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The Angels' Message

"For, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." - Luke 2:10.

OF ALL the proclamations found in the blessed Book that we so much love, and which is replete with utterances of hopeful assurance from cover to cover, there are but few that sound such exultant notes of unqualified delight as does this announcement made by those angelic messengers that hovered over the Judean fields on that night of almost two thousand years ago. In one respect the message differs from the great majority of those sent through the medium of the Prophets of old and which were for the most part couched in terms of stern reproof, warning, or admonishment addressed to God's typical people of Israel. That such was the case need hardly be wondered at in view of Israel's repeated failure to earn divine approval. The wonder rather is that the Most High, dwelling in those realms of awful purity and holiness, should have condescended to show so much mercy and forbearance through long ages of time towards a sin-stained and rebellious people which had constantly flouted his righteous authority and ignored his repeated appeals to their divinely instructed reason. (Isa. 1:18.) But this proclamation is different. It stands almost alone in its unequivocal expression of joyous satisfaction on the part of the angels at being made the heralds of such a glorious announcement, one that meant almost as much to the messengers as it did to the recipients; for have we not learned of the intense and delighted interest which the angels have manifested repeatedly in every phase and detail of the handiwork of Him that "sitteth between the cherubim." - Psalm 99:1; Job 38:7.

This message may be compared in scope only to that joyous declaration of John, when in prophetic vision he became conscious of the great chorus of praise from every living creature in heaven and earth as they hailed the glorious culmination of the completed plan of salvation: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace." It was as if the Father himself, with all the angels, were breathing a great sigh of relief at the successful completion of this great step in the wondrous undertaking. The great Logos had now been made flesh. The gift of God's only begotten Son had been bestowed upon the world (John 3:16), and the Father was inviting all creation to share in his joy. Ignored for the moment were the long years of trial and suffering that lay ahead for that Infant so peacefully sleeping in the manger at Bethlehem. Ignored were the

obstacles that had to be overcome before the forces of darkness and death would be finally and forever destroyed. Nothing at this time must be permitted to interfere with the fullness of joy that possessed the heart of the Father and that the angels seemed to be striving to communicate to those humble shepherds who were staring in speechless amazement at the spectacle, which was being unfolded before them, scarcely daring to believe what their eyes saw and what their ears heard.

Most of us remember the frenzied joy with which the nation and the whole allied world received the news of the unconditional surrender of their enemies and the end of the war. Over the radio was carried the sound of the shouts of joy and relief which came from every corner of the land, as the people danced and paraded all night in the streets. Forgotten were the years of doubt and fear and suffering that had made the coming of the morning mail a dreaded event. All that was now in the past, and all prospects for the future were joyous ones. Yet that was but a poor, pale reflection of that glorious celebration of the future which the Revelator saw, and which will entail no disappointing aftermath such as has been the case with all human celebrations.

It may perhaps have been the prospect of that universal joy that filled the hearts of the angels with thankfulness and praise that night as they invited the shepherds to share in their rejoicing. It may safely be assumed that their knowledge of the trying events that lay in the future was not any more complete than is ours. We know not what awaits us; God kindly veils our eyes. They could not have known how much suffering had yet to be borne before the prophecy to Joseph (Matt. 1:21) was fulfilled, and that holy Infant, grown to manhood, would complete the task of saving his people from their sins. For the moment they gave free rein to the joy which they shared with the mighty Author of the Plan. Their full confidence in his power and wisdom had been amply justified, and they rejoiced before him in praise and adoration, while we who "see through a glass darkly" are even now able to catch something of the thrill of that moment. For the joy they felt was to extend to *all people*. Not to any one class; not merely to the nation to which by fleshly lineage the Babe belonged; no, not even to those favored ones alone who will share in his glory or to that great multitude whose tears of chagrin will be wiped away as they are led to living fountains of waters (Rev. 7:17), evermore to rejoice. No, the words are all-inclusive and unqualified; the joy is to be to all people. Many of us who have felt disappointment at our failure to touch hearts we have never been able to reach with the message that means so much to us can also rejoice at the certain prospect that every ear will eventually hear those glad tidings of great joy. For "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." Perhaps some may cavil at the thought of the Almighty experiencing anything like a feeling of relief, thus implying that he might have felt at some time what in a human would be anxiety. It is undeniably true that no possible doubt as to the ultimate success of his every plan would ever find a place in the mind of the omnipotent God of the Universe, he who knows the end from the beginning. Yet it seems to us, that he could not be the loving and compassionate Father of whom the Son was an exact mental image unless he experienced a feeling of loving sympathy and compassion for that loved Son in the ordeal of suffering and death, through which he must pass, ere he could redeem our race and become the Captain of our Salvation.

A PICTURE FROM THE PAST

An analogy in the Old Testament which should serve to illustrate what God must have felt is that one which is recorded in Genesis 22 where we read that Abraham was called upon to give up in sacrifice his son Isaac, the beloved heir to all his possessions, the one in whom all his hopes were centered and the one whom he regarded as the medium through which all the divine promises were to be fulfilled. Many of us have discovered that in our experiences with the troubles of life, the anticipation of a coming ordeal frequently bears down more heavily upon our spirits and is a

greater test to our courage than is the trouble itself, when the time comes for us to face it. Our dear Master himself was affected in this same manner, for did he not say, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished." The story of Abraham's sacrifice is told by the narrator in plain, unembellished language, with no attempt made to play upon our emotions. Yet one would have to be dull and unimaginative indeed if he failed to visualize something of the anxious strain which must have wrung Abraham's heart as he looked forward in dread to the completion of that terrible three days' journey and the ordeal through which he must pass. (Gen. 22:3, 4.) Abraham may have, and probably did possess, an almost supernatural degree of faith in order to enable him to make that fearful decision, always trusting that God would in some mysterious way overrule the matter for the best. But even that complete trust could not have prevented that journey from being an inexpressibly painful one to the heart of the father. And so likewise it must have been an equally distressing prospect for our Heavenly Father to look forward to, knowing that at the end of those three thousand-year days, he must voluntarily sacrifice his dearest treasure for the sake of sinful man. So, it is our conviction that he must have breathed a great sigh of relief when that first crucial step had been taken, the only begotten Son had left his heavenly home, and had been made flesh in the person of that holy Infant who lay in the manger at Bethlehem.

The immensity of God's love for his estranged children had now been demonstrated to both angels and men, as it is written that, "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life." (John 3:16.) And a still greater degree of relief was to be the Father's portion when, some thirty-three years later, he received back from the dead that same dear Son with the sacrifice successfully accomplished and the victory won. The joyous relief that Abraham must have felt, when he received Isaac figuratively from the dead (Heb. 11:19), should enable us to apprehend 'something of the Heavenly Father's joy on that glorious occasion, just as the knowledge of that wondrous transaction has brought joy and gratitude to our own hearts.

