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Has the Present Evil World Ended?

On Doctrine

"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and the works that are upon it will be burned up."

- 2 Peter 3:10, RSV

With these abrupt words St. Peter described the temporary nature of the second great dispensation of man's history. He details how "this present evil world" (as it has come to be called) was pre-defined by God with limits and how a divine decree had gone forth that it was to end in disaster. Peter describes how "this world" is to be succeeded by a different world or "dispensation." The subject of the end of this world has been a favorite topic for Bible students, and men have tried their hardest (both with the aid of the holy Spirit and by their own strength of mind) to obtain a clearer viewpoint of what shall yet occur in the earth. Partly because of the abundant writings of the prophets and partly because of the difficulties in which man finds himself there are serious students of the holy Writ who feel assured that events in our day are direct fulfillments of the inspired writings of so many centuries past.

In the past century many expositions have been presented on the "world to come" in which righteousness will prevail (2 Pet. 3:13). Some of these have even been printed on the pages of this journal. As earnest Christians attempt to harmonize the writings of the prophets there is an inevitable desire to "see" some fulfillments in one's own days. As we cast a glance around today's society, with its inventions, health advancements, and increasing lifespan it is easy to understand why questions arise in the minds of students of Scripture. One such question is "Has the present evil world ended?" Some extend their question somewhat, including the writings of the prophets. Such ask, "Have not all of the things written by the prophets been fulfilled? And are we not sitting on the precipitous edge of a change of ages, the time of trouble and the passing away of the old order of things? Is the world of death ended? Are we entered into a new world order?"

Because the reactions to these questions may vary greatly depending upon one's own mental image of God's plan, we propose to take a rather cold and calculated look at this question. It is appropriate to remind ourselves, at the outset of this consideration, that we require a great deal of the spirit of God -- the holy Spirit -- in order to accept the divine viewpoint when it disagrees with our predetermined biases. The Lord does not approve the spirit of the world which is personified in f presumption and assumption. Man tries to look beyond what is written. But the Word of God urges us to seek conclusions which are based upon the clear statements (well supported, positive statements) found in the inspired Word.

World of Sin and Death

We believe that we are still living in the old world, the Second Dispensation of human history. This, we will attempt to demonstrate, is the only view which can be harmonized with the facts of life as we know them.

The divine plan of the ages encompasses three great periods of time: there was the first world -- "*the world that was*" (2 Pet. 3:6); this "*present evil world*" which now occupies the scene (2 Pet. 3:10); a third world, as we have discussed at length in other articles, will supercede that in which we now live.

The word "world" (Gr.: *kosmos*) is used to describe a period of time or a general order of conditions existing among men. All agree with St. Peter's testimony about the earth's history. The first world ended with a flood. It was an era in which evil predominated and after a period of 1656 years it was brought to an end. Upon the end of this period there began another, called by the same Apostle, "*the heavens and earth which are now*" (2 Pet. 3:7). The second era has also been a period in which evil has predominated. It, too, is to end and it will endure from the end of the flood until the establishment of God's kingdom in connection with Christ's Second Advent. The Scriptures agree with the human evaluation that this has been an evil world and they indicate that there will be no change on the part of men before it is cut short. The present evil world is, then, the continuation of the reign of sin and death. Satan is the God of this world (2 Cor. 4:4). He is opposed to the Divine government and uses all the evil of which he is possessed in his struggle to resist. His "world" (or the social order over which he presides) is also sinful. Note, with us, several directly stated scriptural truths:

1. The second epoch or dispensation is presided over by Satan, the Adversary of God and man (John 14:30; 2 Cor. 4:4).
2. During the second dispensation under Satan (who usurped control of the world) man is permitted to govern himself and rule over the earth as best he can (Dan. 2:31-43; Rom. 13:1; Dan. 5:17).
3. During the second dispensation the arrangement of things on earth (human government, orders of society, etc.) under Satan's influence is described as being unrighteous, evil, out of harmony with God, and therefore ordained to come to ruin (Dan. 2:44; Mal. 3:15; Mal. 4:1; 2 Pet. 3:12).
4. The second dispensation represents a world of pain, sickness, sorrow, weeping, sin, and death (Psa. 30:5; Rom. 8:19,22; Job 14:1-12).

Let us look at each of these points in detail.

Is Satan still presiding over the affairs of men? What do the facts of daily life show? The giant governments and systems of superstition still control the minds of billions. Many men and women are idolaters and heathen. Even in the lands which are supposedly "Christian" men are generally ignorant of God and of his plan of salvation. Misbelief and superstition masquerade in the guise of truth. The situation is so prevalent that the words of Isaiah are starkly apt: "*...darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples*" (Isa. 60:2, RSV). The state of world affairs should be ample evidence that we are living in the old dispensation.

Is it true that man is still permitted to experiment with his own schemes to rule his fellows and the earth? There can be no hesitancy about our positive answer! The governments of the earth (or

what the Scriptures call the "*kingdoms of this world*") are still intact. Many of them are in well organized form, they are exercising general control over the people. Yes, we agree, the wars and revolutions of the past century have made dramatic changes in the form and number of the earth's ruling forces. But they are still organized governments and represent human attempts to rule the earth after a similar manner to that which has prevailed during the 4400 years since the flood. Yes, we are still living in the second dispensation.

Have the governments of this earth been transformed into the government of God? No one would dare to prove that the governments of this world -- in which avarice, greed, pride, deceit, and selfishness predominate -- have become God-like and righteous. Around the world there are revolutions and armed conflicts. The news services tell a never ending tale of man's inhumanity to men. And although this decay speaks to the proximity of the kingdom of heaven it *has not come yet*.

Are we still living in a world of pain, sickness, sorrow, weeping, sin, and death? The answer is so obvious that we merely quote these words:

*Now the world is full of suffering,
Sounds of woe fall on my ears,
Sights of wretchedness and sorrow
Fill my eyes with pitying tears.*

Yes, we are in much the same world as that on which faithful Abraham and other ancients traveled as pilgrims and strangers while they trusted in the promises of God and looked forward to a "*better country*" [the new order of things on earth] (Heb. 11:16), a city whose builder and maker is God. Ours is the same world in which sorrow and death reigned when Jesus lived, suffered, and died nearly twenty centuries ago. This is the same evil dispensation in which faithful followers of Jesus have borne their crosses. The crimes which were committed in the days of Pharaoh, Caesar, throughout the bloody history of the Papacy, and in the brief dark days of Hitler are the same crimes which are being committed today. The world of sin and death abides with us.

World of Righteousness and Life

Turn your mind away from those hideous realities to the "Third World" which is promised in Scripture.

