the temple, and paving the way for the eventual resurrection of all mankind, prefigured by the breaking of the graveyard tombs -- so the second shock revealed the method by which these would be accomplished -- by the raising of Jesus himself from the dead (Hebrews 10:20).

At Jesus' second advent there is also a pair of symbolic earthquakes. In Revelation 6:12 and again in Revelation 11:13 we read of a "great earthquake" in the period of the sixth seal and sixth trumpet. Many commentators agree that this is symbolic of the French Revolution. But there is still a greater aftershock in the period of the seventh trumpet and seventh plague (Revelation 11:19; 16:18). This earthquake is an apparent reference to the final battle preceding the full establishment of Christ's kingdom -- the Battle of Armageddon (Revelation 16:16). These two quakes are the parentheses on either side of the great transitional trouble which will fully remove the old world order in preparation for Christ's Mediatorial kingdom.

Archaeological evidence of the earthquakes at the time of Jesus' death and resurrection may still exist today. The Essene community at Qumran, some twenty miles from Jerusalem, was destroyed in an earthquake in 31 BC and was rebuilt shortly thereafter, surviving until its final destruction by the Romans in 68 AD. Visitors to the site can see a sharp break in the steps to the ceremonial baths that can only be attributed to an earthquake. Since the entire complex was rebuilt after the quake of 31 BC, it is probable that this damage was done by the same quake which is recorded in our text in 33AD.

Whether the stone was actually moved by the angel or whether it was the earthquake that actually did the moving, it was no small thing. These stones were usually rolled into place at an incline and it took as many as twenty men to move them.¹

The supernatural appearance of the angels with their radiant countenance and brilliantly white raiment may well have been designed to accomplish the very thing it did -- strike the keepers of the tomb with such awe that they literally fainted. Not only their appearance, but their position -- sitting on the moved stone as though in conquest -- were all designed to have the maximum effect on the keepers.

The Message – Verses 8 to 10

And they departed quickly from the sepulchre with fear and great joy; and did run to bring his disciples word. And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail. And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid: go tell my brethren that they go into Galilee, and there shall they see me.

The angel, more likely two angels, apparently changed position before the women arrived, for we read in Luke 24:3,4 that they were standing within the tomb at that time. After being invited to witness with their own eyes the fact that the tomb was indeed empty, they were sent on a mission to quickly inform the other disciples of the fact.

Mary Magdalene ran to tell Peter and John, who came quickly. The account in John's gospel has her seeing the same two angels sitting, one at the head and the other at the foot where Jesus had lain. It was at this time that she saw one she perceived to be a gardener and inquired if he knew where they had placed the body of Jesus. His familiar mannerisms soon revealed to her that she was talking to the resurrected Lord himself (John 20:11-16).

A difference in the appearance of Jesus to the women from his appearance to Mary at the tomb is that the women freely embrace Jesus without reproof, where John says Mary Magdalene's attempt to embrace him is met with a rebuff, "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God" (John 20:17). Perhaps he wished Mary to proceed with her fresh testimony to Jesus' resurrection, whereas on the previous occasion Mary was already ahead of the others en route to bringing them back to the tomb.

It is perhaps noteworthy that the privilege of being first witnesses of his resurrection and given the rare privilege of becoming its first messengers was granted to women. This may indicate a readier acceptance of a near-unbelievable occurrence than would have been true with their male counterparts, or it may merely show a special reward for their early morning act of devotion in preparing the spices and rushing to anoint him as soon as legally permissible under Sabbath rules.

The message they were to deliver had two parts: first, that Jesus had indeed been resurrected and was alive; and second, they were to meet him in Galilee. They must have wondered why. He had been tried in Jerusalem. He was crucified in Jerusalem. He was

buried in Jerusalem. Why did he not accompany them to Galilee if that was where he wished to go? How would he get there?

In fact many of the appearances to follow were in the Jerusalem area. Galilee was a three-day journey and they could not help but wonder at this strange request. The first Galilee appearance is mentioned in the last chapter of the book of John. It takes place at the sea shore and is specifically mentioned as being the "third time" Jesus showed himself to his disciples. Since the other gospels mention four before he went to the north, it is assumed that this count does not reflect the personal appearance he made to Mary Magdalene as the gardener nor the one to the other women as they ran to inform the disciples of the good news. The John account was his third appearance collectively to a group.

However the appearance which John records is by the sea shore, and the command of the women is that he would meet them in "a mountain." This must have been, therefore, after the sea shore meeting. Perhaps there were two reasons for sending them to Galilee. First, it would test their obedience to instructions from an unseen Jesus. Second, though there were many of his disciples in Jerusalem for the Passover, there may have been numerous others who were not able to go and remained in Galilee. It was probably on this occasion that he appeared to "five hundred brethren at once" (1 Corinthians 15:6).

While the name and location of the mountain are not given, it may well be that this final sermon to a number of his followers was in the same mountain where he began his ministry with the "sermon on the mount" (Matthew 5-7).

The Cover Up – Verses 11 to 15

Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers, Saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept. And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you. So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.

The Scribes and Pharisees felt threatened by the ministry of Jesus. They had expressed this fear before his crucifixion. "If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation" (John 11:48). They recognized his abilities of persuasion, that he spoke "as one having authority, and not as the scribes" (Matthew 7:29). They knew that he had predicted his own death and assured his disciples that he would rise from the dead on "the third day" (Matthew 27:63). They concluded this probably not from his references to raising the temple "in three days" (John 2:19) but from his reference to the "sign of Jonah" who was in the whale's belly for three days (Matthew 12:40).

They suspected a plot on the part of his disciples to steal his body from the tomb and make the claims that he had been raised from the dead. Thus they obtained permission

from Pilate to specially secure the tomb with a seal and place their own guard at its doors. Now their best laid plans were foiled. The seal had been broken. The heavy stone had been rolled away. Their guards had fainted in the brightness of the angel's appearance. The body had been removed and, worst of all, word was spreading rapidly that Jesus had risen from the dead.

The only counter-measure that remained was to form a cover up. This they did by offering the guards a bribe to make a false statement that the disciples had somehow overcome them, broken the seal, rolled away the stone, and taken the body. They added an additional incentive to the guards -- protection in case of a Roman judicial investigation.

According to Jamieson, Fausett, and Brown, the grammatical form of the Greek in the clause "we will persuade him" (verse 14) implies the anticipation that there would be just such a judicial investigation, but that they were confident Pilate could be bribed to accept the report of the guards. They need have no fear if they gave false evidence. It might be noted that there are those even today who accept this lie which the guards were bribed to give. A recent example exists in the book *The Passover Plot*. However the lie was not popularly believed in its own time as evidenced by the rapid growth of Christianity, largely due to the acknowledged fact of the resurrection of Jesus on the third day just as he had promised.

The Great Commission -- Verses 16 to 20

Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted. And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.

The fact that only the eleven are mentioned as journeying to Galilee to the appointed mountain (probably either the Mount of Beatitudes or, possibly, Mount Tabor), does not mean that there were only eleven who saw Jesus on this occasion. This is most likely the incident to which Paul refers in 1 Corinthians 15:6 when he was seen by "above five hundred brethren at once." This was the only general meeting with his disciples which the Master was to hold during the forty days between his resurrection and his ascension.

This small body was to form the nucleus of his ambassadorial corps to spread the message which Jesus had introduced. He begins his commission to the assembled group by assuring them that he now has "all authority² in heaven and on earth" to give them a commission.

This great commission foresees the time, perhaps some three years distant, when the gospel call would broaden out to the Gentiles. However, even then they were to spread

the word to the Jewish population already dispersed throughout the Roman empire. Later, when he appeared in their midst in Jerusalem for the last time, he gave them similar instructions, commissioning them to be his witnesses "both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." Again, on the day of Pentecost, the word was spread to the assembled Jews from some fifteen parts of the empire (Acts 2:9-11).

However it was the apostle Paul who, as the "apostle of the Gentiles" (Romans 11:13), applied a truly global approach to this commission. This missionary function of the followers of Christ continues to this day.

They were not only to teach the message but to baptize converts into this faith, acknowledging them not merely as believers of the word but doers also. These new followers were to be taught the same precepts which Jesus had taught the five hundred, namely, those principles laid down in the New Testament.

The baptismal formula -- "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" -- is of doubtful authenticity. Although most trinitarian theologians use this text as a strong support for a triune God, the formula as given was not so used by the early church fathers³ whose writing predated our earliest manuscripts. Some scholars openly challenge these words.⁴

The close of the commission is the encouraging words, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world." This promise is to be distinguished from that of his personal presence at the end of the Christian age, for the apostles Paul, John, and Peter -- all writing well after this promise -- encourage the anticipation of the personal return of Christ.

In the context of Matthew, the meaning appears not only to be a general promise of Christ's spiritual presence throughout the age, but a specific one related to the given commission. In this, it is similar to Jesus' words in Matthew 10:18-20, "And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you."

Jesus, like his Father, makes no requests of those who follow him without giving them the wherewithal to carry them out. What greater assurance can we ask than that, leaning on him in our weakness, we seek to use his strength to do the Father's will.

Although the closing word, "Amen," is of doubtful authenticity and, if not spurious, was probably added by Matthew, it is a fitting response for us today. As he has commanded, so may it be ("Amen"). May we each respond to the requests of our Lord with such a fervent agreement and assent.

NOTES

¹. Thayer's *Greek Lexicon*, Digital Edition, article on Strong's word #617, *apokulio*: "For a small grave, about 20 men were required to roll a stone downhill to cover the door of the tomb. The Bible tells us that the stone covering the door of the tomb was a large stone. The women would have needed more men than even a full Roman guard of 16 men to roll away the stone."

². The Greek *exousia*, translated "power" in the King James is better translated "authority." Vine's *Expository Dictionary*, both Robertson's and Vincent's *Word Studies* and most newer translations so agree.

³. Eusebius cites Matthew 28:19 eighteen times in his work, always in the same form: "Go ye and make disciples of all nations in my name, teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I commanded you." Aphraates, a Syriac writer of the middle-fourth century, cites the text in yet a different manner, "Make disciples of all nations, and they shall believe in me." Even Adam Clark, a devout Trinitarian, demonstrates that the Jews were baptized only in the name of Jesus, the Messiah. For a thorough treatment of this matter we refer the reader to *Beauties of the Truth*, January 1991, in the article "In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and the Holy Spirit" by Leonard Griehs.

⁴. James Martineau in his *Seat of Authority* and Adolph Harnack in his *History of Dogma* are two of these.

The Christmas Story

"And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins." -- Matthew 1:21

A verse by verse Bible study in Luke 2

No story is more important to the Christian religion than that of the birth of Jesus and his subsequent life and death as a ransom for all the human creation.

While we are not told in the scriptures to celebrate his birth, but rather his death, it is nevertheless appropriate that a time be set aside for commemorating this great gift to the human race. Although the evidence indicates a fall date for his birth, the end of the year would approximate the time of his conception. It is in this spirit that we gladly join the Christian world in honoring the birth of humanity's Redeemer.

A Time of Taxation -- Verses 1 through 5

And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

Taxation was introduced in the Roman empire as a more equitable way of extracting tribute from conquered provinces. A periodic census was taken both for taxation and recruitment purposes. While the poll tax was the first introduced, Augustus Caesar introduced the additional burdens of inheritance and property taxes.

It is fitting that the birth of Jesus should coincide with a period of taxation. Just as the Jews were at this time tributary to the government of Rome, so the entire human race was under the heavy burden of taxation of sin since the fall in Eden. It was to remove this burden that the babe was born in Bethlehem. The introduction of new taxes increased the desire to be free from the Roman yoke. This may have been a contributing factor to the Jewish rejection of the meek and humble Nazarene. They were looking for a strong military leader to free them from the increasingly heavy pressures of Rome.

Such periodic taxation naturally bred unrest among the subject peoples. This decree of Caesar Augustus was no exception. The heavy hand of Cyrenius in Syria gave rise to the rebellious Jewish political party of the Zealots. It is probable that among the founders of this party was Judas of Galilee mentioned by Gamaliel in Acts 5:37. The contrast could not be greater between the two Galileans -- Jesus, who encouraged the payment of taxes (Matt. 22:17-21), and the flagrant rebellion of Judas and the other Zealots. It is also noteworthy that Jesus was to later choose as apostles both Matthew, a tax collector, and

Simon, a Zealot (Luke 6:15). Thus he illustrated a ministry for all, both for the seeming collaborator and the rebel.

In God's arrangements the taxation served another function. It brought the expectant couple from Nazareth to Bethlehem. The prophecy of Micah 5:2 demanded that the savior be born in Bethlehem. This was also integral to his status as the heir of David's royal line since Bethlehem was the city of David. In an obscure reference to an unknown prophecy, Matthew 2:23 states that it was also predicted that he be of Nazareth. In the normal course of events, Mary would have likely given birth to her child in her home district of Nazareth. The taxation changed all that. Both prophecies could thus be fulfilled.

A Humble Birth -- Verses 6 and 7

And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

The humble settings of this special birth have been oft noted. The influx of travelers for the census was compounded by the overflow of Jewish pilgrims coming to Jerusalem for the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles, one of three feasts when faithful Israelites were to come to the temple city. The overflow crowds for that event would spill into such nearby villages as Bethlehem.

The arduous trip for a woman heavy with child made a lengthy search for a nearby resting place impractical. Thus they resorted to taking lodging for the night in a small cave used for housing domestic animals. He, who was to be the antitypical bullock of atonement, was born in a bullock's stall. He, who was to miraculously feed crowds of 5,000 and 4,000, found his first bed in a crib for animals' food. God, who made the clouds a swaddlingband for the earth (Job 38:9), now clothed his son in swaddling clothes.

That first night set the pattern for the three and a half years of his ministry thirty years later. "And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Matt. 8:20).

The Angels' Song -- Verses 8 through 14

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the

heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.

The work of the first advent was a pastoral one to Israel. Jesus himself had said, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 15:24). Even his noted forebear, David, in whose town he was born, was known as the "sweet shepherd" of Israel. It was therefore appropriate that the first announcement of his birth would come to faithful shepherds watching their flocks. The surprise of the sudden brightness and the appearance of the heavenly choir naturally struck them with apprehension. On at least eight occasions during his ministry his disciples would need to be calmed from such feelings with the Master's tender assurance, "Fear not."

The message of joyful hope came when the human creation was undergoing the darkness of the night of sin. "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning" (Psa. 30:5). And what a message of joy it was! Not only were they assured that a savior had been born that night and that the very humbleness of his birth would attest to the fact that he was indeed the one, but the accompanying chorus of heavenly beings lifted their voices to God in a paean of praise that this would bring peace on earth and good will to men.

The Shepherds' Witness -- Verses 15 through 20

And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

It was with haste that the shepherds followed through on the news they had heard. Probably leaving the flocks in the charge of one of their number, they hurried off to Bethlehem to search the stables for a newborn child. Being convinced of the truthfulness of the angels' message, they spread the news far and wide. Their reaction is reminiscent of the closing words of the book, *The Divine Plan of the Ages*: "Whoever comes in contact with truth, realizing its character, has thereby a responsibility with reference to it. It must be either accepted and acted upon, or rejected and despised. To ignore it does not release from responsibility. If we accept it ourselves, we have a responsibility toward it also, because it is for all the household of faith; and each one receiving it becomes its debtor, and, if a faithful steward, must dispense it to the other members of the family of God. Let your light shine! If it again becomes darkness, how great will be the darkness. Lift up the light! Lift up a standard for the people!" (p. 349).

While the shepherds' reaction was unbridled joy, Mary reacted differently. She "kept all these things and pondered them in her heart." The Greek words here used paint a graphic word picture. They paint the portrait of Mary building a fenced off portion of her mind in which she tossed the incoming impressions around and around. These events provided fuel for meditation. Her life would be forever touched and changed by the chain of events in which she found herself involved.

Temple Rituals -- Verses 21 through 24

And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb. And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem, to present him to the Lord; (As it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that openeth the womb shall be called holy to the Lord;) And to offer a sacrifice according to that which is said in the law of the Lord, A pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.

Two separate rituals are here mentioned -- circumcision and purification. The first was done in Bethlehem, the second in Jerusalem. The first was the prescribed sign that he was a child of the Abrahamic covenant, the second that she was clean of the pollution of blood which accompanied childbirth.

Circumcision was an unusual sign. Signs are usually given to be seen by others. Circumcision would be rarely seen. However the function of the covenant was to produce the seed of blessing and protect the purity of the Abrahamic line. This is shown in the careful recording of the genealogical records of Jesus both through Mary and Joseph (Matt. 1 and Luke 3). Circumcision as a sign was directly related to the cleansing of the physical organ through which that seed would be passed along from generation to generation.

Although not commanded in the Law, it was customary to name the child on the same eighth day as he was circumcised. Notice the naming of John the Baptist in Luke 1. This tradition stemmed from the fact that God changed the name of Abram to Abraham on the same day he commanded the ritual of circumcision (Gen. 17).

The pre-naming of Jesus before his conception is found in Matthew 1:21, "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins." This was done to fulfill Isaiah's prophecy that he would be named "Emmanuel" (Matt. 1:23; Isa. 7:14). Though dissimilar in English, the two names are practically synonymous in their original languages, both containing the thought of God being with us, the name "Jesus" adding the purpose, "to save."

A considerable time elapsed before the cleansing of Mary. According to Leviticus 12:3, 4 the purification ceremony was to be 40 or 41 days after birth. Similarly Jesus' spiritual life, after his baptism at Jordan, was followed by a specially marked off period of 40 days when he meditated and was tempted in the wilderness before beginning his ministry.

In the type the mother was to bring her offering of atonement to the priest as prescribed in Leviticus 12:6-8. The offering of two turtledoves or young pigeons marked Mary out as one of the poor of Israel, for those who could afford it were also to bring a lamb. Although her omission of the lamb was undoubtedly due to her poverty, it is fitting that it be omitted in this instance. As her firstborn son, Jesus was also being offered and he would become "the lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29, 36).

The fact that Jesus is called Mary's "firstborn" leaves the implication that she had later children. If he was her only son it would have been more appropriate to call him her "only" child. Thus the mention of Jesus' brothers and sisters in Mark 6:3 likely refers to his half-brothers and half-sisters rather than to more distant relatives.

Simeon's Prophecy -- Verses 25 to 35

And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the temple: and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the law, Then took he him up in his arms, and blessed God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel. And Joseph and his mother marveled at those things which were spoken of him. And Simeon blessed them, and said unto Mary his mother, Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against; (Yea, a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also,) that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

Simeon was both just and devout. It is possible to be just without being devout or to be devout without being just. The justness of his character showed his high moral standards while the devoutness pointed to his religious inclinations. Thus Esau of old was just, but not devout, being a "profane" or irreligious man (Heb. 12:16). The Pharisees were devout but often not just, as in their "devouring of widow's houses" (Matt. 23:14). This sterling combination led to the assurance that Simeon would not see death before he had seen the Messiah.

Evidently Simeon had not planned to be in the temple on this particular day, though he frequently went there. The record is that on this day he "came by the spirit into the temple," and undoubtedly this same spirit enabled him to recognize the son of Mary as the long promised Savior. His vision, however, was far greater than merely recognizing the Messiah of Israel. He recognized the import of Isaiah's prophecies. This deliverer would not be for Israel alone but would be also a "light to lighten the Gentiles" (Isa. 60:1-3).

Perhaps this breadth of vision and not merely his ability to recognize the Messiah caused Joseph and Mary to "marvel." Indeed, as Simeon had correctly predicted, this birth was to bring forth a salvation which had been prepared for "all people."

Simeon appears to have also correctly discerned that in the process of reaching out to the Gentiles, many who were Jews would miss their primary blessing. For those few who followed Jesus he would be for their "rise" in glory, while for the majority who rejected him he would become the stumblingblock by which they would "fall."

This "revealing" of the thoughts of many hearts was explained by John the Baptist. "And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Spirit, and with fire" (Matt. 3:10, 11).

Finally, Simeon foresaw the anguish that the experiences of the next thirty-three and a half years would hold for Mary. It must have been with great sadness that he predicted to her, "Yea, a sword shall pierce through thine own soul also." How she must have thought of those words as she saw her firstborn on the cross of Calvary!

The Testimony of Anna -- Verses 36 through 40

And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; And she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for redemption in Jerusalem. And when they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth. And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.

The testimony of Anna is somewhat more brief than that of Simeon. Her presence in the temple was expected, unlike that of Simeon, for she came daily to that sacred place. Her age of 84 might possibly be suggestive of the wait of Israel for the Messiah (12 tribes times 7, a complete period) while the seven years she lived with her husband could represent the full time God was wedded to Israel, a relationship they lost through sin and punishment long before the first advent. Israel was thus widowed a long time before the babe arrived.

The constancy of her devotions is indicated by the fact that she worshiped with "fastings and prayers night and day."

She apparently instantly recognized the babe as the one who would provide for "redemption in Jerusalem," and, like the shepherds, was a ready witness to the significance of this singular birth.

The fact that Mary and Joseph returned immediately after these rituals to their own city of Nazareth leaves a puzzle. Luke's account omits the visit of the wise men, found in Matthew 2. There does not appear to be an open window to fit into Luke's account the visit of the magi and the flight into Egypt at the time of Jesus' birth. It is possible, since the visit of the wise men is missing in Luke, that that evangelist merely jumps to the next item on his agenda, the return to Nazareth, though the trip to Egypt was in the intervening time. Since history is clear that Herod did not live beyond the opening months of 1 B.C., the visit of the magi must have been earlier.

The final verse of this section glosses over the next eleven years of Jesus' life, showing his continuous growth in spiritual strength, wisdom, and the grace of God. This text finds its companion in the final verse of the chapter, which covers the next eighteen years of his life.

Jesus at Twelve -- Verses 41 through 52

Now his parents went to Jerusalem every year at the feast of the passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast. And when they had fulfilled the days, as they returned, the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem; and Joseph and his mother knew not of it. But they, supposing him to have been in the company, went a day's journey; and they sought him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. And when they found him not, they turned back again to Jerusalem, seeking him. And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions. And all that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers. And when they saw him, they were amazed: and his mother said unto him, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing. And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them. And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.

Though the final lesson of the chapter does not deal with the birth of Jesus, it does complete the details of what we know of him prior to the beginning of his ministry at age 30.

Ancient Jewish tradition, as well as modern custom, saw the twelfth birthday of a child as being significant. Childhood now was considered over and it was customary to expect full compliance with the Law from the thirteenth year when they became known as "the son of the commandment."

He had probably traveled to the feast annually with his family and was therefore somewhat accustomed to the layout of the city. After the seven-day feast the family, no doubt in company with other pilgrims, began the northward trek to Nazareth. The three-

day search may have included a day searching for him amongst other traveling pilgrims, a day returning to the city, and somewhat late on the third day finding him in the temple. There is nothing in his demeanor in this incident to suggest rebelliousness toward either his parents or those who sat "in Moses' seat." Rather than presuming to teach the learned elders, he is content to listen to them and query them as to the deeper meaning of the holy books. He was taking his new relationship with the law seriously and, as with his journey into the wilderness after his baptism, seeking the clearest possible understanding of the law and his personal responsibilities in connection therewith.

It is of profit to note the relationship between the young lad and his parents. Undoubtedly distressed by his absence, they only chide him gently as to the sorrow the incident had caused them. Despite their knowledge through the unusual incidents which surrounded both his conception and his birth, that he was indeed the child of God, the record states they "understood not" his saying, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" Nevertheless he understood. He knew that his real father was his heavenly Father and it was upon his business that he had been sent on this journey to become a man, learn to sympathize with their plight, and die for the remission of their sins. This is the reason Jesus felt that his parents should have known that he would be in the temple, "his Father's house."

Although he must have desired to stay longer in discussion with the learned men in the temple, his time was not yet come. Obediently he returned with his parents and was subject to them for nearly two more decades. His behavior was such as to win not only the approval of God but the accolades of man as well.

For Mary this was another strange incident to put in that fenced-off portion of her mind as she battled with the questions as to what the future would hold for this "miracle child" of hers. A mother's lot is never easy and hers was exceptionally difficult. She would be experiencing the joy of raising an obedient child, the thrills of his early acceptance, the disappointments of his rejection, and the pangs of pain that accompanied his persecution and death. Indeed she -- and we -- are left with much to keep in our hearts and to ponder.

A Man of Miracles

*But though he had done so many **miracles** before them,
yet they believed not on him. -- John 12:37*

A verse-by-verse study in Luke 5 (by Carl Hagensick)

Jesus was indeed a man of miracles -- healing the sick, raising the dead, walking on water, turning water into wine. These were but a few of his mighty works. All were intended not only to demonstrate his power, but especially to illustrate his coming kingdom. Three of these miracles, interspersed with other narratives, are found in the fifth chapter of Luke.

Lessons by the Seaside -- Luke 5:1-3

And it came to pass, that, as the people pressed upon him to hear the word of God, he stood by the lake of Gennesaret, And saw two ships standing by the lake: but the fishermen were gone out of them, and were washing their nets. And he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship.

What more tranquil spot could there be for the lessons Jesus taught than by the seashore? While the Gennesaret (the Sea of Galilee) can be quickly roiled by stormy winds, it is usually calm, quiet, and peaceful. The sloping banks on its northern shore -- and it is there this narrative occurs for that is where the home docks were for the fishing firms of Peter, Andrew, James, and John -- rise in a steady curve, forming a natural amphitheater with excellent acoustics.

The choice of Peter's ship is suggestive of the leading role Peter was to play throughout the pre-Pauline New Testament. His quick impetuous disposition naturally suited him for the leadership position he was to fill.

The time was early morning for they had just returned from fishing all night and were busy washing their nets to have them ready for the following night. Jesus had not chosen his apostles from the idlers who were out of work, but men who were not only occupied in a profitable trade but probably were owners of their own fishing business.

Rowing back a short distance from shore gave Jesus better eye contact with his audience. His position of preaching from a sitting position was normal for that time, even when addressing such great crowds as on the mount of beatitudes (Matthew 5:1, ASV).

The popularity he enjoyed in the first year of his ministry is evident from the crowd pressing upon him to hear his message. His message was revolutionary and the multitudes loved it. We read of its appeal in these words: "The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it" (Luke 16:16).

This narrative does not inform us of the content of his sermon, but we can be sure it was the usual theme of his kingdom and the character qualities necessary to enter into it.

The Draught of Fish -- Luke 5:4-11

Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught. And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net. And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake. And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord. For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken: and so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men. And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him.

Jesus' ministry was bracketed by the capture of a large number of fish on two occasions - - the one recorded here near the beginning of his work and that found in John 21:1-11 after his resurrection. Perhaps this is symbolic of the two tasks Jesus would have his disciples accomplish: fish for faithful Jews during the Jewish harvest, and for both Jews and Gentiles during the Gospel age.

The amount of fish in this first instance was so great the nets broke. So it was with the message of the Jewish law; it broke under the strain of the gospel message. In fact, this chapter closes with two parables with a similar lesson.

This does not appear to be the first call to these faithful disciples. The original call to Peter, and probably to John also, is found in John 1:35-42. The time between these two calls was probably used to prepare these men for the work they were to do with Jesus during the first advent. Now they were to be activated -- "henceforth thou shalt catch men."

During these months of training the apostles remained in their fishing business. Now they were called away from that to devote their full time to working with the Master in the gathering of the faithful in Jewry into the embryonic Christian faith.

Before they could be sent forth however, they needed to come to a recognition of their own unworthiness. Impetuous Peter expressed the thoughts they all may have had: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man." Peter's self-confidence melted in the face of the miracle by the far greater fisherman than he.

Cleansing the Leper -- Luke 5:12-16

And it came to pass, when he was in a certain city, behold a man full of leprosy: who seeing Jesus fell on his face, and besought him, saying, Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And he put forth his hand, and touched him, saying, I will: be thou clean. And immediately the leprosy departed from him. And he charged him to tell no man: but go, and shew thyself to the priest, and offer for thy cleansing, according as Moses commanded, for a testimony unto them. But so much the more went there a fame abroad of him: and great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities. And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed.

As in many other cases, the leper's healing was a result of his faith. His was a faith worth emulating. When besought by troubles, how simple the prayer, "Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." This is not a demand of faith, but a simple request based on the principle of having his will done as to whether to aid or to withhold aid -- "Lord, if thou wilt."

The commission to tell no man was not so much to keep the matter quiet as to bring the testimony of the miracle directly to where Jesus wanted it delivered, to the priest. This was not only as a witness to his powers, but to show the priests that he recognized their position and the propriety of the healed leper going to them to be pronounced clean. Notwithstanding, word of the miracle quickly circulated and his fame spread quickly abroad.

Jesus was a man of prayer. He desired constant communication with his father although the burden of many of his prayers is undisclosed. We might assume that this prayer was how to handle his sudden popularity. Perhaps his prayer expressed concerns that he not be overtaken with pride over the acclaim accorded him by the populace. Perhaps he was concerned over the fact that the multitudes followed him more for his miracles than for his message. Likely, it was a measure of both concerns that occupied his mind.

Healing the Palsied -- Luke 5:17-26

And it came to pass on a certain day, as he was teaching, that there were Pharisees and doctors of the law sitting by, which were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judaea, and Jerusalem: and the power of the Lord was present to heal them. And, behold, men brought in a bed a man which was taken with a palsy: and they sought means to bring him in, and to lay him before him. And when they could not find by what way they might bring him in because of the multitude, they went upon the housetop, and let him down through the tiling with his couch into the midst before Jesus. And when he saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee. And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, Who is this which speaketh blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone? But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts? Whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Rise up and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power upon earth to forgive sins, (he said unto the sick of the palsy,) I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy

couch, and go into thine house. And immediately he rose up before them, and took up that whereon he lay, and departed to his own house, glorifying God. And they were all amazed, and they glorified God, and were filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things to-day.

Among those pressed into the crowded house in Galilee were many Jewish leaders. They may have been a delegation appointed to check out the rumors of the miracles of Jesus. They were not only local officials, but from the southern reaches of Judea and the capital city of Jerusalem. The miracle of the palsied man was well designed to illustrate the principle of divine healing.

Palsy is a poor description of the disease. Paralysis, rather than some such disease as Parkinson's, is the thought of the Greek word. There is no statement of faith on the part of the victim when Jesus is approached. It is rather the faith of his friends that is rewarded. In treating the miracle as a parable, Pastor Russell comments: "The various difficulties under which humanity labors called diseases, illustrate sin in various respects; for instance, palsy or paralysis represents a condition of sin in which the individual loses his power -- sometimes merely becoming impotent, in the sense of helpless; at other times, in combination with this may come an insensibility of conscience, a deadness to all principles of righteousness, such as the apostle describes as 'past feeling.' In this condition are quite a good many at the present time; they are not only helpless as respects all ability to go to the great Physician, but additionally they are devoid of any desire, any appreciation of their need; they have no feeling on the subject." -- *Reprints*, p. 2584.

The roofs of houses in the middle East were used for many functions. They were used much as porches in our day, to gain some fresh, cool air in the evenings. They also were handy areas to dry grain and washed or dyed clothes. These roofs were accessed both by steps from the outside of the house and by a ladder from the inside. The hole where this ladder penetrated was covered with tiles to keep out the rain and dirt.

The friends of the palsied man, finding the house overflowing its capacity, ascended the outer stairs and removed the tiles covering the opening for the ladder. It was through this aperture that they let the palsied man down into the crowded room. This was perceived by Jesus to be an act of faith on the part of the invalid's friends. On the basis of this he said, "Man, thy sins are forgiven thee." How much easier it would have been for Jesus to merely heal the man of his infirmities. Jesus, however, had two lessons to convey -- one to the paralytic and one to the scribes and Pharisees.

To the leaders of Israel who challenged his right to remit sins, he was equating the removal of sin with the healing he was about to perform. Sickness, after all, is merely a concomitant of the death sentence for sin. All mankind gets ill and eventually dies from one form or another of what has been termed "Adam-itis." Each act of healing was setting aside a portion of the penalty for sin originally pronounced on the human race in the Garden of Eden.

To the invalid there was a further lesson. While there is no record that he exercised

personal faith in being brought to Jesus' feet, now he would have to demonstrate his own faith. He not only had to believe that his limbs were strong enough to bear his weight, but he was bidden to carry his cot as well. It must have been tempting for his friends to desire to help him up or at least carry his bed, but Jesus wanted him to do it himself.

The Call of Levi -- Luke 5:27-32

And after these things he went forth, and saw a publican, named Levi, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he said unto him, Follow me. And he left all, rose up, and followed him. And Levi made him a great feast in his own house: and there was a great company of publicans and of others that sat down with them. But their scribes and Pharisees murmured against his disciples, saying, Why do ye eat and drink with publicans and sinners? And Jesus answering said unto them, They that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Levi, or Matthew as he is later known, was one of the last disciples to be called. Luke's placement of Matthew's selection is suggestive of a connection between the miracle of the palsied man and the call of Levi. Perhaps the association lies in the healing of the man, not for his own faith, but for the faith of his friends. Likewise Levi, as a tax collector, may not have been a religious and faithful Jew and Jesus may well have selected him, not for what he was, but for what he would become.

The change of name from Levi to Matthew, "a gift from God," is supportive of this thought. Sinners brought to repentance are miracles of Jehovah's grace, and thus "a gift from God." Levi's instantaneous response, like that of the palsied man picking up his bed, shows an immediate leap of faith.

Celebrating his conversion he arranges for a feast at his house. It is noteworthy that all the guests appear to be mostly publicans and sinners. These probably represented the class of individuals with whom Levi was acquainted. The use of the name Levi here, instead of his converted name of Matthew, further emphasizes the lesson of this narrative.

The scribes and Pharisees, observing Jesus attending this feast, accuse him of associating with a sinner class. His response illustrates the theme of the chapter. Most of the healings of Jesus were performed upon the disapproved classes. These were the ones he termed "the sick who need a physician." The Pharisees, righteous in their own eyes, did not consider themselves either sick or as sinners who needed to repent. In the words of one, "The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican" (Luke 18:11).

Jesus and John -- Luke 5:33-39

And they said unto him, Why do the disciples of John fast often, and make prayers, and likewise the disciples of the Pharisees; but thine eat and drink? And he said unto them, Can ye make the children of the bride-chamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them?

But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days. And he spake also a parable unto them; No man putteth a piece of a new garment upon an old; if otherwise, then both the new maketh a rent, and the piece that was taken out of the new agreeth not with the old. And no man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish. But new wine must be put into new bottles; and both are preserved. No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is better.

Knowing that the Israeli populace had great respect for John the Baptist, Jesus was next queried about his life style and the more ascetic customs of John. His answer is in three parts. First, aware that it was common knowledge among the Jews that John had identified him as the Lamb of God, he uses the illustration of a marriage. There is much feasting and celebration in the presence of the prospective groom. But he predicted a time when he would depart -- they knew not that it would be to heaven. Then would come the time for the friends of the groom to mourn and fast.

The two parables that close this chapter further illustrate the differences between the Jewish and Gospel dispensations. Their lessons are similar, though not identical. Garments represented that which clothed a man. Both the Jews and the Christians had spiritual garments -- these were the justification their respective covenants afforded. To the Jew, the Law Covenant could only offer a justification through works. The justification of the Christian's covenant of grace is one that comes by faith alone. This could not be applied as a patch on the Jewish garment, for their covenant relationship was entirely different. The one covenant was by works, the other by grace. These covenants produce two types of children. The works covenant produces earthly seed while the grace covenant produces spiritual seed.

The wine-skin parable is a similar but different lesson. The wine represents doctrines while the skins picture the organizational structures that contain these doctrines. Old doctrines are naturally preferred because they are familiar and comfortable. They hold no challenge for change. But the new is more invigorating and much superior. As the guests at the Cana wedding discovered, the latter wine was better than the former.

This new wine, or doctrine, seeking to train co-leaders in Christ's kingdom, must be taught by the acquisition of principles. The law doctrines, informing men of rights and wrongs, could be taught by memory and rote. Thus the old system of Levites and instructors in righteousness must be replaced by the more democratic system of church government selected by the individual congregations to assist in their mutual search for absolute truth.

The workings of Christ, the Man of Miracles, are only included in small part in this chapter. The whole of his teachings and his works are meant to prepare the ones heeding them to be kings and priests with him to rule a thousand years. May our individual searches lead us to that all-important end.

Begotten by the Spirit

A verse-by-verse study of John 3

John is the only Evangelist who mentions Nicodemus, a Pharisee who was impressed by the miracles and came to Jesus by night to learn more. Because this was a private conversation, we would not expect to know what was said. But since Nicodemus anointed Jesus' body with spices after the crucifixion while the disciples had scattered, it is safe to say he accepted the message and became one of Jesus' footstep followers. Undoubtedly he told John and others about his conversation where he learned that one becomes a son of God by being begotten by God's holy spirit. After growth and development takes place, those who have been begotten will be born on the spirit plane as spirit beings, leaving behind their old human nature as did Jesus.

Nicodemus Appears -- Verses 1 and 2

“There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: the same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.”

In John 7:50 Nicodemus is specifically identified as the one who came to Jesus by night and is associated with “the chief priests and Pharisees” (John 7:45,50). Although Nicodemus might have come at night because he was concerned about what others might think were he to be seen with Jesus, it is more likely he wanted some private time alone. There certainly was no opportunity for privacy during the day when the crowds surrounded Jesus, begging to be healed, and hanging on his every word. Nicodemus was a thinking Pharisee. In John 10:38 Jesus urged the Jews to believe his works even if they couldn't believe in him. That was what Nicodemus was doing. He had seen Jesus' miracles and knew they had to be a result of God's power. He wanted to know more.

Spirit Begetting -- Verses 3-8

“Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born [gennao] again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born [gennao] when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born [gennao]? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born [gennao] of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born [gennao] of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born [gennao] of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born [gennao] again. The wind [pneuma] bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born [gennao] of the Spirit [pneuma].”

In Matthew's genealogy in chapter 1 the Greek word *gennao* is used repeatedly and is correctly translated “begat” because it describes the role of a man in procreation. Matthew 1:16 reads, “Jacob **begat** [gennao] Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was

born [*gennaō*] Jesus, who is called Christ.” Note that in this verse this same Greek word is correctly translated born when the active agent is a woman.

Jesus begins by saying a person must be begotten/born again. But because he does not mention the operative agent, Nicodemus thinks he’s talking about an actual birthing process and is understandably confused. When Jesus says the begetting must be “of water and spirit,” Nicodemus undoubtedly understood how he should interpret this ambiguous Greek word.

We can understand the necessary role of God’s holy spirit in begetting a new life within a believer, but why water? At that time John the Baptist was using water as a symbol of cleansing from past sins after people repented. Water in Scripture symbolizes truth and truth comes from God through his son Jesus. In John 7:37 Jesus calls out for the thirsty to come to him to drink. In verse 38 he refers to “rivers of living water.” In verse 39 John parenthetically observes that by these words he was referring to the spirit that they that believe on him should receive after he was glorified:

“In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness” (Zechariah 13:1). Jesus is that “fountain.” We must drink or appropriate the “living water” which comes from him and receive God’s holy spirit if we are to have life on a spirit plane. The *Companion Bible* states that these two nouns next to each other should be understood as referring to one thing and are better translated “of water -- yea, spiritual water.”

Verse 8 is the only place where translators rendered the Greek word *pneuma* as wind even though it is most unlikely Jesus is talking about the wind. If he were, the Greek word would have been *anemos* which occurs many times and is always translated wind. Surely those who are begotten by God’s holy spirit but not yet born on the spirit plane cannot go and come like the wind. Jesus is talking about how God’s spirit touches one here and one there with no one able to predict in advance just what it will do or who will respond to it. Rotherham conveys the correct thought: “The spirit where it pleaseth doth breathe, and the sound thereof thou hearest; but knowest not, whence it cometh and whither it goeth.” Like countless others Nicodemus was touched by the spirit. Because he boldly came forward during the daylight hours with Joseph of Arimathaea and willingly defiled himself by touching Jesus’ dead body (John 19:39), we feel sure he responded appropriately to the spirit and became a consecrated follower of the Master.

Jesus’ Authority -- Verses 9-15

“Nicodemus answered and said unto him, How can these things be? Jesus answered and said unto him, Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen; and ye receive not our witness. If I have told you earthly things, and ye believe not, how shall ye believe, if I tell you of heavenly things? And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the

serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life."

Nicodemus is hearing things he has never heard before from anyone. Surely this was not a doctrine taught by the Pharisees. Weymouth translates verse 9 as "How is all this possible?"

John is the only one who quotes the Lord as using the phrase "verily, verily." It appears in this doubled form 25 times, never as a single "verily" which is how Matthew, Mark and Luke use it. Why? Perhaps John wants to emphasize the greater authority with which our Lord speaks. John presents Jesus as God's personal representative. He speaks for God and thus his words should be given special emphasis. The Greek word means trustworthy, surely. It is almost always translated "verily" in the gospels and "amen" in all other books. In fact in Revelation this Greek word appears as a title of our Lord: "Unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the **Amen**, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God" (Revelation 3:14).

Students of the Bible have long looked into the Old Testament and found types and pictures of what would occur in New Testament time periods. Paul said that what happened to Israel happened as examples or types for our edification (1 Corinthians 10:6). In his conversation with Nicodemus Jesus identifies as a type an experience the Israelites had in the wilderness. After a particularly egregious lack of appreciation for what God had done for them, the Israelites were plagued with fiery serpents and many died. Moses was told to make a copper-colored serpent and place it on a pole so any who looked upon it would live and not die (see Numbers 21:4-9). This, Jesus tells Nicodemus, pictured himself. He would be "lifted up" on a "pole" and those who looked to him would live and not die. John quotes Jesus as saying this even more directly to a wider audience a few chapters later: "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die" (John 12:32,33).

