

# The Herald

## Of Christ's Kingdom

*May/June 2002*

### In the Beginning

Blessed is the man whom thou choosest.—Psalm 65:4

The Sermon on the Mount is considered by most Christians as the keynote speech of Jesus to introduce the Gospel age. The series of eight (or nine) beatitudes which open this discourse of the Master form a sort of preamble to it. It is these blessings of the beatitudes which constitute the theme for this issue of The Herald.

Each of the beatitudes is given in the form of a conditional promise. The stipulated qualifications form an outline of Christian character to which Jesus wishes his disciples to conform. These characteristics, briefly summarized are:

1. Humility.
2. Sorrow for sin.
3. Meekness.
4. Appetite for Righteousness.
5. Mercifulness.
6. Sincerity or purity of heart.
7. Peacemaking.
8. Endurance of persecution and trial.

In a sense these furnish for the New Testament what the ten commandments did for the Old—an outline of the qualities of the one whom Jehovah approves. The contrast between the two illustrates the difference between the Law dispensation and the dispensation of Grace. The negative “thou shalt not” of the Law are replaced with the “thou shalt” of Christ.

In still another sense these attributes can be profitably compared with those given by the apostle Paul in his inspired examination of love (1 Corinthians 13). In fact, Brother Russell makes the following suggestion: “We advise reading alternately each Sunday our Lord’s delineation of the graces which will insure his blessing and the apostle Paul’s description of the same graces summed up under the name Love” (*Reprints*, p. 2240).

In a similar sermon, sometimes referred to as “The Sermon on the Plain” (Luke 6:20-26), Jesus contrasts a series of blessings with a series of woes. Let us be careful that our lives are worthy of the blessings and not deserving of the woes.

It is with a sincere desire to encourage spiritual growth into a character like unto the “Author and Finisher of our Faith” that we, the editors, place this issue of the magazine in the hands of our readers.

Matthew 5:3

## The Pursuit of Blessedness

*Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.—Psalm 1:1*

Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness” were the inalienable rights imagined by the writers of the United States’ Declaration of Independence. Christ offers life, liberty from the bondage of sin, and the pursuit of blessedness.

Happiness is the emotional reaction to pleasant outside stimuli; blessedness is the feeling of bliss that results from inner tranquility. Happiness is reactive; blessedness is proactive. Happiness depends on what is done **for** us; blessedness is a product of what is done **by** us.

The principle of happiness is found in Psalm 126:3, “The Lord hath done great things for us, **whereof** we are glad.” The principle of blessedness is found in our theme text and delineated in the beatitudes of Matthew 5:3-12.

### The Beatitudes

The beatitudes consist of a series of conditional clauses. Wonderful rewards and promises are made, but only if stringent conditions are met. The conditions are not given in a random or haphazard order. They are carefully structured to form a veritable tower of conduct, each action being premised on the one before it.

Notice the logical sequence of the conditions that claim the blessed promises:

1. **Poverty of spirit**, or recognition of need, is the starting point.
2. **Repentant mourning** comes from an admission of one’s own inabilities.
3. **A meek, or teachable disposition** enables the mind to receive instruction to continue on.
4. **An appetite for righteousness** provides the motivation for making progress.
5. **Mercifulness** is an outgrowth of the realization of one’s shortcomings in spiritual growth.
6. **Purity of heart** develops out of that sympathy which knows its own

need of mercy.

7. **Peacemaking** is the goal for which the Christian is trained by applying the previous graces.

8. **Persecutions** form the final exam to demonstrate that the preceding principles have been well learned and applied.

### **The Foundation**

“Blessed are the poor in spirit.” There are two Greek words, which, with their cognates, are translated “poor” in the New Testament. *Penes* denotes a poor laborer who works for bare sustenance. *Ptochos* describes the poorest of the poor, one who is reduced to being a beggar to survive. *Ptochos* is the word Jesus used in the first beatitude. Thayer’s Lexicon elaborates on this word by broadening its definition to include lacks that include “influence, position, honor . . . destitute of Christian virtue and eternal riches.” He adds the concepts of helplessness, being powerless to accomplish an end. His definition concludes with the words “destitute of learning and intellectual culture which the schools afford.”

It is not usually the learned and self-confident, but those who have a proper lack of self-esteem who, appreciating their own littleness and imperfections, look for assistance from a higher power. One has been heard to remark, “I do not have an inferiority complex, I am inferior.” This does not mean, however, that there is not a proper self-esteem. If the Christian is commanded to love his neighbor “as himself,” there must be a sense in which this love of self is proper. The proper attitude is to reflect that if God sees something in one to call him, then the individual must find and appreciate this same element in himself. It is not what we are, but what God can make of us that is worth appreciating and loving.

Total lack of self-esteem is paralyzing; total trust in God to use us is energizing.

Various support groups for individuals combating addictions recognize the principle of this first beatitude as the starting point for progress. First, recognize the need and then the inability to fulfill that need without the aid of a higher power. A term that encapsulates this basic requirement is humility.

### **Humility in the Old Testament**

Before the Israelites could enter the promised land they needed to first learn this lesson of humility. It is in accord with this that we read: “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. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of

the mouth of the LORD doth man live” (Deuteronomy 8:2,3).

By leading them in a meandering and ever- moving path through a hostile environment for forty years, God denied his chosen people adequate time in one spot to grow crops or provide good pasturage for their flocks, thus making them wholly dependant on him for life-sustaining food. In a similar vein, the Christian finds he lacks the resources to provide satisfying spiritual food, and must become dependent upon heaven-sent manna to grow spiritually. In fact, the present temporal condition of life on earth is called “the body of our humiliation” (Philippians 3:21, ASV).

Isaiah 66:2 summarizes the Old Testament emphasis on humility. Rotherham translates the latter portion of the verse, “But for this one, will I look around, for him who is humbled and smitten in spirit, and so careth anxiously for my word.”

### **Humility and Self Evaluation**

Humility causes one to neither think of self more highly nor more lowly than one ought to think, but to soberly consider oneself in the full light of one’s talents and abilities, and the need of God to realize the potential of these. W. L. Walker in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* expresses it in these words: “It by no means implies slavishness or servility; nor is it inconsistent with a right estimate of oneself, one’s gifts and calling of God, or with proper self-assertion when called for. But the habitual frame of mind of a child of God is that of one who feels not only that he owes all his natural gifts, etc., to God, but that he has been the object of undeserved redeeming love, and who regards himself as being not his own, but God’s in Christ. He cannot exalt himself, for he knows that he has nothing of himself. The humble mind is thus at the root of all other graces and virtues. Self-exaltation spoils everything. There can be no real love without humility. ‘Love,’ said Paul, ‘vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up’ (1 Corinthians 13:4). As Augustine said, humility is first, second, and third in Christianity.”

Jesus is the prime example of humility. The *Emphatic Diaglott* interlinear translation of Matthew 11:29 correctly reads: “Take the yoke of me upon you, and be informed by me; for meek I am, and humble to the heart and you shall find a rest to the lives of you.” It was because the Master had such heart humility that he could ignore his own will and take on the yoke of the Father’s will and do it. “I delight to do thy will, O my God, yea thy law is within my heart” (Psalm 40:8). “Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father do: for what things soever he doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise” (John 5:19).

### **Humility in Inter-Personal Relations**

Not only is humility essential in understanding one’s relationship with God, it is also a helpful adjunct in inter-personal relations. The apostle Paul states, “let nothing be in the spirit of strife or vain glory, but, in lowliness of mind, each esteeming the other as more excellent than themselves; regarding not each his own qualities, but each those of others

also. For let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:3-5, Darby Translation).

Such an attitude not only looks for the good in others but also prepares the mind for accepting the lowest of services. “And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all” (Mark 10:44). Jesus demonstrated this attitude with a practical parable: “And he put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when he marked how they chose out the chief rooms; saying unto them, When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honorable man than thou be bidden of him; And he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”—Luke 14:7-11.

### **Poor in Pocket Not Necessarily Poor in Spirit**

In the Luke account of the beatitudes (Luke 6:20) the words “in spirit” are omitted. Frequently it is moderate poverty that provides the most fertile ground for spiritual growth. “For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are” (1 Corinthians 1:26-28).

Historically the Christian church has prospered most in spiritual matters when poor or persecuted in temporal ways. Shortly after the fall of Communism in Romania, one Romanian Christian remarked that they were surprised to still find true Christianity surviving the material prosperity of the West. Prosperity tends to foster independence and the lack of a feeling of need for God; poverty tends to emphasize the necessity for divine help. Self-sufficiency is not the best avenue to approach God.

However, such observations are only generalities. There were wealthy people—such as Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea and Chuza, the chief steward of Herod with his wife Joanna—who were among the disciples of Jesus. Similarly today, and throughout the age, some have been called and showed remarkable dedication that have more than enough of this world’s goods. Conversely, poverty does not necessarily mean spirituality. There are those who are poor in material things yet are not poor in spirit. The qualification of the first beatitude is one of the inmost self, not one of external circumstances.

## **The Kingdom of Heaven**

Both the poor in spirit and the persecuted are promised the kingdom of heaven while the meek are pledged the inheritance of the earth (Matthew 5:3,10,5). There is no lack of harmony between these two statements. The lowliness of poverty and spirit and persecution is set in contrast with the heights of a heavenly reward. But meekness prepares the recipient of a kingdom with his Lord with the necessary lessons to administer a government over the earth. "Inheriting the earth" does not necessarily mean living there as one's home, but possession of the dominion over the earth. "And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (Revelation 21:2).

It is the responsibility of any follower of Christ to develop all of the qualities mentioned in the beatitudes, but first things come first, and there is no better starting place than true humility. "Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time" (1 Peter 5:6).

Looking on thee in my  
weakness,  
Trusting thee for promised  
grace.  
When I think of self I  
tremble,  
When I look to thee I'm  
strong.

Matthew 5:4

## Blessed Tears

*Jesus wept.—John 11:35*

*Carl Hagensick*

While mourning may indicate weakness, it can speak of spiritual strength. It all depends on the cause of the mourning. If it is to express frustration or to vent emotions when one does not get one's own way, such sorrow does demonstrate a lack in Christian character. However, if the weeping is to show sympathy for the grief of another, or to accompany repentance for misdeeds, or to express sorrow for the inability to live a life acceptable to God, then such tears are beneficial to spiritual growth.

### **Sympathetic Mourning**

“The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23). Not only has mankind spent the past six thousand years paying those wages, but it has also paid the concomitant costs of sickness, pain, and loss. These experiences are usually accompanied by the emotion of grief. Perhaps nothing demonstrates this more than the tears shed daily at countless funerals throughout the world.

Such was the case in the death of Lazarus of Bethany. He was the brother of Mary and Martha and greatly loved by Jesus. A large number of mourners attended his funeral and were still present some three days later when Jesus arrived on the scene. The Master knew well that he had the power to bring Lazarus back from the grave. In fact, he had previously told his disciples that he was glad he had not been there when his friend was still alive and he could have healed him (John 11:15).

Because he remained away from Bethany until Lazarus had died plus three days more, it might at first appear callous, merely prolonging the family's grief. Then, arriving on the scene, rather than immediately bringing them the joy of resuscitation, he pauses to weep. He knew well that it was only the matter of a command and Lazarus would come forth from the tomb. Yet he pauses to weep, and to pray. Why? It was not to put on a show of personal anguish; it was because he was personally touched with the tragedy. He knew the anguish of Mary and Martha. He felt the grief of the assembled family, friends, and mourners. More than that, he was touched with similar portrayals of grief throughout a world marred by the “wages of sin.” These tears are blessed tears.