1. The Scriptures teach that the third world is to be presided over by the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace (Zech. 14:9; 1 Cor. 15:25,26; Isa. 9:6).
2. During the third dispensation, under Christ and his bride, the human race will not be allowed self-rule. The kingdom of God will rule to the farthest parts of the earth (Psa. 72:7; Isa. 9:7; 2:2; Rev. 19:5).
3. During the third epoch society under Christ's rule is depicted as being just and righteous: in full harmony with God. It is, therefore, ordained to continue without end (Isa. 28:17; 11:1-5; Psa. 98:9; 2 Pet. 3:13).
4. The third world will be one of life, joy, and peace. There will be an end to pain, sickness, sorrow, weeping, sin, and death (Rev. 21:1-4; 22:17; Acts 3:21; 1 Cor. 15:55).

We will not attempt to elaborate beyond these scriptural citations as to the conditions to prevail in the third world -- that would be to reason beyond what is written (1 Cor. 4:6). These four scriptural conditions certainly have not yet been fulfilled and it would be folly to claim that Christ is now reigning on earth.

We do not deny that we are living in a time which is very close to the world to come. We are convinced that the voices of prophecy are being fulfilled in our days. Furthermore, the testimony of Scripture assures us that this social order is to end amid confusion and disorder in human affairs and it will take this kind of disorientation for men to recognize the rebuke by God of their pride and selfishness. The decay of man's government, yea, of all of their institutions, will prepare their minds for the long promised kingdom of heaven.

How far are we from the inauguration of a new world? *"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only"* (Matt. 24:36, RSV). While we wait for his time let us endeavor to preserve the spirit of discernment with sober patience. Let us look at the facts around us with moderation, recognizing that only the establishment of that kingdom to come (for which our Lord taught us to pray) can bring about the world to come.

Our Father which art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name,
Thy Kingdom Come,
Thy will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven... (Matt. 6:9-10).

Kept by the Power of God

"...his abundant mercy hath begotten us again. . .to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." - 1 Peter 1:3-5

How wonderfully sweet and assuring are the Master's repeated statements of his faithfulness toward those who are his own! And how deep is the interest which he reveals toward them when he says: *"And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up at the last day"* (John 6:39).

In these words we see not only the greatness of his personal love towards us, but we also see his deep sense of responsibility to God; he was entrusted with the safekeeping of all those who trusted in him. In the figure of a shepherd, he assumes his charge over us, counting every sheep precious to the Father, and through all the circumstances surrounding us -- individually -- he can never be unfaithful to that trust. What wondrous assurance this is to all who are being kept under this shadowing care.

Consider the love that Jesus bears for his Father, Remember the lengths to which Jesus went to demonstrate the reality of that love. It is this same passion which is now pledged to his followers; a love that will keep them, and us as we follow him. The assurance of his care is guaranteed by his own words: *"He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me; and he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him"* (John 14:21, RSV) *"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love"* (John 15:9, RSV).

These are powerful influences at work in the Lord's heart on our behalf. They offer us strong consolation when our days are clouded and stormy (Heb. 6:18). They offer us assurance when our life "flows on in endless song" that he will never leave nor forsake us (Heb. 13:5). On one hand we find his delight in supreme obedience to the Father's will, and on the other hand his love which excels all things for those whom the Father has given to him! What more can he say than he has said to us who are kept by the power of God!

But to enjoy this keeping power of which Peter is here writing, there are, as always, certain prerequisites to be recognized and appreciated. This keeping is a privilege of a specific group of people. Those who are *"sanctified by the Spirit for obedience to Jesus Christ and for sprinkling with his blood"* (1 Pet. 1:2, RSV). The conditions of this care are fixed in the mind of God: the only entrance into it is through sanctification, setting apart unto God, separation.

When this door has been opened and one enters the living hope there comes a further assurance. Those who are begotten by the power of God through faith in order to carry forward God's purposes in their lives come to appreciate the inheritance which has been set aside for them, which will not fade away. The love of Jesus, working in us, focuses our lives upon the Father. The love extended towards us finds a response and our affections grow toward them. The more we appreciate their power to keep us the more our ability to appropriate that keeping power to ourselves grows. Then comes the blessing, the result! We learn to long for his keeping, to be separated from the world, to dwell only in the secret place of the Most High.

In the Furnace God May Prove Thee

Peter has reminded us of God's calling. But he quickly warns us that our faith will be severely tried. Many temptations are to be expected. There will be seasons of heaviness in our lives -- due specifically because of the trials we bear for him. Peter is also faithful to warn us that these trials will be unusually severe at times. These specially hard trials are necessary, but if we had not been acquainted with his purposes, we might think them strange and inconsistent with his pledge of our safekeeping.

It would be difficult, in our day, to escape the witnesses of God's faithfulness. To do so we would have to close our eyes to many things. We would have to forget the record of history. We would have to forget the goodness and mercy which has followed us all the days of our lives. Do we not have the distinct blessing of being able to look back over the annals of history at the operations of God in the hearts of men? Contrast our advantages with those of Abraham. What records of God's faithfulness did Abraham have to strengthen him? How limited were the examples upon which Daniel could draw when he and his faithful friends were called upon to believe that the fiery furnace and death in the den of lions were wholly compatible with a belief in God's love and care? Ah, with so great a cloud of witnesses accompanying us, can we do otherwise than pray with fervor that we may not fail when our tests of faith come? How absurd it would be if we should prove to be weaker in faith than those of old. They triumphed in a day of less revelation. And the rewards to those of ancient times are recorded to be less than the rewards to be received by even the least in the kingdom of heaven.

Let us turn back our minds to the lives of some of those notable characters of the past. Their lives furnish us unquestionable proofs that God will keep his own, under all circumstances. Let us receive instructions in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16) from them. We will look, specially, at the relationship between the trials of today and the opportunities of yesterday. These relationships, the things which seem so inexplicable, are crucial to us -- even though we may not consider them at the time the experiences come upon us. Why? It is our reactions to the divinely appointed opportunities of today that will determine our ability to react properly to the tests of tomorrow. Even if those tests may not come for months or years. The revolving wheel of human experience may turn slowly at times, but as it turns it registers with precision the thoughts and the intents of the heart and the acts of our lives just as a balanced wheel finds a true course and an unbalanced wheel wobbles as it turns. Such are the laws of life as laid down by God: the laws of cause and effect.

Preparing For Tests

Dare to be a Daniel,
Dare to stand alone.

Those words have been easily sung for generations. But how did it come to pass that Daniel stood alone? And not only Daniel, but his three friends also. They were faithful under crucial tests and they are good examples for our imitation. The four men showed great fortitude and faithfulness. But these characteristics were, doubtless, the result of their earlier courses of action.

The captivity of Israel began. Nebuchadnezzar took these four young captives and placed them under a special course of instruction. They were being fitted for positions of responsibility in his kingdom. And we find that they were no sooner situated in their new surroundings than they showed their true light and character.