But at the time of the announcement by the angels of the Savior's birth, all these events were still in the future. For the present it was joy enough for the angels to proclaim the glad tidings to those humble shepherds: "Unto you is born today in the city of David a Savior who is the Lord Messiah." (*Diaglott.*) And then came the full chorus of the heavenly host, voicing their joy and adoration in a great paean of praise to the mighty One who was the Author of the whole glorious Plan: "Glory to God in the highest heavens."

The glad tidings that filled the angels' hearts with rejoicing that night was the announcement that a new way had been found whereby peace could be established between God and man, a peace based upon the justifying work of the One who was to save his people from their sins. Up to that moment the only members of Adam's race who had been privileged to enter into a condition of peace with God were, first, his faithful servants of past dispensations, who in the ages that had preceded the Mosaic era had like Abraham believed God and so were accounted righteous (James 2:23'); and secondly, those Israelites who, by virtue of the yearly Atonement Day sacrifices, had obtained a standing of typical justification before God. All others were regarded as being at enmity with God, aliens and strangers from the covenants of promise. - Eph. 2:12.

But now, in the coming to earth of the Savior, the first step had been taken whereby "he that believeth in the Son" might have peace with God and have the divine good will extended to him that he might continue on and ultimately enter into full family relationship with the Most High, "of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named." (Eph. 3:15.) This is the sense of the message as rendered in the Authorized Version and is to be preferred (in the mind of the writer, at least) to some of the more recent versions.

And what a gracious gift it was! No wonder that the thought of giving characterizes the Christmas season. It is at this time of year, even more perhaps than at any other, that the hearts of those who have learned the old, old story of the Father and his love should overflow in gratitude toward the Giver of every good and perfect gift as they reflect upon his great mercy to the children of men and upon the love that drew us to him.

Consider in contrast the case of the Patriarch Job. Under the buffetings of Satan he had been reduced to penury and forced to endure every form of bodily discomfort. His own wife could see so little hope for him that she urged him to "curse God and die." As if this were not misery enough, his three best friends charged him with being guilty of some concealed sin which had brought upon him divine displeasure. Throughout all his troubles job had nothing left to console him but his consciousness of his own innocence and his complete trust in the integrity and justice of the Most High. "Shall we receive good at the hand of God and not receive evil?" was his defense of the honor of God. "Though he slay me yet will I trust in him, but I will maintain mine own ways before him." (Job 13:15.) In other words job had peace with God and therefore a peaceful mind. As Paul puts it, "Godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Tim. 6:6), and in job's case it compensated him for all his sufferings.

WHAT CHRISTMAS SHOULD MEAN TO US

How should the "Truth people" regard the Christmas festival? Let us disregard for the time being a chronological fact of which most Bible Students are aware, namely, that the actual time of year upon which our Lord's First Advent, as the man-child of Bethlehem, occurred corresponded more closely to about the first of October than it did to the twenty-fifth of December, a matter which we need not go into at this time, and let us consider for a moment, the significance of the event from the standpoint of the human family as a whole.

If in the esteem of those who through divine grace have been granted power to become sons of God (John 1:12) there be one anniversary in the Christian calendar which more than any other prompts them to especially rejoice, it is that one which commemorates our Lord's birth as a new creature on that resurrection morning which succeeded his three days' burial. In the larger, more comprehensive sense that great event was of equal importance to all mankind, for it was then that he became the first-fruits of them that slept, human and spiritual alike. (1 Cor. 15:20.) But the Easter season is in a very special sense the particular festival of the new creation, of which he was the first-born member, and so his resurrection verified and made certain the hopes of those "who first trusted in Christ." - Eph. 1:12.

However, the Glad Tidings of great joy which we commemorate at the Christmas season, as has been already pointed out, were to be to all the world's people. So, accordingly, we rejoice in company with all the world at the good news concerning the birth of the Savior at Bethlehem. The more we learn of and strive to copy the Master's character, and to become imbued with his spirit, the greater becomes our inclination to rejoice with those who rejoice and to weep with those who weep (Rom. 12:15); in other words the broader and deeper become our own sympathies with the whole groaning creation. We are well aware that the present time is a period of fear and anxiety, which bears down heavily upon the entire world. Ominous signs are pointing to a great judgment upon the whole of Christendom, as every news dispatch reveals. If then we can aid in distracting the minds- of the harmless and well-meaning people of our world even temporarily from these dark portents by joining in the celebration of the anniversary of the birth of the Christ-child, let us participate gladly and thankfully. What better cause for rejoicing could there be than a precious season which gladdens and enlarges the hearts of mankind, and which

distributes its genial warmth among those whom he came to save! We remember that the Lord while in the flesh once graced with his presence a marriage feast in Cana of Galilee and contributed to the festivities by performing his first miracle in response to his mother's unspoken request regarding the wine, even though, as he explained, his hour (for relaxation and enjoyment) had not yet come. (John 2:4.) And what an ordeal of suffering he had to endure before that hour would arrive, when with his disciples he would partake of the new wine (life) in the Kingdom! - Matthew 26:29.

Our friends in the great denominations of Christendom also, those who in a sense apprehend something of the meaning of Christmas and the song of the angels as they prophesied of the coming peace and good will to men, these realize but little of the fiery experiences through which mankind must pass before the Sin-offering has been completely made, humanity released from the death sentence, and the work of Him who is to save his people from their sins has been finished. The knowledge of the chronological features of the Plan, that we have been permitted to acquire, gives us assurance that even now the "strong man's house" is being broken up and Satan is beginning to lose the power that he has wielded so long, to deceive the nations. Ere long the Kingdom of the saints of the Most High (Dan. 7:27) will exercise its beneficial rule over mankind so conclusively that men will begin to understand that "the former things have forever passed away." How glorious will be their awakening to the fact that the new Ruler of earth is that same wise, gentle, and loving Jesus, the anniversary of whose birth they have been celebrating for so long at every Christmas season.

OUR REDEMPTION DRAWETH NIGH

And what of us highly favored ones who long ago discovered what peace with God could mean, we who have found a refuge in the secret place of the Most High? Does that peace which our Lord promised (John 14:27) still possess our hearts and minds? The inspired Psalmist once uttered these words concerning the City of God, the holy place of the tabernacles of the Most High: "God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: ... Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea." (Ps. 46:5, 2.) The indications are that ere long we may witness those conditions of which the Psalmist spoke. Even now men's hearts are failing them for fear of the coming tempest of trouble, and we would unquestionably share that fear had we not laid hold upon the promises of the Word. But praise God, his truth has been and still is our shield and our buckler. (Ps. 91:4.) So then let us at this Christmas season be strong and of a good courage, for the Lord thy God doth go with thee. "He will not fail thee nor forsake thee." (Deut. 31:6.) Let us participate with thankful hearts in the celebration of the Christmas season. Let that confidence and assurance which the Lord has bestowed upon us impel us to speak words of cheer and encouragement to those whose ears have not yet become attuned to an appreciation of the true meaning of the angelic proclamation of "peace on earth, good will to men."

