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Memories of the Way

"And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no." -Deuteronomy 8:2.

The power of memory is lasting and is influential. A kindness done in secret -how often has that seed, dropped into the soil of memory, borne fruitage in the gratitude of years. And again, a harsh word or inflicted injury, flung upon the memory, too often has rankled there into lawlessness and into sin. No man can be solitary who has memory. The poorest of us, if we have memory, is richer than he knows, for by it we can reproduce ourselves, be young even when the limbs are failing, and have all the past: belonging to us when the hair is silvery and the eyes are dim. Oh, it is a rare and divine endowment! This is the faculty which the Jewish lawgiver calls into exercise: "Thou shalt remember."

REMEMBRANCE OF FAVOR AND OF JOY

And as the people of Israel recalled their history there would be, in the first place, the remembrance of favor and consequently of joy. What a grand history and one rich in instruction was theirs! Jehovah's presence had gone with them through the tangled desert path -by day in guiding cloud, by night in lambent flame; their raiment had not waxed old upon them, neither their foot swelled for forty years. He had spoiled their enemies in their sight. In Egypt they had quailed beneath the very Omnipotence which had delivered them, and they had crouched trembling at the base of Sinai, while ever and anon loomed through the darkness the flashings forth of the Divinity within. From the time when they groaned in bondage and their cry went up unto God until now, when after forty years' vicissitudes, they stood upon the threshold of the land of Canaan, each day had its wonder and its lesson. There could not fail to be great and grateful rejoicing in this remembrance of the loving-kindness of the Lord.

Brethren, our own has also been an instructive history. Do not these "ensamples" refresh our memories? Do we not recall that loving-kindness which compassed us since first we knew the Lord, and of his favor that hath made our "mountain to stand strong" (Ps. 30:7)? Think of the gracious Providence that in your spiritual journey cared for your infancy and prevented your doings

in youth; think of the unexpected deliverances, the unlooked-for surprises of blessing with which you have been visited. Pause before the various stones of help which you have erected in the course of your journey. Remember the stores of gladness inexhaustible and constantly operating that have been poured upon you by the bounty of your heavenly Father -the joy of your heart, the joy peculiar to yourselves, the joy of meetings, the sweetness of farewells, and of that which came between, more sweet than each. Remember the joys of the Church: victory over some besetting temptation; glad seasons of Christian fellowship which can never be forgotten; sermons that seemed, in their exquisite adaptedness, as if they had been made for you, to counsel in perplexity, to comfort in trouble.

Recall, too, the joy that has sprung for you out of sorrow and has been all the brighter for the contrast; deliverance from danger which threatened to be imminent; recovery from sickness that seemed as though it were about to be mortal; the lightnings that have let the glory through the clouds; the flowers that you have so often plucked from tombs. As we call up the mighty sum of gladness now with subdued and grateful memory, full well may our lips quiver and our heart be full as we *remember* the way which the Lord hath led us in the wilderness.

REMEMBRANCE OF SIN AND SORROW

Nothing is more remarkable as a fact, and more illustrative of the depravity of the human heart, than the frequency with which the children of Israel sinned. Thus secondly in their history would be the *remembrance of sin, and, by consequence of sin, the remembrance of sorrow*. Only three days after the wonderful interposition at the Red Sea their murmurings began. The miracle at Marah, although it appeased their thirst, failed to inspire their confidence, for they tempted God again at the Waters of Strife. They lusted after the fleshpots of Egypt though the manna fell without ceasing. Their whole history is a record of perpetual sin, a perpetual lapse, now into jealousy, and now into sensualism, now into unbelief, and now, alas, into idolatry. These repeated transgressions of necessity introduced them to sorrow, and they suffered the strokes of Jehovah's displeasure.

And does not memory recall for us a history that has its sorrowful side also? What of unfaithfulness since the Lord called you? Your indulgence since your conversion in things you dared not have done while you were seeking mercy? Your cherishing of some secret idol; your forbearance to deliver them that were drawn to death; your efforts for your own aggrandizement and pleasure while the house of God lay waste? What of that terrible callousness which could so unfeelingly trample the honest convictions of a fellow in Christ because they differed from your own; that cruel lack of concern for a brother or sister in the Lord who so much needed the word in season you could have given and did not because "they walked not with you"? And what of that blindness, that unreasoning over-zealousness, which could overstep the Lord's specific injunction, "Judgment is mine," and would condemn another as "out of the truth," whether by direct words or by innuendo; that sly suggestion of moral error within as the only explanation for mental differences without? What of that smug complacency in the holding of the letter of God's Word while the spirit thereof was violated? Call up these memories; do not disguise them; they are necessary to bow us in humility before God.

This is the *memory* of the way. And if by the memory of joy we are impressed with God's beneficence and kept in cheerful piety; and if by the memory of sorrow we are molded into a gentler type, taught a softer sympathy, and receive a heavenward impulse; if by the memory of sin we are reminded of our frailty, rebuked of our pride, stimulated to repentance, and urged to trust in God-then it will be no irksomeness, but a heaven-sent and precious blessing, that we thus "remember the way that the Lord hath led thee in the wilderness."

PURPOSES OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE

Let us, secondly, notice the purposes of divine Providence in the journey. These are stated to be three: "To humble thee and to prove thee"; "to know what was in thine heart"; and "whether thou wouldest keep his commandments or no." We thus recognize that in all God's dealings with the children of Israel, there were purposes at work -- purposes of spiritual discipline, intended to induce self-searching and the improvement of their hearts and lives.

The first purpose that is spoken of is to induce *humility* -- "to humble thee." Everything in their experience taught them their dependence upon God. Every event, alike in their deliverance from Egypt and in their passage through the wilderness, was calculated to show them their own feebleness. What could human might have effected for them in the way of securing their deliverance from Egypt? Their spirits were broken by long years of slavery; the iron had not only chained their limbs, it had entered into their soul. They had not the heart to strike for freedom; and if they had meditated an uprising, they were a people of such divided counsels and so distrustful of each other, that it would have been but a paroxysm of frantic rebellion which would have riveted upon themselves the yoke of a more bitter bondage. What could human might have availed for them when on the borders of the Red Sea the giant waves barred their progress while a host of relentless enemies pressed behind?

What a grand illustration of man's feebleness and of God's eternal power -- six hundred thousand men, besides women and children, led by divine leadership and fed by divine bounty for the space of forty years!

Brethren, the dealings of Providence with ourselves are intended to show us our dependence upon God and to humble us in the dust under his mighty hand. We are proud, sometimes, and we talk about our endowments, and we boast largely of what we have done and what we intend to do; but we can do absolutely nothing. The athletic frame -how soon can he bring it down! The well-endowed heritage-how soon can he scatter it! The mental glance, keen and piercing -how soon can he bring upon it the dimness and bewilderment of years! We cannot, any one of us, bring ourselves into being; we cannot, any one of us, sustain ourselves in being for a moment.