The king assigned them a daily portion of the rich food which the king ate, and of the wine which he drank. They were to be educated for three years, and at the end of that time they were to stand before the king.... But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's rich food, or with the wine which he drank; therefore he asked the chief of the eunuchs to allow him not to defile himself (Dan. 1:5,8).

Only Daniel is mentioned in this citation, but the narrative shows that his companions shared Daniel's determination to remain undefiled. Theirs is an interesting course for captives. They refused to allow their servitude to swerve their devotion to God's law. Hence, they refused to consider that the circumstances imposed upon them were ample justification for indulging in all that the king might place before them. Instead, they decided that those very conditions made it necessary for them to separate themselves from defilement.

What do we know of the customs of those days? Did not the king have the authority to execute any who stood against his will? The course of Daniel and his companions, then, was no small matter -- it could easily have become a matter of life and death -- their own. But defilement was the real issue. They had placed the approval of God above life itself. We are reminded of the gratifying results: *"As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all letters and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams"* (Dan. 1:17, RSV). This is always the way God deals with those who honor him.

"Therefore come out from them, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch nothing unclean; then I will welcome you, and I will be a father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty" (2 Cor. 6:17,18, RSV).

"Who is the man that fears the Lord? Him will he instruct in the way that he should choose" (Psa. 25:12, RSV).

In the time of trouble, the time of final testing, God will hide such in his tent:

"For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent, he will set me high upon a rock" (Psa. 27:5, RSV).

"...for 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" (2 Tim. 1:12). As it was with Daniel, so it is with ourselves. The character which is formed in our early days has everything to do with determining the course which we take when, subsequently, we are brought face to face with the issues of life and death.

He Is Able To Keep You From Falling Peter reminds us that we are kept by the power of God. It is important to remember this. How many have boastfully put on their Christian armor in calmer days? How many times has over confidence resulted in painful instability and failure? Only those who are strong in the Lord can possibly escape the temptations of the Adversary. Our natural powers of mind may be very strong. We might be efficient exponents of Bible truths, whether by tongue or pen. Yet, we are unfit for God's service until the power of the holy Spirit sanctifies our lives -- setting us apart from the defilements of the world -- and fortifies us against the snares set before us. The measure of our spiritual power -- God's power in our lives -- will be in exact proportion to our cleansing from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit. This cleansing must include a realistic estimate of how unprofitable our own works are -- as long as we labor aside from Christ.

It is not until the Divine power can work in a fully consecrated, spirit guided life that there is any power to endure trial or to do any spiritual work. *"Not that we are made sufficient of ourselves to think [or do] anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God"* (2 Cor. 3:5). Any reliance upon our own wisdom is an ignoring of the fundamental truths. So also are the reliances upon our talents, our intellect, our powers of argument or appeal. And it may take a shattering fall to awaken some of us to this realization.

But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honor and some to dishonor. If a man therefore purge himself from these [cf. vss 16, 17], he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared for every good work (2 Tim. 2:20,21).

Desires, lusts, which are tolerated in our lives will constitute an effective hindrance to our spiritual vision. We will also be hindered from the kind of spiritual service which will bring forth fruit unto eternal life. There is a law in Israel which speaks to this condition: *"... bring an offering in a clean vessel into the house of the Lord"* (Isa. 66:20). Should the vessel prove unclean the offering must be rejected by the Lord as one *"wherein is no pleasure"* (Jer. 48:38). We see that long before the Apostle elaborated upon this idea the principle had been anticipated by the four young captives in Babylon. They decided to keep themselves pure, undefiled, and the story written about them is for our admonition upon whom the end of this age has come. Shall we not listen to it?

The Wise Understand And Shine

Our basic purpose remains: to show that opportunities provided now, by God, are to develop in us characters which will be prepared for the experiences of tomorrow. Daniel and his friends were placed in circumstances where it would have been easy to compromise. How easy it would have been to gravitate to the level of their environment. But they did not. How many of their fellow captives thought them foolish, or extreme? Would they not, likely, have suffered scoffing and ridicule from their Jewish brethren who had followed a course of compromise. These, their brethren, were being judged by the actions of Daniel. How often we have seen that those who are judged by the acts of the righteous seek to vindicate their actions through ridiculing those who seek only to follow the instructions of God. Daniel's choices accomplished their work in him. By refusing the king's meat he would create a crisis in his life and in the lives of his fellows. But it was a crisis from which the only escape lay in preserving his intimate fellowship with God. Enjoying that fellowship he retained the assurance of Divine love and keeping power. Thus blessed, his clearness of vision constituted him a savior of others.

"The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will show them his covenant" (Psa. 25:14). These words are beautifully proven in the story under consideration. Later, the king was troubled by a strange dream. It was a dream the details of which he had forgotten, but which continued to haunt his memory, disturbing his peace. As was his custom, he called for his advisors so that they could interpret the dream. But they could not fulfill his request, for none of them could tell him both what he had dreamed and also what the dream meant. Displeased, the king condemned them all to death. After their condemnation someone suggested to the king that there was another interpreter of dreams. This man had been forgotten about in the furor of the king and soon Daniel was brought before Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel's first words to the king were to admit that any wisdom he had was derived from God but that he would shew the king the interpretation of the dream.

Daniel, having bought himself some time with the king, returned home to his companions. Together, they looked to the only source of knowledge. He asked them to "... *desire the mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret; that Daniel and his fellows should not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon*" (Dan. 2:18). Daniel had learned to "*Cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils*" (Isa. 2:22). He went to the only place where God's will can be surely understood -- the closet of prayer.

There is a God in heaven who knows all about our problems. And he is working out his divine plan amid the perplexities of our lives. True, he could have relieved us of any responsibility for the progress of his purposes in the world. Perhaps he could have arranged his plan so that it would be merely a matter of fate when the baneful fruit of error thinned the ranks of his people. But this was not, and is not, his plan. He has arranged that we must accept some very real responsibilities. We are to some degree, just as were Daniel and Paul, our brother's keepers. We have outstanding examples of how truly burdened we should allow our hearts to be on behalf of those who walk the narrow way with us.

We may find that we repeat one lesson which has plagued believers for centuries. It is possible for us to overlook important provisions by God for his people. When we need clear vision we may depend upon God that he has not left himself without a witness upon the earth. Somewhere there will be found a Daniel, a Hananiah, a Mishael, an Azariah, whose names will be interpreted in lives that excel in the virtues they represent. To these who have sufficient faith, devotion, self-denial and holiness to separate themselves from expedient compromises, God will show his covenant promises fulfilled. Such shall have the light of life through the maze of life. God will direct the path of all who walk with him in the sanctity of his presence, yea, he will guide them with his eye. And what a saving influence in the church such characters may be.