We all have friends in similar circumstances. We also feel their grief. We mourn with them, but how do we show our feelings? Many of us feel awkward in approaching even close friends because we do not have the words to express our emotions. What can we do to make our compassion more helpful to a sorrowing heart?



1. **Cry with them.** Such tears are not of weakness, but necessary to the acceptance of a great loss.
2. **Tactile, or touch, communication.** If we are close enough, give a hug; at least, a touch on the shoulder or arm or a warm handshake accompanied by a compassionate facial expression. Touch communication, especially when prolonged, says in body language, “I really care.”
3. **Share the memories of the past.** Such reveries keep the deceased alive in the mind of the bereaved. “The memory of the just is blessed” (Proverbs 10:7).
4. **Share the hopes of the future.** There is no greater comfort than in the biblical doctrine that Jesus died for all, regardless of the record of the present life—both the good and the evil.
5. **Follow through.** Deep grief does not pass in a day, or a week, or even a month. It is often some time after the tragedy, when comforting support slackens, that sorrow has its deepest impact. The wise man has truly said, “A friend loveth at all times and a brother is born for adversity” (Proverbs 17:17).

### **Mourning for Sin**

The daily media is replete with stories of sin, wickedness, violence, and corruption. It is not surprising that a Christian reacts with disgust and repulsion. The degree of human degradation is repugnant to any individual striving to live a godlike life. Yet that very spirit of God, while thoroughly hating the sin, must strive to be cognizant of human weakness and continue to love the sinner. While recognizing the principles of appropriate judgment, a Christian must never take delight in the administration of its penalty. The Bible states that God has “no pleasure in the death of the wicked” (Ezekiel 33:11).

When the same prophet decried the corruption of the religious and civil systems of his day (in words appropriate to the conditions of our time), he instructs a man with a writer’s inkhorn to “Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that **sigh** and that **cry** for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof” (Ezekiel 9:4). The appropriate attitude is not delight in the deserved punishments, but sorrow for their necessity. Viewing the totality of wickedness that prevailed in the years before the flood, it is written that it “grieved him [the LORD] at his heart” (Genesis 6:6).

### **Mourning Our Inabilities**

The apostle Paul describes the dilemma of a loyal Jew under the law trying to obey its righteous precepts while hindered by the effects of being born in sin and shapen in iniquity. He says of such that, while their spirit is willing, their flesh is weak so that they

could not do the things they would. Finally he pictures such a one as crying out, “O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” (Romans 7:24).

According to *Beet’s Commentary*, the Greek word translated “wretched” is better rendered “calamity stricken,” and is frequently used in Greek tragedies where it “describes not a man’s state of mind, but his circumstances.” The word was well chosen by Paul, for it is the circumstance of inherited sin and not the desire of the mind that the apostle is lamenting, and it is the disparity between the two which produces the mournful cry, “O wretched man that I am.”

Such mourning is appropriate, but the Bible provides comfort. It assures us that the Creator is cognizant of our inabilities and accordingly modifies his judgments with mercy. The psalmist expresses it in these words: “Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off” (Psalm 139:2).

### **The Mourning of Repentance**

The series of beatitudes Jesus gives in the fifth chapter of Matthew may be compared to a child’s building blocks, each adding to the one before it. While all the forms of mourning mentioned above are good and beneficial, the second beatitude speaks most directly of the mourning of a repentant heart. This mourning is a result and outgrowth of the poverty of spirit mentioned in the first beatitude. Whereas the first speaks of the recognition of a sinful and undone condition, the second speaks of the heart’s response to this fact: regret, repentance, and sorrow.

It is common in many Christian circles where only adult baptism is practiced to ask the candidates a series of questions beginning with the following two queries:

1. Do you admit that you are a member of a sinful and fallen race? (In other words, do you acknowledge your own poverty of spirit?)
2. Have you repented of this and made what restitution is possible? (This is the “mourning” of the second beatitude.)

### **Works Worthy of Repentance**

Paul speaks of “deeds worthy of . . . repentance” (Acts 26:20, RSV). He uses similar language when he writes: “Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance: for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death. For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter” (2 Corinthians 7:9-11).

There is a godly sorrow and there is an ungodly sorrow. Godly sorrow leads to repentance; ungodly sorrow leads to despair and, too frequently, suicide. Godly sorrow is productive of seven successive works:

1. **What carefulness.** Thayer gives “speed or haste” as the primary definition of the Greek word *spoude* used here, with “diligence” as a secondary meaning. Combined, these characterize an attitude that responds quickly and zealously to the correction of identified faults.
2. **What clearing of yourselves.** The Greek word is *apologia* from which we get our word “apology.” Perhaps this would be the best translation here. The recognition of having done a wrong should be rapidly followed by an apology for the fact. Even if no other person was harmed, the apology should come in the form of an expression to God in prayer of sorrow for the misdeed.
3. **What indignation.** One of the prophetic descriptions of Christ is that he not only loved righteousness, but also that he “hated iniquity” (Hebrews 1:9; Psalm 45:7). When a sinful thought becomes harbored in the mind, it must be detested and rejected. The appropriate emotion is beautifully described in the Greek word *aganaktesis* used here, from which we derive the word “agonize.”
4. **What fear.** The Greek word is *phobia*. True repentant sorrow produces an attitude of “sin-phobia,” a dread of falling into the clutches of sin.
5. **What vehement desire.** *Epipotheo*, used here, is an intensified form of *potheo*, “to yearn, or long for.” The King James translation “vehement desire” is well chosen. Having identified the wrong and developed an aversion to it, the true mourner has an intense desire to rid himself of it.
6. **What zeal.** The desire to rid one’s self of sin, while admirable, is not enough. It must be translated into remedial action, and this with great ardor or zeal. It must be worked at.
7. **What revenge.** Barnes, in his Notes, writes that the Greek word *ekdikesis* used here has the thought of “maintenance of right.” Literally it could be translated as the “outworking [*ek*] of justice [*dikesis*].” Having removed the shortcoming to the best of one’s ability, the final product of godly sorrow is the establishment of protective walls so that the sin is not repeated.

### Sackcloth and Ashes

Customs today in most cultures expect mourners to wear dignified clothing. Such was not the case in Bible times. There the mourners “rent their clothes” and wore sackcloth (a

garment, usually a sash or girdle made of camel's hair). The first recorded use of this custom in the Bible was by the patriarch Jacob (Genesis 37:34). Tamar is the first one mentioned who added the placing of ashes on the head (2 Samuel 13:19), though Joshua is spoken of as expressing his sorrow for Achan's looting of Jericho by putting dust on his head (Joshua 7:6). Jesus implies that the combined custom of sackcloth and ashes may have dated back as far as the days of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Matthew 11:21).

It is the sackcloth, a rough and poor garment, that illustrates the relationship between the first two beatitudes, the fact that the mourning is an outgrowth of poverty of spirit. Ashes, on the other hand, add another dimension to the expression of sorrow. Not only were they the remnants of something that had been destroyed, they also implied a deep-set memory of that object. The ashes of the red heifer which were used in Jewish ritual cleansings for sin (Numbers 19:9) are commonly thought of by Bible Students as indicative of the remembrance of the faithful lives of ancient prophets (*Tabernacle Shadows*, p. 108). This same concept of ashes indicating memory is used today by those who keep the ashes of a cremated relative in an urn as a memorial.

So godly sorrow must not only destroy (turn to ashes) the imperfections identified in oneself, but also create a memorial of these experiences to insure that they will not be repeated. When all mankind does this successfully, they will realize the value of God in permitting evil for more than these past six thousand years.

### **“They Shall Be Comforted”**

When the conditions of the beatitude are fully met, the promised blessing will be secured. The comfort of the mourner will consist partly in the fact that he need fear no chastisement from God, if he has truly done his part in that effectual mourning productive of the godly works of repentance, and more fully from the knowledge that the day will soon come when the causes of all sorrow shall be removed.

Though Christians may mourn, they are not to be constantly mournful. Rather they are to be rejoicing Christians, even in trials and tribulations: “My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations” (James 1:2). “Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, Rejoice” (Philippians 4:4).

Matthew 5:5

## Teachableness

*Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.—Matthew 11:28-30, KJV*

*Richard Suraci*

In the eleventh chapter of Matthew Jesus is speaking to the Jews, chiding them for not accepting his teachings or those of John the Baptist. Jesus said John was the greatest man born of a woman but notwithstanding the least in God's heavenly kingdom is greater than he. Jesus attempted to shake his people from their complacent attitude so that they would consider his gospel.

His words in verse 15 are crucial to all who desire to learn of him: "He who has ears, let him hear." Our resurrected Lord used the same words when he conveyed his message to each of the seven churches in Revelation chapters 2 and 3. The William Barclay translation reads, "It is the duty of everyone who can hear, to listen to what the spirit is saying to the churches." This translation conveys the thought of paying attention to what is said. When children go to school, we don't ask them to "hear," we ask them to "listen" to what the teacher is saying.

In Matthew 11:21-24 Jesus pronounced woe upon the cities in which he preached and performed his miracles because they did not believe him and repent. He said it will be more favorable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for them.

Another important thought is found in verse 25 where Jesus offers rest for the weary: "I praise you Father, Lord of heaven and earth because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned and revealed them to little children." During his ministry, Jesus used "little children" to convey the importance of simplicity, teachableness, and humble dependence on others. "Little children" cannot survive without help from others. "Little children" come into this world with blank pages. Their parents write on those pages what they will. Each day God's children should leave their mind open so that their heavenly Father may write his will and word thereon.

In Matthew 5:3 Jesus said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The "poor in spirit" realize that they need help. The word "poor" translated from the Greek means "extremely poor, utterly destitute." Many who came to Jesus experienced that condition of heart and through his sacrifice were able to find rest.

In Matthew 11:27 Jesus exclaimed, "All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." Jesus also said, "No one can come

unto me unless the Father who sent me draws him” (John 6:44).

In Matthew 11:29 Jesus invited his people to take his yoke upon them. The Jewish nation was under a double yoke which was Adamic condemnation and the Law Covenant which laws they were unable to keep. The Gentile yoke was Adamic condemnation. Jesus invited those who came to him with a listening ear to take his yoke upon them. The word yoke is taken from a root word meaning to join, especially by a yoke, a coupling, figuratively, servitude (Strong’s 2201 and 2218).

Although Jesus was Lord and Master to his disciples, he was also a servant of all (Isaiah 42:1-4; 53:11). By taking his yoke upon us, we individually become identified with him, side-by-side, and like him, become servants of God and each other. Jesus is the stronger one in the yoke we share with him, and he supplies the strength when we become weak or discouraged.

“Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly of heart.” The words “meek” and “lowly” are closely related and are used interchangeably. In New Testament usage the word humble (Strong’s 5013) is taken from the same word as lowly (Strong’s 5011). It means to depress, figuratively, to humiliate (in condition or heart). “Lowly” or “humility” would seem to express the heart quality of a cast-down person who recognizes his low estate and need of recovery, whereas meekness may be the outward expression of humility. Peter writes, “Humble yourselves . . . under God’s mighty hand that he may lift you up in due time” (1 Peter 5:6). This humility may be expressed in the words of Isaiah: “O Lord thou art our Father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand” (Isaiah 64:8, KJV). We need to be kneaded by God. In his hands he will shape us into the character likeness of his son. This shaping process requires a lifetime of learning God’s word and being conformed to his son’s image.