- J. R. Hughes

Report of Pilgrimage in the British Isles

Early in the year the Midland (geographical) Group of Bible Students of England, extended an invitation to the Pastoral Bible Institute to send a brother to Britain to serve Classes there this summer. Accordingly, with the sanction and blessing of the Directors, Sister Essler to accompany me, passage was booked for us to leave New York on the Liner *Parthia*, due to sail on May 20.

OUR PURPOSE

As we were preparing for this trip, the questions we asked ourselves were: To what purpose do we undertake this ministry? Were we secretly desiring to gain adherents to the Pastoral Bible Institute? Did we have some theological opinions that we wished to advance? Were we going in what might be a holiday spirit?

For almost a year we had been praying that the Lord would point out the way whereby we might enter more fully into His service. We have been much impressed of late years that the work which God is doing is the perfecting of the members of the great antitypical Temple, and, as the Apostle Paul claimed for himself, we also desired to be "laborers together with God." This, then, was to be our purpose, to do what we could to forward the building up of the Body of Christ.

OUR FIRST EXPERIENCES

Leaving our home in Beverly, Massachusetts on May 18, we stopped at the Institute home in Brooklyn where accommodation was made for us until the date of departure from New York. While in Brooklyn Brother Thomson spent much time showing photos of British brethren, and briefing us on customs, character of meetings, etc. This we found to be of value when we did reach Britain. Also, while at the Institute, we had the privilege of serving assembled friends one evening.

The passage over from America was not too eventful. A surprise was discovering that aboard with us was Sister Pampling who had traveled with her husband, when he was doing Pilgrim service in the States several years ago.

Arriving in Liverpool, we soon found that no time was to be wasted; for, being met by Brother and Sister Quennell, we were taken to their home in Grappenhall, about 20 miles inland, and after lunch we were conveyed into Warrington to serve the assembled Fellowship Meeting. This, our first contact with the English friends, was an introduction which made it easier for us later on; for from thence, wherever we went, we met some friends with whom we had already become acquainted. That evening we met more of the brethren while attending a public lecture in Wallesley.

The next morning Brother Gordon Chilvers, who arranged our itinerary, took us to Melton Mowbray where we were entertained by Brother and Sister Holmes. Our older readers will remember some excellent and spiritually refreshing articles contributed by Brother Holmes to the pages of the HERALD some years ago. On this second day of our being in England we served the Nottingham Class; then in quick succession the Derby friends, the Nuneaton Class, and the Blaby Whitsuntide Convention.

We would that time and space were available to recount all that was interesting in this our first pilgrimage in Britain. Suffice it to say that continuing through several days spent at Downham Market, then to the Lutterworth Convention, to Blaby, again; to Leicester, Butlers Cross, Oxford, Lincoln, Sheffield, and then back to Warrington, the Lord's blessing was evident. While at Lutterworth and Blaby we were pleased to be accommodated by Brother and Sister Cowling, having met Brother Couling on several occasions when he was in the States on business. And while at Lutterworth we were directed to the church where John Wycliffe preached for many years, and nearby which, his ashes were strewn into the River Swift.

After this we stayed in the Warrington-Liverpool-Manchester region for nine days, during which time we served a different Ecclesia each day. One of the features of this period was seeing many of the same faces each day, as two cars conveyed the friends around to the several gatherings.

From Warrington we traveled to Scotland, our first stop being in Glasgow. While here we stayed with Sister Violet Kirkwood, whose late husband, Brother Alex Kirkwood, is well remembered by the American friends. While serving in Glasgow, several Classes convened as one, for our three ministrations of the Word; which was an encouragement to us as we went on from there to serve in Perth and Dundee. At Montrose we visited for three days with relatives of Sister Essler, whose folks came to the States from this place. Sister Essler had attended school here during the period from 9 to 11 years of age.

An overnight trip by boat from Glasgow brought us to Belfast, Ireland, where we served the Class on Sunday afternoon and evening, and then were taken by car to Londonderry where we stayed until Friday. While there the seamen went on strike, making boat passage back to England unobtainable; but fulfilling our appointments, we laid the matter before the Lord, and then watched to see how He would operate.

On Friday morning, Brother McKeown, seeing a line or two in the paper stating that a mail boat was to leave Dublin that evening, phoned Dublin to see if there might be room for two more passengers. On being assured that no one would be left, he took us in his car the 150 miles to Dublin. So great was the number stranded by the strike that it was necessary to employ two boats to accommodate all who presented themselves for passage. Providentially the temperature was warm, and the sea calm during the crossing, as many, including ourselves, had to stand on the open deck during the three and a half hours to Holyhead. At Holyhead we entrained for Nuneaton, and having to change trains at Crewe, we then found ourselves on the very train we would have been on had we come the scheduled way! Thus the Lord provided for us what seemed the improbable; and we arrived in Nuneaton as had been planned.

FURTHER MINISTRIES

From Nuneaton we were taken by Brother Chilvers to Cardiff. Here, Brother and Sister Jones were our hosts. This is the Brother Jones who served Classes in the States in 1951. And thus our fellowship continued from Class to Class: Swindon, Chorleywood, Stoke Poges, Hayes (Middlesex), Greenford, Welling, and then the Aldersbrook Convention, and the August Bank Holiday Convention at Conway Hall in London.

Here we were pleased to see Brother and Sister Read, as well as some other American friends, all of whom we were to meet on several other occasions. After this we went to Hayes (Kent), to West Wickham, to Sittingbourne, Maidstone, Chatham, and then back to serve the Central London Class. From thence on up to Ipswich on the East coast, and then to the week-long convention at Rosehill, near Reading. This was a delightful season of fellowship and relaxation; a

splendid place for coming apart from the din and bustle of the world. Here, too, we renewed fellowship with many who had been our hosts during our sojourn up to this time. And here we saw much of Brothers Jennings and Lodge, whom the American readers of this journal will remember as having done Pilgrim service in this country some years ago.

After a few days spent with the saints in Dewesbury, we returned to Warrington, and spoke to a Class at St. Helens; and then were taken by auto about 160 miles to Dumfries, Scotland, to visit an elderly sister whom we had met while she was visiting in America two years ago. This was a happy occasion, as the sister is isolated from those "of like precious faith," and beamed with joy at our coming to see her. We are happy to report that the Brother and Sister who so kindly took us this long distance to call on one lonely saint have assured us that they will make it a point to see that she is not forgotten. After this we attended the Lymm Home Gathering, speaking at one of the sessions; and then flew to Dublin, Eire, to serve friends there. This is a group composed of several sectarian backgrounds; and we could wish that we had been scheduled for a much longer time there, to help them in any way we could.

Back to England, we served our last time in Warrington, and then on to Coventry, and the Coventry Home Gathering. Here we began to say the final Good-byes to many, as we were to go south toward London and beyond, after leaving this locality. Then came a few days at Welwyn, Garden City, then Berwick, Bexhill, Portsmouth, and Bournemouth on the south coast of England. Then a few days with a brother and sister whom we had met when they were visiting in the States. After this we traveled back to the London area and served the Aldersbrook Class once more. Then to Yeovil, Brixham, Paignton, and then to Bristol and Pinfarthings; and from there to the Rugby Home Gathering, where again some last farewells were said.