The Value of Righteous Prayers

When the day comes that we know everything (1 Cor. 13:12), we will probably also discover how mistaken we have been in the past. How many times has divine power saved us from the subtle snare which the Adversary has laid for us? How many times has God's presence with us sent the devil fleeing, defeated and disappointed? How many times have the tears of other unknown and equally heroic "Daniels" been heard from the closed closet of prayer? Perhaps then we will see which of our own advances in the ministry were the results of someone's importunate prayer on behalf of Zion. Then we may also find that our own fine schemes -- which we thought would benefit the people of God -- were brought to nothing by the secret prayers of some burdened hearts on our behalf, for they may have seen in us the beginnings of submission to Satan. It cannot be questioned that when Satan is active among God's people it will be those who have walked closest to God who will first detect his presence.

When the Lord has judged his people, who will be most competent to understand the complex situation? The day which will declare whether every man's work is good or bad is upon us, and who will know it? Those who have put prayer, sanctification, and fidelity to truth above all else. When the Spirit must write over any work or movement, "Ichabod" -- "The glory has departed" (1 Sam. 4:21) then only the prayerful, separated, undefiled "Daniels" will be ready to accurately interpret the cause and effect. It is at such times that these pure characters will be able to act as God would have them act. Men of spiritual vision must necessarily be men of prayer. And men of prayer must also be men of humble mind, conscious of their own unworthiness and of their weaknesses.

True, such men will not always be judged as such by others -- there is more of our characters which is improperly understood by man than that which is known by man. But God must know them as such. And he will know how constantly they confess their imperfections at his feet. Daniel was such a character. A life of separateness made his clear vision possible. Revelation made him pray. And in prayer he was humble, not only for himself but for his brethren. We read of Daniel's intercessory prayer in the ninth chapter of Daniel (Dan. 9:3-19) At its close we read these wonderful words: *"And while I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God for the holy mountain of my god"* (Dan. 9:20). -- A true patriot surely; one greatly needed at a time like that.

Would Daniel's contemporaries enter into his contrition? One might hope that they would, joining him in his *prayer for Israel's sake*. Surely so!

"But then, how little are the judgments and actings of faith understood or valued, when things get low among the people of God! This is very apparent on every page of Israel's history, and, we may say, on every page of the church's history also. The path of simple childlike faith is far removed from human sight; and if the Lord's servants sink into a low carnal state, they can never understand the principle of power in the soul of one really acting by faith. He will be misunderstood in various ways, and have wrong motives attributed to him; he will be accused of setting himself up, or acting willfully. All these things must be expected by one who stands in the breach, at a time when things are low. Through lack of faith in the majority, a man is left alone, and then, when he is led to act for God, he is sure to be misinterpreted."

Nevertheless, when crisis hours come, the clearest vision, the deepest perception, the calmest judgment, the most spiritual diagnosis, will be found where there has been most of the bended knee, and most of honest confession, and most of real sincere longing for an undefiled and separated life.

God Whom We Serve

Returning to our overall study we note that there is a progression. Lesson follows lesson. The decision not to be defiled by eating the king's meat prepared Daniel to face the test of the king's dream. Both of these preceding tests prepared him for the subsequent test of the "king's image." That test would affect the character of their worship and service to God. In it we learn more of the ideals, motives, and principles by which these men were moved. And their successful passing of this test would make them witnesses to God on a much larger scale than otherwise could have been possible. They were becoming witnesses whose lives were a *"...demonstration of the Spirit and of power"* (1 Cor. 2:4). Here was another opportunity for compromise. Daniel could have found some way out of really bowing and worshiping the image. Expediency, mental reservation, and other subterfuges might have been brought forth as arguments in favor of less than an outright protest. But once again we see the value of a positive determination to settle questions of right or wrong with "God first" before the mind. This was David's way too. *"I have set the Lord always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved"* (Psa. 16:8). We quote from the pen of a well known writer on the positive action of these faithful young men, and the many lessons which this record teaches:

"On the whole front of it there flames in letters of blazing gold that there is an almighty, living, and independent God, unbound by nature's laws and unlimited to natural forces, whose word is written in his book, whose eye is upon his confiding servants, and who will never leave nor forsake them that put their trust in him!"

"From the innermost spirit of it there comes a proclamation that if kings or dignitaries or commands of church or state go against Jehovah's laws, or demand obedience against his Word, or undertake to keep conscience for the human soul, no true man of God dare obey them, nor shall he be the loser for his fidelity, no matter what penalties he may incur ... And in the whole makeup of it there stands memorialized forever that *the only true expediency is inflexible principle*. It matters not for immediate consequences. God will make all right in the end to them that stand fast to truth and duty. They are, after all, the true heroes, and shall not fail of their rewards."

These thoughts emphasize several noteworthy points. No true man of God can commit the keeping of his conscience to another. When that is done there cannot help but be a deflection from the principles of pure worship. No substitute can be found for personal responsibility to God. And such a deflection is treason against the holy Spirit, against the Bible, against those who stumble, and against our own eternal interests. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego stand as far superior examples of godly behavior. It is better to be strengthened against the fear of man by having the principles of righteousness woven into our character so that our obedience will be spontaneous.

Dare to be a Daniel,
Dare to stand alone!

Another of the points mentioned is found in the statement, "the only true expediency is inflexible principle." If we forget this point we are just as likely to be turned aside by compromise. The compass of an ocean-going ship can be turned aside by the presence of iron. So also the Christian, his service and worship can become misdirected. The Lord left us a test of love and obedience. "...if ye love me, keep my commandments..." "My sheep hear my voice, and a stranger will they not follow." We need to keep our eye upon the Lord and let him alone be our fear. Yes, to remember that "to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. 15:22).

The True Spirit Of Devotion

In all of the foregoing discussion we have not attempted to apply typical features to the image which our heroes refused to worship. We have limited our attention to certain facts of Christian experience and have been gathering lessons appropriate to our present needs. Remembering our theme text, Peter reminds us of those who have been kept by the power of God. By looking at these examples of God's keeping power we hope that all can take some examples for their own lives: of what he may require of us -- today. There does not seem to be any thought more important for us to learn than that these things written before our time were written for us.

Prompt obedience to God was the outstanding characteristic of these Hebrew captives. Since spontaneous obedience is the only real demonstration of loving devotion, is it not appropriate to examine whether our lives demonstrate this same characteristic? Both precept and the examples of God's faithful demonstrate that there is nothing more dangerous than to hesitate in obeying when divine light is thrown upon the path of duty and fidelity. To fail to act when light has come is to run the risk of serious results. It has been suggested, in line with these thoughts, "Never go before your faith, nor lag behind your conscience, for to do so is to trifle with one's eternal possibilities.

Scripture shows that there has been a certain consistency in God's dealings with men. Whether in the Jewish or Gospel Ages, he has dealt first with the masses (the mixed multitude), and then with

distinct individuals. Rather than review the details of several such incidents at this time we will suggest the overall pattern of three stages marked out in divine probation. We encourage the reader to resort to the Word to make sure whether these things be true.