The word “meek” is Strong’s number 4235 and means gentle, i.e., humble. It is a form of number 4239, a prime word meaning mild, i.e., (by implication) humble. William Barclay in his word study on meekness said: “In the Greek *prautes* [meekness] basically is connected with anger . . . is the quality of the man who is angry for the right reasons, against the right people, in the right way, and for the right length of time. The basic idea of the word is not so much gentleness as strength under control. Plato . . . uses it of the sheep-dog who is gentle to the flock but savage to the enemies of the flock. The word indicates a gentleness at the back of which there is courage and strength. This is further illustrated by the fact that the Bible regards this quality of *prautes* as the distinctive quality both of Moses (Numbers 12:3) and Jesus (2 Corinthians 10:1—see the context of this chapter in the Diaglott, NIV, and Barclay).

Brother John Meggison gave us a similar definition: “The Greek word for meek was commonly used in our Lord’s day to describe wild animals, like horses, who have been made to work with men. Nothing spiritless or empty is meant, but rather the description of an energy which, instead of exploding [jumping up on their hind legs and coming down on thunderous hoofs in a cloud of dust], is now willing to be guided and directed. Their strength is now harnessed and trained to work with men. The meek or tamed are

not people who have been born empty and have no inner source to master, no vitality to be taught control. The meek or trained are those whose powerful impulses have been put into understanding. The love of God by his holy spirit has made these realize the blessedness of being guided by the Lord's spirit of helpful service."

Paul is a good example of Brother Meggison's description of meekness. Saul, still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples, obtained authority from the high priest to apprehend any who belonged in the way, and bring them to prison. Saul was stopped on his journey to Damascus, blinded by a heavenly light, and was asked, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" The answer came: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9:1-5). At this point Saul's meekness comes to the fore: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do." Saul was teachable. We are happy that Saul, who became Paul "the apostle to the Gentiles," learned well the word and will of God.

Saul was a misguided "prime mover" for Judaism. It is easy to see the wild horse-like qualities he exhibited. After following Jesus' instructions, Paul became the "prime mover" of our Lord Jesus! What became of Saul's strength, education, forward motion, enthusiasm, and zeal? It was re-channeled, brought under control, for the work of the Lord.

Suppose you asked people, "What does the word meek mean to you?" Here are a few answers I received when I asked that question: "A meek person is a wimp!" "A meek person has no backbone!" "A meek person is timid!" "Meek means flimsy." "Meek is weak!"

These answers express the feelings of our modern society which emphasizes self-assertion, which consists of self-centered, self-made people. According to present-day standards, the meek top the list of those **least** likely to succeed. Now consider Jesus' statement: "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5). The only similarity in the words meekness and weakness is that they rhyme.

A horse trainer from Texas was asked about the qualities of a meek horse. Her answers may be helpful to us in our Christian walk and our relationship to the Lord. She gave four qualities. Her comments corroborate the preceding definitions of meekness!

"First: **Power under control.** Once broken, a good horse doesn't require much correction. He has learned to accept the reins of his master, and a gentle tug is all that is needed to urge him in the direction intended. The training process does not remove the strength and power that used to make the animal wild; rather it places the same energy under control. The phrase 'channel their spirit' is commonly used to describe this process. Properly channeled, the horse is able to jump higher, run faster, and work harder than an uncontrolled animal.

"Second: **Learning the Masters' mind.** A special relationship develops between horse and master. After years of working together, they develop a

rapport that becomes second nature to both of them. Thus trained, a good horse can sense a bad rider and will resist false guidance. An intimate kinship evolves, and it is not long before the horse acts according to what it knows the master would do, even if the master does not give explicit instructions.

“Third: **Partnership.** Teamwork is crucial. A rider may leave his horse temporarily. He is not there beside the horse telling it what to do and personally directing every move. The horse knows its job and is capable of working even when it doesn’t feel the immediate presence of its master. They work as a unit even when physically apart.

“Fourth: **Loyalty.** The meek horse has an elevated sense of loyalty and commitment. In the days of the wild west and the pony express, the lives of the mail carriers depended upon the horses they rode. They needed to be swift and hardy, with a measure of grit that enabled them to keep going, no matter what. Those horses would die in the running if that is what it took. They were bent upon completing the course. And despite the heat, the parching thirst, raging storms, Indian attacks and injury, horses of that caliber never whined in protest.

“These are the qualities of a meek horse. It has learned the secret of submitting to the control of it’s master. It trusts the rider enough to follow uncomplainingly wherever he leads.”

The trainer also added: “Perseverance is very important to the meek horse. A horse doesn’t become that way overnight. It takes a long, hard period of training. Horses must be taken in, trained, and made accustomed to the instruments used to harness their potential and lead them to productivity. It takes patience, sweat, and a view toward the promising future. But with these vital ingredients, the effort pays rich dividends.”

Jesus said, “It is written in the prophets [Isaiah 54:13], And they shall be all taught of God. Every man therefore that hath heard and hath learned of the Father, cometh unto me” (John 6:45, KJV). Herein lies the true formula whereby the meek may draw near to God, allowing God to be their instructor. Meekness or teachableness enables us to be taught of God.

God is the source of all true knowledge: “The LORD gives wisdom and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding” (Proverbs 2:6). All things are of the Father and by the son (1 Corinthians 8:6).

The problem we often have is that we are “self taught”; sometimes we even boast of it! In contrast, Jesus was taught of God. He made this very clear: “The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works” (John 14:10, KJV). “I can of mine own self do nothing: . . . I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me” (John 5:30, KJV).



So when we read, “Learn of me for I am meek and lowly of heart,” it means Jesus was teachable. Although he was perfect, “He learned obedience from what he suffered” (Hebrews 5:8).

A young man, gifted in music and violin, came to a world-renowned violin teacher to apply for lessons. He listed all the credits and instructions he had received thus far. His teacher said: the first step would be to unlearn all he was taught, and then he would teach him to play the violin.

We must unlearn our Adamic schooling and our downward human ways so we can learn God’s ways. We must unlearn our human ambitions and learn pure heavenly ambition. We must unlearn our human attitudes so that we may learn the “beattitudes.”

We must come to the Lord each day with blank pages asking him to write on them what he will. If we are truly led by his spirit, we will strive to take God’s point of view in every matter of life. Our love for God will beget in us a desire to learn and do his holy will.

Diligence, study, and patience will be required to gain this knowledge. Faith in God will lead to explicit confidence in his word. Humility will cast out pride and self-exaltation, and meekness will combine all these essential qualities and absorb them like a sponge into our lives and conduct.

At consecration we were like a sponge; we couldn’t take in the word of the Lord fast enough. Our prayer should be that God would revive us again, that our “first love” for God and his precious word may be uppermost in our hearts and minds, that we may be open-minded and ready to receive his word into good and honest hearts, that we may truly be meek, teachable.

Meekness is the character trait God’s word invites us to:

**Seek after.** “Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness; it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD’s anger” (Zephaniah 2:3, KJV).

**Put on.** “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering” (Colossians 3:12, KJV).

**Follow after.** “But thou, O man of God, . . . follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness” (1 Timothy 6:11, KJV).

How may we become truly meek? The description of a meek horse may help us define the characteristics of a meek Christian:

1. Willingness to undergo a lifetime of training so that coercion will not be

needed, just a gentle reminder by God's spirit.

2. A special relationship with our master that enables us to sense false and confusing direction from the adversary and to resist it.

3. Faith that is willing to work with the Master even when his presence may not be felt.

4. Unshakable commitment and loyalty.

Martin Luther said, "I have held many things in my hands, and I have lost them all; but whatever I have placed in God's hands, that I still possess." Luther knew that to let God reign in his life was to give him the "reins." To give God that responsibility will benefit us during our lifetime, and prepare us for his kingdom!

"Blessed are the meek." By being teachable we will be led by the spirit of God to relinquish the "reins" of our lives into his hands. By so doing, we grant him the freedom to guide and direct us. The difference between self-guidance and heavenly guidance is that ours is feeble and uncertain, his is never failing and eternal.

Matthew 5:6

## An Appetite for Righteousness

*As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God.—Psalm 42:1*

*Rolando Rodriguez*

The beatitudes define the steps that lead individuals into the body of Christ. Each beatitude can be seen to specifically identify a definite character trait in those who have the grace of God.

The first beatitude speaks of spiritual poverty: “Blessed are the poor in spirit” (Matthew 5:3). The second speaks of repentance: “Blessed are they that mourn” (Matthew 5:4). Repentance is an essential element of the character of one who possesses this grace. The third beatitude speaks of meekness: “Blessed are the meek” (Matthew 5:5). The fourth beatitude speaks of spiritual hunger and thirst: “Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness” (Matthew 5:6).

### **Hunger and Thirst**

We have all felt a gnawing feeling in our bellies when we skip a meal. To some degree we know the sensation of thirst and the longing for water especially after expending a lot of energy. In the heat of summer when our bodies perspire, they cry out for more fluids, for cold, liquid refreshment. But few of us know famine, the kind that bloats our bellies and leaves us helpless. Few have ever been in the desert without water to the point of serious, life-threatening dehydration; few know the real pain of thirst or a craving for water like Hagar and Ishmael in the wilderness of Beersheba (Genesis 21:14).

Such cravings are the result of our human makeup; it is the way we were created. For our body to function properly, it must be nourished. Food and drink strengthen us. God created the earth specifically for human habitation. Hungering and thirsting is a powerful metaphor. It expresses the inward cry of every creature for its very life. The Master takes an experience from everyday life—the painful experience of hungering and thirsting—and uses it as an illustration to elucidate the longings of the soul for meaningful contact with God and discerning his will in one’s life.

Those who lack physical food and drink are more likely to be aware of the prevailing injustice in this world. Their hunger or craving to see righteousness triumph can be all the more compelling. The righteousness of which Jesus spoke refers to the quality of propriety that fully conforms to God’s will and commandments. Expressing a thought similar to that of our Lord, the psalmist spoke of himself as being “crushed with longing” for God’s righteous judicial decisions (Psalm 119:20, NASV; compare Isaiah 26:9,10).

## **Whom Was Jesus Addressing?**

Luke's account of Jesus' words read: "Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be filled" (Luke 6:21). When reading from Luke, one would suppose Jesus spoke of those who longed for physical food. However, Matthew's account makes it clear that the Lord spoke of those with a strong craving for righteousness. Jesus was speaking to his disciples. They were not lacking food or drink, but they were hungering and thirsting for righteousness. Not all who hunger and thirst for material things get filled. Such hunger often leads to frustration and starvation. It is those who hunger and thirst for righteousness who receive what Jesus promised; they are filled.

Few today hunger and thirst for righteousness. However, the context shows these words have their primary application to those who are heirs of "the kingdom of heaven," those who hope literally to "see God" (Matthew 5:3,8.) These who hunger and thirst for righteousness follow three basic steps which result in a condition of well being where their hunger and thirst are satisfied.

### **Justification: The First Step to Righteousness**

The necessary first step is to approach the Lord's table and its provisions of spiritual "fat things" (Isaiah 25:6; Matthew 22:4). It requires a high regard for righteousness and truth. We must recognize our own unworthiness, our sinfulness, and our need for Jesus as our personal savior. Acceptance of his redeeming work, his life, death, and resurrection are essential to approach God's throne of grace.

The repudiation of sin and the acceptance of Christ as our sin-bearer and advocate before the heavenly Father brings us to the condition which the Scriptures describe as being "justified by faith" (Romans 5:1; Galatians 2:16). These are the ones who find comfort in knowing that despite their imperfections, they have peace with God. The heavenly Father is willing to accept such and their endeavors as though they were perfect. Such perfection is "reckoned," not "actual." Although we have been invited to partake at the Lord's table as "holy and acceptable" (Romans 12:1), we nevertheless realize that all invited still have weaknesses of the flesh and fight battles within (Romans 7:25).