CLOSING DAYS

The Forest Gate Convention was our last scheduled speaking engagement. What a delight it was to see so many friends whom we had come to know and love in Christ, gathered in this assembly. But then came the inevitable parting, which brought to our minds the words of the bard, "Parting is such sweet sorrow." Yes, it was sweet to hear the expressions of love, and the benedictions; yet there was deep-felt sorrow that the time of parting had come. How good, then, to contemplate the General Assembly of the Church of the Firstborn Ones, when "we shall be forever with the Lord," and parting shall be no more.

As we were not to sail for home for a few days yet, we were taken to visit elderly and isolated brethren, who in years gone by had been among the mainstays of the Truth movement in Britain. And before closing this report we must mention the sweetness of fellowship we had with many such brothers and sisters, some of whom are infirm, after years in the Lord's service. We urge all to remember such in prayer that the Lord's care and grace may continue with them.

We were happy to have a group of friends from the Aldersbrook and Forest Gate Classes at the Boat Train to see us off; and were also pleased to have several of the Portsmouth friends at Southampton to see us on the boat. So our last season of fellowship with the British saints was a season of prayer in our cabin on the *Queen Mary*.

The trip over from England was uneventful. After we were well on our way there were delivered to us messages of love and blessing from some of the friends. These were greatly appreciated. Arriving in New York, we stayed at 177 Prospect Place for two days-enjoyable days, too-and had the privilege of serving an assembly at the Institute on Wednesday evening.

And now that we are again at home in Beverly, we look back to the more than four months of happy relationship with the saints overseas with thankful hearts—thankful to our Lord for this great opportunity which was offered us; and for the grace and strength provided; thankful to the Midland Group who extended the invitation; and thankful to those who by their help and counsel made this pilgrimage possible.

In conclusion we add this observation: that for the most part the friends in Britain are standing free in Christ, and give evidence that they intend to continue so. Also we noted that there is an awareness of the need of realizing their mutual redemption in Christ as the basis of fellowship; and that they are inclining to gather around the Person of Christ rather than around some favorite doctrine or teacher. May God's rich favor continue with them. Our prayer is that all may have been edified in Christ by our feeding together on the Word of Truth; and though the occasion of our visit become hazy and dim to the memory, may we all be like the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration, who, after the cloud had passed away, "saw *no* man, but Jesus only."

- *F. A. Essler.*

Edwin Allbon

Owing to his continued ill-health, Brother Edwin Allbon was not able to meet with either Brother Essler or myself during our sojourn in the British Isles last summer. We were, however, in touch with him by telephone and by correspondence. In a recent letter he asks us to convey to our readers his Christian love, and concludes with the following remarks:

"The Lord knoweth them that are his.' They are to be found, not as groups or communities, but in and among them all. This is our comfort and assurance, as we see the many divisions which exist. There can be no unity except on the basis of our relationship with the Lord. The Lord Jesus Christ can be the only center uniting all who are 'in him'. It is not *what* I believe that is of first importance, but *whom*. Has it not proved true in experience that there is a spirit of unity between brethren who are unable to agree on points of doctrine, while oft-times there is no true fellowship with those with whom we may be in full doctrinal accord. Happy are we if we *can say*, with the Apostle Paul: 'I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.'"

- *P. L. Read.*

Things Coming to Pass

"For as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth." "And none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand." "When ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the Kingdom of God is nigh at hand." - Luke 21:35; Dan. 12:10; Luke 21:31.

FROM time to time, under this article heading, we have considered some aspect of current world events in its relation to that most important of all events, the establishment of God's Kingdom. The Biblical evidences for its proximity have been examined from many viewpoints, but there is still another "sign," and one often overlooked, which we now desire to consider, and that is the "sign" of *unawareness*. To emphasize this we have grouped the Scripture texts above, which, while removed from their context, are nevertheless in complete harmony in testifying to a paradox of paradoxes. For the world's ignorance of the "day of their visitation" is paradoxical, inasmuch as "these things are not being done in a corner." For how is it possible for men witnessing the significant events of history's greatest crisis to be so astonishingly unaware of their true implication -- that the Kingdom of God is near, "even at the doors"? (Matt. 24:33.) Have not millions of Bibles circulated the earth, each witnessing clearly and explicitly to the signs of the times? What is the cause of the mental blindness which has come upon the present generation—a blindness unperceived in the face of intellectual attainments that are the marvel of our day?

"DARKNESS COVERS THE EARTH: GROSS DARKNESS THE PEOPLE

It is becoming evident to thinking men that the roots of the present world distress have their beginnings in deeper soil than is generally recognized. We are witnessing the breakdown of a civilization based on a materialistic liberalism that had its inception in the dissolution of the medieval culture of the feudal civilization which ushered in two great movements, the Renaissance and the Reformation. Both these movements, allied in some respects, and diametrically opposed in others, contributed jointly to the freedom and individualism of modern civilization. Both represented great advances; the one in social, political, and economic reforms which culminated eventually in the industrial revolution of the past century, and the other in a freedom from the fetters of religious authority and the corruptions of religious superstition. Both begat great hopes and promises. Both brought great confidence that the "emancipated" mind would disclose the secrets of nature; penetrate into all the ultimate mysteries of life; exploit the buried treasures of the natural world and make them available for man; explore the complexities of human society and eliminate the social maladjustments that ignorance had perpetuated, and finally free man himself of the sorrows and pains, the frustrations and lusts by which he made himself and his fellows miserable. And in a measure this has come to pass.

But unfortunately in the process of realizing these great dreams, political and economic action was thoroughly secularized and authentic Christian social ideals were neglected. Human dignity, human personality, and human solidarity were forgotten. With the vast material progress there have arisen new problems, and the fabulous productivity of the modern machine has created crises and unemployment rather than security and abundance. The dreams of economic harmony and of individual happiness have been cruelly disappointed. Far from attaining that individual liberty, the "right" of democratic man, today in large sections of the world man has sunk to the position of a creature of the State, that new juggernaut. Great totalitarian systems have sprung up and humanity finds itself in the midst of an unparalleled world-wide conflict between the forces of freedom and slavery. The injustice, the unhappiness, the brutality so rife, oppress and darken men's minds and they see no way out. In Matthew Arnold's words:

"The world which seems
To lie before us, like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light.
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here, as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night."

Poor groaning creation! How accurately did our Master predict the mental state of men of our day. "Upon the earth distress of nations in *perplexity* at the roar of the sea and rolling waves, men ready to die through fear and expectation of what is coming on the habitable earth." - Luke 21:26, *Darby*.

Just what has caused society to move toward catastrophe rather than triumph? Why have not the enormous achievements of man during the past century resulted in a stable and beneficent order for his welfare? Why the present disillusionment and shattering of hopes?