As is always the case with a type the Old Testament experience is much inferior to the glorious antitype. True, "bitten" Israelites who would quickly die if they did nothing, were able to live if they looked at that which had been lifted up for their salvation. But of course they did die eventually. There was nothing they could do to stop the dying process which sooner or later culminated in their certain death. Only when we see Jesus do we appreciate the far grander antitype. Looking to Jesus, and him crucified, brings life, not just life for a few years but everlastingly. In John's gospel the King James translators rendered the Greek word *aiionios* "eternal" nine times (including verse 15) and "everlasting" eight times (including verses 16 and 36). Consistently rendering it "everlasting" in all cases would have been better.

God's Love -- Verses 16-21

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.”

Perhaps no other verse in the Bible is as well known as John 3:16. God is love (1 John 4:16) another word John uses far more than the other Evangelists. God demonstrated love by giving his most precious possession, his son. How sad it has been to hear those who call themselves by his name claim that God tortures forever those who through ignorance or willfulness reject the avenue of salvation his love has provided. In so doing they make him into an ogre who by placing human beings in flames does the very thing he commanded his people to never do (see Leviticus 18:21; Deuteronomy 18:10,12; Jeremiah 32:35).

Why does God love the world when he specifically tells us to not love the world (1 John 2:15)? The answer, of course, is that God loves the world because of what he knows will be its state when his plans and purposes have been fully accomplished, when it will have been brought back to perfection and harmony with him. He does not love the world in its sinful, depraved condition and neither should we.

Light is another word John uses more than the other writers. God is light (1 John 1:5) and Jesus is the human embodiment of God. Water is a symbol of the truth and so is light. Jesus was like a light shining in a dark room making visible all the imperfections. And what do we do when that happens in one of our darkened rooms? We have three choices: 1) ignore what we see and accept the imperfections as they are; 2) correct the imperfections now that we have become aware of them; or 3) turn out the light and pretend everything is fine. Because those with the power within the Jewish polity preferred choice three, they plotted to destroy Jesus and effectively “turn out the light.”

John the Baptist's Testimony -- Verses 22-36

“After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judaea; and there he tarried with them, and baptized. And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized. For John was not yet cast into prison. Then there arose a question between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying. And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same

baptizeth, and all men come to him. John answered and said, A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven. Ye yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him. He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease. He that cometh from above is above all: he that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth: he that cometh from heaven is above all. And what he hath seen and heard, that he testifieth; and no man receiveth his testimony. He that hath received his testimony hath set to his seal that God is true. For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him. The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand. He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him."

Baptism (Greek: *baptizo* -- to make whelmed [Strong's definition], immerse) was being practiced not just by John the Baptist. The disciples under Jesus' authority were also doing it. We know that Jesus himself did not personally baptize anyone because John says, "Jesus himself baptized not, but his disciples" (John 4:2). When some of John's disciples came to him to discuss what was happening, it appears they were disturbed at what they saw as competition. But John did not view it that way. John was preaching words he received from heaven, which is why he could with assurance say, "He [Jesus] must increase, but I must decrease." John did not have a competitive spirit which tried to make himself appear best; the same could not be said for some of Jesus' disciples on another occasion (see Mark 9:33,34).

John correctly points out that Jesus came from heaven. He was sent by God and God gave him the words which he spoke. Jesus made this claim himself when he said to Philip, "I am not the source of the words that I say to you, but the Father who is united with me is doing these things himself" (John 14:10, Goodspeed). Others could not accept this and later John recounts how some Jews wanted to stone him because, in their opinion, he was making himself God (John 10:30-33).

The King James translation of verse 34 makes it seem as though God's spirit is measured out to some but it was not so measured out to Jesus. God's holy spirit is his power in action; it makes things happen. And in this case it illuminated without measure, without limitation, the mind of Jesus so that all the wisdom of God could be communicated to - others. John the Baptist knew that his own understanding, marvelous as it was, had its limitations. Yet he rejoiced in the role he was given to point to God's anointed one, to be a "friend of the bridegroom."

May we all as did John the Baptist, praise God for what he through the spirit has done for each of us. May we rejoice that his spirit has touched us, one here and one there, and opened our eyes to see and our ears to hear. Jesus performed many great miracles during his earthly ministry, but just as types are inferior to antitypes, so his miracles are much less than what will happen in the future. If we are faithful unto death, we will have the privilege of performing even greater miracles in the kingdom: "Verily, verily, I say unto

you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father” (John 14:12).

1. The Companion Bible suggests that faulty punctuation of John 7:37,38 hides the meaning of the Greek. This is how they believe the text should be understood: "Jesus cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and let him drink him that believeth on me. [End verse 37 here; begin verse 38.] As the scripture hath said, out of his [the giver--Messiah--not the receiver] belly shall flow rivers of living water [which becomes available for believers to drink.]

Jesus' Last Sermon

The Vine and the Branches

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. -- 1 Corinthians 12:12

A verse by verse study in John 15

Apparently the words of Jesus, found in chapters 15 and 16 of John's gospel, were spoken either en route to the Garden of Gethsemane or in the valley, just before Jesus and his apostles crossed the Kidron and entered the garden proper. The subject of chapter 15 concerns the expectations Jesus had of his followers and his concern for their spiritual well-being.

The Vine Illustration--Verses 1 to 3

I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.

The opening theme may have resulted from a discussion of the fruit of the vine introduced in the Memorial service, the vineyards through which the walk would wend, the great vine erected over the main temple gate or the smaller vine etching over the Huldah gate at the southern entrance to the temple compound.

It is doubtful whether Jesus, being a hunted man whose time had not yet fully come, would have risked walking by the temple itself for he would surely have been spotted. Rather it seems that he would have followed the southern wall of the city, turning at the pinnacle of the temple to descend into the Kidron valley. Such a course would have led him directly past the twin Huldah gates, which led into Solomon's stables directly under the temple complex. The visitor to Jerusalem even today can see a similar embossed vine and branches over the interior lintel of the Huldah gate. These gates are referenced in Edersheim's *Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Days of Christ*, page 218.

In any case, the object of his illustration was the necessity for fruit bearing. The Christian world is divided into two classes: the fruit-bearing and the no fruit branches. The illustration is similar to that of the parable of the sower, where some seed bore thirty-fold, some sixty-fold, and some a hundred fold. In this illustration, however, he demonstrates that there can be progress between these groups. To secure this progress, the husbandman carefully prunes his vine. He also uses string to tie low-lying branches to a higher level, encouraging them to develop more strength. Grapes on a low-lying branch are not only more tempting to the "little foxes" (Cant. 2:15) but are also more subject to rot and mildew.

It is unclear whether, in verse two, he is speaking of the removal of unproductive branches or this method of tying up the falling branches. The Greek word *airo*, translated "take away" in most translations, has "to lift up" as its primary meaning, according to both Strong's Concordance and Thayer's Lexicon and is so used in such passages as "take up thy bed and walk" (Matt. 9:6). Whichever is meant, both are true statements. The Lord will remove those who bear no fruit at all, and he will bear up those who are weak and need to be pointed in a heavenward direction so that they can begin to bear fruit.

His statement in verse three that they were "clean" appears at first glance to be unrelated to his theme of the vine and the branches. It is reminiscent of what he had told this same group earlier that evening after washing their feet, "Ye are clean, but not all" (John 13:10). Here the thought seems to be they all have an equal start. It will be up to their future conduct if they remain clean and thus able to bear much fruit.

The Dual Abiding--Verses 4 to 8

Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.

The secret of fruit-bearing in a natural vine is having an adequate supply of sap. If the connection between the branch and the stem of the vine is not solid, the sap cannot freely flow to the branch. If the sap is not in the branch, the branch cannot bear fruit. Jesus is using this analogy to illustrate the oft-repeated concept of abiding in Christ and having Christ abide in his follower.

If there is debate as to the non-fruit-bearing branches in verse two, there is no debate in this section. These are removed and burned in the fire, much the same as the tares in the parable of the harvest.

Building on the illustration of the sap, he identified this necessary nourishment as his word. It is by him, both by his teachings and his example, that we receive the needed grace for fruit-bearing. The fruit is well defined by Paul in Galatians 5:22, 23: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law."

Such abiding in Christ requires the frequent study of the Scriptures, and especially of the life he lived for "he who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). Fruit-bearing is a credit both to the vine and to the husbandman, therefore the Father is glorified by the Christian bearing his fruits.

The Commandment of Love--Verses 9 to 13

As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

Jesus further extended the thought of his words abiding in them; he informed them that obedience puts them in the circle of his love. This harmony of two souls working together is the producer of true joy -- both his joy and the joy of the Christian.

On an earlier occasion he had been asked to define the greatest of the Mosaic commandments. His words were simple and to the point, "And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:29-31).

In like manner, in our text he condensed the "commandments" of verse nine to the one commandment of verse twelve. That commandment was to exemplify his love for them in their love for each other. This was the same lesson he had demonstrated by the foot washing earlier in the evening. He well knew their petty jealousies and striving for position. He could foresee the problems that lay ahead. But he also knew the antidote, and he expressed that remedy in the strongest possible terms. It was to be a commandment, not a suggestion or request. They must "love one another."

Not merely was it to be a human or fleshly love, but it was to be of the same sacrificial type he had shown for them. They had seen how he was moved with compassion for all in need. Now they would soon see a new dimension of sacrificial love, a love that would even cause one to die for those he loved. The human family did not deserve such a sacrifice. Indeed it is written, "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). This is the very example he left them in this sermon: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

Servants, Friends, Sons --Verses 14 and 15

Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you.

His disciples had a unique relationship with him. They were not strangers, nor casual acquaintances, not even servants. They were his friends. They would show that friendship by doing his will.

There are a number of distinct relationships the Bible uses to describe man's dealings with Christ and with God. Two of those are contrasted in the verse under discussion: servants and friends. The nation of Israel, as a result of their Law Covenant, had pledged to be God's servants. As servants, they would be told what to do but they would not have the relationship of a close confidant, a friend. In another sense, they were children of God: young and immature children; a parent directs young and immature children by commands rather than by reasoning, as with mature offspring. The apostle Paul picks up on this theme in Galatians 4:1-3, "Now I say, That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; But is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world."

His disciples had shown that maturity. He would deal with them as "friends." In Old Testament times, there were a few who had progressed to this relationship as well. Abraham was called "a friend of God" (James 2:23). The Lord spoke to Moses "face to face, as a man speaketh with a friend" (Exod. 33:11). It was of those in this relationship of whom we read "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do."

Yet, close as this relationship of friendship is, there is still a closer relationship, one that even the disciples could not enjoy at that time. But it was one they would have in less than two months -- the relationship of sons of God. After Pentecost they could progress to this next rung on the ladder that leads to God. There they would be begotten to a new life, a spiritual one, and become "new creatures in Christ Jesus."

This same two-step process operates today for Christians. Once they arrive at the point where they are willing to dedicate their lives to the principles of righteousness, they become a friend of God. But it is only when they take the next step of offering their lives unreservedly to God as a sacrifice that they can progress to the point of sonship.

Ordained to Fruit-Bearing--Verses 16 and 17

Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. These things I command you, that ye love one another.

Not only does he choose the potential members of his bride because they can be developed into fruit-bearing branches, but he commissions, or ordains them, for that very purpose.

The present fruitage of the church is only part of their ordination. They bear this fruit now so that they may train others to bear pleasant fruits for the Lord in the age to come. Now they can preach the "word of reconciliation," then they shall do the "work of reconciliation." As Jesus' parable in John 10 puts it, bringing the "other sheep" into his fold is the grand object of all present training and development.

This is a task they can not do in their own might. Therefore Jesus assures them that whatever they ask of the Father in his name, as branches abiding in the vine, they can confidently expect to receive. Having commissioned them to a task, he is faithful and just to provide them all the necessary tools to accomplish it.

Yet they cannot teach what they have not themselves learned, therefore he reiterates the commandment which they are to teach: "love one another."

Animosity of the World--Verses 18 to 21

If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also. But all these things will they do unto you for my name's sake, because they know not him that sent me.

Although Jesus was the exemplification of love, the world around him which he loved did not return that love. Rather he faced constant and increasing animosity. He warned them that they were to expect no better treatment. The reason is obvious, because they were not of the world. They did not share the same pleasures, ambitions, and desires of non-believers. More than this, their non-worldly ways were a rebuke to those who preferred to pursue their own selfish ideas of pleasure. "This is the condemnation," Jesus said, "that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." The disciples' lives would be a living reproof to those around them, inviting hostility and animosity.

Unfortunately many of their persecutors would afflict them thinking that it was the right thing to do. "They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service."

Therefore Jesus counsels that we are to continue to love even the persecutors, inasmuch as they thought they were doing it "for his name's sake, because they knew him not who sent me." It is not for us to blame one who intends to do right but, because of lack of knowledge, does the opposite. Saul of Tarsus was such a sort. We do not feel anger for a blind man because he cannot see, neither should we resent those who are blinded by Satan and become our persecutors.

Hated Without Cause--Verses 22 to 25

If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke [cloak] for their sin. He that hateth me hateth my Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father. But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause.

Jesus continued by showing how the hatred came about. It was because he spoke fearlessly unto them of the principles of righteousness, removing their excuses for not doing right. The Greek word *profasin*, translated "cloke," carries the thought of rationalization or pretext. The clarity of Jesus' teaching made it impossible to justify their bad conduct.

The statement that if he had not come "they had not sin" is to be taken in a relative sense. Compare it with Romans 7:9, "For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died." It is not that they were sinless before he came but that they were not cognizant of its presence, therefore their guilt was mitigated.

The reference to the Old Testament passage of being hated without a cause applies to many verses in the Psalms, (for example Psa. 7:4; 35:19; 69:4; 109:3). The sense of the passage is that they hated him without a justifiable cause.

Two Witnesses--Verses 26 and 27

But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me: And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.

The chapter closes on an upbeat note, the promise of the coming of the Comforter, the holy spirit. This would happen within about seven weeks. This promise is elaborated in the succeeding chapter (John 16) and is introduced here for a limited purpose: "he shall testify of me."

The very presence of the holy spirit to be an indwelling force within the believers was a vindication of Jesus' life. If he had been unfaithful it would not have come. Among other things, the bestowal of the spirit was an affirmation of the success of his mission. As the dove at his baptism showed the Father's approval of that step, so the tongues of fire showed his approval of the carrying out of that sacrifice.

But the holy spirit was only one witness. Many things under the law were to be established by "two or three witnesses" (Matt. 18:16). His disciples were to be the confirming witness. Nothing would show this witness more than the keeping of his commandment to love one another. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35).

That is our burden. We are to be faithful witnesses to the reality of his work and to his character. We can best accomplish the task to which we are ordained by showing that "love to one another." May we each demonstrate the truth expressed in 1 Peter 1:22, "Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently."

The Comforter

"Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you."--John 16:7

A verse by verse study in John 16

The final message of Jesus to his apostles is recorded in the fifteenth and sixteenth chapters of the Gospel of John. Jesus continues to discuss the themes he had begun in the upper room as recorded in the fourteenth chapter. He was forewarning them of his imminent death and, at the same time, giving them the good news that they would not be alone but would be visited with the holy spirit.

Forewarnings -- Verses 1 to 6

These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended. They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me. But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them. And these things I said not unto you at the beginning, because I was with you. But now I go my way to him that sent me; and none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou? But because I have said these things unto you, sorrow hath filled your heart.

Having their hopes placed so solidly on Jesus as the delivering Messiah it was natural that they should be easily offended by his death. How they echoed the sad confusion of the two on their way to Emmaus: "But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: and beside all this, to day is the third day since these things were done" (Luke 24:21).

Death would come to them in two ways -- religious authorities would shun them, putting them "out of the synagogues" and soon the secular hand of the law would enforce the death penalty for the crime of simply being a Christian. Now, being forewarned, they would be in a position to recall his predictions and it would blunt the shocked surprise of the sudden turn of events. As long as he walked at their side there was little need to burden their minds with such tragic thoughts. He would be able to adequately explain each turn in the road. In fact, though, ever since the Mount of Transfiguration, he began preparing them for the eventuality of his death.

Now sadness would prevail -- sadness on his part that they had so little grasped the reality of his arrest that they had not even asked where he was going and growing sadness on their part now that the truthfulness of his prediction began to sink in. It was only a short while earlier, in the upper room, that Thomas had finally put to him the question, "We know not whither thou goest, how can we know the way?" (John 14:5).

The Comforter -- Verse 7

Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.

The coming of this "comforter" has been a constant sub-theme throughout this closing discourse of Jesus. It is identified both as the holy spirit (14:26) and the "spirit of truth" (15:26). The Greek word translated "Comforter" is *parakletos* and is translated "advocate" in 1John 2:1, where it is applied to Jesus.

This dual identification of the title is in harmony with John 14:16 where the holy spirit is predicted as "another Comforter." There are two Greek words translated "another" in the New Testament, *allos* and *heteros*. The word used here is *allos*. The difference between the two words is best summed up by Prof. W. E. Vine in his Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words: "*Allos* expresses a numerical difference and denotes 'another of the same sort'; *heteros* expresses a qualitative difference and denotes 'another of a different sort.'" The holy spirit was promised to be of the same sort as Jesus, to carry on his work amongst the disciples. As Jesus had been their teacher and guide, so now the holy Spirit would "teach them all things" by calling to their memory the lessons they had learned personally from their Master (14:26). In this manner it would "testify" of him, causing them to more effectually "bear witness" of him to others (15:26, 27).

Certainly if we had been there with the apostles we would have felt like saying, "No, Lord, please stay with us yourself. We prefer you to another comforter." How difficult it would have been for us to grasp the thought of another comforter being "expedient" -- for our advantage. Why would not the continuance of his personal presence have been more desirable? What advantage is there of the holy spirit over that of Jesus himself?

The answer is implied in 1 John 2:1, where it is said that Jesus would be our "advocate [the same Greek word *parakletos*] with the Father." As he had been in the presence of the disciples for three and a half years, so he would now be their personal representative in the presence of the Father. But he would not leave them without a comforter, the Father would give them "another comforter who would abide with [them] forever" (14:16). This comforter would have a unique advantage which even Jesus did not then possess -- it could be with them at all times and in all places. This comforter would not be limited to time and space but would be with each individual Christian connecting him, as with a telephone line, to their "advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."

The Work of the Comforter -- Verses 8 to 15

And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged. I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew

you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you.

In these few verses we have spelled out the contrasting work of the holy spirit to the unbeliever and to the believer. The word translated "reprove" in the King James version is variously translated "convict" and "convince" by other translators and carries with it the thought of uncovering, or exposing, a true meaning.

The three concepts that the spirit would expose among unbelievers were sin, righteousness, and judgment. Sin would be identified as a failure to believe in the work and mission of Jesus. The righteousness of the Messiah would be revealed by his resurrection, rewarding his faithfulness with the exaltation to his Father's own nature, the divine nature. And the finality of judgment would be shown by the ultimate failure of his great adversary, Satan, to thwart God's plan, thus assuring his own negative judgment.

In contrast, the spirit of truth would guide the believer into still deeper perceptions of God's will and plan by directing the believer's mind to the word of God, enlightening him as to the true and spiritual meanings of the scriptures. As Jesus said (v. 12), he had "yet many things to say" to them which they could not bear at that time. These were not unuttered truths, but deeper meanings to what he had already told them. Now the spirit would recall these to their memories, showing their true import.

The method of how this teaching function of the holy spirit would work is spelled out for us in 1Corinthians 2:13-16: "Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ."

Sorrow and Joy -- Verses 16 to 22

A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father. Then said some of his disciples among themselves, What is this that he saith unto us, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me: and, Because I go to the Father? They said therefore, What is this that he saith, A little while? we cannot tell what he saith. Now Jesus knew that they were desirous to ask him, and said unto them, Do ye inquire among yourselves of that I said, A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me? Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man

is born into the world. And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.

Despite Jesus' persistent talk of his imminent death the apostles still could not understand. What did he mean, "A little while?" Briefly he explains the turmoil of emotion that would so shortly be theirs. He knew his death would hit them hard, that they would sorrow greatly even as their enemies rejoiced at having put down their nemesis from Galilee. Likening the experience to that of a woman delivering a child, he assured them that their sorrow would be shortlived. True to his word, he was born again to a spirit nature just three days later and when he showed himself to them some eleven times in his post-resurrection appearances they were so thoroughly convinced of the fact that their new joy was permanent. There was no more uncertainty. They knew that their Redeemer lived.

Joyful as they were at his being raised from the tomb, it is nothing to be compared with the joy that they and all future followers of the Master would experience when he would see them again at his second advent. Then they would realize the import of the words with which he opened his last discourse while still in the upper room: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also (14:1-3).

Prayer -- Verses 23 to 27

And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full. These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father. At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.

The holy spirit would also become the Christian's aid in prayer. While Jesus was with his disciples they came to him frequently with their questions. He answered them, often using parables with hidden meanings because the deeper truths behind them they could not bear at the time (v.12). Now, through the holy spirit and in the name of Jesus, they could make their needs known directly to God. Once again the analogy of the telephone fits well. The holy Spirit was to be their direct connection to the heavenly Father; and the name of Jesus, more than a mere password, would be their "advocate with the Father" to plead their case for them. They had a friend in high places, one who was willing to cover their imperfections with the robe of his righteousness.

Although this privilege of prayer was given as carte blanche, "whatsoever ye ask the Father in my name, he will give it you," there were implied conditions. This is spelled out

in James 4:3: "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts."

Not only does he assure the Christian of prayer privileges, but also of the personal love of the Father "because ye have loved me, and believe that I came from the Father."

True Belief -- Verses 28 to 32

I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father. His disciples said unto him, Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb. Now are we sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee: by this we believe that thou camest forth from God. Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe? Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.

"I leave the world, and go to the Father." Finally his words seem to penetrate the minds of his disciples. They were sure they comprehended. In fact they spoke of this as the conclusive proof that he was the Messiah: "by this we believe that thou camest forth from God."

But what is true belief? This was the challenge Jesus threw at them. "Do ye now believe?" He predicts that when the hour of his departure would come they would desert him. How reminiscent of this is his conversation with impetuous Peter, possibly at this very juncture in his discourse, "Then saith Jesus unto them, 'All ye shall be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered abroad. But after I am risen again, I will go before you into Galilee.' Peter answered and said unto him, 'Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended.' Jesus said unto him, 'Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.' Peter said unto him, 'Though I should die with thee, yet will I not deny thee.' Likewise also said all the disciples" (Matt. 26:31-35).

There are two kinds of belief -- acceptance of a reality, and motivational belief that acts upon the reality. The first kind even the devils possess, "The devils also believe and tremble" (James 2:19). Jesus was looking for the second kind, that belief which produces faithfulness in the one by whom they believed. This they lacked at that time. This they would gain in their future experiences under the guidance of the holy spirit.

Be of Good Cheer -- Verse 33

These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

Predicting their last minute desertion was not an act of scolding by their Master. He knew the pressures that would be upon them. Not only did he know of their desertion, but he

also knew of their ultimate faithfulness. Therefore he follows the prediction of their temporary unfaithfulness with the motivation for disclosing that fact to them, "that ye might have peace."

This peace would not be immediate. They would sorrowfully rue their failures. But they would be constantly reminded by the holy Spirit of their Master's faithfulness and how he overcame the world, proving it to the very end by dying for the sins of all mankind. As he had "overcome the world" so they would be similarly motivated to overcome in the many and varied tribulations that would beset them. Thus they might have peace.

Be of good cheer! As the eleven who trekked with him the lonely road to Gethsemane were to find peace in eventual overcoming, so shall each of us if we likewise resolve to eventually overcome. "Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee the crown of life" (Rev. 2:10).

John 17

A Prayer for Oneness

I and my Father are one. -- John 10:30

A verse by verse study in John 17

Jesus was a man of prayer. Many times in the gospel records we read of him going apart into a mountain or desert place to spend hours in communion with his heavenly Father. He taught his disciples how to pray. However there are not many accounts of the words of his prayers within the earshot of the disciples. The prayer of John 17 is a beautiful exception to this rule. This chapter preserves a model example of a prayer that rises out of concern for others.

Prayer for Himself -- Verses 1–5

These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.

Many artists picture Jesus as kneeling in prayer. But both here and in the simple prayer before the tomb of Lazarus (John 11:41), we see Jesus standing and raising his eyes to heaven. Kneeling is appropriate for a Christian because it demonstrates humility and the attitude of a supplicant. Lifting up his eyes was equally appropriate for Jesus because he was initiating a conversation with his Father. He was having a personal dialog with the one with whom he had spent countless eons in the special relationship of father and son.

In this family prayer with the eleven Jesus again specifies that the "hour is come." He uses this expression some seven times in the gospels, always relating to his final hour as a human -- to his death on Calvary's cross.

He asks now, because he could not so ask in death, for his glorification. But it is not a selfish request; his object was to render greater glory to his father. In this simple and straightforward statement lies the highest motive for all Christian service -- that it may redound to the greatest glory of the Creator of the universe.

Although he had not yet died as the atoning sacrifice for all mankind, his mind is set. He knows he will carry through with his sacrifice. Therefore he knows that he will be given power over all flesh and he also knows how he will use that power -- to give eternal life to the ransomed race. More than this, Jesus defines that eternal life by giving its purpose and the only way of maintaining it when he states, "This is life eternal, that they might

know thee the only true God and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." It will take eternity to fully know both the Father and the Son.

In this prayer we have the only reference by the Master to the combined phrase, "Jesus Christ." This adds yet another dimension to his life on earth. It is one thing to know Jesus as the man who came to earth to provide a ransom for Adam and his posterity, it is yet another matter to know him as "Christ," the anointed, the Messiah. Paul speaks of Christ having a body that is composed of "not one member, but many" (1 Corinthians 12:12-14). Therefore a full recognition implies a recognition of his body members, the Church, also.

The prayer continues by referring to the fact that his accomplished work (of which he would again say "It is finished" as his final words on the cross -- John 19:30) was the method by which he glorified his father while on earth. It is on this basis that he requests a return to his former glory. It should be noted that this request is not to a former nature, but to a former glory. This prior glory was to be personally in his father's presence in the heavenly realm. His exaltation was to an even higher nature than he had in his pre-existence (Philippians 2:8-11).

Prayer for His Disciples -- Verses 6-11

I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word. Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me. I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them. And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are.

Having finished his supplication for his Father's glory and for the fact and purpose of his own glorification, Jesus' prayer now turns to his followers. He begins with five assertions about his disciples:

1. That God was the one who had given Jesus the care of his disciples.
2. That he had been faithful in directing them to God as the Father.
3. That he had indeed instructed them with God-given words.
4. That his followers had understood all these instructions.
5. That they had been faithful in following them up to that time.

Jesus then limits this section of his prayer to his followers, excluding the rest of the world. This does not mean that he was disinterested in the balance of the human race, but

it does mean that there is a recognizable distinction between those who followed him and those who did not. Later he will include the remainder of mankind, but the next requests concern his disciples alone.

The Master proceeds to establish that the close family relationship that exists not only between himself and God, also exists with his followers. He acknowledges that all those whose care God had entrusted to him belonged to the Creator and were only his as a result of his own familial relationship with God -- they were his as an "heir of God" (Romans 8:17).

The statement "I am glorified in them" further cements this union. Jesus, through his life and in his death, glorified the name of his Father (John 12:28). As his works had glorified God, so he prays that his disciples' work would be a glory to their Master. The words of Pastor Charles Taze Russell are noteworthy in this connection:

"It is blessed to mark this oneness between Christ Jesus and the members of his body. Our Lord does not selfishly grasp all the glory and seek to retain it for himself. On the contrary, with loving solicitude he marks the progress of his body-members as they develop in character-likeness to himself, and says, 'They are mine; and I am glorified in them' (John 17:10); and he would have them all bound up together with himself in the Father's Love. He would also have them with himself, beholding and sharing the glory which the Father has conferred upon him as a reward for his loyalty and obedience throughout all the crucial testings which came upon him." -- Reprints p. 5213.

His concern focuses on the fact that, although he had kept all (except Judas Iscariot) of those whom God had given him while he was with them, he pleads that God will continue to keep them after his departure from human life.

The translation of verse eleven is ambiguous, but much weight must be given to the American Standard Version (and many others) which renders the latter part of the text this way: "Holy Father, keep them in thy name which thou hast given me, that they may be one, even as we (are)." Here the keeping power is through the special name which the Father had given Jesus -- Jehovah-tsidkenu, the righteousness of Jehovah (Jeremiah 23:5,6).

A parallel illustration is found in Revelation 7 where 144,000 are seen as having a protective mark or "seal" in their foreheads. This mark is identified in Revelation 14:1 as being "his [Jesus'] name and the name of his Father" (ASV, following the most ancient manuscripts). It is by or through the obtaining and maintaining of this divine righteousness that the saints are kept. It is only through this that Jesus' prayer will be answered, "that they may be one, even as we are one." Because they have the same character of righteousness, Jesus and his father can be said to "be one." Only through the attainment of the same character can the followers enjoy that same type of oneness.

This development of righteousness is further implied in the title of address which Jesus uses of Jehovah in this verse. This is the only instance where Jesus calls upon Jehovah as

"Holy Father" instead of his usual "my father," implying that it is the particular quality of holiness in the Father's character that is the basis of claim for a oneness in such holiness among his disciples.

Sanctifying Power -- Verses 12–16

While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled. And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.

Once again Jesus avers his faithfulness in keeping the twelve he had uniquely been given as apostles. Even the one who had been lost, Judas Iscariot, was lost so "that the scripture might be fulfilled." It appears that the eleven, at least, felt that the Old Testament references were to Psalm 41:9 and Psalm 109:6-8 which read, "Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me. . . . Set thou a wicked man over him: and let Satan stand at his right hand. When he shall be judged, let him be condemned: and let his prayer become sin. Let his days be few; and let another take his office." (See also Acts 1:15-20.)

Some feel that the word "perdition" indicates that Judas will not have a resurrection. In fact, the Greek word *apoleia*, translated "perdition," is neutral in that debate. The word appears 19 times in the New Testament and is first used in Matthew 7:13 where it is translated "destruction": "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat." In this text it certainly indicates a state from which recovery is possible.

The words he had spoken to his disciples "while in the world" may have reference to the entire body of his teachings for three and a half years. However, it was especially applicable to the words he had just spoken (John 14 through 16). In John 15:11 he uses a nearly identical expression: "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full."

Jesus strongly felt the anxiety of his disciples. In fact, he was himself "troubled in spirit" (John 12:27). Now he was praying that that anxiety would be replaced with fullness of joy which would come from the "full assurance" that comes alone from the understanding which, through faith, produces hope (Colossians 2:2; Hebrews 10:22; 6:11).

Next he addresses the relationship of his disciples to the world. Not only are they separate from the balance of the human race, they will be despised for the very reason of their separateness and adherence to his words. He had warned his followers of this when he said earlier that evening, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you" (John 15:18). It should be only for the cause of the Lord's word that his adherents

be looked down upon. It should be just as true of them as it was of Daniel: "We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God" (Daniel 6:5).

Knowing that his followers could not be part of the world since they were following him who was not of the world, and knowing that this would bring upon them opposition, Jesus prays in almost the same words as he taught his disciples to pray, "deliver us from evil" (Matthew 6:13).

Sanctification and Unity -- Verses 17–24

Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.

This holiness which would be the mark of spiritual oneness to the church was to be achieved through a process of sanctification. Not only would this bring their characters to maturity, it would also separate them for the future service of God. The process of this work was to be accomplished by the power of truth while they would be accomplishing the mission for which they were sent -- the Master specifically stating that he "sent them into the world."

It was for their sakes that Jesus sanctified himself, so that through his example and instruction they would become set aside for the same future work of uplifting mankind from the pit of sin and death to the glories of everlasting life. Once again he petitions the Father to help them develop this oneness. It was the vision of the same glory and work which Jesus had been given as the future rehabilitator of humanity that would inspire them to the perfecting of holiness.

In verse 20 the prayer broadens from his immediate disciples to those who would believe on him through their word. While this primarily applies to the bride class to be selected in the next two millennia, it has a secondary application to all who will eventually serve him among the countless millions who will be raised from the grave.

Not only their words, but their conduct also, would be a witness to all who knew them, that the world would know that Jehovah had sent his son not only to redeem the race from the grave, but to lift them up to the standing of perfection before God.

Jesus prayed that this work which he shared in common with his followers on earth, would continue to be their mutual activity in the heavenly realms to which he would soon be going. Then they would share the ultimate unity with their Lord and Master -- the same unity which Jesus shared with God. It was this oneness that the apostle Paul described as the object of Jesus' ascension in Ephesians 4:12,13, "For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

Thus, when the present work of perfecting the saints fades into their future work of instructing mankind in the rules of God and the principles of righteousness, "the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me."

His final statement in this section, "for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world," leaves the strong implication that Jesus as the Logos had an essential part in the laying out of God's plan for mankind. It was not only love for the church and for the entire race, but it was also love for his only-begotten son that sent Jesus into the world to suffer for man's transgressions and to die for his sins.

The Close of the Prayer -- Verses 25–26

O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.

The Master concludes by summarizing the whole of his heart-felt feelings. The world, depraved by sin, knew not the true requirements and goodness of Jehovah. But Jesus did know God as he is and, through his ministry, his followers would also have such knowledge. He had not only proclaimed his name to them while on earth, he avers that he will again declare it. This includes not only the gospel message of this age, but the yet future declaration of God's name that will come in the kingdom when he would be united with his followers in a oneness that will truly be indivisible.

We rejoice that Jehovah overruled that the words of this prayer, the only detailed prayer of the Master thus preserved, have been written for our edification. In it we have a wonderful glimpse into the planned oneness of the human race with the Creator when truly "God may be all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28). It also provides an example of intercessory prayer and love of Jesus for his disciples.

A Message of Restoration

Israel's Grand Jubilee

Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel. -- Acts 1:6

A verse by verse study in Acts 3

This year is being celebrated in Israel as the jubilee, or fiftieth anniversary of statehood. Much progress -- socially, politically, militarily, and economically -- has been made by this fledgling nation in the past half century. This first jubilee, however, is but a prelude to far greater days ahead. The Bible has much to say about the resurgence of this ancient people and the effect of their regathering, not only for them as a people but for all the nations of the world.

The second apostolic sermon, recorded in the third chapter of Acts, has much to say about their restoration as a people and how it will affect the entire human race.

The Setting -- Verses 1 to 3

Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour. And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms.

The persecution and death of Jesus by the Jewish religious hierarchy did not separate the followers of the Galilean from their observance of their national religious rites. In fact, throughout the period covered in the book of Acts, we see the growing group of Christians regularly attending synagogue services and temple rituals.

Three times a day was set aside for prayer -- morning, noon, and evening (Psa. 55:17; Dan. 6:10). The morning and evening prayers (at 9 a.m. and 3 p.m.) coincided with the morning and evening sacrifices while the noontime prayer was probably associated with the blessing of the mid-day meal (Acts 27:35). Since the main thrust of Peter's lesson was to call attention to the death of Jesus on the cross, it may be more than coincidental that this incident happened during the 3 p.m. prayer, for that was the hour of the death of the Messiah on the cross (Luke 23:44-46).

Not only was the time significant, so was the location. The holy spirit was given at Pentecost, not only for symbolic reasons but for a practical one as well. Pentecost, or the Feast of Weeks, drew the Jewish populace from throughout the known world. Some sixteen nations are specifically listed as being present (Acts 2:9-11). While we do not know for sure how long after Pentecost the events of chapter three took place, it is reasonable to assume that they were during the week of feasting associated with Pentecost. Large numbers of pilgrims would be present in Jerusalem.

According to the noted historian, Alfred Edersheim, the temple compound was divided into four sections: the court of the Gentiles surrounding the temple building, the court of the women occupied a high-walled area just west of the temple proper, which in turn was divided into the court of the Israelites and the court of the priests. The court of the women was so named, not because it was exclusively for women but because it was the closest they could approach the sanctuary. It was a place of general assembly for the worshippers and overlooked by four balconies at the four corners for the women. Alms boxes were scattered liberally throughout this enclosure.

The gate called "Beautiful," some forty feet tall and covered with Corinthian brass, was the eastern and main entrance into this court. As such, most temple worshipers would pass through this gate. It was, therefore, a logical place for the friends of the lame man to leave him in his quest for alms.

The Miracle -- Verses 4 to 8

And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them. Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.

While the lame man approached the two disciples in a general way, as part of the passing crowd Peter and John singled him out from the other beggars who would certainly have been there. There is no indication in this case of the lame man exhibiting unusual faith. Rather he was singled out to provide the basis for a lesson to the gathering crowd.

Instead of the anticipated alms, the disciples had a better gift -- health. Yet it was not so much the healing but the name by whose authority it was performed that was the purpose of the miracle. By appending "of Nazareth," Peter was positively identifying the authority as the one despised by the scribes and Pharisees. By using the term "Christ," they were further identifying Jesus as the promised anointed one, the Messiah.

As he felt strength surging in those legs which had been useless for over forty years (Acts 4:22), he did not gingerly rise to test them out but leaped exultantly. Together the three passed through the Nicanor gate into the temple proper where the lame man obediently walked, then leaped for the joy of being healed, and praised not Peter and John for performing the miracle but God, whom he recognized as the ultimate source.

The Audience -- Verses 9 to 11

And all the people saw him walking and praising God: And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him. And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering.

Apparently the man was well known for he was recognized immediately by the other worshipers. Exiting the temple proper and the court of the women, the scene of the story changes to Solomon's porch. This was so named because it was the only remaining part of the original temple of Solomon (The Temple, Alfred Edersheim, p. 36). This porch extended along the inside of the entire eastern wall of the temple complex and provided an ideal pulpit for the ensuing sermon to over 5000 worshippers (Acts 4:4). The size of the crowd also indicates that this miracle took place during the Pentecost week.

The Accusation -- Verses 12 to 17

And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses. And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all. And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers.

Peter begins his sermon by immediately calling attention to the one whose authority he invoked in performing the miracle. His words take on an accusatory tone as he contrasts the glorification of Jesus by Jehovah with the crucifixion by the Romans at the instigation of the Jewish religious hierarchy. Peter does not content himself to denounce the leaders of the Jews, but places the blame on the populace for their clamor, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" and their demand for the release of Barabbas, a murderer, instead of Jesus, the Just and Holy One. Although Peter partially excuses their act, attributing it to ignorance, the force of his words is nevertheless strong.

Nor were such healings as this through the mere incantation of the name of Jesus, but they must be mingled with true faith in the ability of that name to accomplish what was desired. The name of which Peter speaks is not merely the name Jesus, but Jesus Christ. The addition of the word Christ showed a recognition of Jesus as the Messiah. It is this recognition that was essential for it showed the value of his sufferings and death to release humanity from the original Adamic curse which included the dying process as well as death itself: "Dying, thou shalt die" (Gen. 2:17, literal Hebrew).

The Solution -- Verses 18 to 21

But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled. Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord; And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.

Here Peter turns from the negative to the positive. The sufferings which they caused, he assures them, did not catch God by surprise. They had all been predicted by the prophets. Nevertheless, the guilt was theirs.

He points a way out of their guilt -- through repentance and conversion. This dual action of sorrow for what they had done and a change of thinking and behavior would produce a natural reaction -- their sins would be blotted out.

The Greek word here translated "blotted out" only occurs in one other place in the New Testament in relation to the removal of sin. That is in Colossians 2:14, "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross." We suggest that it is used by Peter to refer to the removal of the sins of Israel under the law covenant.

In such reliable translations as the New American Standard Version, the Revised Version, and the American Standard version the nineteenth verse contains two conditional clauses. We quote from the New American Standard, "Repent therefore and return, that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord." These translations not only making the blotting out of sins dependent upon repentance and conversion, they also make the "times of refreshing" dependent upon the blotting out of sins.

Further, the expression, "from the presence of the Lord," would be better translated "from the turned face of Jehovah." This phrase is not an allusion to the second presence of Christ but to a special favor from God himself.

Putting the above evidence together, the thought of this verse appears to be that if any in Peter's audience would repent and be converted the guilt against them under the law covenant would be removed. This removal of guilt would permit a special "refreshing" from the returned face of Jehovah.

A literal translation of the word "refreshing" implies what that blessing might be. The word literally means "a new breath." For the repentant listener, and there were 5000 of them that day, their repentance would result in the privilege of a new breath of life under the heavenly calling.

However there was still more in store. Peter tells of still another blessing -- one that is introduced without a dependent clause. "And [in addition to the opportunity for a new breath] he [Jehovah] will send "the Christ, appointed for you (NAS)." This promise was unconditional. God promised to do this regardless of repentance on their part. This thus distinguishes the "times of restitution" from the "times of refreshing," which were dependent upon repentance.

This blessing of restitution, however, was not to be experienced immediately but when he, who had ascended into the heavens, was no longer retained by those heavens. The implication of the context is that this "restitution" was to be particularly to natural Israel - - the people for whom the Messiah was appointed.

The word *apokastasis*, translated "restitution," contains the thought of a complete restoration to a former condition. It was used in ancient medical writings of a complete recovery.

This complete restoration, however, is not to be limited to Israel. It is of "all things, which God hath spoken of by all his holy prophets since the world began." Like so many of God's blessings, it is "to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile" (Rom. 2:9, 10).