The Scriptures figuratively describe those who have taken this step toward the heavenly Father's table as wearing a white robe of righteousness; they are covered with the merit of Christ which is imputed to all who believe in his ransom sacrifice and who seek to walk in his footsteps. All who approach the Father through the son, all who accept the terms of the upward call made during this Gospel age, are said to be on common ground; all sinners are covered and justified by the merit of Christ.

### **Consecration: The Second Step to Righteousness**

Although the first step of justification is an important one, there is more to follow. The second step is one of full consecration to the Lord, a full denial of one's own will. We recognize our imperfections, our sin-laden ways, that we are imperfect creatures with

inherited weaknesses and surrounded by temptations. When we make a full consecration to the Lord and fully accept his will instead of our own, we are inducted into the family of God. We have the privilege of being called “sons of God,” “heirs of God, joint-heirs with Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 8:14,17; Galatians 3:26; 4:6).

The position we hold within the family of God as sons and daughters has been made possible through the Lord as a result of our righteous hunger. We are given the privilege to feed at the Lord’s table to full satisfaction. We therefore can say with the apostle John: “But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:7,9).

### **Cultivating an Appetite: The Third Step to Righteousness**

The apostle Peter says that believers should be like newborn babies in their desires, craving the pure spiritual milk of the word so that by it they may grow up into their salvation, now that they have tasted that the Lord is good. Consecrated believers must not stop growing toward spiritual maturity. They need the sincere milk “of the word,” the unadulterated word of God, which produces continuous growth until the spiritual inheritance is gained. None should be content with only a small taste; they should crave it constantly and keep growing (1 Peter 2:1-3).

How does one cultivate an appetite for spiritual things? It is done just as a physical appetite is cultivated: guidance. Those who hunger for spiritual things know they are lacking and should seek to eat in the same way one satisfies physical hunger. Nothing is more contributory to alleviating spiritual hunger than approaching the throne of heavenly grace. Such hunger should stimulate us to search the Scriptures, and select from among this storehouse the exceedingly great and precious promises by which we may be filled.

When we become faint and discouraged from opposition and the daily trials of life, we do well to partake of such promises, remembering the words of the Lord, “I will never leave you or forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5). When discouragement sets in due to our failures and shortcomings, we do well to remember these words of comfort, “For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust”; and that he “was in all points tempted as we are”: that he is our high priest and advocate (Psalm 103:14; Hebrews 4:15; 1 Corinthians 10:13).

If we feel discouraged and overwhelmed by the opposition of the world and the great adversary, we need to remember that “all things work together for good to those who love God,” and that “if God is for us, who can be against us?” (Romans 8:28,31).

If thoughts of depression or unworthiness set in, if we ever feel that God is no longer interested in us or our endeavors to walk in the narrow way, we should remember that our heavenly Father so loved the world while we were yet sinners as to give his son for our release from sin and death. He loves us even more now since we have hungered and thirsted after righteousness and approached his table through his instrument of salvation,

Christ Jesus (John 3:16).

In following the course outlined in the Scriptures, the Lord's consecrated ones receive their fill in this present time. As we study his word there is more filling, and with each filling comes the growth of our hearts, our capacities, and our appreciation. Our course as children of the most high God is a progressive one from start to finish. But the finish will not be in this life, it will be when we are changed in the "first resurrection." Then we shall be like our Lord and Redeemer, and "see him as he is" and share his glory (Revelation 20:6; 1 John 3:2).

### **"Give Them Something to Eat"**

Righteousness is a study in contrasts—justice and injustice, truth and error, holiness and sin. To be careless in discerning these is to be lacking in all. Whoever hungers and thirsts after righteousness in one of these areas will surely hunger and thirst for all. Whoever loves justice and righteousness will surely love the truth; whoever loves the truth will surely love righteousness and justice. For as the Lord states: "No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon" (Luke 16:13).

Our Lord's miracle in feeding the multitude illustrates the lesson of hungering for righteousness. The supply of food was so inadequate for the thousands of hungry and tired individuals: just two loaves of bread and five small fishes. The disciples were about to send the people away hungry, but our Lord said to them, "Give them something to eat." As the account tells us, the portions increased and were more than sufficient to feed them all.

In like manner, the world of mankind hungers for righteousness, yet only the Lord's consecrated, his brethren, know of the food which really fills to satisfaction. His message to us is, "give them something to eat" that they too may be satisfied. Those of us who attempt to do so now are richly blessed.

We thank God for his precious promises that our now reigning Lord will put an end to the adversary and his evil influence, that he will open the blind eyes of all mankind to an appreciation of the truth and show them clearly that the only table at which spiritual hunger can be satisfied is the table of the Lord. "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." There is no doubt that the many who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be filled and that comparatively few will then starve to death (Habakkuk 2:14).

Unrighteousness cannot fill any man. There is, however, a filling power in righteousness. Let us not deceive ourselves and go along idly day after day, year after year, looking for satisfaction, comfort, rest, peace of heart, and joy in earthly things. Let us realize that all these are found only by those who find the Lord. It is to these, because of the new joy which comes into their hearts, who receive new experiences. To these the beauty of every flower, bird, and every noble song is enhanced in value; to these the only things lost are

the things not worth having, the things belonging to sin and selfishness.

Let us have a passion when it comes to longing for “food” from God, to hear his voice, and desire that he create in us a righteous heart. Let us, dear brethren, hunger and thirst for righteousness, cultivating our appetites in every sense of the word that we may receive God’s ample supply knowing the Master’s assurance that our satisfaction shall be complete. Already it satisfies our longings as nothing else can do, and eventually we know we shall be fully satisfied when we awake in his likeness (Matthew 6:33).

Matthew 5:7

## Mercy for the Merciful

*Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.—Matthew 6:12*

*Wade Austin*

Jesus' words speak plainly; to obtain the mercy of God or of man we must be merciful to our fellow man. Numerous Old and New Testament Scriptures reinforce this important principle. The psalmist foreshadowed Jesus' words when he wrote, "With the merciful thou wilt shew thyself merciful; with an upright man thou wilt shew thyself upright" (Psalm 18:25). Jesus taught this important principle in his parable of the unmerciful servant (Matthew 18:21-35). Likewise, the apostle James reinforced this concept when he wrote, "For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment" (James 2:13).

*Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* lists charity, clemency, grace and lenity as synonyms of mercy. The dictionary distinguishes mercy from its synonyms by suggesting "mercy is compassion that forbears punishment even though justice may demand it." This definition introduces compassion and justice as two important concepts inherent to mercy. Webster's defines compassion as "a sympathetic understanding of another's distress with a desire to alleviate their distress." Justice is defined as "the administration of what is just by the assignment of merited rewards or punishments." Patiently reflecting upon these definitions and combining their essential concepts into a single comprehensive definition, we conclude, "mercy is a sympathetic understanding of another's distress with a desire to alleviate their distress that forbears punishment even though justice might rightly administer punishment."

The Greek and Hebrew words that are translated "mercy" support this comprehensive definition. The Hebrew word for mercy (*cheched*) according to *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, "refers primarily to mutual and reciprocal rights and obligations between the parties of a relationship (especially Yahweh and Israel). But *cheched* is not only a matter of obligation; it is also of generosity. It is not only a matter of loyalty, but also of mercy. The weaker party seeks the protection and blessing of the patron and protector, but he may not lay absolute claim to it. The stronger party remains committed to his promise, but retains his freedom, especially with regard to the manner in which he will implement those promises. *Cheched* implies personal involvement and commitment in a relationship beyond the rule of law." Adam Clarke commented that the word, "among the Jews, signified two things: the pardon of injuries, and almsgiving." The Greek word *eleeo* (Strong's #1653 and used in Matthew 5:7) is almost always used to translate *cheched* in the New Testament and its meaning is consistent. In short, "forgive those who trespass against us" (cf. Matthew 6:12,14).



Shakespeare revealed a remarkable appreciation of mercy when he most elegantly wrote:

“The quality of mercy is not strained;  
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven  
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blessed;  
It blesseth him who gives, and him who  
takes:  
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest: it becomes  
The throned monarch better than his crown.  
It is an attribute of God himself;  
And earthly power doth then show likest  
God's,  
When mercy seasons justice. —  
Though justice be thy plea, consider this,  
That, in the course of justice, none of us  
Should see salvation. We do pray for mercy;  
And that same prayer doth teach us all to  
render  
The deeds of mercy.—  
Why, all the souls that are, were forfeit  
once:  
And he who might the ‘vantage best have  
took  
Found out the remedy. How would you be,  
If He who is the top of judgment should  
But judge you as you are?”

These words of Shakespeare were included in the November/December 2001 issue of The Herald at the conclusion of the article about Joseph, “Submission Under Injustice.” The title of the article summarizes the spirit of Joseph; the yielding of his just rights to both forgive and administer kindness to his brethren. Like Shakespeare, many wise and learned men have appreciated the blessed quality of mercy through the ages. Yet few seem to have comprehended the breadth and the depth of God's loving kindness and mercy. Fewer still desire to consecrate their lives to God in the hope of living and reigning with Christ to bless all the families of the earth. A faithful life of consecration seeks to emulate the character of God as revealed in his word. Both Old and New Testament Scriptures testify to the abounding mercy of God and encourage God's children to be merciful as he is merciful.

To emulate God's mercy requires an inward spiritual transformation and not simply an intellectual understanding of mercy. This transformation can only happen by faith in God whereby one is declared to be of the seed of Abraham and to whom was promised, “in thee shall all nations be blessed” (Genesis 22:18; Galatians 3:8). Such faith and love in God prompts us to desire complete obedience to him. In the beatitudes we recognize attributes of Jesus and of God and we seek to do these things. Each of the beatitudes, if

practiced, contributes to our spiritual transformation. While each of the qualities Jesus encourages us to emulate in his sermon can stand alone, the blessedness of mercy does benefit from development of the others, and perhaps they grow through the practice of mercy. As an example, the root word from which the Hebrew word *cheved* is derived means “to stoop down or to bend in kindness.” Stooping down would imply humility and meekness of spirit. The compassion embodied in mercy could imply an element of sorrow and mourning for the plight of another, and certainly “hungering and thirsting after righteousness” implies a longing to be like our loving and merciful heavenly father.

The apostle Paul writes: “The man without the spirit does not accept the things that come from the spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man’s judgment” (1 Corinthians 2:14,15 NIV) So it is that wise and learned men may indeed know and appreciate God’s principles, but they will not accept them and do them unless they are transformed by God’s spirit of holiness.

While compassion and forgiveness characterize mercy they may be but inward unseen feelings that do not bless and cannot therefore be fully blessed without outward acts of benevolence. An act of mercy among the Hebrews included “almsgiving” and thus inherently involved a giving of oneself or of one’s possessions to comfort another in need. The letter of the Law required daily sacrifices be given to God, but the spirit of the Law required its keepers “to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God” (Micah 6:8).

### **Doing Justly**

“To do justly” does not mean to demand justice of others without thought for their well-being. What a blessedness are those opportunities we may have to administer justice tempered with mercy, for on such occasions we truly have occasion to reflect the wondrous merciful character of God. But what does it mean? It simply means what it says: **Do justly!** Perform just deeds. We should never take advantage of another, never be unfair, but do that which is right. When we are wronged, to do justly requires that we speak to the one that has wronged us and inform them privately, and seek to resolve the issue peacefully (Matthew 18:15-17). In such cases we must be careful to remove the beam that is in our own eye, else we will not see clearly enough to **do justly**. We may have the right to require justice of another, but because of our need for mercy, Jesus instructs us to be merciful if we would obtain mercy. No one should be able to question the integrity of our fairness and justice whether in big things or in little things. The little things, the ones where we are tempted to say, “Oh, this won’t matter,” are extremely important because if we are slack in little things, then we will be slack in larger things.