"Individual profit, which in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries provided the motive force for the economic system, has failed us, and we have not yet discovered *any* moral substitute for it other than war. Nothing but war seems sufficiently worthwhile. The economic crisis is in essence a moral crisis. It cannot be explained-and much less solved-in constitutional or even in economic terms. The fundamental issue is moral."

Thus wrote pessimistic Professor Carr, in "Conditions of Peace." And here we have a partial answer to our question. Who cannot recognize a great decadence in moral and ethical values throughout the earth? What has become of the absolute distinction between right and wrong, good and evil, of the sanctity of agreements, of the sacredness of one's word? What promise can be trusted, what firm agreement can ever be made again, in a world where millions have been educated to believe that if it seems in their interest to violate it, no pact or pledge, however solemnly drawn up, need be regarded by "realistic" minds, or "cold statesmanship," as more than a "scrap of paper"? And what of the imperatives of conscience, that God within the breast? "Conscience," said Hitler, "is a Jewish invention."

**"CURSED BE THE MAN ... WHOSE HEART
DEPARTETH FROM THE LORD."**

Alas, in his emphasis on material prosperity, man has gradually lost those fundamental values which make for morality and true freedom, and which constitute the individual superior to his own creations. This central value of Christianity, the value of the individual, has been corrupted in modern political thought to demand a subordination of the individual to the State (or indeed to *any* organization or society of which he is a member), the implications of which tragic fallacy are but now being realized by thinking men. Thoreau uttered a profound truth when he said: "There will never be a really free and enlightened State until the State comes to recognize the individual as a' higher and independent power, from which all its own power and authority are derived." This has well been called the lost key to the whole problem of modern government. We are all witnesses to the enslavement of hundreds of millions under the tyranny of totalitarian powers. Never in human history has the individual counted for so little, and never has human life been so cheap. The attempt to comprehend the sum total of human suffering leaves the mind numb with

horror. Thank God for the assurance that under the beneficent rule of Christ's Kingdom man shall regain his original state, a creature in the likeness of his God. For God shall

"Give back the upward looking and the light,
Rebuild in it the music and the dream;
Make right the immemorial infamies,
Perfidious wrongs, immedicable woes."

Thus speaks the Lord:

"Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the Lord of hosts, and in the day of His fierce anger. And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible. *I will make a man more precious than fine gold; even a man than the golden wedge of Ophir.*" - Isa. 13:13, 11, 12.

But what has happened to the world's spiritual guides? Are there not thousands of church edifices, with tens of thousands dedicated to preaching Him whom these buildings monumentalize? Are there not countless multitudes of church adherents and millions upon millions of Bibles? What is lacking?

Hear the words of Jawaharlal Nehru: "The old days were days of faith, blind unquestioning faith. The wonderful temples and mosques and cathedrals of past centuries could never have been built but for the overpowering faith of the architects and builders and people generally. The very stones that they reverently put one on top of the other, or carved into beautiful designs, tell us of this faith. The old temple spire, the mosque with its slender minarets, the Gothic cathedral-all of them pointing upward with an amazing intensity of devotion, as if offering a prayer in stone or marble to the sky above-thrill us even now, though we may be lacking in that faith of old of which they are the embodiments. But the days of that faith are gone, and gone with them is that magic touch in stone. Thousands of temples and mosques and cathedrals continue to be built, but they lack the spirit that made them live during the middle ages. There is little difference between them and the commercial offices which are so representative of our age. Our age is a different one; it is an age of disillusion, of doubt and uncertainty and questioning. We can no longer accept many of the ancient beliefs and customs; we have no more faith in them, in Asia, or in Europe, or in America. So we search for new ways, new aspects of the truth more in harmony with our environment. And we question each other and debate and quarrel and evolve any number of 'isms' and philosophies. As in the days of Socrates, we live in an age of questioning, but that questioning is not confined to a city like Athens; it is world-wide."

In this candid statement we have the full explanation for the present unawareness of the implication of world events. The world has lost its sense of spiritual values-has lost its faith in revealed religion. A spirit of irreligiousness has spread abroad. Men have become lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God. We live in a generation which can refer contemptuously to the Bible as a "collection of Hebrew myths," and stigmatize religion as an "opiate for the inferior minded" -- a time when a prominent man of letters can write a friend that "Rabelais was nearer God than Christ," and a famous writer can say that no man who regards Christ as an ideal is worth working with. This is the day of the cynic; of the pseudo-intellectual, of the spirit of shallow cynicism and of mockery which has destroyed in large measure the old simplicity and integrity based upon the great Christian principles of the Word of God. Yes, a generation which questions the existence of its God. One is reminded of Milton's lines so applicable to our day:

"Truth shall retire
Bestuck with slanderous darts, and works of Faith
Rarely be found. . So shall the World go on,
To good malignant, to bad men benign,
Under her own weight groaning, till the day
Appear of respiration to the just
And vengeance to the wicked."

Yes, the world has reached a condition of disbelief that augurs ill for the immediate future, and though we still hear of "Christian principles," it is too often in circumstances which, as ex-President Hoover has said, make the very phrase sound like a "Gargantuan joke."

**"A Famine in the Land ... Not For Bread,
But for the Word of the Lord." - Amos 8:11**

But what of the spiritual guides of "Christendom"? Have they no message from the Word for questioning humanity? Men seek a positive answer, a definite "thus saith the Lord." Alas, though thousands of sermons are preached weekly, seldom is the voice of assurance and enlightenment heard. Instead only echo of doubt and perplexity, of struggles to find one's bearings, of pious moralism, of psychological therapeutics-truly "stones for bread"; man seeking strength from within himself.

Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr has well written:

"Some of the most stubborn and sentimental illusions about the possibilities of a simple and easy peace between the competing elements in human society have been fostered by modern churches. In America they contributed more possibly than any other influence to political and moral illusions, for they aggravated false estimates of man and history by compounding them with classical and pious conceptions. The errors and illusions of our culture, which have made an estimate of the crisis of our civilization difficult if not impossible, are, almost without exception, various versions of a single error. *They are all expressions of too great an optimism about the goodness of human nature*; they all therefore underestimate the difficulties of relating life to life, will to will, interest to interest, in a harmonious social life. They regard the achievement of justice and social peace in human society as a comparatively easy task. It is, as a matter of fact, a very difficult task, which can be accomplished with tolerable success only if its difficulties are fully recognized."

This fact concerning the weakness of human nature is a fundamental teaching of the Bible, and is the basis for the Divine Plan of regeneration through the Kingdom of Christ. Other salvation there is none. The hope for man resides in the promised Millennial reign upon earth, "times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began." (Acts 3:21.) This is the message of God to all men. Why is it not proclaimed from every pulpit?