What are some of these things to be restored? They include the return of God's favor to his covenant people, the regathering of them to their promised land, and the setting up of the spiritual theocracy which will eventually work through them to bless all the families of the earth.

Future blessings yet to come to this people will be the remarkable deliverance from their enemies (Zech. 14, Ezek. 38, 39) and the restoration of "their judges as at the first" (Isa. 1:26). In due time this restitution will include the restoration of all the dead who have ever lived and the "highway of holiness" by which these restored billions may learn the laws of God and live forever. From Israel, these blessings will flow forth to all mankind (Isa. 2:2, 3).

It is this work of restitution that was pictured by Israel's law of Jubilee (Lev. 25). Under that law, every man was to return to his possessions with equal opportunity to make a living. This will be the grander jubilee for not only the nation of Israel, now celebrating their 50th year of statehood, but a jubilee of restitution for all of Adam's race -- both those dead and those living.

The Prophets -- Verses 22 to 24

For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people. Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days.

Although Peter assured his Jewish audience that all of God's prophets since the world began spoke of this time, he contents himself with furnishing but one example. He quotes Deuteronomy 18:15, where Moses predicted the rising up of a spiritual leader like unto, but greater than, himself. This leader all agree is Jesus of Nazareth and some, like the writer, feel it includes his church as his body. The return of Jesus, then, is the first evidence of restoration -- the restoring of God's spiritual government upon this earth. Closely following that return is the raising of those who are his bride (1 Thess. 4:15, 16).

Children of the Prophets -- Verses 25 and 26

Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed. Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.

The natural seed of Abraham was given many titles. One among them is "children of the prophets." Consider Paul's words in Romans 3:1, 2: "What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God."

Israel is the inheritor of the promises of these prophets. They are also the recipients of a new covenant, similar and yet diverse from that made with Moses at Sinai. "Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers . . . But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.

And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (Jer. 31:31-34).

This "new" covenant will be, in fact, the means by which God will carry out the blessings of the original covenant made with Abraham. That covenant promise is the one referred to in Genesis 22:17, 18: "That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice."

The first step in the fulfillment of that covenant promise, Peter informed them, was the raising up of Jesus as their Messiah to bless them by turning them from their iniquities.

This remarkable sermon was perhaps the most effective of all the spoken messages recorded in the Bible. No less than 5000 believed. They did repent and were converted.

They did receive the new breath of the holy spirit. And what of those who heard but did not heed Peter's words? To them God will fulfill the balance of that promise -- by the return of his son, their Messiah, will come that time promised by all God's holy prophets -- "the times of restitution."

Already we see the beginning of that restoring work with the re-establishment of the nation of Israel. It is with this long-range view of the glories to be brought to all mankind that we most heartily join in wishing God's chosen people a blessed jubilee and urge them to anticipate with us that still grander jubilee which will completely fulfill the Abrahamic promise to bless all the families of the earth.

The Sanctified Life

*But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. -- 2 Thessalonians 2:13**

A verse by verse study in Romans 12

In chapter six of his letter to the church in Rome, Paul describes the purpose and process of dedicating one's life to the Lord Jesus Christ, and the need to symbolize that consecration by total water immersion. In chapter twelve, Paul describes the results in the lives of true believers who fully open their lives to the transforming and sanctifying power of the holy spirit. Let us look carefully at this twelfth chapter of Romans.

Responding to God -- Verse 1

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer yourselves as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God -- this is your spiritual worship.

The word therefore is clearly intended to connect what Paul had previously said with what he is about to say. God having torn down the partition between Jew and Gentile and demonstrated his immense love and mercy by having "bound all men over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all" (Romans 11:32), what should be our logical response? "In view of God's mercy," and as a fitting response, Paul urges us to offer, or yield ourselves (Romans 6:13,19), not as dead sacrifices, but as "living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God." The contrast is clear. Whereas Israel under the Law presented dead sacrifices to God in order to obtain mercy, spiritual Israelites, having freely received mercy and grace, should respond to the immensity of God's divine love by presenting themselves (a total yielding of body, mind, and spirit) to God as living sacrifices. Finally, Paul equates the yielding of ourselves to God as living sacrifices as our "spiritual worship." The Greek work *latreia*, translated "worship" in the NIV, clearly implies more. When we yield ourselves to God as living sacrifices, we do so not only because we love and adore him (worship), but because we also desire to be used by him (service). Hence, presenting ourselves as living monuments of redeemed mercy and as divine property in the highest sense is worship and, the logical sequel, is our priestly service (Hebrews 13:15,16).

Transformation -- Verse 2

Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is -- his good, pleasing, and perfect will.

In dedicating our lives to God, we no longer belong to ourselves: "You were bought at a price; therefore honor God with your body" (1Corinthians 6:19,20). We are in the world, not to be conformed to the pattern of this world, but as a witness to God's divine mercy

and grace. Once we have taken our consecration vows, have died to self, and have been resurrected to a new life in Christ -- symbolized by our baptism into Christ -- we must allow God's workmanship to begin in our lives so he can transform us into the image and glory of his blessed son (Ephesians 2:8-10; Romans 8:29). Clearly, God's transforming work through the power of the holy spirit is a work of metamorphosis -- a change from the inside out. It begins with the renewing of our minds, by God revealing to us through his word and instilling in us new perspectives, priorities, motives, and desires. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17, NKJV). The "renewed mind" is manifested externally in altered attitudes, behavior, and deeds. As the process of transformation proceeds, the "new creation" in Christ finds the lure of the world, the flesh, and the devil more and more abhorrent, and the will of God more and more appealing. To such a sanctified mind, God not only reveals his "good, pleasing, and perfect will," he also provides the power to do his will (see Ephesians 1:17-21). Paul reminds the saints in Philippi as well as us that "it is God who is at work in you to put into you the will to desire, and the power to achieve what his purpose has pleased for you" (Philippians 2:13, Barclay). This, truly, is the amazing grace of God.

The Mind of Christ -- Verse 3

For by the grace given to me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.

A part of God's transforming work "by the renewing of our minds" is to convert the human self-centered ego -- a part of our human inheritance -- into a Christ-centered desire and will. This is what Paul describes as the "mind of Christ" (Philippians 2:5-8, KJV). Having the mind of Christ is having a servant-spirit which, in deep humility, seeks only the will of God and never self-will (John 6:38). Clearly one aspect of the will of God is identical for every member of the body of Christ which is holiness of life and completeness of dedication (1 Thessalonians 4:3; Hebrews 12:14,15). Conversely, God's will for each member of the body of Christ with respect to service within the household of faith will be quite diverse. Our position within the body of Christ must be determined by God and not by ourselves (1 Corinthians 12:18).

Unity with Diversity -- Verses 4-8

Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If one's gift is prophesying, let it be used in proportion to his faith; if it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully.

Paul is addressing every member of every ecclesia -- the body of Christ. (In verse 3 he writes, "I say to every one of you.") The analogy of the structure and function of the human body to the structure and function of the body of Christ (see also 1 Corinthians 12:12-27) immediately sets forth three fundamental truths: 1) the unity of the body; 2) the diversity of the parts that make up the whole; and 3) the mutuality of interdependence of the parts. (Verse 5 states "each member belongs to all the others.") For the body to be healthy and function harmoniously, it is imperative that every part fully carry out its responsibilities. Every member of the body of Christ has at least one special ability imparted by the grace of God. Each of these gifts must be used for the benefit of the body and for the ultimate praise and glory of our loving heavenly Father. Paul proceeds to list seven gifts (*charismata* -- gracious gifts) that might typically be found among members of an ecclesia. The list is neither meant to be exhaustive nor exclusive. It includes:

1. Prophesying: communicating revealed truth that will both convict and build up the hearers; truth that will edify and comfort (1 Corinthians 14:3).

2. Serving (*diakonian*): providing any type of service that meets the physical, emotional, or spiritual needs of others (Galatians 5:13; 6:1,2).

3. Teaching (*didaskalian*): validating, clarifying, and conveying Bible doctrine.

4. Encouraging (*paraklesis*): exhorting others to stimulate faith and promote spiritual growth (Hebrews 3:12,13).

5. Contributing: carrying out deeds of benevolence -- meeting physical and material needs of others (Matthew 25:34-40; James 2:14-17).

6. Leadership (*proistamenos*): "one who stands before others," i.e., organizing and motivating others to serve, either by example or by delegating responsibility (1 Thessalonians 5:11-13).

7. Showing mercy: ministering cheerfully to the physically or spiritually sick and needy; able not only to show loving sympathy, but to show empathy when necessary (Matthew 5:7).

As we review these seven gifts, we see that as we grow in spirit, we are more fully enabled by the holy spirit to serve in several of these areas. But Paul is also saying that each of us, by the grace of God, excels in one or more of these gifts. It is only as we encourage each other to use fully our God-given abilities for the edification of the body that the church will be in its most healthy state, spiritually speaking, and more fully able to glorify God who deserves and expects our very best.

Attitude Toward Believers -- Verses 9–16

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Don't be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Don't be conceited.

In verses 9 to 16, the apostle Paul describes what our attitude and conduct must be toward members of the body of Christ. Clearly, this pattern of behavior is not typical of human behavior, but of those who are indeed a part of God's new creation -- those who have truly yielded their lives to God as living sacrifices and are, therefore, expecting the transforming and sanctifying power of the holy spirit to work within them. As God's children we will:

Verses 9 and 10: Express sincere, brotherly unhypocritical agape love, a love that is always willing to give and expects nothing in return. Failure to love our brethren casts doubt on our love for God (1 John 4:19-21).

Hate what is evil and cling to what is good (Psalm 97:10).

Be devoted to one another in love (Hebrews 13:1; 1 Peter 1:22).

Honor others above self (Philippians 2:3).

Verses 11 and 12: Keep rekindling our spiritual zeal by faithfully serving the Lord. One of the greatest dangers facing the church today is the "Laodicean spirit," an attitude of apathy and complacency, rather than a fervent zeal in running for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (Revelation 3:14-19; Colossians 3:1-4).

Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Our Lord Jesus instills confidence in those who serve him; though he remains invisible, he is wonderfully real to the eye of faith. This results in the joyful hope of seeing him face to face and sharing in his glory (1 Peter 1:6-9; Romans 15:13). This hope leads to patience in trials, knowing the temporary nature of this life in contrast to the hope of eternity (Romans 5:3-5). We will continue to receive the strength and grace we need to meet each experience in life as we daily feast on the word of God and remain in constant communion with him through prayer.

Verse 13: Share with saints who are in need. Even when undergoing difficult experiences, we should never allow ourselves to become so preoccupied that we become insensitive to the needs of others (Philippians 4:15-19; Hebrews 6:10; 13:16; 1 John 3:16-18).

Practice or pursue hospitality. Paul uses the Greek word *dioko*, which means to pursue or "chase after" opportunities for hospitality. It is when we share our homes with God's people that we truly come to know one another with an intimacy that cannot be achieved in any other way. Indeed, when we entertain brethren, we entertain our Lord Jesus Christ and our heavenly Father (Matthew 10:11,40; see also Hebrews 13:1,2 and 1 Peter 4:9).

Verses 14-16: Bless those who persecute us, bless and curse not. Again, from the human perspective, this is virtually impossible. But from God's perspective and by his grace, it not only is possible, it is something we must do (Philippians 4:13; see Matthew 5:43-48).

Rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn. We are to share one another's joys and sorrows (1 Corinthians 12:25-27).

Live in harmony with one another; do not be proud or conceited; be willing to associate with the lowly. Because of the diversity within the body of Christ, high self-esteem due to the lack of humility will lead to pride which results in discord rather than unity and harmony within the body. This clearly displeases our heavenly Father who "resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5-9). Indeed, all of us must be clothed with the humility of our Lord and Master (Philippians 2:5-11) that God might exalt us in his due time. (See 1 Corinthians 13:4,5 and Philippians 2:1-4.)

Attitude Toward Unbelievers -- Verses 17-21

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the sight of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written, "It is mine to avenge, I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

The presupposition in this closing passage is the consecrated, sanctified life. Whereas verses 9 to 16 concern the attitudes and conduct of true believers within the body of Christ, verses 17 to 21 are concerned with our attitudes and conduct toward unbelievers.

Verse 17: Do not repay evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the sight of everybody. The inclination of the flesh is not only to repay evil for evil but to try to go one better against the perpetrator. Our conduct among unbelievers, whether at work, in school, or in our interaction with our neighbors, must never betray the high standards of God's holy word. Peter says, "Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing" (1 Peter 3:9). How do we "inherit a blessing" when we "do what is right" after having evil and insults hurled at us? Clearly, such occasions hold the prospect for witnessing to the love, mercy, and grace of God. It is an opportunity to ask the profoundly important question that we should be asking in all of life's experiences: What would Jesus do? God "calls us" to pattern our lives, our attitudes and conduct, to the example set by his beloved son. This is clearly set out for us in 1 Peter 2:21-25: "To this you were called, because Christ suffered

for you, leaving you an example, that ye should follow in his steps. He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When they hurled insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that he might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."

Verse 18: The admonition to "live at peace with everybody" is accompanied by two conditions: 1) "as far as possible," and 2) "as much as it depends on you." The lives of some individuals are so filled with conflict and disharmony that it is impossible for them to be at peace. We need to be certain that we are not contributing in any way to this condition. If the peace of Christ and of God is in us (John 14:27; Philippians 4:5,6), we will always seek to be peacemakers wherever we are (Matthew 5:9). We are further admonished by Paul to "pursue peace with all people and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled" (Hebrews 12:14,15, NKJV).

Verse 19: Clearly, some will take advantage of a Christian's peace-loving attitude. Even so, we are never to retaliate because vengeance belongs to God. He will take care of it.

Verses 20 and 21: Rather than take revenge, we are to respond as Christ would. If our enemy is hungry, we must feed him; if thirsty, we must give him drink. In so doing, the apostle says, we will "heap burning coals on his head." The Greek word for "heap" has the implication of "to weigh down," that is, to become a weighty matter of thought. The intent of returning good for evil is not to condemn, but to cause the person to think about his inappropriate behavior and hopefully cause regret and contrition -- if not now, then in God's due time (1 Peter 2:12).

Brethren, as we examine this most incredible and profound checklist of what our lives must be, what our attitudes and conduct must be both within and outside of the household of faith, we must be careful not to become disheartened because we fall short of our Father's expectation. When our Master described this dedicated walk in the narrow way, the response of his disciples was, "Who then can be saved?" Jesus replied, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." Herein lies the secret of spiritual success: the workmanship is God's, NOT ours! (Ephesians 2:8-10; Philippians 2:13). Transformation, sanctification, growth, and development of the fruit of the spirit, are processes that occur through the power of the holy spirit over our lifetime. They are not events that occur overnight. However, it is absolutely imperative that we know what God's ultimate destiny is for each of his children: to be conformed to the glorious character-likeness of Jesus (Romans 8:29). Knowing what his goal is for each of us, we must submit to his workmanship willingly and joyfully, having the blessed assurance and full confidence that "he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6). Praise and glory be to his holy name!

So let our daily lives express,
The beauties of true holiness,
So let the Christian graces shine,
That all may know the power divine.

Let love and faith and hope and joy,
Be pure and free from sin's alloy;
Let Christ's sweet spirit reign within,
And grace subdue the power of sin.

Our Father, God, to thee we raise,
Our prayer for help to tread thy ways --
For wisdom, patience, love, and light,
For grace to speak and act aright.

* All Scripture citations, unless otherwise noted are from the New International Version.

Spiritual Discernment

But the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. – John 14:26

A verse-by-verse study in 1 Corinthians 2

In the first chapter of Corinthians Paul expresses concern over the factionalism that had divided that church into at least four camps: some claimed allegiance to Paul, others to Apollos, still others to Peter, and one group asserting they were “of Christ.” The second chapter of the epistle forms a portion of his argument against a major cause of these divisions, namely, esteeming the messenger more than the message.

Oratory Means Little – 1 Corinthians 2:1-5

And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

The apostle opens by using himself as the example. He could easily have matched wits with the best of his opponents. He had done so with his powerful reasoning on Mars Hill in Athens where he effectively quotes the ancient poets. He had been schooled at Tarsus, an educational center rated by the historian Strabo as superior to even the better-known institutions of Athens and Alexandria. He was familiar with the writings of the Cilician poet Aratus (Acts 17:28), Epimenides (Titus 1:12), and the comic poet Meander from whom he borrows the words of 1 Corinthians 15:33.

Although the term “excellency of speech” may apply to oratorical gifts, it also contains the concept of overpowering reasoning. The testimony of God is not comprehended by the powers of rhetoric or philosophy, but by the power of a changed life, from sin and all its alluring accoutrements to the simple purity of a Christ-like life.

There was one central truth that Paul would present, and that was the salvation secured by the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Other, more disputable points of doctrine, were prone to cause division. The doctrine of Christ and him crucified was unifying and profitable for the building up not only of the Corinthian church but the Christian church throughout the centuries.

Paul was noted for his courage. Therefore at first glance it seems odd he would describe himself as approaching them “in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling.” The

weakness to which he refers may be his own physical infirmities, but more likely it was the humility with which he approached them, seeking not so much to impress the Corinthians but to be understood by them. The fear and trembling were almost certainly not of concern for his own personal well-being nor yet those emotions born of a lack of confidence, but rather show the high regard he held for properly representing both his God and the truths which had been entrusted to him.

His final contrast was between the wisdom that comes from secular education and worldly philosophy, and the simplicity of truth as revealed by the holy spirit. It was this truth which would be demonstrated by the power of a converted life. Nothing is more powerful than words aptly spoken with full conviction. It was the power of the concept he presented that would enable the Corinthian Christians to stand before the judgment tribunal of God.

Hidden Wisdom – 1 Corinthians 2:6-10

Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought: But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.

True scriptural wisdom is meant only for “them that are perfect.” The Greek word *teleioiv*, translated perfect, here has the meaning of “mature.” (Compare its usage here with that in 1 Corinthians 14:20; Philippians 3:15; Ephesians 4:13; and Hebrews 5:16.) Jewish rabbis used this word in their ban on the reading of the first chapter of Genesis and the visions of Ezekiel by those under thirty years of age (Hieron., Tom III, fol. 3.2).

A further clue as to whom Paul meant with this word is found in verse 7 where he says that he speaks this word in “a mystery.” At first glance this may seem to conflict with his earlier comments that he did not use oratorical gifts but simple meaning that the readers could understand. But no such conflict exists. The word “mystery” (*musterion*, Strong’s 3466) means that which, while hidden from the casual observer, is crystal clear to those who are initiated into its code

Thus the prophecies, doctrines, and types of the Old Testament could not be fully discerned by any except those who had been initiated into Christianity. Once understood, however, new horizons with a depth and richness not previously seen in the Hebrew Bible were revealed.

Even the princes, most notably the religious elite consisting of both Pharisee and Sadducee, were unable to plumb its depths. Similarly today it is not the education of the theological seminaries or the offices of the clergy that reveal the deep things of God.

Instead the comprehension of spiritual truths is reserved for those who have the holy spirit, no matter how little such may have in the way of formal education. Thus was the Jewish hierarchy amazed at the boldness and clarity with which Peter and John spoke, esteeming them as “unlearned and ignorant men” (Acts 4:13).

With spirit-enlightened eyes these initiates into the Christian faith saw a vision of the future which hitherto had not even “entered into the heart of man.” Such wisdom, such an inspiring vista of the future, is unattainable by the fleshly mind, but truly motivates those who are taught by the spirit. Nor are the deep things of God only complex theological concepts; even the most basic perceptions of what lies in store are part of this rich treasure trove.

The Mind of Christ – 1 Corinthians 2:11-16

For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man’s wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Spirit teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.

These verses contrast the two spirits and the sphere of knowledge available to each. The spirit of man can only discern those things within his experience, while the spirit of God is open to a far broader range of information. Spiritual things, Paul reasons, can only be discerned by spiritual minds. Human philosophy is within the range of spiritual minds, while spiritual concepts relate to a realm to which man, as a human being, cannot understand.

The spiritual dimensions spoken of in these verses do not relate to those things which exist in the invisible world since scientists have grasped and explained many invisible forces, such as electricity, video transmission, and the like. Rather they refer to the effect of biblical principles on the human being, a new mind-set based on the principles of self-sacrifice and not the preservation of natural life.

These are the spiritual elements that hold the solution to the factionalism that so divided the Corinthian brethren. There was a measure of carnality and selfishness in their desire to prefer one above another. Their adoration of human leadership rather than a desire for spiritual unity of the church collective was the symptom which pointed to the lack of a spiritual mind. This new mental dimension is what Paul calls “the mind of Christ.”

Here is how Paul describes this mind: “Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a

thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:5-8, ASV).

How the Spiritual Mind Works

Paul informs the Corinthians that the spiritual mind operates by “comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” The word *sunkrino* (Strong’s 4791), translated “comparing,” can mean “to join or commingle” and thus conveys the thought of joining two thoughts to explain or make clear their meaning. It is often used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew *pathar* (Strong’s 6622) which means “to unfold, or reveal” (see Genesis 40:8,16,22; 41:12,15). In other words the reader is asked to compare one Scriptural verse with another, and contextually to compare the Old Testament writings with the new Christian realities of the New Testament.

This accords well with Peter’s thought: “First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Peter 1:20,21, RSV).

Barnes notes that some derive from Paul’s words that “prophecies, besides having a literal signification, have also a hidden and mystical sense which cannot be learned from the prophecies themselves, but is perceived by a peculiar power of insight imparted by the Holy Spirit, enabling men to understand their secondary mysteries.”

Still others, noting that the Greek word for “spiritual” is in the neuter, feel that the noun to be supplied is “men,” thus the rendering “comparing spiritual things with spiritual men.” There is a truth in this as well, that the search for spiritual truth entails the seeking out of the thoughts of other spiritual thoughts by a peer review of one’s interpretations. This agrees with the context of the entire epistle where the apostle stresses that the brethren of the various factions need each other (see 1 Corinthians 4:1-6 where Paul applies the sacredness of stewardship both to Apollos and himself). The advice of Ephesians 4:16 seems especially relevant: “From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.”

Let all who name the name of Christ fully rely on the holy spirit to rightly interpret the word of God and apply its principles in Christian love, always seeking to put on “the mind of Christ.”

A Verse-by-Verse Study in 1 Corinthians 11

The Memorial Supper

This do in remembrance of me. -- 1 Corinthians 11:24

Carl Hagensick

The book of 1 Corinthians has three main parts with eleven sub-sections. It begins with Paul's observations of the church at Corinth. Then follow these four sections:

- a. Dangers of sectarianism (chapter 1).
- b. Dangers of worldly wisdom (chapters 2-4).
- c. Dangers of not judging sin in the church (chapter 5).
- d. Dangers of brother suing brother (chapter 6).

Paul then answers questions from the Corinthians:

- a. Male-female relations (chapter 7).
- b. Regarding meat offered to idols (chapter 8, 10 to 11:2).
- c. Regarding a paid ministry (chapter 9).
- d. Order in the church (chapter 11).
- e. Women's role in the church (chapter 12).
- f. Regarding spiritual gifts (chapters 13 and 14).
- g. Concerning the resurrection of the dead (chapter 15).

Paul ends with closing admonitions.

The subject of the Passover and Memorial Supper is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 5:7,8; 10:16,17; and 11:20-27. It is always used as an illustration in discussing other subjects. This study examines the one found in 1 Corinthians 11:23-29 by looking at the context of the entire chapter, one that deals with questions concerning various matters of order in the church.

Three matters are brought up for discussion: women's head coverings (verses 3-16); divisions in the church (verses 17-19); and the eating of the Lord's supper (verses 20-27).

Misplaced Verses: 1 Corinthians 11:1,2

Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ. Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you.

Translators arbitrarily made the chapter divisions in the Bible. This is one place where that division may be inappropriately made. In the previous chapters the subject is meat offered to idols. The first two verses of chapter 11 complete the theme of the previous chapters.

Paul discusses three specific situations: prohibiting eating meat in temple restaurants (1 Corinthians 8:10-13); permitting meat bought in the open market (1 Corinthians 10:25,26 -- the word "shambles" found in the King James Version would, in modern English, be translated "market" or "grocery"); and the more delicate situation where one is invited to a meal in the home of a pagan friend (1 Corinthians 10:27 to 11:2). After discussing the pros and cons of the situation, he leaves the decision to the individual by saying, "Whether ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31). He ends by using his own conduct as an example.

Head Coverings: 1 Corinthians 11:3-16

But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God. Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoreth his head. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoreth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered. For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man. For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels. Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God. Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered? Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering. But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.

Verse 3 specifies the hierarchy of both human and divine relationships. The order should be: God, Christ, Man, and Woman.

While this relationship does indicate one of subservience, it does not suggest a dictatorship. Rather it indicates a willing cooperative association. The "us" relationship in the creation (Genesis 1:26) suggests such a mutual union. The same is implied in Christ looking at the church as his brethren. Thus it should also be between man and woman: a consultation bond with the husband serving as chairman and making a decision that tries for a consensus. There is also a hint at a typical function that as Christ relates to God, so should the woman relate to man.

As a mark of this structure, Paul advises the use of a head covering. Yet, the words of verse 15 argues that her long hair is already a covering. Why then, some contend, does she require an additional covering? Apparently it was a Jewish custom based on Numbers 5:18, "The priest shall set the woman before the LORD, and uncover the woman's head, and put the offering of memorial in her hands, which is the jealousy offering: and the priest shall have in his hand the bitter water that causeth the curse."

Adam Clarke comments: “To take off a woman’s veil, and expose her to the sight of men would be considered a very great degradation in the East.” This custom had fallen in disuse in New Testament times, but was widely practiced by Greek and Roman reputable women. According to the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* enforcement of this practice was especially strict in Paul’s hometown of Tarsus. Evidently the apostle recognized it as an appropriate mark of distinction between the modest and respectable women and the courtesans who removed their veils as a mark of independence and rebellion against the customs of their society.

Paul limits his recommendation to those serving in the act of prayer, though it seems logical it would appertain to any religious service in the house of God.

He also addresses the males, saying that for them to have long hair was as shameful as for women to have short hair. Yet, one of the requirements of the Nazarite vow (see Numbers 6) was for a man to let his hair grow. This exception is not inconsistent, for that vow was to show humbleness and subservience in the same way as does long hair on a woman. It was this humility that gave women their glory (1 Corinthians 11:15).

A key verse is 1 Corinthians 11:10 where Paul advances the thought that women ought to wear a head covering “because of the angels.” Of the many interpretations for this verse, three appear reasonable:

1. The angels, or messengers, represent the elders of the church to whom proper respect is to be shown because of their office (*The New Creation*, p. 272).
2. Because women represent the church before a man who pictures Christ, men and women are to “be a spectacle” unto angels (1 Corinthians 4:9).
3. Paul is thinking of Isaiah 6:2 where the angels used one pair of their wings to “cover their faces.”

In the eleventh verse the apostle makes it clear that a man is not to rule over his wife, but that they are to be mutually interdependent. In verse fourteen he says that long hair is even taught by nature. Of the many diverse definitions for the Greek word translated nature, the following from Brown, Driver, and Riggs seems most appropriate: “The sum of innate properties and powers by which one person differs from others.”

Paul concludes his thesis by saying it should not be a matter of contention, for the Christian church at that time had no such ruling. Some take from this that this advice must therefore apply only to Corinth where the head coverings differentiated the humble housewife from the courtesans and intellectuals who wore short hair. Such a supposition seems unwarranted.

Divisions: 1 Corinthians 11:17-19

Now in this that I declare unto you I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse. For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.

Paul now turns aside from questions he was asked, to a report that there were divisions in that church. Although the cause of these schisms is not revealed, we may deduce from what follows that they concerned the celebration of the Lord's supper and a possible failure to differentiate the Memorial from a customary Sunday dinner of the ecclesia.

The word heresy (Greek: *hairesis*) does not necessarily carry a negative connotation. The word simply means to choose, or a choice. It is five times translated sect and four times translated heresy. The word is used to describe the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Christians as groups.

The apostle is not saying that such divisions were good, only that they were necessary -- unfortunately necessary. Neither is he implying that all of the approved are on one side of the controversy. In the words of Jesus, "Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!" (Matthew 18:7).

Barnes, in his *Notes on the New Testament*, makes this apt observation: "The effect of these divisions would be to show who they were. So in all divisions, and all splitting into factions, where the great truths of Christianity are held, and where the corruption of the mass does not require separation, such divisions show who are the restless, ambitious, and dissatisfied spirits; who they are that are indisposed to follow the things that make for peace, and the laws of Christ enjoining union; and who they are who are gentle and peaceful, and disposed to pursue the way of truth, and love, and order, without contentions and strifes."

The Lord's Supper: 1 Corinthians 11:20-34

When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper. For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken. What! have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise you not. For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread: and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat; this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a

man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another. And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come.

Apparently the Corinthian brethren had fallen into the habit of observing the Lord's supper in parties. This not only heightened the sectarian spirit in this church, but also destroyed the picture of a united church with a common appreciation of the Lord's death and a united determination to share in it.

Verse 21 implies that the situation was so severe that the excesses of some led to outright drunkenness. Others, poorer in this world's goods, were left with little or no food. Their celebration copied the love feast Jesus and his disciples ate that preceded the introduction of the Memorial emblems, rather than a common participation in the bread and wine. After chiding them for their irreverence and lack of understanding, the apostle calls attention to the fact that, rather than an elaborate meal, the Lord introduced two items, the eating of the bread and drinking of the cup, as symbols of his death, and it was this ritual that they were to observe.

Not recognizing the significance of these emblems in their lives was to drink of the cup "unworthily." The word "unworthily" is an adverb rather than an adjective and does not refer to the condition of their lives but to their attitude in participating in these elements.

Thus Paul urges serious self-examination of their motives in keeping this solemn ceremony. The following comment is especially apt: "But he that judges his heart, his motives, his will, his intentions, should always be able to find it true to the Lord, however much his life may come short of his new will" (Reprints, p. 1516).

Insincere participation is equated to being "guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." Counting the elements in such an irreverent manner would classify them with the Jews who said, "His blood be on us, and on our children" (Matthew 27:25). Thus they would be bringing judgment (mistranslated damnation in the King James) upon themselves.

Verse 26 says this ritual was to be continued "till he come." This phrase does not refer to his *parousia*, or presence, at his return but to his coming in glory with all the holy angels (Matthew 25:31).

The problem in this regard was so widespread that Paul writes that it was responsible for a condition where "many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep." While the primary meaning here seems to refer to spiritual weakness, sickness, and the lethargy of spiritual sleepiness (Ephesians 5:14), it may have also referred to physical maladies and

even death. “This may refer to spiritual lethargy and sickness only; but not improbably also to the physical” (*Reprints*, p. 2008).

The apostle closes this section of his epistle by again advising self-examination so that they would not need to receive their judgment and consequent chastisement from the Lord. This chastisement is not punitive, but corrective: “The object of the Lord in meting out this chastisement is that we shall learn the needed lesson, and be more watchful” (*Reprints*, p. 5428).

Paul concludes by writing that they should have their meals at home and wait in an orderly fashion for all to arrive before commemorating the death of the Lord by using the emblems of the bread and wine.

Such admonitions continue to be appropriate to the church of the present time as we continue not only to appreciate the great sacrifice Christ made for us but also our privilege in dying with him.

One Body, Many Members

A verse-by-verse study of 1 Corinthians 12

The apostle Paul writes in Ephesians 5:30-32 that the members of the church are all members of the body of Christ and that as the individual members of that church are diverse and yet act as one unified whole, so it is with the spiritual body of Christ. This provides the theme for a more lengthy discussion of these points in 1 Corinthians 12.

Concerning Spiritual Gifts -- 1 Corinthians 12, verses 1-3

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant. Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led. Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost [Spirit].

The apostle Paul reminds the Corinthian brethren that they were converted from among the heathen, having been carried away and led to worship idols. Paul then states that only the consecrated, those begotten of the holy spirit, can rightfully call Jesus, Lord. By the same token, those who would refer to Jesus as accursed had the spirit of the adversary. The apostle here introduces the gifts of the holy spirit by pointing out that the experiences of the consecrated begin with the holy spirit (John 16:7-11). It is through the holy spirit that we receive the gifts Paul writes about in verse 4.

Diversities of Gifts -- verses 4-7

Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.

Paul connects the gifts to the “Lord” and to “God” because the Corinthians tended to forget the source of the gifts they had along with the purpose, which was to produce an effective ministry. Their forgetfulness had led to competition in the use of their gifts. These gifts enabled the possessor to minister to the needs of others. They were not for private, individual enrichment nor for rivalry and jealousy, but for the benefit of all. The word administration is *diakonia*, from which we derive our word “deacon.” It is Strong’s 1248 and has the thought of a servant attending others.

Naming the Gifts -- verses 8-11

For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit; To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit; To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues; But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.

Paul here mentions some of the many gifts which the consecrated may possess. These gifts come **through** or **by** the Spirit and include:

1. Wisdom (*sophias*) or total thinking.
2. Knowledge (*gnoseos*) or understanding.
3. Faith (*pistis*) that infinite trust or high degree of belief in God, often appearing in times of great crisis or opportunity.
4. Gifts of healing (*chismata iamaton*), different kinds of cures or remedies.
5. Working of miracles (*energemata dunameon*) or superhuman powers.
6. Prophecy (*propheteia*) or announcing the decrees of God.
7. Discerning of spirits (*diakriseis pneumatou*), to distinguish between the spirit of God, the spirit of Satan and the spirit of the world.
8. Tongues (*glosson*), use of speech or dialects that the speaker has not learned.
9. Interpretation of tongues (*ermeneia glosson*), to render glossolalia understandable to an audience in its language.

The grouping of these gifts may be intended to indicate a spiritual check-and-balance system. The first two gifts of wisdom and knowledge may be balanced with faith as some may have had the ability to discern whether the wisdom and knowledge claimed by some were mere oratory or were divine revelations of truth. Likewise the seventh gift mentioned, discerning of spirits, may be paired with the healing, miracles, and prophecy, to discriminate between those whose outward acts were really of the Lord and those who were charlatans. Finally, the gift of tongues must be accompanied by the gift of interpretation of tongues if it is to be profitable.

In Romans 12, Paul makes mention of certain talents, such as prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhorting, giving, ruling, and showing mercy. In Ephesians 4 he mentions apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastor-teachers. When the New Testament was completed, some of these gifts were phased out and no longer needed. But then as now

the holy spirit has given to each individual one or more gifts; but no boasting is warranted. The holy spirit has done as it sees best. These gifts all work “that one and the selfsame spirit, dividing to every man severally as it will.”

One Body -- verses 12-14

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many.

Paul presents the analogy of the human body and it is similar to what he says in Romans 12:4-8. Just as a human body is a single, functioning unit having many members, so also is The Christ. All members of a human body (the hand, eye, ear, nose, internal organs, and the like) all function under the direction of the head, so the church as a body functions with Christ as its head and as God desires.

As the various members of a human body perform duties which benefit the other members, so also is it among the consecrated here on earth. The various members have gifts and abilities that are to be used for the benefit of the other members. Some of these may be of a humble kind, nevertheless they have their place and these humble inconspicuous duties are necessary to be performed for the good of others and for the benefit of the whole body.

The finger is good for grasping or beckoning and the nose is adept for smelling; neither can fulfill the role of the other, yet both are essential for the healthy operation of the body. Paul's main point is that the members of the body are interdependent: “From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love” (Ephesians 4:16).

Interdependence -- verses 15-20

If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body.

Paul now begins to encourage the brethren to occupy their own place and perform their own duties, and not feel discouraged because they do not occupy some other position. In the church there were Jews and Gentiles, male and female, educated and ignorant -- all were products of a diverse set of environmental factors, but they were compacted together by a common experience. They were independent but also interdependent. The holy spirit had joined them together because they were in submission to the will of the

head. This same argument is presented forcefully in Romans 12:4-8. One has well said that the twelfth chapter of Romans is an encapsulated description of the entire Christian walk:

Verse 1 is Consecration
Verse 2 is Transformation
Verses 3-8 are Evaluation
Verses 9-21 are Application

Equal Honor -- verses 21-26

And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked: That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

Paul here challenges the Corinthians to see their need for each other. Just as the eye could not say to any part of the body, "I have no need of you," so the Corinthians must understand that they need each other. No member of the body of Christ is sufficient within itself. It is impossible in a physical body; it is impossible in the spiritual body. In fact, the weaker members are essential to the proper functioning of the body. These may only seem to be weaker or they may actually be weaker when compared to other members, but it does not matter. They are part of the body and exist for a specific purpose, without which the body cannot function properly. They are necessary, they are vital, and they are a part of the body. And each is worthy of equal honor and respect, and each is esteemed to be essential to the working of all.

God works in and through the human body which he has given to us all; he works in and through the church collectively as he carries out his Divine Plan of the Ages.

God Does the Placing -- verses 27-31

Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues. Are all apostles? are all prophets? are all teachers? are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret? But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.

Here we see that the apostles were the most important members. Their office was to see first the truths revealed by the holy spirit because they were the Lord's special

mouthpieces. As they heard the voice of the spirit they spoke out the message, and they wrote their epistles for our learning. Evidently some in the early church did not always appreciate that the teaching function of the apostles was most important.

The functions of prophecy, or public expounding of truth, and teaching were listed next. Only “after that” were the more spectacular gifts of healings and tongues mentioned. These were thus relegated to a minor position among the gifts of the spirit and were definitely less important than prophesying and teaching.

Hence we see, according to the apostle, that whatever gift is possessed, all members collectively constituted one interdependent body. There was to be no spirit of rivalry, no wish to discredit or demean others. All were to recognize that the teaching office was more important than physical healing.

There was one way in which all might participate and all might rejoice: the way of love. The gifts of the spirit were not confined to the teaching, miracles, healing, etc., gifts that were distributed “to every man severally as the spirit will” (v. 11). There was and still is a “fruit” of the spirit which is the unceasing privilege of all to exercise and to enjoy. That “fruit” is love. Love, the combination of all those sentiments and virtues, is shed abroad in our heart by the spirit, and enables us to rejoice even in tribulation; it enables us to love and cherish every member of the body, great or small, to appreciate the difficulties and trials of all and to smooth the way of each foot-step follower of the Master on the narrow way that leads to life.

Love

An Ode to Agape

Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned. -- 1 Timothy 1:5

A verse by verse study in 1 Corinthians 13

Agape is a Greek word adopted by the New Testament writers to describe a higher form of love than that described by the traditional word *phileo*. Cramer in his *Biblio-Theological Lexicon of New Testament Greek* has this to say: "We find agape used to designate a love unknown to writers outside the New Testament -- love in its fullest conceivable form; love as it is the distinguishing attribute, not of humanity, but in its strictest sense, of divinity" (p. 14). John A. Meggison, in the Appendix to his *Notes on the Bible*, styles *phileo* as "a love that grows out of relationship or craving," while *agape* is a "love that goes out voluntarily without any intermingling of selfishness -- the one being ordinary love, the other being the higher form of friendship love." Thus "charity," signifying an outgoing generosity that expects nothing in return, is not a bad translation of the word, though inadequate to its full scope of meaning.

The Contrasts -- Verses 1 to 3

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

Two of the three contrasts which Paul draws between other signs of religious involvement and love are based on the discussion in the preceding and following chapters on the subject of the gifts of the spirit. Much was made of these outward manifestations of the spirit. In the church at Corinth undue importance was being placed on these miraculous gifts. As an apostle, Paul possessed perhaps most, if not all, of the gifts of the spirit. Yet he says in 1 Corinthians 14:18,19, "I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all: Yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue." These external signs, he states, were for a sign, "not to them which believe, but to them which believe not" (1 Corinthians 14:22).

While the "tongues of men" seem to refer to the various languages of earth, some have tried to deduce from the phrase "tongue of angels" some mysterious unknown language. This is used to defend the doctrine of glossolalia. Much more likely, the phrase is meant to confer the concept of great eloquence. The commentator Barnes writes: "The language of angels here seems to be used to denote the highest power of using language, or of the

most elevated faculty of eloquence and speech." He thus translates the opening phrase: "Were I endowed with the faculty of eloquence and persuasion which we attribute to [angels], and the power of speaking to any of the human family with the power which they have . . ."

Such use of eloquent speech, without converting the heart to expressions of unselfish love, would be no more effective than the brazen trumpets or cymbals with which his audience was familiar from the many festivals held in Corinth.

The second contrast concerns the gifts of prophecy, knowledge and faith (see 1 Corinthians 12:8–10). In 1 Corinthians 14:1,3,4 (NAS) Paul places the gift of prophecy pre-eminent, writing, "Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy. . . . But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation. One who speaks in a tongue edifies himself; but one who prophesies edifies the church."

Important as were these gifts, however, they were not, even when combined, equal to the exercise of love. The sectarian strife-torn church at Corinth was of considerable concern to the apostle, but the lesson applies with equal force to any church in which a similar spirit of division occurs. Great as may be their progress in the comprehension of the deep mysteries of God, praiseworthy as may be their works of fearlessly giving forth a witness to the cause of Christ, strong as they may be in their expressions of faith, if they possess not the love required to transcend their differences and work with others the Lord has similarly called, all is naught.

In the third contrast Paul turns from the miraculous gifts to the sacrificial life style of the Christians, even altruistic charity to the extent of completely depleting their resources. The "giving of their bodies to be burned" may well refer to the New Testament realization that the Old Testament animal sacrifices represented the consecrated lives of the Christians. Such sacrifices, however noble as they were, were not what would make them worthy to the Lord who, above all, sought the indwelling spirit of *agape* love.