Often times when we think of being unjust, it is in actual actions or in connection with material things such as money or property. But it is just as important to do justly in our

opinions of others. In our mental processes, we must be merciful and learn to give others the benefit of the doubt. If they have behaved inappropriately, then doing justly, doing the right thing, might require us to speak to them with gentle correction, but also with love and mercy.

### **Loving Mercy**

Next, the prophet Micah tells us we are to love mercy. Mercy is a beautiful concept. We should be grateful that our heavenly Father asks so little of us in reality, yet it constantly conflicts with our human nature. It takes practice to have a ready merciful spirit. Practice is akin to the counsel of Solomon: “My son, keep thy father’s commandment, and forsake not the law of thy mother: bind them continually upon thine heart, [and] tie them about thy neck. When thou goest, it shall lead thee; when thou sleepest, it shall keep thee; and [when] thou awakest, it shall talk with thee” (Proverbs 6:20-22). Consciously seeking to be merciful, loving mercy, is like binding it about our neck. We have a merciful heavenly Father. We must strive to be like him. In the kingdom we are to have a position as sympathetic and merciful high priests. Before we are blessed with that privilege we have much to learn about mercy.

### **Walking Humbly With God**

If we demand justice of others with no thought of mercy, then it is possible that we think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think. We too proudly declare our righteousness and the failing of another. We walk proudly with God and not humbly.

The apostle Paul counsels Timothy: “The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will” (2 Timothy 2:24-26).

One of the most merciful things we can do for a troubled soul is to instruct with the word of God. Paul exhorts us to instruct others in a peaceful, patient and gentle manner. The word of God that we preach will do a sanctifying work for those who acknowledge God’s leading and thus recover them from the adversary. When we preach the word of God out of “strife or vainglory” (Philippians 2:3), then we obstruct the message and its sanctifying power by our own behavior. Such behavior on our part is often judgmental and not merciful; it is the result of not walking humbly with God.

Paul encouraged the Ephesians to “walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;” (Ephesians 4:1,2).

Brother Russell eloquently expressed the sentiments of these verses when he wrote: “We show our appreciation of God’s mercy toward us by schooling ourselves in his character and becoming more and more merciful and generous toward all the Household of Faith.

And if merciful toward the brethren, naturally we would be generous also toward all men. In other words, as we remember and appreciate our own weaknesses and blemishes, it will make us sympathetic with the brethren and with all mankind. And mercy, generosity, and sympathy, are qualities God delights in. Such as cultivate these graces of the Spirit will be pleasing in the Lord's sight, and they will thereby be fitted and prepared to have a share with Jesus in his Throne of Glory; for that great Messianic Kingdom will be established for the very purpose of showing mercy unto thousands of mankind who will return to Divine favor and blessing."—*Reprints*, p. 5135 and 359.

### **Let Mercy Crown Our Days**

Let us proclaim the loving character of God in our daily words and deeds. Thus we will be transformed into the glory we behold by reflecting the glorious character of God. Paul proclaimed, "We Christians have no veil over our faces; we can be mirrors that brightly reflect the glory of the Lord. And as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him" (2 Corinthians 3:18, TLB). Let us not be like Israel under the law who were blinded by the veil of the law to see the glory of God. They fearfully held to the justice, judgments, and ceremonial details of the law covenant and were blinded to the simple commandment of God, "And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, to keep the commandments of the LORD, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good" (Deuteronomy 10:12, 13).

Thanks be to God for his grace and mercy to us, and for his blessed assurance that if mercy does indeed crown our days as we humbly walk with him, he will grant unto us a "crown of life" (Revelation 2:10).

Matthew 5:8

## Intentions of the Heart

*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.—Matthew 5:8*

*Aaron Marten*

In this beatitude, the Lord Jesus gives us a perfect instruction as to what the intentions of our heart should be. We are to maintain pure heart thoughts and desires in all that we think, say, and do in our consecrated walk along the narrow way. However, this is much easier said than done given the fact that the Bride of Christ must accomplish this great feat while still in the flesh and in the “present evil world” (Galatians 1:4). Nevertheless, if we are to make our calling and election sure and see God when we pass beyond the veil, we must purify our hearts of all sin, hatred, malice, and anger through reliance on our Lord’s sacrifice and Jehovah’s merciful grace.

### **The Pure in Heart**

To those who heard Jesus’ “sermon on the mount,” the statement that the pure in heart would see God must have been astounding. Who could see God and live (Exodus 33:20)? Even when Moses saw only the backside of God, his face shown so brightly that he had to wear a veil (Exodus 34:29-35). The apostle John emphasized this point when he wrote, “No man hath seen God at any time” (John 1:18). From the testimony of the Scriptures, it is clear that no human being can see God. Furthermore, Paul tells us that the natural man cannot truly grasp the spiritual realm without the anointing of the holy spirit (1 Corinthians 2:14,15).

Therefore, from the Scriptures we know that Jesus must not have been talking about an earthly class when he referred to those who would “see God.” It must refer to a heavenly class. The Scriptures refer to two spiritual classes: the Church and the Great Company. While it is true that the Great Company will be spiritual beings and in one sense “see God,” this beatitude refers primarily to the Church.

The Bride of Christ is composed of those who fully relied on the Lord throughout the duration of their walk, even unto death. These are the ones who truly will have kept their hearts pure. They have had no cares in the world and the intentions of their hearts are pure and blameless. Those of the Great Company, however, may have had their hearts pure at the beginning of their walk, but they failed to keep their robes spotless by continually washing them in the merit of Christ’s righteousness. Only those of the true church possess hearts that are unadulterated and sincere in complete devotion to the Lord’s will.

## Nature of the Heart

When talking about the nature of humanity, it is important to distinguish between the state before the fall and the state after. Adam was originally created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27); he had a pure heart. There were no evil influences to taint his heart's intentions before Eve was tempted by the serpent. It is only when sin and selfishness entered that the quality of purity was eradicated from the human heart as a "natural" quality from that point forward.

The fact that human hearts in this present evil world are naturally evil because of sin is recognized throughout the Scriptures. The prophet Jeremiah wrote, "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it" (Jeremiah 17:9, NAS). Our Lord makes this point about the heart when he said, "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders" (Matthew 15:19).

When we first draw near to the Lord, our hearts are in this "natural" condition to a degree because of hereditary sin. Only when we begin to consciously tear down the will of our sinful nature and ask the Lord for assistance in this will we begin to make progress toward attaining a Christ-like character. Paul speaks about this throughout his writings: "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come" (2 Corinthians 5:17, NAS). Only when we recognize that the old heart, the heart we obtained at birth, is corrupt and full of evil desires can we begin to put on the new creature and purify our hearts to be pleasing to the Lord.

## Purification

If we are to be faithful to our consecration, we need to purify our hearts. How can we accomplish this seemingly great feat? Relying on the Lord by asking for his help as we struggle with our fleshly desires is **always** necessary when trying to attain a more righteous character. The Lord expects us, however, to also make a conscious effort to perfect ourselves by weeding out the sin in our hearts as well as we can to show the Lord the sincerity in our hearts.

This purification process is no easy task. Even the apostle Paul struggled with his old natural tendencies throughout his Christian walk (Romans 7). One way this process begins is through fear: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10). Fear cannot bring about lasting effects. To truly purify our hearts, we must always look for any imperfections.

The best way to make progress along this line is to walk circumspectly along the narrow way. In everything we think, say, or do, we should ask ourselves why we are doing what we are doing. If we see that ultimately our motives in a specific action are to serve the Lord and fulfill his will, we can be sure our hearts are pure. We are making progress toward acquiring the absolute purity the Lord seeks for each of his saints.

On the other hand, if we see that our intentions are not pure, we must feel a sense of urgency to correct the matter. In many cases perhaps an action must be stopped altogether. In other cases an action we know would be the Lord's will may be neglected out of fear or a lack of confidence in him. In any case it is important that we cleanse the heart as we strive toward becoming an image of Christ.

### **Not Purity in Deed**

It is also important to note the difference between purity in heart and purity in deed. - Oftentimes, the heart has pure intentions, but sometimes the ability to perform or speak the Lord's will is impeded by the old flesh in which we still reside. As long as we are still constrained to the fleshly nature, we need the robe of Christ's righteousness to cover us. The Lord does not require us to maintain absolute perfection in deed, word, or thought. This was maintained by Jesus as the unblemished lamb of God. Instead, God requires that we purify our hearts, our new wills, and that we want nothing more than to serve him to the uttermost. This does not mean that we should not try to reach a greater level of perfection and purification in our deeds, but we should realize it is a goal we cannot fully accomplish while in the flesh. We should also remember that the Lord will not condemn us for failing to accomplish what we cannot do. The Lord judges our heart intention. Despite what our flesh would have us do, the Lord sees what is truly in our heart; on this basis we shall be found worthy or unworthy to receive the divine nature.

### **Seeing God**

What a marvelous thought that if we are faithful to our consecration and maintain our heart's purity, we will see God! We will be able to meet, face to face, the Creator to whom we have devoted our lives and our very existence. And we will be able to enjoy this great blessing for eternity if we can maintain our course on the narrow way for this short lifetime on earth. This should be a most comforting thought to any of the Lord's people suffering a terminal disease. They can rest assured knowing they will soon meet the Lord whom they have come to know and love, and shall see him forevermore.

This thought of seeing Jehovah God after we are changed should be a daily meditation of all the members of the Church. Yet there is a sense in which the members of the Church can already begin to see God while still in the flesh. Through a study of God's word, we can see his character manifest and thus we come to know God and see him in our mind's eye. After having the truth of God's word made clear before our eyes by the anointing of the holy spirit, we begin to see the attributes of God and thus see him in a figurative sense.

Many professed Christians cannot truly see God because they have been blinded by the doctrines and creeds of devils and of men (see Ephesians 4:14). Those who believe in a God who would eternally torment billions are blinded in the sense that they cannot see the true love of God. Trinitarians are blinded because they cannot see God's perfect justice shown in the giving of a perfect **human** life for a perfect **human** life. Those who believe in an immortal soul are blinded to see God's wisdom in his foreknowledge that

some would have to be destroyed permanently. It is only with pure truth and by approaching the word of God with a pure heart that we can see glimpses of our Father in heaven while we are still human beings.

### **Continual Cleansing**

Being able to see a foretaste of God should ignite a passion within us to continue to purify our hearts. Can we do more to adjust our hearts to be in harmony with God's will? As good stewards of all that God has given us, perhaps the most important thing we can give back to the Lord is our time. Time is the one asset we are given by God that we absolutely must use. None of us can slow, stop, or in any way impede time. We should have a sense of urgency knowing that we are limited in the amount of time we have to devote to the Lord during our consecrated walk (1 Corinthians 9:24). The more time we spend on changing our heart to an attitude of wanting to serve the Lord to a higher degree, the better we will be. The time until each of us receives the blessing of being able to see God face to face is closer than it was before. May this be a continual, daily encouragement to each of us as we strive to purify our hearts and faithfully complete our walk in the narrow way.