For centuries, God dealt with the nation of Israel. Then following the appearance of Jesus ("whose [threshing] fan was in his hand" Matt. 3:12) there was still a general dealing with the nation, but also a more restricted dealing with "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 10:6). Jesus expressed this intentional limitation to his mission, saying that he was not come to call the righteous [self-righteous], but to call sinners to repentance (Luke 5:32). The third stage was the end of all national recognition and an extension of his favor to individuals for a period of three and one half years.

We see a similar situation in the Gospel Age. There was the first instruction to go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature (Matt. 16:15). This was followed by a limiting instruction: let both [wheat and tares] grow together until the harvest (Matt. 13:30). And when the end of the age comes the instruction is limited once again: "Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps and went forth to meet the bridegroom" (Matt. 25:1). We see the same order followed as to the Jewish nation. First a general extension of favor to the entire field. Then the introduction of factors which would separate the virgins from the others. And finally there is an examination of these alone, as to their fitness for the position proposed for them.

"The parable of the Ten Virgins, while it shows the entire virgin or consecrated class being separated from Babylon, marks distinctly a testing and separation to take place in this class also -- a separation of wise virgins from foolish virgins. The one are full of faith, fervent love, and the spirit of prompt obedience. The other allow their fervency of spirit to cool and their faith and promptness to obey to abate" (Thy Kingdom Come).

These are crucial days for the individual saint. The Lord is occupied with the work of judgment, and judgment must begin at his house (1 Pet. 4:17). It is good that we examine ourselves. Do we possess a love and faith that knows no expediency other than the expediency of principle? Has prompt obedience characterized our service and worship? Crisis periods will come upon all of us collectively as the days go by, and some of these periods will be crisis moments for us individually. The time will come for all of us when our character has been tested far enough to determine our standing. Some day, by taking the wrong turn, by failing to separate ourselves from the impurities of our own lives, or by a failure to render prompt obedience to God, we will have set ourselves aside from the number of his Elect -- by the effects of our own actions -- if we do not keep our hearts with all diligence. And if this were to happen how could we be assured of divine approval? The Scriptures offer their own reply:

Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord?

And who shall stand in his holy place?

He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false, and does not swear deceitfully.

He will receive blessing from the Lord, and vindication from the God of his salvation (Psa. 24: 3-5, RSV).

He shall be "... kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" -- very soon we believe.

Ready For the King's Furnace

Let us follow our young Hebrew heroes through one more step of their experience. They have not yet been cast into the furnace which was heated to seven times its normal intensity. They have not yet experienced the distinct approval of God. Does this experience of the Hebrews have a specific, antitypical fulfillment? We will not attempt a guess, for our purpose is quite different here. We have been looking at the course of the true saint of God when confronted by opposing influences. And so, as we call to mind the deliverance of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fiery furnace, we call to mind the blessing which God has determined shall come to all those who are tested through fiery trials -- both now and to come.

It is easier to think of the furnace of trial than to consider and rejoice in the experiences which that fiery trial may yet make possible. The human refiner has the same two purposes as God, figuratively, has in our testing: he wants to destroy the impurities and he wants to brighten the metal. Whatever the guise in which our trials come they have but one special purpose: that the approved of God may be made manifest (1 Cor. 11:19). When we consider God's activity in our lives from this standpoint is there anything that we would not endure in order to have a victorious record just as these men received.

"Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, came forth of the midst of the fire. And the princes, governors, and captains, and the king's counselors, being gathered together, saw these men, upon whose bodies the fire had no power, nor was an hair of their head singed, neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them" (Dan. 3:26-27).

Glorious triumph! In all these things they were more than conquerors (Rom. 8:37). They had walked in separation with God before the furnace came, and God walked with them within its flame,

"...to shew himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him" (2 Chron. 16:9).

Our trials may take various forms. God knows the burdens we bear and the sorrows we carry with us. There is none who understands like he. So let us take comfort from these four Hebrew lads. It will be with us as it was with them. God was there -- there in his power, to write contempt upon all man's opposition -- there in his deep and tender sympathy with his tried and faithful servants -- there in his matchless grace, to set the captives free and to lead the hearts of his Nazarites into that deep fellowship with himself for which they thirsted.

Is it not worth passing through a fiery furnace to enjoy a little more of the presence of Christ, and the sympathy of his loving heart? Are not shackles with him better than jewels without him? Is not a furnace where he is a better place to dwell than a palace where he is not to be found? Nature says, No! Faith says, Yes!

Here was a noble testimony, such a testimony as would never have been written had the Lord intervened and prevented his servants from being cast into the furnace in the first place. Nebuchadnezzar learned that his furnace was no more worthy of fear than his image, and that the servants of the most high God would serve only him. In a word the enemy was confounded. God was glorified. His servants, too, escaped the fiery affliction unscathed. Precious fruits of faith are these; the fruits of a true Nazariteship. Oh, if we too could be unscathed today!

Is it possible that we too may so completely overcome our trials? May he yet manifest us as his approved ones?

"Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen" (Jude 24,25).

"..for 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" (2 Tim. 1:12). We will be kept from falling: if we seek the inner circle of communion with God; if we shun the defilements he frowns upon; if we keep our wave offering of acceptable sacrifice uplifted to him. And before long we will be separated from the limitation of this present world. But in the meantime,

"Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed" (1 Pet. 4:12,13 NIV).

- J. J. Blackburn

A Fond Farewell

The time for parting now has come:
I try to speak, but tongue is dumb.
You are going home and so are glad;
I am staying here a wee bit sad.

I know I will miss your happy smile
When you are gone for just a while;
But joys we shared are tucked away
In memory's book for a future day.

When I feel lonely, sad, and low
I will always know where I should go.
To a quiet place and take a look
Within that highly treasured book.

So thus again I will be with you
And there I will think our friendship through;
I will know for sure that though apart
You still reside within my heart!

- Laura E. Kelsey

Knowledge, Doctrine, and Love

Doctrine: When someone speaks of "doctrine" they are most commonly thinking of some particular confession of faith that they, personally, deem a necessary prerequisite to which others must subscribe in order to be acceptable as followers of Jesus Christ. A study of the Greek words which are translated by our English word "doctrine" shows, however, that it is the entire teaching of Jesus and the Apostles that is embraced by that one small word. Literally, the word means "instruction," or "teaching." It can mean some particular point of teaching but we should never lose sight of the true meaning of the word. To do so is to chance that it will acquire an ecclesiastical meaning far too restrictive for its true meaning. How this happens is easy to see. By example, the English word "hell" has suffered much the same misunderstanding.*

* [Discussions of what the Bible teaches about hell have appeared in The HERALD but infrequent readers might be interested in the free booklet offered on the last page of this issue: "What Say the Scriptures About Hell?"]