In later years the lesson became even more specific. During the Middle Ages many martyred Christians paid the ultimate penalty for their faithfulness and were literally burned at the stake. Even such martyrdoms, unless they were accompanied by true love, were of no meritorious value.

Still others draw the lesson from the three Hebrews who were cast into the fiery furnace for their fidelity to Jehovah. Even such acts of faithfulness, unaccompanied by love, would be profitless.

It is interesting to note another variation of this verse. Westcott and Hort, following three ancient manuscripts, translates the verse, "And if ever I should beside the body of me, in order that I might boast," love profiteth me nothing. The danger always remains to give oneself glory for the sacrifices we make. Such an attitude countervails the entire purpose of Christianity.

The Attributes of Love -- Verses 4 to 7

Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

It has been well stated that love cannot be defined but can only be demonstrated by what it does. *Agape* finds its expression in all the fruits of the spirit. Quoting an unknown author, Charles Russell on page 186 of *The New Creation*, shows this relationship:

(1) Joy -- Love exultant. (2) Peace -- Love in repose. (3) Long-suffering -- Love enduring. (4) Gentleness -- Love in society. (5) Goodness -- Love in action. (6) Faith -- Love on the battlefield of life. (7) Meekness -- Love in resignation. (8) Temperance [moderation] -- Love in training.

In the chapter under consideration, the apostle enumerated twelve attributes of love.

Suffereth long -- He begins with a quality of *agape* that related particularly to the Corinthians in their sectarian divisive strife. *Agape* will bear with others, looking for the long-range good, rather than the short-range gain. The Greek word here is *makrothumia*, meaning literally "of a long or patient spirit."

Is kind -- Tyndale translates the word here as "courteous." As such it is the companion of "suffereth long." The latter puts up with the discourtesy of others, while the former reciprocates with actions of benevolence and kindness in return. It is one thing to put up with the faults of others, it is yet a different action to bear it kindly and with gentleness.

Envieth not -- It is, perhaps, no coincidence that the words envy and zeal are translations of the same Greek word. In both cases it represents intense desire, one for bad things and one for good. Envy is an emotion that is aroused by many causes. We may envy a man because he is happy while we are miserable; well, while we are sick; caressed, while we are neglected or overlooked; successful, while we meet with disappointment; handsome, while we are ill-formed; honored with office, while we are overlooked. We may envy him because he has a better farm than we have, or be a more skillful mechanic, or be a more successful physician, or lawyer, or have more honor amongst other Christians. In all of these ways, love will seek to cast out envy and replace it with pleasure at the exaltation of others.

Doth not vaunt itself -- Once again the message, while applicable to all Christians today, seems specially tailored for the situation in Corinth where one claims to be of Paul, another of Apollos, another of Cephas, and some even of Christ. The Greek word translated "vaunt" is *perpereuomi*. Strong's Concordance suggests that it originated as a duplication of the Greek word for *peran*, the word for "beyond." Such a word is fitting

for the concept of braggadocio which likes to retell a story, going over and beyond the truth to make one's position more prominent.

Is not puffed up -- Expressions of self-importance usually cloak feelings of insecurity. Recognizing one's own unworthiness, there is a natural tendency to bolster one's spirits by the exaggeration of some accomplishment. This operates in opposition to love since that grace elevates another's accomplishments over those of self.

Doth not behave itself unseemly -- True love not only acts becomingly but avoids even the appearance of those things which could bring disgrace on the one loved and, more particularly, on the Lord and his cause. Love conforms to the norms of society and seeks to go beyond them. Here agape passes out of the realm of thought into the actions it provokes. The one other usage of the Greek word in the New Testament (1 Corinthians 7:36) relates the word specifically to physical love between a man and a woman. While generally advising the single state, Paul advises marriage on the basis of this word between a man and the woman he has been courting if the omission of such a step would caused emotional or financial hardship to her.

Agape seeketh not her own -- Here is an instance where the agape of love goes beyond the phileo. The latter is responsive, based upon reactions to stimuli. Agape manifests itself, even when to do so is seemingly to one's detriment. True love not only seeks the highest spiritual welfare for one's self, but also for one's neighbor. Love is never satisfied except in the welfare, comfort, and salvation of all.

Is not easily provoked -- Some of the force of this attribute is lost in the King James translation. Other ancient translations, some even pre-dating the King James, more correctly render the verse simply "love is not provoked." The Greek word does not convey the amount of provocation to anger, but simply pits agape against all provocation. The admonition is to a "cool head," carefully weighing as objectively as possible the facts of a case, and not letting the emotions rule with either anger, bitterness, or strife.

Thinketh no evil -- Once again the apostle calls attention to the mental condition of the one who professes agape love. Here he follows the lead of the Lord Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount, tracing the action to its proper beginning -- in the thought process. If those emotions which demonstrate the lack of agape love are to be stopped at all, they must be stopped at their source, in the mind.

Rejoiceth not in iniquity -- This qualification of love is easy when it is exercised toward a friend. However human nature tends to rejoice in bad reports about those with whom we are at enmity. The true test of agape is when we are sorry to hear of our enemy's misfortunes or anything that substantiates our low opinion of our enemies. This tendency is directly contrary to that of love, and must be constantly fought.

But rejoiceth in the truth -- This completes the couplet started by the preceding phrase. What is our reaction when the report of iniquity is the truth? Often truth is nebulous. Complete truth is not easily discerned. What appears true to one may appear false to

another. The search for truth is one of the functions of true love. When it comes to ascertaining the accuracy of charges, the Lord sets out a complete procedure in Matthew 18:15–20. Complete truth includes viewing a matter from the perspective of all sides, with all mitigating circumstances taken into account.

Beareth all things -- The last four graces of agape deal with its staying power. The apostle is laying the groundwork for his discussion in the next verses of the temporary nature of the miraculous gifts in contrast with the permanence of love. It is permanent, first, because it bears all burdens. No load is too heavy, no injustice too great, but that, knowing the temporary nature of the present evil world, they cannot be borne with the heavenly goals in view. As Paul writes in Romans 8:18, "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

Believeth all things -- The Greek word here, as Professor Vine points out, is not merely to place credence in, but to rely upon. Love is not gullible, but is willing to risk loss. "Perfect love is not suspicious, but is, on the contrary, disposed to be trustful. It acts on the principle that it is better, if necessary, to be deceived a hundred times than to go through life soured by a suspicious mind -- far better than to accuse or suspect even one person unjustly." (R4919)

Hopeth all things -- This quality refers more to the frame of the mind of one who may feel injured by another. Not only is he willing to bear indignities and quick to believe the words of the supposed wrongdoer, but he sincerely hopes that future events will prove that his trust was well placed. How pertinent were these words to the divided church at Corinth! How appropriate today!

Endureth all things -- Whereas "bear^eth all things" is passive, relating to the uncomplaining acceptance of trials, "endureth all things" is active. The soul that is united to the God of love by the link of love cannot be crushed, cannot be overcome, because this is the divine will, the divine arrangement.

The Permanence of Agape -- Verses 8 to 10

Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

After extolling the virtues of agape love, the apostle returns to the main theme of chapters 12 through 14. The gifts of the spirit which the Corinthians so coveted were not only inferior to love in quality, they were also inferior in durability. Tongues, knowledge, and prophecy were only temporary gifts of the spirit.

It should be noted here that the knowledge to which the apostle refers is not the ability to accumulate facts and join them in the thinking process. Such knowledge we are assured is

eternal. We read of God's eternal kingdom in Habakkuk 2:14, "For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea." Rather it was the miraculous special inspirations of knowledge that were granted as a spiritual gift to some in the early church.

Not only were these gifts to be temporary, but they were only partial as well. Even the inspired apostles did not possess all knowledge. If their knowledge was only partial, it followed that their prophesying, telling others of their knowledge, could only be partial as well.

Verse ten becomes the critical verse in the discussion. It implies that the partial gifts would continue until "that which is perfect" would come. The expression "that which is perfect" is frequently applied to the perfection of being that awaits the resurrected faithful at the second advent of Christ. However, if that is true, then we should expect that "that which is in part" -- the miraculous gifts of knowledge, prophecy, and tongues -- would still continue. We do not see evidence of that today despite the many charismatic Christians who claim to possess these gifts. These gifts in the early church were for the purpose of communicating in known languages to those of different nationalities instead of producing unintelligible sounds that pass for the tongues of our day. Prophecy and knowledge were used as internal gifts for the development of the church and not merely for a sign to show that one had "the spirit."

The word translated "perfect" can with equal ease be rendered "mature" or "complete." Since the gifts were for the preliminary development of the church, we would suggest that "that which is perfect" refers to the completed canon of the Bible. The Bible became the tool to replace the partial knowledge and prophecy which preceded it.

In harmony with this, we quote the words of Charles Russell in his book *The At-one-ment Between God and Man*: "All of these 'gifts' were evidently necessary at the inauguration of the Church, at the start of the new age, but became unnecessary after the Church had been established and the canon of the inspired writings had been completed." -- p. 179*

Now and Then -- Verses 11 to 13

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

In the final section of this chapter the apostle contrasts conditions of the future, "when that which is perfect" has come.

In the first he treats the miraculous gifts of the spirit as children's toys -- important tools for their learning process but not an end in themselves. Children think of the present time

only, adults look to the work of future years. The gifts were important for the early church in its childhood phase. But these gifts were of little value for the future work of the church.

Rather than learning by rote, the Lord wanted to instruct his followers to think. If they would be part of a future work as priests, judges, and kings, they would need to learn not only the laws of God but why these laws were right and important. The primitive church began to develop their Christian theology only after the Bible was complete. True, they made many errors in their discernment of doctrine, but such errors are also a part of the learning process. The proud and self-satisfied would be led astray by their own worldly "wisdom" while the meek and humble would await the Lord's due time for correction.

In the second contrast he shows how that "now" was like viewing an object through a smoked glass in comparison with the views that would come after "the perfect" arrived. The phrase, "then shall I know even as also I am known" is an apt one. We are known by the Lord, not by our outward appearances, but on the full manifestations of the heart (1 Samuel 16:7; 2 Corinthians 5:16). In the same way as the Lord now knows us, by our heart, the church would come to know him after the Bible was completed. They would learn not to know him merely by his actions, but would be introduced to the very heart of God, learning that, indeed, "God is love" (1 John 4:8,16).

In the final verse Paul breaks away from contrasting agape with the gifts of the spirit and compares it to the higher elements of faith and hope. In a sense, he wraps up his lesson by going back to the themes of verses two and three. Important as was their new-found faith in the gospel, even a deep comprehension of the Bible's mysteries would be temporary if it were not accompanied by the object of that gospel, the development of agape love.

The final contrast was with hope. It was the Christians' hopes for future rectification of all wrongs that enabled them to give so freely of their temporal goods to feed the poor and to face the horrors of torture, the lions of Rome, and burning at the stake. It was for this hope that they could face any rigor with steadfastness. Yet, such hopes would have been vain if they had not been accompanied by the development of agape love.

Love alone endures. Love is the greatest thing. It is not the responsive *phileo* love, though that is important, but the full unselfishness of agape that must be the goal of each follower of the Master. Let us so run that we may obtain.

The Resurrection of the Dead

But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.--Luke 20:35,36

A verse by verse study in 1 Corinthians 15

Few chapters in the Bible are more appreciated than the apostle Paul's dissertation on the resurrection of the dead in 1 Corinthians 15. The resurrection concept sets Christianity apart from the other major religions. Particularly notable in this chapter is the order of the resurrection, with both spiritual and earthly phases.

The Gospel--Verses 1 through 4

Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures.

The gospel, or good news, which Paul preached was the same which had been "preached before unto Abraham, saying, in thee shall all nations be blessed" (Galatians 3:8). This was the good news of salvation. There is no other path to eventual salvation than through belief in this gospel as characterized in the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, the "seed of Abraham" (Galatians 3:16; Acts 4:12).

Paul identifies the two essential elements in this gospel, namely, that Jesus both died and was raised from the dead. Jesus' death provided the ransom price for Adam, and thus the entire race in his loins. Important as that was, however, it required Jesus' resurrection to place him in a position to use that price and apply it for the raising of the human race from the dead.

Proofs of the Resurrection--Verses 5 through 11

And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: after that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. Therefore whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed.

Paul condenses the eleven post-resurrection appearances to three, probably considering these sufficient to prove his point. He highlights the first appearance to an apostle, Peter; his appearance to the entire group of apostles, including Thomas (using the term "the twelve" as a title since obviously Judas was not present); and to a group of 500. This number does not appear in the writings of the evangelists, but is probably a detail omitted in the account of Matthew, where he appears in a mountain in Galilee to "his brethren" (Matthew 28:7,10,16). Tradition places this mountain as Mount Tabor, a mountain which many consider to be the Mount of Transfiguration, where Peter says that he was "an eye-witness of his majesty" (2 Peter 1:16).

Paul proceeds to add himself to the list of witnesses. Although modestly calling himself "the least of the apostles," he defends his apostleship with the zeal with which he prosecuted that office. However, he concludes, the office was not the relevant matter. What was of real import was that this was preached by the apostles because of their strong conviction that the resurrection of Jesus was a verifiable reality.

The Importance of Jesus' Resurrection -- Verses 12 through 19

Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.

The doctrine of the resurrection was not new to the Jewish religion in the days of Jesus. It was, in fact, the dividing issue between the two major sects of the time. The Sadducees did not believe in it, while the Pharisees did. The Pharisees admitted that the resurrection would occur because of their Messiah. Paul is carrying their argument one step further-- your Messiah has come. He is Jesus of Nazareth. His resurrection, which you cannot logically dispute, is proof of the resurrection of all. Conversely, if you deny the fact that he is raised you are denying the fact that any will be raised.

Beyond that, he states that their witnessing to the resurrection of Jesus would all be false testimony. This is why it was so important to call over 500 witnesses to the stand to testify to this resurrection. Luke makes the same positive assertions, calling attention to the "many infallible proofs" of Jesus' resurrection (Acts 1:3). It was for the same reason that Peter, mistakenly feeling that the brethren must select a successor to Judas, insists that the candidates for such an office must be "a witness with us of his resurrection" (Acts 1:22).

Not only would the fact that Jesus had not been raised make a mockery of their resurrection hopes, it would undermine the very principle on which such a resurrection

would be based--the cancellation of Adamic sin. They would remain under the death penalty for this sin.

While the term "they which are fallen asleep in Christ" seems an obvious reference to his followers, the Christians, it need not be limited to them. The hopes of all--Christian and non-Christian--lie in the fact that they are under the ownership of the Messiah. Many Christians may contest Paul's last statement in this section. They can testify to the fulfilling nature of the Christian life. Many might state that, if there were no resurrection, living a life by biblical principles is the very best and happiest way to live. But this does not negate Paul's arguments. One of the most fulfilling aspects of the Christian life is having a message of comfort to give to those who have died. If Christ be not risen from the dead, this entire message of comfort is false and misleading.

The Order of the Resurrection--Verses 20 to 28

But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith, all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.

The word translated "resurrection" in this chapter is the Greek *anastasis*, literally meaning to stand anew. The word does not refer to such resuscitations as that of Lazarus, or even of the awakening from the dead in the kingdom of Christ. It refers to a full standing, a reaching of perfection, mentally, morally, and physically. All men are guaranteed an awakening from the dead merely by virtue of being part of the Adamic condemnation. Man does nothing to merit this awakening. But those who attain to the "resurrection of the dead" must be "accounted worthy" so to do (Luke 20:36).

Herein lies the distinction between verses 21 and 22. In verse 21 we see that one man, Adam, introduced a lifestyle of sin. Such a lifestyle would be reversed by the work of one man, Christ, in his kingdom. Verse 22 looks at the means of arriving at such a resurrection--the redemption of Adam guaranteed an awakening from death to all his posterity. The word "firstfruits" is used in two senses in the New Testament. It is used of Jesus alone and it is also used of his followers (James 1:18; Revelation 14:4). In this chapter Paul is placing his emphasis on Jesus alone.

This passage is parallel to 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17: "For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with

a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." The indication is that not even the followers of Jesus would experience their resurrection change until the Lord returns at his second advent. Bypassing the work of Christ's thousand-year kingdom, Paul jumps to the end of that time with the simple statement: "Then cometh the end." The "end" here spoken of is the end of that kingdom when mankind shall have reached perfection. Christ, having achieved his objective, relinquishes the earth and the perfected race to the grand sovereignty of God, that he may be all and in all.

In the book of Revelation we find that when that kingdom shall be completed, Satan will be loosed for a "little season" (Revelation 20:7-10). The purpose of this "little season" is to give the resurrected and educated race a final test of fidelity. While many believe that this final test follows the turning over of the kingdom to the Father mentioned in our text, some of us are more comfortable with the thought that it precedes that transaction. The "little season" forms a type of quality control demonstrating which members of the redeemed race will remain loyal.

It does appear, however, that the office of Mediator will no longer be in force during this testing time. It will be in this short period that the greatest enemy mankind has ever known, Satan, will be destroyed forever.

Practical Application--Verses 29 to 34

Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all? Why are they then baptized for the dead? And why stand we in jeopardy every hour? I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily. If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not? let us eat and drink; for to morrow we die. Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners. Awake to righteousness, and sin not; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame.

An active belief in Christ's resurrection means much more than the acceptance of the fact as a reality. It means a commitment to that belief. Paul describes this involvement as a baptism for the dead. This is the same baptism Jesus referred to in answering the plea of the mother of James and John that they could be at his right and left hand in the kingdom. "But Jesus answered and said, Ye know not what ye ask. Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? They say unto him, We are able" (Matthew 20:22).

This is not a baptism into water, but the reality which that act symbolizes. It is, as Paul phrases it, to "die daily." It involves a willingness to put personal life in jeopardy for the sake of the gospel. It is a commitment to sacrifice. This sacrifice is not without purpose. The experiences of the church, like those which Jesus endured, are to train them to be a

sympathetic high priest to help the human race in their walk from imperfection and sin to perfection and holiness (Hebrews 2:17,18; 4:15,16; 1 Corinthians 10:13).

Paul's fighting with the beasts at Ephesus does not refer to his being placed in the sports arena with literal beasts, but refers to his disputations and persecution at the hands of those of beastlike disposition in that city (Acts 19:23-41).

The conclusion that he might as well take the attitude of "let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" is purely rhetorical. To ensure that his readers understand this, he follows with his warning against such an attitude saying, "be not deceived." It is just such evil conclusions which dilute the Christian's focus. Rather, he incites them to "awake to righteousness" and to the proclamation of the resurrection of Christ, for "some have not the knowledge of God."

The Manner of the Resurrection -- Verses 35 through 50

But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come? Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: and that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain: but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body. All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds. There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.

Paul's chief concern in his letter to the Corinthians is the church of Christ. Therefore he concentrates on the heavenly or spiritual resurrection. His initial illustration is that of the seed. The seed that is planted bears little resemblance to the plant which grows from it. That seed must die as a seed to give life to a new and better form. Although many seeds look similar, their end products vary widely. Yet each seed has the same genetic makeup as the plant which springs from it. So with the Christian; the character makeup which he forms now will become the nucleus of what he is to become. He is advised to "lay up treasures in heaven" (Matthew 6:20).

The Christian is to experience two different bodies--the present terrestrial or earthly one and the resurrection body of a celestial or heavenly nature. Not only will the celestial bodies be more glorious than their earthly counterparts, but even they will differ from each other as one star does from another.

Returning to the theme of redemption, Paul again reverts to the comparison of Adam and Christ, calling Jesus "the second Adam." The first man was made with life, the second with the power to restore life. The first was made of the "dust of the earth" (Genesis 3:19), the second became a glorious heavenly being. Therefore the Christian must share this human body in order to acquire the spiritual one. What that body will be like we are not informed, except as the apostle John writes, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).

In the Last Days--Verses 51 to 57

Behold, I shew you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Trumpets were a familiar sound in Israel. There were trumpets of alarm, trumpets of assembly, the feast of trumpets, the trumpet of jubilee, and many others. Paul, however, appears to reference one particular trumpet by calling it "the last trump." If the epistles to Corinth had been written after the book of Revelation, one might be tempted to believe that he was alluding to the last of seven trumpets found in that book. However, Corinthians was written first and therefore cannot draw on Revelation for reference.

There was one series of trumpets, however, with which the Jews were familiar. These are found in the account of the fall of Jericho when Israel first began to conquer the promised land (Joshua 6:1-16). It is probable that both John and Paul drew their pictures from this event. These were trumpets of judgment; they were also trumpets of victory.

Many Bible Students feel that the seven trumpets of Revelation are parallel in time with the seven churches and seven seals. They also express the thought that the last of this series begins with the return of Jesus Christ. This is supported by 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17: "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." It is this trumpet which heralds the final judgments of God and also the victory of those who were "dead in

Christ." It is then that these dead saints are raised to meet their Lord "in the air" and to be joined, as they individually die, by those "which are alive and remain." Paul seems to refer to two classes who will be "changed" in this resurrection: the corruptibles who put on incorruption and the mortals who put on immortality. This must be taken as either a poetic repetition of one event or, more probably, as referring to the same two classes mentioned in the Thessalonians text. If that is the case, the "corruptibles" would refer to those who have already died, the "dead in Christ" who rise first; while the "mortals" refer to those who "remain," the living saints, who will be changed at their death to immortality.

When this resurrection is complete "death will be swallowed up in victory." This is a quotation from Hosea 13:14 and appears to be one of many examples where an Old Testament text is quoted, not for its contextual meaning, but for the significance of the words themselves.

In harmony with the disputes concerning the law at the first advent, Paul adds that "the sting of sin is the law," that is, by identifying sin the Israelites who remained subject to its commands could identify the guilt which would bring their death. "Thanks be to God," exults Paul, they would have victory over the law by coming into Christ.

The Lesson--Verse 58

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

Now Paul reveals the real purpose of the whole chapter. Jesus did rise from the dead. Their faith was not in vain. This knowledge should give them fresh impetus to carry on their missionary work. Because their faith was not based on idle speculation, but the verifiable truth of the resurrection, they should redouble their efforts. And so should we, dear brethren, since we know that because he arose, we too shall arise if we are faithful to the commandments of our Lord and to the proclamation of his word.

God's Eternal Purpose

"According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord." -- Ephesians 3:11

A verse by verse study in Ephesians 1

Ephesus and Colosse geographically bracketed the early Christian church in Asia Minor, lying about 100 miles distant from each other. Colosse was part of a triumvirate of churches, together with Laodicea and Hierapolis. It is directly linked to Laodicea in Colossians 4:13-16. It is therefore noteworthy that the symbolic letters to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3 are similarly bracketed by Ephesus and Laodicea.

The epistles to these two churches were written at about the same time, probably A.D. 58, and for much the same purpose, Paul confirming to them that God's call was open equally to Jews and Gentiles. Many phrases appear in common in the two epistles. (See box.)

Paul's central argument, particularly in Ephesians, is that there has been a change in God's manner of dealing with the human race; that, whereas his favor had been exclusive to Israel through a law covenant, it was now open to both Jew and Gentile through an administration of grace.

Greetings -- Vs. 1, 2

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus: Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

As in all the epistles, with the exceptions of the three by John, the author immediately identifies himself and his audience. It is probable that the Greek *kai*, here translated "and," would be better translated "even," with the thought not only of further identifying his audience but with the added intention of an encouragement to that complete faithfulness which is the mark of any true "saint."

As is also common in the opening of the epistles, the apostle seeks to bestow "grace and peace" on his readers. Thayer's Lexicon says of the word "grace" that it is that influence which "turns them to Christ, . . . strengthens, keeps them in Christian faith, knowledge, affection, and kindles them to exercise of Christian virtues." The word translated "peace" comes from a primary root meaning "to join" and speaks of that full peace which comes from reconciliation with God. Both of these attributes come from God as the author of the plan, and the Lord Jesus Christ, as its executor.

Predestination -- Verses 3 to 6

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

The blessing of which Paul speaks is that the "saints" are the objects both of God's foreknowledge and his predestination. This text finds its parallel in Romans 8:29: "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren." Foreknowledge and predestination are presented as a two-step process -- "whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate." In the Ephesians text a distinction is shown between these two steps. The "saints," from "before the foundation of the world" are chosen "in him," as members of a foreordained "Christ," or anointed class. Their predestination is "unto" an object -- in Ephesians, "unto" the adoption of sons, and in Romans, "to be conformed to the image of his son."

A rough analogy of this two-step process may be seen in a man contemplating the opening of a large business. He must prepare a business plan in which he visualizes, or foresees, the need for certain types of employees. Then he must predetermine what the job qualifications will be for each position to be filled. In like manner, God, in formulating his plan from "before the foundation of the world," saw the need of a Christ class. Having seen that need, he predetermined the conditions for those who would be of that body.

The expression "from before the foundation of the world" appears twice in the New Testament, here and in 1 Peter 1:19, 20: "But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you." It is to be distinguished from a similar expression, "from the foundation of the world." That term is used of Jesus in Revelation 13:8 and of his church in Revelation 17:8. The harmony between the two is simple. While God's plan for human redemption was laid out in his own mind from "before" he began actual dealings with his creation, it was not put into action until it became triggered by sin at "the foundation of the world."

Lest we should glory in our selection, Paul hastens to add that it is all for the accomplishment of the will of God and for his good pleasure and is only bestowed upon the "saints" as an act of grace.

Redemption, Forgiveness, Knowledge -- Verses 7 to 9

In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence; Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself.

The riches of God's grace bring not only redemption, with its concomitant forgiveness of sins, but he, for his own good pleasure, has bestowed a special degree of knowledge upon his "saints" -- revealing to them "the mystery of his will." This revelation is two-fold: "in all wisdom and prudence." In addressing the distinction between the two Greek words here used, Prof. W. E. Vine, in his Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, has this to say: "While *sophia* [wisdom] is the insight into the true nature of things, *phronesis* [prudence] is the ability to discern modes of action with a view to their results; while *sophia* is theoretical, *phronesis* is practical." As God blessed Bezaleel, the builder of Israel's tabernacle, not only with the spirit of wisdom but also that of workmanship (Ex. 31:2, 3), so he blesses the saints with both the information and ability to perform his will.

Once again Paul stresses that these revelations are not to the credit of the creature but according to God's "good pleasure, which he purposed in himself." This theme of God's "purposes," or plans, is the major subject of the first three chapters of Ephesians. Later in the epistle Paul speaks of this plan as God's "eternal purpose" (3:11). This plan was not only established in eternity past, "before the foundation of the world," but looks forward to eternity future. The Greek word translated "eternal" in this text is *aionian*, meaning "of the ages," thus permitting the legitimate translation of the text being that all things were done according to a "divine plan of the ages."

The Fullness of Times -- Verses 10-12

That in the dispensation of the fullness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him: In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will: That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.

The expression "the dispensation of the fullness of times" can be understood properly in two ways. Ultimately it undoubtedly looks forward to the grand climax of God's plan -- when all things both in heaven and earth are reconciled to him. This will be the answer to the prayer Jesus taught us to pray, "Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10). It is only when this is fully accomplished that "God may be all in all" (1Cor. 15:28). It will be then that God will realize what he has always desired: "who will have all men to be saved, and come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4).

Yet, in another preliminary sense, they were already living in "the fullness of times." As Paul wrote in Galatians 4:4, "when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his son." Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was to die to reconcile all men to God, not the

Israelites only. The "saint" class that was to fill the heavenlies was to be open to both Jew and Gentile. The main object of the letter to the Ephesians was to assure his readers of this fact.

The opening of the door to the Gentiles with the conversion of Cornelius and the full consummation of God's plan form the brackets for the fulfillment of this prediction. What began with Cornelius will not find its completion until all people, the "things on earth," shall be as reconciled as is the church class, "the things in heaven."

That the ultimate reconciliation is Paul's main intention is indicated by the little word "also." This grand plan of at-one-ment has the important by-product of providing a spiritual inheritance that we "also" may obtain. It is this, Paul asserts, that God's plan of the ages predicts, "predestinates," because this was the counsel that God received from "his own will." Again Paul stresses that this is not to the glory of the church, but to the "praise of [God's] glory."

The New American Standard version gives a preferable translation to verse 12, "to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of his glory."

The Holy Spirit -- Verses 13 and 14

In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

The author of the epistle acknowledges that these lofty goals are above the means of the earthly creature alone. He therefore assures them that the guarantee that they can be part of this elect class is that they were "sealed with the holy spirit of promise." Further, he indicates that their ultimate salvation would be the result of a four-step process. First there would be the hearing of the word of truth, which was the good news, or gospel, of salvation. Second, they must believe in it, not with mere mental acquiescence to its veracity, but with the conviction of a full acceptance manifested by a personal commitment, or consecration. Third, they would receive the holy spirit of God as an assurance of their acceptance. Fourth, they must maintain this gift by faithfulness until they would be delivered through death to life anew.

The word picture drawn for us in verse 14 is akin to the process of purchasing a home today. A down payment, or earnest, is laid down which binds the possession until the full amount is paid and then the property is delivered into the hands of the purchaser. In the verse under consideration the word "redemption," Greek *apolutrosis*, should be more properly translated "deliverance" (see Strong's Concordance, Vine's Dictionary, and Thayer's Lexicon).

The same apostle gives a parallel description of this process in 2 Thessalonians 2:13, 14: "But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord,

because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ." Here the word "obtaining" is the same Greek word as "purchased" in the Ephesians text.

Paul's Prayer for the Ephesians -- Verses 15-23

Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, Cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him: The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

Note that their faith was a constant joy to the apostle. He reciprocated with prayers, not only of thanksgiving, but intercessory prayers for their faithfulness. The "knowledge" which he prays will come as a result of God giving wisdom and revelation is more than intellectual assurance. Two Greek words translated knowledge in the New Testament are *oida* from *eido*, and *ginosko*, from *gnosis*. The former is intellectual information, the latter includes experience and heart reliance. This distinction is clearly shown in a statement by Jesus in John 8:55, "ye have not known [from *gnosis*], but I know [*oida*] him." It is this deep experiential and personal knowledge of God which Paul desires for his Ephesian brethren.

It is the same knowledge which the apostle desired for himself in Philippians 3:9-11: "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead."

Paul closes his prayer with his desire for the complete unification of the body with its head. Not only is the body incomplete without a head, the head is incomplete without a body. "Christ," as the anointed, was never designed to be an individual, but a composite of Jesus, the head, and the church, the body. In the last verse of our chapter the church is described as the fullness of Christ. In the companion letter to Colossians he expresses the same thought this way, "In him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." Most translators concur that "Godhead" should be translated "Deity," or that which possesses God's attributes. A permissible translation, of the Colossians text might read, "In the anointed, dwells the complete number who form the body of Christ."

This is the ultimate oneness of the church. This is that oneness for which Jesus prayed in John 17:11, "that they may be one, as we are." In a still larger sense, when humanity is brought to its full perfection, there will be a still further expansion of that oneness for when the race is brought back to full harmony with God we read that he "may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28). This will be the full realization of God's plan which Paul foresaw as the climax of God's plan of the ages, that "he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him."

A Church of Jews and Gentiles

Unity With Diversity

So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. -- Romans 12:5

A verse by verse study of Ephesians 4

Although the apostle Paul was born a Jew, raised a Pharisee, and sought out the local synagogues for worship on the Sabbath, yet he is best known as the "apostle to the Gentiles" (see Romans 15:16). Undoubtedly this was partly because his Christian missionary ministry carried him to the outlying areas of the Jewish Diaspora. Acts 2:9-11 names some fifteen areas where these Jewish emigrants were living.

Ephesus was a seaport town on the west coast of Asia Minor at the mouth of the Cayster River. Its all-weather harbor brought much traffic from Europe and Africa and gave the wealthy town a cosmopolitan atmosphere. The main religious worship of this diverse city was in the great temple of Diana, a magnificent structure dating back to the times of the Amazons, fabled Scythian warriors from the eighth to the fourth century BC. It was destroyed in a fire and rebuilt in the second century before Christ. It was more than a temple and treasure house; it also served as an art gallery, a sanctuary for criminals, and a major tourist attraction with its attendant horde of dealers in souvenirs, antiques, and relics.

The Christian church in Ephesus, as in so many cities of the Diaspora, was a heterogeneous mixture of Jews and Gentiles. With their diverse customs, varying beliefs, and different economic conditions, there was a natural tendency toward cliques and schisms in the church. It is to these that Paul writes his epistle which was sent at the same time, via Tychicus, as the letter to the Colossians, a sister church with much the same make-up and similar problems.

Principles of Unity -- Ephesians 4:1-7

"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ."

The word "therefore" connects this chapter with the previous one, but it is a comparison of contrast and not of similarities. Chapter three ends with an anthem of praise for the glories to follow, whereas chapter four exhorts to lowliness. Emphasizing this theme, Paul emphasizes his own abased state -- as a prisoner in Rome. Yet he does not consider

himself a prisoner of Nero, but of the Lord. It is with the proper view of all things being of God that he begins his exhortation.

The three fundamental traits urged by the apostle -- lowliness, meekness, and long-suffering -- are all important in sustaining good relationships. The first two are mental attributes, while the last flows from their attainment. Lowliness is the objective recognition that we are imperfect and therefore in no position to judge another on his deficiencies. It is the same requirement as the first beatitude: "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (Matthew 5:3).

Meekness on the other hand is a fruit of power. The Lord Jesus was meek, not because he lacked resources, but because he was pliable in the Father's hand to be molded as his Father would desire. Professor Vine expresses it well: "Described negatively, meekness is the opposite to self-assertiveness and self-interest; it is equanimity of spirit that is neither elated nor cast down, simply because it is not occupied with self at all."

Having these characteristics in a diverse and perhaps emotionally-filled church, are the prerequisites Paul saw that the Ephesians needed to "forbear one another in love."

Based upon these fundamentals, it is the "unity of the spirit" which the Ephesians must endeavor to obtain. Such a unity was to have been a present accomplishment, one which they must strive to maintain. This was not a unity of the flesh. That would be impossible considering their diverse backgrounds. The ways of the flesh were to be put away. They were now to act as new creatures. For them "old things" should have passed away and "all things become new" (2 Corinthians 5:16,17). They were not to look at each other "after the flesh" but as coming under the blood of Christ, and him crucified.

This new "unity of the spirit" would contain seven elements:

1. **One Body.** Their individual standing as "new creatures" is the first basis of their unity. Such unity however does not imply uniformity. "For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office" (Romans 12:4).
2. **One Spirit.** Each of the Ephesians attained that "one body" through the same method. They were all begotten of the same spirit, the holy spirit. Their aims should now be spiritual and they should be looking at each other as pursuing the same goals.
3. **One Hope of your calling.** As natural men, their goals were different. Some pursued one trade, others a different one. Now they had the same vocation, the same "calling," the "high calling." Now their goals were alike, to live and reign with their spiritual master.
4. **One Lord.** As their vocations were now the same, so was their leader. As partakers of the heavenly calling their consideration was to be centered on "the apostle and high priest" of their profession -- Christ Jesus (Hebrews 3:1).

5. **One Faith.** The emphasis here is not on unity of belief, but unity of faith. The stages of development of that "one faith" may well vary from individual to individual. As C. T. Russell has well phrased it: "True faith must begin with the one kind of seed-faith in all, no matter what stage of development each may attain" (Reprints, p. 1572).

6. **One Baptism.** Baptism here is not used in the sense of water immersion, but the deeper baptism into Christ of which water is only a symbol. In this discussion it shows the unity of determination which all true Christians share. It is the positive response to the query of Jesus, "Are ye able to drink of the cup that I shall drink of, and to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with."

7. **One God and Father of all.** Above all theirs was to be the unity of family -- not the old natural family ties, but a new family with God as their father and all of them as brothers -- Jesus being the elder brother (Matthew 23:8-10).

Before leaving this section, the apostle has a "but" to add -- a caution that within this unity there may be diverse measures of the same spirit. But whatever the measure, it is the same spirit. These words are parallel to that of the same apostle in Romans 12:3, "For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith."

The Gifts of Christ -- Ephesians 4:8-13

"Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ."

This desired oneness, like everything else in the spiritual realm, revolves around the death and resurrection of Christ. It is a unity not attainable alone, but only with divine assistance. And so Paul asserts that when Jesus ascended he provided the means to lead forth from the grave a multitude of captives. Another result of his ascension was the provision of gifts for mankind. These gifts were individuals specially raised up to provide leadership to mankind -- to the church at the present time, and to the entire world in Christ's glorious kingdom. Paul enumerates four of these gifts:

1. **Apostles.** The "twelve apostles of the Lamb" are the foundation cornerstones of Christ's provision for his church (Revelation 21:14). These (with the exception of Paul) had personally known the Lord, traveled with him, and learned his teachings first-hand. They alone, of all the church, were inspired in their writings. They alone had the ability to pass on the miraculous gifts of the spirit.

2. **Prophets.** In the early church Christ saw that it was necessary to supply some especially endowed with the gift of oratory to both simply explain and emotionally motivate those attracted to the Christian message.

3. **Evangelists.** Evangelists build on the works of the apostles and prophets, making ageless truths relevant to present situations and attracting non-believers to the message of Christ.

4. **Pastors and Teachers.** These two offices are grammatically linked in the Greek and are for those charged with teaching the church through the study of the word. While a "teacher" focuses more on intellectual matters, a "pastor" makes these truths relevant to daily Christian living. This work is well illustrated by the work of the Levites in Nehemiah 8:8.

Verses 12 and 13 detail the object of this four-fold ministry. In verse twelve we read of two current results while verse thirteen gives the long-range purposes. Looking first at the immediate objectives, we find:

To equip the saints for the work of ministry (RSV). Present lessons, whether learned through instruction or by experience, are all for a future ministry of the church. This is summarized in an oft-quoted expression from the familiar "To Us The Scriptures Clearly Teach" found on the inside cover of this journal. The statement reads: "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 kings and priests in the next age."

The edifying of the body of Christ. Whereas the first objective is external for the benefit of others, this one is internal, dealing with the development of a character that is copied after that of their Lord and Master.

The ultimate goals of these gifts must await the glorification of the church. These include:

Unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God. While faith and knowledge are closely related, they are to be distinguished in this passage as cause is to effect. The Greek word here rendered knowledge, *epignosis*, is an active knowledge, an acknowledgement. It describes the mental assent to and obedience of that which is believed. "Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only" (James 1:22).

A perfect man -- the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Likewise, these two terms are meant to build on each other. Not only is the Christian to be developed with the qualities of perfect manhood, but beyond that he is to acquire the spiritual attributes of Christ himself, a sacrificial nature that goes beyond the requirements for earthly life. The latter phrase might be paraphrased, "unto the full mature likeness of the character of Jesus himself."

Stability and Growth -- Ephesians 4:14-16

"That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."

Stability was sorely needed in the early church. In fact, it is sorely needed in every period of the church's history. Truth is not easily interpreted. "The Bible," it is said, "is a harp upon which any tune can be played." More discordant notes have been heard from Christian pulpits than the sweet harmonious sounds of the true gospel. It is for this reason that God has raised up strong teachers throughout the years -- those who could discern the true tones of yesteryears and adapt them to the reality of the present.

The New Living Translation has caught the thought well: "Then we will no longer be like children, forever changing our minds about what we believe because someone has told us something different or because someone has cleverly lied to us and made the lie sound like the truth." Paul describes them as "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 3:7). The certainty of truth is not always open to every new theory. So sure was Paul of his teachings that he wrote, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8). It is not surprising that some of these specious theories appear to have the ring of truth for "Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light" (2 Corinthians 11:14).

Not only does our text warn of the cunning craftiness of the deceiver, it gives a clue as to how to determine the true minister of Christ's word. He will be the one "speaking the truth in love." It is gentleness, humility, and consideration of others which mark the authentic minister rather than his deep mental reasoning powers. The latter may be nothing more than "worldly wisdom," grounded more in philosophy than in the word of God; but the former can never be truly assumed only outwardly since they spring from the heart and a transformed life.

For the body of Christ, as for a natural body, to grow healthy and strong, there must be a unified working together of its various organs. It is in this development of Paul's reasoning that he branches out from the "gifts" of special teachers, to the function of every member, "every joint." The body of Christ is truly interdependent. Paul waxes eloquent on this theme in 1 Corinthians 12:20-27: "But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: and those members of the body, which we think to be less honorable, upon these we bestow more abundant honor; and our

uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honor to that part which lacked: that there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular."

Each Christian is anointed to serve in this body. Each has a talent. Each must seek to use it to influence and assist every other member of the body. And each must recognize his need for the talents of the other and draw upon it if he would be truly spiritually healthy.

Be Not Conformed -- Ephesians 4:17-19

"This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart: who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness."

Paul's reasoning in the next two sections of our chapter closely parallels his thoughts in Romans 12:2, "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."

The analysis here given of the thinking of the natural mind, while scathing, is most perceptive. The Greek *mataioetei*, here translated "vanity" has the thought of emptiness, particularly as producing no satisfactory results. This vanity Paul attributes to the fact that the heart is blinded or hardened, not willing to think of that which benefits others above that which benefits itself. Thus lacking sensitivity, actions become controlled by natural passions, two of which the apostle mentions specifically: the sexual and monetary drives.

Transformation the Answer -- Ephesians 4:20-24

"But ye have not so learned Christ; if so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: that ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."

True Christianity begins with a new mind set. Historically the Bible treats one's attitudes toward others in two steps of development. As a result of the fall, man's priority is to place self first -- the survival of the fittest. Mosaic Law raised this standard one step higher -- to "love thy neighbor as thyself." Christ lifted the bar one level higher yet, to sacrifice one's self for others even as Jesus loved fallen man enough to give life itself for them.