Matthew 5:9

## Peace Making-- Past, Present and Future

*Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.—Matthew 5:9*

*Homer Montague*

From the time of Adam's fall in Eden, the human race lost the peace and security that were his when perfect. After the work of the sixth creative day was complete we read: "And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day" (Genesis 1:31). Thus all was at peace and fully in harmony with the heavenly Father's arrangements for mankind to replenish and subdue the earth, thereby extending the Edenic paradise throughout the entire planet.

How different conditions became for the first pair after disobeying God's command not to partake of the forbidden fruit. As a way of enforcing the death penalty, Adam and Eve were driven from paradise into an unfinished part of the earth to labor by the sweat of their brows for sustenance.

The well known narrative of Cain slaying Abel (Genesis 4:8) is indicative that the peace which their parents once enjoyed was a thing of the past and that all of the first pair's progeny would indeed be "children of wrath."

Subsequently, the heavenly Father selected the nation of Israel to illustrate in typical fashion the means of extricating mankind from inherited sinful conditions to restoration to divine favor. The Israelites were instructed to offer sacrifices such as sin offerings to obtain atonement. Since the blood of bulls and goats could never actually take away sin, these sacrifices pointed to the reality when Christ Jesus would give his own perfect human life as a ransom for all, thereby opening a new and living way so mankind ultimately would have an opportunity to have a peaceful and perfect relationship with the Creator (Hebrews 10:1-4).

Despite Israel's repeated unfaithfulness, the nation maintained a special standing with the heavenly Father whose providences continued with them until they were cast off from special favor because they rejected Jesus as their Messiah. Their unique position and relationship were emphasized by God in words recorded in Amos: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities" (Amos 3:2).

### **Examples of Peacemakers**

Until mankind is brought back to full perfection as a result of the atoning work of Christ, no fallen individual can attain peace in the fullest sense. Nevertheless, there were various Old Testament characters who tried by their actions to serve as peacemakers in an attempt to reconcile situations involving conflict. Three individuals who initiated actions of this nature were Abraham, Isaac, and Jonathan.

Genesis 13:5-13 records an incident involving strife between the herdsmen of Abraham and Lot because the pastureland in question did not appear to be of sufficient size to support their mutual needs. Abraham was both peaceful and generous in dealing with his nephew Lot and he desired to have no quarrel with one of his kindred. He suggested that they separate and asked Lot to choose which portion of land he desired and he, Abraham, would take the other section. In our own attempts to live in peace when dealing with others, we can frequently yield our own rights to good advantage, especially concerning temporal arrangements. Only when a matter of principle is involved should we press a particular point.

Abraham's son, Isaac, also demonstrated his willingness to initiate a peaceful solution. We read that Isaac had become very wealthy in Gerar and King Abimelech asked him to leave where he was living. Isaac then moved a short distance away but the Philistines had stopped up the wells, which Abraham previously had dug. Isaac cleaned out the wells and twice more strife ensued with the Philistines concerning the ownership of the wells. Each time Isaac yielded and moved to a new location. Finally, in Beersheba he built an altar, pitched a tent and dug yet another well. King Abimelech subsequently visited Isaac who made a feast for him and they agreed to live in peace. Isaac's attitude and handling of the situation in an amicable manner merits our attention as an example of living peaceably with all wherever possible (Genesis 26:12-30).

Another situation involved Jonathan and his father, King Saul. David's popularity had risen to such a degree that Saul became envious and sought to kill him. Although David ultimately became a fugitive throughout Saul's reign, Jonathan was successful in changing his father's attitude at least for brief periods of time (1 Samuel 19:4-7). Although this condition

did not last, Jonathan demonstrated nobility of character by seeking to modify Saul's actions against David. Jonathan's attempts at securing a peaceful solution even though not permanently successful, gave evidence that he appreciated the importance of the reconciliation process.

### **Training for Peacemaking**

During this Gospel age consecrated, spirit-begotten followers of Christ are being prepared to aid in reconciling mankind back to God. The promised peace, which the Master left as a legacy for the church, should inspire all believers to faithful obedience and zealous activity in his service, especially with the prospect of being united in glory with Christ in the grand work of restoration during the Millennial kingdom (Isaiah 35).

How can we as believers claim the promise, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee" (Isaiah 26:3)? One of the most important ways is to improve our prayer life. This will assist us in accepting all our experiences whether painful to the flesh or not as being under divine supervision. What comforting assurances we receive when we demonstrate fervency in this area and cast all our burdens on the Lord. When the Master was going through his Gethsemane experience, and throughout his entire ministry, his close communion with God undoubtedly enabled him to faithfully endure all contradiction of sinners. Our Redeemer is no less solicitous of the interests of the church and will succor and sustain us if we do our part.

Another means of sustaining peace in our lives is by meditating upon the Scriptures and applying them to ourselves. We read, "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Peter 1:4). Much was written about the heroism of the New York City firefighters who risked and gave their lives trying to save individuals trapped in the World Trade Center. They were moved by a sense of duty, compassion, and fearlessness, seeking no reward for their efforts. How much more should we have a sense of peace in our lives each day, knowing the heavenly Father desires us to be a part of his divine family? The fact that we have been called to receive glory, honor, and immortality and to share his very nature should give us extraordinary comfort. God provides the necessary grace and his holy spirit to assist us in being victorious if we submit to the righteous influences provided in our lives.

## A Five-Step Program

Sometimes brethren experience difficulties involving others and they seek counsel to help them address issues which trouble them. How can we serve as peacemakers in such instances? It might prove useful to follow a five-step program: practice sympathetic listening, give assurances of God's love, discuss options for action, be available for follow-up support, and guard confidentiality.

**Listening:** A cardinal requirement to be an effective peacemaker is the need for careful listening to discern specifically why someone is distressed. This requires an attitude of compassion and attentiveness to create the proper atmosphere for the person to feel we can be of assistance. We should not offer quick solutions because ultimately the person must take sole ownership for a future course of action. We would do well to heed the admonition, "Wherefore my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak" (James 1:19).

**Assurance of Divine Care:** Once we have listened to the concerns it would be appropriate to offer assurance of God's love as well as his many overruling providences in our lives. When we are approached for counsel and comfort, it is likely to be at a time when the person's own efforts in seeking assistance at the throne of grace or from meditating upon God's word have not yielded the desired quietness of soul. At such times we can be supportive by calling attention to such Scriptures as, "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Hebrews 13:5); and "Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you" (1 Peter 5:7).

**Exploring Options:** Rarely does one particular approach provide the solution for someone who is troubled. Usually a variety of options should be considered depending upon the circumstances. As a peacemaker we should inquire what the person would like to see as a desired outcome regarding the situation. By asking questions we can help others determine what is likely to be God's will in the matter. Other ways to help include encouraging the person to seek the brethren's prayers, discuss how the use of the principles in Matthew 18 might help to resolve the matter, role play to provide confidence in his own ability to address the problem, and suggest how a trial may be used by the Lord

to help him assist others with similar problems in the future.

**Follow-up Support:** When one assumes the role of being a comforter to brethren in distress, time and follow-up efforts are usually needed to provide effective assistance. Jacob wrestled all night with an angel before receiving the desired blessing. Likewise if we wish to provide solace and support, we should not become weary in well doing. We read, “A man that hath friends must show himself friendly: and there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother” (Proverbs 18:24). Before the work of a peacemaker ends there may be the need to pray together, cry together, or just be available to listen or give a sympathetic embrace to lift the spirit.

**Confidentiality:** A true peacemaker will never violate a confidence. When entering into a position of trust, we must guard against any inclination to discuss private matters which have been shared with us. To do otherwise could have tremendously harmful implications to the one who already may be in a fragile state. Additionally, it may encourage busybodying, evil speaking, anger, and other works of the flesh which are detrimental to the development of the new creature. Peacemakers may never speak to the detriment of others for it is written, “He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets: therefore meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips” (Proverbs 20:19).

During the Gospel age, the followers of Christ have been learning lessons that will equip them to help restore the peaceful conditions which existed in Eden before sin entered the world. Presently we are living at a transitional time between the ages: “Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness. Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (2 Peter 3:11,13).

## **The Final Peace**

When righteousness is established, peace will exist. Then it will not be said, “There is no peace, saith the LORD, unto the wicked” (Isaiah 48:22). This present evil order will end with the glorification of the church and Satan will be restrained so he can not deceive the nations (Revelation 20:2,3). It will be a time when war and conflicts that have existed for more than six thousand years will be at an end as it is prophesied, “They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more” (Micah 4:3).

Under the leadership of Messiah, the church will assist in ruling mankind with a rod of iron (Revelation 2:27) so that the conditions for peaceful acquiescence to the kingdom of righteousness can be enforced. The Scriptures indicate the spirit and the bride will invite all the willing of humanity to partake of the water of life (Revelation 22:17) and proceed up the highway of holiness. Unlike today when there is no peace, conditions in the earth during the Millennial reign of Christ will be such that, “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9).

The prospect of helping mankind attain peace during the kingdom is so inspiring that each spirit-begotten child of God should now be willing to pay the full cost of discipleship required to effect the complete reconciliation of humanity back to God under the leadership of Christ Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

Matthew 5:10-13

## Endurers of Persecution

*Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.—2 Timothy 3:12*

*Tim Thomassen*

The English word persecution comes from the Latin *persequi* meaning to pursue. It is similar to the Hebrew *ra-dhaph* and Greek *di-o 'ko*, verbs meaning to pursue, chase, persecute (*Aid to Bible Understanding*, p. 1291). Merriam Webster's *Collegiate Dictionary* defines persecution as "the condition of being persecuted, harassed, or annoyed."

Historically individuals have been persecuted for a variety of reasons. These include personality clashes, misunderstandings, philosophical differences, hurt feelings, physical appearance, social status, racial origin as well as religious faith and conviction. Much has been said and written regarding all of these.

Jesus said, "Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:11,12, RSV).

*Nelson's Bible Dictionary* describes persecution as "the hatred and affliction that follows the witness and holy life of God's people in a hostile world. The concept is stressed in many of the Old Testament prophetic books, such as Isaiah. The New Testament also teaches that God's people will suffer persecution."

### Persecution in the Old Testament

Cain persecuted his brother Abel. He was so angry that he killed Abel. We read that Cain "was of the evil one and murdered his brother . . . because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous" (1 John 3:12, RSV). We are also told that "by faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he received approval as righteous, God bearing witness by accepting his gifts" (Hebrews 11:4, RSV).

Job "was blameless and upright, one who feared God, and turned away from evil" (Job 1:1, RSV). But Job, whose name means "object of hostility," eventually became the subject of persecution. His wife and three friends were manipulated by Satan to afflict him (Job 1:8 to 2:9; 19:22,28).

David was described as a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22). Yet we read that Saul "was determined to put David to death" (1 Samuel 20:33).

“Jezebel killed the prophets of the LORD” (1 Kings 18:13). Elijah proclaimed that the people of Israel forsook God’s covenant, threw down his altars, and slew the prophets with the sword (1 Kings 19:10).

We are told that “Manasseh shed very much innocent blood, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another, besides the sin which he made Judah to sin so that they did what was evil in the sight of the LORD” (2 Kings 21:16, RSV).

Jeremiah suffered at the hands of government officials (Jeremiah 15:15; 17:18; 20:11; 37:15,16; 38:4-6). False priests and prophets felt Jeremiah should die since he prophesied against them (Jeremiah 26:11). This is a good example of how God’s faithful ones have been persecuted by promoters of false religion.

Some of the better known accounts of persecution involving the Lord’s faithful include the three Hebrews who were thrown into the fiery furnace and Daniel being cast into the lions’ den (Daniel 3:13-20). In the book of Esther the Persian King Ahasuerus persecuted the Jews. Mordecai was a special object of Haman’s wicked attacks (Esther 3:1-12; 5:14).