We illustrate this point and the danger of such restrictive interpretations by a simple story. Not long ago we heard someone comment upon a Bible lecture which they had just heard. "Wasn't that a wonderful talk" they said, "and not a word about doctrine." How greatly we are influenced by our previous training and interpretations that have been handed down to us by men of earlier days.

Doctrines have been very publicly "displayed" by many who consider themselves the Lord's people during this harvest time of the age. It is proper that this has been done. Doctrines contain the hopes that are dear to all of our hearts. But many brethren have put aside the careful and scriptural study of doctrine because they have so frequently been used as tools of controversy. This they have done both to their own injury and the injury of others.

When we are correct in our understanding, our doctrine (or "teaching") is just about the most important thing to us -- excepting our Lord Jesus himself. Our doctrine contains our knowledge of him and this knowledge has benefited us all greatly. Without him, and without knowing about him, we would have no eternal hope and no hope of ever understanding God or his plan. **

** [The reader's attention is drawn to the fact that the word "doctrines" is here being used to describe the teachings (plural) either of men or of one's own understanding. We wish to differentiate between the practices which we, as followers of Jesus institute and the perfect example which he gave to us. His teaching and life were ONE and his doctrine was singular (cf. 2 Tim. 3:14-17). Men, even those claiming to be Christian men, have had many teachings and their performance has often varied from them all. - Ed. Comm.]

What You Have Received

What has our Lord given to us? What has he not given? By instruction we are told what course of action to take (2 Tim. 3:16). As we consider the lives of God's ancient people we are witnesses to the care which our heavenly Father exercised in laying the foundation of our faith in their lives. Their lives instruct us. From the days of Adam to the beginning of the Gospel Age we have seen our own lives lived out in pantomime in such a way that we would be able to understand the experiences which come upon us as well as to encourage and strengthen our hearts with love for God and his divine truths.

Believers have one hope in this age (Eph. 4:4). We find that there are two fundamental principles which must be followed if we are to be found faithful to God and to become joint heirs with Jesus. The one is to know; the other is to do. One principle pertains to understanding what our instructions from God are; and the other principle involves our carrying out those instructions. *"If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them"* (John 13:17).

There is a unified purpose to the "instruction book" that we call the Holy Bible. We find this purpose expressed in these words: *"...in bringing many sons unto glory..."* (Heb. 2:10). How much it behooves us, if we have this hope in our hearts, to know as much about God and the plans which he has set in store for man as we possibly can. This is knowledge.

Does The Servant Set the Rules?

How much or how little knowledge any given member of the Body of Christ will have to acquire is not for us to decide: *"Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand"* (Rom. 14:4). One thing is sure, however, that the great Judge will expect of each person according to his own ability (2 Cor. 8:11,12). This world recognizes such standards. The scholar who applies himself to his studies can be looked upon with great respect even if he is not the most brilliant of men; while the most brilliant of men, if he is lax about developing his abilities, is regarded with contempt. Our Christian experience has often been compared to being in the School of Christ. Such a headmaster as God would surely expect us to be diligent in our studies.

Note the example of Cornelius in demonstration of our need for certain kinds of knowledge. The angel of the Lord appeared to him in a vision (Acts 10:1-6). And Cornelius was instructed to send for Peter so that he could tell him what he was to do. Again, Paul, speaking of his people (fleshly Israel), said of them: *"Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge"* (Rom. 10:1,2). Should we fail to mention the admonition given to Timothy? *"Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth"* (2 Tim. 2:15).

It does not seem likely, in the light of such clear instruction, that there will be many who will fail because they have underestimated the value of knowledge. This we find to be particularly true of those who have accepted present truth throughout the Gospel Age. Through the Word of God they have received a wonderful vision of God and our Savior, a vision so grand that our minds are kept occupied to grasp the full grandeur of what we have already glimpsed. David may have had such in mind when he penned the words, *"Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and wine increased"* (Psa. 4:7). Corn and wine were promised to Israel, as part of the blessings of the Law Covenant. But gladness of heart has been the lot of all those who have accepted Christ Jesus.

Since the days of the Apostles there may never have been a day in which the living believers have enjoyed a fuller knowledge of God. Having received the richest of treasures from the Lord through his faithful servants we have been able to discount the teachings of evolution, higher criticism, situation ethics, present immorality, etc.. An understanding of God and his plan has filled our hearts with the peace of God which surpasses understanding (Phil. 4:7). We were once like those who mourned in Zion. But God has given to us *"...beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness"* (Isa. 61:3).

What Is Our Goal?

Having been caught up with the exuberant spirit of Isaiah, some indeed have forgotten that gaining knowledge is not our goal. Knowledge has been given to us so that we might reach our goal. Knowledge is our set of instructions to take us to the goal. Israel of old faced the same situation. They followed the leadings of the Lord through the wilderness while they came to know his will concerning them. They left Goshen, traveled through the "baptism" of the Red Sea, and beyond to Mount Sinai before they truly began to understand God. So it is with us. It is only after we have reached the spiritual "Sinai" that we begin to learn, and with some of us we must travel a long way from our own "Goshens" to reach that mountain.

Many of the Israelites of the generation that left Egypt never learned to do the Lord's will:

Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do always err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest (Heb. 3:10,11).

Those days were a long time ago, and one might wonder why we have those words addressed to the Hebrew Christians. The Apostle Paul elsewhere explains why such lessons are recorded:

"Now these things were our examples ...Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world ["age"Gr.: kosmos] are come" (1 Cor. 10: 6,11).

And once more, even more forcefully, Paul instructs us not to refuse him that speaketh from God (Heb. 12). If we would not fall from the same errors which Israel committed we must apply ourselves to righteousness.

Was natural Israel foolish in their disregard of God? Let us not judge them too harshly. Let us, instead, use their example for ourselves and judge them not at all. What happened to Israel we cannot alter. What happens to us we can: "*Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit.*" (John 15:8). If we do not bear fruit, will we have been any wiser than they? The examples of countless "men of God" have proven that knowledge is one thing and fruit bearing quite another. And there are times when we are all more concerned with knowledge than with bearing fruit. Yet how serious a mistake this is we can scarcely estimate, because it is our fruit-bearing qualities which will constitute our worthiness to be with Jesus in glory.

The "Tools" And the "Mark"

Knowledge is progressive. We doubt anyone would argue with those words. Some learn easily and quickly. Others take much time and the expenditure of great amounts of energy to learn. Consequently, some of our brethren have a better, a more complete, understanding than do we. And some understand less. But unless our knowledge, however great or small, bring us into conformity with the character of our Lord we are no better off having it than we were before we knew anything. And however quickly we acquire knowledge, the changing of our characters is still a very slow and deliberate process. "*...first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear*" (Mark 4:28).