The basis for this new outward-reaching man is within. Before one can truly help others to live productive lives, he or she must develop the necessary qualities within -- righteousness and true holiness. While the concept of "true holiness" may seem to be a contrast with the hypocritical holiness of the Scribes and Pharisees, that is not the thought of the Greek expression. It denotes a holiness that grows out of truth, a holiness that is based on laws that even predate those of Moses -- the law of God as written in the conscience of man. This is how Sophocles phrases these laws in his *Antigonus*:

"Nor did I deem thy edicts strong enough,
That thou, a mortal man, shouldst overpass
The unwritten laws of God that know not change.
They are not of today nor yesterday,
But live forever, nor can man assign
When first they sprang to being."

Practical Applications -- Ephesians 4:25-32

"Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor: for we are members one of another. Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: neither give place to the devil. Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth. Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you."

Paul begins his list of specific applications by stressing the necessity of an open, sincere, and honest communication within the Christian community because of mutual interdependency -- "for we are members one of another."

He continues by showing that there is a proper and an improper anger. All anger is not necessarily a sin, but all anger opens a temptation to sin. In his notes Barnes suggests six areas where anger becomes sin:

- "1. When it is excited without any sufficient cause -- when we are in no danger, and do not need it for a protection. We should be safe without it.
2. When it transcends the cause, if any cause really exists. All that is beyond the necessity of immediate self-protection, is apart from its design, and is wrong.
3. When it is against "the person" rather than the "offence." The object is not to injure another; it is to protect ourselves.
4. When it is attended with the desire of "revenge."

5. When it is cherished and heightened by reflection.

6. When there is an unforgiving spirit; a determination to exact the utmost satisfaction for the injury which has been done."

In any case, anger is to be temporary and attempts should be made to resolve the issue "before the sun goes down," else there will be the temptation to "give way to the devil."

The contrast in the next admonition is most poignant. Not only were they not to follow a former life style which may have occasioned theft, but they were to be gainfully employed, not merely for their own gain, but to have the ability to give to one in need.

Not only was a Christian to watch his emotions and actions, he was also to watch his words. One of the strongest pressures to conform lies in the area of our speech. Daily we are assaulted with not only vile language, but also with words condemnatory of others. These are to have no place in a transformed life.

To revert to the ways of the world, Paul says, would "grieve the spirit" since it would be a direct renunciation of the purpose of God having bestowed his spirit. Such "grieving" of the spirit, though serious, is to be distinguished from the far more serious "quenching" of the holy spirit, which involves completely extinguishing the new life (1 Thessalonians 5:19).

The chapter concludes with a list of qualities of the new life which must be substituted for the bad qualities of the former manner of living. Bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, evil-speaking, and malice are all to be replaced with kindness and tender-hearted forgiveness. In such a way the body of Christ, with all of its beauty of diversity, can grow into the productive unity God designed for it.

A Falling Away First

Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time. -- 1 John 2:18

Verse by verse study in 2 Thessalonians 2

The question of the return of Jesus Christ preoccupied the minds of many of the early followers of Christ. This was particularly so in the church in Thessalonica. Paul's second epistle to this congregation addresses several issues concerning this much-anticipated event.

A Falling Away First -- Verses 1 to 5

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming (parousia) of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?

In his first epistle Paul had stirred the Thessalonians with the prospect of the second coming of Christ with its attendant resurrection of the saints (1 Thessalonians 4:13–5:6). In that letter he emphasized the suddenness and thief-like manner of that return and therefore the need to be awake, alert, and watching.

Evidently there were some in Thessalonica who mistakenly had deduced that Christ had already returned. A similar situation may have also occurred in Corinth (1 Corinthians 4:8). This misapprehension indicates that they anticipated an invisible return of their Master for there is no evidence they had heard reports of Jesus being seen in the flesh.

There were three methods that Paul feared might lead them astray on this subject: 1) "by spirit," that is, by someone claiming to have the spirit of prophecy; 2) "by mouth," as by some claiming they had heard Paul himself make this statement; 3) "by letter as from us." The fact that there may have been just such a spurious letter is suggested by Paul's assurance that any letter from himself would bear his distinctive signature (2 Thessalonians 3:17).

Paul then informs the church that two things must occur before the anticipated presence of Christ: an apostasy and the revelation of its consequence, the man of sin.

This apostasy had been predicted by Jesus himself in the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matthew 13:24–30). The tares ("children of the wicked one" -- Matthew 13:38)

were to grow side by side with the wheat until the harvest, which Jesus defined as "the end of the age" (Matthew 13:40).

Not only was this prophecy of an apostasy a New Testament truth, it was testified adequately in the Old Testament as well, particularly in the book of Daniel under the figure "the abomination of desolation" (Daniel 11:31 and 12:11).

This apostasy was to be fostered by "the man of sin." This developing apostasy not only would occur, it would be revealed before the return of Christ. The description of this wicked one stands in marked contrast to Christ himself.

He is described as "the man (or embodiment) of sin," "the son of perdition (or destruction)," and the self-exultant one who "opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God." In contrast, Jesus at his triumphal entry is described prophetically as "just, having salvation, and lowly" (Zechariah 9:9). The two stand in bold relief:

Jesus

Just [righteous]
Having salvation
Lowly

The Apostate

The embodiment of sin
The son of perdition
Exalting himself above God

These things, Paul assured the Thessalonians, were not new. He had taught them the same things when he was with them in Thessalonica.

The Development of the Apostasy -- Verses 6 and 7

And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.

It did not take long for the great Adversary to plant seeds of evil in the church. These seeds -- variously described as "the man of sin," "the son of perdition," "the mystery of iniquity," and "antichrist" -- were already evident in the apostles' days. In their epistles, the authors allude to several of these apostates. Some of those thus named were Diotrefes (3John 9), Demas (2 Timothy 4:10), and Hymenaeus and Philetus (2 Timothy 2:17). The apostle John showed similar awareness of the ingrowing evil when he wrote in 1 John 2:18, "Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time."

In the book of Revelation, the message to the angel of the first church, Ephesus, was: "But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate"

(Revelation 2:6). Since Revelation is a book of symbols, we might well take this name as symbolic. The name Nicholas means "lord over the people" and may well indicate the spirit of this "mystery of iniquity." It was during the first century that a clergy class began to develop, taking on near dictatorial powers in the supervision of their followers. The apostle Peter warns of this very danger in admonishing the elders of the church, "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock" (1 Peter 5:2,3).

Verses 6 and 7 of 2 Thessalonians are clearer in the New American Standard translation: "And you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he may be revealed. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way."

Because the gospel message was not only unpopular to the Jews but also was oppressed by the Roman government, these tendencies to dominate lay latent. They could not be manifested openly until Christianity became the state religion in the days of Constantine in the fourth century. It was then that this developing trend toward clerical domination became openly evident. It came into full fruition during the "Dark Ages" when persecutions drove the true followers of Jesus literally into the wilderness, and the inquisitions introduced an epoch of torture.

Destroying the Apostasy -- Verses 8 to 10

And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

The revelation of that "Wicked" is in stages. First, from the time of the exaltation of Christianity under Constantine, this spirit of dominance became evident. Then, as centuries rolled by, reformer after reformer began calling attention to the apostate nature of the ruling "papal" system and applying the apocalyptic prophecies of Revelation to it.

These revelations of apostasy preceded the return of the Lord; however, the subsequent destructive processes were to follow it. Two steps in the tearing-down process are outlined in verse eight: "consuming with the spirit of his mouth" and "destroying with the brightness of his coming." These steps appear to be listed in the reverse order of their fulfillment.

The latter action, "to destroy," is from the Greek *katargeo*, meaning "to render powerless." Throughout the centuries of the gospel age the power of the dominant system has been in the superstitions foisted on the laity as though they were truth. The enlightenments of the past two centuries largely have dispelled these superstitions and many have increasingly lost confidence in organized religion. In Psalm 97:4 these

enlightenments are attributed directly to the return of the Lord: "His lightnings enlightened the world: the earth saw, and trembled." These enlightenments are "the brightness of his coming" and have the effect of notifying all who see them that there is a new day dawning.

Not only will this apostate system be rendered powerless, eventually it will be utterly consumed. This second action will mark the permanent removal of that "mystery of iniquity" which was already at work in the days of the apostles. This will not mean, however, the final destruction of the great architect behind these powers of evil for we read of his being "loosed" at the end of Christ's millennial kingdom to attempt once again to deceive the nations (Revelation 20:7-10).

Nor should we assume that the individuals who succumb to this "deceivableness of unrighteousness" will perish eternally. Professor W. E. Vine says of the Greek word *apollumi*, here translated perish: "The idea is not extinction but ruin, loss, not of being, but of wellbeing."

This is the same thought given in Revelation 18. In that chapter we find the pronouncement of doom on this same system in the words, "Babylon is fallen" (Revelation 18:2). However it is not until Revelation 18:21 that we see the final destruction of Babylon. Between these two verses we have a detailed listing of those whose well-being is affected by its fall.

Strong Delusions -- Verses 11 and 12

And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

In these verses we have the reason why God permitted the apostasy in the first place -- to try the hearts of men. God desires servants who yield instant and willing obedience. During the centuries of apostasy, the easy course for an individual was to go along with the masses in their obeisance to the dominant systems. The "little flock" (Luke 12:32), in contrast, is more interested in yielding service to God than to man-made organizations.

At the Lord's return, when these false religious systems come into great difficulty, there tends to be a pulling away from them. Yet God desires the test to continue. Therefore he permits other strong delusions to sift out those who are unwilling to uphold the high ideals of complete consecration to him. The apostle carefully chose the Greek word *pempo*, rather than the stronger *apostello*, to describe this action of God. Citing the noted Greek lexicographer Thayer, Professor Vine notes that *pempo* is a more general term than *apostello*; *apostello* usually "suggests official or authoritative sending." Here the thought is more of permission than of directing the delusions upon men. The Living Bible catches the thought well with this translation: "So God will allow them to believe lies with all their hearts."

The New American Standard correctly translates verse 12, "in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness." Although the judgment is negative, there is no thought in the word of eternal punishment. Their fate is to endure the destructive processes of the systems in which they trusted. Their destiny is the "outer darkness, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 25:30).

Salvation Through Sanctification -- Verses 13 and 14

But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Turning now from the class who receives the negative judgment, Paul directs his attention to his Thessalonian brethren. He expresses his grateful confidence that they will not receive such negative judgments because they have engaged in a two-fold process toward the obtaining of their heavenly glorification.

The first of these steps is "sanctification of the spirit." Called to holiness, they seek to practice holiness in their daily lives. They accept their every experience as sent from God for the purpose of setting them apart for a holy work in the future -- to assist their Master in the uplifting of the human race.

The second step is "belief of the truth." This is not mere intellectual acquiescence to the precepts of Christ, but it is a living faith. This faith, as James says, is demonstrated by their works (James 2:18). It is this active, appreciative faith, which sets them apart from those who are deceived by the "strong delusions."

Some may take the statement of these verses as indicating predestination. However, they fall far short of that concept. Rather than saying that God has pre-selected them to receive salvation, Paul's point is that they were chosen with that goal in mind and that they must follow successfully the steps of sanctification and belief if they would reach that goal. As the same apostle expressed it in Ephesians 4:4, "ye are called in the one hope of your calling."

Admonitions -- Verses 15 to 17

Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle. Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.

The chapter closes with the admonition to stand fast in the doctrinal understanding which they had received, both from personal teachings and through Paul's epistles. By using the word "traditions" he distinguished between direct Scripture (from the Old Testament) and the teachings which he deduced from his study of those inspired writings. The body of

apostolic teaching, while in accord with the law which they had received, was a radical expansion of the body of Old Testament writings, it represented, in many cases, a departure from the traditions handed down through their Jewish rabbis.

As elsewhere, Paul clearly distinguished between the Lord Jesus Christ and God. How comforting to note that God is introduced in this passage, not merely as the Father of Christ, but as "our Father." Through their consecrations, the Thessalonians had become spiritual brothers of Jesus and uniquely sons of God.

What everlasting consolations and good hopes such a relationship portends! It should comfort our hearts and establish us in every good work and word just as it did the Thessalonian church.

Hygienic Doctrine

If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness. -- 1 Timothy 6:3

A verse by verse study in the second chapter of Titus

Titus served as Paul's emissary for many years, accompanying Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem before being sent on specific missions to Corinth, Macedonia, Crete, and Dalmatia (present-day Yugoslavia). The epistle to Titus is written during his ministry in Crete, a large Mediterranean island some 65 miles south of the Peloponesian peninsula of Greece with a hundred organized cities.

The gospel probably found early roots there since Jews from Crete were in Jerusalem when Peter and the other apostles spoke on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:11)

The epistle gives specific instructions from Paul to Titus on how to establish a church there and "to set in order the things that are lacking" (1:5). The first chapter deals with the selection of leadership for the churches, the second with the establishment of sound doctrine and the third with the maintenance of high Christian character need for the latter was specially stressed by Paul since the Cretans had a reputation for a life style of excess. Paul quotes the Greek poet Epimenides of Knossos, "The Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies" and verifies it as accurate with the assertion, "this witness is true" (1:12, 13).

Sound Doctrine - Verse 1

"But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine."

Doctrine is the subject of this chapter. Dr. Paul Brand, in his book *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*, likens Christian doctrine to the bone structure of the human body. It forms the rigid skeleton of beliefs which are fleshed out with extended interpretations and covered with skin to give us a complete moral code of conduct. All doctrines are not abstract intellectual concepts. A doctrine is simply a teaching. It can be a statement of the inner workings of God's plans or it can be a teaching of how to live the Christian life. Both alike are doctrines.

It is not uncommon to hear the word "sound" in our text used as if it had the meaning of "accurate, correct, or pure." The Greek word here translated "sound," *hugiano* (Strong's 5198), is the same word from which we derive our English word "hygiene." It bears the same meaning as the English, "pertaining to health, to be healthy." Except for the Pastoral Epistles it is used of physical health in all other biblical passages.

Perhaps the best translation would be "wholesome" as in 1 Timothy 6:3, "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus

Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness." It is significant that these "wholesome" (or hygienic) words are here combined with "the doctrine that is according to godliness," to godly living.

Paul, however, is not merely admonishing Titus to preach sound doctrine, but "the things which become," or befit, sound doctrine. He is describing the effects of wholesome teaching.

Four Classes - Verses 2 to 6

That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience. The aged women likewise, that they be in behavior as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things. That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed. Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded.

The "aged men" here are to be distinguished from the "bishops" of chapter 1 (v. 7) and those of 1 Timothy 3. Here the term apparently means just what it says, those of older age. The first four items on the list for the aged men -- sobriety, gravity, temperateness and a wholesome faith -- while applicable to all, were particularly suited for the Cretan disposition. The latter two -- charity [*agape* love] and patience -- may have more direct reference to the disposition of the elderly (often through physical deterioration) to a certain crankiness. As Matthew Henry notes in his commentary: "Aged persons are apt to be peevish, fretful, and passionate; and therefore need to be on their guard against such infirmities and temptations."

The first three admonitions to the older women seem likewise related to the Cretan problems of excess, stressing a life of holiness and the avoidance of alcoholic excess and busybodying. The closing exhortation to this group is implied to the older men as well: to teach by precept and example the younger generation how to live a godly life.

Evidently the situation in Crete was not that different from that in nearby Corinth in that there was a tendency for the younger women to be assertive. Hygienic doctrine for them was largely related to domestic living, submission to their husbands as heads of the household, chastity, and attendance to their responsibilities in child raising.

A Living Example - Verses 7 and 8

In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, Sound speech, that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you.

Paul had given a similar example in his epistle to Timothy: "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Tim. 4:12). Our conduct speaks so much louder than our

words. A teacher cannot teach what he does not know. This was even more important in the community on Crete where the general life style was so different from that of the Christian.

Four ingredients of his teaching are emphasized: "unconruptness, gravity, sincerity, and sound speech." The word here translated "unconruptness" has more than thought of undecaying, that which is permanent. The Christian life style is not like a garment that is put on for holy days only, but must be worn in the daily concourse of life. His gravity would contrast sharply with the levity that was such a large part of the island life style. The sincerity was to show that the same principles which Titus was teaching to others were principles he applied to himself, that he was not a hypocrite. The word translated "sound" in this passage is closely related to that of the first verse of the chapter and has much the same meaning, "wholesome, upbuilding." It is just this kind of Christian teaching, then or now, which cannot be gainsayed and if taught by one who himself lives the same principles leaves its opponents speechless, "having no evil things to say of you."

Servants and Masters - Verses 9 and 10

Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again; Not purloining, but shewing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in all things.

Not content with advice to the seemingly all-inclusive classes of older and younger men and women, Paul singles out one class for special admonitions. Society in New Testament times was not all that dissimilar from pre-Civil War America, though the conditions of servants was somewhat more elevated than that of the American slaves. It is probable that Paul speaks only of servants in this epistle because most of the believers were of this class, whereas in his epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians he also admonishes the masters of the servants (Eph. 6:9; Col. 4:1).

It appears from this passage that some of these servants served in more than menial capacities and were, what we might call in our day "white collar workers." This may be why he stresses that they do not purloin, or embezzle, from their employers, but show strict accountability -- "good fidelity." In this way they are "adorning" the gospel, showing its fruitage in their lives.

Taught by Grace - Verses 11 and 12

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world.

Herein lies the secret of the "sound doctrine" which Titus was to commend to the Cretans, the real teacher would be "the grace of God that bringeth salvation." Being saved was not a matter of current attainment to Paul but a process which must be applied to purify the life. A condition of the salvation of which Paul speaks is a recognition of our

own unworthiness. "Repent and be converted" was the clarion call to the prospective believer. Appreciation for what God has done for us must beget a determination to clean up our own lives. Elsewhere the same apostle writes, "I . . . beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called" (Eph. 4:1).

Our society today is not that different from the hedonism which prevailed in Crete. We, too, live in a materialistic world where every sort of pleasure is within our grasp. Thus the admonition is timeless, to deny "ungodliness and worldly lusts."

It is not enough, though, to cleanse our lives of ungodly pleasures. We must replace them with a new style of life. If we fail we will be like the man of whom Jesus spoke who swayed an ungodly spirit from his mind only to find it replaced by seven spirits even more wicked (Matt. 12:43-45). The three ingredients of our new life are to live "soberly, righteously, and godly." The first of these graces is basically that of self-discipline or restraint. Professor W. E. Vine says that it "it suggests the exercise of that self-restraint that governs all passions and desires, enabling the believer to be conformed to the mind of Christ."

Righteousness goes beyond soberness. If soberness is basically a negative grace, eschewing evil thoughts, words, and deeds; then righteousness is its positive counterpart, replacing the former activities with those which are governed by strict standards of justice.

Godliness is the third progressive step. According to Vine, it "denotes that piety which, characterized by a godward attitude, does that which is well-pleasing to Him." It is an added dimension to that of righteousness as love is an added grace to justice. Christ is spoken of as "the mystery of godliness" (1 Tim. 3:16.) His life added a whole new dimension to that required of the Israelites by God's law -- the dimension of sacrifice. Since "God is love" (1 John 4:8), then godliness is living a life motivated by love. That apostle says again in 1 John 3:16, "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren."

This godly life is not a matter for the future, but Paul urges Titus to ask his hearers to do it in "this present world," this "present evil world" (Gal. 1:4). The true Christian challenge is to live a godly life in an ungodly world.

The Incentive - Verses 13 and 14

Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

Such a radical change in life style requires motivation. Here we have it supplied. It is the anticipation of the second advent of Christ. It is at that time that the judgment of the saints is made manifest. It is then that they are redeemed from "all iniquity" and presented as a "peculiar people," or as the American Standard Version better phrases it,

"a people for his own possession." The earmark of these followers would be that they would be "zealous of good works."

Verse 13 is sometimes used to support the concept of the trinity. Kenneth Wuest, in his *Expanded Translation of the Greek New Testament* draws attention to Granville Sharp's rule of the Greek which states that when two nouns are joined by the conjunction *kai* and only the first is preceded by the definite article both refer to the same thing. That is true in this verse. His conclusion, with which we disagree is: "that the Savior, Jesus Christ, is God, thus teaching his deity."

This conclusion, however, is based on the premise that God referred to in this verse is Jehovah. This is highly interpretative. The word for God, Greek *theos*, is also used of Jesus, as well as of angels, ancient judges of Israel, and even Satan, "the god (*theos*) of this world." It is the Son of God, and not God himself, who have a "glorious appearing (Greek, *epiphania*) predicted in the scriptures -- the second advent of Jesus Christ. It is the hope of this appearing to which Paul refers in the epistle to Titus.

The Commission - Verse 15

These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.

In this final verse Paul summarizes his commission to Titus. Not only is he to deliver the messages of "that which becomes sound doctrine," but he is to exhort, or urge, their following and to rebuke those who go astray. The "liberty" of the gospel was very attractive to the early witnesses of the Christian faith, especially for the Jews who had been under the bondage of the Law. Therefore it was necessary that strong admonitions be given in establishing new churches that the object of the gospel, to produce a character likeness to both God and Christ, be realized.

The hierarchical establishment of the early extension churches, such as those in Crete, was not meant to be a model for the age. Professor Mosheim, in his *Church History*, notes that as the individual new congregations developed they were to become autonomous from the churches which sponsored them and became responsible for their own selection of leaders and the maintenance of order and discipline. This made it even more important that, in the establishment stages, that there be sufficient education in sound doctrine, hygienic or wholesome teachings which would prepare them for the greater independence there were to have later.

While the age of Titus is not known, he may well have been about the same age as Timothy. Certainly he did not carry with him apostolic authority. He was an emissary of Paul and was not acting on his own initiative. Knowing this Paul admonishes Titus to not let himself be despised by those whom he was sent to serve. It brings to mind the similar words he wrote in his letter to Timothy, "let no man despise thy youth" (1 Tim. 4:12).

Hygiene Promotes Health

Sound doctrine, then, consists of those wholesome teachings about the Christian life which are meant to keep the body of Christ, his church, in the best of health. They are the health food of the new creature. In other of Paul's writings they are contrasted with earthly teachings and striving over words and endless genealogies which breed strife and contention. How important it is for all God's children to be daily nourished by those doctrines of truth which can be applied in the Christian life and keep them strong in the Lord!

The Pre-Eminence of Christ

Far Above All Principality

Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come. -- Ephesians 1:20,21

A verse by verse study in Hebrews 1

Pre-eminence is the theme of the book of Hebrews. Nelson's Bible Dictionary emphasizes this theme in its outline of the book, an abbreviated portion of which is reproduced here:

Superiority of Christ over the Prophets	1:1-1:3
Superiority of Christ over the Angels	1:4-2:18
Superiority of Christ over Moses	3:1-4:13
Superiority of Christ's Priesthood over Aaron's	4:14-7:28
Superiority of Christ's Covenant over Law Covenant	8:1-8:13
Superiority of Christ's Sacrifice over Law Sacrifices	9:1-10:18
Superiority of Christian's Walk of Faith	10:19-13:25

The contrast between Jesus' life on earth and his station in heaven after his ascension could not be more complete. Paul describes it in nearly poetic language:

“Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” -- Philippians 2:6-11, NIV.

It is just a portion of this superlative position, then, that we see the apostle contemplating in the first chapter of Hebrews.

Superiority Over the Prophets -- -Verses 1-3

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.”

All of the epistles of the New Testament, with the exception of the three by John and this epistle to the Hebrews, begin with the author’s name. Here the writer sees fit to attribute the authorship to God. If the writer, as we believe, was the apostle Paul, the reason seems evident. As a “minister to the Gentiles” (Romans 15:16), and the outspoken opponent of the Judaizing elements in the early church, his words might be suspected of bias by some of his readers. The attribution of the epistle to God invokes a higher authority. He is saying, in effect, the doctrine that I am about to inscribe is not mine but that of God himself. Jesus uses a similar attribution in John 14:10.

Periodically, God raised up prophets to correct his wayward people of Israel in “divers manners” -- sometimes in direct words, sometimes through dreams and visions, sometimes through enacted dramas. Whatever the manner, they always spoke as they were “moved by the holy spirit” (2 Peter 1:21). Frequently the prophetic writers did not themselves comprehend the import of their message (1 Peter 1:10-12).

But now, Paul asserts, there was a new spokesman -- one who did not merely narrate what he saw or what he was told, but one who had first-hand knowledge of all things. This spokesman, the son of God, possessed seven pre-eminent characteristics which Paul enumerates:

1. He was God’s appointed “heir of all things.”
2. He was Jehovah’s agency in the creation of the worlds.
3. He is the reflected brightness of the character attributes of God.
4. Raised to the divine nature, he is composed of the same “substance” as his Father, namely, divinity.
5. He is given direction over all things and charged with their “upholding.”
6. He possessed the qualifications for this by purging sin from the human race through the sacrifice of his life, culminating at Calvary.
7. He was now seated on the second highest seat of the universe, “at the right hand of the Majesty,” “waiting for his enemies to be made his footstool” (Hebrews 10:13, NIV).

First Contrast with the Angels -- Verses 4 and 5

“Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?”

The first demonstration of the superiority of Christ is in the unique glory of his name. Two Old Testament quotations are adduced in support of this argument. The first is from Psalm 2:7.

While it is true that Jesus, as the Logos, was created higher than all other angelic beings, it is not to this that our text refers. Rather, it is to his resurrection. Paul, speaking in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia, makes this plain: “God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee” (Acts 13:33). It was through the faithfulness of his life and his obedience to God even unto death that he obtained his highly exalted position (Philippians 2:6-11).

The second supporting Scripture is cited from 2 Samuel 7:14 and is a promise given to David concerning his son Solomon. David had desired to build a temple for God, and in this passage the prophet Nathan informs him that this desire will not be granted but that the temple would be built by his son. He promised to be a wise father to Solomon, one who would chasten and correct him for any iniquities he would commit. Despite the chastenings, however, he pledged, “But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever” (2 Samuel 7:15,16).

Paul’s use of this quotation is an obvious reference to the “greater than Solomon” (Matthew 12:42). The text however refers to more than the glory of Solomon. His honor comes as a result of his father David. A verse with similar import, applicable to David, is found in Psalm 89:26-28, “He shall cry unto me, Thou art my father, my God, and the rock of my salvation. Also I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth. My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him.” It is such passages as these that made the Jews of the first advent look for their Messiah as “the son of David.”

Second Contrast with the Angels -- Verses 6-9

“And again, when he bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him. And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire. But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.”

Paul’s second contrast is to demonstrate the inherent subservience of the angels to Christ. Three references are cited by Paul to support this relationship.

Verse 6 supplies many problems in translation. Authorities disagree whether the phrase “and again” means merely the introduction of another citation or whether it properly belongs later in the sentence, making it read “When he again bringeth [or introduces] his first-begotten [first-born] into the world.” The latter may well indicate his second advent, which fits well with the citation being used. The reference is probably to Psalm 97:7. The attribution of this quote to the Septuagint of Deuteronomy 32:43 is unlikely for the following reasons: 1) the words there -- “let all the angels of God worship him” -- are not in the Hebrew and it is questionable whether Paul would have used a non-Hebrew text in an epistle specifically to the “Hebrews”; and 2) it seems stretched to apply the context in Deuteronomy to the Messiah. “Confounded be all they that serve graven images, that boast themselves of idols: worship him, all ye gods.” The context of this psalm, which even two noted Jewish rabbis -- Rashi and Kimchi -- acknowledge to be a Messianic psalm, is apparently to the second advent and not to the first.

However, we suggest the passage probably refers to the time of his resurrection. In the epistle to the Colossians the same apostle notes that the term “firstborn” refers in two separate ways to Christ, both as the “firstborn of every creature” and also as the “firstborn from the dead” (Colossians 1:15,18).

The last two citations are set in contrast. <-1>Psalm 104:4 places the angelic host in a ministerial or servant possession, while Psalm 45:6, 7 pictures the Messiah as a reigning king, ascribing this regal position to his proven love of righteousness and abhorrence of wickedness. These are the two qualifications to make him eligible for his anointing as king with the “oil of gladness, above his fellows.”

Third Contrast with the Angels -- Verses 10-12

“And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.”

Here the apostle quotes Psalm 102:25-27. This is an acknowledged Messianic psalm which many attribute to forming the prophetic words of Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane.

While not a direct contrast with the angelic host, the argument for the pre-eminence of Jesus is not only that he was in existence before all things, but he established the very foundation of the earth and the heavens. By “foundation” we are not to understand the literal sub-strata of the earth and heaven, but of the order of things which are set in contrast to “the new heavens and new earth.” We suggest that the reference is to the foundation principles by which society is founded -- the earth being those which establish man's relationship with his fellow, and the heaven being those which establish his relationship with God.

When Adam and Eve sinned and were driven from the garden of Eden, they perished. Perishing does not mean annihilation just as it did not so mean in the case of Noah when “the world, being overflowed with water, perished” (2 Peter 3:6). Just as a garment is folded for later use, they remain set aside for future use. So, that same perfect society which could have been in Eden, will be restored in Christ's kingdom.

But even as the patterns of this world change from age to age and from dispensation to - dispensation, so Christ remains unchangeable: “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever” (Hebrews 13:8).

Fourth Contrast with the Angels -- Verses 13 and 14

“But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool? Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?”

In this final passage of Hebrews chapter 1 the writer asserts that God's promise of rulership over earth was uniquely given to Jesus. Never, he argues, was such a promise made to angels. The citation is from Psalm 110:1 and is applied by Paul to Christ in describing the kingdom: “For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith, all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all” (1 Corinthians 15:27,28).

In contrast to this role of royal conqueror, he again refers to Psalm 104:4, a text he had referenced earlier in verse 7. Not only are the angels to be subject to Jesus, but they are to be subject to his faithful followers as well, to “them who shall be heirs of salvation.” This promise is explicitly stated in Psalm 34:7, “The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.”

The discussion concerning the relative roles of Jesus and the angels is continued in the second chapter of Hebrews, where Paul focuses on the role the angels played in the ministering of the law at Sinai, contrasting it with that of Jesus in his role over the entire subject race of mankind.

Thus, step by step we see the writer of this epistle to his natural kin of the Hebrew nation establishing a firm foundation for the supremacy of Christ in all things. Well can we join with the angelic host in singing the rhapsody of praise recorded in Revelation 5:11,12, “And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing.”

The Preeminence of Christ

And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. -- Colossians 1:18

A verse by verse Bible study in Hebrews 1

One of the finest examples of topical Bible study is the entire book of Hebrews. The unnamed author step by step shows the superiority of the ministry of Christ to all that preceded him. Progressively he compares Jesus to the angels, to Moses, and to Aaron. After displaying how the priesthood of Melchizedec is better than the Aaronic, he continues by demonstrating how the realities pictured by Israel's ancient tabernacle outshine the types that indicate them.

Superiority of Christ's Words -- Verses 1 to 3

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.

An epistle often starts with the author's name. Only here and in the Johanne epistles are there exceptions to this rule. Even the book of Revelation, after an introductory phrase, starts with the author's name, "John."

The author of Hebrews, treating the sensitive subject of the superiority of the gospel to the law, decided to appeal to a higher authority, both to give added strength to his reasoning and to eliminate any biases which might be attached to the use of his own name. He calls attention to the fact that the Old Testament was not written as one continuous treatise. Written over a two thousand year period by a number of authors in 39 separate books, it was not meant to convey a step by step outline of God's plan but, rather, a source book of data from which truths could be extracted and arranged.

The prophetic revelation was given hint by hint. God revealed to Adam that the Messiah would come from the seed of the woman; to Abraham, that he should spring from his loins; to Jacob, that he should be of the tribe of Judah; to David, that he would be the heir of his throne; to Micah, that he would be born in Bethlehem; and to Isaiah, that he should be born of a virgin.

Not only did the times vary but the manner of revelation as well. Some prophets were directly inspired while others had dreams or were given visions. Some spoke directly, some in poetic metaphor, and still others acted out their prophecies. Now, the author of Hebrews continues, was the time for a clearer vision.

No longer would Jehovah's spokesman be a servant, but he would have his own Son speak for him. The Son would not only have the authority of position, "heir of all things," but would have the authority of being an eye-witness of all, the one "by whom also he made the worlds."

The contrast is not only between Jesus and the prophets of old. In the balance of the chapter the author also compares Jesus as a spokesman with the angels who carried out a similar function. The specific angels to whom he refers are apparently those mentioned in 2:2-5 and were angelic forces active in the giving of the law at Sinai. (See also Acts 7:53 and Gal. 3:19).

The two phrases in verse three are well rendered in the Revised Version of the Bible, "He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature." The authority of Christ's words are magnified by the even greater glory which they reflect and authenticated by his bearing the exact impression of God's own nature, the divine -- "far above all principalities and powers" (Eph. 1:21).

His right to this position of second highest power in the entire universe was attained by his "more excellent" ministry of providing redemption for man's sins through his death on the cross.

A More Excellent Name -- Verses 4 and 5

Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?

In the customs of our day an inheritance is a right to property after the death of another, usually an ancestor. The usage of this term in the Bible is different. It merely shows the continuity of possession of the inherited object within the family line. In the text under consideration the word shows the family relationship by which Jesus achieved his exaltation. We know not how many ranks of angels there are. Some are indeed very powerful. The highest ranks of the angelic hosts appear to have been filled by Lucifer and Gabriel. Yet none of these could claim the same family position of Jesus. He was uniquely the "only begotten" Son of God.

The writer evinces two Old Testament quotes to support his point. The first is very direct and is taken from a passage that both Jews and Christians view as a Messianic Psalm. It is from Psalm 2:7, "I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee."

The second quote, however, is more difficult to trace. There are three texts with these words: 2 Samuel 7:14; 1 Chronicles 17:13 and 22:10. However, all three refer in context to Solomon as the one chosen by God to build the temple for which David longed. A

fourth reference with similar terminology is found in Psalm 89:26, 27 and refers to King David himself.

An important rule of prophetic interpretation can be noticed here. The author of Hebrews makes no excuse for applying Old Testament references, not to their original recipients but to their larger counterparts -- to the one who would be both "David's son and David's Lord" (Matt. 22:45) and "the greater than Solomon" (Matt. 12:42).

The implication is clear. The significant interpretation of the Old Testament references is not to the ones to whom they were addressed but to a greater counterpart, the Messiah of Israel. Both texts are used to establish his familial claim to his newly inherited position at the right hand of the heavenly Father.

Over the Angels -- Verses 6 to 9

And again, when he bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him. And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire. But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.

The quotation evoked to demonstrate that Christ is to be worshipped by the angels appears to be an amplification of the last phrase of Psalm 97:7, "worship him, all ye gods." Once again, the choice of the quotation is curious. The time setting of the Psalm is when "The LORD reigneth" and when "his lightnings enlightened the world" (vs. 1, 4). These verses seemingly apply to the Messianic reign and not to the time of the first advent.

This confusion may be clarified by several translations of the Hebrew text which change both the word order and the tense. The New American Standard, American Standard, and New King James Bibles phrase it thus: "And when he again brings the first born into the world . . ." These translations suggest an application at the second advent of Christ rather than the first. This accords better with the Psalm source of the quotation. In any case, the point of the Old Testament passage is clear -- Messiah's position is sufficiently higher than that of the angels so that he is deserving of their worship.

In the next pair of citations the author contrasts the offices of angels and the Son. The former are "ministers" while the latter is a king. The Greek word *leiturgous* denotes a noble position. Rather than being a slave or paid employee, it denotes one who voluntarily offers to serve without remuneration. Professor W. E. Vine says it refers primarily to "one who discharged a public office at his own expense." This is an honorable position and implies a spirit we would do well to emulate. However, it is not to be compared with the position of Christ, who not only has an everlasting throne but whose rule is denoted by righteousness.

The Old Testament quotation is taken from Psalm 45:6, 7. It not only designates Christ as the holder of this exalted position but also lists the qualifications which entitled him to it. "Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity." It is not enough to desire acts of righteousness but one must also totally oppose acts of unrighteousness. Only with such qualifications can a ruler be fit to root out evil and establish righteousness in its place. Since other scriptures offer the followers of Jesus a share in his throne (Rev. 20:4), it is imperative that these followers develop the same proclivity toward righteousness and detestation of evil.

The term "oil of gladness" contains the thought of "acceptance." "Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance" (Acts 2:28; see also Psa. 21:6). There is no implication in the forty-fifth Psalm that Jesus' "fellows," the other angelic beings, did not also "love righteousness and hate iniquity." The thought, rather, is that Jesus excelled in these attributes to a degree not obtained by his fellows. The verse highlights these characteristics as primary ones for those who would share his throne.

The Foundations -- Verses 10 to 12

And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.

The author of our study now proceeds to show the principles of the workmanship of the Messiah. The quotation is from Psalm 102:25-27. Once again the New Testament helps us interpret the Old. The student, without this citation in the book of Hebrews, would find difficulty in understanding this Psalm and might be inclined to look at it as a reference to the writer's own experiences and time period. However, the citation here definitely defines this Psalm as Messianic.

A problem remains, however. In this Psalm the actor appears to be Jehovah, while the author of Hebrews refers it to Jesus. Apparently it illustrates the cooperation between the Father and the Son in the creative works.

While it is tempting to apply this text to the creative works of the seven days of Genesis one, such an interpretation presents a difficulty. The Bible specifically states that "the earth abideth forever" (Eccl. 1:4) and that God made it "not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited" (Isa. 45:18). Therefore "the earth" must be taken in a metaphorical sense for the society that lives upon the earth. This society is based upon two foundation stones. The first is vertical, governing man's relationship to God, and can be summarized in the single word "obedience." The second is horizontal, governing man's relations with his fellow, and is summarized in the principles of marriage found in Genesis 2:24, "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh."

As time went on and men multiplied, these fundamental principles were embodied in the ten commandments, the first four of which were Godward and the last six manward. Still later Jesus capsulated the lesson in two commandments. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matt. 22:37-40).

With the introduction of sin these fundamental principles stopped governing men and they fell backward into sin. While the verb for "perish" used in the book of Hebrews implies complete destruction, the verb in the original Psalm has a far different thought. Professor Strong, commenting on the word, #6, says it means "properly, to wander away; i.e., lose oneself; by implication, to perish."

Man wandered far away from these principles and they ceased being operative in his life. Like an old garment, they decayed from lack of use. But rather than being destroyed, they are "folded up" for future use. These same principles will be reintroduced in Christ's kingdom.

Similarly, the word translated "changed" (Strong's #2498) has a wide variety of meanings, including to "pass through," as a flood or whirlwind; and to "destroy." However the sense of the word in this passage under study is more likely the same as that given to it in Isaiah 40:31, where it is translated renew -- "... they shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles . . ."

The fundamental principles which govern both man's relationship with God and with each other will be renewed by this Messiah for the simple reason that his government shall be as eternal as it is universal -- for "thy years shall not fail."

The Final Promise -- Verses 13 and 14

But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool? Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?

The study of the preeminence of Christ concludes with the writer's forceful use of Psalm 110:1. Here the identification of the Psalm with the Messiah was well recognized. Jesus' application of it to Messiah in both Matthew 22:42-46 and Mark 12:35-37 was unchallenged by the listening Pharisees. The position of being at the "right hand" is an undisputed metaphor for the position of top favor. This concluding argument is thus the apex of the evidence the writer has accumulated.

In the final verse of the chapter he again borrows language from Psalm 104:4. However he broadens the concept from showing merely the preeminence of the Messiah to the angels, but also the preeminence of all "who shall be heirs of salvation" to the angelic

hosts. By using the aforementioned Psalm instead of others, which would perhaps serve even better (see Psa. 34:7), he identifies the church with the Messiah.

This identification of a multi-membered Messiah was the great "mystery" of the Christian church (Col. 1:26, 27); namely, that Christ is not one but many members (1 Cor. 12:14).

Having established this groundwork, the writer of Hebrews is poised to further comparisons between the office of the Messiah with the great heroes of the Hebrew religion. Thus he seeks to prepare his Jewish readers to accept a radical change in their beliefs; yet not so much a change as a progression of development, for their rich religious history and the words of their inspired prophets all pointed forward to this Messiah whom he proclaimed to have been in their very midst -- Jesus of Nazareth.

Principles of Study

A study of the first chapter of Hebrews is not only enlightening to a comprehension of the writer's theme but also illuminates the principles of study used in the early church. Their great familiarity with the "Old Testament" allowed them to build the mighty concepts upon which the Christian religion would be based. Their use of the Jewish writings to bolster their arguments sheds great light on the proper use we are to make of biblical texts to support those themes that are so important to the Christian and to his salvation.

From Shadow to Reality

For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. -- Hebrews 10:1

A verse-by-verse study in Hebrews 9

Israel's Tabernacle in the wilderness was an essential part of the teachings of the early church. An exposition of this Old Testament picture is central to the theme of the book of Hebrews. Chapter 9 contrasts the Tabernacle and the typical Law Covenant with the arrangements of the New Covenant and the blessings it holds for Israel and all people who shall eventually avail themselves of its privileges.

A Better Tabernacle -- verses 1-5

“Then verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary. For there was a tabernacle made; the first, wherein was the candlestick, and the table, and the shewbread; which is called the sanctuary. And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all; which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant; and over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercy seat; of which we cannot now speak particularly.”

It may be noted that the King James Version, quoted above, has the word “covenant” in italics, showing that there is no supporting word in the Greek texts. Other translations insert the word “tabernacle,” which is probably more appropriate. However it is true that all the services of the ancient Tabernacle were dictated by the Law Covenant given at Mt. Sinai.