### **Persecution in the New Testament**

Matthew 10 discusses the calling and sending forth of the 12 apostles. Jesus told his disciples that he would send them out “as sheep in the midst of wolves” (verse 16) and forewarned them that they would be delivered up to councils and flogged in the synagogues (verse 17). Furthermore, they would be “dragged before governors and kings” for his sake, “to bear testimony before them and the Gentiles” (verse 18). He said they would “be hated by all” for his name’s sake (verse 22).

Jesus himself was persecuted. It is written that the chief priests and Pharisees gathered the Sanhedrin together and took counsel how to put him to death (John 11:47-53). “They spat in his face, and struck him; and some slapped him” (Matthew 26:67, RSV). Subsequently he was bound and delivered to Pilate (Matthew 27:2). Later, he was flogged and handed over to be crucified (Matthew 27:26). He was mocked (verse 29) and struck on the head again and again (verse 30).

After the death of Jesus, faithful followers of the Master were also persecuted. After Pentecost, there were arrests, threats, and beatings. The priests, captain of the temple guard, and the Sadducees were “greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. They seized Peter and John, and . . . put them in jail until the next day” (Acts 4:1-3). Peter and John received further threats before they were released (Acts 4:21).

Stephen was seized and brought before the Sanhedrin. False witnesses testified against him (Acts 6:13). During his self-defense, Stephen asked, “Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him” (Acts 7:52, NIV). “When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him” (verse 54, NIV).



Their anger turned to murder, as they stoned Stephen to death. (verses 59, 60).

After Stephen's death "a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria" (Acts 8:1, NIV). "Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison" (Acts 8:3, NIV). He later made "murderous threats against the Lord's disciples" (Acts 9:1, NIV).

Acts 12:1 declares that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church with the intention of persecuting them. James, the brother of John, was killed with a sword (verse 2) and Herod tried to restrain Peter as well. Peter was arrested and put in prison. Only because of the miraculous deliverance by an angel of the Lord was Peter able to escape (verses 7-10).

After Saul's conversion, he became the target of intense persecution himself. During his ministry and travels, Paul experienced severe and repeated affliction, troubles, hardships, distresses, beatings, imprisonments, sleepless nights, hunger, and suffering (Acts 13:50; 2 Corinthians 6:3-5; 11:23-25; Galatians 5:11; 2 Timothy 3:10,11).

Other followers of Jesus became objects of hatred and persecution. The source of this opposition was usually false religious leaders who succeeded in influencing misinformed political leaders (Acts 16:20; 17:6; 28:22).

"Tacitus, a Roman historian born about 55 C.E. tells of the rumor charging Nero as responsible for burning Rome (64 C.E.), and then says: 'Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. . . . Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired.'"—*The Annals*, Book XV, par. 44, translated by Church and Brodribb.

### **Persecutions Throughout the Gospel Age**

The followers of Jesus have been persecuted since the days of the early church until now. The record of history has confirmed Paul's words: "In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived" (2 Timothy 3:12,13, NIV).

How can persecution be endured? "He that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved" (Matthew 24:13). The Greek word translated "endure" has the thought of "to stay under, remain; to undergo, i.e., bear (trials), have fortitude, persevere." The NIV renders this verse, "but he who stands firm to the end will be saved."

## **Enduring Persecution**

Peter gives us some guidelines for endurance: “But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened. But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. It is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil” (1 Peter 3:14-17, NIV). In the next chapter he adds, “if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name” (1 Peter 4:16, NIV).

Having a good attitude and maintaining faithfulness under pressure and opposition are also requisites for endurance. Again, Peter’s words offer guidance and wisdom: “For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps” (1 Peter 2:19-21, NIV).

Paul instructed us to have the same mind as Jesus. Our exemplar emptied and humbled himself, took the form of a servant and became obedient unto death on a cross (Philippians 2:5-8, RSV).

We need to run with perseverance the race that is set before us and look to Jesus who is the perfecter of our faith. Jesus, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorned its shame (Hebrews 12:1,2). We must keep our eyes fixed upon him and walk in his steps if we hope to endure unto the end.

## **Delighting in Persecution**

The apostle Paul delighted in weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and difficulties. His words were: “For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10, NIV). As Paul instructed, we should imitate him in that he imitated Christ (1 Corinthians 4:16).

The importance of faith and patience in this battle of endurance is stressed in Hebrews: “For in just a very little while, He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him. But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved” (Hebrews 10:37-39, NIV).

Difficulties should not be unexpected nor something from which we should shy away. Peter wrote that we should not be surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon us to prove us. We should not consider it as something strange happening to us, but should rejoice in so far as we share Christ’s sufferings. Peter tells us that we will rejoice and be

glad when his glory is revealed. We should consider it a blessing to be reproached in the name of Christ. This will be an evidence that God's spirit rests upon us (1 Peter 4:12,13, RSV).

Our faith should continue to grow, as was the case of the Thessalonians. Paul boasted about their perseverance and faith in all of their persecutions and trials they had endured. He said this was evidence that God's judgment is right. As a result, they would be counted worthy of the kingdom of God for which they suffered. Paul said, "God is just: he will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled" (2 Thessalonians 1:6,7, NIV).

We may never experience that same type of persecution as encountered by the Lord's faithful ones of past times. Yet to whatever degree or in whatever shape and form it may manifest itself, persecution should not be overcome by engaging in evil deeds.

Paul wrote that we should never take revenge but leave room for God's wrath, "for it is written: It is mine to avenge; I will repay, says the Lord. On the contrary: If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:19-21, NIV).

### **Loving Our Persecutors**

Our attitude toward those who persecute us is important. We must always strive to put into practice those words of Jesus: "But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."— Matthew 5:44- 48, NIV

The word "perfect" in Matthew 5:48 is translated from the Greek word *teleios*. Strong's Concordance defines it as "complete (in various applications of labor, growth, mental and moral character, etc.); completeness." Our character development will be incomplete if we do not respond to our persecutions as described in these verses. As Paul instructed, we should bless those who persecute us and not curse them (Romans 12:14).

Only blessing should come from our mouths. James wrote that "from the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brethren, this ought not to be so" (James 3:10, RSV). James also counseled us to be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving ourselves (James 1:22).

Paul said that the apostles were "fools for Christ's sake" but that they were "wise in Christ." We should follow their example when he said: "being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: being defamed, we intreat" (1 Corinthians 4:10-13).

## **Christians Not to Seek Persecution**

Jesus instructed his followers to be “wise as serpents, and harmless as doves” (Matthew 10:16). Commenting on this verse, Brother Russell wrote that we should be neat in - appearance, kind, interested and dignified in language and manner (*Reprints*, p. 825). “We are to do nothing foolish nor go out on the streets to stir up trouble but use the spirit of a sound mind—gentleness, meekness, patience, brotherly-kindness and love” (*Reprints*, p. 5846). “Wisdom is to be exercised in the presentation of the Lord’s Word” (*Reprints*, p. 5146 and 5151). “Many of the Lord’s people need to learn tactfulness; some mistakenly believe that they must use no tact—that to do so would be dishonest” (*Reprints*, p. 4130).

Matthew 13:21 indicates that not everyone who hears the good news of the kingdom will endure the heat of persecution. Of someone representative of a certain class of individuals Jesus said: “When tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.” He was referring to a person who had no root in himself. Hence, the lesson for us is that we should be “strengthened with might through his spirit in the inner man, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:16-19, RSV). “As therefore you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so live in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. See to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ” (Colossians 2:6-8, RSV).

## **Persecution Not to Be Avoided**

There were some in Paul’s day who wanted to “make a good showing in the flesh.” This compelled them to be circumcised “so they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ” (Galatians 6:12). We should not fall into this same trap. We must not hold back from preaching the truth of God’s word, as long as it is done in a loving and edifying manner. “Therefore, putting away falsehood, let every one speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another” (Ephesians 4:25, RSV).

May we rely more and more on God’s strength, praying as David did for deliverance from his persecutors. May his words be our prayer as well: “O LORD my God, in thee do I take refuge; save me from all my pursuers, and deliver me” (Psalm 7:1, RSV).

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”—Romans 8:35-39.

# News & Views

## Pastoral Bible Institute News

### PBI Directors Elected

The members of the Pastoral Bible Institute have elected these seven individuals to serve as directors for the next 12 months:

Francis Earl  
Len Griehs  
Carl Hagensick  
Michael Nekora  
Andrew Polychronis  
George Tabac  
Tim Thomassen

## World News

### Religious

China detained 47 Christians at a church meeting in suburban Beijing as U.S. President George W. Bush ended his visit to China with a call for freedom of worship there. Police charged the group with holding an illegal gathering, but released 55 of them with a caution the next day. Changping district police body-searched the Christians, confiscated their Bibles, and did not allow them to drink or go to the toilet. At a joint press conference after talks with Bush, Chinese President Jiang Zemin defended China's religious freedom and said that anyone imprisoned must have broken the law. China only allows state-supervised religious groups.

—DPA, 2/22/2002

An international fellowship of Bible societies has registered the translation of the Bible into 24 additional languages in 2001. The total number of languages in which books of the Bible are available now stands at 2,287, according to the annual tally by the United Bible Societies.

—Los Angeles Times, 2/9/2002

For more than two decades now, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has worked hard to alter its image. During the Olympics in Salt Lake City, the church's hierarchy advised the media that the term Mormon Church is no longer acceptable. Henceforth, officials declared, short references to the church should read: "The Church of Jesus Christ." In this way the church hopes to emphasize what Mormons share with historic Christianity, not what makes them different. More important, Mormon rhetoric is becoming more overtly evangelical. Are the Mormons going mainstream? "Not at all," says non-Mormon historian Jan Shipps, who has studied the Saints for 40 years. "After a century of cultivating their separate identity as a religious people, Mormons now want to stress their affinities with traditional Christianity yet highlight their uniqueness."

—Newsweek, 9/10/2001

## Social

Haunted by want, depleted from hunger, Akhtar Muhammad six weeks ago did something that has become ruefully unremarkable in this desperate country. He took two of his 10 children to the bazaar of the nearest city and traded them for bags of wheat. Gone now from his home are the boys, Sher, 10, and Baz, 5. "What else could I do?" the bereft father asked today in Kangori, a remote hamlet in the mountains of northern Afghanistan. He did not want to seem uncaring. "I miss my sons, but there was nothing to eat," he said, casting a glance sideways to prove that his misery was hardly unusual. In the nearby foothills, enfeebled people were coming back from foraging wild spinach and even blades of grass, a harvest of hideously bitter greenery that can be made edible only if boiled long enough. "For some, there is nothing else," Mr. Muhammad muttered. Afghanistan, cradle of tragedy, is now in its fourth year of drought, and with the drought has come its inevitable offspring, famine. The hungry, spiraling deathward, try to cope in pitiable ways, selling all, eating fodder, wandering away to beg. In Afghanistan, two decades of war have also left it hard to distinguish between the bad times and the worse. Even without famine, more than one in five children die before the age of 5 and the average life expectancy is a mere 44. Traditionally, girls are "sold" for marriage, with the bride's family collecting a price. But what is occurring now is closer to the practice of bonded labor. Arrangements differ but most often the child is exchanged for a continuing supply of cash or wheat.