And so it is with all matters of human glory. The strong man rejoiceth in his strength, but the Lord hath made him strong; the wise man glorifieth himself in his intellect and fluent utterance, but these are the bestowments of God. Ah! why will men "sacrifice to their own net, and burn incense to their own drag" (Hab. 1:16), when they have absolutely nothing which they have not received; and when every gift cometh "from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17) ?

And in the realm of morals and in our spiritual life, our feebleness is the same. Have you learned this lesson, this deep, hard lesson of humility?

Oh! how this lesson must come home to us now, we who have partaken of the message of Present Truth, as we remember the former days -- the days of outward spiritual prosperity as through the ministrations of a man of God we absorbed the letter of the Word spread so abundantly. Yes, there was growth, but alas, how much of it was a delusive growth, a growth of form and not of spirit, the growth of a plant and not of an oak. Enduring things take long to grow and must be deep-rooted; no mushroom like growths can endure the tests of faith. How we needed to receive the chastisements of the Lord that we might learn of the delusiveness of a growth which was so much dependent on a constant learning of some new thing; a spiritual prosperity so dependent

upon the presence of a servant of the Lord. But true individual faith could not thrive under those circumstances and how needful it was, as we all realize now, that the Lord separate our hand from the one in whose we had placed it, that the succeeding experiences develop in us *a reliance on Christ alone*. How painful has been the road, and how humbling to our former spirit of overconfidence and leaning on the arm of flesh. Yet how far more spiritually healthful has been the atmosphere of reliance and trust in His strength and presence alone. Yes, we remember the Valley of Humiliation. God has indeed humbled us and thereby made us strong.

THE JOURNEY ALSO PROVES US

The second purpose of God's Providence in the journey is to *prove us*. There were many testing circumstances in the history of the children of Israel. They were tested by their mercies, as when, feeling the manna insipid, they lusted after the fleshpots of Egypt; they were tested by their duties; they were tested by their calamities, as at the Red Sea and in the conflicts with the hosts of Amalek. They were tested by their companions, as when they formed unholy league with Midianite idolaters and brought upon themselves that swift destruction which Balak wished for, but which the cowardly Balaam dared not for his life invoke.

Brethren, God has his crucible still. As we look back upon our past lives, we shall find circumstances that have tried us, and we shall remember the results of the trial sometimes with devout gratitude, oftener with unfeigned shame. Our afflictions have tried us, and we thought we did well to be angry; we have arraigned the proceedings of God at the bar of our limited reason (solemn mockery of judicature!) when the reflection of tomorrow would have approved what the distrust of today was so ready to condemn.

Our duties have tried us. We have felt the shrinking of the flesh, and the result has been sometimes their reluctant and sometimes their spiritless discharge. Or people have been unjust or unkind to us: we have met with ingratitude or with treachery; our own familiar one, in whom we trusted, has betrayed us; slander has been busy belching out her calumnies against our fair fame; all these things have tested our patience, our endurance, our meekness, our long-suffering, and, like Moses, we have spoken unadvisedly, or, like the disciples, we have had to pray, "Lord, increase our faith," before we could grasp the large and princely idea of forgiveness to seventy times seven.

Often companionships have tried us, and we have shown how small has been our self-reliance, and how easily we have taken the hue and mold of the society in which we were thrown, and how a pointed finger, or a sarcastic laugh, or a lip scornfully curled, can shame the manhood out of us, and make us very cowards in resisting evil, or in bearing witness for God.

Thus have we been, thus has God proved us in the wilderness, and if we are in earnest for heaven, and if we have in any measure profited by the discipline, we shall be thankful for the trial. Placed as we are in a sinful world, exposed to its everyday influences, whether of good or evil, we need a piety which can maintain itself in all circumstances, so we can say with David, "Thou has proved mine heart; and thou hast visited me in the night; thou has tried me, and shalt find nothing; I am purposed that my mouth shall not transgress. Concerning the works of men, by the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer" (Ps. 17:3, 4).

"KEEP THY HEART WITH ALL DILIGENCE"

And then the third purpose of Providence in the journey is *"to know what was in thine heart -- whether thou wouldst keep his commandments, or no."* Human knowledge can give us very little acquaintance with the heart; such knowledge is too wonderful for man; it is high, and he cannot attain to it. But there is One who knows it, and knows all its tortuous policy, and all its sinister motive, and he is anxious that we should know it too, and one purpose of his providential dealings with us is that we may know what is in our heart.

But whether it be from the deceitfulness of the object of study, or whether it be from the morbid reluctance, almost amounting to fear, with which men shrink from acquaintance with themselves, there are few that have the bravery to pray, "Lord, make me to know myself." Indeed, it were a

hideous picture if it were suddenly unveiled in the presence of us all. When the Lord would show Ezekiel the abominations of Jerusalem, he led him through successive chambers of imagery, upon the walls of which were portrayed their loathsome and unworthy doings. Ah! if our weakness were to be thus tapestried in our sight, who of us could bear the disclosure?

There was deep self-knowledge and deep humility in the word of the old reformer, who, when he saw a criminal led off amid the jeers of the multitude to be hanged, turned around sighing, and said, "There, but for the grace of God, goes old John Bradford." There is a very affecting illustration of what can lurk unsuspected in the human heart, in the eighth chapter of the second Book of Kings. Hazeal, the messenger from the king of Syria, is shocked at the bare mention of the atrocities Elisha prophesies he shall commit, and in indignation remonstrates with the Prophet. And yet as one has quaintly observed, "The dog did it after all."

Brethren, "the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9). There lurks this danger in us all; there is no superiority of character in ourselves; there is no firmer power of resistance to evil. In our unaided strength we are no better fortified against the evil about us than are our fellowmen. From a thousand causes of disaster and of shame with which our experience can furnish us, and which we read in the history of everyday life, it becomes us, with godly jealousy watching over our own hearts, to guard against the beginnings of evil.

USES OF THE MEMORY

If these have been your experience in the way that you have trodden, there will be many *uses* of the memory of the way. You will know more of God at its conclusion than you did at its commencement. You will behold both the goodness and the severity of God - the severity which punishes sin wherever it is to be found, the goodness which itself provides a substitute and finds a Savior. Where do you not find him rather? There was the stream gushing forth from the smitten rock, and the perishing and thirsty Israelites were happy. "They drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ" (1 Cor. 10: 4). There was the brazen serpent, the symbol of accepted propitiation in the wilderness of sin. "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 everlasting life" (John 3:14, 15).

Oh, as you gather up these memories -the memory of joy, the memory of sorrow, the memory of sin; as you remember the goodness and the lovingkindness of the Lord, his faithfulness to fulfill his promises, his tenderness, which your repeated rebellions have not caused to fail, gather up yourself in one earnest reconsecration of flesh and spirit, that you may be in truth living temples now and eventually pillars in the house of God, that shall go no more out forever.

"Ye have seen ... how I bare *you* on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. Now therefore, if ye will *obey my* voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation" (Ex. 19:4-6).