As the available knowledge of Bible truths has grown by the instruction of God's faithful servants the process of gaining knowledge has been made easier. But the "mark" (the goal) for the prize of the high calling has not changed one iota (Phil. 3:14). -- It is no easier to love our enemies today

than it was two thousand years ago. It is no easier to do good to those that despitefully use us now than it was one hundred years ago. It seems, rather, that we now enjoy a greater knowledge because God knows that we will need all the more encouragement to endure the testings to come upon his own in this present evil day.

If an ocean going ship sinks in the middle of the ocean a lifeboat would be a lifesaver. But a lifeboat without food or water would prove to be but a temporary salvation. So also is the "Christian" who does not grow into the likeness of Christ. The knowledge that men think will make them Christians is little more than an empty lifeboat unless there are provisions to sustain life. What is the relationship of knowledge to spiritual growth?

How deep could one's knowledge of God and his truth be without some corresponding manifestation of the Spirit of Christ? We think that one could not progress very far in the true knowledge of God without developing the graces of the spirit, unless he were indeed a forgetful hearer. But Paul places this issue in perspective, silencing forever the question about the relationship between these two factors:

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not [love], I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not [love], I am nothing (1 Cor. 13:1-2).

Imperfect Creature -- Imperfect Knowledge

No matter how much we understand, our knowledge is partial. We can be no more perfect in knowledge so long as we are in an imperfect body than we can be perfect in any other quality of character. Why then should we defer our love for those who (while giving every evidence of consecration to the Lord) may see less or more than we ourselves. If the Apostle Paul could say that he was looking at God's Word through clouded glasses (1 Cor. 13:12), and he had been caught up in revelations (2 Cor. 12:1,7) that far surpass our experience, should not we too admit that we do not see clearly? We do not mean that we should stop trying to come to a meeting of the minds! The unity of our combined thought and actions is the ideal for which we should work; that is, a meeting of the heart and mind with others of Christian faith. But where agreement fails love must overcome; where our brother's (or our own) failure of understanding become apparent the mantle of Jesus' righteousness must cover. This would be perfect obedience. But we are not perfect. Even the Apostle's had their disagreements, and they too did not agree on all points without long and heated discussion.

This point is made clear by Paul in his Epistle to the Galatians. Seventeen years after he began his ministry he went to Jerusalem to compare notes, so to speak, with others of the Apostles. At that time there was a controversy among the believers concerning circumcision. Later, when Peter came to Antioch, Paul withstood him face to face (Gal. 2:11). This should prove to us that it will take an effort on our part and a manifestation of the spirit of the Master to overcome our disagreements with one another.

What a calamity it would have been had love not prevailed among the Apostles. What calamities occur in these days when brethren do not work together to allow love to prevail among them.

Love: But For Whom?

It truly seems that love is a final test. Of all the areas where love is needed there can be no more difficult area to exercise it than among the brethren:

"If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment we have from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also" (1 John 4:20,21).

We will never have a better opportunity for showing our love for God than right now.

The Lord's people are found in little groups: one here and one there. Who among us would dare take the stance of the great apostasy by saying that all of God's people are in this group or that? We must admit that there are some to be found among all divisions; and since we are unable to judge who they are, or where, we must own them all as brethren. How then can we show our love for Christ? Surely not by indifference! There is no such thing as a "love of indifference." Neither can we show the love of Christ by lukewarmness. What kind of love is this, you ask -- the love of lukewarmness? It is the kind of love that says: "I love the brethren in all these divisions, I wish them well, I certainly do not wish them any harm. I can not do anything about it, so I will forget about the whole thing." That is not the love of Christ. If his love had only gone that far we would be lost in sin today. The love of Christ is a saving love. It reaches down to help us up. Jesus humbled himself in order to demonstrate that love. Let us humble ourselves to demonstrate ours.

Let us endeavor to "...grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18) by our use of prayer and supplication and by the doing of those things which we know to be pleasing to God.

- W.W. Boutillier

Pleasing God

We are to walk in such a way as to please God -- thoroughly and well. To do this, our walk must be:

- (1) A believing walk; for without faith it is impossible to please God.
- (2) A decided walk. No compromise nor half-heartedness; we must be Christians out and out; no divided heart, nor service of two masters.
- (3) A consistent walk. Not in word or profession, but in deed; not one part of our life contradicting the other, but all in harmony; each contributing its separate testimony.
- (4) A persevering walk. Not a running well at times, and then a halting or fainting; but a constant pressing forward. Only in these ways shall our walk be "*unto all pleasing.*"

Is it your aim in all things to please God?

- Dr. Horatius Bonar

The Tree Of Life

"And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever: therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden to till the ground from whence he was taken." - Genesis 3:22

The study of biology is concerned with investigating the principles which govern that mysterious force which we so glibly call "life." Biologists have long known that during the lifespan of all forms of earthly life there is no state of absolute balance, inertia, or equilibrium. Every organism (plant, animal, or human) is in the process of either maturing or dying. And there is no point at which the organism reaches a state of balance: neither growing or decaying.

This process is called the law of degeneration and death. It is a seemingly universal principle -- insofar as man knows about the created universe -- and has been active since the death sentence was passed upon the first human couple. Along with the curse of death went a curse upon the earth: *"...cursed is the ground for thy sake..."* (Gen. 3:17). Ever since those words were pronounced the inevitable cycle of growth followed by death has been the one factor constant to all life upon the earth.

There is one organism, however, which possesses such an extraordinarily long life span that it seems to defy this otherwise universal law. This exceptional species is known as the Redwood or Sequoia, it inhabits only one spot upon the face of the earth (a North American stretch of land adjacent to the Pacific Coast). Here are just a few remarkable facts about these trees:

"It attains tremendous size and height, being exceeded in height only by the Eucalyptus tree of Australia. Fully grown Sequoias average two hundred seventy-five feet in height and twenty-five feet in diameter. Some have been known to grow as large as three hundred and two feet tall with a circumference of ninety-six feet. At a point six feet above the ground the diameter can still exceed twenty-five feet. The trunks of these trees are often naked and branchless for the first one hundred feet above the ground."

These trees, apart from their great size, are unique in another respect. Their longevity seems related to their chemical composition and they seem practically immune to all disease forms. The same bacteria and insects which spell doom for other plants seem to have no effect upon the giant redwoods. If undisturbed by fire or the activities of man they have an apparently endless life. By examining the growth rings of some of these trees which have been felled, men have found that they live to be at least two thousand years old. They appear, therefore, to be the oldest living things on earth.

Bible students are reminded of the great tree which Nebuchadnezzar saw in his vision (Dan. 4:10-12), the top of which reached to heaven. As used in this Scripture the tree seems to represent the perfect man Adam, in all of the glory and honor of his original station as king of all the earth. We have suggested that these giant trees seem to defy the law of degeneration, apparently achieving a true state of balance in the process of their development. Having reached a stage of maturity, they seem able to remain healthy and vigorous throughout the ages of man.