The writer of Hebrews proceeds with a straightforward description of the furniture in the Tabernacle. Noteworthy is the omission of the golden altar and the placement, instead, of the golden censer in the Most Holy. A number of translations, including the American Revised and several modern paraphrases, render the word “altar” instead of “censer,” assuming the placement in the Holy of Holies to be a copyist error. Barclay's translation renders this section thus: “It [the Holy of Holies] was approached by the golden altar of incense.” This is supported by the fact that if the censer was meant rather than the golden altar, the latter would be the only item of furniture omitted.

However there is much to be said in favor of the Authorized Version. The Greek word for altar is *thusiasterion*, while the word here is the closely related *thumiasterion*. The latter word is found in the Septuagint of 2 Chronicles 26:19 and Ezekiel 8:11 where censer is clearly meant. *Thumiasterion* is derived from *thumao*, burning, while *thusiasterion* is a derivative of *thusiaso*, to sacrifice (*Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*).

Additional evidence can be derived from Leviticus 16:12, which reads, “And he shall take a censer full of burning coals of fire from off the altar before the LORD, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the veil.”

The obvious reading here is that the censer was brought within the second veil. The Hebrew word rendered “veil” in this passage always refers to the entrance to the Most Holy, the other two Tabernacle entrances being consistently referred to by Hebrew words translated “gate” and “door.”

The incense was to cover the mercy seat before the blood was sprinkled. While some incense could have penetrated beyond the veil, it is difficult to imagine how the high priest would know when enough had done so to cover the mercy seat.

Spiritually the sprinkling of the incense apparently represents the intercession of Jesus on behalf of the church (and ultimately the world). This intercession is described in Hebrews 9:24 as being “in heaven itself,” a condition pictured by the Holy of Holies.

William Crawford, in a letter published in the *Reprints*, comments on a footnote in the *Emphatic Diaglott*. He writes: “Apparently from the reading of this verse, the censer, full of burning coals of fire, as well as the incense, were both taken by the priest beyond the second veil” (*Reprints*, p. 5961). He then proceeds to suggest that the incense was “brought in” by penetration from the golden altar. He does note, however, that there is no doubt that the veil referred to is the one separating the holy from the most holy.

A Better Priesthood -- verses 6-11

“Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God. But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people: the Holy Ghost thus signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing: which was a figure for the time then present, in which were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience; which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation. But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building.”

The scene now turns from the furniture to the actors. The major role in the sacrificial drama of Old Testament worship was played by the high priest. His usual domain was the Holy (here called the “first tabernacle”). Once each year, on the Day of Atonement, he went into the second compartment, the Most Holy, with blood for his own sins and for the people’s transgressions.

The author of Hebrews indicates the lesson is that the way to the Most Holy was not

available until the blood was brought to the mercy seat. The blood of bulls and goats, he points out, was only a picture of a higher reality. This greater reality was the sacrifice of Christ, an offering which needed no repetition, but was given once, efficacious for all time.

To this agree the words in chapter ten: “Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh” (Hebrews 10:19,20). Further confirmation comes from the apostle Paul: “But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (2 Timothy 1:10).

Better Blood -- verses 12-14

“Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?”

The comparison now turns from the actor in the typical drama of redemption to the blood as the means of atonement. Later the body of the animal will be emphasized: “For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate” (Hebrews 13:11,12).

In both references the blood refers to the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus. The bodies, however, being plural, suggest a wider picture than Jesus alone; it includes those who lay down their lives as a “living sacrifice” with him (Romans 12:1).

Some are inclined to take the references to “the blood of bulls and goats, and the ashes of an heifer” as signifying that the reality pictured by each of these sacrifices is Jesus. We suggest that this is a generic reference to the sacrifices of ancient times and not a specific designation of the individual animals involved. The metaphor might be idiomatically translated “for if ancient sacrifices sanctified to the purifying of the flesh, how much more valuable is the blood of atonement offered by Jesus alone.”

The effect of Jesus’ sacrifice is to remove the consciousness of sin from those wishing to serve God acceptably. It is to the same effect that the apostle Paul writes, “There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit” (Romans 8:1).

A Better Covenant -- verses 15-20

“And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth. Whereupon neither the first testament was dedicated without blood. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people, saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you.”

The word “testament” in this passage would be better rendered “covenant,” as it is in many respected translations. The subject is obviously the bringing in of a “new” covenant to replace a former one. The stated object of such an exchange is that “they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.” The former covenant is undoubtedly the Law Covenant, under which the Jewish people were striving unsuccessfully for eternal life.

The question then remains as to whether “they which are called” refers to the entire nation of Israel or only those who were called with the high calling opened up by the sacrifice of Christ and initiated at Pentecost. To answer this question we need to proceed to the method by which this new covenant comes into force -- “the death of the testator.”

If the testator is understood to be the maker of a will, we are faced with the problem of the identity of the testator. Christians are spoken of as “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:17). Obviously God does not die and Jesus is not the giver of the inheritance: he is a “joint-heir.”

In fact the illustration is based on the Old Testament method of making a covenant. Commenting on this verse, Professor W. E. Vine writes: “We may render somewhat literally thus: ‘For where a covenant (is), a death (is) necessary to be brought in of the one covenanting; for a covenant over dead ones (victims) is sure,’ . . . The writer is speaking from a Jewish point of view, not from that of the Greeks.”

The dead animals by which the Law Covenant was ratified are listed as “calves and goats,” the blood of which, with the ceremonial usage of water, scarlet wool, and hyssop, was used to sprinkle “the book and all the people.” The reference is to the inauguration of the Law Covenant recorded in Exodus 24:3-8. The multiplicity of the animals used suggests that they represent not only the sacrifice of Jesus, but of his footstep followers as well.

If this be the case, then the covenant is not completely in force until the death of all the ratifying animals, the members of Christ’s body. In this case the phrase “those which are called” refers not only to those transferred at Jesus’ first advent but of “all the people,”

the nation of Israel prefiguring the entire human race. Since this applies both to the church and to mankind, the covenant referred to may be thought of as the “new covenant” of Jeremiah 31:31.

Purifying the Heavens -- verses 21-23

“Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry. And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission. It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.”

While the account of the inauguration of the covenant mentions the sprinkling of the altar (Exodus 24:6), it does not mention the sprinkling of the vessels of ministry. The instruments of the Tabernacle were sprinkled with the anointing oil in the service for the consecration of the priesthood (Leviticus 8). There was a sprinkling of the golden altar mentioned in Leviticus 16:20 which carried out the command of Exodus 30:10.

This would indicate that this sprinkling of blood related to the work of the entire Aaronic priesthood and was not accomplished until they and the Tabernacle were purified for service. These animal sacrifices, our text explains, prefigure far greater sacrifices (plural) than those used to cleanse Israel’s ancient Tabernacle.

Entering the Holiest -- verses 24-28

‘For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; for then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.’

The Tabernacle drama is brought to a close in this final section. In contrast to the typical high priest needing to enter the Most Holy with the blood of atonement, Christ the greater high priest needed but to enter the reality (heaven) once with the blood sufficient for all time. The entrance beyond the veil into the holiest compartment represented the death of the one entering. So Jesus entered heaven by means of his sacrificial death on Calvary’s cross.

If the high priest did not carry out the typical ritual to the last detail, he was subject to the penalty of death by the Lord. Not only did this affect his own future, it was of deep concern to the entire nation as well since the atonement for their sins would not have been made. It is claimed that the nation waited in the vicinity of the Tabernacle for the high priest to return unscathed. They would all then cheer for the atonement of their sins

had successfully taken place.

The reality is that Jesus Christ entered heaven to make intercession for the world through his death. All mankind awaits the outcome of this judgment, for it portends their own release from death.

Thus, it was after the men of ancient times died symbolically before sprinkling the blood of atonement that the judgment of the successfulness of that atonement was rendered. In the reality the success of that judgment is assured. "So," concludes the writer, "Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation." How the welcome Hallelujah shouts of the entire human race will resound through all eternity for such a salvation as this.

Heroes of Faith

Faith's Foundations

This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. -- 1 John 5:4

A verse-by-verse study in Hebrews 11

Holy men of old were noted for their strong faith. Their faith was not built on wishful thinking or hearsay evidence, but on deep-rooted convictions based on solid evidence. There is no place in holy writ where these foundations for faith are more observable than in the catalog of Old Testament heroes in Hebrews 11.

Faith Defined -- Hebrews 11:1

Now faith is a confident assurance of that for which we hope, a conviction of the reality of things which we do not see. (Weymouth)

The Greek word *hupostasis*, aptly translated “well-grounded assurance,” literally means a foundation, that which stands below. The second definition, “a conviction of reality” is from the Greek *elegcho*. One lexicographer, commenting on this word, says it “means to rebuke with sufficient cause, and also effectually, so as to bring the one rebuked to a confession or at least a conviction of sin. In other words, it means **to convince**.”

Thus faith differs from mere belief in that it is well-grounded and has sufficient reason to be thoroughly convinced of that which cannot be perceived by the human senses. While true faith seeks substantiation for what it holds to be true, it does need irreversible proof, basing its conclusions on the bulk of the evidence.

A Good Report -- Hebrews 11:2

For by it the elders obtained a good report.

Faith was the one common denominator that bound the champions of old together. They were imperfect men. They made mistakes. But they believed -- and it was this intense personal belief, this faith, which justified them in the sight of Jehovah God. While the term “ancient worthies,” a phrase used often in Bible Student vocabulary, does not appear in the Bible, this expression comes very close. The “elders” were “ancient” and their faith made them “worthy” in the eyes of their Creator.

With these two introductory verses, the writer of Hebrews begins a litany of such heroes. The sixteen specific names, along with others who appear grouped by their deeds, do not represent all whose faith shone out on the pages of history. There may well have been thousands of such faithful ones. Paul implies as much when he speaks of 7,000 such chosen ones “according to the election of grace” (Romans 11:4,5).

Faith Grasps the Invisible -- Hebrews 11:3

By faith we understand the ages to have been prepared by a saying of God, in regard to the things seen not having come out of things appearing. (Young's Literal Translation)

Although it is true that the literal earth was formed by the commandment of God, the allusion in this verse is not to the act of creation but to the structuring of great dispensational ages (Greek, *aions*) in the carrying forward of the plans and purposes of the Almighty. The earth itself was not made of invisible ingredients, but the grand progression of ages and dispensations is comprehended, not by human sight, but by the inner eye of faith.

The apostle Peter styles the three major time divisions as “the world that then was,” the “heavens and the earth, which are now,” and a “new heavens and a new earth” (2 Peter 3:6, 7,13). Each of these dispensations has different rulership -- angels, Satan, and Christ, respectively. Within the present dispensation are three ages where God deals with different groups of people -- the patriarchs, the nation of Israel, and the Christian church. When faith grasps this outline, the human mind begins to comprehend the “stately steps of our God” (*Studies in the Scriptures*, vol. 1, p. 75).

Abel -- Hebrews 11:4

By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh.

The phrase “God testifying of his gifts” suggests a possible base for the faith Abel manifested. It is certainly suggestive that the manner of God’s accepting Abel’s offering rather than Cain’s was in a visible manner, possibly by the fire which consumed the offering being miraculously lit by God himself.

Both Abel and Cain offered logical sacrifices. Both gave of the fruitage of their labors. Abel, being a shepherd, offered an animal, while Cain, a tiller of the ground, offered an oblation of his tillage. It might be well to inspect an ambiguous verse concerning these two offerings.

Rotherham’s translation of Genesis 4:7 reads, “Shall it not, if thou do right, be lifted up? But if thou do not right, at the entrance a sin-bearer is lying, Unto thee, moreover, shall be his longing, though, thou, rule over him.” While most translations suggest that it was sin crouching at the door, Rotherham rightly notes that the Hebrew *chattah*, translated sin, can with equal ease be translated “sin offering” or “sin bearer.” In fact the Authorized Version so translates it that way in 116 of the 296 places it appears in the Old Testament.

The suggestion is that if Cain had observed God’s acceptance of Abel’s offering, there was another animal, a “sin-offering,” crouching at the tent door and it was available to Cain for the taking.

One of faith's strong foundations comes from the observance of God's favorable dealings with others of his servants and the meek acceptance of the lesson to improve one's own service. Frequently, however, the temptation with us is toward jealousy, as it was with Cain.

Enoch -- Hebrews 11:5

By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

The Scriptural account of Enoch is too sketchy to draw a strong conclusion as to his specific act of faith. The two clues we are given are that he "was translated that he should not see death" and that prior to that act God had manifested acceptance of Enoch's faithfulness.

Since the writer of Hebrews summarizes his first group of faith warriors by saying "these all died in faith," it seems highly unlikely that Enoch escaped the death sentence. More likely, dying at 365 years of age, roughly one-third of a normal life span at that time, his death may have been in the vigor of his relative youth, without experiencing the decaying effects of the death process in his body.

It was before this that God had given testimony to his faithfulness. The only specific act of Enoch of which we know is furnished in the New Testament: "Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him" (Jude 14,15).

Here Enoch is classified as a prophet predicting a time of judgment. While this undoubtedly has reference to the time of the Lord's second advent, it likely had a more - direct application to the end of "the world that was."

That prophecy must have been greatly disturbing to this righteous man. His faith in it evoked an emotion common to any parent who loves his child: "May my child escape that judgment." That prayer seems echoed in the naming of Enoch's son. He called his name Methuselah, meaning "after he dies may it happen." Perhaps God manifested his appreciation of Enoch's faith by assuring Enoch that this prayer would be answered. And so it was: Methuselah died the year of the flood, before the judgment Enoch had predicted.

The Necessity of Faith -- Hebrews 11:6

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

To believe in the existence of God is not sufficient. Many scientists and philosophers, with but little faith, grasp that tenet by applying reasoning and empirical evidence. James notes that “the devils also believe, and tremble” (James 2:19). So strong is the evidence that the psalmist claims that it is the fool that says in his heart, “there is no God” (Psalm 53:1).

It is not the reality of a supreme creator, but the confidence that this being is one who is not only all-powerful but also all-caring -- a personal God. It is faith that goes beyond the rationalist view of a creator who abandoned his masterpiece to its own devices, but who maintains enough personal interest in its minutiae to be “a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” This is the quality of faith which mark the individuals in this catalog of holy men of old.

Noah -- Hebrews 11:7

By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

Rain was an uncommon phenomenon before the flood. Irrigation in antediluvian times was generally accomplished by a mist that went up from the earth and watered the ground (Genesis 2:5,6). If there had been any rainfall, it certainly was not of such massive proportions as to inundate the ground. Therefore the announcement by God of such an impending catastrophe must have sounded incredible. A world-wide flood appears equally incredible to many skeptics today. Yet it is attested to in writings of most major civilizations. Among similar accounts of a deluge in which a single family is saved are accounts by Berosus of Chaldea, Hieronymus of Egypt, Mnaseas the Phoenician, Nicolaus of Damascus, Abydenus the Assyrian and the famous Roman, Ovid, in his "Metamorphosis". (See Gill's Commentary for still other references to Noah.) Yet, he not only believed but demonstrated his conviction by two outstanding actions.

First, he set upon the unprecedented task of building an ark of sufficient size to accommodate every species of land animal. Second, he boldly proclaimed the message of the coming deluge as a warning to the populace around him (2 Peter 2:5). The massive boat which he and his sons built became the instrument of condemnation to the unbelief of the surrounding peoples.

Abraham -- Hebrews 11:8-10

By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

While Abram was still in Ur of the Chaldees, God had offered to make of him a great nation if he would relocate to a land God would show him. "Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing"(Genesis 12:1,2). There is no record, however, of God informing him where the land was. How was he to know?

At age seventy-five he made a fateful decision to relocate to the land of Canaan, afterwards to be known as "the promised land" (Genesis 12:4,5). Was there a basis for this choice of location on the part of Abram? We suggest there was, and that it is found in a promise given by Noah shortly after the flood. "And he said, Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. And he said, Blessed be the LORD God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant" (Genesis 9:25-27). A contemplation of this prophecy may well have revealed to Abram that, as a patriarch of the house of Shem, Canaan was to be his servant, and therefore the land of Canaan was the land to which God had sent him.

It takes faith to claim such a promise on such tenuous evidence. But if it took faith to so claim the land, it required additional faith to refuse to claim that promise when seemingly proffered. At the death of his wife, Sarah, the patriarch sought a burial place for her. Ephron, a Hittite, owned a fitting spot -- the cave of Macphelah -- and offered it free of charge to Abraham. The bereaved old man refused to take it for free and purchased the land for 400 pieces of silver (Genesis 23:7-20).

Why would Abraham refuse a free offer of land within the country promised him by God? The answer lies in Genesis 15 where God affirmed his covenant to give the land to Abraham and his seed after him. There he was informed that this gift would only come after four generations had passed (Genesis 15:16). Thus, in sharp contrast, the patriarch moved to the promised land by the exercise of faith, and with that same faith refused to claim it for himself in his own lifetime, choosing rather to dwell in it as a sojourner and migrating itinerant.

Sara -- Hebrews 11:11,12

Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable.

Sara is seldom honored for her response to the news that she was to bear a child in her old age. She is depicted as laughing at the news and then denying the laugh when she was accused (Genesis 18:12-15). The writer of Hebrews suggests a different scenario. He states, "she judged him faithful who had promised." Such an evaluation indicates that her laughter was not one of unbelief, but of belief. It was not a scornful laugh but the sudden outburst of a heart filled with joy by the astounding news of the impending birth.

Not only is her faith credited with being causative of the miraculous birth, but as overruling the effects of age on Abraham's body -- "as good as dead." To this agrees the words of Paul: "And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb" (Romans 4:19).

The Prospect of Faith -- Hebrew 11:13-16

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.

In summary of the examples of faith treated so far, the writer of Hebrews suggests their motivation. They sought "a better country, that is, an heavenly." The most direct interpretation of these words is that they held a hope for a heavenly salvation. Such a suggestion was put forward by Pastor Russell: "What is more reasonable than to suppose that at the close of the Millennial age when their service upon the earthly plane shall have ended, the latter class [the ancient worthies] also will be received to the heavenly plane?" (*Reprints*, p. 4389).

On the other hand, it may be that the heavenly city they looked for is the "New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband" (Revelation 21:2, NASB). This city represents the spiritual government of Messiah's kingdom reigning on earth.

In any case, the motivation for these faithful men of old was a solid grasp of the prospects of a better life beyond their current existence.

Abraham Again -- Hebrews 11:17-19

By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.

Perhaps the greatest act of faith in this incredible catalog is that of the willingness of Abraham to offer his beloved Isaac on the altar of sacrifice. Surely he knew of the tragic use of human sacrifices of surrounding nations and the fact that God considered these as abominations.

It takes faith to believe an unbelievable request. It takes greater faith to believe and obey when it involves the sacrifice of something as dear as your beloved son. But the greatest faith believes and obeys even when the command seems contrary to all that nature and one's understanding of what God's moral law has always been.

Upon what did Abraham base such faith? It would require implicit and unwavering belief in the promise that God had made of producing a great nation through his son. Only such a faith could grasp the concept that if he were to be slain the God who had ordered such an act could make it turn out for good. Such an outcome could only logically come about through a resurrection. Jesus testified on him that he saw "my day, and was glad" (John 8:56). It was undoubtedly beyond his greatest expectations to discover how God would work it out by staying his hand in the process of the sacrifice and providing a ram in substitute.

Isaac -- Hebrews 11:20

By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.

It did not require faith for Isaac to bless one of his children. That was normal. But the act of faith was in the blessing of **both** of them. The two blessings, found respectively in Genesis 27:28,29 and Genesis 27:39,40, are almost identical but with significant differences. Jacob's was obviously the superior, but Esau was promised a time when he would come into his own special favor.

Since Isaac had a preference for Esau, the fact that Jacob had claimed the blessing by -deception, though he had legally purchased it, must have offended him. Nevertheless, the writer of Hebrews says that the bestowal of the second blessing was not out of favoritism, but as an act of faith.

Most probably Isaac based his faith on a similar circumstance in connection with his own blessing by Abraham. When God had given his promise to Abraham to have a son through Sarah, that patriarch had one fear. What would happen to Ishmael, whom he had come to love? In Genesis 17:18 we heard him cry out, "And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might [also] live before thee!" And God responded favorably to that request,

“And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation” (Genesis 17:20).

Therefore the precedent was set and Isaac based his faith for blessing both on a solid basis.

Jacob -- Hebrews 11:21

By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.

Jacob's choice of Joseph, the blessings of both of his sons indicating the two-fold blessing of the first-born, is the next described act of faith (Deuteronomy 21:15-17). That same law also prohibited counting the son of a beloved wife as the firstborn over the older children of a less loved spouse. While Jacob mentions specific reasons for not choosing his three oldest children (Genesis 49:2-5), there still remained eight other children older than Joseph.

E. W. Bullinger in his *Companion Bible* suggests the following meaning to the Hebrew text: “By faith, Jacob, on his death bed, blessed the two sons of Joseph, basing that decision on the height of his (Joseph's) staff.” Noting, when his sons gathered for their final blessings, that Joseph had the staff of the grand vizier of all Egypt, he concluded that if God had so blessed this son, then he should act in harmony with that blessing by making him the firstborn of his children.

Joseph -- Hebrews 11:22

By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.

Much of the force of this verse is lost in translation. The Hebrew verb translated “make mention” is used 22 times in the Old Testament and on every occasion except two is more properly translated “remembered.”

Joseph's act of faith in commanding that his bones be carried back to Canaan (Genesis 50:25) was based on an act of memory. It is probable that he remembered the promise made to his great-grandfather Abraham in Genesis 15:16, that in the fourth generation of captivity they would return to Canaan, the land of their inheritance.

As with Joseph, so with the Christian: faith has a firm foundation in searching out and frequently calling to mind the exceedingly precious promises of our God.

Amram and Jochebed -- Hebrews 11:23

By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment.

It is natural to assume from the Old Testament record that Jochebed hid Moses because she feared he would be killed if discovered. The author of Hebrews makes a different assumption. He writes, "They were not afraid of the king's commandment."

The Hebrews account also attributes the plans for the child to his physical beauty. We are not to understand that they would have had less love for a less attractive baby. Rather, the implication was that his good looks lay at the base of their ultimate plan to place the child in a basket in the river Nile. It would not be unreasonable to suppose that they realized that the area of the Nile where they deposited their human treasure would cause him to pass by the spot where Pharaoh's daughter was accustomed to go and that his good looks would appeal to her innate sense of motherhood. It may well have been a good use of the old rule that, if you want to hide something, hide it in plain sight. Likewise Christians do well to be ever on the alert to detect the providences of God in the exercise of their faith. Such faith, properly exercised, may yield similar outstanding results.

Moses -- Hebrews 11:24-28

By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible. Through faith he kept the Passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them.

The Hebrews account of Moses' heroism leaves quite a different impression than that found in the book of Exodus. Three particular acts in Moses' life are singled out as emblematic of his faith:

1. Refusing to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter. In fact Hebrews suggests that he identified with his people well before the incident of the Egyptian taskmaster.
2. Fleeing Egypt, stating this was because of his faith and not for fear of reprisal. The stated reason for his faith on this occasion was that he saw "him who is invisible." The suggestion is strong that he saw that it was God's plan for him not to come to the aid of his Hebrew brethren at that point in time. Then, when the time did come, he was at first reluctant to answer the call, claiming his own unworthiness (Exodus 3:11; 4:10).
3. Keeping the Passover.

The Nation of Israel -- Hebrews 11:29,30

By faith they passed through the Red sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned. By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.

Again, it is surprising that God credits the crossing of the Red Sea to the nation of Israel rather than to Moses. The Exodus account indicates that the people were fearful of the approaching Egyptian army and did not expect the waters to part. Nor, indeed, does the Hebrew account dispute this fact. It was not in either the expectation nor cause of such a miracle that the Israelites were credited with faith, but in the utilization of that miracle by going forward into the breach caused by the parting sea. While they saw a path before them, the distance across was considerable and it required faith to progress despite the possibility that the receding waters might again come together.

The generation of Israelites which entered the promised land was not the same as had left Egypt some 40 years earlier. These appear to have readily marched under Joshua's command in the encirclement of Jericho on seven successive days, culminating in the seven-fold march on the seventh day when the blowing of trumpets coincided with the collapse of the walled fortifications of that mighty city.

Rahab -- Hebrews 11:31

By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.

Rahab is the only Gentile listed among these faith heroes. Hers was not a faith based on the promises made to Israel. Her faith was based on a conclusion drawn from the history of the Jewish people over the previous forty years: "And she said unto the men, I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you: for the LORD your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath" (Joshua 2:9-11).

Evidently traveling caravans had brought the news of the Jewish conquests to Jericho. Therefore many knew these facts, but it was Rahab alone who grasped their significance! The God of Israel was the true God and he had given the land of Canaan to the Israelites.

Her faith not only provided salvation for her entire household, but gave her the privilege of becoming the first Gentile proselyte to Judaism in the promised land and eventually resulted in her marriage to Salmon, the head of the tribe of Judah.

Other Named and Unnamed Heroes -- Hebrews 11:32-38

And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection: and others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

The faithfulness of some of the listed names, such as Gideon, Jephthae, David, and Samuel, seems obvious. However questions may arise concerning Barak and Samson. In the Old Testament account of the battle of Deborah and Barak against Sisera (Judges 4) it would appear that Deborah, not Barak, was the real hero of faith. The Hebrew list, however, suggests that while Deborah had great faith in the Lord, she enkindled that same kind of faith in Barak. She inspired the faith, but it was Barak who had to face the enemy in battle.

Samson is more often known for his weaknesses than his faith. There is reason to believe that, even in some of his weaknesses, the Lord had commanded him to act the way he did. For example, in the case of his first intended wife, of whom his parents strongly disapproved because she was not Jewish, we read, "But his father and his mother knew not that it was of the LORD, that he sought an occasion against the Philistines: for at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel" (Judges 14:4).

In any event, we have the assurance of the author of Hebrews that all of these named individuals were indeed heroes of faith and most probably among the group affectionately known as "ancient worthies."

From The Herald of September/October 1993, p. 26, we read: "The three pairs given [in the first entries in the list below] are each in reverse chronological order which suggests that pairs are intended. In the first pair, Barak needed reassurance but then acted with full assurance of faith to subdue kingdoms. It was likely only a few weeks later when Gideon did likewise, probably strengthened also by Barak's successful step of faith."

subdued kingdoms

Gideon -- Judges 7:1-25

Barak -- Judges 4:4-23

wrought righteousness

Samson -- Judges 14-16

Jephthah -- Judges 11:11-33

obtained promises

David -- 1 Samuel 16:13; 2 Samuel 7:25-29

Samuel -- 1 Samuel 3:19-21; 7:3-15

stopped the mouths of lions

Daniel -- Daniel 6:(1-)16-24

quenched the power of fire

Shadrach, Meshach, Abed-nego --

Daniel 3:(1-)16-27

escaped the edge of the sword

Elisha -- 2 Kings 6:8-19

from weakness was made strong

Elijah -- 1 Kings 18:20-40; 19:1-8

waxed mighty in war

Abijah -- 2 Chronicles 13:3-21

turned to flight the armies of the alien

Asa -- 2 Chronicles 14:9-13

women received their dead by a resurrection

widow of Zarephath -- 1 Kings 17:17-24

woman of Shunem -- 2 Kings 4:32-37

others were tortured

Jeremiah -- Jeremiah 20:2-9; 37:15-21; 38:3-6

Summation -- Hebrews 11:39, 40

And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.

Summarizing the outstanding faith of these men of old, we are told that even such great faith did not qualify them for the promise of being the primary, the heavenly, seed of

Abraham. This was reserved for the saints who lived after Jesus opened up the “new and living way” through the sacrifice of his flesh (Hebrews 10:20).

Jesus makes much the same point concerning John the Baptist: “Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he” (Matthew 11:11).

Even the resurrection of these holy men cannot occur until the resurrection of the church, for it is the church which shall make them perfect. The apostle Peter noted this fact concerning David, one of these heroes: “Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day” (Acts 2:29).

This privilege of the church is spoken of in symbolic language in Psalm 45:16, “Instead of thy fathers shall be thy children, whom thou mayest make princes in all the earth.”

Therefore, as these holy ones demonstrated their faith in the presence of many witnesses, we are encouraged to do the same: “Wherefore seeing we **also** are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1).

ON THE OTHER HAND

The wording of Hebrews 11:29,30 contains some ambiguity. It might be inferred that the crossing of the Red Sea was credited either to the faith of Israel or of Moses. Exodus 14:11-14 indicates it was Moses rather than the nation of Israel that had faith God would deliver them from the Egyptians, although it is true that the Israelites proceeded into the water after Moses stretched out his hand and the waters parted (Exodus 14:21,22). Israel’s baptism into Moses in the cloud and the sea suggests Moses’ long-demonstrated faith was the reason for this deliverance.

According to the definition of faith, it would not imply a momentary decision or action at the last minute, but a deeply rooted conviction that had been evidenced well before being put to the test. Israel’s constant murmuring and rebellion after crossing the Red Sea is well documented in Scripture. It does not appear plausible Israel could be included in Hebrews 11:29 as having a good report through faith when, with few exceptions, the adults wandered in the wilderness and died, failing to enter the promised land.

In Hebrews 11:30, Joshua, who was the chosen successor to Moses, would appear to be the one whose faith had long been manifest throughout the wilderness wanderings and was credited with the triumph over Jericho. In obedience to God’s instructions, he utilized a unique battle strategy that caused the walls of Jericho to fall, thereby gaining the victory over Israel’s enemies. Thus it is written, “So the LORD was with Joshua and his fame was noised throughout all the country” (Joshua 6:27).

-- Homer Montague

The Works of Grace

But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.--James 1:25

A verse by verse study in James 2

The debate between the relative roles of faith (or grace) and works has been actively pursued in the Christian church since its founding. The early church, composed largely of Jews, instilled with the work ethic of the law, found the liberty of the gospel a challenging concept. Paul's epistle to the Romans deals largely with this problem, emphasizing the preeminence of faith over works. In his epistle, James covers the same ground, emphasizing the preeminence of works over faith.

Later, in the Reformation, this question again comes to the fore. The sacrament of penitence in the Roman Catholic Church, with the attendant practice of indulgences, emphasized the priority of works. Martin Luther, in contrast, stressed the doctrine of justification by faith. So strong was he in his opposition to salvation through works that he suggested the epistle of James not be considered apart of the Bible.

Rightly understood, however, there is no real conflict between the two concepts. Faith and works are like the two legs of a man; both are needed to make true progress along the narrow way. Grace and its acceptance through faith are totally unmerited and cannot be earned; they are the gift of God (Eph. 2:8).

In the first chapter of his epistle, James treats the value of trials and temptations, showing that these are God's tools for the developing of character. In this discussion he describes the gospel as the "perfect law of liberty," in contrast with the strict "thou shafts" and "thou shaft pots" of the Mosaic law.

Partiality

My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; And ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool: Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? (vs. 1-4)

It is only too common among humankind to respect men of success. Not only is it their wealth, but with prosperity often goes a certain amount of refinement and social standing which commend the possessor to those around. Often the poor lack these advantages and there is a tendency to respect them less. "Look at the inner man," is James' message.

God and Man

Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats? Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called? (vs. 5-7)

In contrast to man, God has usually chosen the more ignoble of this world. There are reasons for God's selections. First, there is usually an attitude of humility and need in the poor that is replaced by an aura of self-sufficiency in the more affluent. Second, materialism is frequently its own reward and often becomes an all-consuming obsession. Additionally, improvement of the person of low estate shows the glory of the power of God, whereas one who is naturally noble might claim a share in the glory of his life. One poet has expressed it well:

*If I had been more worthy,
And my stumblings had been few,
When men gave God the glory,
hey'd have praised my virtue, too.*

*If I'd never lost a battle,
Or had never missed the mark,
As they talked about his goodness,
Mine, also, they'd remark*

*But my being so deficient,
In thought and word and deed,
Means he'll get all the glory
He deserves it all indeed.*

*When they see this weak mortal
Raised to such immortal heights,
What praise will rise to him
Who in such nothingness delights.*

James then proceeds to call the attention of his reader to the injustices that only too often accompany those of high position. Being materialistic, they are frequently open to bribery. Even in the best of scenarios, those in authority are prone to be unsympathetic to the plights of the poor, not having experienced its hardships personally. Since, especially in Israel, those who sat in positions of judgment were supposedly pronouncing the judgments of God, such inequity from the judgment seat reflected on the character of God; and these judges James accuses of blasphemy. Perhaps for this reason James opens the next chapter with these words: ***Be not many of you masters (3:1).***

The Law of Moses

If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill; Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law (vs. 8-12).

Ancient Israel had a law against discrimination. Jesus deemed it as the second greatest of all the laws given to Moses, only inferior to the one preceding it that stated Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart. This law commanded that one love his neighbor as himself. No qualification was put on the term "neighbor"-rich or poor, male or female, white or black-all were to be treated equally. When queried by a lawyer as to the meaning of this term "neighbor," Jesus gave a story which we know as the Parable of the Good Samaritan in which he illustrates that even a despised Samaritan should be considered as a neighbor.

Partiality on the part of the church, to whom James was writing, was to be considered as a violation of this law and thus a sin. Under the demands of Judaic law the attention paid to all other features of the law-the minutiae of cleansings and purifications, of prayer and almsgivings-could not wipe out the violation of this precept of love for one's neighbor.

By using the two examples of the commandments against adultery and killing, James takes our minds back to the words of the Master in the sermon on the mount (Matt. 5-7). Jesus uses these same two commands to show their deeper meaning, of regulating thoughts as well as actions. If lust could be adultery, then hatred could be murder. James implies an even further extension -- discrimination and partiality could be murder, since they involved the slaying of another's reputation.

The Law of Liberty

So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty. For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment (vs. 12, 13).

It is not the law of Moses but the law of grace, the law of the gospel, where James finds the harsher judgment. "You shall be judged as you have judged others," is his message. It is the same message Jesus gave: *Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again* (Matt. 7:1, 2). It is the same message Paul preached: *Therefore thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself for thou that judgest doest the same things* (Rom. 2:1). The Christian is warned of the same danger in the model prayer given to him: *Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors* (Matt. 6:12).

Grace received without grace distributed is like a lake receiving water but disbursing none-like the barren depths of the Dead Sea. This dispensing of forgiveness to others becomes a responsibility for those who have received God's grace, lest they receive it in vain (2 Cor. 6:1). It is a "work of grace."

Faith and Works

What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say,. Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead? (vs. 14-20).

Here is the heart of James' discussion. Faith and grace are both gifts from God, but these gifts are not to provoke idleness but activity. They should energize the Christian. To receive God's forgiveness and the attendant standing with him through justification without showing the same character toward others demonstrates a lack of appreciation for the gift received.

Jesus told of a debtor who was forgiven a large debt but demanded payment from a pauper who owed him a small amount. The moral is given in unforgettable terms:

Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?-Matthew 18:32, 33

Forgiveness to those who have wronged us is not an easy task. The disciples found it sufficiently difficult when commanded to forgive one who offended them up to seven times in a single day, responded with the request: *Increase our faith* (Luke 17:5).

James uses a specific illustration to demonstrate the kind of works he is advocating. Again he reverts to their attitude toward the poor. It is not sufficient, he counsels, to commiserate with the poor but seek to give him the necessary clothes and food to uplift him from his condition of poverty. If not dead, such an unproductive faith is at the best very weak. If we find ourselves emulating such a faith, let us ask like the disciples, *Lord, increase our faith.*

Belief, the doctrinal substructure of a Christian, is vital, but by itself is insufficient. Belief as an intellectual assent to certain facts is not unique to good people. Even devils believe. They react to their belief with a certain trembling in anticipation of their judgment. Let your belief in retributive judgment be a spur to encourage the works of faith and of grace. Do not just receive grace; give grace.

Abraham and Rahab

Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? (vs. 21-25).

James evokes two illustrations of his principle from the Old Testament-Abraham and Rahab. Both are named in the gallery of faithheroes in Hebrews 11. Throughout New Testament writings Abraham is constantly referred to as the one who was "justified by faith."

Faith alone did not justify him; he demonstrated his faith in action. If Abraham merely believed that God could raise his son from the dead, it might indeed show a measure of faith. But acting on that faith and showing his willingness to sacrifice his beloved son in death was the true measure of his faith-and that was an action, a work. Likewise it required faith to believe that the invading forces of Israel would be blessed by God in their conquest of Canaan, but Rahab's justification came as a result of acting upon faith and taking the risk to harbor and deliver the spies who sought refuge with her.

Works, the Spirit of Faith

For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also (v. 26).

For his summary, James invokes the picture of human life. Life is composed of two elements- body and breath forming a living soul: *And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul* (Gen. 2:7). So, James reasons, spiritual life is composed of two elements: faith and works. Faith supplies the body, the organism. Works keep that organism functioning. Without the action of breathing, the natural man would die. Without the active functioning of works, the spiritual man will die.

Proper spiritual works are not motivated by a desire to earn salvation or merit favor. Grace remains unmerited. But the gift of grace requires a thankful response on the part of the recipient. He responds with good works, motivated by thankfulness and gratitude.

Prayer Partners

***And the prayer of faith shall save the sick,
and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins,
they shall he forgiven him.-- James 5:15***

A verse by verse study in James 5

The final chapter of the epistle of James appears to be an oddity. Nestled in a book lauding the necessity of works, the Christian requirement of controlling the tongue, and a discussion on intercessory prayer we find inserted an apparent prophecy of the woes of the rich in the latter days. This anomaly is more apparent than real.

Woes of the Rich

Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are motheaten. Your gold and silver is eankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were ire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth. Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter. Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you (vs. 1-6).

While undoubtedly prophetic in nature, James is not writing these words as a prophecy of world conditions but as the natural result of men failing to heed the counsel of the preceding chapter (vs. 13-15): "Go to now, ye that say, 'To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain:' Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, 'If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.'"

It is because greed is so endemic in the human race that the results of failing to live altruistically take on world-wide prophetic scope.

The spoilage and rust of the silver and gold is reminiscent of Jesus' own words in Matthew 6:19, 20: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal"

The "last days" of verse three can either be taken as each man's final hours or as prophetic of the end times, the transition from the conditions of the present evil world into the kingdom of Christ. The injustice of their greed is pointed out when contrasted with the conditions of the farming and laboring classes whose blood and sweat produced

the gains of the capitalistic and monopolistic upper classes. Karl Marx phrased it well with the rallying cry of Communism, "Workers of the world, Unite!"

This cry for justice by the oppressed classes is heard by the Lord. The word *sabaoth* in verse four is not to be confused with the word *Sabbath*. The word *sabaoth* literally means "armies," and the title *Lord of sabaoth* is equivalent to the Old Testament "Lord of hosts." The term is describing God in a militaristic capacity, as the leader of a large army. Thus these oppressed classes of James seem directly linked to another group of have-nots in Joel, described as an army of locusts (Joel 2:25).

The further description of the "rich" as being "wanton" and viewing others as their rightful victims ready for "slaughter" again highlights how heinous is their crime and how low their hearts have sunk in the mire of sin.

While the final verse in this section may be merely an allusion that they have built their financial empires on the bodies of those more just than themselves, it is not improper to apply "the just" to the person of Jesus himself. It was, after all, this same disposition of love for power, office and gain, which led those who condemned and killed the Nazarene to commit their fateful act.

Judgment and Patience

Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain. Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned: behold, the judge standeth before the door. Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy (vs. 711).

The grand theme of the Bible concerning the question as to why God permits evil revolves around one principle, "Whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7). It may not be in this life, for "now we call the proud happy" (Mal. 3:15). Some men's judgment follows after the present life (1 Tim. 5:24). As the farmer waits for both the early and latter rains before concluding what his crop shall be like, so the Lord is abundantly patient for the inequities of present society to run their course knowing that in due time their appropriate fruitage will be manifest. It is this same patience he would have the Christian practice.

The time of reckoning is clearly identified in our passage as being at the "coming of the Lord" when he, as the righteous judge, "standeth before the door" (Rev. 3:20). How parallel is this assessment of the matter with that of the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 4:5: "Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God."

The story of Job is introduced to show how the Lord rewards the righteous in the end even though their present lot may seem bleak indeed. It is only when viewed from the long range that the compassionate mercies of God can be clearly seen. As it has been often stated, judging the Lord on the conditions of the present time is like judging an architect on his incomplete building.

Unwavering

But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation (v. 12).

While patience is being tried and tested there is a natural tendency to waver in one's decisions. When a given course of action produces only sorrow and poverty and a less righteous course seems to produce positive results it is only human to doubt the long course. Therefore James counsels a set path, unwavering, where our yea is yea and our nay, nay. Having glimpsed the heavenly vision, our eyes must remain fixed on it in order to obtain the prize. Well did a king of ancient Israel say, "Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off" (1 Kings 20:11).

Intercessory Prayer

Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms. Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. " (vs. 13-16).

James appears to suddenly jump in his thought patterns from the sin and evil that will reap their due reward to the subject of intercessory prayer. This subject change though is not what it seems.

Verse 13 can be best understood by going back to the previous chapter, "Go to now, ye that say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain:' Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away. For that ye ought to say, 'If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that'" (James 4:13-15).

It is to ward against this independence of the wealthy in pocket or the proud in spirit that we are told to acknowledge God in all that happens to us (Prov. 3:6). If, therefore, our experiences are those of affliction, take it to the Lord in prayer; and if they are joyful, sing the Lord's praise and accept them with thanksgiving. Praise the Lord!