- *W. J. Siekman*

What the Bible Says About Sex

By The Rev. Billy Graham

For guidance in this vital area, the best-known evangelist of our time urges that we look to the most reliable textbook of all time.

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A MAN prominent in public life plans the seduction of a beautiful young woman; repulsed, he rapes her, then casts her off, with tragedy resulting for both.

The wife of a government figure tries in vain to seduce her husband's young associate-then charges him with attempted rape, causing his imprisonment.

The people of a great city, boasting of their sexual "freedom," turn to perversion, with both male and female homosexuals flagrantly practicing their deviations and demanding the right to do so openly.

Are these accounts taken from today's newspaper? Not at all. Though they all have the ring of today, they are taken right from the Bible. A book that has never gone out-of-date, the Bible could properly be called the world's most reliable textbook on sex. No book deals more forthrightly with the subject. As history, it records without distortion the sexual aberrations of its times. As biography, it refuses to gloss over the sex sins of its heroes, but details them and their consequences with straightforward explicitness. As philosophy, it sets forth the changeless standards of God.

In this day of the "Permissive Society," we hear many voices on the important subject of sex -- most of them confusing. I think it is time we listened once again to the Biblical admonitions upon which Judeo-Christian moral standards were built. Sex education is a burning issue in many American communities. I am convinced that sex education without moral guidelines could be disastrous.

One thing the Bible does *not* teach is that sex in itself is sin. Far from being prudish, the Bible celebrates sex and its proper use, presenting it as God-created, God-ordained, Godblessed. It makes plain that God himself implanted the physical magnetism between the sexes for two reasons: for the propagation of the human race, and for the expression of that kind of love between man and wife that makes for true oneness. His command to the first man and woman to be "one flesh" was as important as his command to "be fruitful and multiply."

The Bible makes plain that evil, when related to sex, means not the use of something inherently corrupt but the misuse of something pure and good. It teaches clearly that sex can be a wonderful servant but a terrible master; that it can be a creative force more powerful than any other in the fostering of love, companionship, happiness -- or can be the most destructive of all of life's forces.

The "thou shalt pots" of Scripture are not pious prohibitions aimed at taking all the joy out of life; they are signposts set by God himself to protect our happiness and to help make our life's journey as tragedy-free as possible. Every command that God gives is for our good.

This truth gets too little emphasis in these days when a "sexual revolution" is being proclaimed, when enticements to illicit sex leer from every side. The flood of "sexploitation" grows daily worse -- in novels, magazines, movies, TV, advertising. Meanwhile, the church as a whole remains mute.

In many churches, one can attend services for a full year without once hearing the word "sin" mentioned. Not a few ministers and teachers of religion have fallen prey to this permissive thinking, which holds that there are no absolutes, that the right or wrong of an act depends upon the circumstances of time and place. As for such acts as premarital or extramarital sex, these are said to be justified "if the relationship is meaningful" and "if it hurts nobody else." With even religious leaders talking this way, it is small wonder that youth is bewildered, and that the church's moral authority is eroding almost to the vanishing point.

To counter the disastrous effects of this new permissiveness, which is, as has been said, nothing more than "the old immorality brought up-to-date," we need a bracing dose of Biblical morality. Amid our shifting moral standards, the commandment "Thou shalt not commit adultery" stands as firm today as when God wrote it on tablets of stone. That commandment has never been revoked or watered down. No man every really "breaks" it -- though many have broken themselves *upon* it. And so have nations.

We of the Western world, on a sex binge never before equaled in modern times, should be wise enough to heed history's lessons. For history conclusively teaches that the decay of a nation inevitably follows the decay of its sex standards. Theologian Paul Tillich, in his book *Morality and Beyond*, stated flatly: "Without the immanence of the moral imperative, both culture and religion disintegrate." And sociologist Pitirim Sorokin has warned that "the group that tolerates sexual anarchy is endangering its very survival."

To God's people, living in societies given to the worship of obscene fertility gods and goddesses, ancient Israel's prophets thundered this commandment repeatedly. And to Israel's young, her teachers constantly recounted the stories of Biblical characters caught up in what might be called "sex situations," driving home the lesson that sexual sin can only make the strong weak, the wise foolish, the great ordinary.

Illustrating the nobility of chastity was Joseph, handsome young servant of the Egyptian ruler Potiphar, who resisted the allurements of Potiphar's wanton wife and who went to jail rather than betray his ideals. And Daniel, who in Babylon dared to decry the immoralities of Belshazzar's court and to the ruler's face predict his kingdom's finish; and who lived to become prime minister under three kings and two empires -- one of the greatest statesmen of all time.

Stories of the otherwise great who allowed moral weakness to stain their images included Samson, the strongest of men, whose undoing began with his unbridled lust and ended in the infamy of Delilah's lap and his own tragic suicide. And Solomon, who, given wisdom above all others, nevertheless besmirched his life through lecherous dalliance with innumerable concubines. Most tragic of all, perhaps, was David, Israel's greatest king, whose guilty anguish over his adultery with Bathsheba was expressed in the saddest prayer in all literature: "Have mercy upon me, O God. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions; and my sin is ever before me."

Tristram Coffin says in his book *The Sex Kick*: "Modern lovers have learned to fornicate but not to love. Contraception and antibiotics have put sex within the 'safe' area, lessening the fears of pregnancy and venereal disease." But, as others have said, no one has invented a diaphragm for the conscience. And so thousands have learned, as David did, that nothing can etch such indelible scars of guilt as sexual sin.

The New Testament backs up in every way the sex ideals found in the Old Testament. Jesus endorsed the prophets' strictures on illicit sex -- and went beyond them. He warned: "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery. But I say unto you that whosoever looketh upon a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart."

Writing to Christians in vice-ridden Corinth, the sex capital of the ancient world, where temple prostitutes accommodated both men and women, St. Paul said: "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit? He that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body." There is almost no aspect of human sexuality that the Bible does not deal with. Even the "unnatural" acts of sex are portrayed-and condemned with blunt candor in both the Old and New Testaments. Speaking through Moses, God commanded: "Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind. It is abomination." The Apostle Paul said, "Neither the impure . . . the adulterer . . . the pervert . . . or the foul-mouthed shall have any share in the kingdom of God."

Nowhere does the Bible suggest that the battle between the flesh and the spirit is easy. Neither does it suggest that to be tempted is sin, or that it is abnormal to experience sex hunger. But it does teach, by precept and example, that there are spiritual resources we can use to overcome our illicit urges.

Shining through the Bible is God's readiness to forgive sin, sexual or otherwise, and his eagerness to bring peace of mind and heart to the repentant. But the natural consequences of our sins will have to be suffered. The ugly memories cannot be forgotten; the illegitimate baby cannot be unborn. David was forgiven his adultery, but he had to take his punishment.

Concerning sex sin, Jesus always dealt tenderly. There is no more wonderful illustration of Christ's compassion than his defense of the woman taken in adultery. Ringed by the self righteous about to stone her, he said, "Let him who is without sin among you cast the first stone." As he spoke, his finger wrote some words in the dust. What the words were we are not told. But, seeing them, the mob of accusers quickly dispersed. Whereupon Jesus said to her, "Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more."