We turn from the subject of trees with the reminder that it is their state of chemical balance, of internal composition, that allows them to attain such unprecedented longevity. There is the

obvious suggestion that man too could live longer if he could achieve this same chemical balance. Science tells us that our entire bodies are regenerated every seven years -- just due to the life and death cycle of our individual cells. Why, then, can man not harness this cycle, achieving forever the youth and freshness of body seen in the child of seven?

Men, in their pride and search for everlasting life, have given millions of money and thousands of hours of their lives to the study of just such questions. While no man has yet succeeded in stopping the aging process, these students of biology have seen some interesting phenomena. Many older persons seem to get a sort of "second wind," some slight improvements of eyesight, or the return of hair coloring, or of increased resistance to certain diseases. We have seen pictures and read about communities of super centenarians (persons over the age of one hundred years) living near the Black Sea -- close indeed to the land in which Methusaleh lived for nearly ten centuries. In this century the number of *living* persons between the ages of one hundred and thirteen and one hundred and thirty-six has fluctuated around thirty-five in just this one area alone.

Our purpose here is not to delve into scientific or pseudo-scientific findings. The "problem" (from the standpoint of how God will give man a body suitable for "age lasting life") of man's longevity is clearly in the hands of God. But such examples of super-long lives present some interesting thoughts to those who understand something of the Divine plan of the ages. If our understanding of God's plan is accurate, the day cannot be too far away when the burden of the Adamic death sentence will be lifted from the shoulders of men. For the thousands of years of man's history he has been barred from the way to the tree of life (Gen. 3:22-24) by the flaming sword of the cherubim of God.

Now, we seem to be approaching the time when the "change" of the spirit begotten ones will signal the end of this Gospel Age. With their change the focal point of God's creative plan will change once again, as it has done several times in the past. The selection of God's Elect being completed, the merit of Jesus' sacrifice will be applied on behalf of Adam and all his children. Following this there will be great changes upon the face of the earth. Beginning at that point there will be men who will achieve that state of balance and equilibrium which will enable them to live for great periods of time.

Some things are clearly known about this time to come. Those who are willing and obedient to God will enter the highway of holiness (Isa. 35:8). Their development along this course will result in lasting life. On the other hand it is not to be expected that all men will know of the opening of this pathway to life at the same time. The longer we study the divine plan the more we are convinced that the Millennium will be along the lines of a preparatory period. The Christ will rule from heaven: our Lord and his Bride. Along with these heavenly rulers there *will* be others upon earth: Ancient Worthies. But how will the rulership of these be made known to all men? The Scriptures promise that "...the *earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea*" (Isa. 11:9). As we look at the course of God in the affairs of men we become increasingly convinced that all men will not come to an immediate or miraculous understanding.

If this assumption be proven true by time then it may follow that the rejuvenation of old people -- or even the re-awakening of them from the dead may be misunderstood by many men at the early stages of the Kingdom. Just as there are skeptically minded persons in this age there will be those who are slow to accept the ways of the kingdom. Such may seek scientific answers for the blessings which come only from grace.

The miracles of the Almighty have rarely been spectacular. Generally, his activities among men have only been discerned by those faithful ones who were watching for indications of God's

intervention. This they did by the guidance of God and through the encouragement of his Word. Rationalization by man has been allowed by God. He has made it possible that the faithful would recognize his hand, but that those who chose not to retain God in their memory (Rom. 1:28) could find natural causes and the human ingenuity to explain away these happenings. As an illustration of this we remember that only Jesus heard the voice from heaven which attested to his faithfulness (John 12:28,29); those around him thought that they heard a natural clap of thunder.

The Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of another such example (Heb. 3:15-19). Paul tells us about Jews who did not enter into the promised land because of unbelief. Isaiah prophetically tells us that this condition will exist in the kingdom of Christ: *"Let favor be shown to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness: in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly, and will not behold the majesty of the Lord"* (Isa. 26:10). In the minds of those who refuse to believe there will always be ways to explain away the miracles of God. The waters of the Red Sea had been driven back by strong east winds. This had happened in earlier days -- long before the children of Israel fled from Pharaoh (Ex. 14:21). Similarly, there had probably been other landslides which temporarily dammed up the Jordan River before any priests bearing the Ark of the Covenant had seen the water recede when their feet touched it (Josh. 3:16).

Character traits are carved deeply into the human heart by the passing of years. Unbelief and skepticism are among those characteristics. Those who have received the grace of God can testify that unbelief and skepticism are difficult to overcome, even when they have been blessed with a hearing ear (with a disposition to listen and understand). Willingness to believe the promises and miracles of God is something which needs our daily attention. When Jesus left the Jordan we read that the heavens were opened to him. His followers have received this same opening of the heavens, enabling them to see things afar off and things which others could not recognize (1 Pet. 1:8,9). May God grant us each the ability to preserve his Word in our minds and a clear vision of heavenly things until we see him face to face. -- J.R. Hughes

Step By Step

God does not lead me year by year
nor even day by day;
But step by step my path unfolds
as he directs my way.
Tomorrow's plans I do not know:
I only know this hour
and him who bids me walk each step
supported by his power.
And I am glad that it is so:
Today's enough to bear.
And when tomorrow comes, his grace
will far exceed my care.
What need to worry then or fret?
My Lord, who gave his son,
holds all my moments in his hand
and gives them one by one.

- Robert A. Young

Procession

Help me to see in those I meet
On country road or city street
Not just strange people passing by
But those for whom you came to die.

The young, the fair, the sick, the old,
The miser with his hoard of gold,
On, on, they go unminding by
And yet for these you came to die.

Then through thine eyes of love and grace
Let me find beauty in each face.
These weary people passing by
Are those for whom you came to die.

- B. Fugate.

Notice of Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting of the Pastoral Bible Institute, Inc., is scheduled to be held (D.V.) on Saturday, June 4, 1988, at 11:00 A.M., at 4454 S. 14th Street, Suite #2, Milwaukee, WI 53221.

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

A report on the Institute's activities during the preceding year will be given and an election of directors to serve during the coming year will be conducted. Opportunity will be given for such other matters as may properly come before the meeting.

These brethren, who are now serving as directors, are candidates for reelection, viz.: A. Gonczewski, A. Jarmola, P.J. Pazucha, L. Petran, J.B. Webster and L.R. Webster. Also nominated are B. Kuehmicel and T.M. Thomassen. Br. Buss requested that his name not be retained for reelection.

Entered into Rest

Deelight Caudle, CA
Florence Eisert, WI
Peggy Hogg, CA
Ellen M Shawn, RI
J.L. Wingo, TN
Genevieve Z. Curley, NY
Bruno Hack, IL
Louis A Litke, GA
George G. Rowland, CANADA