Then, however, knowing that those experiences which depress us are often the more common, James concentrates on the handling of these. The Greek word translated "sick" in verse 14 (*astheneo*) can refer to either physical, mental, or emotional weakness and is used in the Bible in a broad sense.

The context in James 5 speaks little of physical suffering, but rather the depressions that come from the continued observance of inequities around us. Therefore it seems logical to conclude that the point of emphasis here is on spiritual and emotional weakness.

Verses 14 and 15 give the first line of approach, asking the elders of the ecclesia, as representing those who should be the most mature, to join in as prayer partners over the matter. The use of oil was evidently a custom of the time in anointing those with sicknesses (Mark 6:13) and, to the early church, hearkened back to the role of the holy Spirit in their lives (1 John 2:20, 27). Whether the oil is to be taken literally or metaphorically for the holy Spirit it is obvious that the assistance for the sick came from the prayer and not from the oil.

The Doctrine of Submission

Building a Spiritual Temple

A verse by verse study in 1 Peter 2

The message of the second epistle of Peter is two-fold: to comfort the Jewish brethren scattered throughout the provinces of Asia Minor and to encourage them to endure their trials with patient submission. We are not informed of their particular trial, but the time of writing suggests a wave of persecution sometime between Paul's imprisonment in Rome and his execution.

In the second chapter, he develops his admonitions on the basis of two doctrines: the present training of his readers to be a part of a future priesthood and the doctrine of submission as it applies to the various walks of life.

Peter's Transition -- Verses 1 to 3

"Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: if so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious."

The classic Greek writing style was to write in complete sentences and proceed from one subject to the next in an orderly fashion. Peter, however, as an uneducated fisherman, uses a more provincial approach, and works with transitional phrases, basing his reasoning on his previously expressed thought.

The "wherefore" of his opening sentence thus connects with his closing words of chapter 1. There he refers to their having developed "unfeigned love for the brethren" and being "begotten again" of "incorruptible seed" (1 Peter 1:22-25, ASC; 1 Peter 2:1-3, ASV), thus having an enduring faith in contrast with the grass that fades away.

The encouragement in the opening verse is to repel five characteristics which would hinder their spiritual development in the trials they were facing. These are:

1. Malice. This Greek word (*kakia*, Strong's 2549) literally means anything of an inherently bad nature. Here it may be a subject heading for the four vices to follow, or indicating the avoiding of an evil intent in the mind. Under persecution, it is most difficult to have a good feeling toward one's detractors.

2. Guile. Rather than to be deceptive to their accusers, they were to develop the opposite traits of sincerity and openness. Following such a path they would have the opportunity to be a witness to their magistrates (Luke 12:11,12).

3. Hypocrisies. It takes strong faith to refuse all compromises in the face of severe opposition. It is these compromises that cause a Christian to assume an identity somewhat less than a full follower of the Master.

4. Envy. It is easy in the best of times when, seeing the superior possessions or position of another, to ask, "Why am I not so similarly favored?" The temptation to envy increases still further when one suffers loss, and another does not. Then the question, "Why me?" must be changed to "Why not me?"

5. Evil speaking. The United Bible Society translator's handbook states that though the word literally means to speak evil, it "primarily describes the act of speaking about others in order to belittle or defame them" (compare NAB "disparaging remark of any kind"). This sets a high standard for the Christian in all circumstances.

Peter, speaking of these scattered Christians as "newborn babes," either indicates that they were recent converts or, more likely, that Peter was quite aged at the time he wrote this epistle. His encouragement for them to grow with the "sincere milk of the word" is not in conflict with Paul's rebuke in his epistle to the Hebrews, that they had become "such as have reed of milk, and not of strong meat" (Hebrews 5:12, 13). Peter is merely encouraging them toward spiritual growth.

A Spiritual Temple -- Verses 4 through 9

"To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

Peter now turns to metaphorical language. His use of the temple is parallel to the Lord's use of the vine and branches in John 15. Jesus, as the chief corner stone of the temple, is the base of all Christian building, just as the vine is the source of growth for all branches.

In the twin metaphors of "living stones" and an "holy priesthood," Peter not only shows the close relationship of Christ and his church, but also the relationship of present experiences to their future work.

The one chosen to be this "living stone," who is, to the believer, both "elect" (chosen) and "precious" (the Hebrew tense is the intensive form, "most valuable") is none other than Jesus of Nazareth. The words "chief corner stone" mean literally "the head of the corner,"

a cornerstone on which two walls are founded. The uniqueness of this stone is well illustrated by the southeast corner stone of the platform for Solomon's temple. Since this corner lies over the hillside descending to the Kidron valley, it is irregular in shape, perfectly shaped to fit the topographical contour of Mt. Zion. As a "keystone" in modern architecture, the entire structure would collapse if this particular stone were removed.

Whether the words "spiritual house" are to be taken literally as the temple building or metaphorically for "household," the priesthood which occupies the temple, is debatable. Perhaps both are intended. The individual members of the body of Christ are well compared to the temple stones for they are taken from the same quarry and there shaped before being transported to the final site for their particular place in the structure. Like the temple stones of old, their shaping is done so perfectly that they slide into their pre-assigned position with "neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron heard in the house, while it was in building" (1 Kings 6:7).

But the church is to be, with their Lord, the "royal priesthood" which will offer the sacrifices in this antitypical temple of the future. While the authenticity of the word "spiritual" before "sacrifices" is challenged by some, the overwhelming evidence is that it appears in the most ancient manuscripts.*

In this passage the thought is apparently "antitypical" sacrifices. The promise of being a "holy nation" in Exodus 19:6 is here transferred to the church as the "royal priesthood." In fact, verse 9 is a specific allusion to this text. This promise finds its reality in the Melchizedek priesthood when the church with their Lord shall "reign with him a thousand years" (Revelation 20:6). Their ministry, illustrated by their life and teachings of the present time, will be "to show forth the praises of him who hath called [them] out of darkness into his marvelous light."

Peter then returns to the analogy of the corner stone, demonstrating that Christ as that stone is precious only to the believers. To the non-believers he becomes both a "stone of stumbling and a rock of offense." The picture is still that of the temple corner stone. As an unfortunate individual stumbling upon the overhanging temple corner stone would die in his precipitous fall upon the stone below, so the Jew who stumbled over Jesus being the antitypical corner stone would be judged thereby. The "rock of offense" picture is even more dramatic. Barnes, in his Notes, states that it was at this corner stone where Jewish executions were carried out. He writes: "A scaffold was erected twice the height of the man to be stoned. Standing on its edge, he was violently struck off by one of the witnesses: if he died by the blow and the fall, nothing further was done; if not, a heavy stone was thrown down on him, which at once killed him. So the Saviour speaks of the "falling" of the stone on his enemies. They who oppose him, who reject him, and who continue impenitent, shall be CRUSHED by him in the day of judgment, and perish forever."

The Second Transition -- Verses 10 through 12

"Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy. Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation."

In this transition of thought Peter alludes to Hosea 1:9,10 and 2:23. He makes the same application of the Hosea text as Paul does in Romans 9:25. Contextually, however, the prophecy is of natural Israel being returned to God's favor at the second advent of Jesus. This is one of several examples of Old Testament prophecies having a dual fulfillment; they possess applications at both the first and second advent of Christ.

Although they have this honored position of being a royal priesthood, they must patiently await that distinguished title until a future life. Therefore they should regard themselves, as Abraham did in the land of Canaan, as pilgrims and sojourners. Though beset on every side, the Christian must be an example of pure and holy living, recognizing that the desires of the flesh are at war with the desires of the spirit.

The word "honest" does not cover the full meaning of the Greek. Rather the thought is "honorable," the living of a life that is in full accord with their commitment to follow in the footsteps of the Master. Seeing that the Christians of Asia Minor were undergoing particularly strong persecutions at that time, this honorable living would be made all the more difficult by the fact that they were looked down upon and evil spoken of by their pagan neighbors. Their admonition was the same as that of the apostle Paul in Romans 12:20,21, "Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."

Submission to Civil Authorities -- Verses 13 through 17

"Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: as free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king."

The subject matter now turns to the concept of submission:

1. To Civil Authorities -- Verses 13-17 -- [chapter two]
2. Servants to Masters -- Verses 18-25
3. Wives to Husbands -- Verses 1-6 -- [chapter three]
4. Husbands to Wives -- Verse 7
5. Submission One to Another -- Verse 8

The submission to civil authorities, especially Rome, was particularly difficult for the Christian Jews of the dispersion. Rome ruled with a heavy hand. Though governed by a system of relatively enlightened laws, the rulers expected and demanded strict obedience. The Jewish religion was being increasingly discouraged as unrest and rebellion by zealots increased and Christianity was watched with even greater suspicion.

Submission, Peter admonishes, was not because of Roman power, but "for the Lord's sake." There was a legitimacy to foreign rule which the Christian was to respect. Governments are established to maintain law and order, punishing the violators and protecting those who comply. The apostle Paul is even more direct on this point: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: for he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake." -- Romans 13:1-5

How does this operate, however, in such cases as the Christians were facing in Asia Minor, when the powers that be were punishing them for their good works? This is the dilemma a disciple must sometimes face. These texts do not speak to the issue of compliance with civil law in cases of conscience, but appear to enjoin the spirit of submission to the penalties such non-compliance imposes. A Christian is to be submissive and neither pro-active or reactive when laws interfere with his duties to God.

The verbs in verse 17 should be noted. Both the king and "all men" are put in the same position. They should be "honored" or "respected." It is always tempting to disparage or put down those in authority because of their transparent political maneuvering or for the graft and corruption that so often occupies positions of power. Nevertheless, even if we cannot respect the man, his office is worthy of our esteem.

But respect is not sufficient for the "brotherhood." They are to be loved, both with the purest sense of disinterested agape love and with the warmth of true *phileo* love. Their position, as a brother or sister in Christ, warrants a higher place in our minds than even those in authority. Above everyone is the person and position of God who is to be

"feared," not in cringing terror as before a mighty potentate, but in complete awe of his majesty and goodness.

Submission to Masters -- Verses 18 through 25

"Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls."

Society has changed considerably since the days of the early church. Slavery, though it still exists, is not the rule. However, many profitable lessons can be learned by applying the principles of this section of the epistle to Christian attitudes in the workplace.

"Office politics" is well-known today, especially in larger firms. It often results in unfair practices and unjust treatment of conscientious workers. Peter describes such ill treatment as being "thankworthy" -- worthy of our appreciation. As one has well phrased it, "Don't waste your trials; they're worth millions." The apostle claims that acceptance and submission in such circumstances is "acceptable with God." It is part of the "good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" which Paul says would come from a transformed mind (Romans 12:2).

Peter goes even further. Such submission is not only acceptable, but he adds "hereunto were ye called." Patient submission and suffering are part of the prescribed curricula in the school of Christ. Since Jesus suffered "the just for the unjust" (1 Peter 3:18), to follow in his steps may also require the unjustified bearing of harsh or unkind treatment -- in the office or wherever a Christian comes into contact with the world.

Finally, we are told by Peter that we have been "as sheep that have gone astray" and that it is incumbent to realize that in our practice of Christian submission we are returning to one who can both correct and protect us, "the Shepherd and Bishop" of our souls.

Space prohibits the continuing of our examining this concept of submission as it relates to wives, husbands, and as a universal principal of divine law. These relationships form the subject matter of the first part of chapter 3.

Let us be constantly on the lookout to keep our bodies under and bring them into subjection by submitting to whatever experiences our heavenly Father permits (1 Corinthians 9:27).

* The word *pneumatikos*, translated "spiritual," appears in approximately 500 of the oldest manuscripts, including the Vatican 1209, Manuscript 1739, and Papyrus p72, three of the most reliable. Only the Sinaitic manuscript omits the word.

The Doctrine of Submission

*Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder.
Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility:
for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. -- 1 Peter 5:5*

Verse-by-Verse study of 1 Peter 2:13 through 3:17

It is far easier to state the concept of submission in words than to live it in practice. The doctrine of Christian submission forms much of the subject matter of the second and third chapters of Peter's first epistle. He deals successively with submission to the ordinances of man, of servants to masters, of wives to husbands, of husbands to wives, and, in chapter five, of the younger to the elder. He then concludes with the all-inclusive statement, "Yea, all of you be subject one to another."

The situation in the early church differs greatly from that of today. Peter wrote this epistle to Jewish Christians scattered throughout the areas of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia -- all under Roman jurisdiction. There was strong resistance to the burgeoning Christian influence, largely because its teachings were contrary to the prevailing pagan cultures.

In these verses Peter counsels a humble submission to this environment rather than a resistance against it. The mark of the Christian religion is to live at peace with all men.

Submission to Ordinances -- 1 Peter 2:13-17

Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: As free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.

Neither the Roman government nor the Jewish authorities favored the Christian religion. Many of the laws, while designed to maintain peace and tranquility, were far from being based in biblical principles. Nevertheless Peter admonishes a quiet and humble submission to the rules. There is no suggestion of civil disobedience or even passive resistance, much less open defiance of civil law. The sole exception seems to be when human laws are in direct conflict with those of the Creator. This is manifest in Peter's response to the council: "And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:18-20). This is the practice followed today by many who oppose military service.

The apostle Paul likewise appreciatively notes the ideal function of governments: “For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: for he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil” (Romans 13:3,4). While it is true that corrupt rulers often abuse their office, such abuse is often better than the alternative. As the seventeenth century historian Horneius put it, “Tyranny harasses many, but anarchy overwhelms the whole state.”

This acquiescence to civil rule applied not only to the laws of the emperor, but also to local ordinances made by such delegates as the Roman proconsuls. Their authority included not only appropriate punishments, but recognition of good behavior as well. The noted Roman jurist, Ulpian, wrote, “The presidents of provinces have the highest authority, next to the emperor.”

This submission was put to its severest test during the second century Christian persecutions before the gladiators and the lions in the Coliseum. The humble acceptance of death displayed a faith that is inspiring even to us today who live in happier times (though selective cruelty is still practiced in several places around the world).

Peter concludes this section with a fourfold admonition:

1. **Honor All Men** -- even the sixty million slaves in the Roman empire at the time.
2. **Love the Brotherhood** -- The verb changes from the mere recognition that all men should be respected and given due dignity, to the more intimate relationship accorded those of a Christian’s spiritual household.
3. **Fear God** -- The hierarchy builds higher in the reverential awe due to the mightiest king of all.
4. **Honor the King** -- It seems odd that the king is placed last as though he was to be esteemed above God. Peter’s point is not that of a higher authority due a holy fear, but that for a time the king and his laws are to be viewed (except when in direct conflict) as the permissive will of God for his people to follow.

Submission of Servants -- 1 Peter 2:18-20

Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.

The Greek word translated “servant” denotes a household domestic. These were slaves who, while granted rather liberal rights under Jewish law, were often treated harshly in the Roman world. The general admonition is to be faithful workers to all. One Christian writer has phrased their responsibilities to their masters this way: “With reverence to their persons, strict regard to their commands, faithfulness in any trust reposed in them, diligence in the discharge of their duty, and carefulness of offending them.”

These rules applied equally to both kind and cruel masters. As Adam Clarke puts it, “Your time belongs to your master; obey him in every thing that is not sinful; if he employs you about unreasonable or foolish things, let him answer for it. He may waste your time, and thus play the fool with his own property; you can only fill up your time: let him assign the work; it is your duty to obey.”

Suffering caused by such abuse can be accounted as suffering with Christ. Not only does it teach sympathy with the plight of others so treated, it is a tool for the development of patience, a necessary Christian grace. However, such suffering is only praiseworthy if it is not induced by faults or negligence of our own.

Although circumstances regarding slavery have changed greatly from apostolic times, the Christian in the workplace of today can well apply the same lessons. Quick and efficient dispatch of an employer’s instructions is to be viewed as though the service were rendered to the Lord. The irritants of rude or unjust supervisors or the intricacies of office politics are not to be looked upon as excuses for laxity or sloppy execution of one’s duties, which are to be faithfully fulfilled unless they call for an illegal activity or one that is in direct conflict with conscience.

Consequent Suffering -- 1 Peter 2:21-25

For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed. For ye were as sheep going astray; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.

Jesus Christ himself is the extreme example of submission and suffering. Rather than retaliation for the unjustness of the opposition and mockings that he received, he chose to

endure them and thus leave an example for his followers. The secret of his strength under trials may be found in these prophetic words: "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it" (Psalm 39:9). The margin in the Geneva Bible captures the thought: "Seeing my troubles came from your providence, I ought to have endured them patiently."

As the stones in Solomon's temple were carefully shaped before being fitted soundlessly into the overall structure, so the "living stones" of Christ's spiritual temple must submit willingly and uncomplainingly to the chisel of the Master Builder while still in the quarry of this present life. They can do this because of their trust in the divine architect and their knowledge that each of life's sufferings better prepares one for the kingdom work of uplifting humanity from the mire of sin and death.

The Submission of Wives -- 1 Peter 3:1-6

Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives; While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price. For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement.

The context here is far different from that in Ephesians 5:22 where Paul writes similar words: "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord." There the exhortation is to a couple that is equally yoked in the Lord and considers such a case an illustration of the relationship between Christ and his church. Peter addresses the situation where a newly converted Christian woman is unequally yoked to an unbeliever. Perhaps that is why his admonition to wives is six times longer than that to husbands. Her task is more difficult. In the culture of that time when wives were little more than chattel possessed by their husbands, if a man accepted the Christian dogma, it was expected that his wife would follow suit. On the other hand, a woman accepting Christianity apart from her husband would place her in an untenable position.

Peter counsels such women to be in subjection to their husbands, not because their mates represented the role of Christ in the relationship, but that such humble conduct might persuade her husband to see the beneficial effects of her new religion. One Greek lexicon notes that the word *hupotasso*, translated "submission," is "a Greek military term meaning to arrange [troop divisions] in a military fashion under the command of a leader. In non-military use, it was 'a voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden'."

Roman women were deeply concerned with fashion and wore ostentatious jewelry as shown here. Peter contrasts such outer adornment with the inner graces of the spirit. Particular emphasis is laid on “a meek and quiet spirit.” Quietness is not to be understood as silence, but rather as that tranquility which accepts unreasonable and unjust demands with a lack of murmuring or complaining.

The example of Abraham’s wife, Sara, is adduced to illustrate this point. This is a curious illustration since the term “Lord” was a common word of respect, roughly equivalent to our word “sir.” Note the use of it by Heth to Abraham in the matter of the purchase of a tomb for Sarah (Genesis 23:6,11,15).

Sarah’s use of the term does not appear to describe a total submission so much as yielding appropriate respect to the one addressed. Such acquiescence to her husband’s desires was to be offered freely without the husband resorting to mental or physical violence to obtain it. The position, therefore, of the unequally yoked wife in the early church was a difficult one indeed.

Sarah is also an unusual example for Abraham who, on one occasion, was to obey her preferences when they strongly differed from his own. When Sarah requested in jealous - anger that Hagar be sent away with her son Ishmael to Abraham’s great displeasure, God said “unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called” (Genesis 21:12).

We might appropriately gather from this observation that any submission of the wife to the husband is not for him to ignore her input in the decision but for there to be a willingness on a husband’s part to acquiesce to her wishes in some matters.

The Reaction of Husbands -- 1 Peter 3:7

Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.

It may well be supposed from the context that the case of the husband in Peter’s epistle is also addressing one in an unequally yoked marriage. This may or may not be the case. Whatever the specific, the advice seems apropos to all husband-wife relationships.

This verse has been sagely annotated as follows: “Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them [your wives] according to knowledge [wisely and generously], giving honor unto the wife [taking pleasure in her progress and in all her noble attainments and achievements], as unto the weaker vessel [using your strength for her support and encouragement, and not for her oppression], and as being **heirs together** of the grace [the favors and blessings] of life.” (*Reprints*, p. 1553)

There is reciprocity in all of the biblical comments on submission. The Scriptures never place all the responsibility on one side. If they speak of the duties of slaves, they speak also of the obligations of masters. If they speak of the duty of children, they speak also of the obligations of parents (compare Ephesians 6:1-9; Colossians 3:20-25; 4:1).

Three specifics are urged upon husbands:

1. **He Must Be Understanding** -- A good husband will sensitively consider the feelings of his mate. The cruelty that is hardest to bear is often not deliberate but the product of sheer thoughtlessness. When Paul writes, "Consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works" (Hebrews 10:24) he uses the Greek word *katanoeo* which means to examine closely, as though the observer had to bend down for this purpose. Such careful scrutiny will greatly help a husband become a better husband.
2. **He Must Be Chivalrous** -- Remembering the natural delicacies of both body and emotions of his wife, a man should seek to provide the physical and mental support to provide a proper balance between the natural attributes of the two sexes.
3. **He Must Be Cognizant Of Her Spiritual Rights** -- "As heirs together of the grace of life" he should seek to encourage his spouse in her pursuit of a personal relationship with both God and her Savior.

The penalty for not fulfilling these basic responsibilities is automatic: his own prayer life, his own spiritual development will be hindered. Accepting the wife's submissive attitude, he is accountable for what she becomes spiritually. Her life is in his hands and any failure to live up to these duties reflects on his own relationships with God and with Christ.

Submission to All -- 1 Peter 3:8-13

Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous: Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing. For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil. And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?

In the fifth chapter of this epistle Peter continues his dissertation on submissiveness by adding the case of the younger submitting to the more mature, older brethren. He then concludes with a statement that includes the submission of everyone to everyone else: "Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time" (1 Peter 5:5,6). Paul gives a similar admonition: "In humility consider others better than yourselves" (Philippians 2:3, NIV).

Peter delineates seven fruitages of such submission:

1. **Compassion** -- The first fruitage of universal submission is the desire to enter into the feelings of others, to share their passion, to be compassionate.
2. **Pitiful** -- That is, to be full of the pity that expresses sorrow rather than anger for the one who may appear to be at enmity with them.
3. **Courteousness** -- Kindness should always be a hallmark of a Christian and must be demonstrated in the way compassion is shown -- not in a condescending manner, but upholding the dignity of the other.
4. **Proactive** -- By not reacting to the slights or abuses of another, true submissiveness will seek to return blessings for injuries received.
5. **Avoid Evil Speaking** -- A truly submissive Christian will not murmur against injustices or speak badly about the perpetrators, but seek to attribute the best of motives to all detractors.
6. **Honesty** -- The lack of guile will not only produce honesty in one's words and dealings, but also a measure of naiveté that reflects a heart willing to accept injustice rather than be constantly suspicious.
7. **Peacemaking** -- Not only will a Christian seek peace, he will persistently pursue a course that will bring eventual reconciliation with the one to whom he submits.

Consequent Suffering -- 1 Peter 3:14-17

But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ. For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.

Peter recognizes that the course of submission will bring a measure of suffering, but such is to be viewed as sufferings with Christ, therefore a pleasure and a cause for rejoicing. Such an attitude removes the terror or fear of opposition and, like the lily of the field, meekly bows before the winds of adversity only to rise again afterward (Matthew 6:28).

Suffer we must, but let us each see to it that our suffering is for well-doing and not for evil-doing.

The Prophetic Preview

Scoffers in the Last Days

"Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart rope: That say, Let him make speed, and hasten his work, that we may see it: and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it!" -- Isaiah 5:18,19

A verse by verse Bible study in 2 Peter 3

Few subjects have grasped the interest of the Christian more than that of the return of Jesus Christ. This was as true in the early church as it is today. The Apostle Paul dealt with it extensively in his letters to the Thessalonians. It was a major theme in the Apostle John's vision of Revelation on the Isle of Patmos. In our study here, the Apostle Peter shows equal interest in the subject.

Stirring Up Pure Minds--Verses 1 and 2

This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: that ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Savior.

Peter's opening sentence in this chapter demonstrates what should be the object of all Christian communication. It is a two-fold object, both to stimulate pure thought and to direct attention to the words of the Bible. This was the object of both of Peter's epistles. In the first, he dealt with the sufferings of the Christian, and how submission to those sufferings would eventuate in salvation. The subject of the second epistle is the certainty of the Lord's return. Although he only deals with this in this third chapter, he precedes it by establishing the authority of the scriptures in the first chapter and warning of false teachers who bring other doctrines in the second chapter.

While Peter's object is to stimulate their pure minds, his method is to bring things they knew to their remembrance. In this he is emulating the method by which God instructs through the holy spirit. "But the Comforter, which is the holy spirit whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:26).

Writing before there was a New Testament, he nevertheless anticipates it by calling attention to two sources for this remembered knowledge: the prophets and the words of Jesus. The King James translation somewhat clouds the issue in the second verse. Most other reliable translations follow the Greek in attributing the "commandments" here to "the Lord and Savior" and not to the apostles. He is the author of them. The apostles were only the channel for their communication.

The inspired author carefully chooses the word "commandments." These are not mere suggestions. They are precepts to be acted upon. Strong's Concordance defines the word as "an authoritative prescription." Thayer defines it as "an injunction that is prescribed to one by reason of his office," "a prescribed rule by which a thing is done." He further states that it is used ethically of "the commandments in Mosaic law or Jewish tradition." In other words, Peter is stating that the words he is about to write are not his own but have divine authority and are not given for mere information but are to be acted upon.

Scoffers--Verses 3 to 7

Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: but the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

Before beginning his discussion of the "day of the Lord," Peter continues his theme of the previous chapter by warning of false teachers. The Greek is even stronger than most translations, preceding the noun "scoffers" with the adjective "mocking." The intensity of Peter's distaste for these teachers is shown by his accusation that they are "willingly ignorant" of relevant facts. It is impossible to know to which specific group of false teachers he refers. There were many of them. While the canonical New Testament contains four gospels, there were more than fifty apocryphal gospels circulating amongst the early church, according to the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia.

The specific challenge of these false teachers is, "Where is the promise of his coming (Greek parousia, [presence])?" The probable meaning is "Where is his promised coming?"

The support for this challenge is that "all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation." Jesus encountered such skepticism at his first advent. His rebuke to such skeptics is found in Matthew 16:3: "O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky; but can ye not discern the signs of the times?" The "signs of the times" in his day were the various miracles he performed and the fact that the gospel was even preached to the poor (Matt. 11:4, 5). His second advent was to be likewise accompanied by specific "signs," many of which he outlined in his Olivet sermon, found in chapters 24 and 25 of the Gospel of Matthew.

The fact that Peter is directing attention to the scoffers of the second advent is supported both by his reference to these being in "the last days" and by the later verses of the chapter which describe the work of the second advent.

The reference to their being ignorant of the lesson of the flood of Noah's day appears to be drawn from the Lord's words in Matthew 24:37-39, "But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be." The point of emphasis is on the unawareness of the ending of the first world being parallel to a similar unawareness of the return of Christ. Peter charges that the refusal to be on the alert for the indications of that return was "willingly" and deliberate. The connection with Noah can also be deduced from the prophecy of Enoch found in Jude 14-16.

The title of James Baldwin's best seller on the black separatist movement, *The Fire Next Time*, is drawn from verse 7. His title is appropriate, though it will be not only racial tensions but the inequities in all of the areas of society that will occasion the eruption symbolized by the "fire" of this verse.

It is significant that he uses the illustration of fire to describe the closing scenes of the present age. It would seem at first more logical to use the parallelism of saying that as the old world ended in a flood so would the new world similarly end in a flood. However such would have been an offense to his readers who may well have remembered God's promise to never send a flood again (Gen. 9:11); though Isaiah did use such a figure of speech (Isa. 28:15-18).

There may be yet another reason for the change of metaphor. Many (perhaps the majority) of those destroyed in the flood were born as a result of an illegal hybridization of the race, being the children of angelic fathers and human mothers. As a result of being an unauthorized race they could expect no resurrection from the dead. In contrast, those who may love their lives in the conflagration which ends the present age will all come back from the grave to receive their trial and judgment in Christ's kingdom (John 5:28, 29). Fire, as contrasted to a flood, could convey this thought for fire is a symbol of purgation as well as destruction.

Another interesting word play is employed by Peter's choice of the words translated "kept in store" and "reserved." The Greek for the expression "kept in store" is *thesaurizo* (from which we derive the English "thesaurus"), meaning a treasure house, or to lay up as treasure. (Note its use in Matt. 6:19, 20; 1 Cor. 16:2; and James 5:3.) The Greek word translated "reserved" is a stronger term than merely to delay an action, but implies an active guardianship. Both Professors Strong and Thayer define the word as meaning "to guard." The picture thus drawn is of a wise Creator treasuring the experiences which man learns through his life under evil influences and guarding, or protecting, the status quo until the fullness of the lessons are learned. It is, as the Lord answered Job out of the storm, "Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further: and here shall thy proud waves be stayed" (Job 38:11).

Though the heavenly Father has been protecting the nations from their own destruction for the present (see Rom. 13:1 and John 19:11), great will be the fall thereof when that

protection is withdrawn. It will indeed be a day of both judgment and perdition. Here, too, the words are carefully chosen. The nations will both receive a fair and equitable judgment, or crisis as the Greek word would have it, and the effect of the negative judgment, which is the thought of the word "perdition." There is, perhaps, a tendency of some to place too much emphasis on this word "perdition," as though it always means a destruction from which there is no relief. While the word can be used of the second death from which there is no release, it is also used of Adamic condemnation. In Matthew 7:13, for instance, it is used as the terminus of the "broad road" upon which the entire race is walking. (Note also its use in Rom. 9:22.)

The ones being thus judged are the "ungodly." These are not limited to those who do wickedness but to all who disregard God and his laws. Their fate is not necessarily eternal death, for, as we read in Romans 5:6, "Christ died for the ungodly."

The Day of the Lord--Verses 8 to 10

But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

Peter extends the thought of the willing ignorance of the scoffers to the warning of the believers against similar disregard of the facts. By reminding his readers that the day of the Lord is not a 24-hour period, but a lengthy term, he suggests that not all expectations of that period will come at one time. Rather, there would be a gradual onset, much as the rising sun gradually makes its presence known.

The apostle is not here asserting that the day of the Lord is precisely one thousand years. That may very well be true and appears indicated in Revelation 20:1-6. Here, however, Peter contents himself with a generality by stating that the day is "as," or "about," one thousand years.

The Greek word *hos*, translated "as" in the King James Bible is open to a broad variety of meanings. However, as Professor W. E. Vine notes in his Expository Dictionary, "when the word is used with numbers, it signifies about." He then cites a number of examples where this Greek word is used. The Gadarene swine that drove themselves into the sea was **about** 2000 (Mark 5:13). Those who ate the feast that Jesus prepared from the loaves and fishes were **about** 4000 (Mark 8:9). Jesus invited Andrew and his companion disciple to stop with him **about** the tenth hour (John 1:39). The disciples had rowed **about** twenty five or thirty furlongs when Jesus came walking on the sea (John 6:19). Bethany was **about** fifteen furlongs from Jerusalem (John 11:18). The disciples gathered before Pentecost number **about** one hundred twenty (Acts 1:15). When the Revelator saw the seventh seal opened there was silence in heaven for **about** a half-hour (Rev. 8:1).

Noting the length of the period, the apostle exhorts against discouragement. "Hope deferred maketh the heart sick" (Prov. 13:12). God's reckoning of time is different from that of man. When a thousand years are as one day, then the average life span is only an hour or two. It is this seeming delay that caused the prophet Habakkuk to write, "For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry" (2:3).

In our day we see these same tendencies are prevalent. Some tend to look at the Lord's return as a single event, a rapture with a world-wide recognition of a change in world conditions. The Bible, on the contrary, indicates a more gradual event, as the "Sun of Righteousness" gradually dawns on the horizon.

The reason for this "day of the Lord" being so long is then revealed by Peter. It has two purposes. It is an example of the longsuffering of God, first "us-ward," to the church, to give them sufficient time to make their "calling and election sure." But, beyond that, it is for the purpose of dealing with all of mankind, the dead as well as the living, for God is "not willing that any should perish, but come to repentance."

The analogy of the "thief in the night" captures both the suddenness of his coming and its unexpected manner. This metaphor was first used by Jesus himself (Luke 12:39-41), and picked up by the Apostles Paul (1 Thess. 5:2) and John (Rev. 3:3; 16:15) as well as Peter.

But though the onset of this day is sudden and not anticipated, the effects will be felt worldwide. It will accomplish a complete dissolution of the present world order and its replacement with a "new heavens and a new earth." Peter uses intensive words to describe the completeness of this dissolution. It will be accompanied by "great noise" and the elements shall melt with "fervent heat," resulting in their being utterly "burned up." The present religious ("heavens") and civil ("earth") orders of society will be completely done away with in preparation for the new kingdom of peace and justice for all.

The "elements" refer not to physical components of the universe, but to the basic principles upon which present society is based. The base concepts of "might makes right" and "survival of the fittest" will have no place in the new government that considers the rights and dignity of all peoples.

Practical Effects--Verses 11 to 14

Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.

The effect of this knowledge about the utter dissolution of earth's society should not be discouragement or fear but stimulation to a more devout and godly life. Realizing the possible shortness of our time on earth should be an incentive to prove all the more faithful and to finish the work that God has given us to do. The exhortation is not so much to work and activity, though, as it is to holiness and purity of conduct. The Greek word translated "conversation" (*anastrepho*, Strong's 390) is not limited to what comes out of our mouth but the entire manner of behavior, our conduct in life. The prefix *ana* in this word suggests a turning back, and answers to the "repentance" of verse nine. The proper course for all has always been "repent and be converted" (Acts 3:19), not only showing sorrow for past misdeeds but also changing one's course in life so as not to repeat past mistakes.

The Christian is admonished to not only "look for" this promised day, but also to "haste its coming." The word "unto" is not supported in the Greek, though the thought may be there. Although the American Standard Version translates the phrase "eagerly desiring," most translators follow the usual usage of the word as indicating the hastening or speeding up of its arrival.

This raises a serious question. Can man change God's timetables? Can he truly hasten any feature of God's plan? The answer seems obvious: No! We suggest that the statement is not to be taken in a strict literal sense but as an admonition to work diligently towards the end of speeding its arrival. The blessings of that day cannot commence until the church is complete. The church cannot be completed until each of its members proves faithful. Therefore giving diligence to such faithfulness is, as it were, a hastening of the promised blessings that day will bring.

The specifics of this "holy conversation and godliness" are given in verse fourteen, "that ye may be found in peace, without spot and blameless in his sight." The peace here referred to is that peace of mind that comes from doing that which is right. This gives one confidence of a favorable judgment by God. The encouraged action is to live a life as pure as possible so that one is neither defiled nor can be justly so accused by others. This is to be done with "diligence." The word for diligence is from the same root as the word "hasting" in verse twelve and illustrates how we can do this hastening in a practical way.

Paul's Concurrence--Verses 15 and 16

And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.

The seeming delay of the "day of the Lord" gives each Christian ample opportunity to show his faithfulness and to learn the lessons from his daily experiences.

Peter cites Paul as being in complete agreement with his arguments. This statement indicates either that the epistles of the apostles had broad circulation in the early church or that there were epistles that have been lost. Paul speaks most directly of these issues in his letters to the Thessalonians. Peter is writing his second letter to the same church as his first (2 Peter 3:1), and that was directed to the Christians in what is now north central Turkey (1 Peter 1:1), a long way from Thessalonica in Greece. Only the epistles to Colossae and Galatia were in the vicinity of Peter's audience. Peter's reference to Paul also shows the high regard he had for his fellow apostle, despite the fact that they had had a face to face confrontation in Antioch (Gal. 2:11), an example for all Christians who may sometimes have differences with each other. While Peter shows his respect for Paul, at the same time he suggests that Paul's complex logic was frequently misinterpreted and given meanings other than Paul intended.

Final Admonitions--Verses 17 and 18

Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.

To be forewarned is to be forearmed. This adage is the essence of Peter's closing remarks. The Living Bible phrases it well, "I am warning you ahead of time, dear brothers, so that you can watch out and not be carried away by the mistakes of these wicked men, lest you yourselves become mixed up too."

Peter concludes his epistle by encouraging his readers to grow in both grace and knowledge. Either without the other makes for an unbalanced and unstable character. Both are needed, both must be diligently developed.

Gaius

John's Well-Beloved

"The elder unto the well-beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth." -- 3 John 1

A verse by verse Bible study in the third epistle of John. The touching tenderness of the Apostle John shines out in his three epistles. While the first of these three letters appears to be addressed to the church generally, the latter two are a personal correspondence with ones he holds dear. However, in this study our attention is on the third epistle.

Gaius -- Verses 1 and 2

The elder unto the well-beloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth. Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.

John and the author of Hebrews are the only writers of epistles who do not begin by giving their names. John's one exception to this rule (if we regard the first three verses as introductory) is in the book of Revelation. Some attribute this to humility on the part of the apostle. This may well be true. However, in view of the personal nature of these letters and the fact that John at this time is the only apostle living, it may have seemed unnecessary. In any case, John's authorship has been generally accepted since the earliest days of the church, with only a few exceptions.

Eusebius mentions that John returned from his exile in Patmos after the death of Domitian (A.D. 96) and began to visit nearby churches, even though he must have been about 100 years old at the time. Such intentions are indicated in 2 John 10 and 3 John 10, 14.

Gaius was a very popular Roman name, meaning "lord" or "lordly." There are a number of believers in the New Testament with this name. This Gaius is not to be confused with any of the others, since he appears to be a comparatively young man at the turn of the second century (v. 4) and is identified as one of the "children" of John, one who probably became a Christian through John's ministry. It is likely that he was the Gaius who became the bishop of Pergamos, for that Gaius is specifically mentioned in early church history as having been a disciple of John.

The repetitive assertion in the first verse of John's agape love for Gaius indicates a tender bond between the two. Like Timothy, Paul's son in the faith, Gaius does not appear to have been in robust health. It would be a strain on the word "health" to interpret it as spiritual health. Rather, John seems to have been genuinely concerned about the physical well-being of Gaius.

Although the health he desired is apparently literal, John's desire is not to be construed as a prayer for healing but merely what he stated it to be, a desire that the young man be healthy. And although the health is literal, we do not need to jump to the conclusion that

John's hope for the prosperity of his friend is equally literal. In Thayer's Lexicon he gives "success, or prosperity" as the third possible definition for the Greek euodoo. The primary definition is "to grant a prosperous and expeditious journey, to lead by a direct and easy way." John's ardent desire for Gaius is that his pathway be a profitable one and that he be in good health because John could see that his spiritual life is prosperous.

John's Joy -- Verses 3 and 4

For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.

Of all the apostles, John had enjoyed the longest life. During his years in the way he had witnessed the high of being with Jesus and the low of seeing him crucified. His experiences in subsequent years would have been likewise checkered. He had witnessed the growth of the new religion within one century throughout Asia Minor, southern Europe, and northern Africa, and as far east as Babylon (1 Peter 5:13). He had witnessed persecution at the hand of his fellow Jews as well as harsh attempts to stop the new religion by the leaders of the Roman Empire. He himself had personally been exiled to the island of Patmos. There he had seen the dramatic vision of Revelation. His interest in the developing church was intense. It was the passion of his life.

Considering the lack of modern technology, communication was amazingly well developed throughout the Roman Empire. Traveling missionaries such as Paul, Titus, Luke, and Apollos would bring word of the churches they visited. Letters were freely exchanged.

We can thus well imagine the joy of this centenarian saint as the brethren returning from Pergamos, or wherever Gaius was, and bringing back word of his spiritual well being. He not only was happy but "rejoiced greatly," or as Thayer's translates the word, he rejoiced "exceedingly beyond measure." Gaius had withstood whatever tests God had designed for his pathway, and the aged apostle desired greatly that he continue to thrive along the "narrow way."

John does not rate this joy too high when he said that there was for him "no greater joy." John's joy was not limited to Gaius but his particular interest was in all those whom he called "my children." It is perhaps not unusual for such a revered and aged saint to consider all of the other brethren as "little children" as he did twelve times in his first epistle (though he used a more intimate Greek term in 1 John 2:13, 18). Everyone who has been a parent, or who has had the privilege of leading another to Christ, can well appreciate John's sentiments.

In the context of this epistle, though, it seems obvious that Gaius was the one of the "children" to whom he referred. His joy was not that they were fellow believers, nor is it that they had professed a consecration to God. Rather, what brings him joy is that they "walk" in truth. Many speak of Christ, many desire to be known as his followers, but the

real joy is in witnessing the lives of those who go beyond that and obey and walk in the truths they are learning.

The Good Words of Gaius -- Verses 5 through 8

Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers; Which have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well: Because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles. We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellowhelpers to the truth.

The King James Version of these verses is somewhat confusing. They are well clarified by the New American Standard Version: "Beloved, you are acting faithfully in whatever you accomplish for the brethren, and especially when they are strangers; and they bear witness to your love before the church; and you will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. For they went out for the sake of the Name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore we ought to support such men, that we may be fellow workers with the truth."

Gaius was commended for his hospitality. The non-biblical historical records portray him as a man of means. He was here commended for using his resources to support those missionary workers who passed through his city. The biblical record of the early church indicates this was a common practice (1 Cor. 16:6). In Romans 16:23 Paul writes of another Gaius who had been his "host." The account of Lydia in Acts 16:15 is another such indicator.

The sixth verse indicates that Gaius' hospitality may have gone beyond providing room and board but also included financial subsistence for the traveling laborers in the vineyard. By this time the church was occupied more and more with a witness to the gentiles. John indicated that the traveling ministers refused donations from such; thus, there was even more need for support from the consecrated community -- support to assist the ongoing witness work as well as the upbuilding of the new congregations in the faith.