For all those caught in a web of sexual confusion and guilt, that is still the Divine word.

Great Truths Are Dearly Bought

Great truths are dearly bought. The common truth,
Such as men give and take from day to day,
Comes in the common walk of easy life,
Blown by the careless wind across our way.

Great truths are dearly won; not found by chance,
Nor wafted on the breath of summer dream;
But grasped in the great struggle of the soul,
Hard buffeting with adverse wind and stream.

Sometimes, 'mid conflict, turmoil, fear and grief,
When the strong hand of God, put forth in might,
Ploughs up the subsoil of the stagnant heart,
It brings some buried truth-seeds to the light.

Truth springs like harvest from the well-ploughed fields,
Rewarding patient toil, and faith, and zeal.
To those thus seeking her, she ever yields
Her richest treasures for their lasting weal.

- *Longfellow*

The Privilege of Prayer

"Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass." - Psalm 37:5.

PRAYER implies that the suppliant is on terms of intimate acquaintance with our loving Heavenly Father, so that he is welcomed into the divine presence and heart. In accordance with this symbolical representation, the prayers of saints ascend before him as sweet incense (Rev. 5:8), supplications, a pouring out which the Heavenly Father is pleased to receive from his humblest child.

Only those who have become God's children by forsaking sin and laying hold upon Christ as their Savior are accorded the privilege of approaching the throne of grace that "they may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16). In the world, therefore, only those who are accepted in the Beloved are privileged to call Jehovah by the endearing name, Father -- "Our Father who art in heaven" (Luke 11:2). The attempt to thus approach God implies (1) a faith in the divine being; (2) a realization of dependence upon him; (3) a faith that reconciliation has been effected with the Father through the Redeemer; (4) trust in the fact that the great Creator no longer condemns the suppliant, but accepts him as his son.

In addition, it implies a recognition of the fact that there are others sons of God who, like himself, have fled from sin and been adopted into God's family - hence the petition: "Our Father." Therefore, whoever prays thus intelligently must have interest in and concern for all the interests of the family of God. Former selfishness must be eliminated when he comes to the Father, and the believer must realize himself as merely one of the favored class of sons thus privileged. In harmony with this thought all the Lord's truly consecrated people have special joy when permitted to approach the throne of grace together, whether but two or three or in larger numbers (Eph. 5:19, 20)

In proportion as the Lord's people grow in grace, in knowledge, and in love, they will grow in appreciation of the great privilege of prayer. Not that prayer will take the place of study of the Divine Word, but that realizing more and more from the Word something of the lengths and breadths and heights and depths of divine mercy and provision, the true children of God have comfort of heart and joy in going to the throne of grace to give thanks unto the Lord for all his mercies, to commune with him respecting their trials and difficulties, and to assure him of their loving confidence in the gracious promises of his Word, in the exceeding riches of his grace, and in his wisdom, love, and power to fulfill toward them and in them all his gracious promises (1 Thess. 5:17, 18).

NOT MY WILL BUT THINE

The more the Lord's people advance in knowledge of him, the more they will appreciate the fact that the divine arrangement is broader and deeper and higher than anything they could suggest, so that they are granted liberty to ask what they will with the assurance that it will be done. The Lord well knows that this class will ask that his will be done; hence the promise is made only to those who abide in Christ and who have his Word of promise abiding richly in them. All such learn, before attaining this station and liberty, that as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are the Lord's ways and provisions higher than our conceptions and in every way to be preferred (Isa. 55:8). Hence, while praying to the best of their ability in harmony with the provisions of the

Word, these would always include the sentiment of our dear Redeemer, "Nevertheless, not my will but China be done" (Luke 22:42).

The heart that is thus continuously in all of life's affairs looking for divine direction, maintains a prayer attitude (Prov. 3:6; Ps. 37:4). However, we must not neglect the privilege of a more formal approach to the throne of grace -- on bended knee, privately and alone. Whoever does not embrace this privilege misses a portion of the great blessing which the Lord has arranged for his benefit and assistance in walking in the narrow way. Our Lord spent seasons in prayer alone, and surely his disciples may well follow his example in this as well as in other matters to advantage. As Jesus sometimes prayed in the presence of his disciples, as is evidenced by their recording of his words, so all of his followers are to realize that they have a special privilege of fellowship in prayer, praying with one another, and in petitions to the throne of grace (1 Cor. 4:14-17).

Once it is recognized that the privilege of prayer is an exclusive one, the more those enjoying the privilege will be inclined to use it in a most reverent manner. In the divine arrangement the merit of Christ not only covers the sins that are past, but provision is made for our weaknesses and blemishes on our way to the Kingdom. God could indeed apply the merit of Christ to these blemishes and excuse us from them, and not require us to mention them at all, but for our advantage he has arranged it otherwise, that we must make application for the covering of these debts, for exoneration in the name of Jesus. In so doing, (1) we learn to keep track of our blemishes and are better assisted in the future in warring a good fight against them; (2) we are continually reminded of our dependence upon the merit of Christ, the precious blood; (3) we are assisted in being merciful, compassionate, and generous toward others who may be our debtors in matters great or small.

Thus the divine arrangement assists us in pointing out the right direction, assisting us in the development of character which the Lord can approve and which would be meet for the inheritors of the Kingdom. Trials, testings, and temptations are necessary for our development as new creatures, and since of divine permission, it would not be appropriate for us to pray that the Lord would spare us from them (Heb. 12:8).

LORD, TEACH US TO PRAY

Sometimes it is said that no one needs instruction in how to pray, but such a thought is not borne out by the New Testament. Evidently there are proper and improper prayers. Mistakes have been made as to who may pray and as to what may be properly prayed for. Our Lord in Luke 11 outlines a proper form of prayer, beginning with ascriptions of praise and thanksgiving, and proceeding to expressions of confidence in God and in the promises of his Kingdom, continuing with acknowledgements of our dependence upon his provisions day by day, and ending with expressions of confidence in his power and goodness to protect us and ultimately deliver us. This is the general form which our Lord commends to us as proper in approaching the throne of grace.

On the other hand, however, it is interesting for us to note that the Lord does not wait until we have become proficient in the use of language and in the form of expressing our petitions to him, but that so gracious and broad are his arrangements that we may come in imperfection and with stammering tongues to tell him of our devotion, our appreciation, our confidence, in any manner that we please (Rom. 8:26).

The Lord wishes us to ask for his blessings in order that we may feel our need, appreciate the privilege of asking, and look for a response, and in all these experiences he would develop us as his sons of the New Creation. We are to seek for God's keeping power in every trouble and his

supervision in all of life's affairs, so that we continually go to him day by day, hourly and momentarily, watching and praying without ceasing, and in everything giving thanks, accepting by faith the promises of his Word (Rom. 8:28). To such the blessings are on the way, sometimes coming in one form and sometimes in another, but generally in ways not anticipated, and larger by far than anything we had asked.