The answer to this question goes back to two great scientific theories. The first was the theory of Copernicus which destroyed the old comfortable assumption that the earth was the center of things, and dwarfed man by the mere size of the material universe. The other was the Darwinian theory, which subjected his inner world to an even more disintegrating scrutiny, and filled mankind with doubts as to the values of human personality and the nature of its origin. The advancing flow of scientific thought, true or otherwise, plus the wave of Higher Criticism which originated in Germany and flowed out to all the ecclesiastical schools, resulted in the gradual

breakdown of faith in the Scriptures as the inspired Word of God. The great foundation truths were slowly obscured, with the tragic result that people are now blind to the Bible's message revealing the stupendous significance of present momentous events. It is rare indeed today to find in some one a living faith in the Bible as God's revealed Word. True, there is still regard for the moral precepts of the Scriptures, but the vital substance has been lost. Men do not seek from the Bible the answers to their questions. Men do not bring God into their counsels. And so, as of old, to our day the Word of the Lord speaks:

"Forasmuch as this people draw near Me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor Me, but have removed their heart far from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the precept of men: Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid." - Isa. 29:13, 14.

The Church Nominal gropes blindly on, all unwitting that the hopes of true Christians are soon to materialize. Though professing faith in the First Advent of Christ, the evidences for His Second Advent are disallowed, though there are ten times as many Scriptures for the latter as there were for the former. The glorious words of the 96th, 97th, 98th and 99th Psalms evoke no responsive chords. There stands One at the door and they know not. Christ's own judgment is recorded in Rev. 3:15, 16: "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of My mouth." The Church Nominal now brings forth no message for the times from the Lord. The voice of the Bridegroom and Bride is heard no more in her. There remains but blindness and barrenness. "Her prophets also find no vision from the Lord." "Where there is no vision, the people perish." - Lam. 2:9; Prov. 29:18.

Yes, "as a snare" are these things coming on all mankind. Only the wise of God understand and rejoice in the evidence of the proximity of God's Kingdom. The world continues on into ever-increasing darkness, unheeding the few who point to the sure Word of Prophecy, until that glad day soon when upon the wreck of man's institutions, the human race, illuminated by the Spirit of God, shall rebuild an earth wherein dwelleth righteousness.

"And while the earth with strife is riven,
And envious factions Truth do hide,
Lo! He, the Lord of earth and heaven,
Stands at the door and claims His Bride.

"He's come! Let all the earth adore Him;
The path His human nature trod
Spreads to a royal realm before Him,
The Life of Life, the Word of God!"

- *W. J. Siekman.*

Israel Today

"And now Israel, what loth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, to keep the commandments of the Lord, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good?" -- Deuteronomy 10:12, 13.

Paradise, California,
October 27, 1960

"What is the Status of Religion in Israel?" is the title of an article by Dr. Karl H. Baehr which appeared recently in the *United Church Herald*. Dr. Baehr is a Congregational minister and is also executive director of the pro-Israel American Christian Palestine Committee. In this latter capacity he is largely responsible for *Land Reform*, a journal issued by this committee. He has traveled extensively in Israel. In his fairly long treatise on the religious conditions in the Jewish State today he demonstrates a depth of perception that is seldom manifest by others who have visited the Land of Promise.

In commencing his analysis Dr. Baehr says, "What other nation than Israel could ever get involved in a situation in which the government is challenged by a motion of 'no confidence' because its Prime Minister expressed an unorthodox view of the Bible?"

After pointing up the growing interest in the Bible that is evident in Israel today, Dr. Baehr continues, "With all of this interest in the Bible, American Christians are nevertheless confused and troubled by the religious situation in Israel. Often Christians judge Israel by standard not applied to other nations or to so-called Christian lands. One sinister told me quite candidly: 'We have a right to expect more of Israel, or didn't its people give us the Bible?' Perhaps it is not strange, therefore, that some visitors return from Israel convinced that Israel is a 'nation without God' while others are convinced that Israel is a 'theocracy.'

"Why all the confusion? Why the conflicting testimony? One of the problems, I am convinced, is a matter of semantics. In the United States a person is generally considered 'religious' if he attends church (or synagogue) and accepts the basic doctrines of the church. In Israel this definition breaks down completely. There, the term 'religious' is synonymous with 'orthodox,' and 'orthodox' means the observance of the rituals and practices of the orthodox tradition. Accordingly, when Israelis were asked by visiting Christians, 'Are you religious?' the response is very likely to be 'No.' As many as 75 per cent of the people in Israel would be non-orthodox in these terms. This does not mean, however, that they are non-religious or atheists, for there are few atheists in Israel. Nor does it mean that they have no regard for or interest in the ethical, moral, and religious precepts of the Hebrew prophets and of Judaism!

"Of course, traditional or orthodox elements in Israel do consider the non-observant person as 'non-religious.' For aham there can be no other interpretation; no compromise is possible. However, from the vantage point of the Christian, who stands outside this ritual tradition, other standards are necessary. What, for instance, is the Israeli's attitude toward love, forgiveness, sacrifice for the welfare of others, and a devotion to the ethical and moral precepts of the Bible? Questions such as these usually produce a most satisfying response. They point to their sharing in the *kibbutzim* (communal agricultural settlements) where they care for the widow, the orphan, and the elderly, even though they are not productive and are a financial responsibility."

After pointing out the changes that are taking place in these socialist agricultural colonies where certain traditional religious observances are taking hold to the surprise of many, Dr. Baehr continues, "Many of the older pioneers have believed that ceremony and tradition are not necessary in Israel, that orthodoxy is a ghetto development and necessary only in alien countries for purposes of self-preservation. In Israel, they say, the Holy Land is at one's feet; the spirit of the Bible is breathed continuously! This reaction against orthodoxy had a richness of meaning for those who suffered much of their lives on other less holy soils-in Russia, Germany, or Middle East lands-and for whom 'autoemancipation' from repression and prejudice became a life mission. But the children who have not had direct association with these less holy lands and who have not known anti-Semitism need something more. And so the Sabbath lights are lighted and the holy days are celebrated anew for their historic and spiritual value.

"Not only is religion beginning to touch the more secular quarter in Israeli society but the development of religious interest can also be seen in the fact that during the past year 339 synagogues have been established in Israel, of which twenty-one are special youth synagogues. Tel Aviv alone has more than 400 synagogues only one of which is an imposing structure, the 'Big Synagogue.'"

In discussing the matter of whether Israel is a theocracy or not, and orthodoxy's influence there, Dr. Baehr states,

Judaism is obviously in a state of flux in Israel and the development of a modern industrial and democratic state will inevitably force more changes in these and other orthodox religious practices and customs. The end result will not be American Reform Judaism; it will be something distinctly Israeli. Whatever develops, however, will have a profound effect on the practice of Judaism in lands outside Israel."

After presenting an interesting discussion of missionary activity in Israel, Dr. Baehr concludes with the following significant statement: "The Christians who can be most effective in Israel are the indigenous Hebrew Christians who are at home in Jewish culture and who are themselves Israelis. Even for them the mission role will be difficult because they must bear the burdens of an incredibly unchristian Christian history. Their first and most important task will be to win acceptance as Christians and as Christian Israelis."