—New York Times, 3/8/2002

The number of foreign-born residents and children of immigrants in the United States has reached the highest level in history, according to a Census Bureau report released in February. It found that the number had leapt to 56 million from 34 million in the last three decades. Mexico accounted for more than a quarter of all the foreign-born residents, the bureau's analysis of data from its March 2000 Current Population Survey showed. That share is the largest any country has held since the 1890 census, when about 30 percent of the country's foreign-born population was from Germany. While the number of foreign-born residents and their children is higher than ever, their percentage in the population is not. In the 1910 census, that group made up 35 percent of the population, compared with 20 percent in 2000, a spokesman for the Census Bureau said.

—New York Times, 2/7/2002

7% of people [U.S.] who died in 1975 were cremated.  
26% of people who died in 2000 were cremated.  
49% who die in 2025 (estimated) will be cremated.

—Time, 3/4/2002

Early winter in the United States was pretty much missing in action this year. The three months of November to January were the warmest November through January period on record. The average U.S. temperature over those months was 39.94 degrees—a whopping 4.3 degrees more than the same three-month average in the previous 100 years, according to the National Climatic Data Center in Asheville, N.C. The old record was set only two years ago. More than two-thirds of the U.S. recorded extremely higher-than-normal temperatures for November. "This is one manifestation of global warming," said Kevin Trenberth, head of the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colorado.

—Philadelphia Inquirer, 2/22/2002

Malaria is the leading killer in many sub-Saharan countries, with children accounting for 90% of the estimated 1.8 million deaths each year. Across the continent public health experts are debating how to replace chloroquine, to which the malaria parasite has become resistant. As the disease's resistance to drugs has increased, deaths from malaria have soared across Africa. The cost of [an effective drug] is prohibitive for most African countries, which rely on international donors for money to buy medicines. Nearly half of Burundi's 6.5 million people contracted the disease in an epidemic that broke out a little more than a year ago, killing thousands of people. In Tanzania malaria accounts for 300,000 deaths a year according to government figures.

—Los Angeles Times, 2/14/2002

## Civil

President Olusegun Obasanjo told an anxious nation that rising violence and lawlessness were dangerously undermining its three-year-old democracy. The warning was his direst since Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, emerged from nearly 16 years of military dictatorship in 1999. Speaking after months of rising anarchy and a week of convulsive violence here in the nation's largest city, Mr. Obasanjo said Nigeria appeared "to be steadily losing ground to the suffocating influences of violence and lawlessness in the conduct of our political affairs."

—New York Times, 2/8/2002

The wave of anti-Semitism sweeping through France has triggered mounting concerns about the safety and welfare of Western Europe's largest Jewish community. Though a surge in violent attacks against Jewish schools and synagogues has elicited the usual condemnations from French politicians, it seems that France's government has yet to recognize the seriousness of the problem. Home to the third-largest Jewish community in the Diaspora, France has some 600,000 Jews who span the religious and political spectrum and are outspoken in their support for Israel. According to Deputy Foreign Minister Michael Melchior, there were 320 anti-Semitic attacks in France in 2001.

—Jerusalem Post, 1/20/2002

A research team of U.S. and Brazilian scientists has provided compelling evidence that rates of forest destruction in the Brazilian Amazon have accelerated over the last decade. The team, led by William Laurance of the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, analyzed deforestation estimates produced by Brazil's National Space Agency that were based on detailed satellite images of the Amazon since 1978. Contrary to the claims of the Brazilian government that threats to Amazonian forests have fallen in recent years because of improved environmental laws and public attitudes, the Smithsonian team asserts that rates of deforestation have risen sharply since 1995. "Forest destruction from 1995 to 2000 averaged almost two million hectares a year," said Laurance. Although new environmental laws in Brazil are designed to slow forest loss, the research team claims that most laws are rarely enforced. That, in concert with a rapidly growing population and dramatically expanding logging and mining industries, means that threats to Amazonian forests are growing.

—Smithsonian Institution, 1/15/2002

Afghanistan may have been a failed state, but it was a state that Somalis could gaze upon with envy. Somalia is so fractured that the nominal government controls less than half its capital city and some coastal strips. The north has two breakaway states, and in the rest 30 clans with overlapping borders go to war over land, cattle raids and blood feuds. With no central bank to object, businessmen have privately printed billions in the national currency, the shilling, rendering it almost worthless. The country's biggest exports, beef and camel meat, were banned 14 months ago for fear of Rift Valley fever, which can be



fatal to humans. And in 12 years of civil war, warlords have shelled or looted everything. In Mogadishu, the nominal capital, AK-47's are everywhere and hotel taxis are trailed by trucks full of hired gunmen to protect guests from unemployed gunmen seeking kidnapping victims. On the coast, pirates attack Red Sea shipping. The languid coastal boulevards are awash with garbage and sand.

—New York Times, 2/10/2002

## Financial

Israel and China signed a \$180 million contract under which Israel Aircraft Industries will sell China two communications satellites. The satellites will assist in the broadcast of the Beijing Olympics in 2008. Government officials said that the agreement is a sign of positive relations between the two countries.

—Arutz 7, 01/17/2002

Boll weevils, once a leading pest for farmers in the U.S. cotton belt, is on the way to being eliminated in the country, a government report said. Osama El- Lissy and Bill Grefenstette of the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service said in a joint report to the annual Beltwide Cotton conference that a large chunk of the cotton belt stretching from Georgia to California had virtually eradicated the pest. El-Lissy said 33 percent of cotton-growing states have completed elimination of the boll weevil and some 65 percent "are nearing eradication."

—Reuters, 1/12/2002

Water will be to the 21st century what oil was to the last—controlling it will make vast fortunes and nations will go to war to preserve access to it. In a world in which fresh water is increasingly scarce, that axiom is being taken to heart in the boardrooms of some of the globe's most powerful corporations. In nearly every corner of the planet, international water conglomerates are vying to sign operating contracts, make deals, buy rights and acquire local water supply and treatment companies. It's a worldwide water rush. Given that less than 1 percent of the Earth's water is drinkable, the corporate betting is that the price of water can only go up. Fresh water is a finite resource for which there is no substitute. Estimates of the value of the global market for water range from \$300 billion to \$800 billion. About 86 percent of the municipal water in the United States is delivered by public utilities, while 85 percent of French customers already get their water through privately owned or operated water utilities. In the United Kingdom, nearly all the water services have been privatized for more than a decade. Private water companies contend they can provide water services more cheaply and efficiently than governments or public utilities. Their services will be essential if the world hopes to stave off the impending global fresh-water crisis that is forecast to occur as water scarce regions scramble to find new supplies for a growing population.

—Scripps Howard News Service, 1/1/2002

## Israel

There are 137,000 Christians in Israel's population, compared to 120,000 in 1995, the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) reported. The total population of Israel is nearly 6.5 million. Israel is often blamed for the considerable drop in the Christian population in the West Bank and Gaza, yet while their numbers drop in the PA areas, they have increased in Israel. The report said that about 115,000 of the Christians are Arabs, while the remainder are immigrants who mostly arrived with Jewish relatives, either from Poland and Romania in the 1970s and '80s or from the former Soviet Union during the past decade. The figures do not show the expatriate Christian numbers who are not Israeli citizens and work in Christian organizations in Israel. In 1949, according to CBS figures, there were 34,000 Christians in Israel; in 1961, the first census year, 51,000. In the 1995 census, the first which differentiated between Arab Christians and other Christians, there were 101,000 Arab Christians.

—Jerusalem Post, 12/31/2001

A new publication by Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics shows that 850,000 people made aliyah (immigration) from the former Soviet Union during the 1990s. Haifa absorbed more new immigrants than any other city with 58,000, followed by Ashdod with 55,000 and Beersheva with 47,000. Immigrants from the former Soviet Union now account for 13 percent of Israel's population. A third came from Russia and a third from the Ukraine. Almost 60 percent have higher education, compared with 40 percent of the general Jewish population.

—Central Bureau of Statistics, February 2002

The cornerstone of Israel's first desalination plant was placed in Ashkelon on February 12, during a festive ceremony presided over by National Infrastructures Minister Avigdor Lieberman. The installation is slated to produce 50 million cubic meters of water annually within 2-3 years, or the equivalent of 30 centimeters of height in Israel's main reservoir, the Kinneret (Sea of Galilee). The Kinneret falls roughly a centimeter a day during the summer, and rises about that much or more, each day during the winter. The Ashkelon plant will also provide some 1,000 jobs. Minister Lieberman said that within 5-6 years, Israel is expected to produce some 500 million cubic meters of water annually.

—Arutz 7, 2/12/2002

The number of unemployed Israelis surged to 9.9% of the civilian work force at the end of November, the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics reported. Over 250,000 Israelis are out of work and government officials expect this number to rise. "This is one of the toughest periods our nation has been going through," labor and Social Affairs Minister Shlomo Benizri said. "With the exception of 1997, which was an abnormal year for unemployment statistics, 2001 saw the highest rise in unemployment figures ever," he said. Economic policymakers are particularly worried about the 29% increase in jobseekers since the start of January 2001. "The main problem we are dealing with right now is reducing our dependence on foreign workers," Benizri said, noting that the proportion of foreign laborers has reached 10% of the local civilian work force.

—Jerusalem Post, 1/17/2002

## Book Review

**Philistine: The Great Deception, Ramon Bennett, Shekinah Books, Citrus Heights, California, 1995, 344 pages.**

Bennett writes with passion hurling forth quote upon quote from his seemingly bottomless file of news clippings. These clippings chronicle the current unremitting pain, misery, suffering and pathos of the holy land, and he is right about many things:

- Islam arose in the seventh century of the Christian era and with blinding speed its sword cut a wide swath across the ailing Roman and Parthian empires of the Middle East, Levant, North Africa, Persia, and Bactria to become a major world religion.
- Islam adheres to belief in Muhammed as God's prophet and the Quran as God's final revelation to man before the Day of Judgment.
- Islam claims authority to sweep aside both the Old and New Testament based on the belief that the Arabs are victims of a conspiracy to keep their branch of Abraham's family—Ishmael's branch— from receiving their proper recognition as Faithful adherents to Abraham's God.
- Yassir Arafat was born and bred to live by the sword with a Nazi-inspired hatred of the Jews and the morality of a pirate. Arafat holds little in common with Saladin, an earlier Islamic protagonist for Jerusalem who even the crusaders grew to respect.

The work has the appearance of some scholarship and value. However, the reader is strongly cautioned against unreflective deep drinking from this heady brew. The cause of Christ is little served by taking the sad state of culture offered up by the current crop of Islamic fundamentalists, terrorists, and suicide bombers and making things even worse by repeating every innuendo and half-truth that spills into the popular press. Scripture provides a warning against the baneful and corrupting influence on us from repeating half-truths and lies; even Michael the archangel when contending with the devil, "durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee" (Jude 9,10).

Dubious scholarship permeates Bennett's book. Equating the name of "Allah" with "the [Arabian] moon god" (p.46-47) is as meaningful as equating Jehovah's title of "Baal" (Hosea 2:16) with the worship of the Canaanite deity "Baal." Moslems in places as far away as Nigeria have ridiculed such ideas. The Hebrew Elowahh (Strong's #433) is recognized as cognate with Arabian "ilah" by the Gesenius Hebrew Lexicon. "Allah" is a contraction for "Al-ilah," meaning "The God."

In another example, statistics do not support that there is an "extremely high rate of homosexuality among Arab males" (p. 33). This is inconsistent with current World Health Organization statistics for AIDS sufferers that report infections among 0.2% of the male population in the Middle East, much less than the 0.6% in the U.S.

Ultimately, we must agree that God will judge and bring to destruction both Islam and every false system of worship. However, there is little of value in this unsavory work by Bennett to warrant its recognition and respect among the Lord's people, and under no circumstances should Bennett be offered as a primer on the Middle East or Islam.

—*Richard Doctor*