We know from experience that some of the severest trials and disappointments of an earthly kind have worked out for us development of character, elements of the holy spirit, which probably could not have been so well received in any other manner. Hence, when we pray to the Lord for his blessings, we are to wait with patience for them, and to seek them and to find them in the various circumstances of life which his providences will permit. Remembering that the holy spirit is the spirit of meekness, gentleness, patience, long-suffering, brotherly kindness, love, we may well ask ourselves how else could the Lord work out for us these elements of character which we desire, did he not permit to come upon us the trials and difficulties of life necessary to their development (Isa. 26:16).

The practice of prayer has various facets, one of which is communion with God. In our modern day, life is marked by practical efficiency and a splendid enthusiasm for work, and yet there is also a spiritual shallowness. This condition seems to be due in part to prayer being an occasional act and not an habitual attitude (Ps. 63:5-8). Many believers associate prayer with special postures or the verbal requests for specific wants. To Jesus, prayer was communion, fellowship with his Father. He prayed with such power that the disciples requested him to teach them how to pray, because he prayed with such conscious joy that at times his countenance was changed with the glory of it (Luke 9:28, 29).

Thus our Lord underscored the thought that true prayer is communion with God, undisturbed by the problems often confusing us, and bringing to our hearts the serenity, joy, vision, and peace which abides in God. The same thought is expressed by Jude (Jude 21): "Keep yourselves in the love of God."

DANIEL'S NOBLE EXAMPLE

A striking illustration of this phase of the subject is found in the Old Testament. In Daniel 6:10-23 we have recorded the Prophet's manner of dealing with a crisis in his life. His enemies had schemed for the destruction of Daniel, but even after their new law had received the king's sanction, Daniel worshiped as before, kneeling three times a day before the Lord in prayer, thanksgiving, and supplication -- with his window open toward Jerusalem, his expectations bright with hope in the Lord's promises, and especially with the thought that the seventy years of Jerusalem's desolation were about fulfilled.

Daniel was not satisfied to merely close his eyes in prayer after he had retired to rest, as do many people living under the greater light of the Gospel Age and under greater privileges and opportunities and grander promises. He had a great God who was worthy of reverence and worship, and he was great enough as a man to appreciate that it was a privilege to have intercourse and fellowship with his Creator. He was not only not ashamed to bow the knee to the Almighty, but was unwilling to assume a less humble position before God than he and others assumed toward earthly kings.

When the Lord's people become overcharged with the cares of this life, instead of realizing their danger and seeking the help of the Lord to order the affairs of life differently, the suggestion comes that they are too weary to pray, or that another time will be more favorable. It may be they

are so fully engrossed that reverence and acknowledgement to the Lord, from whom cometh every good and perfect gift, is entirely forgotten: or perhaps sin lieth at the door, and they seek not to think of the Lord and therefore avoid the throne of grace -- or perhaps coldness has come in from some other cause and the Lord seems afar off and prayer becomes a mere formality and is by and by abandoned.

The child of God in proper heart harmony with the Father will not only hear the Word but also offer thanksgiving and worship, as surely as he desires natural food and drink for the sustenance of the natural body.

In some instances it may please the Lord to grant a wonderful deliverance, as in the case of Daniel, while in other instances his providential dealings may result otherwise, as in the case of Stephen (Acts 7:54-60). To learn both of these lessons we must come to trust fully in the Lord's provision, be it great or small. One of our Lord's temptations was to perform a hazardous action for which there was no necessity-to leap from the pinnacle of the temple. Frequently the Lord's people are beset by Satan to attempt foolish or impossible or unnecessary things, simply to show their faith. Such should take a lesson from our Lord's reply in his temptation: "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God" (Matt. 4:7). We are not to tempt divine providence, nor to expect miracles to be wrought in our behalf where the divine arrangement has not made them necessary.

YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER KNOWETH

The Christian's prayer is not for the purpose of giving information to God, nor calling attention to matters which he might overlook or forget. On the contrary, he is enjoined to pray because it will benefit himself. God withholds many blessings until we approach him in prayer to ask for them, in order that we may realize our need of his aid and our dependence on him. Our communion with him is not to induce God to give us things which he desires to withhold from us, but merely to secure the things which he desires us to have and has promised to us, and is more willing to give than to withhold.

Thus, in addition to the favors asked and received, the very necessity of prayer itself has brought us into close harmony with the Lord -into the enjoyment of one of our greatest privileges and blessings.

Prayer has another facet, and that is a vital belief in God's care for the individual (Matt. 18:12-14; Matt. 10:29-31). The Bible is preeminently a book of prayer. Our Father knows all the stars by name (Ps. 147:4); he numbers the hairs of our head (Matt. 10:30); all the sparrows are remembered (Luke 12:6); he calleth his own sheep by name (John 10:3); none of his children should perish (Matt. 18:14).

These beautiful suggestions are easy to speak about, wonderful to contemplate, but can we make real to ourselves that he who sustains the Milky Way, who controls Orion and the Pleiades, knows us by name? The Psalmist entertained the same question: "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?" (Ps. 8:3, 4).

As the Lord's children grow in grace and knowledge, they think of our Father as something like a librarian. To the untrained mind, looking at row after row of books on all subjects, they appear as vague masses. But the student and lover of books knows each one by name. Each volume has its special associations, edition, value, contents, author, and purpose, and so he looks upon books as units.

In similar fashion our Father is the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob. David has also expressed it: "I will give thee thanks in the great assembly: I will praise thee among much people" (Ps. 35:18). Once we have satisfied our minds as to our Father's individual care of his children, we come to the vital and searching task of laying hold on the experience of that care. We acknowledge his daily guidance, the consciousness of divine resources, and the sustaining sense of God's presence as we abide in habitual communion with him.

- *A. L. Muir*

Notice of Annual Meeting

As announced in our May-June and July-August issues, the Annual Meeting of the Pastoral Bible Institute, Inc., is scheduled to be held on Saturday, September 19 at 10:00 a.m., in the Central Y.W.C.A., North Carolina and Pacific Avenues, Atlantic City, New Jersey 08401.

While only members of the Institute may vote (in person or by proxy), all those who love our Lord Jesus and his appearing are welcome to attend.

The agenda will include a report by the chairman, reviewing the activities of the Institute for the preceding period. Following his report, the election of directors for the coming year will take place. Opportunity will also be given for the consideration of such other matters as may properly come before the meeting.

The seven brethren now serving as directors are candidates for reelection. Brothers Laurence Iannaccone, Wilbur Twelker, Jr., and Edward Zielinski have also been nominated.

The Question Box

THE BARREN FIG-TREE

Question:

Will you please discuss the Barren Fig-tree incident - Matthew 21:18-22; Mark 11:12-14, 20-25?