At the end of his article Dr. Baehr remarks: "Israel is indeed the land of the Bible. One must be very insensitive not to feel the ubiquity of religion in a host of garbs or in no garb at all. The Bible is central. As Harold Fisch wrote in *The Jewish Forum* of December 1959: 'The Bible is, after all, accepted as the source of all material and cultural values by secularists and religious folk alike. It is clearly the most important bridge standing between the divided parts of Jewry.' And one might add, the Bible is also the link between Jews and Christians, and to a great extent between them and Moslems as well. Religion in Israel is multifarious; it is both intense and marginal, rigid and in a state of flux, liberal and orthodox. But the Bible is central for all!"

EXCAVATIONS AT GIBEON

The Restitution Herald reports that "Biblical archeologists have suspected for many years that the ancient city of Gibeon lay buried under the tiny Arab village of el-Jib, eight miles northwest of Jerusalem. For four years, Professor James B. Pritchard of the Church Divinity School of the Pacific has been digging at this site. His great interest is checking the historical accuracy of the Old Testament.

"He has found the Pool of Gibeon, where the men of David and Saul fought (2 Samuel 2:12-17), and inscriptions that prove that the town there was Gibeon. The Gibeonites tricked Israel into sparing their lives when Israel entered the Promised Land. (Joshua 9:3-15.) Late in July, this year, Dr. Pritchard made a find which proves the great age of the city of Gibeon. He found twelve ancient tombs whose contents of possessions of the dead proved that Gibeon was a 'great city' long before Joshua and the Israelites invaded the land of Canaan from the wilderness to the east.

"While the believer does not need proof of the accuracy of the writings of God's Word, he is always interested in such scientific evidence of Bible truth."

- *Casimir Lanowick.*

Resting From His Labors

BROTHER William J. Hollister was to have addressed a convention of Bible students at Chicago on October 2nd. His discourse, on the subject of "Urgency, was scheduled for three o'clock. Instead, his funeral service was held at the same hour at the mortuary chapel just across from the Convention Hall. Brother P. L. Read, assisted by Brothers John Read and Will Siekman, conducted the service with appropriate scriptures and remarks. The more than two hundred friends and brethren were touched, some moved to tears, by the words of life and the beautiful musical selections rendered by Wesley and Adelaide (Jones) Bradburn, John Read and Cousin Orson Curtis of St. Louis. Interment was at Pittsburgh, where other members of the family lie, and only a short distance from Brother Russell's grave. The Pittsburgh services were conducted by William's surviving brothers, Robert and Ben, and his brother-in-law, James C. Jordan.

"Urgency," the subject of William's final discourse, together with *his* strong and abiding faith, characterized his whole Christian life. As a boy of twelve years, during the great St. Louis cyclone of 1898, he comforted his Mother with the words, "God will take care of us. The same year as a candidate for membership in the Congregational Church he was prompted to reply to an inquiry by the Board of Deacons in the following words: "I love God and want to be with his people." That expressed desire as a youth was gratified to the full during the following sixty-two years. When he was 17 years of age, the "Present Truth" came to our family. Not only fellowship and love of the brethren, but extensive service followed: a successful colporteur at 19; interviewing newspapers regarding the publication of Pastor Russell's sermons at 24; in the Orient witnessing to the truth and comforting the brethren at 27; and back in America helping with the Photo Drama work at 29. Always uppermost in his mind was the ministry to the brotherhood, truly constituting him a "Barnabas. "

Consistent with William's disposition to comfort the brethren, he rarely discoursed on doctrinal subjects, except at public meetings, and his current topics and notes emphasize this fact. Some of these characteristic themes were: "The Lord's Jewels"; "Sacrifices Acceptable to God"; "What Manner of People"; "Saints and Their Songs"; "Discipline"; "Peace of God"; "Hallowed Be Thy Name"; "The Law of Growth"; "Perfecting Holiness"; "God's Family"; "Faith, Grace, Salvation."

Naturally of retiring disposition, William was bold when duty or principle called for action. To the hundreds of brethren who knew him, his life and example were a source of strength and encouragement, as attested by the many letters and personal testimonies coming to hand. His influence for good will be missed, but his is a rich reward and inheritance. "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have showed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints...." - Hebrews 6:10.

- *Robert Hollister.*

The Question Box

2 Peter 1:20

Question:

What is the meaning of St. Peter's statement that "No prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation." - 2 Peter 1:20?

Answer:

STRANGE as it may seem, this text is usually misunderstood to mean that any one presenting an exposition of Scripture different from that generally held by the Bible study group with which he associates must evidently be in error. His exposition, being at variance with that of the Class (or its leaders), is quite obviously a "private" interpretation. As such it must be rejected.

Such reasoning, of course, is quite wrong, but also, alas, quite common.

The right of private judgment -- private interpretation -- is claimed by all good Protestants. Unfortunately though, it is claimed by them as though it were their *exclusive* possession. Few of them ever think of exercising the right for themselves, and too many deny it to their brethren. An exposition of Scripture comes their way which clashes with their preconceived ideas -- clashes with the ideas of their group. It is, therefore, unwelcome, and so, instead of investigating and, if the circumstances warrant, embracing the new teaching, they reject it, rebuke the expositor, and refer to St. Peter's words in support of their position.

Let us turn to the text itself and seek to understand it in the light of its context.

In 2 Peter 1:16, 17, 18, St. Peter had been speaking of our Lord's Transfiguration, and had insisted that he had been an eye-witness on that occasion, and had himself heard the voice from heaven which said: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Nevertheless, sure as he was of these things which he had both seen and heard, there was something even "more sure." It was, he tells us, "the word of prophecy."

In a previous Question Box ("Herald," November 1949, page 159) we have been cautioned against a common misconception. Too often we conceive of "prophecy" as though it meant only "prediction." The "word of prophecy" is a term that includes all the moral teaching of the Bible, as well as its predictive utterances. Indeed the expression points rather to the moral than to the predictive element. And this body of moral teaching, broken only occasionally by predictions-the whole Bible indeed, insofar as it was known to him-the Apostle Peter affirms to be a safer guide to faith than even that message from heaven which they who were eyewitnesses of the Transfiguration had made known. No doubt, as they stood on the Mount of Transfiguration and witnessed the honor and glory which Jesus received from the Father, the Apostles understood that the Son of Man was indeed the Son of God, but the very voice which pronounced him God's beloved Son bade them "*hear him*." (Matt. 17:5.) The Transfiguration was a wonderful thing for them to have witnessed; indeed it was a miracle. And all of our Lord's miracles are full of tender and wise instruction. Yet should we have learned their true meaning save for the words he spake?