While the Greek word *hupolambano* is not incorrectly translated "receive," such Greek scholars as Adam Clarke and Jamieson, Faucett, and Brown prefer the more intense thought of support, both through hospitality and financial assistance. The context seems to indicate that their thoughts are well-based. It was a well-established principle in the early church that individuals who could not afford to be kept in the full time ministry were assisted by those who had the ability to aid. Paul discussed this principle at length in 1 Corinthians 9:1-23, concluding that while such a method was proper, he would not personally engage in it. On at least one occasion, however, Paul did receive financial assistance (Phil. 4:16-18). While the Lord desired the personal involvement of each of his children in their consecration, there are times when the Lord asks those who have the gift of finance to be fellow-workers with those who have not. Even Jesus was partially supported by some women of means (Luke 8:3).

Diotrephes -- Verses 9 to 11

I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church. Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.

The contrast could not be clearer than between Gaius and Diotrephes. One the giver of hospitality, the other not only denying it but actively lobbying against it. The phrase "loveth to have the preeminence" is suggestive that he either was an officer in the church or desired to be one.

In both verses ten and eleven, the Greek word for "receive" is different from that in verse eight. Here "receive" is the best translation. Strong's Concordance notes two levels of depth to the word (#1926), saying it means "to admit (as a guest or [figuratively] teacher)." It is possible that it was in both senses Diotrephes did not want the local church to receive the brethren passing through.

In the church in our day there can be similar tendencies. Certain ministers of the gospel are more popular than others. There can be a tendency to lobby for the non-acceptance of certain elders as teachers, as well as offering them hospitality. The organization of the church is so established that the decision of each local body, or ecclesia, is supreme in its midst. Each consecrated member is encouraged to exercise his personal judgment on their qualifications by casting or withholding his personal vote. But there is to be no electioneering, no lobbying for or against the proposed candidates. Such would tend in the ways of Diotrephes.

There are, of course, matters of serious concern to the church, including the "grievous wolves" of which Paul spoke at Miletus (Acts 20:29, 30). If exposure is deemed essential, the Lord lays down the principles for such in Matthew 18.

Each member of the body of Christ must follow that "which is good." The Apostle Paul phrases it well and concisely in 1 Corinthians 13:5, saying love "thinketh no evil." To emphasize his point he states that this positive, "good-thinking" disposition of mind is godlike; and the opposite is not godlike.

Demetrius -- Verses 12 to 14

Demetrius hath good report of all men, and of the truth itself: yea, and we also bear record; and ye know that our record is true. I had many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee: but I trust I shall shortly see thee, and we shall speak face to face. Peace be to thee. Our friends salute thee. Greet the friends by name.

It would seem that Demetrius is the specific cause for this letter. John assured Gaius that, despite what he may have heard from Diotrephes, Demetrius was to be trusted. He possessed the attribute of a good reputation that Paul made a requirement for an elder (1 Tim. 3:7). Perhaps even more important, the truth he taught bore witness to his acceptability. John could write these words with authority, not only because of his venerable age and his apostleship, but because of his personal knowledge. He then pitted his commendation against the condemnation of Diotrephes by saying "ye know that our record is true." What higher attestation could one receive than from the last surviving apostle.

Having completed the main theme of his epistle, he assured Gaius that, even at his advanced age, he hoped to visit Gaius and those with whom he met in the near future. If the early church fathers are correct in identifying Gaius with Pergamos, it would not be an overly long journey (perhaps 100 miles). Yet at John's age, with no modern transport, it was still an ambitious desire. We have no knowledge that he ever made such a journey but his very desire shows the strong determination that had fueled this man of God for the better part of a century.

Closing his epistle, John did not content himself with a salutation to either the church or select members thereof, but asked Gaius on his behalf to "greet the friends by name" -- a touching end to a touching epistle by "the disciple whom Jesus loved."

Contending for the Faith

For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. -- Acts 20:29

A verse-by-verse study of the book of Jude

What Paul predicted Jude saw as a reality. In the strongest possible terms, he denounced the heresies of belief and practice that had invaded the early Christian church. Some years later, the apostle John wrote of the rapidity of the spread of these heresies: "Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time" (1 John 2:18). This is the situation in the church of which Jude speaks.

Introduction -- Jude 1,2

Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called: Mercy unto you, and peace, and love, be multiplied.

There is much debate as to whether the author of this epistle is the apostle Jude or the half-brother of Jesus, both of whom had brothers named James. Others claim these are the same. However, as T. E. Stracy writes in his exegesis of this epistle, "Not the author, but his inspired message, is the thing that is important."

The author limits the ones to whom he is writing to those who possess three qualifications: 1) sanctified by God; 2) preserved, or kept, by Jesus; and 3) the called, or ones invited to run for the heavenly call. Robertson, in his *Word Pictures of the New Testament*, notes that the word "called," grammatically, should head the list, and suggests the translation, "to them, who, being called are therefore sanctified by God and preserved in Jesus Christ." In any case, the intended audience is not those who only claim to be Christians, but those who are deeply committed to the understanding of, and obedience to, the word of God and its precepts.

To these Jude expresses three desires: 1) God's **mercy** to cover their transgressions resulting from original sin; 2) the **peace** and harmony with God which this would afford; and 3) the continuing **love** of God to protect them from the seriousness of the dangers that lie ahead. Not only does he seek these gifts for them but, in view of the severity of the perils, that they be multiplied unto them.

Contending for the Faith -- Jude 3,4

Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is not that Jude had written an earlier letter, but that he had set his mind to the writing of an epistle on the common salvation, that is, the salvation held in common with other like-minded Christians (see Titus 1:4). The word “common” here (Greek: *koinos*) is not used with the thought of “ordinary,” but with the thought of “shared.”

However, Jude seems to have changed his mind before putting pen to ink and, instead of writing an informatory epistle on salvation, he considered it essential to write a cautionary letter warning his readers of false teachers in the church.

The phrase, “who were before of old ordained to this condemnation” in the *King James Version* incorrectly gives the thought of predestination. The Greek word translated “ordination,” *prographo*, Strong’s #4270, is more literally translated “written of beforehand” in the *American Standard Version*. It is probably an allusion to the prophecy of Enoch quoted in verses 14 and 15.

While the word translated “lasciviousness,” Strong’s #766, implies sexual excess, Professor Vine, in his *Expository Dictionary of the New Testament*, remarks, “the fundamental thought is the acknowledging of no restraints, the insolent doing of whatever one’s caprice may suggest.”

The danger of which Jude warns his readers is that they are being falsely taught to take the grace of God offered by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as an excuse for profligate living.

Old Testament Examples -- Jude 5-7

I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not. And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day. Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

Jude elicits three examples from the Old Testament on which to base his warning:

Israel in the wilderness: Despite voluntarily binding themselves to God’s law given at Sinai, they failed to live up to its restrictions (see 1 Corinthians 10:1-13).

The angels before the flood: Giving in to their attraction for the “daughters of men” (Genesis 6:2), they chose to abandon their heavenly home and divine instruction to satisfy their desires.

Sodom and Gomorrah: Yielding to the triple temptations of “pride, fulness of bread, and abundance of idleness” (Ezekiel 16:49), they not only lived a sensual life style, but sought to cohabit with the “strange flesh” of their two angelic messengers (Genesis 19:1,4,5).

That the “eternal fire” which they suffered was not eternal torment is adequately refuted by the mention of their eventual redemption (Ezekiel 16:55; Mark 6:11). The Greek word *aionia*, Strong’s #166, is often translated “age-lasting”; it is translated “age-abiding” by Rotherham and “age-during” in *Young’s Literal Translation*. Phillips perhaps captures the thought of Jude when he renders the final clause of verse 7, “stand in their punishment, as a permanent warning.”

Avoid Two Extremes -- Jude 8-10

Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities. Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee. But these speak evil of those things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves.

Jude’s description of these teachers as “dreamers” may be a reference to Deuteronomy 13:1-3: “If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the LORD your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.”

Pastor Russell suggests that the dignities to which Jude refers are “those whom God has honored and ‘set’ in the body” (*Studies in the Scriptures*, vol. 6, p. 166). Thus he suggests that these are not those who are in civil authority, but those whom God has placed in positions of responsibility in the church. These are those Paul speaks of in Romans 1:28 as those who “did not like to retain God in their knowledge.”

Of these Jude says that they speak evil of things “which they know not [spiritually],” but are motivated by their natural mind, “as brute beasts.”

Nevertheless, Jude cautions his readers not to take judgment into their own hands. To support this thought he cites a vision of Zechariah where the angel of the Lord, identified as Michael in our text, resists Satan, yet he does not personally condemn him, but merely says, “The LORD rebuke thee, O Satan” (Zechariah 3:2).

In like manner, true believers, while not following the counsel of false and self-indulging leaders, are not to bring against them a “railing accusation,” but to leave the final judgment to Jehovah.

Three Primary Sins -- Jude 11-13

Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core. These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.

Three primary sins are highlighted in the epistle, highlighted because each of them is a root cause for the headlong pursuit of intemperate selfishness.

The Way of Cain: *Jealousy* -- The illicit desire to have the position of approval, and the resultant anger when that approval is denied.

The Error of Balaam: *Greed* -- The inordinate desire for possessions is another fruitful cause of excess. Indeed, “the love of money is the root of all evil” (1 Timothy 6:10).

The Gainsaying of Core: *Ambition* -- The desire for prominence and power is the third root of the indulgent spirit Jude saw creeping into the Christian church.

Waxing poetic, the writer likens those who possess such desires to four phenomena of nature:

To wind-driven, waterless clouds -- Lacking purpose in life, they have only the form of good without its substance, driven by spontaneous desire to satisfy their lusts.

To barren fruit trees -- Withered and dead, then made doubly dead by being plucked up; thus dead in original sin and again dead by apostasy of character.

To foaming wild waves -- As such waves cast up a deposit of seaweed, sand, dirt, and flotsam on the shore, so these teachers bring every vile imagination to the minds of men with their words.

To wandering stars -- Instead of bringing light to the church, their hedonistic teachings without fixed principles go farther and farther into outer space, into the darkness of a spiritual “black hole.”

The Prophecy of Enoch -- Jude 14,15

And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.

The source of Jude's quote is highly debated. There is a Book of Enoch, the composition of which is thought to date to the third century before Christ. Although it is extensively quoted by such early church fathers as Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, and Tertullian, there is no evidence that the church of the apostles' day considered it authentic, and some of its narrative seems bizarre and fanciful. While Enoch 1:9 does contain a prophecy similar to the one quoted by Jude, it seems more likely that he derived it from the large body of Jewish tradition.

Since Enoch lived about a thousand years before the flood, he may have understood it as predicting the end of the antediluvian world. This may provide insight into the naming of his son Methuselah, whose name means, "after he dies, may it come." In light of these facts, it is interesting to note that Methuselah died the same year as the flood of Noah's day.

However, the larger fulfillment of this prophecy is at the second advent of Christ, when he returns "**with** his saints" (as distinct from his return "**for** his saints") to commence his thousand-year judgment of all mankind. This judgment (Greek: *krisis*, Strong's #2920) is not a mere rendering of a summary sentence, but a full period of trial with an opportunity to correct and instruct mankind in righteousness. Pastor Russell expresses it well: "The work of that thousand-year judgment day will show men to what extent they are out of harmony with God, and will show them how to come into harmony with him" (*Reprints*, p. 5442).

A Predicted Apostasy -- Jude 16-19

These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage. But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ; how that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts. These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit.

The character of these false teachers presents an interesting dichotomy. On the one hand, they murmur and complain, and on the other hand, they are pompous, speaking boastful words. The *New King James* captures this last thought well: "flattering people to gain advantage." But whether they complain and whine or whether they flatter, it is all for one purpose -- to do what they want to do with no regard for God's will or his commands.

This, however, should not take the church by surprise because the apostles had predicted it. Paul wrote, “the mystery of iniquity doth already work” (2 Thessalonians 2:7). John spoke of many deceivers entering the church in 2 John 7. Peter and James sounded similar alerts.

These do not, unfortunately, separate **themselves**, but rather, as the *American Standard Version* phrases it, “these are they who **make** separations.” This is the same danger of which the apostle Paul writes in Romans 16:17, “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.”

The word translated “sensual” in Jude 19 would be better rendered “natural” and is the antonym for “spiritual.” Because their mind is attuned to natural things, they desire the things of the flesh, thus separating the spiritually-minded ones who desire the things of the spirit.

Christian Responsibility -- Jude 20-23

But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. And of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.

Jude concludes his warning by instructing his readers how to handle this sad development in the church. He gives them responsibilities toward each other, specifying three groups within the church: the spiritually-minded, the tempted, and the deluded.

For those who seek the spiritual things he recommends a four-step program. First, they are to establish a strong and sure foundation. The *Twentieth Century New Testament* paraphrases the thought: “build up your characters on the foundation of your most holy faith.” This involves not only personal study, but also employing the modifying influence of discussing your faith with other spiritually-minded Christians.

Step two is frequent, thoughtful, sincere prayer, asking for both guidance and the courage to apply that guidance in the Christian walk. “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him” (James 1:5).

The third step is keeping one’s self in the love of God. Writing on this text, Pastor Russell penned these words: “The keeping is with **you**. God will never force your will. God is not now seeking those who need to be compelled” (*Reprints*, p. 5725). We maintain this relationship with Him by humbly obeying His will.

Finally, there is the step of waiting. This is not an idle wait, but an anticipatory expectation for the Lord to accept our intentions and best efforts for the deed, and thus in mercy rewarding our imperfect attempts with everlasting life.

But there is a second group within the church. These are likewise spiritually-minded, but through the weakness of their flesh are tempted by the “do it your own way” suggestions of false teachers. These must be dealt with compassionately and, by a non-judgmental approach, assisting them to follow the course of sacrifice. The *American Standard* translates this verse, “And on some have mercy, who are in doubt.” It is those with doubts, torn between the Bible path and the easier road suggested by the apostates that need strengthening.

The last group is the backsliders who are succumbing to temptation. These are not to be rejected but pulled, as it were, “out of the fire.” The fire here is the purging temptation to which they have yielded. These need a firmer warning of the disastrous course they are taking. And, while we abhor the spots on their robes of Christ’s righteousness, we do not hate the one wearing the robe. We are to hate the sin, but not the sinner.

Benediction -- Jude 24,25

Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

After writing such a strong warning of those who are diluting and distorting the gospel, Jude concludes with this graceful benediction, thus assuring both the ones to whom he wrote and us today that, if we keep entrusting ourselves to God’s care, we can and will come out more than conquerors through him who loves us.

Revelation 12

A Gospel Age Overview

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John. -- Revelation 1:1 (NIV)

A verse by verse study of Revelation 12

The revelation of those things which “must soon take place” describe events that would occur during a 2,000-year period we call the Gospel age. The first half of the book of Revelation contains the messages to the seven churches, the opening of the seven seals, and the sounding of the seven trumpets. These all describe the events of the Gospel age from different perspectives. The last half of Revelation is concerned with the events that end the Gospel age. Because the entire book is written in symbolic language, it definitely does not literally mean what it says. There is no better example of that than chapter 12 which also describes the entire Gospel age.

Understanding this chapter requires a basic understanding of the symbols sun, moon, stars, heaven, dragon, “Michael,” and water. To consider any of these as meaning exactly what they literally describe will not reveal the beauty of revelation which God gave to Jesus Christ and who in turn described it in vision to John (Revelation 1:10).

This chapter describes a woman who, in the pains of child birth, is confronted by a dragon who wants to destroy her child. The child is a son and is whisked away to safety. A battle between the dragon and this son occurs and the dragon is defeated. A voice from “heaven” declares that salvation has come, but the woman who is on earth must go into the wilderness to escape from the dragon. As a last resort the dragon attempts to destroy the woman with a flood of water, but she is not harmed.

The Woman -- Revelation 12:1,2

“And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: and she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered.”

This woman is “clothed with the sun.” When John received the revelation, he described the countenance of “one like unto the Son of man . . . as the sun shineth in his strength” (Revelation 1:13,16). Thus the woman has the enlightenment of Jesus Christ (she is “clothed” with it). She stands on the moon which has no light of its own; it only reflects light it receives from the sun. We are told that the priests in the tabernacle arrangement “serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things” (Hebrews 8:5). The Jerusalem Bible renders Hebrews 10:1, “Since the Law has no more than a reflection of these realities and no finished picture of them, it is quite incapable of bringing the worshipers to perfection.” So the woman is grounded in the Jewish Law arrangement but is not

herself under it. A “star” refers to a bright luminary in the religious or ecclesiastical world. Jude, for example, refers to ungodly men as “wandering stars” (Jude 13). The woman has “a crown of twelve stars,” clearly a reference to the 12 apostles of the Lamb (Revelation 21:14).

Who is this woman? She is the true church at the beginning of the Gospel age. She is the one who Isaiah says “shall renew their strength, [who] shall mount up with wings as eagles” (Isaiah 40:31). Eagles’ wings will be used by this woman in verse 14. The early church is in the process of producing something which is conveyed by saying she is “with child.”*

The Dragon -- Revelation 12:3,4

“And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born.”

This is the first occurrence of the word “dragon” in the New Testament. It comes from a Greek word that is used only in the book of Revelation. This dragon is not in the heaven that is God’s literal dwelling place. It is in the “heaven” that Peter says is “reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men” (2 Peter 3:7). This “heaven” describes the place of religious control over mankind. At the time of the early church, what could be said about the state of the religious world? The fourth universal empire, ruled by a succession of Roman emperors, controlled the world, and it was pagan. It intended to put down anyone that might arise to challenge its power. The powerful from time immemorial have always done whatever it takes to retain their power against any threat, real or imagined. Herod, whose power was but a shadow of Caesar’s, slew all those two years and younger in Bethlehem thinking that would erase a possible threat to his personal power (Matthew 2:16).

The dragon as a symbol represents civil power both in this chapter and all other places the symbol appears in Revelation (13:2,4,11; 16:13; 20:2). This dragon is not the personal devil although the devil does use civil power for his purposes. When Peter urged our Lord not to go to Jerusalem to be crucified, Jesus said, “Get thee behind me Satan” (Matthew 16:23). He recognized that at that moment Satan was using Peter in an attempt to control him. At the time of the early church, civil power was in absolute control of both religious and secular life. The “dragon” was in “heaven.”

The Battle -- Revelation 12:5-9

“And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne. And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days. And there was war in heaven: Michael and

his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him."

When the child comes forth, it is caught up "unto God and to his throne." But this is not literally heaven because the woman is not there with her son. She must flee into a wilderness condition for 1,260 "days." These "days," of course, are not literal. In the symbolism of Scripture each symbolic "day" represents one literal year (see Numbers 14:34; Ezekiel 4:6). While the son prepares to "rule all nations with a rod of iron," the "woman" must spend 1,260 literal years in the wilderness. This is similar to the experience of Elijah who had to hide himself from Jezebel for three and a half years, some of which time was in the wilderness where he was fed by ravens (1 Kings 17:4).

Michael is the name of the archangel (Jude 9); it is a name used by Daniel as a title of a spirit being (Daniel 10:13,21; 12:1). But that does not mean that the archangel is here fighting against the dragon because the name is similarly being used as a symbol. The "heaven" in which this battle is being waged is the ecclesiastical heaven. The Hebrew word Michael means "Who (is) like God" (Strong's #4317). The force opposing pagan Rome would win the battle; civil power would no longer dictate religious thought. That would become the right of the one who has set himself up as God, the pope. Papal Rome replaced pagan Rome.

According to John the false Christian church came out from the true church: "Little children, it is the last hour, and, according as you hear that the antichrist is coming, now also there have come to be many antichrists, whence we know that it is the last hour. Out of us they come, but they were not of us, for if they were of us, they would have remained with us. But it was that they may be manifested that they are not all of us. And you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all are aware" (1John 2:18-20, Concordant translation; emphasis added).

In Matthew 13:24-30 Jesus gave the parable of the wheat and the tares. The field of activity, which was expected to bring forth only wheat, in fact brought forth both weeds and wheat, both a bad and a good "crop." This has been an accurate description of the events of the Gospel age. There has been a true church during this period, but there has also been a false church as well.

After losing this battle, civil power was confined to secular matters, those things that happened on the "earth" as opposed to "heaven." Satan was directing civil power, of course, just as he "pulled the strings" of the rulers of ecclesiastical power, the pope and the church system of which he was the head.

Paul calls this false system the "man of sin" (2 Thessalonians 2:3). Commenting upon the man of sin, Pastor Charles Russell has written: "These various appellations and brief descriptions [of the man of sin] indicate a base, subtle, hypocritical, deceptive, tyrannical and cruel character, developed in the midst of the Christian Church; at first creeping in

and up very gradually, then rapidly ascending in power and influence until it reaches the very pinnacle of earthly power, wealth, and glory -- meanwhile exerting its influence against the truth, and against the saints, and for its own aggrandizement, claiming, to the last, peculiar sanctity and authority and power from God." (Studies in the Scriptures, vol. 2, p. 272.)

The Proclamation -- Revelation 12:10-12

"And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time."

The "heaven" is the same here as it has been up to this point. The "loud voice" emanates from the ecclesiastic heaven and it is the voice of papacy claiming that because of their past faithfulness, they have the right to rule as Christ's vicegerent. It is the counterfeit kingdom that was to reign for a period of 1,260 literal years during the time when the woman, the true church, had to remain in a wilderness condition.

The rejoicing in the "heavens" is a condition only for those associated with the apostate church. For those who are not a part of this system, it is a message of woe. As we know from history the false church system actually used civil power (the dragon) to enforce its power and control over the people.

The Woman's Persecution -- Revelation 12:13-17

"And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child. And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent. And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood. And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth. And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ."

Many commentators on the book of Revelation measure the period of the reign of the false church from 539 to 1799. The Pope had been left in control of Rome in 538, and in 539 the threatening Goths were defeated at their stronghold Ravenna. The Pope was taken from Rome by the French in 1798, and he died as a prisoner in France in 1799, leaving Papacy temporarily headless. This was the beginning of the end for the false church system. The French Revolution which broke out in 1789 broke a spell of darkness and initiated a great flood of truth on many subjects. Water is a symbol of truth.

“Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14).

The French Revolution marks the start of a flood of truth throughout the earth, especially the truth consisting of the Scriptures themselves. The first of several Bible societies was formed in England in 1803 and had the objective of placing God’s word in the hands of the common people. Today the Bible has been translated into all the written languages of the earth. The “dragon” (civil power) thought to injure the true church by a great increase of knowledge on many subjects such as science, sociology, medicine, and education. But the “earth” -- meaning of course the people living in the earth -- embraced all of these truths and it proved to be a blessing, not a curse.

The final verse describes a war between civil power and the “remnant of [the woman’s] seed.” Since the interpretation of prophecy is best understood after it is fulfilled, we cannot be sure just how civil power will afflict the true church at the end of the Gospel age.

So we see from this brief chapter found in the middle of the book of Revelation that what began as a time of great distress for the true church did not result in permanent harm. God’s protecting power has remained over her through this long and difficult period when ecclesiastical and secular power would have liked to wipe her away. From our vantage point in history, we can see that the best course was to never grow weary in well doing because God’s time table was not man’s. May we similarly maintain our confidence steadfast unto the end even though the time for the full establishment of the kingdom seems to tarry. We know it will not really tarry (Habakkuk 2:3).

A Verse-by-verse Study of Revelation 17

Seven Heads, Ten Horns

The ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast. -- Revelation 17:12

George Tabac

In the book of Revelation the apostle John represents the church class which is instructed by various means: in 1:17-20 by Jesus, in 4:1,3 by a voice from heaven, in 5:5 by an elder, in 10:9 by an angel, and in 19:5,9,10 by a voice from the throne. In chapter 17 we read, "Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, Come here, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters" (Revelation 17:1, NASB). This opening verse of Revelation 17 helps us to see the time setting is the beginning of the harvest. We believe this angel, "one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls," refers to the seventh messenger to the church: Bro. Russell. This angel first speaks in chapter 17 and continues to instruct John all the way to the end of the book.

As we trace the teachings of this angel to John from chapter 17 forward, we see they all are things we learned from the ministry of Bro. Russell. In this first verse, he shows us the judgment to come of the great harlot. Who but Bro. Russell identified for us the casting off and final judgment of Babylon? In 17:3 he takes us back to the 1,260-year wilderness period. Bro. Russell explained the 1,260 days of Daniel, the development and reign of the Man of Sin. He explained who the bride class is and how they will bless all the families of the earth (Revelation 21:9).

In Revelation 22:2,3 the angel brought to light the doctrines of ransom and restitution that were hidden for centuries. In Revelation 22:10 the angel gives us words that were used in the title of the second volume of *Studies in the Scriptures*: "The Time Is At Hand." In Revelation 19:6,9,10 he explains the doctrine of the Great Company which had not been seen since the days of the apostles. In Revelation 19:10 the angel tells us to not worship him for he was one of our brethren, and repeats it again in 22:8,9. The angel admonishes us as Bro. Russell himself did, that we are not to prove things by what he wrote, but by a "Thus saith the Lord." As the angel said, we are to "Worship God," not his messenger.

Incidentally, having seen that one of the seven angels who have the seven vials to pour out the plagues is the seventh messenger, it would follow that the other six angels are the other six messengers to the church. Since they were raised in 1878 as divine spirit beings, together with all the other sleeping saints, they would thus be in a position to pour out the plagues at God's appointed times.

But why would the seven messengers be the ones to pour out the vials of plagues? Perhaps because no other seven individuals have a more comprehensive view of the persecutions done by the Antichrist system. These persecutions occurred through the age and these seven messengers experienced and witnessed them as God's spokesmen at each stage of the church. So now it is their responsibility to oversee the carrying out of God's retributive justice.

The Judgment of Babylon -- Revelation 17:1-5

There came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters: with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.

Revelation 17 deals with the judgment of Babylon, the false church, considered a harlot because instead of being a virgin espoused to Christ, she unites with the kings or governments. The strong language describes the false church, not any single individual or devoted, consecrated, sincere people in it; rather it describes symbolically the system overall and its actions and persecutions throughout the ages.

So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns" (verse 3).

John is here given a vision of the 1,260-year period of the true church being in the wilderness condition, from 539 to 1799. The false church is pictured by a woman, sitting on a scarlet colored beast. This beast is scarlet colored. Two other beasts mentioned in Revelation are different. Chapter 12 refers to a **red dragon** and chapter 13 to a **leopard-like** beast. Both differ from the **scarlet colored beast** of chapter 17. When we speak of the beast in Revelation, we most often think of the leopard-like beast of chapter 13 which pictured Papacy; it had power forty-two months to persecute the saints, had the number 666, etc. But the scarlet colored beast of chapter 17 is not Papacy. It pictures the **common people** who supported the false church.

In verse 1 the harlot sits upon many waters, a picture of people. In verse 3 the woman sits on a scarlet colored beast. This is the angel's way of telling us that the many waters and the beast are the same. The beast, in other words, pictures the many common people who in one form or another help support the false system. She sits on the beast and the beast supports her. Just as a rider who sits on a horse controls the horse with the reins, in like manner the system controls the common people. Then in verse 3 we are told the beast had seven heads and ten horns. The four elements of the vision thus far picture the following:

? **The Woman Rider:** The false church which by harlotry rode or controlled the common people.

? **Body of the Beast:** The common people who directly or through coercion supported the false church. She rode this beast, showing she controlled it.

? **Seven Heads of the Beast:** The head of a beast is the part that does its thinking and directs the body. Thus the heads pictured seven successive forms of government or leadership throughout the age that were over the beast or people. These heads were also controlled by the woman.

? **Ten Horns: Horns** picture power. The ten horns picture the ten supporting European nations produced by a division of the Roman Empire; it is similar to the ten toes of Nebuchadnezzar's image. Throughout the age the number of the horns or nations that were the civil powers supporting the woman have sometimes been less and sometimes more than ten. The number ten symbolizes earthly completeness. Thus ten horns is but a symbolic expression of the disintegration of the original Roman Empire into numerous divisions and powers.

And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet color, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication: and upon her forehead was a name written, Mystery, Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the Earth" (verses 4, 5).

The false church woman is pictured in royal robes as a queen because she was united with the kings of the earth and sat as a queen. She had a golden cup claiming to be the sole dispenser of biblical divine truths, but in reality the cup was full of religious falsehoods.

The woman rider is given a name: Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots. This implies there are other harlots who followed her example. Other religious protestant systems, like the mother, also united with the kings of the earth.

Things to Come -- Revelation 17:6-15 (NASB)

And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. When I saw her, I wondered greatly. And the angel said ... Why do you wonder? I shall tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns.

The scene changes now to the harvest time when the true church was given the correct understanding of the false church during her 1,260-year reign. It caused the harvest church to look with utter astonishment at the history of the Gospel age abominations done in the name of Christ. Then beginning in verse 7 we are told the scene is going to change. Rather than being told the history of the harlot woman, the angel is going to tell us the prophecy of her future, as well as the future of “the beast that carries her,” that is, what is in store for the common people who support that system.

The prophecies of verses 8 through 13 are quite complex. We will first discuss verses 9 and 10, then we will return to verse 8. The time of these verses is the beginning of the harvest when the seventh messenger speaks to the church.

Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits. And they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while” (verses 9, 10).

Note carefully what is depicted. It is somewhat a recap of verse 3. The woman is the false church. She sits on a beast, which pictures the common people who support the system. This beast has seven heads, now called mountains, picturing seven successive forms of government through the age that did the thinking for the common people. In verse 10 the symbology changes. The seven heads of verse 9 become seven kings in verse 10.

About these seven heads or kings we are told, “Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while.” In other words, at the beginning of the harvest when the seventh messenger speaks, five of these kings or heads have fallen, they are gone, in the past. One was in existence, and one was yet to come. Thus in Bro. Russell’s day the sixth head or king was in existence. The seventh head would come later and remain but a short time.

Who are these seven heads now called seven kings? “The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits” implies she has control of the heads. Since the woman rode both the beast and its seven heads, she controlled both the beast and the heads. Thus the first of these seven heads would be a rulership that existed when the false church first came into existence and would in turn be able to control.

The Seven Heads of the Beast

1. Justinian's Rome, which first gave the Bishop of Rome the title Pontifex Maximus, or Chief Priest over all the others.
2. Charlemagne's Empire, which first allowed the Papacy to crown the emperor.
3. The Holy Roman Empire (962 A.D. to the "Peace of Westphalia" in 1648). In 962 A.D. Otto the Great became Emperor and named the empire "The Holy Roman Empire." This third head continued until, as Revelation 13:3 [NASB] puts it, "I saw one of his heads as if it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed." This wound began with the great schism, when two and eventually three popes fought a forty-year war against each other for control of the church. It continued with the Reformation upheaval by Martin Luther which divided the empire into nations favoring Catholicism against those favoring Protestantism. A thirty-year war resulted, ending in 1648 with the "Peace of Westphalia." The Roman Church reorganized and the fourth head came into being. The head "that was wounded as if slain" was healed when a new fourth head appeared.
4. The Rejuvenated Holy Roman Empire after the Peace of Westphalia, to 1806.
5. Napoleonic Empire (1806) when Napoleon overthrew "The Holy Roman Empire." At the time of the harvest message these "five heads had fallen" or were in the past.
6. The Victor Emmanuel Dynasty began in 1870. This is the one described as "one [head] is," that is, was in existence during the time of the seventh messenger and lasted until 1929. (Victor Emmanuel conquered all of Italy, took away the Papal States, but made Roman Catholicism the state religion, and gave other guarantees to the Vatican.)
7. The Nazi-Fascist Empire, from 1929 to 1945. In the time of the seventh messenger this head was "yet to come." It began when Mussolini signed the Lateran Treaty with the Vatican in 1929. In return for the surrender of papal claims to Italian territory, the treaty granted the pope a large sum of money and complete sovereignty over Vatican City. The Catholic religion was given a privileged status and became the state religion. Other treaties were later signed between the Vatican and Hitler's political party, paving the way for Hitler coming to power.

The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and to go to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth will wonder, whose name has not been written in the book of life ... when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come" (verse 8).

The phrase, "the beast that you saw **was**, and is **not**," is not referring to the entire beast, but only a portion of it. The entire beast never went out of existence. It is referring to an **anarchistic portion** of the beast that rose up against the Roman Catholic Church during the French Revolution. That anarchistic phase of the beast is what is meant by "it was,"

that is, it rose up during the French Revolution, and then it “was not” when the anarchy ended.

The anarchistic phase ceased when Napoleon quelled the insurrection and reestablished the woman or Roman Catholic Church as the official religion of France once again. Thus at the time of the angel’s writing (Bro. Russell’s day), this anarchistic portion of the beast was not, but will rise again as “The Lord’s Great Army.”

After Napoleon overthrew “The Holy Roman Empire” in 1806, the next head of the beast came into existence. The Napoleonic Empire became the fifth head when Napoleon worked with the Papacy to reestablish Roman Catholicism as the state religion of France.

The same anarchistic portion of the beast is repeatedly referred to in this chapter when the common people rise up once again in opposition to the false system: “The beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition” (Revelation 17:11). This is the same uprising portion of the beast referred to, that “was,” and “is not,” but will rise again as an eighth and then be destroyed. The phrase “will rise again as an eighth” cannot mean an eighth head for the beast had only seven heads, controlled by the harlot. Thus the symbology changed from heads to kings. The word kings refers to rulers. When the uprising of the people against the harlot takes place, the people as a body will rise up and be like an eighth ruler, but they will not be controlled by the harlot as were the seven heads. They will be “of the seven” in the sense that this new eighth ruler will be as the uprising people that ruled during the French Revolution phase of the seven heads. This eighth king or ruler, after the uprising, will go into perdition, be destroyed.

A Singular Kingdom

*The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have not yet received **a kingdom**, but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour” (verse 12).*

The Revelator now states what will happen to the ten horns. The ten horns are now called ten kings. Since Napoleon’s time the supporting beast with its ten horns has reduced its support to its head and harlot rider. The Nazi empire tried to increase the beast’s size to include the entire continent of Europe, but it failed. With the defeat of Nazism in 1945, the beast lost its seventh head. Thus these ten kings are no longer horns on a beast because there is no head to this beast to support horns. All seven heads are gone!

The ten, however, are still kings, or rulers of nations. We are told these ten kings have not yet received “a” kingdom (singular). It doesn’t say they have not received kingdoms (plural) for they are kingdoms or nations. Verse 17 shows these combined ten kings will receive a **singular** kingdom, for it says they will give “their kingdom” (singular) to the beast. “For God has put it in their hearts to execute his purpose by having a common purpose, and by giving **their kingdom** [singular] to the beast, until the words of God will be fulfilled.”

This singular kingdom that the ten kings will give to the beast can best be understood if we digress from Revelation to consider what is currently happening in Europe today.

Antitypical Ten Horns [Kings]

After World War II, the NATO Alliance was formed calling for the United States and European Nations to help one another should there be a future attack on any member nation.

The war-weary nations of Europe formed another alliance in 1954 called the Western European Union. It was an alliance formed originally by Great Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg to promote mutual economic benefits.

From this Union came what we know as the “Common Market,” an entity that worked to remove trade barriers among themselves.

By 1995 this Western European Union grew to ten nations when Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Greece were added. The Western European Union Alliance changed its name to the European Union.

The Alliance then formed the European Monetary Union. Its objective was for Europe to develop its own currency to challenge the dominance of the dollar and of the United States’ leadership of the free world. Europe resented the power exercised by the United States through its control of the world’s money. Until recent times virtually all central banks in the world would exchange one currency for another based on the value of the dollar.

In January 1999 a new currency came into being called the euro. By June 2002 this one currency was being used by all except two members of the then fifteen European Union member states. (Ten new member states were recently added to the European Union.) These linked economies and dominance should increase since European companies no longer need to exchange their currencies among themselves.

Another area of European resentment that has existed for years is that the United States makes virtually all the decisions regarding when and how NATO troops will be engaged. This led to a significant development in November, 2000. The ten symbolic kings of Revelation 17 agreed to go beyond their economic union to form a **military** alliance. According to the *Washington Post*, November 21, 2000, the “European Union” defense ministers met together to form an initial military alliance of 60,000 troops. The official name given to it is “European Security and Defense Policy.” The troops will be used as a “Rapid Reaction Force” that could act in crises on the continent when NATO, and in particular the United States, chooses not to engage.

European Union Leaders, with delegates from all participating countries, met for seventeen months in Brussels to write a constitution for the nations of Europe. Valery

Giscard d'Estaing the former president of France, was its chairman. On July 10, 2003, they submitted a draft treaty establishing a constitution for the nations of Europe that is now being evaluated by all those nations.

The "hand writing" seems to be on the wall. The European Union is growing at a rapid pace. It has developed a common market, a common currency, a common military alliance, and now are in the process of adopting a constitution for all member states.

Here is a comparison of the European Union with the United States:

	European Union	United States
Population	373 million	273 million
Work Week	35 hours	40+ hours
Vacation	4 to 6 weeks	2 weeks
Gross National Product	\$8.332 trillion	\$8.127 trillion
Armed Forces	2,196,000 Compulsory	1,411,673 Voluntary

Many European leaders are committed to full union: economic, military, and political. They take their inspiration from Emperor Charlemagne, crowned by Pope Leo III in 800 A.D., who had a vision of a United Christian Europe that would return the continent to the glory of ancient Rome. European leaders present an annual Charlemagne Prize to the individual who contributed the most to the concept of European unity in the prior year. In the year 2000 President Bill Clinton became the third American recipient.

These developments are causing great concern in Washington. The U. S. wants to maintain superiority and dominance over Western Europe. Senators Helms and Smith recently warned "that it is neither in Europe's nor America's interests to undermine our proven national relationships in favor of one with a European super-state whose creation is being driven in part, by anti-American sentiment."

Is the European Union growing into a super-state, or superpower? Yes it is. Individual national language divisions will continue to exist (the ten kings continue on the scene in the prophecy), but a collective cooperative will emerge that will wield a power far in excess of the individual nations. What is developing at an ever-increasing rate is exactly what we should expect according to the prophecy.

"The ten horns which you saw are **ten kings** who have **not yet received a kingdom**" (Revelation 17:12, NASB). The ten horns are the ten kingdoms of Europe which have not yet received or become the single, combined, super-power kingdom, which is, however, knocking at the door. When they receive this kingdom, note what will happen:

"They receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour. These have one purpose, and they give their power and authority to the beast ... For God has put it in their hearts

to execute his purpose by having a common purpose, and by giving their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God will be fulfilled” (Revelation 17:12,13,17, NASB).

Thus when the ten kingdoms of Europe achieve this new United Super Kingdom status, they will give or share the kingdom power and authority with the beast, which pictures the uprising common people, in other prophecies referred to as “The Lord’s Great Army.”

The power will be given by God for “one hour.” This is the same hour referred to in the next chapter, the hour in which Babylon is destroyed: “Alas, alas, that great city Babylon, that mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come” (Revelation 18:10).

The result of the cooperation of the ten kings and the beast is given in verse 14: “These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.”

The phrase “these shall make war with the Lamb” means the alliance of the kings and the beast will result in war against our Lord, against all our Lord’s kingdom interests including the remaining church members and those of the great company who will no doubt finish their course during the early part of this time. But the Lamb, our glorified Lord as King of kings, will be victorious, together with his glorified saints who will then be with him, those who were called, chosen, and faithful unto death.

“And he said to me, The waters which you saw where the harlot sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues” (Revelation 17:15, NASB).

The angel reminds us of the main characters in this vision. The harlot is Babylon, primarily the mother, but it includes her daughters. The beast she sits upon and controls are peoples of all nations that supported her.

This is an important verse. The King James translation says “And the ten horns which thou sawest **upon** the beast, these shall hate the whore,” etc. The King James gives the thought that only the ten horns hate the harlot and in turn destroy her. This is not the thought of the Greek. Both the Sinaitic and Alexandrian manuscripts have “the ten horns **and** the beast shall hate the harlot.”

What will cause them to hate the harlot? This vision does not say, but other Scriptures imply it is because of a worldwide spread of the truth of God’s plan; the people will come to see her teachings as false. This is the thought of the phrase that the ten kings “will make her naked,” that is expose her for what she really is. But in any case, this text says the people who formerly supported the harlot as she rode upon them, controlling their actions, will now rise up as the Lord’s great army in opposition to her, just as they did in the French Revolution. The beast “that was” will rise up again out of the abyss of inactivity, and together with the authority or cooperation of the “United Ten Horns,” will destroy the harlot systems of Babylon.

This prophecy is in complete harmony with the type of Jezebel who similarly as this harlot of Revelation, pictured Babylon. It was Jezebel's own eunuchs, who previously ministered to her every wish, who threw her out the window. Likewise here: those who previously supported her will destroy her as a system.

The End -- Revelation 17:16-18

And the ten horns which you saw, and the beast, these will hate the harlot and will make her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire. For God hath put in their hearts to fulfill his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled. And the woman which thou sawest is that great city [Babylon] which reigneth over the kings of the earth.

God will allow the Lord's Great Army uprising to continue just long enough, "until" -- until it fulfills his purpose of burning the tares and removing the false systems. Then will come the full blessings of the kingdom when all mankind, including the individuals who had part in these systems throughout the age, will be raised from the dead. They will be taught our heavenly Father's wonderful plan which Satan blinded them from understanding previously. Then the glorified church will give them every opportunity to receive everlasting life.

Why did God give us prophecies such as this? This is Paul's answer: "But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober" (1 Thessalonians 5:4,6).

God wants us to soberly watch current events that we might know where we are in the stream of time. He gives us these prophecies to strengthen our faith as we watch for the stately steppings of our Lord fulfilling prophecy. Let us watch, and be sober!