In your discussion kindly answer the following questions:

1. Mark 11:13 states that "the time of figs was not yet." Notwithstanding this, its condemnation was evidently because it had no fruit. Please explain.
2. Did this barren fig-tree represent the Jewish nation?
3. If this fig-tree did represent the Jewish nation, how are we to reconcile the words of our Lord in Matthew 21:19 and Mark 11:14 that no fruit should grow on it henceforth *for ever*, with the general teaching of the Scriptures that Israel is yet to be restored?
4. When the disciples noted the withering effect of our Lord's condemnation of the tree, and called his attention to it, he replied: "Have faith in God." While we realize it is always proper to have faith in God, what was there in the circumstances which made his counsel especially appropriate to the disciples then?

Answer:

The first question certainly calls for an answer. On its surface this incident represents our Lord as acting unjustly. On the one hand it was not the time of the year when figs should be expected; while, on the other hand, the tree is condemned for not having any.

To avoid this difficulty which all admit, most scholars conclude that Mark meant something it is quite certain he did not say. They interpret his statement that "it was not the time of figs" to mean that it was not the season for gathering figs, or that the season for gathering figs had not yet passed. This view is advanced by Barnes in his New Testament Notes. A similar view, given by Pearce, is quoted approvingly by Wilson in the Emphatic Diaglott, in an elaborate footnote on Mark 11:13.

This view, as we see it, simply reverses what Mark says. He says the time of figs was not yet; they say, in effect, that it was. And, of course, if it was, the question as to the conduct of our Lord is solved.

Such a viewpoint, however, is certainly not supported in the word-for-word translation of the Emphatic Diaglott, nor even in the translation given in the right hand margin. Moreover, none of the other translations we have consulted differ in meaning from that given in the Authorized Version. The American Revised Version puts it in these words: "It was not the season of figs."

Furthermore, the context proves the accuracy of Mark's statement, for when our Lord came to this fig-tree, it was just before the Passover -- that; is to say; in the spring of the year. According to competent testimony it would not be until late May or early June that the season for ripe figs would begin.

In view of these considerations it seems clear that the solution of the problem must be sought in another direction.

To begin with it will be helpful, if we have not already done so, to acquaint ourselves with the manner in which figs grow. According to an article in Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible, the branches of the fig-tree are straggled and naked in winter, but when the rains are nearly or quite over, small green knobs appear at the ends of the twigs. These are the young fruits -- the green figs. They are thus named in Canticles 2:13. The fruit, then, appears first, before the leaves appear. (This point, by the way, is correctly noted in the Diaglott footnote, previously mentioned.) Next the leaf-bud expands and the new pale green leaves soon more or less overshadow the little figs. When this occurs it is a sign that summer is not far away. To this familiar sign our Lord referred in Matthew 24:32, when he said:

"Now learn a parable of the fig-tree: When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer is nigh."

With these facts before us let us return to the Barren Fig-tree incident. "It was not the season of figs" Mark tells us. It was also *too early for fig-leaves*, and that is the point generally overlooked. At that time of year neither leaves nor fruit were naturally to be looked for on a fig tree. This particular tree, however, unlike all the other fig-trees did have leaves, *and therefore*, should have had fruit. Jesus, hungry, saw in the distance a surprising thing-surprising at that time of year -- a fig-tree in full leaf, as Weymouth renders it. (Mark 11:13.) Since he was hungry, and since, notwithstanding the time of year, this fig-tree was so advanced, he went to see, to quote once more from Weymouth, "whether perhaps he could find some figs on it. When however he came to it, he found *nothing but leaves*."

It was not the season for figs, but this tree, by putting forth leaves, claimed, so to speak, to be something more than other fig-trees; claimed, indeed, (since we have seen that in the fig-tree the fruit appears before the leaves) to have fruit on it. This remarkable fig-tree, in the attitude of false pride, may we say, vaunted itself, claimed to be in advance of other fig-trees, and challenged the passer-by that he should come and refresh himself with its fruit. Yet, when the Lord accepted the challenge, and drew near, it proved to be but as the others, without fruit. It was, in fact, in a far worse state than the others; for they doubtless had young fruits which needed only the heat of the summer to ripen them, whereas this one had *nothing but leaves*.

The fault of this tree, then, was not that in the spring of the year it had no ripe fruit, but that, having none, not even green figs, it had clothed itself abundantly with leaves, with the foliage which, according to the natural order of the tree's development, gave a pledge and a promise that fruit would be found *on* it, if sought. In the circumstances our Lord's conduct is vindicated; the tree was justly condemned.

2. We come now to the second question: "Did this barren fig-tree represent the Jewish nation? To our understanding it did, and this is the view held by most scholars.

In support of this view we offer three considerations:

(1) The fig-tree is used in the Old Testament as representing Israel. - Joel 1:7.

(2) The parable of the fig-tree given by Jesus in Luke 13:6-9 undoubtedly was intended to apply to Israel.

(3) It accurately symbolized Israel's condition. In itself the fig-tree was neither good nor bad, morally. When, therefore, Christ condemned it for its deception, he did not attribute moral responsibilities to it, but he did attribute to it a fitness for representing moral qualities. And the sin of Israel was exactly that which the tree symbolized. The true fruit of that people, prior to our Lord's first advent, would have been to admit its absolute inability to produce fruit apart from their coming Messiah, to have presented itself before God bare and naked and empty altogether. But this was exactly what Israel refused to do. Other nations might have nothing' to boast of, but for themselves they claimed much. And yet, on close inspection, the substance of righteousness was as much lacking in their case as in that of the Gentiles, as Paul so abundantly demonstrates in the second chapter of Romans. Since the characteristics of the barren fig-tree so faithfully represented those of Israel, we think we are justified in believing they were intended to do so.

3. Our third question is answered by reference to better translations. While the fig-tree itself was withered "for ever," this was not to be in the case of Israel. The word translated "for ever" really means "to the end of the age," and is so rendered in the Diaglott and other translations. As St. Paul explains, it is only until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in, that blindness in part is happened to Israel-thereafter there shall come out of Zion the Deliverer who shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob, and thus all Israel shall be saved. (Isa. 59:20; Rom. 11:2,5, 26.) A day will come, indeed, when Israel which now says, "I am a dry tree" (Isa. 56:3), shall consent to that word of its true Lord, which of old it denied: "From Me is thy fruit found." (Hos. 14:8.) It shall then be arrayed with the richest foliage and fruit of all the trees of the field. That time is near, very near, we think. May we once again quote our Lord's words: "Now learn a parable" (it is more accurately trans. lated "the" parable) ; "Now learn *the* parable of the fig-tree. When his branch is yet tender, and putteth forth leaves, ye know that summer *is* nigh; so likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors." (Matt. 24:32, 33.) If this be true for Israel, what message has it for the Church?

4. We come now to the fourth and last question. The explanation of our Lord's words, "Have faith in God" is to be found in the astonishment which the disciples manifested at the rapidity with which the Lord's sentence was executed. From the account in Matthew it appears that the withering began almost as soon as the Lord spoke. It was, however, on the following morning, as we learn from Mark, that the disciples specially noticed its condition. "Master, behold, the fig-tree which thou cursedst *is* withered away." It was as though they had said one to another: "Did you notice the instant effect yesterday, just when our Lord spoke? The leaves seemed to droop in a moment. But who would have thought that the withering would have been so complete in a single day? Verily, he speaks and it is done. How great, how thorough, how marvelous is his power!"