Miracles are "wonders" that arrest our attention; but when our attention has been arrested, we still need to have it engaged and instructed. What the Apostles needed, what we all need, indeed, is not to see an occasional miracle, dazzling in its splendor, but a little light on the dark and troubled path we have to tread, a lamp that will burn steadfastly and helpfully over the work we have to do. Stars are more sublime, meteors more superb and dazzling, but the lamp shining in a dark place is infinitely closer to our practical needs. Plain rules of life that commend themselves to our conscience, in

obedience to which we rise above "the world, the flesh, and the devil," and become better, happier men--these, with some bright hope in the future to attract and draw us on, to assure us that if we do God's will, we shall enter into God's rest -- these rules and this hope are worth far more to us in the conduct of our daily life than all the signs and wonders ever wrought. *These* are as the lamp by which we can walk and work; miracles are but as the distant stars or occasional flashing comets. And this lamp of rules for daily conduct is given us in the "word of prophecy."

And here we come to the point of the question with which this discussion began. This wonderful "lamp," which shines so helpfully on the activities of our every day lives, does *so because it has been lit and is fed by God himself*. Not one single statement in it is the private thought the best opinion or counsel of the Prophet uttering it. Those Ancient Worthies were no doubt capable of reaching sound conclusions as to the various problems of human life and conduct. Trained in the principles of truth and righteousness they might well be supposed to be able and willing to give wise and wholesome counsel. But the "word of prophecy" did not come that way, says St. Peter. It "came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the holy spirit."

No prophecy of Scripture is a private interpretation of the Prophet, That is to say, the "word of prophecy" is not a mere logical deduction from the facts of life and nature, by the Prophet uttering it; nor is it a mere guess at things to come, based on a knowledge of what has taken place in the past. A Prophet was not simply a man who, after studying a multitude of various facts, discovered the law which was common to them all, or inferred a maxim on which men would do well to act. Nor was he simply a man who, having studied the ethical forces which were at work in his age, arrived at a probable conjecture as to the results that would flow from them and give its form and pressure to the succeeding age. There was something higher than human wisdom in his utterances, something safer than the forecasts of human reason; for prophecy did not come from the will of man, but holy men, borne along by the holy spirit as the ship is borne before the wind, spake the words that were given them by God. Their prophecies -- their forth-tellings -- were not their private interpretations of the moral facts and enigmas of human life; they were the authoritative interpretations of God himself. There is a divine wisdom, therefore an infallible wisdom -- there is a divine power, an Almighty power in the inspired Word, even when it is most human and imperfect in outward form. And it is this divine wisdom and power which makes that Word a sure and certain guide to our feet. The lamp itself may be only an earthen vessel, unskillfully molded by the hand of man; but the treasured splendor of the light, and the oil that feeds the light, are the gift of God.

The foregoing, we think, is the truth which St. Peter is emphasizing. However, two other related truths should not be overlooked:

(1) The meaning of a Scripture cannot be clearly discerned except by such as are guided by the self-same spirit as that which inspired the Prophet. - 1 Cor. 2:14.

(2) Since *all* Scripture given by inspiration of God is profitable (2 Tim. 3:16), it follows that any interpretation given to a single passage of Scripture, which conflicts with the general tenor of Scripture, cannot be the true interpretation.

In closing we submit a few translations of the Greek word translated in our Authorized Version "interpretation." According to the Diaglott a prophecy "is not of its own solution. " Rotherham translates "No prophecy of Scripture becometh self-solving." As J. Rawson Lumby says, it is not of its own "untying." There are hard knots in the utterances which God puts in the mouths of his Prophets, which they themselves had not the power of untying. The same word appears in Mark 4:34, in reference to our Lord -only in his case the power to "untie" was possessed. We quote "When they were alone he expounded [literally, untied] all things to his disciples."

- P. L. Read

Human Destiny -- In Whose Hands?

From time to time Brother Musk, well known to our British brethren, publishes in the Daily Press, brief notices of Christ's coming Kingdom. Recently one such notice appeared, under the caption "Human destiny -- In whose hands?" With Brother Musk's permission we are submitting it below, in the belief that it will be of interest to our readers. - Ed. Com.

Demonstrations against the preparation for nuclear warfare is one of the many indications of the fear of thinking people with regard to the possible use of such power.

Scientists, statesmen and other well informed people tell us the destruction of the human race is a possibility by use of the powers now in the hands of man. This is staggering and gives rise to the question, "Will a man or a few men be allowed to decide the fate of mankind?"

As Christians, we must answer that this matter rests in the hands of God. As the Creator he alone has the right to decide the destiny of the human race. He has given to us definite assurance upon this matter.

THE HUMAN RACE WILL NOT BE DESTROYED.

Jesus would not have taught us to pray "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" if mankind were to be destroyed. In harmony with this all the Prophets of God have spoken of the time when his Kingdom would be established on earth. We call to mind as an example the words of Daniel, "The God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed." (Dan. 2:44.) No power in the hands of man or devil can hinder the purpose of God. The long promised Kingdom of God is sure to be established.

THE LOVE OF GOD

"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." - John 3:16, 17.

These are well known words which tell us that God did not send his Son to earth in a desperate effort to "save" a few of the human race, but that he had the whole world in mind. The coming of Jesus was to fulfill a great and essential feature of the divine purpose, preparatory to the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth.

Sin separates man from fellowship with God and is the cause of death (Rom. 5:12) and all the imperfections and ills which afflict mankind. Jesus took the sin of the world upon himself in order that we and all men might have the opportunity of life and reconciliation with God. The work of saving the world from sin and its consequences as seen in human affairs, is delegated to Christ at his second advent.

Then he will come as earth's rightful King, to judge the nations of the present world order, to establish truth and justice in the earth and bring in everlasting peace. Then all will have the opportunity of eternal life, even those who have as yet never heard of him. - Isaiah 9:6, 7.

KINGDOM OF GOD IS NEAR

Fulfilled prophecy, particularly with reference to world fear, the return of the Jew to Palestine and events in the Middle East, indicates that the Kingdom of God is at hand. This is the assurance that mankind will not be destroyed. The second coming of Christ will save mankind from such a fate.

Since the First Advent, the Gospel has been preached by the command of the Lord Jesus, not to convert the world, but to take out from mankind the true Church of God. This is composed of a "remnant" from Israel and a "people for his name" from the Gentiles. (Rom. 11:5; Acts 15:14.) These are they who have heard the Gospel, believed in Jesus, received him as their personal Savior and accepted his call to follow him (John 14:6; 6:29, 44; Mark 8:34-38, etc.). Such embrace his promise to come again to receive them unto himself. - John 14:3.

If this is your happy position, "lift up your head," "be ready," "watch and pray," his coming is at hand. (Matt. 24:42; Luke 21:28; 31, 34-36). We would say to all Have faith in God, commit your way to him, trusting in his Son Jesus Christ. - Acts. 4:12.

In him there is sure rest and peace of heart and mind for the present, and hope for the future.

- *Fred Musk*, Eng.

Recently Deceased

Sr. Anna Tabaczynski, Chicago, Ill. - (Oct.)

Bro. F. F. Cook, Maitland. Fla. - (Aug.)