He will not let the occasion go without its further lesson. What he had done, they might do, and more. "Have faith in God." Faith in God would place them in relation with the same power which he wielded, so that they might do mightier things even than this at which they marveled so much. Listen to his words in the next verse:

"Verily I say unto you: Whosoever shall say to this mountain, Be thou taken up and cast into the sea, and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe ,that what he saith cometh to pass; he shall have it."

Faith has already removed greater mountains than the Mount of Olives on which our Lord and his disciples were then standing; and many more shall it yet lift aloft and fling far out of sight *in* ;the depths of the sea. What mountains of obstacles and obstructions! what mountains of prejudices! what mountains of accumulated evil habits! what "hills of *difficulty*," apparently insurmountable-

inner, outer, social, political, spiritual, has faith tossed, and is faith still tossing, away! It is the Almighty God in whom our faith is to rest. If the removal of Olivet itself is needed, or of any other mountain, material or spiritual, he *is* still ready and able to put his finger on its summit, when it will leap from its very socket.

Of course this marvelous promise is conditional. But it is not too large for God to perform. It has always been fulfilled and always will be, if the conditions are met. If our wills are truly, immersed into *the* will of God, so that his will becomes truly our will, we may ask what we will, and it shall be done unto us. (John 15:7.) And greater works than Jesus did (including the miracle of withering the fig-tree) shall we do. - John 14:12.

This lesson was for the disciples then; it has been *for* the whole Church since; it belongs to us today. "Have faith in God."

- P. L. Read

"Even at the Doors"

What will be the sign of thy presence, and of the consummation of the age?" - Matthew 24:3 (Diaglott).

"When ye shall see all these things, know that he is near." - Matthew 24:33 (margin).

IN recent issues of this journal, writing under this caption, we have expressed the following convictions:

1. The object of Messiah's Second Advent is a glorious one - not the destruction or enslavement of our race, but the salvation of both the Church and the remainder of mankind (John 14:2, 3; 1 Chron. 16:31-34).
2. Since the Millennial Age is to be a time of restoration, and since the retention of Jesus in heaven is to be only until that time, it follows that his Second Advent must take place before, not after, the Millennium (Acts 3:21; Rev. 20:4).
3. Antichrist must first come -- and has; the predictions concerning him having been abundantly fulfilled in the Papal system (Dan. 7:26; 2 Thess. 2:1-12).
4. Christ's Second Advent is to synchronize with the end of the Age; any sign, therefore, which denotes the end of the Age must also constitute evidence of his presence (Matt. 24:3; Mark 13:4; Luke 21:7).
5. Our Lord is no longer a man but a great spirit being, partaker, indeed, of the divine nature; the express image of the Father's person, invisible to human eyes (Phil. 2:9; Heb. 1:3).

If our Lord were a human being, it could be said of the Church: "Since we are to be like our Lord, and since he is a human being, it doth even now appear what we shall be." St. John, however, in 1 John 3:2 writes otherwise. There, in harmony with the thought of his brother Apostles, he tells us: "It doth not yet appear what we shall be."

6. The word *parousia* is correctly translated "presence"; it does not have the thought of "being on the way" nor does it refer to a "moment" of arrival. Its meaning is established in Philippians 2:12 where the period of the Apostle's absence is contrasted with the period of his presence.

Before leaving our consideration of the word *parousia*, there are two other points worthy of special attention. One of these is the importance of distinguishing the respective shades of meaning which New Testament words have, when referring to one idea common to them all. For example, the words *parousia*, *epiphaneia* and *apokalupsis*, while frequently employed in reference to the one subject (the Second Advent of Christ) are not synonymous terms, but have individual shades of meaning. An illustration of this point was given in our last issue, taken from the writings of J. A. Seiss, in reference to 2 Thessalonians 2:8, in which verse both *epiphaneia* and *parousia* are used together "in reference to the final overthrow or annihilation of the great anti-Christian confederation, which is said to be by the *epiphaneia* of his *parousia*; that is, by the appearing of his presence; which involves the implication that the presence ... is not manifested or discernible until then, thus showing that the Advent involves different phases, stages and times."

Again, on this same point, we referred in our last issue to St. Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians by George Milligan. This writer, who with James Hope Moulton produced for the world of Greek scholarship the monumental lexicon, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament*, is reputed to have been one of the world's greatest Greek scholars. In his *Thessalonians* (a volume of nearly 200 pages, he devotes a whole chapter to the three words, *parousia*, *epiphaneia*, and *apokalupsis*, "in order to determine as exactly as possible the different shades of meaning between them." At the close of the chapter he summarizes his conclusions as follows:

"If we have been correct in the foregoing distinctions between the three words, it will be seen that, while all may be used to describe the return of the now exalted and glorified Lord, they do so from three distinct points of view."

The other point (this one derived from *Vine's Expository Dictionary*) is, that while the word *parousia* always has the significance of "presence," its context in some passages emphasizes the beginning of the period (the course of the period, and its conclusion, being implied). In other passages, the context emphasizes the course of the period; while in yet other passages, the context emphasizes its conclusion.

To assist the reader in tracing these points of emphasis, the twenty-four places in which *parousia* occurs in the New Testament, are arranged in tabular form on page 79 of this issue.

The suggestion has been made that differences of viewpoint, as to the meaning of *parousia*, might be reconciled, if care be taken to place the emphasis where the inspired writers intended.

7. At our Lord's First Advent many failed to learn from the signs which attested him that Messiah was in their midst. Even the disciples had been slow to recognize him and had needed a revelation from the Father to enable them to do so (Matt. 16:16, 17). The possibility that at his Second Advent they might experience a similar difficulty was probably back of their question: "What will be the sign of thy presence?" If the indications of his presence were to be so plain that none could fail to recognize him, there would seem to be no point to their question; no sign or signs would be necessary. On the other hand, if there was a possibility of his being present unrecognized, as had proved to be the case at his first advent, then a sign which would reveal his presence to them would be most desirable. "What, Lord, will that sign be?"

8. Our Lord's reply is seen to be divided into two main sections: (a) a description of the long interval which must elapse before the end of the Age and the period of his presence would be reached, and (b) a description of the end of the Age and period of his presence.

9. The long interval between the First and Second Advents known as the Gospel Age, was to be a time of tribulation. In the world it would be marked by wars, famines, pestilence, and earthquakes. The world would hate his true disciples, and in many cases they would undergo martyrdom. In the Church a great falling away would take place. False teachers would arise, deceiving many; and because iniquity (opposition to God's laws of truth, righteousness, justice, and love) would everywhere prevail, the love of many (*the many, the great majority*) of Christ's professed followers would wax cold. Notwithstanding all this God's good news would be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations (Matt. 24:3-14).

After thus describing the conditions which would obtain in both Church and world throughout the Gospel Age, and after warning them against false Christs, our Lord, in verse 27 (Matt. 24) comes to the heart of their question as to how they shall learn of his presence, and declares: "As the

bright shining cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto; the west, so shall the presence of the Son of Man be."

In verses 37-39 he adds a further word: "As in the days of Noah, so shall also the presence of the Son of Man be." The point of comparison, as the context clearly shows, is not the arrival of Noah and the arrival of our Lord. It is not even the coming of the flood and the coming of our Lord. The comparison is between the days of Noah before the flood and the days of the presence of our Lord before the time of trouble with which this Gospel Age ends (Luke 17:26).

Moreover, the comparison is not between the respective degree of wickedness of the people living in the days of Noah and that of those living in the days of the second presence of our Lord. The point of comparison is the ignorance of the people. In both periods the people were in ignorance of the coming storms. In the case of Noah, except for his immediate family, no one heeded Noah's warnings; in the days of our Lord's second presence, similarly, the existing order of society will not know.

WATCH, THEREFORE

The first thing, then, to be remembered, from our Lord's own words, is that there will be no sign at all for the worldly. With this agrees the word of the Apostle Paul: "The day of the Lord cometh as a thief" (1 Thess. 5:1-3).

Not only will the people of the world be in ignorance of the presence of the Son of Man, our Lord warns, but unless they are alert, his disciples will be in danger of being in darkness as to his return. Is it asked: "Where does he thus warn?" We answer: In verse 42 and those which follow. There he brings this danger to their attention: "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. . . . if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh."

In other words, in reply to their question our Lord cautions them to remain alert, to be on the watch, and the implication is that when he did arrive, the watchers would be made aware of it; all others would be taken unawares.

With this word of our Lord the counsel of the Apostle Paul is found once more in harmony. In 1 Thessalonians 5:4, 5 he says: "But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake *you as* a thief." Or to quote from another inspired writer, Daniel the Beloved: "None of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand" (Dan. 12:10).

In the foregoing paragraphs, and in the recent issues referred to in our opening paragraph earnest effort has been made to present our convictions in a Christian spirit, with due consideration of others who may view matters differently. We have made it clear, we trust, that so far as we are concerned, differences in viewpoint on the various phases and features of our Lord's Second Advent have not been, nor, please God, will they be, permitted to mar the sweet fellowship in Christ which should always obtain between the members of the one Body -- the Church.

Furthermore, we hope it has been made clear that we stand ready at all times to reconsider our views on this, as on all other matters of faith, and we shall most certainly abandon our present views should others come to our attention which, on examination, appear to us to be better supported by the Scriptures and by sound judgment. Grateful as we are for the light now shining, we nevertheless recognize with the Apostle that we see but dimly, as through an opaque glass,

compared with the vision which will be ours ere long (1 Cor. 13:12); that if we imagine we already possess any true knowledge on this as on any other subject, we have as yet attained to no knowledge of the kind to which we ought to have attained (1 Cor. 8:2, Weymouth and Moffatt); and that at present, at the very most, we are but learning bit by bit, whereas then-in only a very little while ("how short! how short!" - Hebrews 10:37, *Rotherham*), we shall understand as all along we have been understood by him (1 Cor. 13:12, *Moffatt*).

In our own studies we have found it helpful to group the "signs and groanings promised to precede a second birth," under five main captions, which may first be stated and then discussed, as follows:

1. Gentile Times
2. Ecclesiastical Heavens
3. Israel
4. General Social Conditions
5. Chronology

1. GENTILE TIMES

No one that is at all acquainted with the pages of history, and with the Book of Daniel, will question the statement that the broad outline of Gentile history, twice forecast by Daniel twenty-five hundred years ago (ch. 2 and 7), has had a remarkable fulfillment in the succession, order, and events of the four great empires, Babylon, MedoPersia, Greece, and Rome. Nor will such question the statement that the last of these four has been the greatest of them, as Daniel foretold.

Rome, however, at the time Daniel wrote, was, according to the historian, "a mere cluster of huts." Its existence was unnoticed and unknown beyond the limited regions of its neighbors in Italy. Yet Daniel, writing under the inspiration of God, of the One who calls things which be not as though they were (Rom. 4:17), sees this cluster of huts made over into a mighty empire, the mightiest of them all -- and tells us what he sees.

Now if this were the only "sign" we had, if no other line of evidence were available, if this grand outline of fulfilled prophecy were all -- if Scripture contained nothing else to guide us but this one broad outline of Gentile Times, would we not even then have real grounds for strong convictions that we are living in the very end of the Age?

Plainly -- so plainly that he who runs may read (Hab. 2:2) -- it was forecast in these Daniel prophecies that during the long centuries intervening, until he should come whose right it is (Ezek. 21:27), four great empires would hold sway in the affairs of men, four empires governed by Gentile rulers, and that the fourth should, in its final stage, give place to the Kingdom of God. Do we not find ourselves living at the close of the fourth world empire? Surely so, and not only at its close, but at the close of its last form, the Papacy, unless we greatly err. What then, are we to look for next? What indeed, but the Kingdom for which so long we have prayed.

However, let us not forget, what we have more than once noted in these pages, that the great time prophecies of the Bible are not to be measured from any one particular year to another, but from one era to another. This is so, because the rise and fall of nations must, in the very nature of the case, cover more or less extended eras. The fall of Israel and Judah covered a period of 160 years, culminating in the overthrow of their last king, Zedekiah. It should not surprise us then, if we find their restoration extending over a number of years, or decades, or even longer periods. What we

should be on the lookout for is not a thunderbolt from the skies, but *a noticeable change* in the *trend* of events. We should be watching and intelligently reading the signs of the times, and noting how they are fitting in with the prophetic forecasts.

(Continued in next issue)

- P. L. Read

Parousia

Arranged From Vine's Expository Dictionary, Vol. I, page 209

Second Advent Period

	Beginning	Course	Conclusion	Other
Applications				
Matthew				
1 Matt. 24:3		X		
2 Matt. 24:27			X	
3 Matt. 24:37		X		
4 Matt. 24:39		X		
5 1 Corinthians 15:23	X			
6 1 Corinthians 16:17				X
7 2 Corinthians 7:6				X
8 2 Corinthians 7:7				X
9 2 Corinthians 10:10				X
10 Philippians 1:26				X
11 Philippians 2:12				X
12 1 Thessalonians 2:19		X		
13 1 Thessalonians 3:13		X		
14 1 Thessalonians 4:15	X			
15 1 Thessalonians 5:23	X			
16 2 Thessalonians 2:1	X			
17 2 Thessalonians 2:8			X	
18 2 Thessalonians 2:9				X
19 James 5:7	X			
20 James 5:8	X			
21 2 Peter 1:16				X
22 2 Peter 3:4	X			
23 2 Peter 3:12				X
24 1 John 2:28	—	X	—	—
	7	6	2	9

Entered Into Rest

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